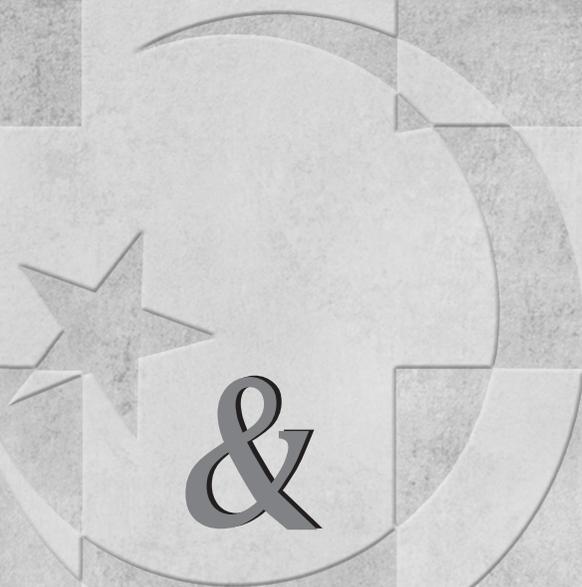


The Cross



&
The Crescent

Understanding Islam

Abdul Hadi

Table of Contents



Introduction	i
Chapter 1 – Evangelizing Muslims: The Nature of the Task ...	1
Chapter 2 – How to Communicate with Muslims	17
Chapter 3 – Muhammad	33
Chapter 4 – The Expansion of Islam	65
Chapter 5 – What Muslims Believe	75
Chapter 6 – The Duties of Muslims.....	97
Chapter 7 – Islamic Sects	109
Chapter 8 – The Superiority of Jesus in Islam	121
Chapter 9 – Islam and the Deity of Christ.....	145
Chapter 10 – How to Prove the Authenticity of the Bible .	160
Chapter 11 – How Muslims See the Crucifixion	186
Chapter 12 – Proofs of the Crucifixion	204
Chapter 13 – Why Jesus Had to Die	222
Chapter 14 – Why Christians Believe in the Holy Trinity .	240
Chapter 15 – Explaining the Trinity to Muslims	252
Appendix A – Important Dates in Islamic History	268
Appendix B – Glossary.....	270
Appendix C – Islamic Commentaries and Hadith Books .	276
Appendix D – Bibliography	278

Introduction

IN 1840 THE HISTORIAN THOMAS CARLYLE WROTE:

For these twelve centuries, Islam has been the religion and life-guidance of the fifth part of the whole kindred of mankind. Above all things, it has been a religion heartily believed. These Arabs believe their religion, and try to live by it. No Christians, since the early ages, or only perhaps the English Puritans in modern times, have ever stood by their faith as the Muslims do by theirs – believing it wholly, fronting time with it, and eternity with it.ⁱ

Today, Islam’s adherents exhibit no weakening in either numbers or belief. So impregnable does the Muslim faith appear, many Christians despair of converting Muslims to Christ.

Yet when God called me to be a servant to the Muslims, His encouragement was great and His warning was clear. “Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you. Do not be dismayed before their faces, lest I dismay you before them.” (Jeremiah 1:8,17) Many times I have asked, “Lord, when will the wall of Islam collapse?” And He has reminded me of His answer to His disciples: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me...to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:7,8)

Today, I see a crack in the Islamic wall. Like Elijah I look up at a clear blue sky and I see “a cloud as small as a man’s hand.” (I Kings 18:44) It is my wish and my prayer that every Christian should share the vision of Joshua and Caleb on the borders of the Promised Land. May we not be among those who say, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” Instead, may we have the mind of Joshua and Caleb, who declared, “Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.” (Numbers 13:30)

That is God’s challenge to the Church. This book sets out to answer the vital questions Christians ask about Islam. What makes the faith of Islam so fervent? Why do Muslims object to Christianity? How can a true Christian present Christ the Redeemer and Savior to them?

–*Abdul Hadi*

ⁱ From a lecture delivered Friday May 8, 1840 on “Heroes and Hero Worship.” See *The Best Known Works of Thomas Carlyle* (New York: The Book League of America, A Blue Ribbon Book, 1942), p. 205.

1 Evangelizing Muslims: The Nature of the Task

ON JANUARY 1, 1985, COLONEL MUAMMAR AL-QADDAFI, PRESIDENT OF LIBYA, SENT A LETTER TO THE HEADS OF SO-CALLED CHRISTIAN COUNTRIES TO MARK THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW YEAR. IT SAYS A LOT ABOUT THE WAY MUSLIMS SEE CHRISTIANS. HE WROTE:

I congratulate you on the occasion of the New Year and the passage of 1984 years on the birth of Jesus, may the Lord's peace be upon him, of whom we would have known nothing were this not revealed to Muhammad, peace be upon him. It was Muhammad who recited the complete story of Jesus and his mother Mary. We Muslims have believed, through the Quran which was revealed to Muhammad and which you have unfortunately not recognized, in the miracle of Jesus' birth and prophecy. This story has not reached us clearly either through the Torah or the Bible, because the current copies of the Old and New Testaments have been forged and distorted. The name of the prophet Muhammad and many other things have been intentionally dropped from them. For Jesus says in the true Bible, addressing the Israelites who deserted him and tried to kill him, "Sons of Israel, I am the prophet of God sent to you to attest the Torah and Bible and to bring glad tidings of a prophet called Ahmad who will come after me" (Sura 61:6).

On this holy occasion, I call upon the new generation in the Christian world to read the Quran to discover the truth about

Jesus Christ, “may peace be upon him,” his mother Mary and brother Aaron, I call upon them to read the Quran to see how the virgin Mary was approached by Gabriel who brought glad tidings of Jesus and how Jesus was born in a distant place. They will also learn how God provided her with food from heaven and a palm tree and how her people attacked her...How the child Jesus spoke and convinced people that he is a blessed prophet and that Muhammad will come as a prophet after him...How he was forsaken by the Israelites who tried to kill him, putting his look-alike to the cross, while God lifted Jesus to the heavens...How Jesus, through God brought life back to the dead and healed the lepers and the dumb.

All these details have made us, we the Muslims, believe in the miracle of the birth of Jesus, his prophecy, his beginning and end, the Israelites war against him and the Disciples’ support for him...We have learned all this only from the Quran which you have not read and do not believe in, because of the blind nationalistic fanaticism against the Arab nation, misleading Israeli propaganda and the ignorance which has prevented you from seeking the truth of the Quran and the prophet Muhammad who recited in detail the story of Jesus and the stories of other prophets in the Quran.

Therefore, I call upon the new generation in the Christian world to carry out a cultural revolution to transform the beliefs of the Christian world which is now in the process of disintegration and decline and is now in need of men like Savonarola, Martin Luther and Calvin.

May peace befall all the righteous...¹

On this evidence, Muslims can understand as little about Christianity as many Christians understand about Islam. Yet both are evangelistic religions. Christianity practices evangelism, and proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ. Islam practices *Da’wa* (“a Call”) inviting all to accept its faith. Against such a background, the message of this book can be summed up in a single statement: that if God calls us to evangelize the Muslim world, He will give us everything we need to do it successfully. For God never orders us to do the impossible.

To start with, though, we need to ask what difficulties underlie the task of evangelizing Muslims, and why it is that many Christians have effectively “given up” the challenge. I suggest there are two factors at work. These have to do, first, with the weakness of the Church, and second, with the resistance of Islam.

I. THE WEAKNESS OF THE CHURCH

1. Lack of obedience to the Great Commission

The greatest impediment to the evangelizing of Muslims lies in the Christian Church. A weak and lukewarm Church neglects its first duty, which is missions. Divided believers have much time to fight – and no time to witness. Many congregations are self-satisfied. They prefer the cozy atmosphere of their closed fellowships to the challenge of going out to reach the lost. The result is that believers “lose touch” with the surrounding world. They actually drive sinners away because nobody wants to be like them. By contrast, the Spirit-filled and Spirit-obeying believer witnesses to God’s saving power, and thus leads others to know Christ as personal Savior.

2. Lack of confidence in the Christian faith

In almost all countries where Christians are a minority, they exhibit a lack of confidence, both in themselves and in what they believe. They act like the ten spies who returned to Moses from Canaan and declared that the proposed invasion should be called off (Numbers 13:28-33).

In Muslim states, this behavior is reinforced by social attitudes dating back to the seventh century Covenant of Umar. A major purpose of the Covenant was to protect the life and property of non-Muslims – particularly Christians and Jews – who were resident in Muslim countries. But it did so on strict conditions. First, that Christians put no obstacles in the way of a fellow Christian who desired to become a Muslim. And second, that Christians make no attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity.

Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab used the Covenant to consolidate his conquests. He would present it to Christians in sub-

ject territories, and demand that they sign. It came in different forms. One version reads as follows:

In the name of Allah, the Merciful the Compassionate: When you arrived in our country, we asked you to protect our lives as well as those of our family members and brothers in the faith. We requested you furthermore to guard our properties. [In return for these services] we pledged to build neither churches nor monasteries; neither to repair those in areas where Muslims reside.

We declare our obligation to hide no spies or foreign envoys in our churches or monasteries, nor to withhold information from Muslims that could endanger their welfare. We vow neither to conduct our religious services out of doors nor to recommend this in our sermons. We agree not to hinder anyone in our religious fellowship from following Islam, if that is his wish. It will be our duty to treat Muslims kindly and to stand when they sit. We shall not deal in alcoholic beverages. We agree not to display our books or our crosses in Islamic areas.

Centuries later, the terms of the Covenant remain deeply embedded in the way Christian and Muslim communities relate in Islamic nations.

According to the daily paper *Al-Alam*, King Hassan II of Morocco, who was also the Imam of his country, made the following statement before a human rights commission on May 15, 1990: "If a Muslim says, 'I have embraced another religion instead of Islam,' he – before he is called to repentance – will be brought before a group of medical specialists, so that they can examine him to see if he is still in his right mind. After he has then been called to repentance, but decides to hold fast to the testimony of another religion not coming from Allah – that is, not Islam – he will be judged."

Against this background, it is important for Christian minorities in Muslim countries to know what is expected of them. They should be a creative minority – the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and the leaven that leavens the whole lump (Matthew 5:13,14; 13:33).

3. Lack of love for Muslims

After long years of war and persecution, Christians seldom see Muslims as people whom God loves and for whom Christ died. It is clear that Christians need a new filling of the Holy Spirit to love those who disagree with them (Matthew 5:43-48). The greatest expression of love is to share with them the most precious thing a Christian has, which is the good news of the salvation of Jesus Christ.

4. Lack of doctrinal knowledge

Most Christians do not know how to explain their faith to non-believers. They have received the salvation of Christ, but they cannot defend their basic creeds. According to the apostle Peter, we should always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks us a reason for the hope that is in us (1 Peter 3:15). Yet most Christians could neither answer a Muslim's questions, nor refute a Muslim's attacks against basic Christian doctrines. They haven't even got to grips with Muslim vocabulary. How many Christians, for example, know that Muslims refer to the Holy Spirit as the angel Jibril (Gabriel)?

5. Lack of faith in God

Most Christians simply do not believe that God will save Muslims. Many Christian ministers in Muslim countries have not seen a single Muslim come to Christ. At the same time, they have probably seen hundreds of Christians converting to Islam. Jesus Christ has full authority in heaven and on earth – and the Christian evangelist should never lose sight of that fact (Matthew 28:18).

6. Lack of security in a Muslim state

Christians refuse to witness to Muslims because they fear persecution. Some of the Muslims who ask Christians to explain Christianity to them are spies for the police or for fundamentalist Muslim groups. The reluctance of Christians to welcome new converts makes those converts more likely to backslide to Islam under pressure from family and friends, after which the backsliders may report Christian activities to the authorities.

II. THE RESISTANCE OF ISLAM

1. Muslims are usually satisfied with their faith.

A typical Muslim believes that the Jews have God's revelation to Moses; Christians have God's revelation to Moses and Jesus; while Muslims have what was revealed to Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

In other words, the Muslim believes that he has the final true revelation. To him, Muhammad is the "seal of the prophets" (Sura 33:40). Consequently he will ask what sounds like a reasonable question: "We acknowledge Jesus as one of our great prophets. Why don't you acknowledge Muhammad as one of yours?" But Jesus and Muhammad cannot be equal; their respective claims about themselves are irreconcilable. And if Christians try to "play fair" by accepting Muhammad as a genuine prophet, the pressure will soon be on them to accept him as the Final Prophet.

We should ask the Muslims, "On what basis can anyone claim that the most recent religious leader must be considered the truest and the greatest?" The most recent philosopher (and no doubt there are many still to come) is not necessarily the most logical or the most brilliant. Which modern artist can compare with the geniuses of the Renaissance? Which twentieth-century composer can rival the perfection of Beethoven or Mozart? Christ is not just the greatest of the prophets. He is the First and the Last (Revelation 1:8).

But, of course, quoting Scripture is of limited use in evangelizing Muslims. For almost all Muslims believe that the Bible as we have it now is a corruption of the original. They believe that Jews and Christians have altered their scriptures, and that Islam has abrogated all previous revelations. Many Muslims say that when Jesus was lifted up to heaven before the crucifixion, He took the original Gospel back with Him to heaven!

2. Muslims have an uncomplicated faith.

Islam has the form of religion, but denies its power. Muslims call it *Din al-fitra*, "the natural religion." It requires praying, fasting and alms giving. Islam has added nothing to the religious thought of the world. The Quran frankly admits that

its truths have been revealed in earlier scriptures (see Sura 41:43; 87:18,19). Much of Islam's appeal lies in its simplicity.

To become a Muslim a person has only to repeat, in Arabic, the "Words of Witness": "*La Ilaha Illa Allah. Muhammad Rasulu Allah*" ("There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah"). God is simply "One," not "Three-in-One."

In matters of justice, Islam unflinchingly applies the principle of "an eye for an eye" (Sura 5:45). Muslims hold this to be more natural than "turning the other cheek," as taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:39).

Islam unashamedly favors men over women. As holders of economic power, men support women with their property and are entitled to run their affairs (Sura 4:34). Under Islamic law, men have the right to marry as many as four women, and also to possess concubines (Sura 4:3). A man may divorce his wife at any time. After a divorce, the woman "is not lawful unto him thereafter until she has wedded another husband, then if he [the other husband] divorces her, it is no sin for both of them that they come together again, if they consider that they are able to observe the limits of Allah" (see Sura 2:227-230). Sura 2:223 gives a man the right to sleep with his wife in any position he likes. It says, "Your women are a tillage for you; so come unto your tillage as you wish."

The mysteries of Christianity puzzle the Muslims. They struggle with the doctrine of Jesus as God Incarnate. The doctrine of the Trinity baffles them – for how can Christians, worshipping three Gods, be anything other than polytheists? And, of course, emphasizing God's greatness over God's love, they instinctively deny the highest proof of God's love for mankind – the crucifixion.

3. Muslims believe half-truths about Christ.

Islamic and Christian beliefs about Jesus Christ overlap in many places. Muslims believe He was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of Jibril ("the Holy Spirit") and that He performed all kinds of miracles. Yet they deny that He humbled Himself or took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). They refuse

to accept His crucifixion to redeem fallen mankind. In crucial respects, therefore, the “Muslim Christ” differs from the Jesus of the Gospels – a point I shall return to in chapters eight and nine.

4. Muslims equate “Christian” with “Western.”

Because Islam makes little distinction between religion and state, Muslims tend to see Western society and politics as direct expressions of Christian faith. In their thinking, what Westerners do is Christianity. Not surprisingly, this gives them a low view of belief in Christ. Whatever loose morality is promoted in the latest Hollywood movie will appear to them as the benchmark of Christian behavior.

5. Muslims see Christianity as a hostile political force.

Many Muslims consider Christians their number one enemy. The founding of the State of Israel (with the help of the “Christian West”) and the resulting dispersion of the Palestinians are interpreted by many Muslims as a revival of the eight Crusades (AD 1096-1291), resentment at which remains fresh in Islamic memory. America in particular – with its pro-Israeli foreign policy, Christian political rhetoric, and ready supply of Christian missionaries – all too often gives the impression to Muslims of being dedicated to the destruction of Islam.

6. Muslims often enforce a stringent law of apostasy.

In Islam, even associating with people of other faiths is strongly discouraged. “O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends. They are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friends is one of them. God guides not the wrongdoing people” (Sura 5:51).

Because they betray their faith and their community, apostates face the harshest penalties. The law of apostasy for Muslims resembles the law of Moses concerning apostate Jews (Deuteronomy 13:6-11). Abdulrahman al-Jaziri in his book on Islamic apostasy law, says, “All four *Imams* [the founders of the four schools of Islamic law] agree that the apostate whose fall from Islam is beyond doubt must be killed, and his blood

must be spilled without reservation. The hypocrite and heretic who poses as a Muslim but has secretly remained an unbeliever must also be killed.”ⁱⁱ

Even where the full law is not applied, a Muslim convert to Christianity is liable to face ostracization from family, disinheritance, and the loss of his job.

7. Muslims embrace a violent religion.

In the Quran the word “pray” appears 99 times as a verb, noun and adjective, while the word “kill” appears no less than 170 times. And in Islam it’s not only apostates who come in for brutal treatment.

The Quran represents violence as an integral feature of domestic life. It is legal to beat one’s wife. Sura 4:34 says, “Men are the protectors of women, because Allah has given the one more than the other, and because they spend of their property [to maintain women]. So righteous women are the devoutly obedient, guarding in secret that which Allah has guarded. As for those (women) from whom you fear disloyalty, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and beat them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them. For Allah is High, Sublime.”

The position of women in Islam shows this violence. Sura 4:3 orders polygamy. It says, “Marry such women, who seem good to you, two or three or four. If you fear that you will not be equitable, then only one, or what your right hands own. Thus it is more likely that you will not be partial.”

However Muhammad was allowed to marry four kinds of wives. Sura 33:50 says that Allah ordered Muhammad, “O Prophet, we have made lawful to you: your wives to whom you have paid their dowries; and those whom your right hand possess of those whom Allah has given you as spoils of war; and the daughters of your uncle on the father’s side, and the daughters of your aunts on the father’s side, and the daughters of your uncle on the mother’s side, and the daughters of your aunts on the mother’s side, who emigrated with you; and a believing woman if she give herself to the Prophet and the Prophet desire to ask her in marriage. A privilege for you only, not for the (rest of) believers. Sura 2:28 says that men are a

degree above women: “(Women) have rights similar to those (of men)... and men are a degree above them (women).” Sura 4:11 says concerning Female Inheritance: “The male a portion equal to that of two females (in inheritance).”

Concerning Female Witnessing Sura 2:282 says, “Get two witnesses out of your own men. If there are not two men, then a man and two women such as you choose for witness.”

Concerning marriage after divorce Sura 2:229 says. “If he has divorced her, then she is not lawful to him thereafter until she has wedded another husband. Then if he (the other husband) divorces her, it is no sin for both of them that they come together again, if they consider that they are able to observe the limits of Allah.” (Compare Deuteronomy 24:1-4)

Sura 24:31 says about Women appearance in public: “Say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty.”

It follows that adultery brings down fierce retribution. Sura 24:2 says, “The adulteress and the adulterer, flog each of them a hundred stripes. Let not any pity for them withhold you from supporting Allah’s religion, if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a party of believers witness their punishment.”

Concerning the idol worshippers Sura 9:5 says, “When the sacred months are over (months of Rajab, Dhul-Qeda, Dhul-Hejja and Al-Muharram), slay the polytheists wherever you find them, and take them (captive) and besiege them, and lie in ambush for them everywhere. But if they repent and establish the Prayer and pay the Zakat, let them go their way. Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.”

About Jews and Christians Sura 9:29 says, “Fight those who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day and do not forbid what Allah and His messenger had forbidden- such men as practice not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book- until they pay the tribute out of hand, and have been humbled.”

God’s rewards are offered for Jihad (“Holy War”). Sura 9:111 says, “Allah has bought from the believers their lives

and their wealth because the Garden will be theirs. They shall fight in the way of Allah, kill and be killed; that is a promise binding upon Allah in the Torah and the Gospel and the Quran. Who is more faithful to His promise than Allah? Rejoice then in the bargain you have made with Him. That is the supreme triumph.” Sura 4:74 says, “Let those fight for the sake of Allah who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter. Whoever fights for the cause of Allah, be he slain or be he victorious, on him we shall bestow a great reward.”

As for those who take up arms against Islam, Sura 5:33 says, “The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger and strive after corruption in the land will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be expelled out of the land. Such will be their degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be a severe punishment.”

Muhammad and his army attacked the people of Qureish in the battle of Badr. The Quran says concerning this battle in Sura 8:95,60,65: “And let not those who disbelieve suppose that they can outstrip Allah’s purpose. Lo! They can not escape. Make ready for them all you can of armed force and of horses tethered, that thereby you may terrify the enemy of Allah, and your enemy, and other beside them whom you know not. Allah knows them. Whatsoever you spend in the way of Allah it will be repaid to you in full, and you will not be wronged. O Prophet! Exhort the believers to fight. If there be of you twenty steadfast they shall overcome two hundred. And if there be of you a hundred steadfast they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve because they (the disbelievers) are a folk without intelligence.”

Concerning the Jews and the Christians Sura 5:51 says, “O you who believe (O Muslims) Take not the Jews and Christians for friends. They are friends one to another. He among you who takes them as friends is one of them. Allah guides not wrongdoing folk.” According to Aisha, Muhammad’s favorite wife, the prophet’s last words were, “Two religions in the Arab Peninsula are not to be tolerated.” iii

The attitude of Islam to outsiders is summed up in this verse by Ali Ibn Abu Talib, Muhammad’s cousin and son-in-law:

*Our flowers are the sword and the dagger;
Narcissus and myrtle are not;
Our drink is the blood of our enemies;
Our goblet their skull when we have fought.^{iv}*

Just how easily these incitements can ignite real and widespread violence was demonstrated by the Salman Rushdie affair. According to Daniel Pipes, Director of the Philadelphia-based Middle East Forum:

The problem began in January 1989, when Muslims living in Bradford, England, decided to do something to show their anger about The Satanic Verses, a new novel by the famed writer Salman Rushdie that included passages making fun of the Prophet Muhammad. The Muslims, mostly Pakistani immigrants, purchased a copy of the novel, took it to a public square, attached it to a stake, and set it on fire.

In Pakistan itself, after a month's buildup, an unruly mob of some 10,000 anti-Rushdie protesters took to the streets of the capital city of Islamabad. Marching to the American Cultural Center (a fact significant in itself), they attempted with great energy, but without success, to set the heavily fortified building on fire. Six people died in the violence, and many more were injured.

These events, in turn, caught the attention of Ayatollah Khomeini, the revolutionary ruler of Iran, who took prompt and drastic action: on February 14, 1989, he called upon "all zealous Muslims quickly to execute" not just Salman Rushdie as the author of The Satanic Verses but "all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content." This edict led to emergency measures in England to protect Rushdie's person, and to weeks and months of intense debate among the world's politicians and intellectuals about the issues of freedom of speech and blasphemy.

When the dust settled, Khomeini had failed in his specific goal of eliminating Rushdie physically. But if Khomeini did not manage to harm Rushdie, he did accomplish something far more profound: he stirred the souls of many Muslims, reviving a sense of confidence in

their faith and a strong impatience with any denigration of it, as well as a determination to take the offensive against anyone perceived to be a blasphemer or even a critic.

Although Khomeini himself passed from the scene just weeks after issuing his decree, the spirit it engendered is very much alive.

During the decade since 1989, many efforts have been undertaken by the forces of Islamism – otherwise known as Muslim fundamentalism – to silence critics. Ranging from outright violence to more sophisticated but no less effective techniques, they have produced impressive results.

Some early acts of physical intimidation involved the Rushdie case itself. Translators of The Satanic Verses were stabbed and seriously injured in Norway and Italy and, in Japan, murdered. In Turkey, another translator escaped when a fire set in his hotel failed to kill him, but 37 others died in the blaze. Other acts of violence were designed to punish both Muslims and non-Muslims for a variety of alleged offenses.^v

EVANGELIZING MUSLIMS IS A CALLING GOD WILL HONOR.

For all kinds of reasons, evangelizing the Islamic world presents a tough challenge. But it is no more impossible than evangelizing the Roman world was for the first disciples. The apostle Peter tells us that evangelism is the main reason for the establishment of the Church (1 Peter 2:9,10). A glance at the book of Acts will show that the early believers evangelized fearlessly (see, for example, Acts 2:8; 4:20,29; 8:4; and 13:1-4). Every Christian sharing in the Lord's Supper is reminded that "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11: 26).

God never orders the impossible. When He commands the Church to evangelize to the ends of the earth, He equips believers with what it takes to obey. This is why He must be obeyed without reservation. You cannot call Him "Lord," and say "no" to Him. The Lord does not take a "no" from His followers; to call God "Lord" and then say "no" to Him is a contradiction in terms.

When the Lord orders, He empowers His people to obey. “Who ever goes to war at his own expense?” asked Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:7. What is more, when we obey Him, He guarantees the results. He is always on His throne. Before Jesus delegated His disciples to witness for Him, He told them, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18). To those who obey and go, He says, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Also, remember that you are not the one doing the conversion work. You are just sowing the seed of the word of God. In the parable Jesus told in Matthew 13:1-9, nobody asked the sower to check if the ground was good or thorny or stony. His job was to scatter grain. In the same way, the conversion of the heart is something only the Holy Spirit can accomplish.

Paul had no delusions about this. He asked the Corinthians, “What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe – as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

When someone says that he won a person to Christ, he is telling a half-truth. He is not the only one whom the Holy Spirit used. Many have preceded him, and through them God has been preparing this heart to open to Christ. Also, it should not be forgotten that this “teamwork” continues after conversion – a point of special importance with Muslim converts, because they need such attentive support.

The Muslim convert to Christ lives under constant stress. At home he cannot freely read his Bible or have his private time with God. His unfamiliarity with the faith makes it difficult for him to understand much Christian preaching. His awareness that he has broken his family’s heart by rejecting Islam breaks his own heart and leaves him in

continuous sadness. All this can become a fast-growing weed that chokes the word of God inside him (Matthew 13:21).

In addition, he will probably face harassment – from family, neighbors, and authorities. Often a wife deserts the converted husband, taking the children into her custody. The convert is liable to forfeit his job and his inheritance. If he is single, he must find another place to live and a suitable person to marry.

While exercising all due caution – and praying for a spirit of discernment to identify spies (1 Thessalonians 5:21) – Christians in Muslim nations should set the new convert a good example. Before baptizing him they should make it clear that there are two sides to Christianity: rest and peace in Christ, but also persecution for the sake of Christ. A well-balanced picture of Christian faith should be presented. The Bible says to Christian believers, “For unto you is given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29). Churches should be alert to all this, and train Christian families to welcome the new convert and help him to grow in his newfound faith.

First, though, we need to turn to one of the most pressing problems in evangelizing Muslims. How can a Christian effectively communicate the Gospel to someone of the Islamic faith?

ⁱ Quoted by *Times of India*, January 2, 1985.

ⁱⁱ Abdulrahman al-Jaziri, *The Penalties of Apostasy in Islam*, (Villach, Austria, Light of Life 1997), first chapter.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibn Hisham, *The Life of Muhammad*, revised and expanded by Abd al-Masih (Villach, Austria: Light of Life, 1999) Vol 2, p. 305.

^{iv} *Ibid*, p. 306.

^v Daniel Pipes, *How Dare You Defame Islam*, (Washington, D.C.: Religious Freedom House, November 1999).

How to Communicate with Muslims

2

Developing a productive and ongoing discussion of faith issues with a Muslim takes patience and great diplomacy. It is easy to be misunderstood. It is also easy to get bogged down in matters of complex detail which, in the long run, benefit neither party. This chapter outlines some important guidelines to keep in mind.

I. ANSWER QUESTIONS – AND RAISE THEM.

Pray that a Muslim will ask you about your faith. It is necessary to be ready with a suitable reply to the questions a Muslim may ask. Don't seek controversy for its own sake, and don't "duck" difficult questions – that will give the impression no answer can be given to Muslim objections. The model for Christian argument is given in Acts 17:23, 24 where Paul addressed the Areopagus about the Unknown God.

Alternatively, raise sincere questions about Islam. Why ablutions before prayer? Why zakat? How can Muslims be sure God forgives them? Why do they think Christians place emphasis on atonement, and why do Muslims consider al-Adha (the feast of redeeming Abraham's son) as their first and greatest feast? Make sure you learn as much as you can about the culture and religion of Islam, as this will help you understand a Muslim's answers, and demonstrate your good faith.

Dr. Richard Thomas offers this good advice on evangelizing Muslims in his book *Islam, Aspects and Prospects*:¹

Listen carefully to what the Muslim friend has to say. Do not invite controversy but welcome inquiries. I used to go

round the TB wards of a hospital in Lebanon where often there were Muslims from the Gulf States. One Sunday an elderly Saudi stopped me and said, “You want to read the Injil to me? Will you pay attention while I recite from the Quran?” He proceeded to recite 60 verses before he would let me continue. Dialogue can be time-consuming, but then all worthwhile undertakings take time.

You may wish to agree on an agenda beforehand. Don’t try to cover too wide a field, as flitting from one point to another creates confusion all round. Try to bring every discussion to a tentative conclusion, and remember the rule that men should witness only to Muslim men, and women only to Muslim women. In all discussions, it’s best to avoid politics. Muslim Arabs particularly have many grievances against Jews and Christians, and often animosities among themselves. Richard Thomas recalls that an evangelical worker – an Arab with a fine record of hospitality and concern for Muslims – once put an end to a political argument with an abrupt: “I do not allow political wrangling in my home.” It worked.

II. INFORM THE MUSLIM.

Let a Muslim know where to find Christian Radio broadcasts, Christian TV programs and Christian websites. Suggest that he see “the Jesus film.” Offer to supply a tract, booklet, portion of scripture or New Testament – and always have more materials to hand in case they are requested. The best pieces of Scripture to use are the Sermon on the Mount, the Psalms, and the Gospel of Luke. Many Muslims love to read the book of Job. They are also fascinated by Jesus, but often have no access to His teachings, parables, interviews, or stories of His miracles. If a Muslim gives you a Quran or a tract, accept it politely. Read it and be willing and ready for a friendly discussion.

III. USE THE QURAN’S INVITATION TO DISCUSS FAITH.

Before going into details about Muslim objections to Christianity, you may like to refer to Sura 29:46, which

says, “Argue not with the People of the Book, unless it be in a way that is better, save with such of them as have dealt wrongfully with you: And say, ‘We believe in that which has been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is one, and to Him we surrender.’”

This Quranic verse instructs a Muslim to:

- Treat good Jews and good Christians well.
- Believe in the Old Testament, revealed to the Jews, and the New Testament, revealed to the Christians.
- Believe that the God of the Jews and the Christians is his own God, to whom he must surrender.
- Acknowledge that Christians are neither infidels nor polytheists.

IV. SHARE THE GREAT FACTS.

Three great facts about mankind’s relationship with God lie beyond the grasp of Islam, but are powerfully affirmed in the Christian gospel:

1. God loves you.

Islam emphasizes the greatness of God, Allahu Akbar (“God is Greater”). Christianity teaches that “God is Love” (see 1 John 4:8,16). What a difference between the law that scares people and the grace that draws them nearer (Hebrews 12:18-21; Matthew 5:1)!

Islam says that God loves the godly. Christianity says that God loves the whole world. He loves the sinner and the blasphemer. He loves the ungodly in order to make them godly.

A Muslim hadith (or tradition) says that God took a handful of dust in His right hand, created some people with it, and said, “To heaven, and I do not care.” He took another handful of dust in His left hand, created some people with it, and said, “To hell, and I do not care.”ⁱⁱ

Islam acknowledges Allah to be the Merciful One. In fact, this name occurs in the Quran more than any other name for God. But even in His mercy, Allah remains the Great and Exalted One. Even in exercising His mercy He remains

distant and impersonal.

In contrast, the Bible tells us that God, in His love, came down to our level in Jesus Christ. He took on the form of a slave and abased Himself, bearing our guilt and taking our place in judgement. His self-sacrifice for us sinners gives us a permanent place in God's family. People everywhere seek to love, be loved, and enjoy security. These are three basic human needs. Only in the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ do we get all three – eternally.

2. You can have a personal relationship with God.

Islam teaches that people are slaves of God. Christ instructs true Christians to call God "Our Father, Who art in heaven." The Apostle John says clearly, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!...Beloved, now we are children of God" (1 John 3:1, 2).

3. You can be always sure of salvation.

On the subject of eternal salvation for believers, the Quran is shot through with uncertainty. It quotes Pharaoh's magicians as saying, "We believe in the Lord of the worlds. Assuredly we hope that our Lord will forgive us our sins, because we are the first of the believers" (Sura 26:47,51). It also quotes Abraham as saying, "...and who, I ardently hope, will forgive my sin on the Day of Judgement" (Sura 26:82).

The Quran orders its readers, "Fear Allah so that you may prosper" (Sura 2:189) and "Obey Allah and His Messenger that you may find mercy" (Sura 3:132). Of itself it says, "This is a blessed Scripture which We have revealed...follow it and fear Allah that you may find mercy" (Sura 6:155).

According to Sura 19:71,72, every Muslim, religious or not, will go to hell: "None of you there is, but he shall go down to it; that for your Lord is a thing decreed, determined. We shall deliver those that were godfearing; and the evildoers We shall leave there, hobbling on their knees."

No Muslim who fears God knows when he will be delivered! One hadith claims that a Muslim may spend his life doing the works of the people of heaven, and end up in hell, while

another may spend his life doing the works of the people of hell, and end up in heaven.ⁱⁱⁱ Another hadith says, “Verily Allah created Adam and then rubbed his back with His right hand and took out a progeny from him and said: ‘I created these for Paradise and with the actions of the inmates of Paradise which they will do.’ Afterwards he rubbed his back with His hand and took out a progeny from him and said: ‘I created these for Hell and with the actions of the inmates of Hell, which they will do.’”^{iv}

By contrast, in Christ, the believer who puts his trust in what Jesus has done for him is guaranteed eternal life. Salvation depends on grace alone. The Quran allows no such tension between the holiness of God, which demands the death of all who are guilty, and the love of God, which longs for all sinners to be saved. Allah does not love sinners (a principle recorded 24 times in the Quran - see Sura 2:190-192). He only loves those who fear him (Sura 3:76). For this reason, no Muslim can ever be certain whether Allah has prepared a place for him in paradise or summarily dismissed him to hell.

Christian preachers should catch every opportunity to proclaim the three great facts of God’s love, His desire for a personal relationship, and His guarantee of salvation. This acceptance, which everyone longs to have, is available to the Muslim only through the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Like the father of the Prodigal Son, God awaits the returning, repentant sinner with open arms (Luke 15).

V. USE QURANIC VERSES THAT BUILD BRIDGES.

A number of passages in the Quran show that Christians are accorded great respect in Islamic thought – much more so than many Muslims will at first acknowledge. It may be worth gently drawing these passages to a Muslim’s attention. I mentioned Sura 29:46 earlier in this chapter. Here are some more:

Sura 3:55

Remember when Allah said, “O Jesus...I am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me you will all return, and I shall

judge between you as to that in which you used to differ.”

Sura 3:113-115

Among the People of the Scripture there is an upright community who during the night recite the revelations of Allah and fall prostrate before him. They believe in Allah and the Last Day, and enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil, and vie with one another in good works. They are of the righteous. And whatever good they do, its reward will not be denied them. Allah is aware of those who are righteous.

Sura 5:69

Those who believe [Muslims], and those who are Jews, and Sabaeans, and Christians, whoso believes in Allah and the last Day and does right, no fear come upon them, neither shall they grieve.

Sura 5:82

You will find the most vehement of men in enmity to those who believe [to be] the Jews and the idolaters. And you will find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe [to be] those who say, “We are Christians.” That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant.

VI. KNOW AND SHARE THE QURANIC STORY OF THE FALL.

The story of the Fall of Adam and Eve is mentioned twice in the Quran, in Suras 2 and 7. Here are the stories in full:

Sura 2:30-38

(30) Your Lord said to the angels: “I will create a viceregent on earth.” They said: “Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? While we do celebrate Your praise and glorify Your holy name?” He said, “I know what you know not.” (31) And He taught Adam the names of all things; then He placed them before the angels, and said, “Tell Me the names of these if you are right.” (32) They said, “Glory to You: of knowledge we have none, save what You have taught us: in truth it is You Who are perfect in knowledge and wisdom.” (33) He said,

“O Adam! Tell them their names.” When he had told them, Allah said, “Did I not tell you that I know the secrets of heavens and earth, and I know what you reveal and what you conceal?” (34) And behold, We said to the angels, “Bow down to Adam.” They bowed down: not so Iblis. He refused and was haughty. He was of those who reject Faith. (35) We said, “O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as you will; but approach not this tree, or you run into harm and transgression.” (36) Then Satan made them slip from [the Garden], and got them out of the state in which they had been. We said, “Get you down, all [you people], with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling place and your means of livelihood for a time.” (37) Then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and His Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful. (38) We said, “Get you down all from here: and if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”

Sura 7:11-26

(11) It is We Who created you and gave you shape; then We bade the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down; not so Iblis; he refused to be of those who bow down. (12) [Allah] said, “What prevented you from bowing down when I commanded you?” He said, “I am better than he. You created me from fire, and him from clay.”(13) [Allah] said, “Get down from this. It is not for you to be arrogant here. Get out, for you are of the meanest [of creatures].” (14) He said, “Give me respite till the day they are raised up.” (15) [Allah] said, “Be you among those who have respite.” (16) He said, “Because You have thrown me out of the Way, lo! I will lie in wait for them on Your Straight Way. (17) Then will I assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left: nor will You find in most of them gratitude.” (18) [Allah] said, “Get out from this, disgraced and expelled. If any of them follow you, Hell will I fill with you

all. (19) O Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the Garden, and enjoy as you wish, but approach not this tree, or you run into harm and transgression.” (20) Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them, in order to reveal to them their shame that was hidden from them. He said, “Your Lord only forbade you this tree, lest you should become angels or such beings as live forever.” (21) And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser. (22) So by deceit he brought about their fall. When they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them and they began to sew together the leaves of the Garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them, “Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?” (23) They said, “Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls. If You forgive us not and bestow not upon us Your mercy, we shall certainly be lost.” (24) [Allah] said, “Get you down, with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood for a time.” (25) He said, “Therein shall you live, and therein shall you die. But from it shall you be taken out. (26) Children of Adam, We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of piety, that is the best.” Such are among the signs of Allah, that they may receive admonition!”

From these two quotations we see that the first solution presented to the Fall of Adam was for Adam to receive “words of inspiration” from his Lord (verse 37). The second was for him to receive the “raiment of piety” (verse 26).

The Quran does not elaborate on either of these phrases. However, the book of Genesis does. God’s “words of inspiration” in Genesis 3:15 are that the Seed of the woman will crush the serpent’s head, while the serpent will strike His heel. This is to happen centuries after the Fall. Jesus, the “Seed of the woman,” crushes the head of the serpent (Satan), while the serpent strikes His heel through the crucifixion.

Muslims believe in the Virgin birth (thus establishing Jesus as the “Seed of the woman”). They also believe in the perfection of Jesus (see Sura 19:19 “faultless Son”). They differ only in

refusing to acknowledge the crucifixion – though this is plainly foreshadowed in Genesis. For the “raiment of piety” provided by God was made from the skin of animals – an allusion to animal sacrifice and the future role of Jesus as the “Lamb of God.”

VII. PRACTICE PERFECT COURTESY IN ARGUMENT.

Managing discussion with a Muslim requires skill and patience. You will need to vary your approach and method. Note what type of person your Muslim friend is. How much does he know about the respective tenets of his religion and yours? Has he a vague knowledge of religious issues? Is he a keen intellectual with a grasp of the differences between Islam and Christianity? Remember you have much room for agreement, but that Muslims will often overlook the importance of sin and separation from God – and of God’s righteousness providing the means of reconciliation.

Keep asking the Lord how best to proceed in discussions. Christ has promised that the Holy Spirit will help believers when they are stuck for words and ideas. Not all Muslims will want to engage in discussion on faith issues, but many will. And as Richard Thomas points out, “God loves to hear us speak well of His Son.”

On the appropriate way to behave with Muslims, I can find no better guide than the Rev. W. St. Clair Tisdall. Written decades ago, his advice remains absolutely relevant:^v

1. Don’t argue to “win.”

Remember that your aim is not to silence objectors, not to gain merely logical victories, but to lead souls to Christ. In argument we should endeavor to remove stumbling blocks. We must not expect to convert souls. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, whose aid must at every step, be prayerfully and believingly involved. Urge the inquirer to prayerfully read the Bible, especially the New Testament and not to be content with finding fault with it, nor discovering difficulties in it.

2. Be focused.

Try to limit the discussion on each occasion to one or two definite points, which should be decided upon before-

hand. To let the inquirer hurry from one point to another without waiting for an answer is a waste of time, or worse. Try also to bring the argument to some definite conclusion. This can be done only by planning out the course of the discussion, as far as possible in one's own mind, and keeping the goal steadily in view.

3. Set an example in courtesy.

Pay full attention to fairness and courtesy in your arguments. It is not usually practiced in arguments as frequently as it is in normal conversation. I believe its use in arguments has an enormous effect. If you are polite and kind in your words and manner, a Muslim will generally, even against his will, be forced to observe the rules of courtesy. Regard him as a brother for whom Christ died, and to whom you are sent with the message of reconciliation. You can generally repress any rudeness on his part, without offending him, by showing courtesy to him and making it clear, by your manner, that you expect the same conduct from him. Never let an argument degenerate into a quarrel.

4. Never get angry.

Remember that the Muslim may be trying to make you angry. If he can succeed in leading those present to imagine that you are angry, he will, in their opinion, have gained victory. If you unintentionally become angry in an argument, your opponent will pause and look at the audience in order to catch their attention. Then he will begin to apologize, with an appearance of fear, for having quite unintentionally made you angry. He has gained the round; he has made his opponent angry, or at least pretends to think he has, and perhaps convinces the rest that it is so. Anger shows consciousness of defeat.

5. Demonstrate a serious attitude to faith and sin.

Try to make the Muslim feel the deep importance of the matters he is inclined to discuss so lightly. Show him that you regard them as matters of life or death. However frivolous he may be at first, he will generally empathize

with you very readily if you are in earnest. If you are not, you are not a true witness for Christ...Create a climate that leads to the conviction of sin and shows him his need for a savior. Muslims have very little idea of the seriousness of sin. Try to reach their hearts and not merely their intellects. Appeal to them as persons for whom Christ died, who need the salvation, which He has commissioned you to offer through the Gospel.

6. Avoid being led into giving offence.

Never be misled into answering (in a discussion) such a question as “What do you think of Muhammad?” or into making a direct attack upon him. To do so would be to offend your hearers and do immense harm. It is needless to tell them your opinion of Muhammad, for they will not accept it on your authority. In time, if they read the Bible, they will form a very decided opinion themselves. It is better to reply something like this, “What does it matter what my opinion of Muhammad is? I am to tell you about Christ.” The meaning of this will be quite clear to your audience. Your courtesy will be appreciated. Probably you will be asked to talk about Jesus.

7. Speak of Muhammad with due respect.

The Christian should be careful to give some title of courtesy to Muhammad and, if need be, (among Shia’ Muslims) to Ali and Fatimah or other persons honored by Muslims. In some countries if you do otherwise it would be deemed disrespectful. In India, it is best to say “Muhammad Sahib;” in Persia, “Hazrat-i Muhammad” since Christians cannot give him higher titles, but Muslims are content if we give him these. In Egypt and Middle Eastern countries, they do not seem to resent his being spoken of simply as “Muhammad.” You can say, “Nabeyyokum” (“Your Prophet”) out of courtesy. It is necessary, however, to add to “Jesus” the title of “our Savior” or “Lord.” Muslims themselves always give Him some title of respect, and they are offended if you omit it.

8. Avoid theological technicalities.

Be careful in the theological terms you use. See that you, first of all, thoroughly understand them yourself in your mother tongue. The words like “holiness, atonement, sin, kingdom of heaven, and peace” which are used in the vernacular version of the Bible, do not convey their Christian theological meaning to the Muslim at first glance. Guard against any misunderstanding on his part. Use his own theological terms as far as possible, making quite sure that you first fully understand them.

9. Ground discussion in Biblical text.

*Whenever the Muslim quotes and finds an argument in any passage from the Bible, make a point of turning to that passage and ascertaining from the context exactly what is said and what is meant. Do not rely upon memory. This is of utmost importance. To read the verse aloud within the context will often afford a complete reply to the difficulty, which has been discussed. The same plan might profitably be applied to the *Quran*, which must be quoted in context.*

10. Know what you think.

Before entering into an argument, you should not only know the Bible well, but should also have your own mind made up on the matters which are in dispute. Of course you must be fully convinced of the authenticity of all the main Christian doctrines and also know exactly what the Bible teaches and what it does not teach on such subjects as the fall, conditional immortality, eternal hope, the atonement, and many more.

11. Warmly affirm what you have in common.

*Readily accept, and make it plain that you heartily accept, all truth common to Christianity and Islam. Then lead on from these points of agreement to show them how much deeper some of their creeds are than they realize. You can show that the Bible teaches all that is true in their creeds and that it even goes further on such points than their theology does. In speaking of the *Quran*, you have to be very respectful and be careful how you quote it. But*

in treating the great truths which are common to the two religions, the Christian can speak freely and heartily, and in so doing can awaken a glow of sympathy in the hearer, which will at least dispose him to listen to what you have to say in regard to distinctive Christian doctrines.

12. Draw out, don't lecture.

Put yourself as much as possible in the Muslim's place, to be able to understand his difficulties. You will thus be better able to frame your answers in such a way that he understands. The Socratic method of asking questions and leading your opponent to find the answers, and, thus, to convince himself of the truth of what you wish to teach him, is perhaps the best method if properly used. You may ask, "Why ablutions before prayer? Is it just for physical cleanliness?" or "If God is capable of doing everything, can't He come to us in the form of a man?"

13. Start from what a Muslim can accept.

Remember what the orthodox Muslim will be ready to admit and what he will not at first admit. You will thus be on sure ground in your arguments, and will have a place to stand whereupon to plant your seeds.

a. He is bound to admit the validity of arguments on the assumption (for the sake of argument, as far as you are concerned) that the Quran is the Book of God, that every word and letter of it in the original is of divine authorship and that he is unwilling to compromise this.

b. He accepts the great doctrines of (1) God's unity, almighty power, wisdom, eternity, unchangeableness, and that He is the union of all good attributes; (2) His creation of the universe, and His divine government and providence; (3) The divine mission of all the prophets, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus; (4) the eternal distinction between the Creator and His creatures; (5) The existence of the world and of human personality, of the human spirit, of life after death, of future rewards and punishments, the resurrection, the need of faith, the existence of good and evil spirits; (6) Christ's divine mission,

His birth of a virgin, His sinlessness (all the prophets being called sinless by Muslims) His ascension, His life in heaven now, His second coming, and that Christ is the “Word of God” (Kalimatu’llah) and “A Spirit from Him” (Ruhun minhu) (Sura 4:171); (7) that the Bible, as originally given, was a divine revelation; and (8) that idolatry is the one unpardonable sin (Sura 4:48,116).

On the other hand, he does not realize the guilt of sin, the existence of eternal Moral Law. He has no real conception of God’s holiness or justice or love. He practically conceives of God’s omnipotence as eclipsing all His other attributes. He sees no need of an atonement. He denies the Trinity, the Sonship of Christ and His death on the cross. He believes that the Bible was tampered with, or at any rate, he thinks that it has been annulled by the “descent of the Quran upon Muhammad.”

Ninety percent of the Muslim objections come from their tendency to look upon everything and interpret everything carnally. My main endeavor is to try and set forward the spiritual side of the text or doctrine. If I can get them to realize that there is a spiritual side to religious observances, I think something is gained.

For instance, when they raise the objection that we do not perform ablution before prayers, the objector has probably never looked on ablution as more than a form, and the spiritual teaching that may be derived from it is very likely quite a revelation to him. My line with that and similar objections would be to take the objector a step back to the nature of prayer and of what preparations are required when we approach our Creator.

Similarly, objections about the cut of our beard and moustaches or the make of our clothes, or the fact of our removing or not removing our head dress and shoes under certain conditions all bring the discussion back to the underlying motives and internal nature of true religion. Help may be obtained by reminding them of the words they use in the “niyyat” before prayers which stresses on heart preparation as opposed to externalities.

14. Pray!

The evangelist must remember and act on Bengel's advice: "Never enter upon controversy without knowledge, without love, without necessity," and, let us add, without prayer.

ⁱ See Richard Thomas, *Islam, Aspects and Prospects* (Villach, Austria: Light of Life, n.d.), pp 187-190.

ⁱⁱ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* 26216, 31062.

ⁱⁱⁱ Muslim, *Sahih*, 4791.

^{iv} *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol.3, p.107.

^v The points in this section are adapted from W. St. Clair Tisdall, *A Manual of Leading Mohammedanian Objections to Christianity* (SPCK., London, 1904), pp. 13-23.

Muhammad

I. PRE-ISLAMIC ARABIA

It is a sobering thought that, had there been a sound Christian evangelist on the Arab Peninsula in the sixth century, Muhammad might have become one of the world's great Christian evangelists. In fact, Muhammad *was* influenced by Christianity, and also by the many other religious sects operating in the Arab Peninsula when he lived – including Judaism, the Sabaeans and the Hanifites.

1. *Judaism*

Judaism was introduced to the Arab Peninsula by the Jews fleeing Titus's destruction of Jerusalem in the year AD 70. Some rich Jewish families lived in Yathrib, Yemen and elsewhere. Their wealth was based on agriculture, money lending, and trading in armor and jewels. The Arabs treated them with respect because the Jews had a "Holy Book." Some Arabs even embraced Judaism.

Muhammad must have been familiar with the Jewish Scriptures, because a lot of material from them crops up in the Quran. Sura 3 is named *Al Imran* (the family of Imran, the father of Moses); Sura 10 is named *Yunis* (Jonah); Sura 12 is named *Yusuf* (Joseph); Sura 14 is named *Ibrahim* (Abraham); and Sura 71 is named *Nuh* (Noah). The Quran speaks about the Exodus (Sura 2:49,50). Muhammad often reminded the Jews of his day of the revelations God gave to Moses. The Quran also says, "We have bestowed on the

children of Israel the Book and the Command and the Prophethood, and provided them with good things and favored them above all peoples” (Sura 45:16).

The Arabs knew the Jews had rejected the Christian doctrines of the Virgin Birth, the Trinity, and the Deity and Atoning Death of Christ. The Quran blames the downfall of Israel on “...their breaking of their covenant, and their disbelieving in the revelations of Allah, and their slaying of the prophets wrongfully and their saying, ‘Our hearts are hardened.’ Nay, but Allah has set a seal upon them for their disbelief, so that they believe not save a few. And because of their disbelief and of their speaking against Mary a tremendous calumny” (Sura 4:155,156).

One noteworthy Jewish sect of second century Arabia was the Ebionites. They counted Jesus as the Messiah, the son of David, and the great Lawgiver. Yet they saw Him as a mere man like Moses, who received the call to Messiahship, and was united with the Holy Spirit only at the point of baptism. Origen of Alexandria said the Ebionites were like a blind man who cried, “Have mercy on me, Son of David,” but lacked a clear understanding of who Jesus was.

2. Christianity

At least at the start of his mission, Muhammad seems to have been well-disposed toward Christians:

Sura 5:69,82

Those who believe [the Muslims] and those who are Jews, and Sabaeans and Christians, whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does right; there shall no fear come upon them, neither shall they grieve... You will find the most vehement of mankind in hostility to those who believe to be the Jews and idolaters. And you will find the nearest of them in affection to those who believe to be those who say, ‘We are Christians.’ That is because there are among them priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant.

However, most Christian teaching which reached the Arab Peninsula was heretical. Because the Arab Peninsula was not under Roman rule, many heresies oppressed in the Roman

Empire found asylum in it. Consequently the Christianity Muhammad came in contact with was far from orthodox.

(a) The Monophysites

Religious strife in the Roman Empire caused the Monophysites to flee to Al-Hira. They believed that Christ's nature was divine but that He possessed human attributes. They came from Syria and Iraq to spread their form of Christianity. The tribe of Ghassan converted to the Monophysite faith. By AD 518 they had a monastery. Bishops are recorded in Oman in AD 424, and in Bahrain in AD 575.

(b) The Nestorians

Nestorian Christianity came early to Al-Hira, where a monastery was built in AD 410. Nestorians believed that there were two distinct persons in the Incarnate Christ, one human and the other divine. This is against the orthodox teaching that Christ was fully human, fully divine, and indivisible.

Nestorians had started to migrate from Ethiopia to Yemen by the year AD 525. Their aim was to establish trade rather than to spread the Gospel. They settled mainly in the southern part of the Arab Peninsula. One of the most prominent and influential Nestorian figures at the time of Muhammad was Waraqa ibn Nawfal, the Pastor of Mecca and cousin of Khadija, Muhammad's first wife. Waraqa translated chapters 1-25 of the Gospel of Matthew into Arabic, omitting the last three chapters because he did not believe in the crucifixion and resurrection.

(c) The Mariamites

Followers of this heresy used to worship Venus. When they converted to Christianity they worshipped the Virgin Mary instead, elevating Mary to the Trinity in place of the Holy Spirit. This is a heresy Muhammad specifically condemned:

Sura 5:116

When Allah said, "O Jesus son of Mary, did you say to mankind: Take me and my mother for two gods apart from Allah?" He said, "Be glorified! It is not mine to utter that to which I had no right."

(d) Docetism

This heresy denied the full humanity of Christ. Its name is derived from the Greek *dokein* (“seem”). Docetists regarded matter as inferior to spirit, so could not allow that Jesus became man in a full sense – only that He *seemed* to be human. This implied either that He assumed humanity at birth and discarded it on the cross, or that His human nature was of a merely heavenly or ethereal kind. Docetists repudiated the doctrines of the Incarnation, Atonement and Resurrection, which is perhaps why Muhammad claimed that Jesus – from the Jewish standpoint – only seemed to have been crucified (see Sura 4:157).

(e) Arianism

This heresy emphasized the unity and transcendence of God, and regarded Christ as a created person, subordinate to the Father. The Arian heresy was condemned in the Nicean Council (May, AD 325) which affirmed that Christ “was born but not created” and “was of one essence with the Father.”

3. The Sabaeans

The Quran mentions the Sabaeans three times, along with Muslims, Jews and Christians, in very positive terms: “Their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve” (Sura 2:62, 5:69, 22:17). The name probably came from the Hebrew *sba*, which means “to immerse,” and referred to a Judeo-Christian sect practicing baptism in Mesopotamia.

However, the name was used also by a pagan sect. This group may have adopted the name deliberately as a means of securing the toleration accorded to Jews and Christians. They were star worshippers, who called the planets “fathers” and the elements “mothers.” They prayed seven times a day facing the Ka’aba.ⁱ They performed funeral prayers without kneeling or prostration, fasted for one month a year, practiced circumcision, and undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca. They also forbade bigamy and the eating of pork, dead meat, and blood, and permitted divorce only on the decree of a judge. Islam adopted many of their teachings.

4. The Hanifites

The name Hanifite denotes “those who preserved themselves

from deviating to false religions and followed the true religion of Ishmael, son of Abraham, who worshiped the one God, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth.”¹¹

Hanifites rejected idolatry, Judaism and Christianity. They believed in the simple unity of God, in life after death, and in the Day of Judgement. They practiced regular ablutions and circumcision, retreating to caves to pray and meditate. They rejected adultery, interest on money loans, the consumption of alcohol and pork, and the custom of killing newly-born females. Thieves they punished by cutting off the hands, adulterers by stoning, and alcoholics by whipping. The Hanifites were the first to accept Muhammad’s message, and many of their practices entered the thought and preaching of Islam.

II. THE LIFE OF MUHAMMAD

Muhammad (whose name means “the praised one”) was born to the tribe of Qureish, in Mecca, around AD 570. He was to become one of the most influential figures of all time – the prophet of Islam, which means “surrender to the will of God.” Muhammad’s father was Abdullah, son of Abdul Muttalib. His mother was called Amina.

Mecca, about 85 kilometers inland from the port of Jeddah on the Red Sea, was one of the most important commercial and spiritual centers of Arabia in Muhammad’s time. The people of Mecca helped finance the caravans that traveled from Yemen to Syria, supplying the lands of the west with spices for preserving food, as well as with silks and other luxuries. After purchasing these goods from Indian ships in Aden, traders transported them north to Mecca, and from there to Syria and Egypt. Mecca was a significant staging-post on the Eastern trade route.

Pilgrims from many neighboring areas traveled to Mecca to worship. The famous black stone called the Ka’aba, housed in Mecca, had been the focal point of pagan worship for hundreds of years. Local tradition says that when Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden they met each other on the plain of Arafat. They walked westward until they came to the valley floor where Mecca would stand. There Adam built a small structure of four walls, setting the black stone in one corner.

After the deluge of Noah, the building was lost under the sands. But later, on God's orders, Abraham and his son Ishmael dug up the ruins and rebuilt them.

The Quran says, "When Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundation of the House, [Abraham prayed] 'Our Lord, accept from us [this duty]. You only are the Hearer and the Knower'" (Sura 2:127). Muslims believe that the Ka'aba was the first house of God ever built on earth.

In fact, almost twenty Ka'abas have existed in the Arabian Peninsula at different times and places. But the most famous, and consistently the most deeply respected, is the one in Mecca. By the time of Muhammad, 360 different idols – one for each day of the lunar year – had been put around the Ka'aba for worship and intercession.

1. Muhammad's Childhood

Muhammad left Mecca soon after his birth. In keeping with the custom of Meccans, he was taken into the desert to be wet-nursed by a Bedouin mother. It was there, with his nurse Halima and her tribe, *Beni Saad*, that Muhammad spent the first five years of his life. In this way he gained two advantages: a healthy constitution, and a desert-tribe dialect which the people of Arabia viewed as "pure" and eloquent.

According to some accounts, before Muhammad was three years old he declared that "two men dressed in white clothes" approached him, opened his belly, and touched his organs. Halima then took the child to his mother, reporting that something like a fit had happened to him. She attributed it to the influence of an evil spirit. Amina persuaded Halima to take Muhammad back, but fresh symptoms appeared, causing Halima to return him permanently to his mother when he was five. Muslims explain this early experience as two angels purifying and preparing Muhammad for his message:

Sura 94:1-3

Have we not caused thy bosom to dilate, and eased you of the burden which weighed down your back?

Muhammad's father, Abdullah, died before Muhammad was born. When he was six, his mother took him on an eleven-day

journey north to Yathrib, her home town. On the return trip, she became ill and passed away, leaving the child's 80-year-old grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, to take care of him. Within two years the grandfather also died, and Muhammad was given to his uncle, Abu Talib.

2. Trip to Syria at Twelve

Details of Muhammad's early life are mostly traditional, and



thus difficult to verify. But it is generally held that at the age of twelve he accompanied his uncle Abu Talib on a caravan journey to Syria that lasted several months. It was there that he first came into contact with the Christian people of Syria.

Quite probably, the picture of Christianity presented in the Quran derives from impressions formed on this journey. It is also possible that in the sincerity of his early search for the truth, Muhammad might have embraced, and faithfully adhered to, the teachings of Jesus, especially as, according to tradition, he formed a friendship with a Christian monk. But as researcher Sir William Muir points out:

Instead of the simple message of the Gospel as the revelation of God reconciling mankind unto Himself through His son, the sacred dogma of the Trinity was forced upon the traveler with...offensive zeal. And the worship of Mary was exhibited in so gross a form as to leave the impression in Mahomet's mind that she was held to be a goddess, if not the third person of the Trinity.ⁱⁱⁱ

3. The Hidden Years

The period between Muhammad's twelfth and twenty-fifth birthdays may be termed "the hidden years." He no doubt herded sheep and goats on Mecca's nearby hills, as did the other boys of his region, and he probably went on other caravan journeys. The authorities agree that neighbors and friends viewed the youth as reserved and temperate. Sir William Muir expresses it this way:

Little is told us of the youth of Mahomet. He used to attend a fair held yearly at a spot three days' journey from Mecca where he witnessed the vainglorious contests in poetry and rhetoric so characteristic of Arab manners. At this fair also he met Jews and Christians, and gained, no doubt, some acquaintance with their views. In after life he used to refer with satisfaction to his having there met Coss, the bishop of Najran, and having heard at his lips "the preaching of the catholic faith of Abraham."

Endowed with a refined mind and delicate taste, reserved and meditative, he lived much within himself, and the

pondering of his heart no doubt supplied occupation for leisure hours spent by others of a lower stamp in rude sports and profligacy. The fair character and honorable bearing of the unobtrusive youth won the approbation of his fellow citizens; and he received the title, by common consent, of al-Amin, "the Faithful." ^{iv}

4. Khadija, the First Wife

When Muhammad was 25, he entered into the service of a wealthy widow by the name of Khadija. He was faithful in his work, and became the attendant of her caravans. In this capacity he visited the lands of the north again, going at least as far as Damascus and Aleppo. Khadija was so impressed with him that she sent her sister to make a marriage proposal on her behalf.

Muhammad reluctantly accepted. Khadija's father, however, refused to give his consent. So Khadija prepared a feast, and, when her father was drunk, slaughtered a cow and had the marriage ceremony completed by Waraqa ibn Nawfal, Khadija's cousin and pastor of Mecca. Khadija was fifteen years older than Muhammad, and had a daughter and two sons by previous marriages. Nevertheless they lived happily together. She bore Muhammad two sons and four daughters. The daughters survived, but the boys died in infancy.

5. The First Revelation

With the wealth and prestige that his marriage brought him, Muhammad was now able to take part in the civil councils at Mecca, and had leisure for contemplation. Being of a deeply meditative nature, he often retired for days at a time to lonely desert hill caves. One day, while he was in a cave in Mount Haraa, a few kilometers north of Mecca, he had a vision.

According to the account of Ibn Ishaq, Muhammad's first biographer, the future prophet was fast asleep when the angel Jibril (Gabriel) appeared to him and commanded: "Recite!" Startled and frightened, Muhammad asked, "What shall I recite?" Immediately he felt his throat tighten, as if the angel had grabbed his neck and was choking him. "Recite!" the angel again commanded. Again Muhammad felt the angel's grip. "Recite!" the angel com-

manded for the third time. "Recite in the name of the Lord, the Creator, who created man from a clot of blood! Recite! Your Lord is most gracious. It is He who has taught man by the pen that which he does not know" (Sura 96:1-5).

This experience Muhammad later saw as his call to be the prophet of the true God, Allah. The name is closely related to the Hebrew *Elohim*, used for God in the Old Testament. Muhammad returned to his wife, gazing around him like one semiconscious. "It is as though fire were burning within me," he cried. "Bring me some cold water, perhaps it will quench that burning fire." Fetching water from the well, Khadija and her servants poured it over her husband. Many pails were needed to cool that strange heat in his body. Then a trembling seized hold of him, and Khadija, wrapping him in a thick cloak, laid him on his bed to rest.

6. The Nature of Muhammad's Revelations

Muhammad's contemporaries tell us something of the manner in which he received his revelations:

Ibn Sa'ad

At the moment of inspiration, anxiety pressed upon the Prophet, and his countenance was troubled. He fell to the ground like an inebriate, or one overcome by sleep; and in the coldest day his forehead would be bedewed with large drops of perspiration. Even his she-camel, if he chanced to become inspired while mounted on her, would be affected by a wild excitement, sitting down and rising up, now planting her legs rigidly, then throwing them about as if they would be parted from her. To outward appearance inspiration descended unexpectedly, and without any previous warning to the Prophet. When questioned on the subject he replied, "Inspiration comes in one of two ways; sometimes Jibril communicates the Revelation to me, as one man to another, and this is easy; at other times, it is like the ringing of a bell, penetrating my very heart, and rending me; and this it is which afflicts me the most." Muhammad attributed his gray hairs to the withering effect produced upon him by the "terrific Suras."^v

Tabari

When revelation came to him, he would fall into a violent state of agitation. His face would turn livid, and he would cover himself with a blanket from which he would afterwards emerge perspiring copiously.^{vi}

Ibn Hanbal

This process, at times accompanied by snoring and reddening of the face, came to be recognized as the normal form of inspiration, and could be produced without the slightest preparation. The Prophet would receive a divine communication in immediate answer to a question addressed him while he was eating; and would, after delivering it in this fashion, proceed to finish the morsel which he held in his hand when he was interrupted; or a revelation would come in answer to a question addressed him as he stood in the pulpit. In revelations which appear to be very early, Muhammad is addressed as “the man in the blanket,” or “the man who is wrapped up.”^{vii}

Obada ibn as-Samit

When the inspiration descended on the Prophet he was distressed on account of that and his face was altered to a dark hue.^{viii}

Another source describes how Muhammad lowered his head during a revelation – causing his companions to follow suit – and then raised it again when the revelation ceased. Muhammad’s favorite wife, Aisha, recalled that al-Harith ibn Hisham once asked the Prophet, “How does the inspiration come to you, messenger of God?” To which Muhammad replied, “It comes to me at times like the clanging of a bell, and that is the type which is most severe for me; it then leaves me, I having retained of it what the angel said. At times the angel appears to me in human form and speaks to me, and I retain what he says.” Aisha said she had seen the inspiration descending on him on a very cold day, and his forehead pouring with sweat when it left.^{ix}

7. Cessation of the Revelation

For some time after his initial revelation, Muhammad received no further messages. Al-Bukhari, narrating Aisha, says, “The commencement of the Divine inspiration to Allah’s Apostle...Khadija then accompanied him to (her cousin) Waraqa bin Naufal, the son of her parental uncle, who, during the pre-Islamic period became a Christian, and used to write the Gospels in Arabic as Allah wished him to write... Khadija said to him, ‘O my cousin, listen to the story of your nephew...’ The Prophet described what he had seen. Waraqa said, ‘This is the same Namus that Allah had sent to Moses. I wish I were young and could live up to the time when your people would turn you out.’ Allah’s apostle asked, ‘Will they turn me out?’ Waraqa replied in the affirmative and said, ‘Never did a man come with something similar to what you have brought but was treated with hostility. If I should remain alive till the day when you will be turned out then I would support you strongly.’ But after a few days Waraqa died and the Divine Inspiration was also paused for a while. The Prophet became so sad as we have heard that he intended several times to throw himself from the tops of high mountains. Every time he went up to the top of a mountain to throw himself down, Gabriel would appear before him and say, ‘O Muhammad, you are indeed Allah’s apostle in truth, whereupon his heart would become quiet and he would calm down and would return home. Whenever the period of the coming of the inspiration used to become long, he would do as before.”^x

Muhammad Subeih, in his book on Muhammad, gives the following explanation for the interlude:

The cessation of revelation was based on providential wisdom. The pressure attendant upon it had already told upon the Prophet’s physique. His body might not stand such a rapid repetition. The interval, therefore, was necessary in the interest of his physical health.^{xi}

Commentators variously judge the lapse to have lasted anywhere from six months to three years. Finally, however, a second revelation came, recorded in the Quran as Sura 74. Commenting

on this Sura, in his book *Asbab al-Nuzul*, Al-Suyuti provides some background to this, quoting Muhammad as follows:

While I was walking I heard a voice from the sky. Raising my eyes I saw the angel who had come to me in Haraa' sitting on a throne between heaven and earth. I was terror-stricken on the account so that I fell to the ground. The angel said, "You [Muhammad] who are wrapped up in your vestment, arise and give warning! Magnify your Lord! Cleanse your garments, and keep away from all pollution.

Other sources tell of Muhammad subsequently going to his family and saying, "Wrap me up, wrap me up." His wife Khadija was first to hear his call. She believed in him, encouraged him, and became his first convert.

Muhammad himself seems sometimes to have been unsure of the source of his revelations. To reassure him, tradition tells us, Khadija devised a way to test the character of the spirit. She made Muhammad sit first on her right knee, then on her left, and in both positions the apparition would continue to appear. Then she took him into her lap and removed her veil – at which point the spirit immediately disappeared, thereby proving its modesty and virtue. "Rejoice my cousin," exclaimed Khadija, "for by the Lord: it is an angel, and no devil."^{xli}

8. Followers multiply – and persecution begins.

Muhammad's first followers were of his own household: Khadija, his wife; Zaid ibn Haritha (Khadija's slave from a Christian family, given by Khadija to Muhammad, who freed and adopted him); Um Aiman (the slave of Muhammad's late mother); and Ali, Muhammad's cousin. Then came such persons as Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman – future leaders of the movement.

Reluctant to abandon their pagan worship, however, the members of Muhammad's tribe persecuted the new sect. As a result, fifteen of Muhammad's followers crossed the Red Sea to Ethiopia, among them Roqaya, Muhammad's daughter, and her husband Uthman. They were welcomed by the Ethiopian king, and stayed for three months. Surprisingly, news soon

followed them that Mecca had converted to Islam.

It appears that Muhammad, sorely pressed, had struck a compromise with the Meccans. He was reading a “revelation” that included a reference to three local goddesses: “Lat, Uzza and Manat, the third besides” (Sura 53:19, 20). Then he added, “These most high cranes! Truly their intercession is desired.” He bowed down – and all the Meccans bowed also and worshipped, saying, “Never before did he speak well of our gods.”

Allah, though, soon rebuked the Prophet, and said, “We never sent a messenger or prophet before you, but when he framed a desire, Satan cast into his desire some affair. But Allah abrogates what Satan casts. Then Allah establishes [or perfects] His signs [or revelations], and Allah is all-knowing, all-wise” (Sura 22:52).^{xiii}

How Muhammad came to be deceived in this way is not commented on. Muhammad, though, had to recant. When he withdrew his reference to the intercession of the goddesses, the Meccans felt aggrieved, and intensified their persecution, forbidding both intermarriage and commercial relations with Muslims. On Muhammad’s advice, still more followers retreated to Ethiopia – about a hundred in all – and for the next two or three years the Meccans abused and mocked the prophet.

Many of their insults are recorded in the Quran. Muhammad, they said, “listens to everyone, and is disposed to believe” (Sura 9:61); he was “surely possessed” (Sura 15:6); “an imposter” (Sura 16:101); a “mad poet” (Sura 37:36) and “bewitched” (Sura 17:47). They dismissed his prophecies as “muddled dreams he has invented” and charged, “He is but a poet. Let him bring us a sign even as those of old” (Sura 21:5). Of the Quran they complained, “Other people helped him with it” (Sura 25:4).

9. Muhammad Encouraged

The Meccan ban was finally lifted in the tenth year of Muhammad’s mission. Soon afterwards Khadija died, quickly followed by Abu Talib, Muhammad’s uncle. In straitened circumstances, Muhammad accompanied his adopted son Zaid to Taif, about 100 kilometers east of Mecca, to preach his message. But the people of Taif not only refused his

approaches; they threw stones at him and wounded him. On his way back to Mecca, Muhammad received a vision in which the Jinn (superhuman spiritual beings) surrounded him to listen to his revelations, and accepted the faith of Islam (see Sura 46:29, 72:1,2).

It was during this difficult period that Muhammad received his most dramatic revelations. He said that he undertook a night journey (*Israa*) to the temple in Jerusalem on the back of the *Buraq* – a name al-Tabari links to lightning. The *Buraq* is a winged animal, smaller than a mule and larger than an ass, with a woman's head and a peacock's tail.^{xiv} In Jerusalem Muhammad led Abraham, Moses and Jesus in prayer – thereby establishing his precedence over them – then made an ascent to the heavens (*Miraj*).^{xv}

Most Muslim theologians take the orthodox view that the *Israa* (“Night Journey”) and the *Miraj* (“Ascent to the heavens”) were physical experiences, since the *Buraq* is understood to carry bodies, not spirits. Muhammad was escorted to the heavens by the angel Jibril (Gabriel), and in each heaven they met one of the earlier messengers of God: Adam in the first heaven, Jesus and John the Baptist in the second, Joseph in the third, Idris (Enoch) in the fourth, Aaron in the fifth, Moses in the sixth, and Abraham in the seventh.^{xvi}

Finally, Muhammad was taken up to the highest heaven, into the presence of God Himself. Some hadith say that he saw God face to face, and held 70,000 conversations with Him. The Quran says:

Sura 17:1

Glory be to Him who caused His servant to journey by night from the sacred temple [of Mecca] to the farthest temple [of Jerusalem], whose surroundings we have blessed, that we might show him some of Our wonders.

10. The Hijra

In AD 622, after preaching unsuccessfully in Mecca for thirteen years, Muhammad decided to go to Yathrib, where a number of his followers were already resident. By caravan, this journey of about 400 kilometers took ten or twelve days. It came to be called the *Hijra* (“Flight”), and marks

the opening of the Muslim era, so that years on the Muslim calendar are designated “A.H.,” or “After *Hijra*.”

So rapidly did the new faith spread in Yathrib that Muhammad later renamed it Medina (“City of the Prophet”). Before his arrival in Medina, Muhammad had been simply a religious leader – one who preached the unity of Allah and warned of the Day of Judgement. Now, though, he fast became not only the spiritual head of the new faith, but also a legislator and a military leader. This change is clearly reflected in the suras of the Quran.

The first place of prayer and meeting was the open courtyard of Muhammad’s own house. Around this courtyard was a building constructed of sunbaked brick in which each of Muhammad’s wives had an identically sized room. Around it, other houses were built for his followers.

11. Muhammad’s wives

Within a year of Khadija’s death, Muhammad married two other wives. More were added to his household as time went by. Zainab had been the wife of his adopted son Zaid. Another one, Safiah, was Jewish, and still another, Mariya, a Coptic Christian. No doubt both the latter deepened Muhammad’s exposure to the Bible and Judaeo-Christian religion.

God authorized Muhammad’s polygamy with the following words:

Sura 33:50

*O Prophet! We have made lawful to you your wives whom you have paid their dowries; and those whom your right hand possesses of those whom Allah has given as spoils of war; and the daughters of your uncle on the father’s side and the daughters of your aunts on the father’s side. The daughters of your uncle on the mother’s side and the daughters of your aunts on the mother’s side who emigrated with you; and a believing woman if she gives herself unto the Prophet and the Prophet desires to ask her in marriage – a **privilege for you only, not for the rest of believers.***

The phrase I have boldfaced should be noted. Muhammad used this license to the full. A complete list of his wives is as follows:

- **Khadija bint Khuwailid.** Muhammad's first and only wife for about 25 years.
- **Sawda bint Zam'a.** One of the first women who embraced Islam. Muhammad married her one month after Khadija's death, about AD 620. She was not young, and grew fat with advancing age. He finally divorced her, but she stopped him in the street and begged him to take her back, pleading that her only desire was to rise on the Day of Judgement as his wife. Muhammad consented. The incident is referred to in Sura 4:128, which says: "If a woman fears ill-treatment from her husband or desertion, it is no sin for them if they make terms of peace between themselves. Peace is better." Muhammad used to call Sawda "longest-handed," meaning the most charitable of his wives.
- **Aisha bint Abu Bakr.** Muhammad's favorite wife. She was about nine years old when they married. She brought her toys with her to the home of her elderly husband. She was 18 when Muhammad died. She occupies a prominent place among the narrators of the Hadith. 1,210 hadith were reported by her directly from the Muhammad's mouth. After he died, she was often consulted on theological and juridical subjects.
- **Hafsa bint Umar.** Muhammad married her about AD 625. She is known for her Muslim virtues of prayer and fasting. Whenever fights broke out in the household, Hafsa took the side of Aisha against the other wives.
- **Zainab bint Khuzaima.** Twice widowed, she married Muhammad the same year he married Hafsa, and died shortly afterwards. Earlier her title had been Um al-Masakeen ("Mother of the Poor"), because she was generous to them.
- **Um Salama.** Muhammad went to comfort her after her husband's death, and asked her to become his wife – probably in AD 628.
- **Zainab bint Jahsh.** She offered herself to Muhammad in marriage, but he gave her instead to his freedman and adopted son Zaid ibn Haritha. Visiting Zaid in his home, Muhammad saw her alone and fell in love. In AD 625, Zaid

divorced her so that she could become a wife of Muhammad. To provide divine sanction for this, Muhammad received the verses of Sura 33:36-39. Zainab was about 35 when she married the prophet, and died aged about 50.

- **Juwairieh bint al-Harith.** From Beni Mustalaq, the Jewish tribe. Muhammad freed her and married her after her Jewish husband Safwan ibn Malik was killed in the war with the Muslims.
- **Safia bint Huyai.** From Khaiber, the Jewish tribe. Her father, brother and husband were killed, and she was taken captive by the Muslims. Muhammad freed her and married her.
- **Um Habiba.** Tradition says that the king of Ethiopia gave her to Muhammad.
- **Mariya the Coptic.** The Governor of Egypt sent Mariya and her sister Serine to Medina, as a gift to Muhammad. He chose Mariya. When she gave birth to his son Abraham around AD 629, Muhammad freed her and considered her his legal wife.
- **Raihana bint Zaid.** A Jewess from the tribe of Beni Quraiza. Like Safia, her husband was killed in battle and she was taken captive.
- **Maimuna bint al-Harith.** From the Hawazin tribe. Her first husband divorced her. Her second husband died. She became Muhammad's last wife.

12. Early Islamic Wars

(a) The Battle of Badr

In Medina there were five tribes – two Arab and three Jewish. Watered gardens around the city helped supply food for all. As the flow of new believers continued, there was not enough water to irrigate the farmland. To rectify this, Muhammad decided to raid the Meccan caravans passing near the city. His followers ambushed a caravan of about a thousand camels on its way to Mecca from Syria. In this attack, known as the Battle of Badr, Muhammad's men surprised and overran the much larger Meccan force, bringing home rich

spoils and numerous captives. Muhammad's revelations had already legislated for the situation:

Sura 8:41

Whatever you take as spoils of war, a fifth thereof is for Allah and for the Messenger.

The captives were duly handcuffed, and two ordered to be executed. When one asked why he was being dealt with more severely than the rest, Muhammad answered, "Because of your enmity to Allah and His prophet. I thank God who has comforted my eyes by your death."

(b) The Battle of Uhud

In response, the Meccans gathered their forces and returned to inflict a heavy defeat on the Muslims at Uhud in AD 625. Many Muslims died. Muhammad himself suffered a torn lip and broken tooth when a blow drove the rings of his helmet into his cheek. Ibn Hisham, Muhammad's biographer, records that as the blood was being washed off his face he cried out, "How shall a people prosper that treat thus their Prophet who calls them unto the Lord! Let the wrath of God burn against the men that have besprinkled the face of His Apostle with his own blood!"

The setback proved only temporary, however, for the armed forces of Mecca failed to follow up their victory. A pattern of conflict had been set, and, as the army of the new religion grew, neighboring tribes were subjugated. It has been argued that, in the circumstances, Muhammad had little choice but to scatter enemy forces before they could unite and crush Islam.

Muhammad was forced to have recourse to the sword in order to defend his followers and their common faith. Had he not done so, his disciples, to all seeming, would have been annihilated, his religion suffocated in the cradle and he himself treated in the same manner as his illustrious predecessor.^{xvii}

Several verses in the Quran advocate aggression:

Sura 2:190, 191

Fight for God's sake them that fight against you, but transgress not, for God loves not the transgressors. Kill them wheresoever you find them; and expel them from whence

they have expelled you: for temptation [to idolatry] is more grievous than killing.

Sura 9:36

Attack those who join gods with God in all, and know that God is with those who fear him.

Muhammad Subeih makes the following comment on the prophet's military campaigns:

The writers of the life of Muhammad disagree about the total number of battles to which he went out. The majority of them say that these battles were between twenty and twenty-seven. In the battle of Uhud, he killed Ubai Ben Khalaf with his own hands. The sarias which he sent out to fight were forty-seven. A Saria consisted of 50 to 400 soldiers.^{xviii}

(c) The battle of the Ditch

In AD 627, a superior Meccan force besieged Medina. At the suggestion of Salman, a Persian companion, Muhammad dug large trenches in front of the unprotected parts of the city. Thus the prolonged struggle gained the name "The Battle of the Ditch." The fact that the technical name for the ditch, or trench, is Persian rather than Arabic lends credibility to the story.

(d) Later expeditions

These included one against the Jews of Quraiza. Seven hundred Jews were captured and killed, and their wives and children sold into slavery. When a group of Jews complained about the slaughter of Ka'ab, one of their leaders, Muhammad replied, "Ka'ab offended me by his seditious speeches and his evil poetry. And if any one amongst you does the same, verily, the sword shall be again unleashed."^{xix}

(e) Overcoming Mecca

Battles with various tribes continued through the seventh year after the Hijra. In that year, Muhammad tried unsuccessfully to make a pilgrimage to the Ka'aba in Mecca. It required another year, and the negotiation of a peace at Hudaibieh, before he could achieve his ambition. Even so, many Meccans remained hostile, and Muhammad determined to capture his native city. In the end his army of ten thousand took the place

unopposed, and destroyed the idols of the Ka'aba. However, Muhammad kept the famous black stone, which remains in Mecca to this day as the center of Muslim pilgrimage from all parts of the world.

Soon after the taking of Mecca, Muhammad experienced the deep sorrow of losing his small son Ibrahim. The boy's mother was the Coptic slave Mariya, and the boy himself had been named after Abraham, considered the father of the Arab and Jewish races and known as the "Father of the Faithful" in all three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

13. A new *Qiblah*

The taking of Mecca precipitated a significant change. During the early years of Islam, Muslims had faced Jerusalem to say their daily prayers. After Mecca was taken, they faced the Ka'aba instead – and so it has remained.

Three verses in the Quran give instructions concerning the *Qiblah* ("Direction for prayer"):

Sura 2:125

Unto Allah belongs the East and the West. Whichever way you turn there is the face of Allah.

Sura 2:142

Adopt the place where Abraham stood as a place of worship.

Sura 2:144

*We have seen you turn your face towards heaven. We will surely turn you towards a *Qiblah* that will please you. Turn towards the inviolable sanctuary. And wherever you may, turn your face towards it.*

Muslim theologians argue that the third verse abrogates the first two. This may reflect a change in Muhammad's own thinking. At first he hoped that the Jews and Christians would accept his religion. He referred to both as Ahl al-Kitab ("People of the Scripture"), hoping that they would authenticate his mission. Indeed the Quran instructs Muhammad to defer to them:

Sura 10:95

If you are in doubt regarding what We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Scripture before you.

It is likely, then, that Muhammad initially looked upon his mission simply as a reform movement and a continuation of the Judeo-Christian religion. However, various circumstances brought about a hardening of his attitude. Muhammad was no doubt greatly disappointed when Jews and Christians failed to embrace his new faith; but disappointment turned to animosity as these groups resisted him with force of arms. The latter suras of the Quran show clearly the resulting Islamic policy of hostility toward Jews and Christians.

14. Muhammad's Death

In the year after Mecca was taken, deputations were sent to various tribes to invite them to embrace Islam. Most of the tribes accepted Islam as their religion and Muhammad as their political leader. The suras of the Quran continued to be revealed, and Muhammad made his pilgrimage to the newly-conquered Mecca with great ceremony.

But he was now past sixty years of age, and the turmoil and demanding life of the desert military camps had taken their toll. He fell ill on the return journey, and his health continued to deteriorate when he got back to Medina. Despite his sickness, he sent out a crusade against the territory that is now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and mounted the pulpit of the mosque for a final address to his followers. After this, he rested his head in the lap of Aisha, his favorite wife, murmured, "Eternity in Paradise! Pardon!" and quietly passed away. The probable date of his death is June 8th, AD 632.

At first, his followers were greatly dismayed. It is recorded that Umar ibn al-Khattab endeavored to calm the crowd with the message that their leader was not dead, but in a trance. When Abu Bakr heard this, he marched out of the room to announce in a loud voice, "Whosoever worships Muhammad, let him know that Muhammad is dead! But to those who worship Allah, let it be known that Allah is alive and does not die!"

No matter what the critics may say about Muhammad, it is abundantly clear that the world has seen few religious leaders of his caliber. His enduring influence, evidenced in the devotion of his hundreds of millions of followers, confirm his place as second only to Jesus Christ. By common consent he is the greatest Arab ever to have lived, and one of history's great men.

III. WAS MUHAMMAD FORETOLD IN THE BIBLE?

The Quran claims that previous Scriptures foretell Muhammad's appearance:

Sura 7:157

Those who follow the Apostle, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own [Scriptures] – in the Torah and the Gospel.

It backs up this claim by placing the following words in the mouth of Jesus:

Sura 61:6

O children of Israel, I am the messenger of Allah to you, confirming that which was revealed before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who will come after me, whose name is Ahmad.

Also, Arab ibn Sariya records this saying of the Prophet:

I heard the apostle of God saying, "I am written in God's book as the last prophet. I shall tell you the beginning of it: my father Abraham's call, the prophecy of Jesus about me, and the vision which my mother had seen. All the mothers of the prophets saw that when my mother had given birth to me, light came out of her that illuminated the palaces of Syria." xx

Muslim scholars have searched the Bible for prophecies of the coming of Muhammad. We will discuss the two most important passages they cite – Deuteronomy 18:18 and the New Testament references to the *parakletos* in John 14:16,17,26; 15:26; 16:7 and Acts 1:4, 5.

1. Claims based in the Old Testament

The verse at issue runs as follows:

Deuteronomy 18:18

I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Muslims say that the prophet described here is none other than Muhammad. In support of this they put forward three arguments:

- The Quran is God's words put in Muhammad's mouth.
- Muhammad was a descendent of Ishmael, so he is a brother of the Jews.
- Muhammad was like Moses.

In reply to the first point, we say that God put His words in the mouths of many Old Testament prophets. God said to Jeremiah, "I have put my words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:9). Jesus said, "I have given them the words which you had given me" (John 17:8). Deuteronomy 18:18, then, applies not to one but to every true prophet.

The second point claims that Muhammad was a brother of the Jews. But we reply that if Muhammad is a descendent of Ishmael, he is a cousin of the Jews, not a brother! Moses said to the Israelites, "One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother" (Deuteronomy 17:15). This clearly identifies Jesus as the prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18:18, since Jesus was from the royal tribe of Judah.

The third point highlights strong resemblances between Muhammad and Moses. Muslims argue that Moses and Muhammad were both born naturally of human parents and buried on earth – whereas Jesus was born miraculously of a virgin, and was raised up to heaven. Further, Moses and Muhammad became lawgivers, military leaders, and spiritual guides to their peoples. Both were rejected and fled into exile, returning later as religious and secular leaders. Both made possible the immediate and successful conquests of the land of Palestine by their successors – Joshua and Umar, respectively.

None of these things, say the Muslims, is true of Jesus. But

this is incorrect. The Bible often calls Jesus a prophet (see Matthew 13:57). He was rejected by His own people. And as Moses led the Israelites during his life on earth, so Jesus today is leading the Church from His heaven. In this respect, the ties between Jesus and Moses are very strong.

Also, there are many similarities between Moses and Jesus which Muhammad does not share. Moses and Jesus were Jews; Muhammad was an Ishmaelite. Moses and Jesus both left Egypt to perform God's work; Muhammad was never in Egypt. In particular, if we study a later passage of Deuteronomy, we will find three major ways in which Moses and Jesus are linked:

Deuteronomy 34:10-12

There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great and terrible deeds which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

This passage makes three statements about Moses that resonate only with Jesus Christ:

(a) God spoke directly to Moses.

Moses was a direct mediator between God and the people of Israel. God "used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). Even the Quran says that God spoke directly to Moses in a way in which he did not speak to other prophets (see Sura 4:164).

God had promised that the prophet to come would be like Moses in this mediatorial work. Moses took the blood and threw it upon the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:8).

Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant. As Moses ratified the first covenant by the blood of a sacrifice, so Jesus would ratify the second covenant in the same way. Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Corinthians 11:25). The prophet foretold in Deuteronomy 18:18 would be the one

to mediate this new covenant between God and his people. “Therefore Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant” (Hebrews 9:15). Jesus knew God face-to-face. He said, “I know him, I come from him, and he sent me” (John 7:29). He proclaimed, “No one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matthew 11:27). And again, “Not that anyone has ever seen the Father except him who is from God – he has seen the Father” (John 6:46).

Jesus is the direct mediator between God and men. He said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me... Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:6, 9). By contrast, the revelations of the Quran are said to have come to Muhammad from the Angel Jibril (Gabriel). God never communicated the revelations face to face. Nor did Muhammad ever mediate a covenant between God and the people of Israel.

(b) God performed great miracles using Moses.

Jesus and Moses both performed great signs and wonders to confirm their mediatorial work. “Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind” (Exodus 14:21). Jesus quieted the storm and calmed the waves. His disciples exclaimed, “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (Matthew 8:27). He calmed a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee with a single utterance: “Peace – be still!” (Mark 4:39).

Muhammad, according to the Quran, performed no miracles at all. In Sura 6:37, when Muhammad’s enemies said, “Why has no sign been sent down to him from his Lord?” Muhammad answered that God could send a sign if He wanted to, but had not done so. The prophet admitted, “I have not that for which you are impatient” (Sura 6:57) – meaning he could not perform the wonders of Moses, useful as these might have been in proving his case. Muhammad’s adversaries in Mecca once asked him, “Why are not [signs] sent to him, like those which were sent to Moses?” (Sura 28:48). The Quran’s answer is to devalue the signs. If people rejected the signs of Moses, it argues, why expect signs from Muhammad?

(c) The Bible confirms that Jesus Christ is the promised prophet.

Jesus said outright: “Moses wrote of me” (John 5:46). In Acts 3:22, the apostle Peter explicitly announced that Jesus is the prophet mentioned in Deuteronomy 18:18. Stephen, the first Christian martyr, quoted Deuteronomy 18:18 to prove that Moses was one of those who had “announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One” (Acts 7:37).

The Quran admits that prophethood is the privilege of the Children of Israel alone. It quotes God saying about Abraham:

Sura 6:85

We bestowed upon him Isaac and Jacob, each of them we guided; and Noah did we guide aforetime; and of his seed David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. Thus do we reward the good.

This verse does not mention Ishmael, or any of his descendents. The Quran also says:

Sura 19:49

When Abraham had turned away from them and from those whom they worshipped besides Allah, We gave him Isaac and Jacob. Each of them we made a prophet.

The same idea appears in Suras 29:27 and 21:72. Had Ishmael been chosen, his name would surely have appeared before the name of Jacob! On the contrary, though, the Quran appears to bestow special favor on the Jews:

Sura 2:47

O Children of Israel, remember my favor that I bestowed upon you and how I preferred you above all the worlds.

It does not even list the Ishmaelites among the “excellent” or the “elect”!

Sura 38:45-48

And make mention of Our bondsmen Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, men of power and vision. Indeed we purified them with a pure thought, remembrance of the Home [of the Hereafter]. Lo! In Our sight they are verily of the elect, the excellent. And make mention of Ishmael and Dhul-Kifl. All are of the chosen.

A useful summary of the case is given by Hamran Ambrie, a convert from Islam to Christianity. Formerly he had considered Deuteronomy 18:18 a prophecy about the prophet Muhammad:

But on that day I read these words [Deuteronomy 18:18] slowly and earnestly to understand the real meaning. The Holy Spirit whispered in my soul, saying, "If you meant the similarity between Muhammad and Moses was that both were born of parents, then they were only similar to the rest of mankind. This characteristic cannot be used as a point to indicate the truth of the prophecy.

"Furthermore, if Muhammad was like Moses because he was married, then both were like most others in the world! So this too could not be used to prove that Muhammad was a prophet.

"If Muhammad was regarded the same as Moses because he has descendents, then the fact could also not be used to determine the prophecy, because most people in this world have children.

"Muhammad, just like Moses, died in his old age and was buried. If this example was used to prove the meaning of the prophecy, then this point too could not be used to prove the similarities, as every person in this world has to die and be buried."

It became more and more clear to me that the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18 only indicated Jesus Christ. Indeed I found several outstanding similarities between Jesus and Moses, not shared with others:

During the childhood of Moses Pharaoh tried to kill him, just as Jesus in His childhood was threatened to be killed by Herod. Not all people are born and threatened to be killed during their infancy.

During the birth of Moses, Pharaoh was furious and ordered that all little boys should be killed. When Jesus was born Herod was very angry and ordered that little boys be killed. In the whole world only these two personalities have experienced such intense hatred and persecution.

During his childhood Moses was protected by the

daughter of Pharaoh. As a child Joseph, His foster father, protected Jesus. Not all people were protected by people chosen of God during their childhood when their lives were threatened.

During his childhood Moses lived far from his home country in Egypt. It was the same with Jesus, who during His childhood lived in exile in Egypt. Not all children have had to escape to a distant country, like Egypt, during their childhood.

When Moses served as the divine messenger of God, he received the power of the Lord to perform miracles, just as Jesus, who in His authority as the Living Word, received power from God to perform miracles by healing the sick and raising the dead.

Moses freed the people of Israel from the bondage of the Egyptian slavery, but Jesus freed His people from the chains of sin and death.

These special proofs allowed me to conclude that the unique prophecy of Deuteronomy 18 was not intended to prove Muhammad as the prophet foretold, but to indicate that Jesus Christ was the Word of God incarnate.^{xxi}

2. Claims based in the New Testament

Muslims consider a number of verses in John's Gospel and Acts to be prophecies about Muhammad:

John 14:16,17

And I will pray to the Father, and he will give you another Comforter, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you.

John 14:26

But the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

John 15:26

But when the Comforter comes, whom I shall send you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me.

John 16:7

Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Comforter will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.

Acts 1:4,5

And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Muslims believe that the Greek word *paracletos* ("Comforter," "Counselor," "Advocate") is not the original word Jesus used. Rather it is *periklutos*, meaning Ahmad, the "the praised one." Thus Jesus not only foretold the coming of Muhammad, but mentioned him by name.

To answer this we first say that there are hundreds of New Testament manuscripts in which the word used is clearly *paracletos*, not *periklutos*.

Also, if we study this Biblical passage carefully we will see that there are several reasons why this mention of the *paracletos* cannot be a prophecy about Muhammad:

- The passage says that Jesus was going to send the *paracletos*. If the *paracletos* is Muhammad, it means that Jesus sent Muhammad. No Muslim will accept this.
- The *paracletos* is a spirit. The world neither sees him nor knows him, whereas Muhammad clearly had a body and was seen and known.
- Jesus foretold the coming of the *paracletos*, but he also told the disciples: "He is with you." Muhammad lived more than five centuries after the disciples.
- Christ ordered the disciples "not to leave Jerusalem but wait" for the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. In obedience to their Master they waited ten days in Jerusalem until the Comforter came and "everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4). No one has ever claimed that Muhammad appeared at the day of Pentecost.

• Jesus foretold that the *paracletos* would be with the disciples of Jesus forever. This is not true of Muhammad. The Comforter, then, is the Spirit of God, who came on the disciples at the day of Pentecost, according to the promise of Jesus. Peter linked the coming of the Spirit with the ascension of Christ, and said, “This Jesus God raised up and of that we are all witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear” (Acts 2:32-33).

ⁱ The small building in the court of the Great Mosque at Mecca, which contains the famous black stone. The Ka’aba is the center of pilgrimage and worship and the point toward which all Muslims turn in prayer.

ⁱⁱ Gibb, H.A.R. and Kramers, J.H. (eds.), *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), subject of Hanifites.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Muir, *Mahomet and Islam* (London: The Religious Tract Society, n.d.), p. 9.

^{iv} William Muir, *op.cit.*, pp.6, 7.

^v Ibn Sa’ad, *Tabaqat*, p. 131f.

^{vi} Tabari, *Commentary*, xii, 9 and xxviii, 4.

^{vii} Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, iv, 222; vi, 56; iii, 21.

^{viii} Ibn Hanbal, *op.cit.*, vi, 163.

^{ix} *Mishkat al-Masabeeh*, p. 1254.

^x Bukhari, *Sahih, kitab al-Ta’abir* Vol 9, hadith No. 111.

^{xi} Muhammad Subeih, *Muhammad* (Cairo: Dar al-Thaqafa Al-Amma, 1957), p. 35.

^{xii} Muhammad Subeih, *op.cit.*, p.37.

^{xiii} Al-Suyuti, *Asbab al-Nuzul* of Sura 22:52.

^{xiv} *Tabari*, I, 165.

^{xv} *Bukhari*, II, 147.

^{xvi} Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, iv, 66.

^{xvii} Kiddawi, *Muhammad*, pp.180f.

^{xviii} Muhammad Subeih, *op.cit.*, p.150.

^{xix} Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wal Nihaya*, vol. 4, Chapter of Killing Ka’ab.

^{xx} Al-Bukhari, vol. 6, *kitab al-Manaqib*. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 4, Hadith Utba.

^{xxi} Hamran Ambrie, *God Has Chosen For Me Everlasting Life* (Rikon, Austria: The Good Way, n.d.), pp.11-15.

The Expansion of Islam

I. WHY DID ISLAM SPREAD SO FAST?

Various factors paved the way for the rapid spread of Islam. Among the most important are these:

- Judaism was not a missionary faith at the time of Muhammad. On the contrary, some Jews helped transfer into Muhammad's teachings a mixture of Jewish myth and Old Testament history.
- Christian evangelism had neglected Arabia, leaving the field open for Islam to take over.
- Judaism and Christianity together had weakened traditional Arabian religions, inoculating them with a collection of diluted Jewish and Christian beliefs, many of which Muhammad later included in his teaching.
- Christianity, particularly, failed to mount effective opposition to Islamic belief because there were so many competing heresies and sects.
- Monasticism often led the faithful to withdraw from society, leading to a lack of effective Christian presence.
- Christians under Muslim rule faced discriminatory taxation, inferior social status and persecution. Often this pressure caused them to desert their faith and accept Islam.

- Muhammad's reported saying that "Two religions in the Arab Peninsula are not to be tolerated"ⁱ led to the expulsion of many Jews and Christians from Arabia.
- Islam spread because of the superior military power of Muhammad and his successors. Weakened through luxury and internal division, the Persian and Roman Empires had begun to decline before Muhammad's time. They proved no match for the Arabs, who were united, proud of their faith, and accustomed to hardship. Seeing the military victories of Islam, many Christians concluded that God's favor was with the Muslims, and abandoned their faith.
- Later on, Islam spread not by military expansion, but along Muslim trade routes. Arab merchants traveled to India and China, and took their religion with them.

II. THE FOUR CALIPHS

1. Abu Bakr, first Caliph

Practically all of Arabia was under the control of Islam by the time of Muhammad's death. Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, or "successor to the Prophet," ruled for two years (AD 632-634). The tribes in the Arab Peninsula rose in protest at the political centralization in Medina. Abu Bakr sent an army to suppress revolts in Bahrain, Oman and Yemen, and his merciful treatment of the vanquished helped to establish a lasting peace. Abu Bakr saw his army defeat Persia at al-Hira in June AD 633, and Palestine at the Battle of Ajnadain a year later.

2. Umar, second Caliph

In AD 634 Umar was chosen Caliph. He ruled for ten years, extending the Muslim Empire from the borders of India to North Africa. Umar's fairness and faithful observance of obligations merited, and received, the praise of many of the conquered peoples.

In his first year as Caliph, Umar secured a victory over Syria and Palestine at the Battle of Yarmuk, putting both under Muslim rule. Damascus and other cities fell in the next year, soon followed by Aleppo and Antioch. By the end

of AD 636, Jerusalem and all of Palestine had fallen to the conquerors from Arabia.

Umar invaded Iraq in AD 636, initiating a struggle that raged fiercely until the Battle of al-Qadisiyya two years later. By AD 637, Iraq was occupied as far north as Mosul, which stands across the river from the site of ancient Nineveh. The following year, the cities of Basrah and Kufa were founded in Iraq and settled by Arabs.

In the Gulf provinces, the offensive continued with the capturing of the ancient city of Sus, in southern Iran, in the year AD 640. The great Persian army was finally defeated at the Battle of Nehawand in AD 642, and the capital city of Bayy, near the site of modern Teheran, fell the following year. In a series of further campaigns, Umar also subdued the outlying provinces of Iran, completing the desert warriors' mastery of an empire which a thousand years before had been the world's foremost power.

Umar invaded Egypt and captured Alexandria in AD 641, though it would be some years before the whole country was subdued. Territory was gained along the coast of North Africa – the start of an advance that would engulf the entire North African coastline in fifty years.

3. Uthman, third Caliph

After these grand victories, Umar was ignominiously murdered by a slave, and Uthman chosen as his successor. Uthman ruled for twelve years, but was lax in his control of the state treasury and showed favoritism in appointing members of his own clan as state officials. This led to a rebellion against him, culminating in his murder at the age of 82.

It was during Uthman's caliphate, in AD 651, that a Muslim representative was sent to the court of the Tang Dynasty in China. Many traders who had become converts to Islam were now penetrating this great land both by land and by sea.

4. Ali, fourth Caliph

Ali, whose reign lasted five years from AD 656 to 661, presided over a lasting division in Islam.

He appointed Mu'awiah, who belonged to Uthman's

clan, as governor of Syria, only to be accused by Mu'awiah of neglecting to prosecute Uthman's murderers and thus of being unfit to rule. Ali moved his capital from Medina to Kufa, Iraq. Mu'awiah's rebels put Aisha, Muhammad's widow, on a camel in the midst of their army. Ali defeated them in what came to be called the Battle of the Camel. Though Aisha openly opposed him, Ali treated her with respect and returned her to Medina. Soon, though, Mu'awiah sent another army against him, and this time Ali was killed.

Muslims were divided. The majority followed Mu'awiah, and were called *Kharijyyah* ("Seceders"). Others followed Ali, and accepted Hasan, Ali's oldest son, as the legitimate heir to the caliphate. These were called *Shi'at Ali* ("the Party of Ali"). Later Mu'awiah persuaded Hasan to step down by promising him all the money in the public treasury at Medina. Six months after Hasan abdicated, one of his wives fed him poison, and he died.

The Shi'a party believed that the caliphate should remain in Muhammad's family, and invited Husein, Hasan's younger brother, to come to Kufa as Caliph. He started out to Kufa with his family and a small army, but at Karbala, near modern Baghdad, was intercepted and killed by Yazid, Mu'awiah's son, leading a force from Syria. The schism between the Shi'a and the *Kharijyyah* – later known as the Sunnis – persists to this day.

III. THE DYNASTIES OF ISLAM

1. The Omayyad Dynasty

The death of Ali's two sons left Mu'awiah as the sole leader of political Islam. Mu'awiah's caliphate in Damascus became increasingly powerful as the Muslim armies in Asia Minor, Iraq and Egypt continued their conquests. By now Mu'awiah ruled over what was effectively a Muslim Empire. Realizing his end was near, he nominated his son Yazid to be his successor, thus introducing the dynastic principle into Islam. The Omayyad Dynasty reigned from AD 661 to 750.

During this period, expansion continued apace. Within a

century the Muslim Empire embraced more territory than the Roman Empire had at the zenith of its power. In AD 711, the Muslims crossed from North Africa into Spain, largely subduing it before they forced their way through the Pyrenees to France in AD 720. Only at the Battle of Tours, in the year AD 732, did the Islamic armies meet with decisive defeat at the hands of Charles Martel, averting the march of Islam into northern Europe. The Battle of Tours was fought a mere one hundred years after the death of Muhammad.

2. The Abbasid Dynasty

The Shi'a party had never given up hope of regaining leadership, and in AD 750 they defeated the last Omayyad Caliph in two battles, subsequently setting up a descendent of al-Abbas, Muhammad's uncle, as Caliph in Kufa. The new Abbasid Dynasty was to last for more than 500 years (AD 750 to 1258).

In AD 755, a large body of Muslim soldiers was called into China under government pay to suppress a rebellion. Given property, they settled down to establish their religion. Today there are Muslims in every province of China, though the greatest number remains in the northwest. In China, as in other countries, they resemble the general population, yet they have retained certain distinguishing marks of dress – such as special cap brims and waist sashes – and also certain customs by which they may be readily recognized as Muslims.

The Abbasid Dynasty won general approval by establishing peace, justice and prosperity. During the first 350 years of its rule it made a major contribution to world culture by blending the ancient learning of Greece with advances in philosophy and the medical sciences. In its early years, around the turn of the eighth century, Muslim expeditions also advanced into central Asia beyond the Oxus River. India was attacked in the year AD 658, but no great success was gained in that region until the early eleventh century, when Mahmud of Ghazni made extensive conquests. By the thirteenth century, all northern India from the mouth of the Indus to the delta of the Ganges had fallen before the Muslims, and Islam dominated a swath of territory extending a third of the way around the globe.

As early as the closing years of the seventh century, the Caliphs of Islam had appointed governors to Armenia, the first country to embrace Christianity nationally. To the west, this supremacy was briefly challenged by the Crusades. In the eleventh century, when the Mediterranean islands of Sicily and Malta fell into Muslim hands, European Christian forces retook them, and, in the year AD 1099, pushed the Muslims back as far as Jerusalem. Christian Europe remained in control of the Holy Land until Saladin won the Battle of Hittin in AD 1187, after which the lands of the eastern Mediterranean saw a gradual and complete reversion to Muslim power.

Militarily, the Crusades marked, at best, a temporary success. In addition they had the unfortunate effect of entrenching the enmity between Muslims and Christians – a situation from which the representatives of the two religions have never fully recovered, and which continues to afflict relations between Islamic and Western states.

IV. SUBJECT PEOPLES

In the Islamic “Middle Ages,” usually reckoned as running from AD 1280 to 1480, the Muslim Empire continued to expand through Asia, Afghanistan and the farthest parts of India. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Islam was introduced to Java, where it soon had very large numbers of converts, and also to the neighboring island of Sumatra, from which it spread to other East Indian islands, as far as the Philippines.

It is said that in the eighth year after the *Hijra*, Muhammad introduced the principle of “subject peoples.” Under this principle, certain communities of the other religions could maintain their own faith if they paid a prescribed tax to show their submission to Muslim rule. The Arabic word for “tax” is *jizya*. It comes from the root *jaza’a*, meaning “punishment.” Paying the tax, then, constituted a punishment for infidelity and an incentive to accept the faith of Islam.

The only religions entitled to Islamic protection of life and property through the *jizya* were the Christian, Jewish,

Magian, Samaritan and Sabaeen. Adherents of these faiths were called *dhimmis* (“people of protection”). Although some groups of Jews and Zoroastrians accepted this status, the largest group by far were the Oriental Christians, who held onto their Christian faith for centuries under all sorts of disabilities and restrictions.

To live as non-Muslims under an Islamic government cost – and still costs – more than just a tax. Under the rule of the Caliphs, those who did not confess the Muslim faith suffered restrictions in both public and private life. Sura 9:29 supposedly justified these restrictions, saying: “Until they pay tribute out of hand, and they be humbled.”

The Covenant of Umar lists some of these restrictions in a letter resident Christians were required to submit to the Muslim authorities. One such draft runs as follows:

When you came to us, we asked of you safety for our lives, our families, our property, and the people of our religion, on these conditions; to pay tribute out of hand to be humiliated; not to hinder any Muslim from stopping in our churches by night or day, to entertain him there three days and give him food and open to him their doors; to beat the nakus [bell] only gently in them and not to raise our voices in them in chanting; not to shelter there, nor in any of our houses, a spy of our enemies; not to build a church, convent, hermitage, or cell, nor repair those that are dilapidated, nor assemble in any that are in a Muslim quarter, nor in their presence; not to display idolatry nor invite to it, nor show a cross on our churches, nor in any of the roads or markets of the Muslims; not to learn the Quran nor teach it to our children; not to prevent any of our relatives from turning Muslim if he wishes; to cut our hair in front; to tie the zunnar round our waists; to keep to our religion; not to resemble the Muslims in dress, appearance, saddles, the engraving on our seals (that we should engrave them in Arabic); not to use their Kunyas [titles]; to honor and respect them, to stand up for them when we meet together; to guide them in their ways and goings; not to make our houses higher [than theirs]; not to keep weapons or swords, nor wear them in a town or on a journey

in Muslim lands; not to sell wine or display it; not to light fires with our dead in a road where Muslims dwell, nor to raise our voices at our funerals nor bring them near Muslims; not to strike a Muslim; not to keep slaves who have been the property of Muslims. We impose these terms on ourselves and our co-religionists; he who rejects them has no protection.ⁱⁱ

Codes of this kind generally were not enforced for sustained periods of time or over extensive territories – partly because, in the early years of Islam, many government servants, teachers, and medical men were of Christian or Jewish origin. This has undoubtedly assisted the survival of comparatively large bodies of Christians in Muslim lands – including the Copts in Egypt, the Armenians in Turkey, and the Nestorians in Iraq and Iran.

V. EXPANSION IN MODERN TIMES

1. The period extending from the latter fifteenth century down to the present has seen Islam spread through most of Africa, driven first by slave traders and later by merchants who were also active lay missionaries for their faith. Recently mission has played a less prominent part in the propagation of the faith. Nevertheless Islamic religion and culture has, by choice or imposition, engulfed such great masses of mankind that population growth alone adds millions of adherents to Islam each year.

Two other factors contribute to Islamic strength. First, although the modernist sects of Islam are in a minority, they aggressively proselytize. Second, the Muslim press has become a powerful tool both for the extension of Islam and for the education of its adherents.

Politically, an Islamic revival has occurred under the umbrella of the rich Arab oil-producing countries and under the influence of religious leaders like the late Ayatollah Khomeini. Arab governments use petro-dollars to promote Islam. Since Islam is itself a system of government, Muslim fanatics seek a Khomeini-style merging of religion and state in which the Muslim *Sharia* (“Law”) is strictly enforced. Opponents of this idea, like President Sadat of Egypt, have sometimes met untimely ends.

2. Islam in the U. S. A.

In an article, James Romaine, of the Samuel Zwemer Institute of Muslim Studies in Fort Wayne, Indiana, claims that Islam is growing in the United States at a rate of 7% to 10% annually, or about half a million Muslims per year.ⁱⁱⁱ In a few decades their number has grown from a few hundred thousand to almost eight million. It has become the third largest religion in America. Many Muslims come to America as students, and almost every university in America has a Muslim Student Association, linking to others through a national umbrella organization and the Internet.

The largest concentrations of Muslims are in urban areas, but they are found in almost every town or city in the USA. They are purchasing abandoned inner city churches and converting them to mosques. What makes Islam so appealing to Americans? James Romaine puts forward five suggestions:

- Muslims believe that Western society is bankrupt and morally corrupt – proof, it is argued, that Christianity is a failure and not the true religion of God.
- Muslims say that Christianity has only a negative message for humanity. Muslims do not believe in original sin, so all men are capable of accepting Islam and saving themselves.
- Muslims believe that Islam is the one true and universal religion of God. Therefore it is superior to every other religion, and is God's final revelation.
- Muslims believe that Islam is a religion of purity and peace. It is family-based and protects its women and children from immorality. It has helped the poor, and has cleaned up neighborhoods it has entered. It creates a caring community, which provides for and supports individuals and families.
- Muslims recognize no divisions between religion and state, which gives an Islamic government the right to establish religious laws and limit religious freedom. Islam works through the American educational and political

system to open Islamic schools and elect local and national officials.

Romaine goes on to advise his fellow countrymen to be informed about Islam. He asks them to pray more for Muslims, and to love Muslims more. Unlike Christianity, he says, Islam does not teach Muslims to love those who differ from them. He calls upon Christians to promote work among Muslims, encouraging their churches to be involved in Muslim outreach and supporting Christian witness. He ends his advice with these words: "Be encouraged. God is converting Muslims! More Muslims are coming to Christ than ever before. God is Great."

ⁱ Ibn Hisham, *The Life of Muhammad*, revised and expanded by Abd al-Masih, Villach, Light of Life, 1999, vol 2, p. 305.

ⁱⁱ Tritton, A. S., *The Caliphs and their non-Muslim Subjects* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1974) p. 5-8

ⁱⁱⁱ James Romaine, in *Missionary Monthly*, Grand Rapids, January 1999.

What Muslims Believe

I. SOURCES OF ISLAMIC DOCTRINES AND LAWS

Besides the Quran, which we will return to later in this chapter, there are three sources of Islamic doctrine and law:

- The *Hadith* (the body of tradition).
- The *Quias* (analogy in questions of law, based on the Quran and Hadith among Sunnis, and reason among the Shia’).
- The *Ijma’* (the consensus of all Islamic scholars).

1. *The Hadith*

The *Hadith* is the second authority of Islam, second only to the Quran. It consists of traditional accounts of what Muhammad did, what he allowed, and what he commanded. Collectively, these hadith form a model of conduct and a basis for law.

The influence of the *Hadith* is far-reaching in Islamic law. The Sunnis say, “If a Quranic verse contradicts a hadith, the Quranic verse may be abrogated.” Not surprisingly, in Muslim thinking, a hadith can only be accepted if (a) it supports the substance of the Islamic “tradition,” and (b) it can be shown to have been handed down through a reliable chain of authorities.

This chain is often long. Worse, many traditions were deliberately invented to support the customs or beliefs of rival parties as Islam grew and divided. So large had the mass of tradition become by the middle of the third century of Islam that the Sunnis decided to sift the wheat from the chaff.

Al-Bukhari spent 16 years listening to 600,000 hadith, of which he accepted only 7,275 as reliable. Abu Dawud accepted 4,800 out of 500,000. Of more than a thousand hadith collections, the Sunni now accept just six books – all of them originating in the third century after Muhammad's death.ⁱ These are the collections from Bukhari (d. AD 870); Muslim (d. AD 875); Abu Dawud; (d. AD 888); Al-Tirmidhi (d. AD 892); Al-Nasa'i (d. AD 915) and Ibn Maja (d. AD 886).

The Shia' sect accepts five separate books, containing not only the hadith of the Prophet, but also records of what the twelve Imams ("Leaders") said and did. The Shia' have developed their own hadith collection. They view the hadith of the Sunni with suspicion if so much as one link in the chain of authorities does not belong to Ali's group. The most important Shia' hadith collection is *Al-Kafi fi usul al-din* by al-Kallini. Quotations are widely copied and, along with verses of the Quran, used in architectural ornament and monumental decoration.

2. The *Quias*

In logic, analogy is the name given to an argument that says: because A resembles B in respect to X, it will resemble B also in respect to Y.

Muslims use this principle to extend the teaching of the Quran to matters the Quran does not address. For example, the Muslim may ask, "Is using drugs legal and permissible, or is it forbidden and prohibited?" The answer would be, "The Quran prohibits the drinking of wine in Sura 5:90, which says, 'Intoxicants and gambling and stones and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave them aside in order that you may succeed.' Therefore, by analogy, drugs are forbidden and prohibited because they are intoxicants."

3. The *Ijma'*

On points not settled by other methods, Muslims look for consensus among the Prophet's companions. Consensus more strictly refers to the agreement of the legists and the *Ulama* ("Theologians") of the second and third Islamic century, who produced a consensus for the community.

4. Interpreting Muslim Law

The interpretation of Islamic law has created four schools of judicial practice, acting on the principle of *Ijtihad* – that is, the exercise of human reason to confirm a binding rule. Sunnis recognize as authoritative only the founders of these schools, holding that after the death of the fourth, ibn Hanbal, the right of individual reinterpretation no longer held.

The collective careers of the four schoolmen extended from AD 750 to 850, and form a watershed in the evolution of the *Shariah* (“Law”). They are Malik, whose school flourished in North and West Africa; Abu Hanifa, influential in Turkey and South Asia; Shafii, whose influence predominates in Indonesia and East Africa; and ibn Hanbal, the least tolerant of the four, whose school predominates in Arabia.

For the last five centuries these schools have, by consensus, been treated as possessing equal orthodoxy. There are a few minor differences between them, Abu Hanifa sometimes taking a less stringent line. Thus, while the four agree that within Islamic lands neither Jews nor Christians may erect new places of worship, Abu Hanifa allows such building at a distance of at least a mile from the outer walls of a city. He also permits non-Arabs to recite the Quran in their own tongue, and overlooks the accidental or involuntary breaking of the fast.

II. BELIEFS OF MUSLIMS

The longer creed of Islam, formulated by the Sunni school, includes six official and authoritative doctrines. A Muslim is required to believe these because they are expressly stated in the Quran (mainly the second Sura).

1. Allah

At the time of Muhammad, the name of the supreme god in the Arab Peninsula was Allah, derived from the Hebrew name *Elohim*. This word existed before Islam, and is found within the name of Muhammad’s father (Abd Allah, literally “Slave of Allah”). The Ka’aba was called *Bait Allah* (“House of Allah”) – a name found in the early Arabic poetry, hundreds of years before Muhammad. Also, the worship of the one God

– by Jews, Christians and other Arabs – existed in the Arab Peninsula long before Muhammad’s time.

Muhammad, then, was not the first to introduce monotheism to the Arab Peninsula, nor did he claim to introduce a new God to the Arabs. Rather, he called his countrymen to the exclusive worship of the same God worshipped by the Jews and Christians. The Quran proclaims to Jews and Christians, “Our God and your God is the same One” (Sura 29:46).

Muhammad opposed all false gods, idols and images. He taught that Allah is One, and freed the Arabs from idolatry:

Sura 112:1-4

Say, He is Allah, the One; Allah, the eternal. He did not beget, nor was He begotten; and there is none comparable to Him.

The Quran nowhere provides a philosophical definition of Allah. But it is rich in names, descriptions and adjectival phrases which express the attributes, qualities and activities of Allah. It is common among Muslims to speak of the 99 “Most Beautiful Names of Allah.” However, there are undoubtedly more.

These names must all be authorized and established by use in the Quran or valid tradition. For instance, Allah may be called al-Shafi (“the Healer”), but not al-Tabib (“the Physician”), because neither the Quran nor Muhammad ever called Allah al-Tabib.

(a) The 99 Names of God

1. The Merciful (*al-Rahman*); 2. The Compassionate, (*al-Rahim*);
3. The King (*al-Malik*); 4. The Most Holy (*al-Quddus*); 5. The Peace (*al-Salam*); 6. The Faithful (*al-Mu’min*); 7. The Protector (*al-Muhaimin*); 8. The Mighty (*al-Aziz*); 9. The Super Strong (*al-Jabbar*); 10. The Proud (*al-Mutakabbir*); 11. The Creator (*al-Khaliq*); 12. The Maker (*al-Bari*); 13. The Fashioner (*al-Musawwir*); 14. The Forgiver (*al-Ghaffar*); 15. The Dominant (*al-Qahhar*); 16. The Bestower (*al-Wahhab*); 17. The Provider (*al-Razzaq*); 18. The Opener (*al-Fattah*); 19. The Knower (*al-Alim*); 20. The Restrainer (*al-Qabid*); 21. The Spreader (*al-Basit*); 22. The Abaser (*al-Khafid*); 23. The Exalter (*al-rafi’*); 24. The Raiser (*al-Mu’izz*); 25. The Humiliator (*al-Muzill*); 26. The Hearer (*al-Sami’*); 27. The All-Seeing (*al-Basir*); 28. The

Ruler (*al-Hakim*); 29. The Just (*al-'Adl*); 30. The Subtle (*al-Latif*); 31. The Aware (*al-Khabir*); 32. The Forbearing (*al-Halim*); 33. The Grand (*al-Azim*); 34. The Forgiving (*al-Ghafur*); 35. The Grateful (*al-Shakur*); 36. The Exalted (*al-'Ali*); 37. The Great (*al-Kabir*); 38. The Guardian (*al-Hafiz*); 39. The Provider (*al-Muqit*); 40. The Reckoner (*al-Hasib*); 41. The Majestic (*al-Jalil*); 42. The Generous (*al-Karim*); 43. The Watcher (*al-Raqib*); 44. The Responder (*al-Mujib*); 45. The Comprehensive (*al-Wasi'*); 46. The Wise (*al-Hakeem*); 47. The Sympathiser (*al-Wadud*); 48. The Glorious (*al-Majid*); 49. The Raiser (*al-Bairith*); 50. The Witness (*al-Shahid*); 51. The Truth (*al-Haqq*); 52. The Advocate (*al-Wakil*); 53. The Strong (*al-Qawi'*); 54. The Firm (*al-Matin*); 55. The Protector (*al-Wali'*); 56. The Praiseworthy (*al-Hamid*); 57. The Counter (*al-Muhsi*); 58. The Beginner (*al-Mubdi'*); 59. The Restorer (*al-Mueid*); 60. The Quickener (*al-Muhyi*); 61. The Killer (*al-Mumit*); 62. The Living (*al-Hayy*); 63. The Subsisting (*al-Qaiyum*); 64. The Finder (*al-Wajid*); 65. The Glorified (*al-Majid*); 66. The Only One (*al-Wahid*); 67. The Eternal (*al-Samad*); 68. The Powerful (*al-Qadir*); 69. The Prevailing (*al-Muqtadir*); 70. The One who Brings Forward (*al-Muqaddim*); 71. The Deferrer (*al-Mua'khir*); 72. The First (*al-Awwal*); 73. The Last (*al-Akhir*); 74. The Manifest (*al-Zahir*); 75. The Hidden (*al-Batin*); 76. The Governor (*al-Wali*); 77. The Exalted (*al-Muta'li*); 78. The Righteous (*al-Bar*); 79. The Repentant (*al-Tawwab*); 80. The Avenger (*al-Muntaqim*); 81. The Pardoner (*al-Afu'*); 82. The Kind (*al-Ra'uf*); 83. The Ruler of the Kingdom (*Malikul Mulk*); 84. The Lord of All Majesty and Honor (*zul-Jalal wal-Ikram*); 85. The Equitable (*al-Muqsit*); 86. The Collector (*al-Jami'*); 87. The Rich (*al-Ghani*); 88. The Enricher (*al-Mughni*); 89. The Giver (*al-Mu'ti*); 90. The Withholder (*al-Mani'*); 91. The Distresser (*al-Darr*); 92. The Profiter (*al-Nafi'*); 93. The Light (*al-Noor*); 94. The Guide (*al-Hadi*); 95. The Incomparable (*al-Badi'*); 96. The Enduring (*al-Baqi*); 97. The Inheritor (*al-Warith*); 98. The Director (*al-Rashid*); 99. The Patient (*al-Sabur*).

Muslims recite these 99 descriptive names of Allah in their devotional exercises. Some use rosaries of thirty-three or ninety-nine beads to help them.

(b) The names of Allah are contradictory.

Allah as described in the 99 names bears little resemblance to the God who revealed Himself in Christ. If a Muslim says to a Christian, “Your God and our God are the same One” (Sura 29:46), he does not understand who God is.

Allah is not a Triune God. From an Islamic point of view, whoever says that God has a partner, a companion or an equal will fall into an unforgivable sin (see Sura 4:48) – comparable to the sin against the Holy Spirit in Christianity (see Matthew 12:31). The Islamic confession of faith declares the uniqueness of Allah, and rejects the deity of Christ and of the Holy Spirit.

Al-Ghazali, meditating on the 99 names of God, said that these names can mean everything and yet nothing. One name of Allah can negate another. The only certainty is His absolute greatness. Bedouin tribes once said to Muhammad, “We believe in Allah.” He replied, “You have not believed until you say, ‘We have submitted!’” (Sura 49:14).

(c) Allah’s compassion

The 99 names of God call Allah “compassionate and merciful.” He is benevolent and patient, faithful and kind. He is the generous giver. He alone provides for all mankind. He is a guardian over all who worship him. He acknowledges those who repent, and forgives them. He is gracious toward those who establish a good relationship with Him.

Allah is also all-knowing and has infinite wisdom. He hears and sees all. He understands all and encompasses everything. His strength is unlimited. He is powerful enough to build up and to destroy. He is sublime and exalted above everything. He is great, immeasurable, magnificent and almighty. No one is equal to Him. He is the living one, everlasting, unending, the first and the last. He is praiseworthy and excellent, the Holy One, light and peace. He is the true reality and the foundation of everything. He created the world out of nothing by the power of His word, and to Him we shall all return. He creates life and causes death. He will raise the dead and finally unite the universe.

(d) Allah's wrath

But this total authority of Allah has consequences. As sovereign Lord and king, He both exalts and abases. He is defender and destroyer, guide and tempter. He saves and condemns whom He wills (see Sura 16:35, 76:30). He is the greatest deceiver and plotter (Sura 3:54, 8:30, 10:21, 13:42). He is also the avenger, recording everything precisely to act as witness on the Day of Judgement. Nothing takes place outside His will, and He needs no mediator, for everything depends directly on Him.

No one – the Muslim included – can be certain whether Allah will look on him kindly. Allah's more oppressive attributes are frightening. Allah is unique and cannot be comprehended. The only privilege men have is to worship him in fear:

Sura 13:13

The thunder glorifies Him with His praise, as do the angels with awe of Him. He lets loose the thunderbolts and smites with them whomsoever He will, yet they dispute about Allah, who is mighty in wrath.

Sura 14:4

God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides whomsoever He will.

The Quran quotes Allah as saying:

Sura 17:16

When We desire to destroy a city, We command its men who live at ease, and they commit ungodliness therein, then the Word [of doom] has effect for it, and we destroy them utterly.

(e) Allah in Muslim theology

Muslim theologians have described Allah in three categories: his essence, his attributes, and his works.

The only Arabic word used to describe Allah's essence is *dhat*, which literally means "possessor." Few theologians have explored Allah's essence. For the most part, they have followed the admonition passed on by al-Ghazali: "Meditate upon Allah's creation, and do not mediate upon the being of Allah."

Most theological discussion in Islam has focused on Allah's *sifat* ("attributes"). The Quran emphasizes three: Allah's Oneness (*Allahu Ahad*), His Unique Reality (*Huwa'l-Haqq*), and His Direct Activity (*Huwa'l-Fa'il*). Sunni scholars have recognized seven attributes as essential – "life," "knowledge," "power," "willing," "seeing," "hearing," and "speech." To which Shia' scholars add "eternity."

All other attributes of Allah concern His activity. He is the sole agent of all occurrences in the universe – good and evil. He leads and misleads people as he wills (Sura 16:93). His will is supreme and unchangeable, and has been predetermined since the creation of the universe. Allah created the world and sustains it. He provides for the needs of the world, its creatures, and everything else in existence. And His creative activity includes the works of men.

Two problems follow from this last belief. First, if men are compelled to perform His actions, they cannot by the same token be held responsible for them. Second, if everything that happens in the universe is directly, immediately, and exclusively ordained by Allah, little incentive remains for social progress.

Islamic religious leaders have tended to concern themselves with preparation for the life to come, not with the quality of life here and now. Islam means surrender, submission, subjection. Why study the relationship of cause and effect when everything has been, and will go on being, predetermined by divine decree? Predestination in this extreme form, which is characteristic of Islam, discourages curiosity, investigation, exploration, experimentation and research.

2. Angels

The Quran mentions only a few angels by name. It says there are numerous angels of lesser rank (see Sura 89:22). They praise God night and day (Sura 2:30; 21:19,20), and labor at His command (Sura 21:27; 66:6). Among them are heavenly hosts who guard the walls of heaven against the "listeners of Jinn and devils" (Sura 37:8). Eight angels carry God's throne (Sura 69:17). The *Hadith* says that angels were created from light, and that their defining characteristic is obedience.

Individual angels, or classes of angels, identified in Islam include the following:

- **Jibril.** The angel of revelation, named three times in the Quran (Sura 2: 97,98; 66:4). He is called “the Faithful Spirit” (Sura 26:193-195), and also “the Holy Spirit” (Sura 16:102), indicating that Islam’s use of this term is different from Christianity’s. Jibril is the spirit God sent to Mary (Sura 19:17), and used to aid Jesus (Sura 2:253, 5:110).
- **Mikhail.** A second angel of equal rank with Jibril (Sura 2:98).
- **Israfil.** The angel who will sound the trumpet for the Day of Judgment.
- **Azrafil.** The angel of death (Sura 32:11).
- **The “Violent Thrusters” (al-Zabaniya).** The guards of hell (Sura 96:18).
- **The “Brought Near to Allah” (al-Muqarrabun).** Mentioned in Sura 4:172, these praise Him day and night without ceasing. The same title (muqarrab) is used of Jesus (Sura 3:45), linking Him with the company of angels nearest to Allah. Some of these angels are messengers with two or three or four wings (Sura 35:1). They are also guardians over mankind, seeing what every person does, and writing it down.
- **Munkar and Nakir.** Mentioned in the *Hadith*, though not by the Quran. These two visit a dead person in his grave, on the night after his burial, and question him as to his faith. If he is an unbeliever, his grave becomes a preliminary hell. If he is a believer, it becomes a preliminary purgatory from which he may pass at the Last Day into paradise. If he is a saint, the grave may be a preliminary paradise. This questioning is called *Su’al*.
- **Shaitan/Iblis.** Satan, who was banished from the Garden of Eden when he broke his angelic rule of obedience by refusing to obey God’s command to bow down to Adam (Sura 7:10-17).
- **Harut and Marut.** According to the Quran, two fallen angels who yielded to sexual temptation and are confined in a pit near Babylon (Sura 2:102).

Related to the angels is another category of superhuman being – the Jinn (sing. *Jinni*, giving us the English “genie”). Created of fire, the Jinn heard the preaching of Muhammad. Some of them believed and became Muslims; others rejected him and are destined for hell.

Belief in the Jinn is common in popular Islam. It was accepted by the official Islam of earlier centuries, and remains so in some groups today. Thus the stories of the Arabian Nights are not strictly comparable to fairy tales in medieval Europe. Even the rationalistic Islamic sect *al-Mu'tazilah* and some of the early Muslim philosophers took the stories literally. Early books of Muslim jurisprudence regulated relationships between Jinn and human beings in such matters as marriage and property. Among the classes of Jinn are the *ghul* – another word imported into English.

3. Books

According to Muslim belief, successive books of revelation have been given to successive prophets, each containing rules and regulations suitable for its own time and for the people who received it. But because each new revelation supercedes and improves on the last, many earlier revelations have been lost. These include the 100 Leaves and four books received by eight of Allah's messengers to mankind. Of the 100 Leaves, Adam received ten; Seth, whose name is not mentioned in the Quran, received fifty; Idris (or Enoch), received thirty; and Abraham received ten. None of these survives.

Later revelations which have survived – albeit, it is claimed, in a “corrupted” form – came in the following order:

1. **The Torah.** The Law – given to Moses. Many Muslims consider the Old Testament, or Jewish Scripture, to be a holy book. However, they also believe that the Jews have changed the *Torah*.
2. **The Zabur.** The Psalms – given to David.
3. **The Injil.** The Gospel – given to Jesus. Muslims call the whole New Testament *Injil* – a holy book which “descended upon” Jesus. They also claim that Jesus took the real *Injil* with Him when He ascended to heaven, and that the copy, now in the hands of Christians, has been changed.

4. **The Quran.** Given to Muhammad, and the last book revealed by Allah. In eternity it was written on the Preserved Tablet (*al-lauh al-Mahfuz*), which is a single pearl. God brought it down by the angel Jibril, from the highest heaven to our heaven, in the Night of Power (*Lailat al-Qadr*) during the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. For twenty-three years Jibril “brought it down” to Muhammad, in sections of a few verses, a verse, or even a part of a verse. In Muslim thinking, Muhammad had nothing to do with the content of the revelation. He was just a “warner,” telling his listeners what Jibril had brought.

Muslims believe that the Quran supercedes and abrogates all former revelations. However, parts of the *Hadith* and even of the Quran itself cast doubt on the reliability of the text. In particular, six problems are mentioned:

(a) *Six verses from the Quran that cast doubts on the reliability of the text:*

- **Muhammad forgot some revelations.** The Quran says, “We shall make you read [O Muhammad] so that you shall not forget save that which Allah wills” (Sura 87:6,7). Commenting on these two verses, al-Zamakhshari said, “While reading the Quran in his prayer, Muhammad dropped a verse. Ubai thought that the verse was abrogated. He asked Muhammad, who replied, ‘I forgot it.’”

Immediately, the question arises whether this forgetfulness should be taken as “that which Allah wills.” Was the forgotten verse to have been replaced, as we read in Sura 16:101 (“When we replace a revelation in place of another revelation”)? Or was it to have been omitted, as in Sura 13:39 (“Allah blots out or confirms what He wills”)? What was on the “Preserved Tablet” – what was blotted, or what was confirmed?

- **Muhammad hastened some revelations.** The Quran says, “And hasten not [O Muhammad] with the Quran before its revelation has been perfected unto you, and say, ‘My Lord, increase my knowledge’” (Sura 20:114). Also: “[O Muhammad,] Move not your tongue with it to hasten it;

ours it is to gather it, and to recite it. So, when we recite it, follow the recitation. Then ours it is to explain it” (Sura 75:16-19).

Al-Baidawi interprets this last Sura to mean, “Do not move your tongue that it may elude you. Wait until the revelation is complete.” It is a rebuke to Muhammad’s weakness for hasty action. But again, is this hastiness willed by Allah? As al-Suyuti says in his *Asbab al-Nuzul* of Sura 20:114, “Was it something that Muhammad did of his own accord, or did Allah order him to do it?” He goes on, “Certainly he said it of his own accord. Then Allah revealed it later.”

- **Muhammad’s judgement may have been swayed.** In the Quran, Allah admonishes the Prophet: “Indeed they were near to seducing you from that We revealed to you, that you might forge against Us another. And then they would surely have taken you as a friend. Had We not confirmed you, surely you were near to inclining unto them a very little; then they would surely have taken you as a friend” (Sura 17:73-75). Al-Suyuti says in his *Asbab al-Nuzul* of these three verses, “The people of Quraish had proposed a compromise with Islam, telling Muhammad, ‘Wipe yourself against our gods, and so we enter into your religion.’ Since Muhammad wanted converts, he at first gave in to their demands.”
- **Muhammad may have left out some of what was revealed to him.** Again, Allah admonishes Muhammad: “A likely thing that you would forsake anything of that which has been revealed unto you, and that your breast should be restrained for it, because they say, ‘why has not a treasure been sent down for him, or an angel come with him?’ You are but a warner” (Sura 11:12).

Al-Zamakhshari comments on this verse and says: “They were demanding verses hastily out of obstinacy rather than asking for guidance. They were not relying on the Quran, but thought little of it. Muhammad became annoyed. He did not want to tell them what they would refuse or make fun of. Allah challenged him

and provoked him into carrying on with the call and abandoning anxiety over their mockery and defiance.”

- **Muhammad may have altered the Quran.** The Quran says, “And when we exchange a verse in the place of another verse – and Allah knows very well what he is sending, they say: ‘You are a mere forger!’ But the most of them have no knowledge” (Sura 16:101). In his book *Asbab al-Nuzul*, Al-Wahidi comments on this verse by saying: “The idolaters were mocking Muhammad. They said that he would order his followers to do a particular thing and forbid them from doing it the next day, or he made the forbidden less difficult. They claimed that he was inventing things that he was saying of his own accord.”

Once again, the problem lies in the supposed correspondence between the Quran and *al-lauh al-Mahfuz* – the “Preserved Tablet” on which the original Quran has been recorded in heaven since the very beginning. Were both the substituted text and the new text to be found in the Preserved Tablet? How can annulment and alteration be reconciled with God’s unchanging wisdom and with the infallibility of the Prophet?

- **Muhammad may have been susceptible to the intervention of Satan.** Sura 16:98 says, “And when you recite the Quran, seek refuge in Allah from Satan, the outcast.” This implies that the words of Allah drive the devil away. But, as we noted earlier, the Quran itself acknowledges exceptions to this. Facing the relentless hostility of tribal leaders in Mecca, Muhammad began reading Sura 53. When he reached, “Have you thought about al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third, the other?” the devil cast on his tongue the following words: “The most high cranes! Truly, their intercession is desired.”

Though the idolaters knelt in apparent submission to Allah, Muhammad had clearly made a crucial concession. As a result, the following verse was revealed:

Sura 22:52

We never sent a messenger or prophet before you, but when he framed a desire, Satan cast into his desire some affair. But Allah abrogates what Satan casts. Then Allah

establishes [or perfects] His signs [or revelations], and Allah is all-knowing, all-wise.

But the very fact that Satan had cast this “affair” into the process of revelation, and that Allah had been forced to repair the damage by abrogating the false statements, implicitly undermines the authority of Muhammad’s revelations. Sura 22:52 shows us that Satan was intervening in the Quranic recitation of Muhammad. *Asbab al-Nuzul* by al-Wahidi comments on this verse by saying, “Muhammad was sitting at his home. When the evening came, Jibril appeared to him. Muhammad showed him Sura 53. Jibril asked, ‘Did I bring you these two verses?’ Muhammad replied, ‘I have put words in Allah’s mouth.’” No wonder Muslims are repeatedly ordered to seek God’s refuge from the outcast devil (*Isti’aza*) before reading the Quran!

Another instance is recorded in Sura 81:19, 20: “This is in truth the word of an honored messenger, mightily established in the presence of the Lord of the Throne.” Commenting on these verses, al-Razi quoted al-Khazin, saying, “The demon called *al-Abiad*, the White, came in the likeness of Jibril and opposed Muhammad with wicked suggestions. But Jibril overtook *al-Abiad* and pushed him to the remotest part of India.”

Again, Sura 22:53 says, “That He may make that which the devil proposes a temptation for those in whose hearts is a disease.” Al-Baidawi comments: “This verse implies the possibility of inadvertence as well as devilish insinuation with prophets.”

(b) Seven comments from the Hadith that cast doubts on the reliability of the Quranic text:

- Muslim, in his Sahih, reveals that, according to Anas ibn Malik, a Christian used to write the Quran for Muhammad. This Christian said, “Muhammad wants only what I write.”
- Sura 6:93 says, “Who does greater evil than he who forges against God a lie, or says, ‘To me it has been revealed?’” In *Asbab al-Nuzul*, al-Suyuti explains the origin of this verse. Abdallah ibn Sa’d ibn Abu Sarh was writing the revelation

for Muhammad. When Muhammad said “*azizun hakim*” (“powerful and wise”), Abdallah wrote “*ghafurun rahim*” (“forgiving and merciful”). Hearing this, Muhammad said, “It is one and the same.” Abdallah then rejected Islam and rejoined his pagan tribe of Quraish. He claimed, “I used to manipulate Muhammad any way I wanted. He said, ‘*azizun hakim*,’ and I said, ‘*alimun hakim*,’ and Muhammad then said, ‘Yes, both are right. Write whatever you want.’” Abdallah added, “If it was revealed to Muhammad, it was also revealed to me. If Allah speaks in the Quran, I have revealed just as Allah did.”

- Al-Suyuti, in his book *Al-Itqan*, said that Abdallah ibn Mas’ud was one of the Quran scribes. Muhammad once dictated a verse to him. The next day, ibn Mas’ud searched for that verse but could not find it. The scroll was empty. When he asked Muhammad about this, Muhammad said, “It was abrogated that same night.”
- The *Hadith* books of Bukhari, Muslim, al-Darimi and ibn Hanbal all record these words of Umar ibn al-Khattab:ⁱⁱ “I agreed with my Lord on three things...I said, ‘O Apostle of Allah, if you make a place of worship out of the place where Abraham stood to pray.’ So it was revealed, ‘Take as your place of worship the place where Abraham stood to pray’ (Sura 2:125). I also said, ‘the righteous and the profligates encounter, O Apostle of Allah, your women. If you would just order them to be veiled!’ Then the verse of the veil was revealed. It says, ‘When you ask of them [the wives of Muhammad] anything, ask it of them from behind the curtain.’ When the wives of Muhammad turned against him, out of jealousy, I said to them, ‘It may happen that if he divorces you, his Lord will give him in your place, wives who are better than you.’ And so the verse was revealed.” [in Sura 66:5]
- Al-Suyuti, al-Nisaburi, and Abu Dawud all record Abu Huraira’s saying that when Muhammad announced Sura 2:284 (“And whether you make known what is in your minds or hide, Allah will bring you to account for it”), the early followers found this too hard.ⁱⁱⁱ They dropped

to their knees in front of Muhammad and said, "Allah has revealed this verse to you, and we do not tolerate it." Immediately the verse was abrogated, and another verse revealed that says, "Allah does not tax a soul beyond its scope, standing to its account is what it has earned" (Sura 2:286).

- Sura 33:50 says, "And a believing woman, if she gives herself to the Prophet, and the Prophet desires to marry her, for you exclusively, apart from the believers." Explaining the revealing of this verse, al-Suyuti says that Um Shuraik al-Dausiyya offered herself to Muhammad. She was so beautiful that he accepted her. Aisha commented, "There is nothing good in a woman offering herself to a man." Then she told Muhammad, "Allah is quick to work things out for your passion."
- Al-Suyuti also reports the words of Abdurrahman ibn Auf: "We do not find what has been revealed to us, 'Fight a holy war,' as we did earlier. It, among other verses, dropped out of the Quran."^{iv} Ibn Umar said, "Let none of you say I have taken hold of the entire Quran. For what is its entirety? But rather, let him say I have taken hold of what has appeared of it."

4. Prophets

All messengers were prophets, but not all prophets were messengers. The Hadith says the prophets number 124,000, or 224,000, or an indefinite number. Prophets have been needed to give mankind knowledge of what is lawful and permitted, since, according to Islam, right and wrong are not inherent in certain actions but determined by the Will of Allah. Creatures unreached by prophets are saved in a Paradise of their own; but Allah has a covenant with the offspring of Adam (Sura 2:27, 3:81) which gives Him the right to cast all who disobey into the Fire.

The Quran mentions 28 prophets by name. Of these, three are Arabs (Muhammad, Salih and Shu'aib). A list of prophets is given in the following verses:

Sura 3:33

Allah preferred Adam, Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of Imran above all His creatures.

Sura 4:163

We inspire you [O Muhammad] like We inspired Noah and the prophets after him, as we inspired Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the tribes, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron and Solomon, and as we imparted unto David the Psalms.

Sura 6:84-87

We raise to degrees of wisdom whom We will. And We bestowed on him [Abraham], Isaac and Jacob; each of them we guided; and Noah did We guide aforetime; and of his seed [We guided] David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron. Thus do We reward the good, and Zachariah, the Baptist, Jesus and Elias. Each one of them was of the righteous. And Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah and Lot. Each one of them did We prefer above Our creatures.

These three lists consist exclusively of names from the Old and New Testaments. Many of the greatest Old Testament characters are not mentioned. According to the Quran, prophets had appeared only among the Jews and Christians. Muhammad did not call himself *Nabi* (“Prophet”) until he was in Medina.

According to the Islamic reckoning, there are six eminent prophets. Their names usually appear alongside the honorific titles by which they are commonly designated.

- Adam, the chosen of Allah, *Safi Allah*;
- Noah, the preacher of Allah, *Nabi Allah*;
- Abraham, the friend of Allah, *Khalil Allah*;
- Moses, the speaker of Allah, *Kalim Allah*;
- Jesus, the word of Allah, *Kalimat Allah*;
- Muhammad, the apostle of Allah, *Rasul Allah*.

Although the other prophets are acknowledged and respected in Islam, attention has centered on Muhammad, called the “Seal of the Prophets” (Sura 33:40). Muslims also call him “Glory of the Ages” and “Peace of the World,” among around two hundred other titles and names.

The figure of Muhammad has been glorified through the *Hadith* and subsequent accounts of his life, most of which were written many decades after his death. As a result, and against the evidence of the Quran itself, he is now commonly seen in the Islamic world as a semi-angelic figure who existed before the creation of the world. His character is considered ideal and sinless – in spite of the fact that the Quran shows him praying for the forgiveness of his sins (see Sura 40:55, 48:2, 110:3). Among the more widely mentioned miracles in the later accounts of his life are:

- That he caused pebbles to talk in his hands.
- That his body did not cast a shadow.
- That he split the moon in two with his finger.
- That trees would bow in respect as he passed.
- That he made a night journey to the seventh heaven (or ninth, according to some accounts).

Some of Muhammad's revelations seem to have no higher purpose than the reconciling of the Prophet's behavior with the religious code he preached, thus transforming apparent flaws of character into virtues. Nevertheless, the *Hadith* has elevated Muhammad to the position of final moral authority, sole guide for life, and only effective intercessor on the Day of Judgement.

Muhammad's words and conduct, as presented in the *Hadith* and Quran, form the basis of a rigid religious code that governs the Muslim's every act, morning to night and cradle to grave. There are prescribed forms for almost every aspect of life, from ablutions and purification to diet and the care of body and clothing.

In addition, Shia' Muslims also give great veneration to Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, even adding his name to the Word of Witness:

*There is no god but Allah;
Muhammad is the apostle of Allah;
And Ali is the vicegerent of Allah.*

The *Hadith* tells stories of Ali's achievements which are even more fantastic than those about Muhammad. There are also lengthy accounts of what the twelve Imams, or leaders of the Faith, said and did.

It is widely held among Muslims that Muhammad did not begin a new religion. Rather, he revived the original and true religion that had grown corrupt with the passage of time. Sura 41:43 quotes Allah as saying to Muhammad, "Naught is said to you [O Muhammad] but what already was said to the Messengers before you. Surely your Lord is a Lord of forgiveness and of painful retribution."

5. Day of Judgement

Muslims are required to believe in a resurrection for Judgement, followed by eternal life in either the *Janna* ("Garden of Paradise") or *Jahannam* ("Fire"). For disobedient believers the Fire is a temporary purgatory, while jihadists killed in war, plague victims, and women who die in labor all enter directly into Paradise without undergoing the trials of the Day of Judgement.

According to popular belief, Muhammad will be given the sole right of intercession when Judgement comes. The order of events in Muslim eschatology is as follows.

First, there will be signs announcing the coming of the end – in particular, the appearance of the *Dajjal* (Anti-Christ) who will lead almost all men astray. This is followed by the descent of Jesus to earth. He will kill the *Dajjal*, and a period of peace will ensue, during which Jesus will establish peace and Islam.

Second, there will be a call to Judgement. At the first blast of the trumpet, all the living will die. After an interval, the second blast of the trumpet will bring all living things to life again (see Sura 39:68), and unite them at the *Mahshar* ("Place of Gathering"). They will all stand there for a long time, sweating in the presence of Allah.

Third, there will be Judgement itself. Allah will question every person. The books of record will be opened. The deeds of those whose position is in doubt will be weighed in a balance. There will begin a process of adjustment of enmities and requital of wrongs between man and man, and man and beast.

Fourth, all people will pass across *al-Sirat*, the bridge over hell into Paradise. *Al-Sirat* is finer than a thread and sharper than a sword. It will lead the saved to security, while those without sufficient merit will fall from it into the Fire. The Fire is a gigantic monster with glowing jaws, ready to devour the damned. It has also described as having seven gates (see Sura 15:44) and seven stories, the lowest of which, the *Zaqqum*, contains boiling and stinking pitch with the heads of demons as flowers (see Sura 37:62). There is no escape. “As for the wretched, they shall be in the Fire, wherein there shall be for them a moaning and a sighing. Eternally therein, so long as the heavens and earth abide, unless your Lord ordains otherwise” (Sura 11:106,107).

The *Janna* (“Garden of Paradise”) is the place of the blessed. The Quran describes it vividly:

Sura 47:15

The Garden that has been promised to the righteous is such that rivers will be flowing in it of unpolluted water, and rivers will be flowing in it of milk of unchanged flavor, and rivers will be flowing in it of wine which will be delicious to the drinkers, and of honey, clear and pure.

Here the blessed “will recline on couches lined with thick brocade, and within their reach will be the fruits of both gardens...Therein are maidens of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before them. They are like rubies and corals” (Sura 55:54-58).

Sura 56:15-24

On lined couches, reclining therein face to face. There wait on them immortal youths with bowls and ewers, and a cup from pure spring that will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason, with fruits of their choice, and flesh of fowls that they desire, and fair ones with wide lovely eyes like unto hidden pearls, as a reward for what they used to do.

To sum up, the Muslim paradise is a garden of sensual pleasures. In it there are beautiful women, couches covered with thick brocades, and flowing cups of delicious fruits. God does not appear in these Quranic descriptions of paradise.

However, the Muslim Syrian writer Afif Tabbara insists that the bliss of heaven differs from earthly pleasures.^v His assertion is not supported by Quranic evidence, but he quotes a hadith narrated by Bukhari, in which God is made to say, “I have prepared for my righteous worshippers what no eye has seen or ear has heard or heart conceived” (clearly a reference to 1 Corinthians 2:9). Tabbara mentions “meeting the Lord” (Arabic: *liqa’*; French: *revoir*) as stated in Suras 10:7,11 and 18:110, and says that this is a spiritual experience like the Beatific Vision familiar to Christian mystics. He supports this belief by quoting, “On that day faces will glow, glancing towards their Lord” (Sura 75:22,23), and asks: “How can one see the invisible God unless the Invisible becomes visible?”

6. *Qada’ wa Qadar* (Decree of Good and Evil)

A shorter term for this doctrine would be “fatalism.”

Qada’ means “deciding”, “commanding”, “judging”, “making so as to be fixed”. It is the office and function of a judge. *Qadar* means “to measure an amount, to estimate” and then “to assign something by measure.”

Together they imply that Allah can do what He pleases with His own. *Qada’* stands for the knowledge and will of Allah. *Qadar* stands for His bringing things into existence in accordance with His knowledge and will. In Muslim doctrine, everything that happens, good or bad, is foreordained by Allah’s unchangeable decree.

It will be seen at once that this makes Allah the author of evil – a position most Muslim theologians hold. Many schools entirely deny the free will of man. Others, including the thinkers of Shia’ Islam, attempt a compromise that allows some place for human freedom.

As we have seen already, the all-encompassing will of Allah is firmly asserted in the Quran:

Sura 17:16

When We desire to destroy a city, We command its men who live at ease, and they commit ungodliness therein, then the Word [of doom] has effect for it, and we destroy them utterly.

Sura 14:4

God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides whomsoever He will.

The fatalistic philosophy of life that stems from this doctrine is all too evident in the daily life of Muslims worldwide. The worst calamities are often accepted with a stoic shrug of the shoulders. Without a doubt this doctrine has also had much to do with static social conditions and slow development in many Muslim lands.

ⁱ Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad*, 26216, 31062.

ⁱⁱ See Bukhari, *Salat* 32; Muslim, *Fad'ail al-Sahaba* 24; al-Darimi, *Manasik* 33; ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* 1.23,24,26.

ⁱⁱⁱ See al-Suyuti, *Asbab al-Nuzul*, on Sura 2:284,286, and Abu Dawud, *Zakat* 32.

^{iv} Al-Suyuti, *al-Itqan*, Chapter on the Abrogative and the Abrogated.

^v Afif Tabbara, *Ruhu al-Din al-Islami* (Damascus, 1972).

The Duties of Muslims

Islam prescribes five religious and civil duties for its followers. These duties are imposed upon all sane and free adults of both sexes. Accommodations are made for unfavorable circumstances, such as dangerous travel, and for valid personal reasons, such as sickness and poverty.

I. SHAHADA (“CREED”)

The basic Muslim creed is:

*La Ilaha Illa Allah,
Muhammad Rasul Allah*

[“There is no God but Allah,
Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah”]

This is known as the *Shahada* (“Words of Witness”). Reciting it is the principal duty of every Muslim. When ritually uttered by the *Mu’adhin* (the announcer of the Call to Worship), all believers who hear must repeat it, vocally or in a whisper. It is recited in the ears of the newborn babe, and proclaimed by the lips of the dying. It is the most common utterance of the individual believer. The *darwishes* chant it at meetings of their order, and it is to be found on the national flag of Saudi Arabia. For Muslims everywhere, the psychological and religious significance of this brief creed is incalculable.

The *Shahada* summarizes the theology of Islam. Only the utterance of the creed comes within the province of Islamic law, since the Shari’ah deals only with observable acts of

obedience or disobedience. The exposition, interpretation, and expansion of the *Shahada* are all left to Islamic theologians and scholastics.

II. AL-SALAT (“PRAYER”)

The second duty of Muslims is the performance of *al-salat* (“prayer”). The word *salat* derives from an Aramaic root meaning “ritual worship or litany.” Unlike its looser English-language equivalent, it is a specific and technical term, denoting a sequence of particular actions and utterances.

Five principles govern its proper use by the Muslim:

- It must be preceded by the prescribed ablutions.
- The praying-place must be free from all uncleanness.
- The body and clothes should be clean and tidy.
- The face must be held in the direction of the Ka’aba in Mecca.
- Praying must take place in a disciplined attitude. Talking, laughing, playing or eating during prayer will cancel its effect.

To perform *al-salat*, the Muslim must be ceremonially clean. Muslim books of law allow two forms of washing, or ablution. The minor ablution *wudu’* prescribes cleaning head, beard, hands (fingers to elbows), and feet (toes to ankles). The major ablution *ghusl* is a complete bathing. This has made public baths popular in Muslim countries. The Bedouin of the desert often immerse themselves in the wells they frequent. Occasionally hair-remover containing arsenic has been used to make the cleansing more thorough. When water is unavailable, symbolic washing may be done with clean sand. This is called *Taiammum*. The Jewish Talmud similarly permits the use of sand instead of water. And a Christian historian has even described a baptism performed with sand during a journey through the desert.

The four schools of Islamic law allow fourteen variations in the way ablutions are performed. However, all of them agree that the worshipper must cover his or her person and

stand in a clean place – hence the common use of “prayer rugs” among Muslims. The full ablution ceremony should follow this pattern:

- Washing the hands.
- Rinsing the inside of the mouth.
- Washing the inside of the nose.
- Washing the face.
- Washing the forearms.
- Running the hands over the hair.
- Washing out the ears.
- Washing the feet.

1. An example – morning prayer in detail

There are five prescribed times for worship each day: just before dawn; after mid-day; mid-afternoon, just after sunset, and late in the evening. None of these acts of worship may be performed before the specified time, though any may be done after. Prayer is customarily divided into *rak’as* “rounds, or cycles” with a certain number being required for each prayer time:

- Morning prayer 2 prayer rounds
- Noontime prayer 4 prayer rounds
- Mid-afternoon prayer 4 prayer rounds
- Sunset prayer 3 prayer rounds
- Evening prayer 4 prayer rounds
- DAILY TOTAL 17 prayer rounds

Many people have seen Muslims performing their daily prayers, without knowing what the worshipper is actually doing. This is the pattern for the Muslim’s morning prayer time:

- After doing the prescribed ablutions in the correct order, the Muslim stands for prayer in the direction of Mecca, lifts his hands up to his ears and says, “*Allahu Akbar*” (“Allah is Greater!”).
- Then he quietly recites *al-Fatiha* (the first Sura of the Quran), which says, “In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise belongs to Allah, the Lord

of all beings, the All-merciful, the All-compassionate, the Master of the Day of Doom. You only we serve. To You alone we pray for succor. Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom You have blessed, not of those against whom You are wrathful, nor of those who are astray.”

- The Muslim may also recite another short Sura, generally Sura 112, which says, “In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Say: He is Allah, One God, The Eternal, Absolute; He did not beget, and has not been begotten; And equal to Him is not any one.”
- Then the Muslim says, “*Allahu Akbar*,” bows and repeats “Praised be my mighty Lord” three times.
- Following this, with the body erect, he says, “God hears the one who praises Him.”
- Then he repeats, “*Allahu Akbar*,” drops to his knees until his forehead touches the ground, and recites three times, “Praised be my Lord, most high.”
- He says, “*Allahu Akbar*” and raises his upper body, but remains on his knees.
- Then he prostrates himself a second time and repeats three times, “Praised be my Lord, most High.”
- After that, he says, “*Allahu Akbar*,” stands up, and begins the second round of prayer. To begin this, he again silently recites the al-Fatiha or a short Sura.
- After this he says, “*Allahu Akbar*,” bows, and remaining in this position repeats three times, “Praised be my mighty Lord.”
- Then he stands erect and says, “Allah hears the one who praises Him.”
- He follows this with “*Allahu Akbar*,” then drops to the ground and repeats three times, “Praised be my Lord, most high.”
- After repeating “*Allahu Akbar*” again, he raises his upper body while remaining on his knees.
- Then he prostrates himself for the fourth time, and says three times, “Praised be my Lord, most high.”

- After this he raises himself and, still kneeling, recites the following confession: “The greetings, the offerings, the alms-giving, and the prayers are due to Allah. Peace be on you, O Prophet, and the mercy of Allah and His blessing. Peace be upon us and on all faithful worshippers of Allah. I testify that there is no God except Allah. He is alone and has no partner. I testify that Muhammad is His slave and His Apostle.”
- Finally, still on his knees, he turns his head to the right and says, “The peace and mercy of Allah be with you.” With this the morning prayer is ended.

With the preparatory acts complete, four introductory parts of the worship are performed. These are:

- Standing facing the Qibla (a niche facing Mecca).
- Saying the *Basmalah* (“In the name of Allah, the Merciful and Compassionate”). All but one (the 9th) of the 114 Suras of the Quran begin with this formula. It is properly recited at the beginning of any endeavor. In a modified form, it is used to make meat *halal* – that is, ceremonially suitable for eating.
- Saying the *Istia’za* (“Seeking-for-Refuge”) formula to make the occasion sacred and safe from Satan’s interference.
- The utterance of the *Adhan* (“Call to Worship”). This was instituted in Medina, after the rejection of equivalent rituals practiced by other religions – the pagan kindling of fire, the Jewish blowing of a horn, and the Christian use of naqus (wooden slats, or a triangle). The *Adhan* normally consists of seven sentences. Prayer before dawn adds an eighth: “Prayer is better than sleep.”

The prayer itself consists of four actions and four utterances. The four actions are: standing, bowing, prostrating, and sitting. Each is performed in a special manner. The utterances include the statement of *niyat* (the “intention” to perform prayer), the recital of portions of the Quran, and a special formula of praise. During the prostration, private petitions may be uttered.

2. Congregational worship

On Fridays the congregational service takes the place of the noon prayer. Remaining seated, a *khatib* (“preacher”) usually recites a standardized sermon in rhymed prose, then stands, then sits again to recite a prayer for blessing on the ruler, who is mentioned by name. Historically, this has often been the time for announcements about new rulers.

The four positions of the ceremony of prayer constitute a *rak’ah*, “round or cycle”, making seventeen cycles each day. Extra voluntary worship is recommended. Additional special ceremonies are performed on feast days and other occasions, including funerals, droughts, and eclipses of the sun and moon. In Muslim law, a ceremony may be shortened during a battle, or two ceremonies combined while traveling.

Muslims pray with their eyes open. No offering is taken at the mosque service. Mosque expenses are paid from *waqf* (that is, income from Islam’s religious and public endowments). The mosque is used for other public purposes besides the worship, including teaching, lectures, government proclamations and the sheltering of indigent travelers. The Friday congregational worship must be performed in an officially designated mosque, not in a private mosque, and at least forty adult free males must attend in order for the worship to be valid.

3. How much time does a Muslim spend daily in prayer? Amounts of time spent in prayer vary widely. A well-informed Muslim recently estimated as follows:

- Normal Muslims (about 70% of the Muslim population) say the regular prayers, requiring about 80 minutes a day.
- Non-Fundamentalist Religious Muslims (about 6-8% of the Muslim population) include in their prayers the reading of the Suras, requiring about 150 minutes a day.
- Muslim Fundamentalists (less than 1% of Muslims) add the prayers of *Qiam al-lail* – night prayers which religious Muslims pray only during the month of Ramadan

– requiring about 300 minutes a day.

Other Muslims – about 21% – pray only on Fridays and the two feasts of *Adha* and *Fitr*.

III. SAWM (“FASTING”)

The third Muslim duty is *sawm*, or *siyam*, meaning “fasting.” The Quran says:

Sura 2:183 – 185

O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those who came before you, that you will perhaps guard yourselves. A certain number of days, but if any one of you is ill or on a journey, let him fast the same number of days later on. And for those who can afford it there is a ransom: the feeding of a man in need. But he that does well of his own accord, it is better for him, but to fast is better for you, if you did but know. The month of Ramadan in which the Quran was revealed, a guidance for mankind, clear proofs of guidance and the criterion. Therefore whoever of you is present in that month let him fast; but he who is ill or on a journey shall fast number of days later on. Allah desires for you ease. He desires not hardship for you; and that you shall complete the period, and that you should magnify Allah for giving you His guidance, and that perhaps you will be thankful.

Fasting consists of two elements: the *intention* to abstain from all physical refreshment, which is a religious act, and *actual fasting* in daylight hours during the month of Ramadan. (The descent of the Quran is supposed to have taken place on the “Night of Power,” during the latter third of this month.) Fasting is obligatory for every fit adult Muslim male in full possession of his senses, and similarly for every Muslim woman, except during menstruation. Fasting is nullified by:

- Drinking water or any other liquids.
- Smoking.
- Eating.
- Swallowing one’s saliva.

- Deliberate vomiting.
- Sexual intercourse.
- Deliberate seminal emission as a result of sexual contact.
- Intoxication.

The fast begins at dawn – as soon as a white thread can be distinguished from a black one at arm’s length. It continues until dark, when the same test is applied in reverse. In most Islamic cities a cannon is fired to mark the beginning and end of the fast. Ironically, daytime fasting is often compensated for by social gatherings at night where many Muslims eat more food than usual, with the result that Ramadan is sometimes called “the month of feasting.” Islamic law allows Muslims to spend some of their daytime fasting hours asleep.

Since the lunar year is shorter than the solar year, the Ramadan fast may occur in any season. The sick do not have to keep the fast; but others do, and in very hot weather, working all day without food or water becomes an ordeal. Other rules on fasting include the following:

- The Quran prescribes fasting, in certain circumstances, as a substitute for the *Hajj* (“Pilgrimage” — see Sura 2:196).
- Fasting for two consecutive months is obligatory as an atonement for killing a believer by accident (see Sura 4:92).
- If a person breaks his oath, he must fast for three days in compensation (see Sura 5:89).

IV. ZAKAT (“ALMS-TAX”)

The fourth Muslim duty is paying alms-tax, known as *Zakat*. (The word, literally translated “to be pure,” is used elsewhere in the Quran to suggest virtue.) The giving of alms to the poor was practiced and encouraged by Muhammad, and continues to be a work of merit. Such charity is to be dispensed at any time of good fortune, on return from a journey, at births, weddings, feast days and holidays. In some places the practice has caused problems, by creating a class of professional beggars, and by discouraging formal care provision for the needy and physically handicapped. Although the practice of

voluntary charity is widespread, many educated Muslims complain that its lack of coordination tends to create rather than alleviate conditions of poverty and need.

According to Sura 9:60, alms-giving is an obligatory duty. Alms are to be given:

- To the poor and the needy.
- To those employed to administer the funds.
- To those “whose hearts are to be reconciled.”
- For the ransom of captives and debtors.
- For the way of Allah.
- For the wayfarers.

The system for determining how much to give is complex. The Shaf’i school of law says that only Muslims pay *Zakat*. Ten percent is due from food crops – including fruits such as dates, grapes and figs – so long as the land depends upon rain for moisture. Irrigation reduces the *Zakat* to five percent. In both cases payment is due immediately at harvest. Livestock must have been grazed freely for a whole year and not used for work. Uninterrupted possession of 5 camels, 20 cattle, or 40 sheep or goats attracts a *Zakat* of five percent. Only two-and-a-half percent is required from payments in currency, gold or silver, or from sale of merchandise.

Further alms are payable on bequests, gifts, and other unearned income. In addition, wealthy Muslims frequently bequeath immense sums in gifts and property to pious foundations or for the endowment of philanthropic agencies and religious shrines. In several Islamic countries such institutions have recently been taken over by the government, and are administered for the public good by a special department.

In early Muslim theocracies, alms were often collected like taxes. Today this is rare, and for the most part the giving of the *Zakat* is left to the individual, who may direct it to the poor or a mosque or a religious foundation as he chooses.

V. HAJJ (“PILGRIMAGE”)

The fifth pillar of Islam is *Hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. This is required at least once during the life of any pious Muslim,

male or female, who is physically and financially able to make the trip (see Sura 3:97). Slaves, the mentally ill, and women without a husband or relative are exempted.

The days of the *Hajj* are from the first to the twelfth of the month of *Zul-Hijja*, the last month in the lunar year. Three special days of ceremony take place in Mecca, from the seventh to the tenth of the month. The *Hajj* may be made at other times of the year, but it does not then win the same amount of merit.

Before the pilgrim reaches Mecca, he undergoes a ceremonial ablution and puts on the special dress for the occasion, which consists of two seamless tunics. He visits the Great Mosque, kisses the famous Black Stone, and then circles the Ka'aba seven times. Three circuits are done rapidly, four slowly. Special prayers are said. Then the pilgrim visits the Place where Abraham stood for prayer, and drinks from the sacred well of *Zemzem* before running seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa. On the way back he spends the night at Arafat, several miles from Mecca, and later, at Mina, throws seven pebbles at three pillars of masonry known as the First Pillar, the Middle Pillar, and the Great Devil. The ceremony concludes on the *Eid al-Adha* ("Feast of Sacrifice") by the offering of animal sacrifice. Afterwards most pilgrims visit the grave of Muhammad in Medina.

A Muslim can also make a briefer visit to Mecca, known as *Umra*, or "Little Pilgrimage." The pilgrim goes first to the Ka'aba. He enters the Mosque through the north door, approaches the Black Stone built into the Ka'aba wall, then, turning right, begins the seven circuits, saying prayers all the while. In conclusion he prays two *rak'as* "rounds or cycles" behind the Place where Abraham stood for prayer, drinks from the sacred well of *Zemzem*, and touches the Black Stone again in farewell. After this, he leaves the Mosque through the al-Safa door to perform the second essential part of the *Umra*, the run between al-Safa and Marwa. In all he makes seven journeys between these two hills, uttering prayers each time at both. Finally he shaves his hair.

The ceremonies of both the *Hajj* and the *Umra* are taken over from the pre-Islamic period.

VI. JIHAD (“HOLY WAR”)

Jihad is Islamic warfare. Muslims divide the world into three groups: *Dar al-Islam* (“House of Islam”), *Dar al-Harb* (“House of War”), and *Dar al-Sulh* (“House of Agreement”).

“House of Islam” covers areas already under Muslim rule, where all the ordinances of Islam are established and a Muslim sovereign reigns. The inhabitants are principally Muslims. Non-Muslims who submit to Muslim control are guaranteed their lives and property by the State, but without the privileges of full citizenship. These non-Muslims should be *Ahl al-Kitab* (Jews and Christians, called “People of the Scripture”) – not idolaters.

Theoretically, a Muslim state is constantly at war with the non-Muslim world. But land that ceases to be “House of Islam” does not become “House of War” unless it adjoins a “House of War.” When a Muslim country becomes “House of War,” all Muslims must withdraw from it, and a wife who refuses to accompany her husband in this must be divorced. Some schools of canon law recognize a third status, “House of Agreement,” where a non-Muslim state exists in tributary relationship to Islam. This probably originated in Muhammad’s treaty with the Christians of Najran, who were guaranteed their safety in exchange for payment of a tribute, called *Jizya*.

Theoretically, *Jihad* is general duty (though it is sufficiently performed by a few representative members of the community), and remains obligatory until the whole world becomes Muslim. It was formerly the duty of the Caliph, as defender of the faith, to mobilize his army every year, and, if there was any assurance of success, to begin a war with a non-Muslim nation. The treaties the Caliphs made with neighbors were time-limited truces. Not until the establishment of the secular Turkish Republic did permanent treaties become possible.

Islam is pitiless in its treatment of enemies:

Sura 5:33

The only reward of those who make war upon Allah and His messenger, and strive after corruption in the land, will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands

and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be expelled from the land. Such will be their degradation in the world, and in the Hereafter theirs will be a severe punishment.

In addition, as noted before, the Quran exhorts Muslims not to take Jews or Christians for friends. This distrust toward any non-Muslim is emphatic throughout the Quran (see Sura 3:118, 5:51). Against the background of the call to Jihad, such intolerance makes it virtually impossible for Muslims to interact on a trust basis with anyone who is not a member of the Muslim community. Some modern thinkers protest that in other passages the Quran speaks well of Jews and Christians. This is true. However, orthodox Muslims believe the later, more hostile verses (including Sura 5:33, above) to have cancelled, abrogated and replaced the earlier ones.

Islam teaches that Judaism and Christianity have been superseded by the final revelation of God. As sole keepers of the true faith, Muslims are commanded by God, through the Quran, to take over the world and subdue it. *Jihad* is the logical expression of this belief.

7 Islamic Sects

In this book we have dealt so far with Sunni Islam, because Sunnis are the world Muslim majority. The word *Sunna* represents “a path and manner of life; the custom, especially of Muhammad, transmitted through the *Hadith*.” Sunni Muslims are those who accept the Sunna and the historic succession of the Caliphs.ⁱ But there are at least two further important traditions with similar roots – the Shia’ and the Sufis.

I. SHIA’ MUSLIMS

Sunnis differ from the Shia’ in some obvious respects, the Shia’ recognizing five different collections of hadith, and including Muhammad’s daughter Fatima and her son Husain in the focus of their devotion. Nevertheless there is a large measure of agreement between the groups. Both accept the Quran as authoritative in matters of faith and practice. Both value many of the same customs and traditions. And both revere the memory of Muhammad, their ultimate founder.

The historical separation between them has its roots in the envy and malice among Muhammad’s wives (see Sura 33:28-34). Muhammad had great affection for Ali, his cousin and son-in-law, who in turn repaid the debt with loyalty and courage in the cause of Islam. On one occasion Muhammad commended Ali by saying, “To look upon Ali is devotion. I am the city and Ali is the gate.”

Violence broke out after Muhammad’s death. Muslims raid-

ed infidel territory and fought for Islam's rapid expansion. But Islam was fractured with internal divisions. Three of the four Caliphs were assassinated. Aisha, Muhammad's favorite wife plotted first against Uthman, then against Ali. When Ali called his followers to support the *Jihad* ("I have summoned you to fight that host night and day, covertly and overtly. Attack before they attack you."), he was directing their aggression not at the Infidel but against his fellow Muslims.

Ali's base was at Kufa, Iraq. Later it became a center of Shiism. When Ali was killed in AD 661, his son Husain made ready to mount a revenge attack. From Mecca he wrote to the Kufans for aid. They refused, and taking out a smaller force, Husain fell fighting at Karbala' on the Euphrates. That was on the 10th of the month of *Muharram*, AD 680, which remains a day of fasting and mourning for Shiites. Though of little political significance at the time, Husain's death proved to be the catalyst for his cause.

That cause came to bear at least three names – *Ahl al-Bait* (the party of Muhammad's family), the *Imamis* ("Leaders"), and the Twelvers (referring to the number of Imams the Shia' revere). Several key traits distinguish the Shia' from the majority Sunnis – dominion, race, secrecy, Messianism, and dogma.

1. Dominion

The dispute between the Sunnis and the Shia' was first and foremost political – who should rule the Islamic nation? Were Caliphs to be appointed on a hereditary basis? Was the succession to be restricted to eminent Meccans, or was it open to any pious Muslim to seek the privilege?

In the Shia' view, both spiritual and temporal leadership belonged to Ali's household by right. They assume that Muhammad transferred the succession to Ali and thence to Ali's descendants. Ali's sons were the grandchildren of the Prophet through Fatima, his daughter. A divine torch had been passed on from Muhammad and handed to the Imams of Ali's seed. Al-Ghazali quotes Muhammad as saying, "You, Ali are to me what Aaron was to Moses." In fact this hadith does not establish a hereditary principle – yet that belief was hammered into Shia' minds.

Shia' are called Twelvers because Ali is considered the first

of twelve Imams in the authentic line. His elder son, Hasan, poisoned by one of his wives, became the second Imam; his next, Husain, whose death at Karbala' produced the movement's first martyr saint, became the third. From there the line should have progressed uncontested through Husain's son Ali (the fourth Imam) and his grandson Muhammad (the fifth Imam).

But a complication arose. Imam Muhammad was Ali's second son, whose elder brother, Zaid, had pre-deceased his father. When Muhammad was made Imam, therefore, those among the Shia' who believed that succession should pass only through the elder son split off and formed the rival Zaidis, or Fivers. Zaid left no children, and accordingly, the Fivers believe that Zaid was the true fifth Imam and the last. A generation later a similar split would occur. The sixth Imam Ja'afar (Muhammad's successor) also had a son pre-decease him, and another rival faction split off, recognizing the dead son Ismail as seventh Imam, and calling themselves Ismailis.

Meanwhile in the mainstream Shia' movement, Ja'afar's surviving son Musa (seventh Imam) was succeeded by Rida (eighth Imam), who was martyred at Meshed, later a pilgrimage site. Then came al-Jawad, al-Naqi, al-Askari, the ninth, tenth and eleventh Imams respectively. Almost all these Imams were slain or poisoned by their Sunni adversaries. But not the twelfth. Completing the Imami line came Muhammad al-Mahdi, who vanished from sight about AD 880, thus creating the legend of the Expected One, *al-Muntazar*. He will return at the end of time, and has been given the titles *Imam al-Zaman* ("The Leader of Time") and *Hujjatullah* ("God's Sign or Proof").

2. Race

In the early days most Shia' were Arabs. However, a growing number of non-Arabs were turning to Islam, and these folk became known as the *Mawali* ("Clients"). Their language of worship was Arabic, but they managed to hold on to their racial identities as Arameans, Chaldeans, and Persians.

The Arabs controlled the economies of conquered lands, and imposed a poll tax. Corrupt tax collectors milked their victims, while the governors of subject provinces oppressed

them. Many of the *Mawali* joined the Shia' in protest against these inequities. This is one reason why Shiism gradually became the national religion of Persia and southern Iraq. Another reason is that orthodox Sunni Islam has little appeal to the Persian temperament. The Persian inclines towards the artistic, the mystic and the secretive. Adorned with martyrs and saints, Shiism served as a magnet to draw this dissatisfied sector of the Muslim faith. Other large Shia' populations can be found in Lebanon – almost certainly of non-Arab stock – and in India and Pakistan.

3. Secrecy

Shia' Islam boasts a certain amount of “esoteric knowledge” which only chosen insiders may share. Shia' Muslims believe that God imparted a special revelation to Fatima – the Prophet's daughter and Ali's wife. They expect that the last Imam will be all-seeing and unlock the mysteries of the universe. They also credit Imams with possessing the gift of interpretation. Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran claimed to interpret the mind of Allah and his prophets to the masses – a sort of infallible pontiff in a broken line of succession.

Shia' Islam adds to the text of the Quran phrases that enhance the status of Ali and his house. Sura 4:166 says, “God witnesses to what He revealed to you of His knowledge.” The Shia' add, “concerning Ali.” Sura 5:67 says, “O apostle pass on what was revealed to you by your Lord.” The Shia' add to it, “about Ali.” Sura 3:110 says, “You were the best nation raised up. You order what is good and forbid what is vile.” The Shia' change “nation” (*ummah*) to “Imams” (*A'immah*). These changes remain without foundation.

Nowadays the Ismailis and the Druze survive as the more obvious examples of secretive cults within the Shia' fold.

The Ismailis combine the Iranian ideology of grace with some Gnostic speculations and a Manichean religion which benefits the elite. The number seven assumed a sacred significance, with the Ismailis recognizing seven legislating prophets (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and Muhammad al-Tamm) and seven steps in a descending cosmic system (God, Universal Mind, Universal Soul, Primal Matter, Space, Time,

World). The Qarmatians, a kindred sect, held love feasts, and proposed seven degrees of initiation.

The Druze derive their inspiration from Hakim, the Fatimid ruler who went mad and proclaimed that he himself was Allah. The Druze divide their community into two tiers, the *Uqqal* (who possess the mysteries), and the *Jubhal* (“Ignorant”) – a typically esoteric class division.

4. Messianism

For Christians this is often the most attractive feature of Shia’ religion. The Shiite Messiah, sometimes called the Mahdi, is a composite figure embodied collectively in the Imamate – notably the first Imam, the third, and the last. These three reflect the marks of an accepted Messiah. In his person the Martyr-Mahdi is larger than life, idealized, romanticized, calling for devotion which falls little short of adoration. He is also the victim slain for his people, enduring pain, trial and death. In the end he will return to earth as intercessor, mediator or even as savior.

Some of the Shia’ sects see their own Imam as partaking of the divine nature. The strange disappearance of the twelfth Imam (referred to as his “occlusion”) merely sharpens the flavor of the mystery the Imamate has acquired over the centuries. Some of the more extreme Shia’ groups go so far as to claim that Ali, Fatima and Husain were created before Adam. Notions of pre-existence and quasi-divinity fit in well with the concept of a divinely guided Messiah.

The idea of the Messiah as sacrificial victim and martyr attaches most strongly to Husain, and has given rise to the sensational Shiite practice of *Ashura*. At the beginning of *Muharram*, the first month of the Muslim year, Shiites commence ten days of lamentation, recalling Husain’s martyrdom at Karbala’. They re-enact the story of his death by dramatizing his trials in the desert, his courage, and his cruel end. Many of the “celebrants” cut their bodies and parade in the streets streaming with blood. It is a Day of Atonement for sins – but excluding any thought of pardon for the foe. Extracts from the drama of Husain’s passion show the intensity of Shi’ite feeling. Husain cried, “I am the

prey for the arrow of affliction. They are going to kill me for no crime or guilt, save that I am the Prophet's grandson. Is there anyone to pity our condition? If I wished I could make the moon fall. But I die offering myself a sacrifice for the sins of my people that they might be saved from wrath. I am their intercessor at the Resurrection."

So Husain, unaware of the fateful hour of the glory awaiting him, has been raised to the rank of expiator. In the human mind, the need for a mediator between God and man has somehow to be met – whether in legend at Karbala', or in history at Golgotha.

Bukhari relates how Muhammad promised on one occasion, "The Mahdi will be descended from me, and will reign over all for seven days." The last of the Imams, *al-Muntazar* ("the Expected One"), vanished down a well near Baghdad. The Shia' believe he is still alive and will appear on the Last Day. Ibn Khaldun records that in his generation devout folk would gather at the well to beg the absent Imam to come forth. Shia' tradition adds that when the Major Occultation is over, the Mahdi and Jesus, two pure beings, will destroy the Anti-Christ, and the world will enter the fold of true religion.

5. Dogmatism

There are three major dogmatic differences between the Shia' and the Sunni:

- **The role of the Imam.** For Sunnis, the Imam is the leader at congregational prayers. In the words of the *Hadith*, "The man most familiar with God's book, he shall act as Imam for a people." Among the Shia', the Imam has become an object of adoration, and is regarded as semi-divine. It is an article of their faith that all the Imams were created from preexistent light, and were preserved sinless and without error. While it is unlikely that new truth will dawn on the Sunni, the Shia' hold that new truth may still be communicated to a representative of the Imams (as was believed of Ayatolla Khomeini).
- **The pious deception.** The Shia' admit a principle of religious camouflage, *Taqiyyah* ("Pious Pretense"), whereby

the Shiite in times of persecution or under pressure may compromise his stand or deny his creed to escape harm.

- **Mut'a marriages ("enjoyment marriages").** Marriage laws vary between Sunnis and Shia' in some detail. The most striking difference is the acceptance by the Shia' of a temporary contract between a man and a woman, with no witnesses required for the contract to go into effect. *Mut'a* means "enjoyment," and this seems to be the only purpose of the liaison. Though Muhammad is said to have allowed *mut'a*, Sunnis dispute the claim. The text is ambiguous: "All the married women [are forbidden] unto you save those [captives] whom your right hand possesses. It is a decree of Allah for you. Lawful to you are all beyond those mentioned [in verse 23] so that you seek them with your wealth in honest wedlock, not debauchery. And those of whom you seek enjoyment, give to them their portion as a duty. And there is no sin for you in what you do by mutual agreement after the duty [has been done]. Allah is all-knowing, all-wise" (Sura 4:24). *Mut'a* requires a period fixed by the parties. The link is severed when the term expires. Such convenience marriages are common in rural Iran. The resulting abuse is easy to imagine. The practice degrades women, in particular making the much-publicized execution of adulteresses an exercise in hypocrisy.

II. SUFISM

Sufism is the knowledge of God arrived at through the embrace of unifying love. According to Sufists, mere intellectual knowledge of God fails to satisfy the hungry soul, and so, seeking to go beyond a formal creed or rational discourse, he sets out on a quest called the "Mystic Path."

Like a grain of salt falling into the ocean, the mystic expects to dissolve in the vastness of a Being for whom he has a variety of names. He earnestly desires to see his individual existence melt away into an all-embracing unity, the self-life into unifying love. There are many mystic paths, within and

beyond Islam. Together with mystics from other faiths, the Sufis strive for the path that leads to oneness and bliss.

1. Origin and influences of Sufism

We do not know for certain how far orthodox Muslim teachings influenced Sufism, nor how far it was influenced by Christianity.

The noun Sufi most probably derives from the Arabic *suf* (“wool”), a reference to the rough woolen clothes worn by the early Sufi monastics. Other etymologies have been suggested but are less satisfactory – for instance, *safa* (“purity”), *suffah* (used of a row of worshippers in the first mosque at Medina), or even the Greek *sophos* (“wisdom”).

In other respects, too, early Sufism seems to have been modeled on Christian monasticism – despite the claim of Muslim tradition that “there is no monasticism in Islam.” Sufis took over the recitation of litanies. They adopted something close to a monastic routine. And they favored celibacy. Al-Basri wrote, “If God desires good for his servant, He will not let him be occupied with family and children.”

But Sufism has taken many forms, and can be found pursuing paths other than the *zahid* (“ascetic”) emphasis on abstinence from food, silence before God, and flight from the outside community. Some Sufis embrace the poverty of the *faqir* (“pauper”), seeking to possess and be possessed by nothing. Others embrace both these paths but insist that the essence of Sufism lies in something else of which asceticism and poverty are only the beginning.

2. The pioneers of Sufism

As early as AD 700 there were pious folk in the Muslim tradition who wore rough garments of wool to signify their penitence and devotion to God. A century later we hear of a group of monastics in Iraq called *sufiyyah*. About AD 900 a guild of mystics flourished in Baghdad that included al-Junayd, the great Sufi.

Sufism changed over time. In the earlier phase, where monasticism was dominant, Sufis had their minds and affections set on hope hereafter. In the latter phase, which

moved toward pantheistic mysticism, they reached out for an ecstasy attainable in present union with God. There appears to have been a period of transition in between. Darani, one of the early monotheists, said, "Contemplation is the fruit of self-mortification." Al-Rumi, the pantheist, later urged, "Thy body mortify, thy flesh consume with pain...you will find God's oneness to be your gain." These two Sufist mystics show accord on at least one point.

To a large extent, Sufism represents a reaction against orthodoxy in Islam. As orthodox Muslim theologians developed their systems, their concept of God became more and more abstract and depersonalized. Indeed, orthodox Islam frowns on the concept of personhood when applied to Allah. By contrast, the primitive Sufi longed for a warm, intimate relationship with his Lord, and was able to find some justification for this hope in the Quranic texts – for example, "Those who believe love Allah more ardently," (Sura 2:165) and "Allah will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him, humble toward believers, stern toward disbelievers, striving in the way of Allah" (Sura 5:54).

Also, in the second and third centuries of the Muslim Era the Arabs were reaping the benefits of their success. The Caliphs lived in luxury, and abundance and status-seeking left little time for contemplation. Accordingly, in many parts of the Muslim East a reaction set in, drawing men away from the prevailing corruption and into holy living.

3. From fear to love

People renounce the world for one of two reasons: they are driven by the terror of the Lord, or they are constrained by His love. Several devotees among the Sufis were constrained by the love of God.

The experiences of Rabiah al-Adawia of Basra (d. AD 801) are noteworthy. With a tomb in Jerusalem later much-frequented by pilgrims, she is the most famous of Sufi women saints, remarkable for her tenderness and ardent love for God. Before her conversion she was a popular musician – a singer of love songs. But that love shifted from the world and became focused on God Himself. It was cleansed and raised heavenward. She prayed, "O God, if I worship You in fear of

hell, burn me in hell. If I worship You in hope of heaven, keep me out of heaven. But if I worship You for Your own sake, withhold not Your everlasting beauty from me.”

Someone asked her, “Do you hate the devil?” She answered, “My love for God leaves me no time to hate the devil.” She added, “ I saw the Prophet [Muhammad] in a dream, and he asked, ‘Do you love me?’ I answered, ‘O Apostle of God, who does not love you? But love of God has so absorbed me that neither love nor hate for any other thing remains in my heart.’”

4. The *Tariqa* (“Path”) and its stages

Tariqa is the path pursued by the seeking Sufi. When Sufists felt the need for collective organization, they turned to Eastern Churches for a model. They met together in cells to recite the Quran and discuss religious themes. Liturgical forms were developed, and *dhikr* (“remembrance of God”) became a regular feature of their meetings. A typical litany would run like this, “I ask forgiveness of God Almighty. Glory to God. May God bless our Master [Muhammad], his household and companions.” Each phrase was repeated a hundred times.

Along with the *dhikr*, the Sufis introduced the *sama*’, a religious concert designed to cause ecstasy and characterized by dancing or the rending of garments. Orthodox Muslims frowned on these displays of fervor, fearing lest the *dhikr* and the *sama*’ should replace public worship in the mosques.

The *Tariqa* itself has several stages. Al-Ghazali speaks of the seven seas that a person must cross to reach the goal. These are Repentance, Abstinence (occasionally going without pleasures), Renunciation (giving up all morally dubious activities), Poverty (which, voluntarily accepted, encourages dependence on God), Patience, Trust in God, and Satisfaction.

A *sheikh* (“leader”) normally guides the seeker through these stages, the special training for which may last several years. The Sufi’s path does not end until he has completed all the stages and experienced all the proper emotions. He is then raised to a higher plane of consciousness, where the “seeker” becomes the “knower,” and “knower” and “known” are one. The achievement of the ultimate goal of union with

God is signaled by ecstasy for some and by death for others. The Sufis of India took over their concept of Fana' ("Death") from the Buddhist ideal of Nirvana, but believe that Fana' is rewarded by Baqa' ("Survival") in God. As Junayd, the great sufi of Baghdad, expressed it, "God causes you to die to self and to live in Him." To a Sufi, self is the last enemy, which above all should be denied or suppressed.

5. Criticizing Sufism

Like all mysticism, Sufism is easy to criticize. It is escapist, running away from the complexities of daily living. It neglects responsibility to family and society. It gives undue emphasis to subjective experience. And – particularly in its medieval form – it had its share of charlatans and cheats.

Nevertheless, in its "golden age" Sufism did attract many sincere disciples, who sought the peace that passes understanding, the joy that cannot be expressed, and the love that is stronger than death. And the seeker hoped to discover all this in union with the Divine. I have heard a Sufist say that he wanted to have a personal relationship with God. He did not find this in Islam, and was anyway afraid to renounce Islam for fear of falling under the penalty of apostasy. But neither did he find it in the Christian doctrines of the deity of Christ, His atonement, and the Trinity. Unable to discover what he sought either in Islam or Christianity, he turned to Sufism.

ⁱ This chapter is based on Dr. Richard Thomas, *op.cit.*, pp.118-155.

The Superiority of Jesus in Islam

The Quran ranks Jesus Christ above all prophets and apostles, and even above Muhammad. Jesus' Quranic titles, teachings, attributes and deeds excel them all. The name of Christ appears, or is referred to, ninety-three times in the Quran, and when a Muslim thinks of Christ it is to these verses his mind returns.

The Sufis consider Jesus the greatest and highest of all prophets. Jawad Nurbakhash, in his book, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, says, "No previous prophet, however graced with virtues of perfection, ever quite attained His degree. He is the paragon of a perfect human being and the example par excellence of a true master... To the Sufis, Jesus is the model and example of ultimate purity. The true Sufi yearns to be pure like Jesus. Attar, a Sufist, prayed, 'Cleanse me, O Lord, of this filthy soul, so I may claim immortal purity for myself, like Jesus.'"ⁱ

In Sufist tradition there is a story in which the disciples of Jesus say to Him, "Master, each one of us has his own house, while you do not."

Jesus refuses to let them build Him a house, but they insist. At last He accepts their offer and says, "I will choose the site and let you do the building."

One day He is crossing a bridge with them when He says, "I have chosen the site." He points to the bridge.

"But Master," they exclaim, "this is not a place for building. This is where people cross."

Jesus answers, "And all of us are crossing from this life to

the life to come.”

Muhammad himself longed to meet Jesus: “My hope, if my age is prolonged, is to meet Jesus, Son of Mary. But if death hurries me along, then let the one who meets Him give Him my kind regards.”ⁱⁱ No other prophet held such a place in his heart. In the Hadith he says, “The prophets are brothers of different mothers, but their religion is one. Of all men I am the most deserving to be the brother of Jesus Son of Mary, for there was no prophet between me and Him.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Examination of the Quran, and particularly of the titles it bestows on Jesus, confirm the pre-eminent place held by Jesus Christ in Islam.

I. JESUS IS THE WORD OF GOD.

According to Sura 3:45, the angels said to Mary, “God gives you good tidings of a Word of Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary; illustrious in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those near stationed to God.” The Quran also says, “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary is the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed into Mary, and a Spirit from Him” (Sura 4:171). No other person in the Quran is called the “Word of God” – a title higher than Apostle, prophet, warner, or preacher.

In the New Testament, the title “Word” has at least three clear implications:

- **Jesus is eternal.** God was never wordless or speechless. He always communicated. Therefore Jesus is the eternal Word of God. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God” (John 1:1, 2).
- **Jesus has the full authority of God.** The word carries the authority of the speaker. Thus Jesus has God’s full authority. God’s Word carries all His commands. This is why Jesus performed miracles. He said, “All power is given to me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).

- **Jesus reveals God.** A person's word reveals his character and tells who he is. By speaking he unveils himself. Jesus, God's Word, revealed God to us. He said, "He that has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). "No one has ever seen God. The only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father has declared Him" (John 1:18).

Al-Razi, al-Jalalan and others say that Jesus was called "Word of God" only because God called Him into being through a spoken command. But this cannot be so. First, the title is never used of Adam – though God clearly spoke Adam into being. Second, the Quranic expression "a Word of Him whose name is Messiah" confirms that the "Word" is itself a person, for the Arabic *ismuhu* ("whose name") is masculine, referring to the *Kalima* ("Word"), which in Arabic is feminine. Third, it clearly makes no sense to name things after the means of their creation. This book was written on a word processor, but we don't call the book a word processor – we call it a book. Even if God had created Jesus by a word of command, as the Muslims claim, Jesus could not be called *Kalima* ("Word"), because He would not be the command itself, but the product of the command.

II. JESUS IS THE CREATOR.

The Quran says, "The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary...is a Spirit from Him" (Sura 4:171). No one else in the Quran received this title, "Spirit from Him." In fact the Quran says outright that God used the title to set Jesus apart.

As a "Spirit from Him" Jesus also shares fully in God's role as Creator. In the Quran, Jesus says to the children of Israel, "I will create (*akhluqu*) for you out of clay as the likeness of a bird; then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the permission of God" (Sura 3:49). The Quran quotes God saying to Jesus, "You create (*takhluqu*) out of clay as the likeness of a bird by my permission" (Sura 5:110).

Most English translations of the Quran translate the verb *akhluqu* as "I form," or "I make," or "I shape." The correct and honest translation is: "I create." God has permitted all men and women to share His attributes of generosity, justice,

mercy and charity. He has also bestowed on His prophets the power to perform supernatural miracles and to foretell future events. But He has reserved to Himself the act of creating. The claim that Jesus breathed life into a clay bird, as God breathed life into the dust of the ground to make Adam, is by necessity a claim that Jesus is like God – able to create something out of nothing.

Compare this with the Quran's taunt to idol worshippers:

Sura 22:73

Surely those upon whom you call, apart from God, shall never create a fly, though they band together to do it; and if a fly should rob them of aught, they would never rescue it from him. Feeble indeed alike are the seeker and the sought.

It should be noted also that, in the New Testament, Jesus does not do creative miracles "by God's permission." Moses obeyed God's command when he transformed his staff into a snake. But God did not order Jesus to raise Lazarus from his tomb (see John 11) or to heal the man born blind (see John 9).

III. JESUS WAS ACKNOWLEDGED IN THE WOMB.

Jesus is the only prophet to be believed upon while still in his mother's womb. In the Quranic story of John the Baptist, angels tell Zechariah that his son "shall confirm a Word from God" (Sura 3:39). Al-Razi confirms that "What is meant by 'Word of God' is Jesus, peace be upon Him. This is the choice of the majority of commentators." But the "confirming" happened long before Jesus arrived at the River Jordan. Like ibn Kathir, al-Razi reports the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth: "The mother of Jesus met the mother of John, peace be upon them. Both were pregnant: one with Jesus, the other with John. The wife of Zechariah said to Mary, 'I found that he who is inside me bows down to the One inside of you.'" Muhammad's cousin ibn Abbas, says al-Razi, confirms this when he says that John was older than Jesus by six months, and that he was the first to believe and to confirm Jesus as

“the Word of God” and “His Spirit.”

Muslims consider the Baptist a great prophet. Al-Suyuti, commenting on Sura 3:39, says, “A caller called from heaven saying that John is the greatest among those born of women, because he is a leader of the believers.” Jalalan, commenting on the same verse, says that the Baptist is “the prominent one who is sought as the authority and the example in religion.” Yet, despite John’s high calling and precedence in age, the Quran accepts that he bowed down in the womb to Jesus. Jesus deserved respect and honor above that of a prophet because He is *more* than a prophet. He is the “Word of God.”

IV. JESUS WAS BORN MIRACULOUSLY.

In Sura 19:19-21, the Quran tells how the angel Jibril came to Mary and said, “I am only a messenger from your Lord to announce to you a gift of a holy son (or “sinless son”, or “faultless son”).” Mary replied, “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?” Jibril said, “So it will be, thy Lord says ‘That is easy for me, and We wish to appoint Him as a sign unto men and a mercy from Us. It is a matter decreed.’”

The Quran also says:

Sura 66:12

And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity, and We breathed into her body of Our Spirit, and she testified to the truth of the words of Her Lord and His revelations, and was one of the devout servants.

Commenting on this verse, al-Suddi says, “The angel Jibril took the sleeves of Mary and breathed into them. The breath reached her chest, and she bore Jesus.” The Quran also says that Jesus “was the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him” (Sura 4:171). This acknowledges that He was not conceived by a human father, but by the Holy Spirit, in a supernatural manner.

Muslims who wish to downplay the miraculous conception and birth of Jesus compare him to Adam, who, they say, had

neither mother nor father. This is true. Adam, like Eve, could only be created by a miracle. But the birth of Jesus imposed no such necessity. It was simply the purpose of God that Jesus should come into the world by miraculous means – “That We may appoint Him a sign unto men and a mercy from Us” (Sura 19:21). Jesus has no equal among men. He occupies the highest position.

Al-Baidawi agrees that the birth of Jesus was miraculous. And because Jesus was born in this divine way, he says, He is unique among all God’s messengers.

V. JESUS IS EMINENT IN THIS WORLD AND THE NEXT.

The Quran records this message from the angels to Mary: “God gives you good tidings of a Word from him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary. Eminent shall he be in this world and the next, near stationed to God” (Sura 3:45).

Al-Razi explains: “This is the same great praise given to the angels. God, by this description, has ranked Jesus with the same degree and place as the angels. The angel who accompanied Jesus was Jibril, the closest angel to God Himself and the greatest angel. Jibril is next only to the Most High God. Muslims consider him to be the Holy Spirit.”

According to al-Razi, Jibril enjoys an intimate relationship with God. Explaining the meaning of “We sent unto her Our Spirit that presented himself to her a man without fault,” (Sura 19:17) al-Razi says, “God called Jibril His Spirit because he is the cause of the life of religion, or to indicate His love and nearness to Him, as you would say to your beloved ‘my spirit.’”

God’s gift to Jesus of Jibril’s companionship indicates how precious Jesus is to God: the value of the gift measures the worth of the recipient. There is nothing more precious than the permanent company of the Holy Spirit.

“Eminent” in Arabic is *wajih*, the root of which is *wajh* (“face”). Commenting on Sura 3:45, al-Razi says that *wajih*

connotes distinction because the face is the most honorable part of the body. A city's foremost citizens are called its *wojha'a* (plural of *wajih*). Just as there is only one face on the body, so too there is only one person distinguished both in earthly life and in the life to come. Jesus' pre-eminence is continuous, and final throughout all eternity. Jesus is *wajih* ("eminent, distinguished") in this life, because His requests are granted – He raised the dead, and healed the blind and lepers. He is *wajih* in the life to come, because God made Him intercede on behalf of His true people, and because God accepts His intercession.

During the time Jesus spent on earth, His acts of intercession were more powerful than death. In the life to come, His intercession is more powerful than Hell. Jesus' eminence in His earthly life is a measure of His eminence in the life to come.

Al-Baidawi comments on Sura 3:45, saying that Jesus' eminence is unmatched both in His earthly life and in the life to come. He comments on Sura 2:235 saying: "God made Jesus' miracles the reason for His preferment because they are clear signs and great miracles. When put together, those miracles were not performed by anyone else."

Al-Zamakhshari, commenting on Sura 3:45, says, "Eminence in this world means prophecy and precedence over men, and in the next means intercession and exaltation of position in paradise." In Sura 39:44, the Quran grants the right of intercession solely to God. Yet Sura 3:45 says that Jesus has the right of intercession because of His eminence "in this world and the next."

The history of Islamic theology (*Fiqh*) shows a strong-felt need of a mediator. This is expressed in Sura 37:107: "We redeemed him [Abraham's son] with a tremendous sacrifice." Jesus Christ is the only One who can fulfil this natural longing for intercession and atonement. True, the Quran tells Muslims, "Be not as those who hurt Moses, but God declared him quit of what they said, and he was eminent with God" (Sura 33:69). But Moses' eminence was limited to the mortal world. By contrast, according to al-Razi, Jesus has "the office of prophet and supremacy over men in this world, and in

the next, in the office of intercession and likeness of rank in paradise. Not every eminent one is high-honored because the people of Paradise are in ranks and degrees, therefore Allah said, ‘You will be divided into three groups and the foremost will be the Foremost. Such are they that shall be brought near’” (see Sura 56:7,10,11).

The Bible makes the same distinction when it says, “Moses verily was faithful as a servant in all his house, but Christ as a Son over His own house” (Hebrews 3:5-6). In the matter of mediation, the Quran places Jesus far above Muhammad. Thus Allah tells the Prophet, “Whether you ask forgiveness for them or not; if you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them” (Sura 9:80).

VI. JESUS IS INFALLIBLE.

Sura 19:19 says that the angel addressing Mary called Jesus *Zakeian* (“Holy or faultless or sinless Son”). Quran and Hadith agree that Jesus is the only sinless person. Al-Baidawi says that “a holy son” is a son “pure from sins.” The word *Zakeian* is used also in Sura 18:74, to describe a little boy, where al-Jalalan translates it “pure from murdering another soul.” According to Bukhari, Muhammad said, “Every child of Adam as he is born, Satan thrusts him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but thrust the curtain.”^{iv}

The Quran, like the Old and New Testaments, acknowledges the sinfulness of prophets and apostles. It mentions the sins of Adam (Sura 20:121), of Noah (Sura 71:26-28), of Abraham (Sura 37:89), of Aaron (Sura 7:150-152), of Moses (Sura 28:15,16), and of David (Sura 38:20-25). It also states that Muhammad sinned. On one occasion Allah told him: “Did We not expand your breast for you and lift from you your burden, the burden that weighed down your back?” (Sura 94:1-3). On another occasion Allah said, “Surely We have given you a manifest victory, that God may forgive you your former and your latter sins” (Sura 48:2; see also 40:55, 4:106, 47:19). In Sura 9:43 Muhammad is told, “God pardoned you. Why

do you give them leave till it was clear to you which of them spoke the truth and you knew the liar?” And Sura 80:1-4, after Muhammad ignores a blind man, the Quran says, “He (Muhammad) frowned and turned away because the blind man came to him. What could inform you but that he might grow [in faith], or take heed and so the Reminder might avail him?”

The Hadith states that Muhammad used to “ask forgiveness and turn to Allah in repentance more than seventy times a day.” And Bukhari records these prayers of Muhammad:

O Allah! Forgive my mistakes and my ignorance and my exceeding the limits of righteousness in my deeds; and forgive whatever you know better than I. O Allah! Forgive the wrong I have done jokingly or seriously, and forgive my accidental and intentional errors, all that is present in me.

O Allah! Wash away my sins with the water of snow and hail, and cleanse my heart from all the sins as a white garment is cleansed from the filth, and let there be a long distance between me and my sins, as You made East and West far from each other.^v

Bukhari adds: “He continued to ask forgiveness until the last breath.”^{vi} The Quran is explicit about the corruption of the whole human race (see Sura 2 36, 7:24, 11:9, 12:53, 100:6). The Hadith says, “Satan circulates in the human mind as blood circulates in it.”^{vii} However, neither Quran nor Hadith mentions any sin of Jesus. On the contrary, both testify to His unparalleled holiness and purity. No mere prophet or apostle, however great, claimed infallibility for himself. Yet Jesus asked His enemies, “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (John 8:46). He announced, “The ruler of this world [Satan] is coming, and he has nothing on me” (John 14:30). When Pilate examined the charges of the Jews against Jesus, he declared that he could not find any fault in Him (see John 18:38, 19:4,6). Pilate himself refused to take responsibility for the trial, declaring: “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it!” (Matthew 27:24).

VII. JESUS IS HIGH AND LIFTED UP.

The Quran says:

Sura 2:253

Of those messengers we have exalted some above others. To some Allah spoke directly. Others He raised to a lofty status. We gave Jesus son of Mary clear signs and strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit.

The Quran clearly states that Jesus was lifted up to be with God, and that He is alive today. It says, "They slew Him not of certainty – no indeed; God raised Him [Jesus] up to Him, God is all-mighty, all-wise" (Sura 4:157, 158). The Quran quotes Allah as saying, "Jesus, I will raise you to Me" (Sura 3:55).



Muslims point out that other prophets were raised. But the context is always different. When the Quran quotes Allah saying to Muhammad, "Did we not raise your fame?" (Sura 94:4) it is the fame being raised, not Muhammad himself. And

when it says that the prophet Idris (Enoch) was “raised...up to a high place,” (Sura 19:57) the high place is not specified. Al-Razi, commenting on Sura 19:57, says that the preferred meaning of “raised” is “lifted” because the lifting of Idris is associated with physical position, not spiritual rank.

But in the Quran, God says to Jesus, “I will raise you to Me.” The meaning is clear: Jesus was lifted up to be with God. As al-Razi comments on Sura 4:158, “The lifting up of Jesus...is affirmed by this verse and its equivalent in Sura 3:55. That proves that the lifting up of Jesus to God as a reward is greater than Paradise and all that is in it of physical pleasures. And that verse opens to you the door of the knowledge of the spiritual joys.” He adds that “I will raise you to Me” means “I am raising you to the Presence of My Honor.” Commenting on Sura 4:157, al-Razi says, “The spirit of Jesus was holy, high, heavenly; shining intensely with Divine lights, and of great closeness to the spirits of the angels.”

VIII. JESUS IS BLESSED.

In the Quran, Jesus announces from His cradle, “And He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live” (Sura 19:31).

Al-Tabari says the phrase “has made me blessed” means “He made me a teacher of all goodness.” Jesus is sinless. He is also blessed. His perfection is not only passive, but active. He is to be blessed unconditionally and continuously “wherever He may be.” Al-Baidawi interprets “blessed” to mean “possessing much profit for others.” In his comment on Sura 3:39, al-Razi explains the phrase “profit for others” thus: “By Jesus, God brought people to life out of deception, just as man lives by the spirit.” He likens Jesus’ ministry to the life the spirit gives to the body. Al-Baidawi, commenting on Sura 3:49, says that Jesus “Used to raise dead bodies and dead hearts to life.” Being Himself free from sin, Jesus sought to set people free from the deception of Satan.

Jesus is the only person in the Quran described as “blessed.” The word is used in other contexts – for example, of the Quran itself, described as a blessed book, Sura 6:92.

Also called “blessed” are:

- The first holy house in Mecca, built by the angels before the creation of Adam (see Sura 3:96).
- The *Lailat al-Qadr* (the “Night of Power” in which the Quran was revealed – see Sura 44:3).
- The olive tree whose light was likened to the light of God (see Sura 24:35).

Nowhere in the Quran is the word “blessed” used of a person – except in the case of Jesus.

IX. JESUS IS CONFIRMED AND STRENGTHENED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The Quran says three times that Jesus is strengthened with the Holy Spirit. In this respect, once again, Islam acknowledges Jesus as unique. The statement is made in Sura 2:253. The Quran also records these words of Allah:

Sura 5:110

O Jesus Son of Mary, remember my favor to you and to your mother, how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit.

Sura 2:87

We gave Jesus Son of Mary the clear signs, and confirmed Him with the Holy Spirit.

Commenting on Sura 2:87, al-Razi says, “The exclusive portion of Jibril [the Holy Spirit] to Jesus is a most distinguishing characteristic, so that not a single prophet among the prophets was thus distinguished. Jibril proclaimed the good news to Mary concerning the birth of Jesus. Jesus was conceived by the breathing of Jibril. He brought Him up in all situations, and used to walk with Him wherever He walked.”

He adds, commenting on Sura 3:52-55, “Jibril did not leave Jesus, even for one hour.” By contrast, Jibril only visited Muhammad. When the revelations ceased, Muhammad asked Jibril, “What prevents you from visiting us more than you visit us now?” To which Jibril replied, “We angels descend not

but by the command of your Lord.”^{viii}

Abu Muslim says, “The Holy Spirit may be the pure spirit that God breathed on Jesus and made Him different from all people in His birth.” And ibn Abbas: “This ‘Spirit’ which was breathed in Jesus was a spirit that God had given Him to honor and consecrate Him.” According to al-Suddi, “The Holy Spirit is the angel Jibril, who helped Jesus and was always with Him until He lifted Him up to heaven.” Ibn Gobair adds, “The Holy Spirit is the great name of God by which Jesus raised the dead.” Ibn Abbas agrees that the Holy Spirit is the name by which Jesus raised the dead, and that this Spirit is holy.

X. JESUS IS THE SAVIOR.

According to the Quran, God named only two persons before their birth – John the Baptist and Jesus. Thus the angels said to Mary, “God gives you good tidings of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, *Isa* [Jesus], Son of Mary” (Sura 3:45).

Al-Qasemi, commenting on this verse, points out that “the name *Isa* is an Arabic form, from a Greek word, which means ‘Savior.’ It is equivalent to Joshua in Hebrew.” Nevertheless, God gave that name to Jesus before His birth, in a language that is unlike any on earth: “Perfect are the words of our Lord in truthfulness and justice. No man can change His words” (Sura 6:116). Thus the All-knowing God gave Jesus the name of “Savior” to signify that He would save the world from the *Dajjal* (Anti-Christ).

Commenting on Sura 3:48, al-Suyuti tells that “When Jesus and John the Baptist would come to a village, Jesus would seek the sinners of the village while John would go to its virtuous people. So John asked Jesus, ‘Why do you seek the sinful people?’ Jesus answered, ‘I am a physician. I came only to heal the sick.’”

Similarly, al-Baidawi comments on Sura 4:171 by saying, “Jesus was called spirit because he used to raise dead bodies and dead hearts to life.” Al-Baidawi also comments on Sura 5:110, defining the Holy Spirit not simply as Jibril, but as “the

words by which religion lives,” or “the words by which the human soul lives eternally, and which cleanse [people] from sins, or the Majestic Name by which Jesus raised the dead.”

Thus the words of Jesus are powerful enough to give life, both eternal and physical, and to cleanse people from their sins. This power belongs exclusively to Jesus, and is acknowledged by the Quran as strictly divine: “God has promised the believers, men and women, gardens underneath which rivers flow, forever therein to dwell” (Sura 9:72).

Sura 3:52 says, “When Jesus became conscious of their [the Jews’] disbelief, He said, ‘Who will be my helpers in the cause of Allah?’ The disciples said, ‘We will be Allah’s helpers. We believe in Allah, and bear witness that we have surrendered [are Muslims].’” Al-Razi comments on this verse, “The disciples of Jesus were twelve in number. Jesus came across a group of fishermen, amongst them Simon, Jacob and John the son of Zebedee. Jesus said to them, ‘Now you catch fish, but if you follow me you will catch people for eternal life.’ So they asked a miracle of Him. Simon had been trying all night to catch fish but caught nothing. Jesus commanded him to throw his net again, and this time they caught so many fish that the net was about to tear. They asked for help from a nearby ship, and both ships were filled with fish. So they believed in Him.”

Al-Baidawi, commenting on the same verse, makes this point: “Jesus had the words that impart eternal life. Because the giving of eternal life and the raising of the dead are divine powers, the disciples must have been confused as to how a mere man could perform these acts. So they wanted Jesus to prove to them that He was capable of doing just that. The followers of Jesus did not ask for proof that He is a prophet; rather, they wanted proof of His power to give eternal life.”

Al-Razi quotes Jesus as saying, “Now you catch fish, but if you follow me you will catch people for eternal life.” Jesus is the Savior. When He was on earth He saved people from their sins, and He continues to do so now that He is lifted up to heaven. By contrast, the Quran quotes Muhammad as saying, “I have no power to hurt or benefit myself, except by the will of Allah” (Sura 10:49).

XI. JESUS WILL COME AGAIN.

According to Orthodox Islam, it is Jesus, and not Muhammad or any other prophet, who will return to earth to judge the world and kill the *Dajjal* (Anti-Christ).^{ix}

In the Hadith, Al-Hindy confirms this in the quotations he attributes to Muhammad:

“By God, Jesus Son of Mary will descend to judge in justice.”

“The Hour will not take place until Jesus Son of Mary descends a righteous judge and a just leader.”

“Jesus Son of Mary will descend a just judge and leader. He will come to my grave and salute me and I will answer Him back.”

“God will kill the Dajjal by the hands of Jesus Son of Mary.”

“Jesus Son of Mary is coming again and when the Dajjal sees Him, he will melt like wax melts. And so Jesus will kill the Dajjal.”^x

According to ibn Majah, Muhammad said, “The *Dajjal* will not leave a place on earth, but subject it and tread upon it by foot, except Mecca and Medina. Wherever he attempts to enter, the angels will meet him with swords. He will come to the red hills and the city will tremble three times. That day will be called the day of salvation. Then he was asked, ‘O Prophet of God! Where are the Arabs in that day?’ He said, ‘The Arabs on that day are few, and when Jesus looks at the *Dajjal* he will dissolve like salt dissolves in water and runs to escape, but Jesus will kill him.’”^{xi}

Again, al-Hindy quotes Muhammad as saying, “Jesus Son of Mary will be the just ruler over my nation and a righteous leader. Enmity and hatred will disappear, and the whole earth will be filled with peace as a vessel becomes filled with water. War will cease. Under his rule everything that has a sting will lose its sting, so that a child will handle a snake without getting hurt and touch the lion without getting harmed. The wolf shall be like a dog amongst the sheep. The plants will yield like the

days of Adam. Because the whole earth will be ploughed.”^{xii}

Jesus, then, is both just ruler and divine avenger. In marked contrast, Muhammad himself is shown in the Hadith praying for protection from the *Dajjal*.^{xiii} Yet again, Jesus is seen to be supreme.

XII. JESUS IS THE CHRIST.

Jesus is called “Christ” ten times in the Quran. Al-Baidawi, commenting on Sura 3:45 (“His name is *al-Masih*”), acknowledges that the title *al-Masih* (“Christ”) derives from the Hebrew *Masih* (“Anointed”).

Mary’s mother prayed after she gave birth to Mary, “Protect her and her descendents from Satan, the outcast” (Sura 3:36). Al-Suyuti, commenting on this prayer, quotes ibn Abbas, saying, “Among those who were born, only Jesus, son of Mary, was untouched by Satan and not overpowered by him.” Muslim commentators agree that Jesus was untouched by Satan because He was anointed.

Al-Razi, also commenting on Sura 3:45, gives some further explanations of the title:

- Jesus was called the Christ because He was anointed with that which made Him pure from sins.
- Jesus was called the Christ because He was anointed by the wing of Jibril and was protected from the touch of Satan.
- Jesus was called the Christ because He surveyed the earth – in other words, because He can travel through the whole length of it in a short time.
- Jesus was called the Christ because Christ means “the king” or “the righteous.” When He came out of His mother’s womb, He was already anointed with oil.

Some additional explanations are put forward by al-Qurtubi:

- Jesus was called the Christ because whomever He stroke with His hand must be cured of his sickness.
- Jesus was called the Christ because He used to anoint the

heads of the orphans for God.

- Jesus was called the Christ because He was anointed with that which made Him pure from sins.
- Jesus was called the Christ because He was anointed with pure blessed oil used only for anointing prophets.

To these comments on Sura 3:45, al-Qasemi adds this: “The original meaning of the title ‘Christ’: according to the Jewish revealed law, whoever the religious leader anoints with the holy ointment, becomes pure, worthy for the kingdom and knowledge and the high degrees of sainthood, and blessed. So the Most High God has indicated by that title that Jesus is in a state of continuous blessedness which results from such anointing, even though He was not anointed.”

The Bible teaches that God gave Jesus the title “Christ” before He was born. God, not man, anointed Jesus to be king. When a human anoints another human, both remain mortal. But since Jesus was anointed by the eternal living God, He is an eternal king. He is alive with God.

XIII. JESUS’ MESSAGE WAS PROVEN BY MIRACLES.

According to the Quran, the titles, attributes, and words of Jesus are unique. Thus the Quran quotes Allah as saying, “To Jesus, the son of Mary, We gave clear signs and strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit” (Sura 2:253). Al-Baidawi comments on this verse, saying, “God had given Jesus alone clear and great miracles. No other prophet performed as many various miracles as Jesus did.”

Jesus’ miracles do not have the same kind of significance in Islam as they do in Christianity. Christians see that the mission of Jesus on earth was to restore people to God. He was given the unique power to free them from slavery to Satan, and this power was expressed in miracles of physical healing that demonstrate God’s care and love. By contrast, the Hadith shows Jesus performing miracles not out of compassion or to serve the needy, but to demonstrate the power of God. Their mes-

sage is the message of Islam – “Allah is great” – not the Gospel assurance that “God is love.”

Thus the Quran calls Jesus’ miracles “clear signs” of God’s power, a privilege not given to all the prophets. Speaking of the Messengers of God, Suras 2:252 and 2:253 say: “Some We have preferred above others...And we gave Jesus Son of Mary the clear signs.” Commenting on these verses, al-Baidawi says, “God made the miracles of Jesus the evidence of His preferment above other prophets, because they are clear signs and great miracles. Together those miracles were not performed by anyone else.”

Two Quranic verses make direct reference to miracles performed by Jesus. In the first, Jesus announces:

Sura 3:49

I bring you a sign from your Lord. From clay I will create (akhluqu) for you the likeness of a bird; then I will breathe into it, and it will be a bird, by the permission of God. I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I raise the dead to life. I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if you did believe.

In the second, Allah responds:

Sura 5:110

O Jesus, son of Mary, remember my favor to you and to your mother; how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit so that you spoke to mankind in cradle as in maturity; and how I taught you the Scripture and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel, and you create (takhluku) out of clay as the likeness of a bird by My permission, and did blow upon it, and it was a bird by My permission; and you did heal him who was born blind and the leper by My permission; and how you did raise the dead by My permission; and how I restrained the children of Israel from harming you when you came to them with clear signs, and those of them who disbelieved exclaimed, “This is nothing but clear magic.”

Many of the miracles Muslims ascribe to Jesus are recorded in the apocryphal books, and particularly in the collection of Abu Ishaq Ahmad al-Thaalabi (d. AD 1035). Among the

specific miracles mentioned in the Quran and the Hadith are the following:

1. Jesus spoke in His cradle.

The Quran tells how the relatives of Mary were dismayed when she gave birth to a child before she was married. They said, “Oh sister of Aaron, your father was not a man of evil, nor your mother a woman unchaste.” Mary pointed to the baby. They said, “How can we talk to one who is in the cradle?” Jesus then answered, “I am indeed a servant of God. He has given me revelation, and made me a prophet, and has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live. He has made me kind to my mother and not overbearing or miserable. So peace is on me the day that I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life again” (Sura 19:28-33).

2. Jesus raised the dead, and healed the lepers and the blind.

According to the Quran, Jesus said, “I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead” (Sura 3:49). Ekrema points out, “Jesus said this verse to the children of Israel because they refused the miracles which proved His prophethood. Since no one can raise the dead, or heal the born blind or the leper, this shows the accuracy of His message.”

The Hadith names those whom Jesus raised from the dead even after their bodies had decayed – a power Muslim commentators agree belongs to God alone. The Quran quotes Allah thus:

Sura 36:78,79

*Who shall quicken the bones when they are decayed?
Say, He shall quicken them, who originated them the first
time.*

Al-Suyuti, commenting on Sura 3:48,49, relates two accounts of Jesus’ power to raise the dead. One concerns Jesus’ own brother. The other, quoted here, shows Jesus raising Sam, the son of Noah: “The children of Israel came to Jesus saying, ‘Sam the son of Noah is buried not very far from here. Call God to raise him.’ Jesus then called him with a shout, and Sam came out of the grave, but with grey hair. The people

exclaimed, ‘He died when he was young. What is this white hair?’ Sam replied, ‘When I heard the voice of Jesus, I thought it was the single cry.’

He meant, of course, the shout that will raise the dead in the Last Day – a reference to the belief that in the end times all things will reach fulness of age. The same belief underlies Sura 73:17: “If you disbelieve, how will you guard yourselves against a day that shall make the children grey-headed?” Islam thus accepts Jesus’ authority over death (the Quran mentions no other prophet raising people from the dead – with or without God’s permission). It also lays great emphasis on the power of Jesus’ voice.

Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. AD 732), a Jew converted to Islam, and considered by Muslims to be a great historian, relates that sometimes fifty thousand sick people surrounded Jesus and were healed. In particular, Wahb tells a story from Jesus’ childhood. A fight broke out in which one lad killed another, and then, to escape punishment, threw the corpse into the lap of Jesus. The family dragged Jesus to the judge. He denied the charge, but seeing his bloodstained clothes the onlookers wanted to kill Him, and so He asked them to bring in the corpse. When they asked why, Jesus said He wanted to ask the dead boy who had murdered him. Finally they did as He asked. Jesus then prayed and gave the corpse life. It told the name of the murderer – and died again. Jesus was released.

Al-Kalby says, “Jesus used to raise the dead, saying, ‘Oh, living God, Oh Almighty.’ He raised up Lazarus who was his friend. He ordered Sam, the son of Noah, to come out of his tomb; so he came out alive. He passed by a dead boy and called God. Instantly the boy left his bed and went back to his family.”

3. Jesus fed the hungry.

In the Quran the disciples ask Jesus, “Oh Jesus, the son of Mary, can Your Lord send down to us a table set from heaven?” The passage continues:

Sura 5:115-118

Jesus answered, “Fear God if you have faith.” They said,

“We only wish to eat thereof and satisfy our hearts, and to know that you have indeed told us the truth, and that we ourselves may be witnesses to the miracle.” Jesus said, “Oh God, our Lord, send us from heaven a table set that there may be for us, for the first and last of us, a solemn festival, and a sign from you, and provide for our sustenance, for you art the best sustainer.” Allah said, “I will send it down to you. But if any of you, after that, resist faith, I will punish him with a penalty such as I have not inflicted on any one among all the peoples.”

Commenting on these verses, ibn Abbas said that Jesus asked the children of Israel to fast for thirty days, and promised that Allah would give them anything they asked for. They fasted for thirty days, and said to Jesus, “We have fasted for thirty days and we are hungry. Call upon your God to give us a feast from heaven.” So Jesus put on sackcloth, sat on ashes, and called upon God. Angels brought a feast, carrying seven loaves and seven big fishes. They put them in the hands of the people, and all of them ate.

4. Jesus knew the unknown.

The Quran quotes Jesus as saying, “I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if you did believe” (Sura 3:49). The Quran also calls the knowledge of the unseen a divine quality. Sura 6:59 says, “With Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them but He.” By contrast, Muhammad says in the Quran, “Had I knowledge of the unseen I would have acquired much good, and evil would not have touched me” (Sura 7:188) – once again indicating the supremacy of Jesus.

Muslim commentators say two things about Sura 3:49. First that, since the time He was born, Jesus knew the unknown. Al-Suddi says that the boy Jesus would tell His friends what their parents were doing and what food their mothers were preparing for them. Consequently His neighbours decided He must be a sorcerer, and gathered the children into one house to keep them safe. When Jesus came to the house and asked to see the children, the parents told

Him there were no children there. He asked, "Who then is laughing and giggling in the house?" "Pigs," they answered. So Jesus transformed the children into pigs.

The second point Muslim commentators make is that knowing the unknown is a miraculous power. Unlike astrologers, who deduce knowledge from the patterns of the stars and frequently issue false predictions, Jesus used no instruments, asked no questions, and made no mistakes. This, say the commentators, must be the result of divine inspiration.

5. Jesus knew the Last Hour.

The Hadith lists many signs of the Last Hour, but Sura 43:61 says: "He is the knowledge of the Hour." The majority of Muslim commentators agree that the verse refers to Jesus. Al-Jalalan, commenting on this verse, says, "This Last Hour is known by the appearing of Jesus." Zamakhshari and Baidawi say: "Jesus is the sign or mark of the Hour, that is, the Last Hour; or He is a condition and a requirement for its happening." And al-Razi: "Jesus is a condition by whom the Hour is known. The Last Hour is known by His appearing. Jesus is the sign of the Last Hour; or He is a condition and a requirement of its happening."

Some say He has knowledge of the Hour because of His mighty miracles. Shokani, commenting on the same verse, says, "The virgin birth of Jesus and His raising of the dead are a proof of the truth of the final resurrection." Ibn-Kathir says: "The miracles God performed by the hands of Jesus of raising the dead, and healing the sick, are the sufficient proof for the certainty of the Hour of Doom. That verse refers to Jesus, for the context of the verses is about Him, and the meaning is that Jesus will come before the Resurrection Day."

The Quran ranks Jesus with God, as a witness of mankind. Thus it quotes Jesus as saying, "I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when you caused me to die (*tawaffaitani*), You were the watcher over them. You are witness over all things" (Sura 5:116,117). Once again, the contrast with Muhammad is striking. In the Quran Allah tells Muhammad, "Say to them, 'I am no new thing among the

Messengers. I do not know what shall befall you tomorrow, or what shall befall me” (Sura 46:9).

ⁱ Nurbakhash, Jawad, *Jesus in the Eyes of the Sufis*, Khaniqahi-Nimatullahi Publications, London, 1983, p. 25, 53.

ⁱⁱ Kanzul Ummal, *Hadith* 1033.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kanzul Ummal, *Hadith* 1033.

^{iv} Bukhari, *Sahih*, Vol. IV, 506.

^v Bukhari, *Sahih*, VIII, 408, 379.

^{vi} Bukhari, *Sahih*, V, 715.

^{vii} Bukhari, *Sahih*, IV, 501.

^{viii} Bukhari, *Sahih*, VI, 255.

^{ix} Muslim, *Sahih*, Section 23, No. 116.

^x Al-Hindy, Vol. 17, No. 1017; Vol. 18, No. 1037; Vol. 17, No. 1028; Vol. 18, No. 791; Vol. 18, No. 812.

^{xi} Ibn Majah, II, 4077.

^{xii} Al-Hindy, Vol. 17, No. 919.

^{xiii} Al-Bukhari, IX, 244.

Islam and the Deity of Christ

Both the Quran and the Hadith frequently affirm the superiority of Jesus, even above the prophet Muhammad. The first Quranic verses revealed to Muhammad in Mecca speak highly of Christianity and reflect a kind attitude toward Christ and His followers. By the end of Muhammad's ministry in Medina, however, some irreconcilable differences had emerged between the two religions. Muhammad could not convince Christians to surrender to Islam, and in time he came to see the doctrines of the Trinity and of the deity of Christ as denials of the oneness of the God he himself preached. Accordingly, later Quranic references to Christianity are far more hostile, accusing Christians of polytheism and exaggeration.

I. QURANIC ATTACKS ON THE DEITY OF CHRIST

A number of Quranic verses put forward objections to the deity of Christ. These, and corresponding answers, are listed below:

1. The Quran says Jesus resembles Adam.

Sura 3:59

The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam. He created him from dust and then said to him, "be" and he was.

Al-Suddi, commenting on this verse, said that four persons from Nijran came to Muhammad asking his opinion about

Jesus. Muhammad said, “He is a servant of God, His spirit and His word.” Angrily the four replied, “No, He is God. Have you ever seen a child born without a father?” So Muhammad was given Sura 3:59 to state that Jesus was created from dust like Adam. This contradicts other Quranic verses, which agree with the Gospels in accepting the virgin birth (see Sura 3:35-55 and Sura 19:1-34).

2. The Quran says Jesus is just an apostle.

Sura 4:171

Oh people of the Book, do not exaggerate in your religion; nor say nothing but the truth about Allah. Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, was no more than an apostle of God, and His word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in God and His apostles. Say not “three.” Desist it will be better for you, for God is one God, Glory be to Him. Far exalted is He above having a son. To Him belong all things in the heavens and earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender.

Commenting on this verse, al-Tabari says, “You people of the Book, do not go beyond the truth or exaggerate. Do not say more than the truth about Jesus, for, if you continue saying that, you will expose yourselves to God’s great punishment.” But Christians do not exaggerate. They believe that Jesus emptied Himself of His glory and came to our earth as a slave of God and a prophet. Christians never claimed to worship three gods. God is one, and to Him be all the glory.

3. The Quran says Jesus the man could not contain God.

Sura 5:17

In blasphemy indeed are those that say that God is Christ the son of Mary. Say, who then has the least power against God, if His will were to destroy Christ the son of Mary, His mother and everyone that is on earth: For to God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between.

There is really no contradiction here. Christians never said that “God is Christ,” for that would exclude the Father and

the Holy Spirit from the Godhead. However, Christians affirm that Christ is God.

4. The Quran says Jesus was too weak to be God.

Sura 5:75,76

Christ, the son of Mary, was just an apostle. Many were the apostles that passed away before Him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their food. See how God does make His signs clear to them? Yet, see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth. Say, "Will you worship besides God something which has no power either to harm or benefit you?" But God, He it is that hears and knows all things.

Commenting on these verses, al-Razi makes three points:

- Jesus has a mother. He has been created, therefore He is not God.
- Jesus and His mother were in need of food. God never needs anything, therefore Jesus is not God.
- Jesus and His mother ate food. This means they passed wind and went to the bathroom. It is blasphemy to say this about God.

Muslims say the created person can neither harm nor benefit another. "Will you worship besides God something that has no power either to harm or benefit you?" Consequently they will ask: "How come the Jews crucified Jesus? And when He said He was thirsty, how come He allowed them to pour vinegar in His nose? How can God experience such a state of weakness? Also, if God needs nothing outside Himself, how come Jesus went to the temple to pray? That means He needed God, proving He Himself was just a prophet."

For Christians, of course, these problems vanish under the doctrine of the Incarnation. Jesus could be fully God, yet also fully man. As a man, He shared all the necessities of physical existence. As God, He can benefit those who accept His salvation, and harm those who refuse Him. Thus the Bible says to believers:

1 Peter 2:4-10

You come to Him, the living Stone – rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to Him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says, “See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.” Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone,” and, “A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.” They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Christians find no problem with Jesus praying. This was His fellowship and communion with the Father. Also, the Quran states that God prays. Sura 33:43 says, “He [Allah] it is who *yosalli* (literally: ‘prays’) upon you [Muslims] and His angels, that He may bring you forth from darkness unto light.” Similarly, Sura 33:56 says, “Allah and His angels *yosallona* (‘pray’) upon the Prophet [Muhammad].”

5. The Quran says Jesus claimed to be a god apart from God.

Sura 5:116

God will say, “Oh Jesus, the son of Mary, did you say unto men ‘worship me and my mother as gods apart from God?’” He will say, “Glory to you. Never could I say what I have no right to say. Had I said such a thing You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart though I know not what is in Yours. For You know in full all that is hidden.”

Commenting on this verse, al-Razi points out that God's question is rhetorical, and intended as a rebuke to Christians in danger of falling into heresy. The heresy is that of the Mariamites, in which the Trinity consists of father, mother and son. Originally Venus-worshippers, converts to Christianity, came up with the Mariamite heresy, exchanging the Greek deity Venus for the Virgin Mary.

6. The Quran says Jesus could not be God's Son.

Sura 6:102

How can He have a son when He has no spouse?

Sura 19:35

It is not befitting to God that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him. When He determines a matter He only says to it "Be" and it is...

Sura 19:88-93

Indeed, you have put forth a thing most monstrous. At it, the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin. That they should involve a son for God most gracious, for it is not consonant with the majesty of God most gracious that He should beget a son. Not one of the beings in the heavens and earth must come to God most gracious but as a servant.

Commenting on Sura 6:102, al-Baidawi says, "For God to have a son, it means that He has a relationship with a woman, and this is impossible."

Al-Tabari comments on the same verse, saying, "A child comes from a male and a female relationship, but God never had a female consort, so how can He have a son? He created all things, and He has knowledge of all things, so how can He have a son?"

Of course, Christians never said that God had a relationship with a woman. The Gospel says, "Before the world was created, the Word already existed: He was with God, and He was the same as God (John 1:1). The relationship of Jesus to the Father is a spiritual one.

7. The Quran says Jesus is only the servant of God.

Sura 19:30,31

I am indeed a servant of God; He has given me revelation and made me a prophet and He has made me blessed wheresoever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer and charity as long as I live.

Al-Razi gives four comments on these words attributed to Jesus:

- Christians are completely wrong in saying that Jesus is God.
- Jesus confessed that He is a servant of God.
- Jesus refuted that Mary his mother is a harlot.
- God will also be vindicated, since He did not give a holy son to a bad woman.

Christians should not tire of repeating to Muslims two biblical facts about Jesus.

First, as the son of Mary, Jesus is indeed the servant of God. This is what the Bible says: “Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?...After the suffering of His soul, He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by His knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and He will bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:1-11).

Second, being a servant does not prevent Him also being the Son. The first four verses of the epistle to the Romans make this clear: “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God – the gospel He promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, regarding His Son, who as to His human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 1:1-4).

8. The Quran says Jesus the man cannot share in the Godhead.

Sura 43:15

They attribute to some of His bondsmen a share with Him (in His godhead). Truly man is manifestly ungrateful.

Muslims say that to call Jesus “Son of God” is to assert – blasphemously – that a human being has become part of the Godhead. Of course no created person can become a part of his Creator. Christians believe that Father and Son are one, and have been so from the beginning (John 10:30). Indeed, the Quran itself speaks about the unique relationship between Jesus and God when it says that Jesus is the “Word of God and a Spirit of Him” (see Sura 4:171).

II. WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT JESUS CHRIST

Jesus is unique. We cannot compare Him to anyone. He is unique in the way He entered into our world, unique in the way He lived in the world, unique in His teachings and miracles, unique in the way He departed from this world, and unique in that He will one day return. Some grasp of this is apparent in the Quran and the Hadith. But Muslims cannot fully understand Jesus Christ, because Islamic doctrine will not allow them to see Him as He truly is. Jesus can be known only from divine revelation in the Holy Scriptures:

1 Timothy 3:16

Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

The Bible gives a very different picture of Jesus from the one presented in Islam. Here are six crucial things it says.

1. The Bible says Jesus existed before He was born.

The Quran says:

Sura 4:171

Christ Jesus the son of Mary is a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him.

You cannot bestow what does not exist. Jesus was bestowed to Mary before she bore Him. He existed from the very beginning with God, and “when the time had fully come,

God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Galatians 4:4, 5).

The Bible says that Jesus was the Son *before* He was born on earth. The Father said to the Son, “You are My Son. Today I have begotten You” (Psalm 2:7, Hebrews 1:5). A father is not a father until he begets a son. A son is not a son until he is born to a father. Jesus was a Son from the very beginning, before He was begotten.

2. The Bible says Jesus is God in the flesh.

Jesus is God and man at the same time. God appeared in the man Jesus Christ, so that “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). As the writer of Hebrews puts it:

Hebrews 1:1-3

God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

By His divine power, Jesus performed miracles. As man, He ate and drank and slept like any other human. He spoke of Himself sometimes as God and sometimes as man, because He was both God and man. He said to His accusers, “Hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64). Yet He also said to a disciple, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:9).

So if we say that Jesus is God, or that Jesus is human, we are telling only part of the truth. He was both God and man, and these two sides of His nature emerge at the same time in many Gospel stories. For example:

Mark 4:35-41

When evening came, He said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side." Leaving the crowd behind, they took Him along, just as He was, in the boat. There were also other boats with Him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!"

Only if Jesus was fully God and fully man could the writer of Hebrews say of him, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). He is the "Word made flesh," as John explains in a well-known passage:

John 1:1-4, 14

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men... The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

3. The Bible says Jesus "became flesh" voluntarily, and returned to His state of divine glory after the resurrection.

Man cannot become God – but God can become a man. Jesus became man by a voluntary and authoritative act. He said, "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:17,18).

Jesus entered our time and space in order to perform the work of redemption. When He had finished that work, He said to the Father, “I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began” (John 17:4,5).

Far from diminishing Jesus, the act of “becoming flesh” actually increased His glory. How the Most High God could be born as a man, and how He could submit to a humiliating execution, are matters far beyond our understanding. But the Bible states clearly that these things happened, and that they happened because God willed them to happen:

Philippians 2:5-11

Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Even on earth, Jesus’ glory was not entirely hidden. From a distance He seemed like any other man. But those who were close to Him began to see His divine nature:

Matthew 16:13-18

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?” And Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

4. The Bible says Jesus announced Himself as God.

Muslims who refuse the testimony of Jesus' disciples will often take seriously what Jesus said about Himself. In at least three places, the Bible records explicit claims made by Jesus about His own divine nature:

Mark 14:61-64

Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. "You have heard the blasphemy. What do you think?" They all condemned Him as worthy of death.

John 5:17, 18

Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working." For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.

John 8:56-59

Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid Himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

As St. Augustine rightly said, a man who claims to be God must be one of three things: mad, lying, or telling the truth. Islam has never condemned Jesus as either a lunatic or a liar. The Muslim, then, must reckon seriously with Jesus' explicit claim to be equal with God.

5. The Bible says Jesus confirmed His deity by word and actions.

On many occasions Jesus immediately endorsed His claims about Himself by performing a miracle.

- In John 6:35, Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” This happened after He had fed 5,000 persons from five loaves and two fishes.
- In John 8:12, Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Soon afterwards, He opened the eyes of the man born blind.
- In John 11:25, 26, Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.” Soon afterwards He raised Lazarus from the dead.

6. The Bible says Jesus is the Son of God.

Muslims refuse to call anyone a “son of God” or a “child of God” because these terms imply God has a spouse. They do not call God “Father” for the same reason.

Sura 2:116

They say, “Allah has taken a son.” Allah is above such things!

Sura 39:4

Had God desired to take to Him a son, He would have chosen whatever He willed of that He has created.

It should be emphasized again and again that the sonship of Jesus describes a spiritual relationship. There is no physical connection implied. We use such figurative language every day. Sudanese and Egyptians are called “children of the Nile.” Even the noun “father” in Arabic has a number of meanings, referring to legal and figurative parenthood as well as biological. Thus the Quran names one of Muhammad’s foes *Abu-Lahab*, or “Father of Flames” (see Sura 111). Similarly, the poor are called “children of the road” (see Sura 2:177). The Preserved Tablet in Paradise is three times named *Umm al-Kitab*, the “Mother of the Book” (see Sura 3:7, 13:39 and 43:4). Sura 93:6-8 quotes God as saying to Muhammad, “Did Allah not find you an orphan and

shelter you?” – echoing the Psalmist’s description of God as “the father of orphans” (Psalm 68:5).

God’s fatherhood is taught in several Old Testament passages (see Proverbs 23:26; Hosea 11:1; Psalms 68:5; 103:13), but unlike Muhammad the Hebrews did not see this as contradicting the divine unity. The Quran calls Jesus “Son of Mary” twenty-two times (see Sura 2:87,253; 3:45; 4:157,171; 5:17). This relates Him to a mother. To relate Him to a father, we would say that He is the Son of God. Given the fact of the Incarnation – this is logical.

This title implies a number of things about the special relationship between Jesus and the heavenly Father:

- In Jewish thought, “Son of God” meant “equal to God.” “For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill Him; not only was He breaking the Sabbath, but He was even calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18).
- The “Son” carries His Father’s characteristics. “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made Him known” (John 1:18).
- The Son represents His Father in special missions. Thus the Father sent the Son to finish the work of redemption (see John 19:30).

7. The Bible says Jesus lives in His followers.

Christianity is not a set of creeds and ordinances. It is Jesus living in the hearts of those who accept Him as Savior and Redeemer. The apostle Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). He also said, “For me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). Jesus is alive today, and He wants to reveal Himself to whoever calls upon Him, praying, “Reveal yourself to me.”

III. HOW TO HELP A MUSLIM UNDERSTAND THE INCARNATION

Islam deeply resists the idea of God becoming a man, because in Muslim thought God's greatness is a basic principle. It may help to demonstrate that the Incarnation does not, in fact, diminish God or require Him to act in a way contrary to His nature.

1. An illustration from everyday life

Suppose that a church buys an adjacent piece of land, full of stones and thorns. Its members want to plant a garden in that land, and they volunteer to do the work. A leading surgeon and the pastor are among the volunteers – though in the clothes of laborers they look the same as everyone else. Only a close look will reveal their true identities – the roles they have laid aside to work on the garden, and to which they will return when the garden is finished. And of course, if the pastor cuts his finger, the surgeon can help him, even without his surgical gown. The laboring does not diminish them. Rather, the passer-by will respect them more, because they are willing to put aside their professional prestige and join in the work with their fellow church members.

Jesus dressed Himself in the clothes of a laborer to atone for our sins. When the job was successfully done, He returned to His glory. He said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends” (John 15:13,14).

2. Two illustrations from the Quran

Sura 28:29,30 says, “When Moses had fulfilled the term, and was traveling with his house-folk, he saw in the distance a fire, and said to his house-folk, ‘Stay you here, for I see in the distance a fire. Perhaps I shall bring you tidings thence, or a brand from the fire that you may warm yourselves.’ And when he reached it, he was called from the right side of the valley in the blessed field, from the tree: ‘O Moses! Lo! I, even I, am Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.’”

The same story is also told in Sura 20:9-12. If God called Moses from the right side of the valley, in the blessed field, from the tree – can't He appear to us in Jesus?

Again, the Quran quotes Allah as saying: "Had We appointed him [Muhammad] an angel, we assuredly had made him a man" (Sura 6:9). Muhammad Wagdi, in his commentary on this verse, says, "Had We created Muhammad an angel, not a human, We would have needed to change him in a form of a man to make it possible for men to see him." In a similar way, Jesus appeared to us in the form of a man to tell us the Good News of His salvation.

How to Prove the Authenticity of the Bible

10

All religious doctrines claim to be authoritative, and in the case of Judaism, Christianity and Islam this authority is held to derive from God's revelation in Holy Scripture. Christians build their creeds on what was revealed in the Old and New Testaments. If we claim that our doctrine is true, we must be able to show that it is, in fact, contained in the Scriptures, and that those Scriptures are reliable. Given that Christians and Muslims base their doctrines on different Holy Scriptures, it is not surprising that these doctrines conflict. Specifically, Muslims will challenge:

- The authenticity of the Bible.
- The deity of Christ.
- The fact of the crucifixion.
- The doctrine of the Trinity.

Despite denominational differences, Christians actually disagree among themselves a lot less than they disagree with members of other religions. A Muslim Imam was writing a paper on the differences between Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox. Visiting the author he was told, "These traditions agree on all the doctrines with which Islam takes issue. They all agree that the Bible is authentic. They all agree that Jesus is God appearing in the flesh. They all agree that He was crucified, died, buried, and rose from the dead. They all agree about the Holy Trinity."

When Muslims assert – as they often do – that the Bible

on which Christians base their doctrine is not authentic, it is important to bring the discussion back to the facts. The Bible as we have it now is an accurate and authentic copy of the revelation God gave to His holy prophets and apostles. And Muslim objections are frequently founded on ignorance and misunderstanding.¹

I. CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM HAVE DIFFERENT IDEAS OF “REVELATION.”

Revelation in Judaism and Christianity has two sides: the divine and the human. The Apostle Peter said “No prophetic message ever came just from the will of man, but men were under the control of the Holy Spirit, as they spoke the message that came from God” (2 Peter 1:21). Other parts of Scripture tell us how this process of inspiration worked. In the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 31:24-26

After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, “Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you.”

Jeremiah 36:1,32

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD. So Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the scribe Baruch son of Neriah, and as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote on it all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them.

And later, in the New Testament, Luke tells how he recorded the story of Jesus:

Luke 1:1-4

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses

and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Similarly, in the book of Revelation (see 2:1; 3:14; 14:13) John is instructed to record God's messages with the formula: "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write..."

All these men of God were fully aware of what God had revealed to them. The poets, like David and Solomon, recorded the divine revelation in poetry, others wrote in prose. Some wrote in eloquent language, others in the language of the common people. God used them and their talents. He protected them from making any mistakes. He also protected His message from any alteration.

By comparison, Muslims believe that since eternity the Quran has been written in Arabic on *al-Lauh al-Mahfuz*, the Preserved Tablet, made from a single jewel. They say that it came down from the highest heaven in *Lailat al-Qadr*, the Night of Power. The Quran says, "We have indeed sent it down on the night of *Qadr*...The night of *Qadr* is better than a thousand months. On that night angels and the Spirit come down by their Lord's leave, with all His decrees" (Sura 97:1-5). Over the following twenty-three years, it was given to Muhammad, piece by piece, largely without any contribution from Muhammad. Allah says to Muhammad, "Move not your tongue with it to hasten it [that is, the revelation]; Ours it is to gather it, and to recite it. So, when We recite it, follow the recitation. Then Ours it is to explain it" (Sura 75:16-19).

According to the Muslim creed, Muhammad only recited what Allah gave him. He played no more part in the act of revelation than a radio plays in transmitting the signal from a radio station. His main responsibility was to ensure the "signal" remained pure: "And when you recite the Quran, seek refuge in Allah from Satan the outcast" (Sura 16:98).

II. GOD DOES NOT ALLOW HIS REVELATION TO BECOME CORRUPT.

Both the Bible and the Quran say that God protects His divine revelations from alteration.

The Quran says: “There is none to alter the words of Allah” (Sura 6:34) and “We have, without doubt, sent down the *Dhikr* (“Remembrance”), and We preserve it” (Sura 15:9). By “Remembrance” the Quran means all Scriptures that remind mankind of God’s words – a category that includes the Bible.

The Quran also says, “Before you [Muhammad] the messengers We sent were but men, to whom We granted inspiration. If you realize this not, ask of those who possess the *Dhikr*. [We sent them] with Clear Signs and Scriptures; and We have sent down to you the *Dhikr* that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought” (Sura 16:43, 44). These words are repeated in Sura 21:7. Sura 21:48 says, “In the past We granted to Moses and Aaron the Criterion [for Judgement], and a Light and a *Dhikr* for those who would do right.” The Quran quotes Psalm 37:29 by saying, “Before this We wrote in the *Zabur* [Psalms], after the *Dhikr*, ‘My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth’” (Sura 21:105).

Before the Quran, the Bible had affirmed that God protects His revelations. God said, “Grass withers and flowers fade, but the Word of our God endures forever” (Isaiah 40:8). And to Jeremiah: “I am watching to see that my Words come true” (Jeremiah 1:12). Jesus confirmed this when He told His disciples, “Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matthew 5:18). He added, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35).

Scripture itself contains stern instructions to maintain the purity of revelation. God ordered his people, “Do not add anything to what I command you, and do not take anything away. Obey the commands of the Lord, your God, that I have given you” (Deuteronomy 4:2). And right at the end of the Bible we read this warning:

Revelation 22:18,19

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Christians believe that God reveals Himself to us because He loves us, and wants to save and guide us. He reveals Himself in the written word of the Bible and in the Living Word of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Both are changeless. God does not alter His message of salvation. Nor does He allow the written communication of that message to become corrupt. If God let the Bible be altered, we would no longer have an authoritative foundation for our faith. It would be like a bottle of strong medicine losing its label: the user would no longer know what the bottle contained, how much he should take, or indeed whether the bottle contained medicine or poison. God does not allow this situation to occur, because He loves us and cares for us.

III. ISLAM “CONFIRMS” PREVIOUS SCRIPTURES.

The Quran says that both Jesus and Muhammad “confirmed” the Scriptures that came before them.

Certainly, Jesus confirmed the Old Testament in a very explicit way:

Luke 4:16-21

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. And He stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written, “The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him, and He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The Quran says that Muhammad confirmed both Old and New Testaments, and was a watcher over them to keep them in safety. It says:

Sura 5:43-49

How come they [the Jews] come to you for judgement when they have their own Torah wherein Allah delivered judgement [for them]? Even after that, they turn away. They are not [truly] people of faith. Indeed, We did reveal the Torah wherein there is a guidance and a light, by which the prophets who surrendered [to Allah] judged the Jews, and the rabbis and the priests [judged] by such of Allah's Scripture as they were bidden to observe, and thereunto were they witnesses. So fear not men, but fear Me. And sell not My revelations for a miserable price. Whoever judges not by that which Allah has revealed; such are disbelievers. And We ordained for them therein; the life for the life, and the eye for the eye, and the nose for the nose, and the ear for the ear, and the tooth for the tooth, and for wounds and retaliation. But, if any one remit the retaliation [by way of charity], it is an act of atonement for itself. And whomever judges not by what Allah had revealed, such are the wrongdoers. And in their footsteps We sent Jesus son of Mary, confirming that which was [revealed] before him, and We bestowed on him the Gospel wherein is a guidance and a light, confirming that which was [revealed] before it in the Torah – a guidance and an admonition to the Godfearing. Let the People of the Gospel judge by that which Allah revealed therein. Whoever judges not by that which Allah had revealed; such are the corrupt. And to you have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which Allah has revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which has come to you. For each We have appointed a law and

a traced-out way. Had Allah willed He could have made you one community, but that He may try you by that which He has given you. So compete with one another in good works. To Allah you will all be returned, and He will then inform you of that wherein you disputed. So judge between them by that which Allah has revealed, and follow not their desires, but beware of them lest they seduce you from some part of that which Allah has revealed to you.

Ibn Kathir's commentary on Sura 5:43-48 quotes a Hadith narrated by Abu Dawud (Hadith 4449), which says that the Jews brought to Muhammad a man and woman caught in adultery. Because the offenders were of noble birth, the Jews hesitated to stone them. Muhammad asked the Jews to get him the Torah. When it was brought, he lifted it up and said, "I believe in you and in the One who revealed you." He was sitting on a cushion. He put the Torah on the cushion, and asked his secretary to read until he found the verse about stoning adulterers. He then declared that the man and woman should be stoned as the Torah requires.

The implication is that the Jews and Christians must, in the end, live by "that which Allah has revealed." Both the Torah ("a guidance and a light") and the Gospel ("a guidance and an admonition to the Godfearing") contain the revelations of Allah. But because Jews and Christians cannot be trusted as custodians of the truth Allah has bestowed on them, it falls to Muhammad to confirm previous Scriptures and to act as "watcher," arbiter, and judge.

IV. THE QURAN ASSUMES THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE BIBLE.

- **Sura 29:46** orders all Muslims: "Dispute not with the People of the Book [that is, Jews and Christians], except with means better, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong; but say, 'We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you; our God and your God is the same One; and it is to Him we bow [in surrender].'" This verse

clearly makes the assumption that “the Revelation which has come down” to Jews and Christians is reliable.

- **Sura 10:95,96** orders Muhammad: “If you are in doubt regarding what We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before you. The Truth has indeed come to you from your Lord, therefore do not doubt it. Nor shall you deny the signs of Allah lest you will be among those who perish.” Here Muhammad is instructed to use the Jewish and Christian Scriptures as a yardstick against which to judge the truth of his own revelations – again, clearly assuming that the Scriptures can be trusted.
- **Sura 16:43,44** tells Muhammad and the Muslims: “The messengers We sent before you were not other than men to whom We gave revelation. Ask the people of the *Dhikr* [Remembrance] if you do not know. [We sent them] with clear signs.” Once again the Quran places complete confidence in previous Scriptures – wisely, since those Scriptures contain details about the prophets and the miracles of Jesus which the Quran only refers to by name (see Sura 3:49, 5:110).
- **Sura 26:193-196** says: “The faithful Spirit Jibril came down with it [the Quran] to your heart and mind [O Muhammad], that you may be one of the warners, in plain Arabic tongue. Without doubt it is [announced] in the revealed Books of former peoples.” The same idea – that the Quran’s truth is to be found already in existing Scriptures – crops up in Sura 41:43 (“O prophet, nothing is said to you that has not already been said to the Messengers before you”) and in Sura 87:18,19 (“This [the Quran] is in the Books of the earliest, the Books of Abraham and Moses”).
- **Sura 19:12** and **Sura 66:12** claim that John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary owned authentic Books. God said to John, “O Yahya (the Baptist), take hold of the Book with might. And We gave him Wisdom even as a youth.” The Virgin Mary also had an authentic Book. The Quran says, “And Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into [her body] of Our spirit;

and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of his Revelations, and was one of the devout.”

V. THE QURAN DOES NOT ATTACK THE BIBLE.

In spite of the above, most Muslims say that the Quran attacks the authenticity of the Bible, and accuse both Jews and Christians of changing their Scriptures. The Arabic word the Quran uses for changing is *tahrif* – and it is a word that needs careful handling. Thus Dr. R. Thomas asks:

What does the word *tahrif* mean anyway? In textual criticism we have expressions like corruption, dislocation, transposition. These refer to errors in transmission, but never to deliberate distortion or forgery. And these accidents of transmission never apply to the key doctrinal passages of Scripture. No one is entitled to speak about “Corruption” who is not familiar with the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments. Even the Muslim use of the word *Injil* is strange. It is supposed to stand for a book that Jesus wrote, whereas the world of scholarship recognizes the existence of four Gospels written by the four Evangelists, and reserves the term “Gospel” for the substance of the good news proclaimed by Jesus Christ and His followers down the centuries.ⁱⁱ

If we examine carefully every Quranic verse the Muslims say proves this *tahrif* has been made, we discover two things:

- The verses never attack the New Testament.
- The verses that appear to attack the Torah in fact attack only its *interpretation* by Muhammad’s Jewish contemporaries.

This is not surprising. We would expect the Jews of the seventh century Arab Peninsula to quote stories from the Talmud. This contains versions of Old Testament stories that conflict in some detail with the original narratives. Muhammad was not in a position to check the Hebrew text of the Old Testament to substantiate his charges. The Quranic

attack, then, will necessarily center on the changed meaning, not the changed text, of the Scriptures.ⁱⁱⁱ

The verses Muslims cite are actually addressed to three different kinds of person and level three different kinds of charge:

1. Verses rebuking Jewish converts to Islam who had subsequently backslid and made alterations, not to the Torah, but to parts of the Quran

Sura 3:70-72

O People of the Scripture! Why do you reject the signs of Allah, of which you [yourselves] bear witness? O People of the Scripture! Why do you clothe the truth with falsehood, and knowingly conceal the truth? A section of the People of the Scripture say, "Believe in that which has been revealed to those who believe in the morning, but reject it in the evening, so that they may turn away."

Sura 3:78

There is a party of them who distort the Book with their tongues, that you may think that what they say is from the Scripture, when it is not from the Scripture. And they say, "It is from Allah," but it is not from Allah, and they speak a lie concerning Allah knowingly.

It should be noted, however, that another verse from this same Sura presents a different view:

Sura 3:199

There are certainly among the people of the Scripture some who believe in Allah and that which is revealed to you [Muhammad] and that which was revealed to them, humbling them before Allah. They will not sell the revelations of Allah for a miserable gain. Verily their reward is in the presence of their Lord; and Allah is swift in reckoning.

2. Verses rebuking Jews who suppressed parts of the Torah they found disagreeable – like the instruction to stone adulterers

Sura 2:40-44

O Children of Israel! Call to mind My favor which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill your Covenant with Me as I fulfill My Covenant with you, and fear Me alone, and believe in what I revealed [the Quran], which confirms the revelation that is with you, and be not the first to reject it. Sell not My revelations for a small price; and fear Me alone. Do not confound truth with falsehood, nor knowingly conceal the truth. And be steadfast in prayer; pay regular charity; and bow with those who bow down. How is it that you enjoin others to follow the right way, but forget yourselves, though you read the Torah? Have you no sense?

Sura 2:75-79

Now [O Muslims], do you then hope that they [the Jews] will believe in you, when some of them have already heard the Word of Allah, and knowingly perverted it, after they have understood it. When they meet with the believers they say, "We believe." But when they are alone they say to each other, "Will you tell them what God has revealed to you, that they may engage you in argument about it before your Lord?" Do you not understand [their aim]? Do they really not know that Allah has full knowledge of all that they hide and all that they reveal? There are illiterates among them who are ignorant of the Scripture [the Torah] and depend on nothing but conjecture. Woe to those who write the Scripture with their own hands, and then say: "This is from Allah," in order to sell it for a miserable price! Woe to them for what their hands had written, and woe to them for what they have gained.

Sura 6:92

They measure not the power of Allah its true measure when they say, "Allah has revealed nothing to a human being." Say [O Muhammad to the Jews who speak thus], "Who revealed the book which Moses brought, a light and guidance for mankind, which you have put on parchments which you show, but you hide much [thereof]?"

3. Verses rebuking Jews who misinterpreted parts of the Torah

Sura 4:44-47

Don't you see that those to whom a portion of the Scripture had been given, how they buy error, and seek to make you [Muslims] err from the right path? Allah knows best [who are] your enemies. Allah is enough for a Protector, and Allah is enough for a Helper. Some of those who are Jews change words from their context and say, "We hear and disobey; hear as one who hears not"; and "listen to us," [Ra'ina] twisting with their tongues and slandering religion [Islam]. If they had said, "We hear and we obey; hear you and look at us" it would have been better for them, and more proper. But Allah has cursed them for their disbelief, so they believe not, except a few. O you to whom the Scripture have been given, believe in what We have revealed confirming that which you possess, before We destroy countenances so as to confound them, or curse them as We cursed the Sabbath-breakers.

Sura 5:13

Because of their breaking of their covenant, We have cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard. They change words from their context and forget a part of the Message that was sent them. You will not cease to discover treachery among them, all save a few. But bear with them and pardon them. Surely Allah loves those who are kind.

Sura 5:41-43

O Apostle! Do not be grieved by those who compete with one another in the race to disbelief of such as say with their lips, "We believe" but whose hearts have no faith; and of the Jews: men who will listen to any lie, listeners on behalf of other people who come not to you, changing words from their context and saying, "If this be given to you receive it, but if this be not given to you, beware!" He whom Allah dooms to sin you will avail him naught against Allah. Those who are they for whom the will of Allah is that He purifies not their hearts. For them there is disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter a heavy

punishment. They listen to falsehood, and devour what is unlawful. If they come to you, either judge between them, or decline to interfere. If you decline, they cannot hurt you in the least. If you judge, judge in equity between them, for Allah loves those who judge in equity. How come they come to you for judgement when they have their own Torah? Therein Allah delivered judgement [for them]? Even after that, they turn away. They are not [really] People of Faith.

VI. THE BIBLE DOES NOT CONTAIN CONTRADICTIONS.

Many of the most damaging attacks on the authenticity of the Bible have come from within Christianity itself, through Liberal theology and so-called “higher” and “lower” criticism. Higher criticism tries to determine the supposed purposes of the Biblical authors, and involves examining the context of their writing with reference to secular history or archaeology. Lower criticism tries to determine the nature of the “original Biblical text.” Both have tended to focus on paradoxes and apparent contradictions in the Bible. And although the problems they raise have been satisfactorily answered by learned Christian theologians, Muslims often persist in thinking that the Bible has somehow been “disproved.”

Contradictory statements in the Bible should not be accepted at face value. “Whenever two statements seem contradictory, we should examine them, to find most of the time that what appears at first to be an inconsistency may be, after all, only a difference. All too often, those who accuse the Bible of having inconsistencies are themselves victims of intellectual biases, unable to distinguish between mere differences and contradiction.”^{iv}

Sources of confusion include the following:

- **Repeated names.** In Acts 12 Herod is said to have killed James. Yet later, in Acts 15, we find James speaking at a

general church council. There appears to be a contradiction. But on examination we find that the James of Acts 12 is James, son of Zebedee, while the James in Acts 15 is James, son of Alphaeus.

- **Different names given to the same person.** Critics often compare the lists of names of the twelve Disciples of Christ and find differences. But the objection disappears once we realize that a person may have more than one name. An example of this is the name of Abraham's father. The Quran names him Azar (Sura 6:74), while the Bible calls him Terah (Genesis 11:27).
- **Parallel accounts.** At first glance the two accounts of angels at Jesus' tomb in John 20:12 and Mark 16:5 appear to conflict. The passage in John mentions two angels, whereas that in Mark mentions only one. But there is no contradiction. Neither denies the other. One is merely a broader and more detailed description.
- **Meanings lost in translation.** Sometimes an apparent contradiction results from faulty translation. In such cases, a person with knowledge of the original language can easily solve the problem. The Hebrew and Greek vocabularies do not correspond, word for word, or meaning for meaning, with the English vocabulary. Often, then, two or more different words in Greek or Hebrew will be translated using the same one word in English – with the result that important shades of meaning are lost. An example is found in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus in the book of Acts. Acts 9:7 says, “And the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice but seeing no one.” Later, in Acts 22:9, Paul says, “Now those who were with me indeed saw the light and were afraid, but they did not hear the voice of Him who spoke to me.” At first glance, these two statements appear contradictory. In one account, the men traveling with Paul heard the voice, and in the other only Paul heard it. But if we examine the original Greek, we find that, in the first case, the word translated “hearing” denotes only the physical reception of sound into the ear,

whereas in the second case the word translated “hear” includes both physical hearing and comprehension. In other words, Paul’s companions heard the sound of the voice, but failed to understand what was said.

- **The testimony of archaeology.** The “higher critics” used to argue that the Bible was mistaken in saying that Bel-Shazzar made Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom (see Daniel 5:7,10,29). They claimed he should have been made second ruler, like Joseph under Pharaoh (see Genesis 41:40,43). Recent archaeological discoveries, however, prove that Bel-Shazzar was only vice-regent under his father Nebonedes – which makes the Bible’s description of Daniel as third ruler completely accurate.
- **Statistics.** 1 Kings 7:26 says that the capacity of a certain tub was 2,000 baths, while the corresponding passage in 2 Chronicles 4:5 gives the capacity as 3,000. There is a simple solution. A tub that holds 3,000 baths when filled to the brim can also be described as holding 2,000 tubs at a level that allows a person to bathe without spillage.

There is not sufficient room here to examine every apparent contradiction in the Bible. It is enough to recommend the following principles:

- The fact that the oldest surviving manuscripts of the Old and New Testaments were copied some time after the original compositions does not mean they are inaccurate. The first transcribers labored diligently to ensure a trustworthy textual transmission.
- It is only to be expected that some minor spelling errors were unintentionally transmitted during the process. For example, the letters “d” and “r” in Hebrew resemble one another closely and are sometimes exchanged. But such errors in no way influence the meaning of a text.
- We will sometimes encounter apparent contradictions that baffle us. In such cases we should acknowledge the limits of our understanding. Coming generations may find simple solutions to problems we cannot solve.
- God reveals and conceals Himself in His word as well as His works. Only the sincere seekers of truth find Him.

When we encounter a seeming contradiction we need to humble our spirits and bow our heads in reverence to the Eternal, Immortal, Wise Lord and unseen King who speaks to us. Our acceptance of God's revelation is a test for our hearts. If we approach the Scriptures with our minds subdued in reverence to the guidance of the Spirit, complexities will unravel at the appropriate time.

VII. BIBLICAL PROPHECIES HAVE BEEN FULFILLED.

Biblical prophecy witnesses to the authenticity of the Bible. The perfect fulfillment of Bible prophecies is a great testimony that God protects His word from change. These prophecies specify in minute detail events that would occur in the future. The events occurred exactly as foretold – often hundreds of years later.

Several features of the life of Jesus were predicted accurately by prophecies in the Old Testament:

- **Jesus' birthplace.** Micah 5:2 says, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Jesus was born in Bethlehem some seven hundred years later (Matthew 2:1).
- **The virgin birth.** Isaiah 7:14 says, "The Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Emmanuel." Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, again over seven hundred years later (Matthew 1:18, Luke 1:35).
- **The slaughter of Bethlehem's children.** The prophet Jeremiah prophesied that the babies of Bethlehem would be killed. He said, "This is what the LORD says, 'A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more'" (Jeremiah 31:15). This was fulfilled some six hundred years later, according to Matthew 2:16-18.

- **The flight into Egypt.** The prophet Hosea prophesied that Jesus would go to Egypt: “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Hosea 11:1). This was fulfilled over seven hundred years later, according to Matthew 2:15.
- **The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.** Zechariah 9:9 says, “Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter



of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” This was fulfilled about six hundred years later, according to Matthew 21:1-11.

- **The betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver.** This was foretold in Psalm 41:9 and Zechariah 11:12: “I told them, ‘If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.’ So they paid me thirty pieces of silver.” This was fulfilled six hundred years later, according to Matthew 26:15.
- **The purchase of the potter’s field.** A field was bought for these thirty pieces of silver, according to Zechariah 11:13: “And the LORD said to me, ‘Throw it to the

potter' – the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter." This was fulfilled six hundred years later, according to Matthew 27:7.

- **Crucifixion with the wicked.** Isaiah 53:12 says: "He will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." Luke 23:33 records the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy – after seven hundred years.
- **The piercing of Jesus' hands and feet.** Psalm 22:16 says, "For dogs have surrounded me; the assembly of the wicked has enclosed me. They pierced my hands and my feet." Zechariah 12:10 says, "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son." These two prophecies were fulfilled hundreds of years later in the crucifixion (John 19:18).
- **Burial with the rich.** Isaiah 53:9 foretold: "He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth." This is exactly what happened. Matthew reports, "As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away" (Matthew 27:57-60).
- **The resurrection.** Psalm 16:10 says, "You will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." Peter announced that this prophecy was not fulfilled in David, whose body decayed like that of any other mortal. It was fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 2:25-36).

- **The ascension.** Psalm 68:18 says, “When you ascended on high, you led captives in your train; you received gifts from men, even from the rebellious – that you, O LORD God, might dwell there.” This was fulfilled, as we read in Luke 24:50,51 and Ephesians 4:8-11.

VIII. THE BIBLE HAS NOT BEEN CHANGED.

Those who say that the Bible was changed need to prove their case. In particular, they need to answer the following questions:

1. When was the Bible changed?

Was the Bible changed before the recording of the Quran, or after it? If before, then surely the Quran would never have asked Muslims to consult the Bible to find true facts (see Sura 16:43,44), nor would Allah have advised a doubting Muhammad to consult the “People of the Scriptures” (see Sura 10:95,96). Besides, thousands of Bible manuscripts dating from before the Quran are identical with those we have today.

2. Where was the Bible changed?

Changing the Bible in the way envisaged by Muslims would almost certainly have required an international conference of Jewish and Christian leaders, an approved list of changes, the preparation of a revised master manuscript, and the systematic destruction of all preceding manuscripts. This was how the Caliph Uthman made a master copy of the Quran. Yet no such event is recorded in the history of Christianity, nor is it likely to have occurred.

3. Who changed the Bible?

The Jews could hardly have made changes to the Old Testament (even had they been motivated to do so), since the Christians had independent copies both in Hebrew and Greek. Did the Christians change the New Testament? The Quran says that the Christians were divided among themselves and were fighting each other:

Sura 5:14

From those, too, who call themselves Christians, We did take a Covenant, but they forgot a good part of the Message that was sent them: so We estranged them with enmity and hatred between the one and the other, to the Day of Judgement. And soon will Allah show them what it is they have done.

Sura 61:14

O believers, Be Allah's helpers. When Jesus son of Mary said to the disciples, "Who will come with me to the help of Allah?" They replied, "We are Allah's helpers." And a party of the children of Israel believed, while a party disbelieved. Then We strengthened those who believed against their foe, and they became the uppermost.

It is unlikely that a Christian church so divided would have been able to coordinate changes to the Bible. Also, as with the Jews, it has to be asked whether Christians would ever have the motivation to alter Holy Scripture. As Jesus said to Nicodemus:

John 3:5-8

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is everyone born of the Spirit.

When the Holy Spirit gives new life to believers He teaches them honesty and faithfulness. How can the faithful born-again followers of the Bible desire to change their Book, which is the word of life – especially in view of the penalties threatened at the close of the book of Revelation?

4. What was changed and what was not?

It is impossible to change every word of the Bible. Those who say the Bible has been changed should make plain what the changes are. There are over thirteen thousand ancient manu-

scripts of the New Testament, including those in the John Reiland collection, c. AD 130; those in the Chester Beatty collection, c. AD 200; the Siniatic manuscript, c. AD 350; the Alexandria manuscript, c. AD 400; and the Vaticanus manuscript kept in Rome. Not one of these is significantly different from the translations used in Christian churches today. And all can be dated reliably hundreds of years before Muhammad. In addition to which, the whole New Testament (excepting only eleven verses) is quoted in the writings of the Early Church Fathers.

IX. THE QURAN DOES NOT ABROGATE THE BIBLE.

It is commonly believed among Muslims that the Quran has abrogated the Bible. Abrogation is a legal concept. It means to remove one law or authority or principle by replacing it with another. There are only two verses in the Quran that speak about abrogation, and they refer not to the Bible, but to the Quran. The Quran, then, never claims that the Old and the New Testaments were abrogated.

The first Quranic verse concerning abrogation is this:

Sura 2:106

If we abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We replace it by a better or a similar one. Do you not know that Allah has power over all things?

The reason for the “revealing” of this verse, according to ibn Abbas, was that Muhammad sometimes forgot verses given to him during the night. So God would replace the forgotten verses with similar or better ones.^v This raises serious questions about the authenticity of the Quran (which verses, after all, appeared on the Preserved Tablet?) – but it has nothing to do with the Bible.

The second verse concerning abrogation is:

Sura 22:52

We never sent a messenger or prophet before you, but when he framed a desire, Satan cast into his desire some affair. But Allah abrogates what Satan casts. Then Allah perfects

His revelations, and Allah is All-Knowing, All-Wise.

The comments on this verse (Asbab al-Nuzul by Suyuti, and also Bukhari) have already been referred to. Reading verses 19 and 20 of Sura al-Najm (Sura 53 of the Quran), which talk about the three principal idols of the pagan Arabs, Muhammad added the phrase “These most high cranes! Truly their intercession is desired.” Satan had cast this addition into Muhammad’s revelation, and it was necessary for Allah to abrogate it – an event on which the author Salman Rushdie would later build his controversial novel *The Satanic Verses*.^{vi}

Abrogation, then, is a principle used exclusively for maintaining consistency of doctrine in the Quran. Of these four contradictory verses about the drinking of wine, the last is understood by Muslim scholars to be the abrogator of the other three:

Sura 16:67

And of the fruits of the date-palm and grapes from which you derive strong drink and good nourishment.

Sura 2:219

They ask you about drinking and gambling. Say, “There is great harm in both and some benefit for men, but their sin is greater than their benefit.”

Sura 4:43

Do not approach prayers when you are drunk, until you know what you say.

Sura 5:90

Intoxicants and gambling and stones and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan’s handiwork. Leave them aside in order that you may succeed.

Similarly, of the three contradictory verses about *al-Qibla* (where to turn for prayer), the last is understood to have abrogated the other two:

Sura 2:125

Adopt the place where Abraham stood as a place of worship.

Sura 2:142

To Allah belongs the east and the west.

Sura 2:144

We shall make you turn [in prayer] toward a Qibla which is dear to you. So turn your face toward the Inviolable place of worship [the Ka'aba in Mecca].

Muslim theologians say that there are three kinds of abrogated verses found – or previously found – in the Quran:

- **Verses whose laws were abrogated, but whose words were not.** Thus, although their words are still in the Quran, they are not applied in everyday Islamic practice. An example is Sura 7:199: “Keep to forgiveness, and enjoin kindness, and turn away from the ignorant.” Muslim theologians say that “Keep to forgiveness” and “turn away from the ignorant” are abrogated, while “enjoin kindness” is not!
- **Verses whose laws and words were abrogated.** These verses are not found in the Quran. The following is an example: “The best religion with Allah is the Hanifite.” This verse is not found in the Quran, and its law is disregarded. Another verse says, “If the son of Adam is given a valley of money for which he asked, he will ask for a second. If he asks for a second and was given it, he will ask for a third.”
- **Verses whose words were abrogated, but whose laws are still applied.** An example is: “If the old man and the old woman commit adultery, stone them as a punishment.” The words are not found in the Quran, but the commandment contained in these words should be obeyed.

X. WHY THERE ARE FOUR GOSPELS

Muslims often say that the *Injil* (“Gospel”) is the book “revealed to Jesus.” However, they believe that Christians no longer possess this real *Injil*, but have instead four *Injils* – of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

To explain this paradox to Muslims we should make clear what the word *Injil* means. It means “Good News.” It always comes in the singular form. Our *Injil* is the Good News that Jesus came to our fallen world to save us. Jesus did not write

the Good News. He Himself *is* the Good News. However, four Christian historians recorded the Good News. As noted before, Luke the physician makes his purposes absolutely plain:

Luke 1:1-4

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

Under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Church kept four records of the one story. These are four recordings of the one Gospel – the one Good News.

XI. WHY MUSLIMS FAVOR THE FORGED GOSPEL OF BARNABAS

The Gospel of Barnabas is not a historical record of Jesus and is not a true Gospel. An Italian monk who converted to Islam in the 15th Century wrote it to prove the authenticity of his new faith. J.F. Cramer, a leader in the kingdom of Prussia, found the first copy of it in 1709, in the Italian language. In 1713 it was presented to Prince Eugene of Savoy, then given to the National Library of Vienna in 1738.

Mr. Muhammad Ghorbal says, “This is a forged gospel written by a European in the 15th century. He commits great mistakes in his description of the political and religious situation during the days of Christ. He quotes Jesus as saying that he is not the Christ.”^{vii} Early Muslim commentators do not refer to the Gospel of Barnabas for the simple reason that they died before it was written. In particular, the Muslim commentators Al-Tabari and ibn Kathir do not mention it in their list of the writers of the true Gospels.

Nevertheless, modern Muslims like to consider this forged Gospel a canonical book for five reasons:

- It teaches that Jesus is a prophet (Bar. 1:4), not God (Bar. 92:17-20) or the Son of God (Bar. 212:5,6).
- It teaches that Judas Iscariot was made to look like Jesus, and was arrested and crucified as Jesus was lifted up to heaven unharmed (Bar. 112, 139:4-9).
- It teaches that the Old Testament was changed (Bar. 72:11, 124:6-10), as was the New Testament (Bar. 52:14, 96:9-11).
- It teaches that God's covenant was with Ishmael, not Isaac (Bar. 43:20-31).
- It teaches that Jesus came to prepare the way for Muhammad and foretold Muhammad's coming (Bar. 42:10-13, 72:10-72).

Faults and contradictions in the Gospel of Barnabas are too numerous to list. Among the most glaring errors are:

- Bar. 20:1,2 and Bar. 92:3 say that Nazareth and Jerusalem were two seaports.
- Bar. 152:75 says that the Jews stored wine in barrels. In fact they used wineskins. Barrels were used in the Middle Ages.
- Bar. 82:18 says that the Jubilee year comes every hundred years, while the Bible says it comes every fifty (see Leviticus 25:11).
- Bar. 3:5-20 says that Mary gave birth without pain, contradicting Sura 19:22,23 of the Quran, which says Mary's pain was so great that she longed to die.
- Bar. 105:308 says there are nine heavens, contradicting Sura 17:44, which says there are seven.

XII. THE BIBLE CHANGES LIVES.

The final proof of the authenticity of the Bible is that it changes lives. Islam did not change the aggressive nature of the early Arabs. Three of the four Caliphs were assassinated. Arab warriors continued to fight when they became Muslims;

they only changed the flag under which they raided other tribes and countries. Muhammad killed with his own hands the Jewish poet who insulted him.

Yet wherever the Bible word was proclaimed, the lives of the hearers changed. The Holy Spirit escorted the word, and people repented. "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28). The psalmist rightly said:

Psalm 19:7-11

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

ⁱ A useful resource on the subject of this chapter is Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers Inc, 1972).

ⁱⁱ R. Thomas, *Islam: Aspects and Prospects* (Villach, Austria: Light of Life, n.d.), p. 184 f.

ⁱⁱⁱ Further details on the subject of this section can be found in *The True Guidance* (Villach: Light of Life), vols.1-5. Available on the internet at www.light-of-life.com

^{iv} "False charges against the Old Testament," *True Guidance* (Villach: Light of Life, 1992) pp. 8-11.

^v Al-Suyuti, *Asbab al-Nuzul* of Sura 2:106.

^{vi} Al-Suyuti, *Excellence in the Quranic Sciences*, Chapter of the Abrogated and the Abrogator, Part 2, p. 20, for a list of Quranic abrogations.

^{vii} Muhammad Ghorbal, *Al-Mawsuua al-Arabia al-Muyassara* (Cairo, self-published, 1986), p. 354.

11 How Muslims See the Crucifixion

Ironically, it is because of their profound reverence for Jesus Christ that Muslims refuse to believe He was crucified. This is the same reverence the Apostle Peter showed before he was filled with the Holy Spirit. When Jesus “began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matthew 16:21-23).

In a religion that sees God in terms of purity and absolute power – and this is essentially the outlook of both Judaism and Islam – the idea of God suffering and dying is completely incomprehensible. How can the all-powerful divine nature endure such crushing defeat?

Muslims and Jews have always asked this question, and Christian theologians have always had to answer it. St. Athanasius of Alexandria, the composer of the Nicene Creed, gave the following illustration: “The blacksmith puts an iron bar in the fire, then he beats it to form, say, an axe. But when he beats the iron he is only beating the iron, not the fire. This is what happened when Jesus suffered on the cross.”ⁱ Centuries later, in AD 820, a debate was held in

Jerusalem between Caliph Abdul-Rahman ibn Abdul-Malek al-Hashemi and a monk by the name of Ibrahim al-Tabarani. The debate was attended by al-Badawi al-Bahili, who declared, "Either you say that the Divine nature left Jesus when He was pierced with the spear, or you say that the Divine nature took the same pain and death as Jesus." To which the monk replied, "If you hit a camel sitting in the sun with a knife, does this affect the sun or stop its rays from shining? This is what happened when Jesus suffered."ⁱⁱ

I. THE CRUCIFIXION AND THE QURAN

A single passage in the Quran tries to resolve the problem for Muslims in the following manner:

Sura 4:157,158

They say, "Because of [the Jews] saying, 'We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger.' They killed Him not, nor crucified Him, but Shubbiha lahum [it appeared so to them], and those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof except pursuit of a conjecture; they killed Him not for certain. But Allah raised him up to Himself, Allah is Mighty, Wise."

In fact Muhammad was not the first to hit on this solution. Earlier Christian believers, feeling the same reluctance to admit that Almighty God endured a humiliating death, had already come up with the idea of the *Shabih*, or "Lookalike." In a book on the subject, Mr. Qayrawani says, "The historical resources inform us that the myth of the resemblance as indicated in the Quran is not a novelty. During the first six centuries and before the inception of Islam, this false teaching was widespread among Christian heretics."ⁱⁱⁱ

Qayrawani cites a number of examples:

- Basilides, the Gnostic, claimed that Simon of Cyrene, who carried the cross for Christ, consented to be crucified in His stead. Thus God cast on him the likeness of Christ, and he was crucified.

- The Docetists said that Jesus was not crucified at all, but only appeared so to the Jews. Actually the word “Docetic” is derived from a Greek verb that means “to seem” or “to appear.”
- In AD 185 a heretic sect, descended from the priests of Thebes who embraced Christianity, claimed: “God forbids that Christ should be crucified. He was safely lifted up to heaven.”
- In AD 276, the Persian self-proclaimed prophet Mani said the one who was crucified was the son of the widow of Nain whom Jesus raised from the dead. In a later Manichaean tradition, Satan was the one who sought to crucify Jesus. He failed, and was crucified in His place.
- In AD 370 a hermetic Gnostic sect denied the crucifixion of Jesus, claiming He “was not crucified, but it seemed so to the spectators who crucified Him.”
- In AD 520 Severus, bishop of Syria, fled to Alexandria where he encountered a group of philosophers teaching that Jesus was not crucified but only appeared so to the people who nailed Him on the cross.
- In AD 560 the monk Theodore denied Christ’s human nature and thus denied His crucifixion.
- About AD 610, Bishop John, son of the governor of Cyprus, began to proclaim that Christ was not crucified but that it only seemed so to the spectators.

These heresies were widespread among the Gnostic sects in the Arabian Peninsula during the era of Muhammad. So much so that as early as AD 380, the Council of Constantinople commissioned Bishop Gregory of Nyssa “to visit churches in Arabia and Jerusalem where disturbances had broken out and schism threatened.” These sects did not base their beliefs on historical evidence. They were driven by their own conceptions and imaginations, and focused mainly on the nature of Christ’s human body.

II. THE MEANING OF SURA 4:157, 158

If we read these two verses carefully, we will discover the following facts:

1. The Jews would not have claimed to kill the Messiah.

Verse 157 has the Jews boasting, “We killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger.” But had they described Jesus as their Messiah, they would never have killed Him. The Quranic verse misrepresents them.

2. The verse does not deny the historicity of the crucifixion.

The statement “They killed Him not, nor crucified Him” may be interpreted in different ways. It may mean:

- That the Jews did not crucify Jesus, but the Romans did.
- That the Jews were not the true agents of the crucifixion, because Jesus freely and voluntarily gave Himself up to be crucified: “No one takes it [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord” (John 10:18).
- That the attempt to kill Jesus was ineffective because He rose from the dead on the third day.

The third argument is one the Quran itself uses when it deals with the destiny of the martyrs. It says, “Think not of those who are killed in the cause of Allah as dead. They are alive; with their Lord they are richly sustained” (Sura 3:169). Also: “And do not say that those who were killed in the cause of Allah are dead; rather, they are alive, but you do not perceive” (Sura 2:154).

These two verses negate the results of martyrdom without denying its historicity. The martyrs died – but we do not consider them dead, because they are alive in the presence of God. Applying the same logic, we can say that Jesus died on the cross. The Centurion testified to Pilate that He was dead (see Mark 15:44). He was put in a tomb. A stone was rolled against the entrance of the tomb (see Mark 15:46). The tomb was secured with a seal and guards (see Matthew 27:66).

The Jews rejoiced greatly because they thought that they had put an end to His teachings and miracles. They thought that this cruel death would dissuade His followers from causing further trouble. But they were wrong. The prophecy of Jesus was fulfilled: “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself” (John 12:32). In reality, the Jews “killed Him not, nor crucified Him.”

3. Disagreement about the crucifixion is an Islamic problem, not a Christian one.

Verse 157 says, “Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof except pursuit of a conjecture.” But Christians are not among those who disagree concerning the crucifixion. They were never in doubt of it. They do not pursue conjecture. The four Gospels are in full agreement concerning the crucifixion and the events surrounding it.

The Muslims are the ones who disagree and are in doubt of it. It is they who have “no knowledge thereof except pursuit of a conjecture.”

III. MUSLIM SAYINGS ABOUT THE SHABIH ARE CONTRADICTIONARY.

Muslims say that God cast Christ’s likeness on another man, who died while Jesus was lifted up to heaven. But commentators on the Quran are no more agreed than the Christian heretics are on the identity of this *Shabih*:

- **Al-Jalalan**, commenting on the phrase “it appeared so unto them” (*Shubbiha lahum*), says that Allah caused the likeness of Jesus to be cast upon a man, and he was arrested. Thinking he was Jesus, the Jews crucified and killed him. The same commentary explains the phrase “those who disagree and are in doubt about Him” by saying that when some Jews saw the crucified man they shouted, “The face is the face of Jesus, but the body is not His body.” Others said, “It is He Himself.”

- **Al-Baidawi** says, “It is related that a group of Jews captured Jesus and His mother. Jesus cursed them. They right away became apes and pigs! The Jews met together to kill Jesus, but God told Jesus that He would take Him to heaven. Jesus then said to His friends, ‘Who is ready to take my likeness upon him and be killed and crucified and enter Paradise?’ One of them accepted. God cast the likeness of Jesus upon him and he was killed and crucified.”
- **Al-Zamakhshari** says, “The phrase *Shubbiha lahum* means that they imagined it to be so, or they presumed that they killed and crucified Him – so He is dead and not alive. But He is alive because God took Him up to Himself.”

Al-Razi puts forward four different suggestions as to who the *Shabih* might have been:

- Trying to arrest Jesus, a Jew named Judas entered a house where He was, but did not find Him. God made this Judas look like Jesus. When he came out of the house people thought he was Jesus and took him for crucifixion.
- When the Jews arrested Jesus, they set a watchman over Him. God lifted Jesus to Himself by a miracle and made the watchman look like Jesus. This watchman was crucified while he was crying, “I am not Jesus! I am not Jesus!”
- Jesus promised one of His friends a place in paradise if that friend volunteered to die in His stead. God made this friend to resemble Jesus. He was arrested and crucified. God took Jesus up to heaven.
- One of the followers of Jesus betrayed Him. He guided the Jews to where Jesus was. When they reached the place, God caused that treacherous follower to look like Jesus. He was arrested instead of Jesus, and was crucified.

Other differences have arisen concerning exactly how long Jesus’ death lasted. The Quran reports Allah as saying:

Sura 3:55

O Jesus! I am mutawaffika [causing you to die, or “gathering you”] and causing you to ascend to Me, and am cleansing you of those who disbelieve, and am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of

Resurrection. Then to Me you will all return, and I shall judge between you as to that in which you used to differ.

Commenting on this verse, al-Razi quotes Muslim authorities who express different opinions on the duration of the death:

- **Wahb ibn Munabbih** said that Jesus died for three hours, then Allah took Him up.
- **Muhammad ibn Ishaq** said that Jesus died for seven hours, then God raised Him and took Him up.
- **Al-Rabi' ibn Anas** said, “God caused Him to die while taking Him up to heaven; for God said [in the Quran], ‘God takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that have not yet died, during their sleep’” (Sura 39:42).
- **Idris** said that Jesus died for three days, then Allah raised Him and took Him up.

At a later date, Ikhwan al-Safa' (Al-Safa' Brothers), a secret Arab fraternity founded at Basra, Iraq, sometime in the second half of the 10th century AD, said that Jesus died, and after this He appeared to His own.^{iv}

IV. AL-RAZI'S SIX PROBLEMS WITH THE SHABIH

Commenting on the idea of the “Lookalike” who supposedly stepped in for Christ at the crucifixion, al-Razi identifies six problems. These are quoted below, each followed by the comment, or conclusion, to which the problem led him:

1. The problem of all perception becoming suspect.

If we allow the likeness of one person to be cast on another that would entail sophistry. For if I see my son [*the first time*], then I see him again, it becomes possible that the one I see for the second time is not my son but just an impersonation. That will eliminate the trust in the perceptible concrete things. Likewise, the Companions of Muhammad who saw him instructing and prohibiting them could not have been certain that he was the same Muhammad, because of the possibility that his likeness may have been cast on somebody else. This will entail the collapse of the laws. The pivotal

theme in the chain of the oral narration is that the first narrator has related what is perceptible. If making an error in perceptible visual things is possible, then making an error in relating orally an incident is more probable. In summary, opening such a door is the beginning of sophistry and its end is the nullification of prophecies entirely...

Al-Razi's comment:

Anyone who believes in God, the only Omnipotent, admits that God is able to create a person in the image of another person. Such similarity does not necessitate the above uncertainty. This is the answer to what you mentioned.

2. The problem of Jesus not using his divine power.

God, the Most High, ordered Jibril to accompany [*Jesus*] most of the time. This is what the expositors indicated as they interpreted his saying, "How I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit" (Sura 5:110). The edge of one of Jibril's wings was sufficient for taking care of mankind. How then was that not good enough to protect [*Jesus*] from the Jews? Furthermore, since [*Jesus*] was capable of raising the dead, and of healing the blind and the leper, how did he fail to inflict those Jews who intended to hurt Him, with death, or afflicting them with ailments, chronic illnesses, and paralysis, to render them incapable of confronting Him?

Al-Razi's comment:

If Jibril defended [*Jesus*], or if God enabled Jesus to repel His enemies, His miracle would have been achieved by force of constraint. This is not admissible.

3. The problem of an unnecessary action.

God, the Most High, could have saved [*Jesus*] from His enemies by lifting Him up to heaven. What then is the use of casting His likeness on somebody else? Would not this cause an unfortunate person to suffer death for no reason?

Al-Razi's comment:

If God had lifted Jesus up and did not cast His likeness on another, that miracle would have been achieved by force

of constraint.

4. The problem of implying divine deception.

If God cast Jesus' likeness on another person, then Jesus was lifted up to heaven, people would think that the person is Jesus, when in fact he was not. That would make them a subject of deception and obscurity. This is incompatible with God's wisdom.

Al-Razi's comment:

The disciples of Jesus were present. They were aware of the circumstances which surrounded the event. Thus, they would remove that ambiguity.

5. The problem of discrediting religious tradition.

Multitudes of Christians in both Eastern and Western hemispheres, despite their extreme love to Christ and their excess exaltation of Him, reported that they saw Him killed and crucified. If we deny this, that would be a discrediting of what was verified by oral transmission. The discrediting of the oral transmission demands the discrediting of the prophethood of both Muhammad and Jesus and even the [denial] of their historicity and the historicity of the rest of the prophets. This is futile.

Al-Razi's comment:

Those who were present at that time were few. It is possible for the few to be deluded. After all, when oral transmission is handed down to the few it would become useless for knowledge.

6. The problem of the crucified person not trying to escape.

By virtue of the oral transmission, [we are told] that the crucified one survived a long time. If he were not Jesus but another person, he would have become frightened and said, "I am not Jesus. I am another person." He would have made every effort to announce this fact. Had he mentioned that, it would have become well-known among the people. Since none of this happened, we knew that the matter is not as you claimed.

Al-Razi's comment:

One probability is that the one who bore the likeness of Jesus was a believer in Him, and accepted to be his substitute. In this case it is possible that he would not disclose the truth of the matter. In short, the questions they mentioned are subject, from some aspects, to many probabilities. Since the irrefutable text [*of the Quran*] attests to Muhammad's reliability in all that he reported, it would be impossible for these contingent questions to contradict the infallible text [*of the Quran*], and God is the possessor of guidance.

The difficulties are real. But this great Islamic scholar only ties himself in knots attempting to resolve them. Unable to accept the obvious solution (that the whole idea of the Shabih is untenable), he retreats into an assertion of Quranic authority. It must be right, he says, because Muhammad said so.

V. MR. QAYRAWANI'S RESPONSE TO AL-RAZI

Qayrawani, in his book *Was Christ really crucified?* presents six responses to al-Razi's six comments:^v

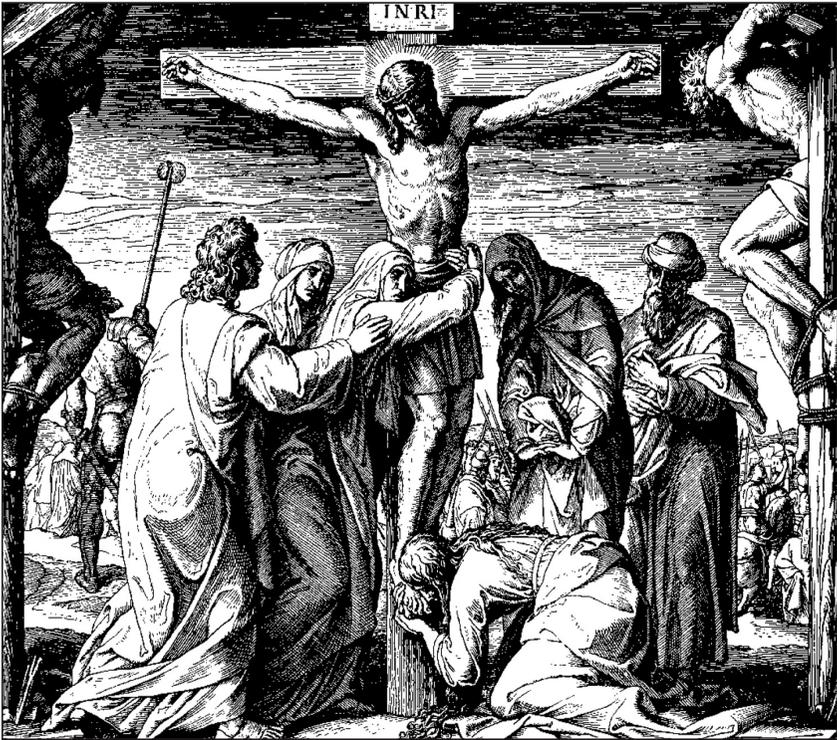
1. Jesus did not need a "double."

For Razi's first response we agree that it is true that God is able to create as many people as He wishes to resemble each other. But in the case of Christ, there was no need to do so. Christ did not endeavor to avoid crucifixion. He came, in the first place, for the redemption of mankind. It is a task He chose to accomplish by His own will. If Christ really tried to evade crucifixion either through cowardice or apathy He would be evading a responsibility He took on Himself to fulfil. This is not a characteristic of the Christ who is the Word of God. In this case there was no need at all for God to perform the miracle of the one who looked like Jesus.

2. Jesus was all-powerful, but chose not to defend Himself.

Christ never needed the Angel Jibril to rescue Him from the hands of His enemies. Jesus was not defenseless. The

miracles that He performed before His death were even more wonderful and far surpassed the alleged rescue operation. The facts recorded in the Gospel are examples of His unlimited power. When His enemies came to arrest Him, He threw them down to the ground by the powerful word of His mouth (John 18:6). He could have gone on His way safely. That was not the first time in which the Jews conspired against Him, but each time He slipped away from among them. None of them dared at that time to hurt Him. But when His appointed time came Jesus willingly delivered Himself to His foes to accomplish what He came for. Al-Razi and all those like him should have studied Christ's purpose for His incarnation. That would have helped them to perceive that forgiveness of sin through death on the cross was the main reason for Christ's incarnation and virgin birth.



3. There is no function for a Shabih.

Did God really need to cast Jesus' resemblance on anybody? Some claimed that the purpose of the resemblance story was to penalize Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed his Master. But the Gospel account presents us with all the facts about the suicide of Judas. Besides, why should refraining from casting the likeness of Jesus on another person be regarded as a forced constraint? Lifting Jesus up to heaven before the eyes of the Jews would dispel any doubt that surrounded His person. Both the religious and political Jewish leadership would realize then what a grave error they had committed against the "Word of God."

4. There is reliable historical evidence for the crucifixion of Christ.

It is true that the disciples of Jesus and some of His followers were present that horrible night and witnessed what happened to their Master. Thus by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they accurately recorded the details of the crucifixion on the pages of the Gospel accounts. The Gospel's narration, corroborated by tangible references and documents, disagrees with the Quranic text, the various stories of the Islamic Hadith and the many fantasies of the Muslim expositors. The Gospel has preserved for us even the minute details of this important event.

5. The eye-witnesses can be trusted.

Al-Razi contradicts himself as he states in his fourth response, "Jesus' disciples were present. They were aware of the circumstances that surrounded the event. Thus, they would remove that ambiguity." Now he claims that the disciples were few and "it is possible for the few to be deluded. After all, when oral transmission is handed down to the few it would become useless for knowledge." What a contradiction! When al-Razi realized that quoting the disciples would serve his purpose he resorted to them as eyewitnesses who could dispel the ambiguity. Then suddenly those eyewitnesses become subject to the

influence of the illusion. Actually, those who witnessed the event of the crucifixion and those to whom Christ appeared after His resurrection and gathered together to watch Him ascending to heaven were more than 500 persons. Therefore the disciples' record of the crucifixion is no doubt authentic.

6. The wrong man would have resisted execution.

According to the contrasting Islamic episodes, with one or two exceptions, the one who was made to look like Jesus was never a believer in Christ. Most Muslim expositors are inclined to believe that he was one of Jesus' enemies. Thus it is unlikely that he would resort to silence and would not vigorously shout that he was not Christ, or "that he would not disclose the truth of the matter in that case." A person who is falsely accused and whose life is at stake would do everything possible to save himself unless he is dying for a noble cause.

Qayrawani concludes by arguing that if al-Razi invokes the truthfulness of Muhammad in support of the Islamic version of the crucifixion story, Christians should invoke the truthfulness of the Gospel writers. "One verse uttered six centuries later in the Quran cannot discredit the authentic historical documents available to us."

VI. QURANIC VERSES THAT MAY CONFIRM THE CRUCIFIXION

Over and against the one Quranic passage that throws doubt on the crucifixion, a number of verses can be interpreted as confirming the Gospel account:

Sura 2:87

Verily we gave Moses the Scripture and after him we sent messenger after messenger. We gave unto Jesus the Son of Mary clear miracles, and strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit. Is it so, that whenever a messenger, whose message does not suit your desire, comes to you, you grow arrogant, denying some of them, and killing others?

This verse mentions Moses and Jesus, and denying and killing. Since the Quran does not explain how the killing of Jesus took place, the *Injil* becomes the sole, natural, and original source of information on this subject. Jesus was the messenger denied and killed.

Sura 3:55

Allah said, "O Jesus! I am mutawaffika [causing you to die] and causing you to ascend to Me, and am cleansing you of those who disbelieve, and am setting those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me you will all return, and I shall judge between you as to that in which you used to differ.

Interpreting this verse, and particularly the phrase *mutawaffika*, usually translated "gathering you," Al-Razi compiles the various opinions of other Muslim scholars, but does not express his own. Here are the various interpretations:

- **End your term.** *Mutawaffika* means: "I end your term on earth, so I do not leave you to your enemies, the Jews, to kill you."
- **Cause you to die.** This is the interpretation of ibn Abbas, Muhammad's cousin, known as "the expositor of the Quran." It is also the interpretation of ibn Ishaq, Muhammad's biographer. They said that the purpose was to prevent Jesus' Jewish enemies from killing Him. After this, God honored Jesus by raising Him up to heaven.
- **Make you die to your lusts.** Abu Bakr al-Wasity says, "I cause you to die of your lusts and the desires of your soul, then I raise you up to Me. Unless He dies to what is not but God, He would never reach the place of the knowledge of God. When Jesus was raised up to heaven, He became like the angels, free of lust." This mystic interpretation contradicts the Islamic principle of the infallibility of the prophets. It also contradicts the Quranic saying that Jesus is "faultless" (Sura 19:19).
- **Cause you to ascend.** That is, Jesus, son of Mary, was raised up whole in both body and spirit, not only in spirit as some may think. What supports this interpretation is God's saying, "They would not cause You any harm."

- **Make you as if you died.** Raising Jesus up to heaven ends His existence on earth, as if He had died.
- **Grasp, or take possession of.** Taking Jesus up from the earth and into heaven is a payment and a reward.
- **Compensate for work.** God has announced to Jesus the good news of accepting His obedience and good works. He revealed to Jesus the troubles He would have suffered from His enemies.

These contradictory interpretations create confusion in the mind of the reader. Why did these Muslim scholars differ in interpreting a common word? And why is it that when they encounter a difficulty they so quickly resort to the phrase “God knows better”?

It is simple enough to study the connotations of the word *mutawaffika* as it appears in the Quran. This word and its derivatives occur twenty-five times. On most occasions it is used to talk about death. Only twice is it used for sleep:

Sura 6:60

It is He who recalls you by night, and knows that which you commit by day.

Sura 39:42

God takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that have not yet died, during their sleep.

Studying the context of Sura 3:55 we see that *mutawaffika* has no figurative meaning. It means death, naturally or by killing or crucifying. The Hadith supports this meaning of *mutawaffika* as “causing you to die.” Al-Bukhari narrates on the authority of Ibn Abbas that Muhammad said, “You will be gathered [on the Day of Judgement], bare-footed, naked and not circumcised.” Then he recites the words of Sura 21:104: “As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it: A promise We have undertaken; truly We shall do it.” Muhammad added, “The first to be dressed in the Day of Resurrection will be Abraham. Some of my companions will be taken to the right side and the left side, and I will say, ‘My companions!’ It will be said, ‘After you left them they

regenerated [from Islam]. Then I will say as the pious slave Jesus, son of Mary, said [in Sura 5:117], ‘I was a witness over them while I dwelt among them. When you *tawaffaitani* [“caused me to die”] You were the watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things. If You punish them, they are Your slaves; and if You forgive them You are indeed the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.’”

According to this Hadith, Muhammad quoted what Jesus said as given in the Quran. Muhammad had died, and no one claimed that he was raised up to heaven. So when he recited the above Quranic verse and used the term *tawaffaitani* (“caused me to die”), he was referring to his own death, and not his being raised up to heaven. The statement “caused me to die” is applied both to Jesus and Muhammad. The difference between the two is that Christ rose from the dead on the third day and will come back to judge the living and the dead – a fact Christian and Muslim doctrines agree on.

The normal meaning of the word *wafat* in most Quranic verses and the Islamic Hadith (unless contextual evidence indicates differently) is “death.”

Sura 3:183

They [the Jews] say, “God has commanded us that we believe not in any messenger until he brings us an offering which fire, from heaven, shall devour.” Say to them, [O Muhammad] “Messengers came to you before me with miracles, and with that [miracle] which you describe. Why then did you kill them? Answer that if you are truthful.”

Examining the Quranic stories, we find that the only messenger who came from God with an offering from heaven was Jesus. Sura 5:114 says, “Jesus, Son of Mary, said, ‘O God, our Lord, send down for us a table spread with food from heaven, that it may be a feast for us, for the first and the last of us, and a sign from You. Give us sustenance for You are the best of sustainers.’” Jesus, then, is the One who brought the offering from heaven, and the One that the Jews have killed.

Sura 5:116, 117

When Allah said, “Oh Jesus, Son of Mary, did you say to mankind, ‘Take me and my mother for two gods apart from Allah?’” He said, “Be glorified. It was not mine to say that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then You knew it. You know what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Your mind. I spoke to them only that which You commanded me, ‘Worship Allah my Lord and your Lord.’ I was a witness over them while I dwelt among them. When you tawaffaitani [caused me to die] You were the watcher over them, and You are a witness to all things.”

According to Verse 5:117, watching over the followers of Jesus has become God’s responsibility. This implies that after His death Jesus had no control over His followers. However, if we accept the Islamic point of view that Jesus did not die but had been raised up to heaven, body and soul, then He would still be able to watch over them and to witness against or for them. When Jesus said, “I was a witness over them while I dwelt among them” He referred indirectly to His death. What He meant was, “Now that You have caused me to die I am not able to watch over them. Everything now is in Your hands because You are the living eternal God.”

Sura 19:33

Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive.

This is a clear Quranic confession and prophecy from the mouth of Jesus that He became incarnate, died, and was raised from the dead. This is based on a miracle. It agrees with the text of the Gospel. The Quran uses the same expression of John the Baptist in Sura 19:15 “So peace be upon him on the day he was born and on the day of his death; and the day when he is raised to life.” Many Muslim scholars have not examined the story of Christ’s death, and assume that the phrase “the day I die” refers to the death of Jesus after His Second Coming and His

destruction of the *Dajjal*. Commentators like al-Tabari, ibn Kathir, al-Zamakhshari and al-Baidawi could have provided better information to illuminate these verses.

ⁱ St. Athanasius, *The Incarnation of the Word* (Maktabat al-Mahabba, Cairo, n.d.), p.56.

ⁱⁱ Al-Tbarani, Ibrahim, *A Theological Debate* (Villach: Light of Life, n.d.), p.42.

ⁱⁱⁱ Qayrawani, *Was Christ really crucified?* (Villach, Light of Life, 1994), p.27.

^{iv} Ikhwan al-Safa', *Encyclopaedia, Rasa'il ikhwan al-Safa' wa khillan al-wafa'*, Vol. 4, p.30.

^v Qayrawani, *op.cit.*, pp.23-26.

12 Proofs of the Crucifixion

I. BIBLICAL PROOFS OF THE CRUCIFIXION

Sixty-six inspired books state that Jesus was crucified. Thirty-nine precede the crucifixion, prophesying details of events that later took place at the cross. Twenty-seven books record Jesus' crucifixion after it took place. Four of those describe the life of Jesus, concentrating heavily on the last week of His life – a sure sign that the authors saw this period as the most important.

1. Biblical prophecies witness to the crucifixion.

Psalm 22 (written one thousand years before Christ) and Isaiah 53 (written seven hundred years before Christ) are perhaps the most striking Old Testament prophecies referring to Jesus. But many more passages foretell the atoning death of Christ, all of them literally fulfilled.

(a) *Delivering Jesus to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver*

Zechariah 11:12

Then I said to them, "If it seems right to you, give me my wages, but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty shekels of silver.

Fulfillment:

Matthew 26:14

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver.

(b) *Buying of the Potter's field*

Zechariah 11:13

Then the Lord said to me, "Cast it into the treasury: the lordly price at which I was paid off by them." So I took the thirty shekels and cast them into the treasury in the house of the Lord.

Fulfillment:

Matthew 27:3-8

When Judas, His betrayer, saw that He was condemned, he repented and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver in the Temple he departed and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury since they are blood money." So they took council and bought with them the potter's field to bury strangers in. Therefore the field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

(c) *Mocking Jesus, then crucifying Him*

Psalms 22:16-18

Dogs are round about me; a company of evil doers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet; I can count all my bones; they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, for my raiment they cast lots.

Fulfillment:

Matthew 27:39-42

Those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked Him saying, "He saved others, He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel, let Him come down now from the cross and we will believe Him."

(d) His astonishment that the Father forsook Him

Psalm 22:1

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?

Fulfillment:

Matthew 27:46

About the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" That is, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

(e) Giving Him vinegar to drink

Psalm 69:21

For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Fulfillment:

John 19:28

After this, Jesus knowing that all was now finished said, to fulfil the Scripture, "I thirst."...so they put a sponge full of vinegar on hyssop and held it to His mouth.

(f) Soldiers dividing His clothes by lot

Psalm 22:18

They divided my garments among them and for my raiment they cast lots.

Fulfillment:

John 19:23

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took His garments and made four parts, one for each soldier, also His tunic.

(g) His bones not being broken

Psalm 34:20

He keeps all His bones, not one of them is broken.

Fulfillment:

John 19:32

The soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with Him, but when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs.

(h) His being pierced by a spear

Zechariah 12:10

When they look on Him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for Him.

Fulfillment:

John 19:34

One of the soldiers pierced His side, with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.

(i) His dying with the wicked, but being honored also

Isaiah 53:9

They made His grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death.

Fulfillment:

Matthew 27:57-60

When it was evening, there came a rich man, from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud, and laid it in his own tomb, and rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and departed.

2. Jesus Himself witnessed to the crucifixion.

Jesus knew that the cross was coming upon Him, and He prepared His followers well in advance. Here are some statements Jesus made:

Matthew 16:21

Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised.

Matthew 17:22

As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered unto the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day." And they were greatly distressed.

Matthew 26:1-2

He [Jesus] said to His disciples, "You know that after two days the Passover is coming, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

Mark 8:31

He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 9:31

For He was teaching His disciples and saying to them, "The Son of Man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and when He is killed, after three days He will rise."

Mark 10:32-34

They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them, and they were amazed and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again He began to tell them what was to happen to Him, saying, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles, and they will mock Him and spit upon Him and scourge Him and kill Him; and after three days He will rise."

Luke 9:22

The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

John 3:13, 14

No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life.

John 12:24, 32

I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

Muslims say that Jesus is the “statement of truth” (Sura 19:34). Since they respect Him as One who spoke Truth, they contradict their own faith when they say that Jesus was not crucified!

3. Jewish contemporaries witnessed to the crucifixion.

The first disciples of Jesus preached among Jews who had witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus and knew the story of His resurrection. Significantly, not a single Jew accused them of lying. Ten days after the ascension of Christ, and a few meters away from Golgotha, the apostle Peter, a key eye-witness, said to his Jewish listeners, “Him, being delivered by the predetermined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified and put to death” (Acts 2:23). On a similar occasion he announced, “You denied the Holy One and the Just...killed the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses” (Acts 3:14,15).

Had these charges been groundless, the Jews would have denied them – and the disciples would hardly have sacrificed their lives to back them up. As things were, the Jewish leaders made no attempt to counter the accusations. They only ordered the disciples to keep quiet (Acts 4:18, 5:28,40), and – when the disciples took no notice – began a fruitless campaign of persecution (see Acts 7:59, 8:4).

4. Nature witnessed to the crucifixion.

When Jesus died, the sun was darkened for three hours. The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the graves were opened.

Matthew 27:50-54

Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom, and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion, and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe...

Seeing these events, even a Roman Centurion, supervising the crucifixion, expressed astonishment. He said of Jesus, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

5. Early catechisms witness to the crucifixion.

The first known Christian catechism – penned by the apostle Paul – says, “Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the Gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance, what I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

6. The sacraments witness to the crucifixion.

The early church practiced two sacraments: baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism signifies “burial with Jesus.” The Scriptures say, “Don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection” (Romans 6:3-5).

The Holy Communion is an ongoing celebration and reminder of the crucifixion, begun by Jesus Himself: “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins’” (Matthew 26:26-28).

7. The healing the ear of Malchus witnesses to the crucifixion.

At Jesus’ arrest, Simon Peter was carrying a sword. He wanted to defend his Master, and drawing the sword he struck Malchus, the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the

cup the Father has given me?” (John 18:10,11). Jesus touched the ear of Malchus, and healed him (Luke 22:51).

Who but Jesus could heal the ear that was cut off! Had the arrested person been the *Shabih*, the one who only looked like Jesus, he could never have performed such a miracle.

8. The seven statements on the cross witness to the crucifixion.

The Gospels record seven statements made by Jesus from the cross. Again, the *Shabih* would never be able to utter such things while in the throes of a painful death. These statements are as follows:

- **Statement 1.** Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).
- **Statement 2.** When the penitent thief said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:42,43).
- **Statement 3.** When Jesus saw His mother watching Him on the cross, and John, the disciple whom He loved, standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Dear woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother” (John 19:26,27).
- **Statement 4.** About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).
- **Statement 5.** Jesus, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, said, “I am thirsty” (John 19:28).
- **Statement 6.** When Jesus had received the drink, He said, “It is finished!” With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30).
- **Statement 7.** Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When He had said this, He breathed His last (Luke 23:46).

It should be noted that the Virgin Mary and John the disciple were standing at the very foot of the cross, and could not have mistaken Jesus for anyone else. A mother is the first to recognize the voice of her son, and the closest friend is second!

9. The empty tomb and resurrection witness to the crucifixion.

Muslims and Christians agree that someone was crucified – though they disagree as to the identity of that person. However, Muslims have to account for the fact that on the third day the crucified person’s tomb was found empty. The body had disappeared. Christians know that their Lord was resurrected. But Muslims, who believe that an ordinary man was laid in the tomb in Christ’s stead, have a much harder task explaining the disappearance.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter delivered his first sermon (see Acts 2:14-36), in which he told about the life of Jesus on earth. He said, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you [the Jews] by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross.” Having devoted one verse each to Jesus’ life and death, Peter then went on for a further nine verses about the resurrection:

Acts 2:24-32

But God raised Him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him. David said about Him: ‘I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’ Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the

Christ, that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

In the same sermon Peter went on to explain how the risen Christ ascended to heaven:

Acts 2:33-36

Exalted to the right hand of God, He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, “The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

The listeners were deeply moved. No one contradicted Peter, because they had all seen the crucifixion, and all knew about the resurrection and ascension. Thus we read, “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’ Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.’...Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:37-41).

The apostle Paul says,

1 Corinthians 15:14, 15

If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead.

The resurrection proves that the crucified Christ is alive. After He rose He appeared to His disciples and to hundreds of His loyal followers, assuring them that He was indeed crucified and raised from the dead. As Paul attests:

I Corinthians 15:3-8

What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also.

Maybe the most remarkable reaction to the resurrection came from Thomas, the disciple of Jesus. He was one of those who always asked for tangible proof before believing. The other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he replied, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later the disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:24-29).

II. MEDICAL PROOF OF THE CRUCIFIXION

The nature and extent of the injuries of Jesus prove that He must have died. He was beaten and whipped. He fell under the heavy cross as He carried it up to Golgotha. The crucifixion itself was painful and exhausting. He stayed hanging on the cross for about nine hours, bleeding from His hands, feet and head. A soldier pierced His side with a spear, the emerging blood and water proving He was already dead (John 19:34).

A number of respected medical doctors have written books

confirming the death of Christ on the cross.ⁱ An article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, concluded:

Clearly, the weight of historical and medical evidence indicates that Jesus was dead before the wound to His side was inflicted and support the traditional view that the spear, thrust between His right rib, probably perforated not only the right lung but also the pericardium and heart, and thereby ensured His death. Accordingly, interpretations based on the assumption that Jesus did not die on the cross appear to be at odds with modern medical knowledge.ⁱⁱ

III. PSYCHOLOGICAL PROOF OF THE CRUCIFIXION

No group would proudly publicize the shameful death of its leader unless (1) the event really happened, and (2) it led to something helpful and beneficial.

St. Paul claims to take great pride in the cross of Christ (see Galatians 6:14). Moreover, Christians soon adopted this instrument of death as the symbol of their faith. They hung it around their necks, engraved it on their arms, and lifted it up in their churches. The cross, once a source of shame, became a source of joy and pride.

As an illustration, we say that suppose a brutal dictator invaded a neighboring country, torturing and abusing its citizens. When a loyal patriot led his countrymen to revolt, the dictator captured him and punished him by hanging. This so enraged the man's followers that they rose up and drove out the oppressor. The country was freed. In recognition of the great sacrifice of their leader, the citizens decided to rename their country "The Country of the Hanged," and placed a picture of a noose prominently on their flag.

This is much like what happened in Christianity. The Christians' basic message is "Jesus and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). They have adopted the cross as their symbol. And they are in absolutely no doubt that the death of their Leader – a real, historical event – is the cause of unparalleled blessing.

IV. NON-CHRISTIAN PROOFS OF THE CRUCIFIXION

Many pagan historians testify to the historicity of the crucifixion. For example:

- **Cornelius Tacitus** (AD 55-120). Renowned for his integrity and goodness, Tacitus is sometimes called the greatest historian of ancient Rome. His best known works are *The Annals* and *The Histories*. It may be that he received his information about Christ and the Christians from official records to which he had access as governor of Asia Minor. He makes three references to them. The most important one is found in his *Annals*: “Consequently, to get rid of the report [that he burnt Rome], Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the *populus*. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular.”ⁱⁱⁱ The “mischievous superstition” to which Tacitus alludes was doubtless the resurrection.
- **Thallus** (c. AD 52). Like Tacitus, Thallus was a contemporary of the early Christians. One of the great Roman historians, he charted the history of the eastern Mediterranean world from the Trojan War to his own time. Only few fragments of his work survive, in quotations from other authors like Julius Africanus. Reporting the darkness that covered the land during the crucifixion, Julius writes in AD 221, “Thallus, in the third book of his histories, unreasonably explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun, as it seems to me.”^{iv} Julius rejected this explanation on the basis that a solar eclipse “could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was at the season of the Pascal full moon that Jesus [was

crucified].”^v Thallus is not the only one who mentions this darkness. Several other ancient authors report it. Dionysius the Areopagite said, “Either the god of nature is meditating now, or he is lamenting someone dying.” In the second century, Philopone, the astrologer, said, “The darkness that occurred when Jesus was crucified, nothing like it happened before.” Even ibn Kathir referred to it in his book *Al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya*.^{vi} Ibn al-Athir recorded it in his *Annals*, on the authority of the narrators and expositors.^{vii}

- **Josephus.** A Jew born a few years after the crucifixion, Josephus wrote in the year AD 66 a twenty-volume history of his people, including a detailed account of the crucifixion of Christ. He says, “At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good and was known to be virtuous. Many people from among the Jews and other nations became His disciples. Pilate condemned Him to be crucified and to die. Those who had become His disciples did not abandon His discipleship. They reported that He had appeared to them three days after His crucifixion and that He was alive. Accordingly, He was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.”^{viii}
- **Lucien (AD 100).** An outstanding Greek historian, Lucien was an adherent of the Epicurean philosophical school. He could not understand the faith of Christians and their readiness to die for Christ, and ridiculed their belief in the immortality of the soul and their longing for heaven. He considered them a deceived people, clinging to an uncertain hope of heaven rather than living for the present. One of the significant allusions he makes to Christ is this: “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account...and deny the gods of Greece, and worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws.”^{ix} Evidently the crucifixion of Christ was not disputed even by heathens who ridiculed the Christian faith.

- **Pontius Pilate.** In his first *Apology*, Justin Martyr (c. AD 150) quotes the *Acts of Pontius Pilate* and says that the crucifixion of Jesus can be confirmed by the report of Pilate. Referring to the miracles of Jesus, Justin says, “From the *Acts of Pontius Pilate* we know that Jesus did those things.”^x
- **Celsius** (c. AD 140). An Epicurean philosopher and enemy of Christianity, Celsius recorded the fact of the crucifixion in his book *The True Discourse*. He said, “Christ endured the anguish of the cross for the welfare of humanity.”^{xi}
- **Mara Bar-Serapion.** In a letter sent to his son from prison, written between the late first century and the third century, Mara Bar-Serapion says, “What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise king?...Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given.” As a pagan, Mara Bar-Serapion considered Jesus one of the philosophers, on a par with Socrates and Plato.^{xii}

V. SPIRITUAL EVIDENCE WITNESSES TO THE CRUCIFIXION.

Those drawn to Jesus because of His death are more numerous than those drawn to Him by His holy life and unique teachings. Jesus’ death did not dissuade people from following Him. He Himself said, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me” (John 12:32). And: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). People are attracted by love. The crucifixion reveals the love of God’s tender heart:

1 John 4:8-10

God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His One and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

VI. ISLAMIC PROOFS OF THE CRUCIFIXION

1. The Quran proves the crucifixion.

To say that someone else was crucified in Christ's place is to attribute deceit to God! Disciples preaching salvation through the atonement of Christ alone would, in fact, have been preaching salvation by the merits of the *Shabih* – the person who looked like Jesus. For the six hundred years until Muhammad came, God would have left His people trusting in a fake!

Can we believe that a holy, wise and loving God would do this? Unfortunately, this is what the Quran says. The idea of God deceiving mankind is a Quranic one. The Quran says, "The hypocrites seek to deceive (*yukhadia'una*) Allah, but it is Allah who deceives them (*khadi'uhum*)" (Sura 4:142). It also says, "They [the Jews] *makaru* ("plotted"), and Allah *makara* ("plotted"); and Allah is best of *makereen* ("plotters"); when Allah said, 'O Jesus, I am *mutawaffika* [causing you to die], and causing you to ascend to me.'" (Sura 3:54,55)

According to the Quran, God created the heresy of the crucifixion and made everyone believe that Jesus was crucified – until Islam came to reveal the "truth." Strangely, this "truth" arrived not only six hundred years late, but completely lacking in evidence to back it up!

2. Many Muslims witness to the crucifixion.

Finally, and in spite of the above, many Muslims believe in the crucifixion. Among them is the Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, winner of the Nobel Prize, who wrote these moving lines:

From His eternal seat Christ comes down to this earth,
where, ages ago, in the bitter cup of death He poured His
deathless life for those who came to the call and those who
remained away.

He looks about Him, and sees the weapons of evil that
wounded his own age. The arrogant spikes and spears, the
slim, sly knives, the scimitar in diplomatic sheath, crooked
and cruel, are hissing and raining sparks as they are sharp-
ened on monster wheels.

But the most fearful of them all, at the hands of the slaughterers,

are those on which has been engraved His own name, that are fashioned from the texts of His own words fused in the fire of hatred and hammered by hypocritical greed.

He presses His hand upon His heart; He feels that the age-long moment of His death has not yet ended, that new nails, turned out countless in numbers by those who are learned in cunning craftsmanship, pierce Him in every joint.

They had hurt Him once, standing at the shadow of their temple; they are born anew in crowds. From before their sacred altar they shout to the soldiers, "Strike" And the Son of Man in agony cries, "My God, My God why hast Thou forsaken Me?"^{xiii}

ⁱ See, for example, Dr. W. Stroud, *Treatise on the Physical Cause of the Death of Christ and its Relation to the Principles and Practice of Christianity*, (London: Hamilton and Adams, 1871) p 28-156, 489-494.

ⁱⁱ *Journal of the American Medical Association*, March 21, 1986, p.1463. Quoted in the book *Answering Islam*, by Norman L. Geisler & Abdul Saleeb, Baker House, Grand Rapids, 1993, p 230.

ⁱⁱⁱ Gary R. Habermas, *The Verdict of History* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), p.87f.

^{iv} F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents* (Cambridge: Tyndale, 1960), p.113.

^v *Ibid.*, p.113.

^{vi} Ibn Kathir, *Al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya*, Vol.1, p.182.

^{vii} Ibn al-Athir, *Tarikh al-Kamil* (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1965) p.319.

^{viii} Gary R. Habermas, *op.cit.*, p.91f.

^{ix} Gary R. Habermas, *op.cit.*, p.100.

^x Gary R. Habermas, *op.cit.*, p.107f.

^{xi} Awad Samaan, *Qadiatul Ghofran fil-Masibia* (Cairo, 1951, self-published), p.109.

^{xii} Gary R. Habermas, *op.cit.*, p.101.

^{xiii} Rabindranath Tagore, *Collected Poems and Plays* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p.453f.

Why Jesus Had to Die

13

The Bible and the Quran agree that human nature is sinful. We have seen already that the Quran confirms man's fall in the Garden of Eden. It tells the story of Adam and Eve (in Suras 2:35-38 and 7:19-26), saying that "Satan caused them to swerve." It also makes clear the consequences of this for their descendents. Sura 2:36 quotes God as saying to Adam and Eve (addressing them specifically as a pair), "Go you down [plural], your offspring enemies to each other...Go down, all of you [plural] from here" (Sura 2:36, 38). Sura 7:24 quotes God as saying (again, specifically to Adam and Eve as a pair), "Go you down [plural], one of you [plural] a foe to the other."

The Quran acknowledges the depravity of the human soul when it says:

Sura 11:9

He [man] is despairing, ungrateful.

Sura 12:53

The human is certainly prone to evil.

Sura 14:34

Surely man is a wrong-doer, ungrateful.

Sura 17:67

Indeed man is ever ungrateful.

Sura 33:72

He [man] has proved a tyrant and a fool.

Sura 100:6

Surely man is ungrateful to his Lord.

The Old Testament says, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). The New Testament says, “As it is written: ‘There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes.’...Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:10-20).

This is why every Muslim prays, “Forgive us our sins, and atone [*Kafar*, cover] for us our evil deeds, and take our souls in death in the company of the righteous” (Sura 3:193).

The big question is: How can this petition be granted?

I. GOOD DEEDS DO NOT SAVE.

The Quran teaches that good deeds annul evil ones. It says, “Establish prayer at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night. Surely good deeds will annul evil ones. This is a remembrance for the mindful” (Sura 11:114).

Here are some of the good deeds the Quran recommends for annulling evil:

Sura 2:271

To give charity in public is good, but to give alms to the poor secretly is better for you, and will atone for some of your sins.

Sura 5:12

If you establish worship and pay the zakat [alms], and believe in my messengers and support them, and lend to Allah a goodly loan, surely I shall remit your sins.

Sura 5:45

The eye for the eye...but if anyone remit the retaliation, it is an act of atonement for himself.

Sura 5:89

Allah will not call you to account for what is unintentional in your oaths, but He will call you to account for the oaths which you swear deliberately. The expiation for that is to feed ten of the poor with the average of that which you feed your own people, or the clothing of them, or the liberation of a slave. And for him who finds not, then a three days' fast.

Sura 29:7

As for those who believe and do good works, we shall remit for them their evil deeds, and shall repay them the best that they did.

These verses teach that prayer, almsgiving, supporting God's messengers, refusing to retaliate, releasing slaves and fasting are effective means of atonement.

The Bible, however, takes a radically different view. The New Testament teaches that good deeds cannot annul or wipe out bad ones. Rather:

Ephesians 2:8,9

It is by grace that you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.

Titus 3:3-7

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us not because of righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we may become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

God does not use a set of scales, putting our good works on one side and our evil ones on the other. A person cannot be saved even if his good deeds outweigh his bad ones by ten to one.

There are two reasons for this.

First, every good thing we do is a result of God's favor. He is the One who gave us life, power and the means to do good things. The money we give, the energy we use, the good health we enjoy, the time we put at His disposal – all these things are His divine gifts to us. When David was contributing to the building of God's temple in Jerusalem, he said to God: "My people and I cannot really give you anything, because everything is a gift from you, and we have only given back what is already yours" (1 Chronicles 29:14). God's gifts to us cannot be used to pay off our spiritual debts.

Second, no court in the world will allow a criminal to "earn back" his innocence by doing good deeds. Does giving all his money to the poor relieve a man of the guilt of murder? Of course not. The court must impose a punishment fitting to the crime, and the criminal must endure that punishment to the end. That is a fundamental principle of law. Similarly, we cannot employ pious deeds to wipe out our sins. Only Jesus was able to pay for our sins and trespasses. "This is a true saying to be completely accepted and believed: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. I am the worst of them" (1 Timothy 1:15).

II. WE NEED A RANSOM.

1. The ransom is a Biblical must.

The Bible says, "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22). This is what happened when Adam and Eve sinned and felt the shame of their nakedness. All their efforts to cover themselves failed. But God took the initiative by killing an animal, skinning it, and clothing them with its fur (Genesis 3:20). God Himself had prepared the atonement.

Abel and Cain, the two sons of Adam, presented offerings to God. God accepted Abel's offering because it was a sacrifice.

He refused Cain's because there was no shedding of blood in it (Genesis 4:3,4).

The great prophets of old offered animal sacrifices, asking God for forgiveness and thanking Him for His grace and salvation. Noah did it (see Genesis 8:20), Job did it (Job 1:5), and so did Abraham (Genesis 12:8). Isaac was redeemed with a great sacrifice (Genesis 22:13), and later he himself offered sacrifices to God (Genesis 26:25), as did his son Jacob (Genesis 35:3).

Almost the whole book of Leviticus deals with the laws God gave to Moses concerning the animal sacrifices that should be offered for the sins of the people. The children of Israel had to sacrifice the Passover lamb to escape from the bondage of Pharaoh. They were ordered to celebrate the Passover annually to commemorate their salvation from the Egyptian bondage (Exodus 12:1, 2). From then on, Aaron and his descendents, the Levites, were consecrated to present sacrifices to God. God said to Moses, "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for one's life" (Leviticus 17:11).

All these sacrifices were but ritual symbols of the one true sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Seeing Jesus, John the Baptist announced that in Him came the fulfillment of all the sacrificial offerings of the Law of Moses. He said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus is "our Passover lamb who was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:7). For:

Hebrews 9:22-28

In fact, the law [of Moses] requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness...For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Nor did He enter heaven to offer Himself again and again, the way the High Priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own...But now He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself...Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and He will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

2. The ransom of Abraham's "son" in the Quran

The Quran accepts the concept of "ransom" when it speaks about redeeming Abraham's son with a great sacrifice. It quotes God as saying about that redemption, "We ransomed him [the son] with a great sacrifice" (Sura 37:107).

But which son is meant? The commentary of al-Qurtubi on Sura 37:107 relates the opinion of some leading Muslims – including Muhammad himself, his cousin ibn Abbas, Ali, Umar, Abdulla ibn Massaoud, Abdulla ibn Umar and others – that the redeemed son was Isaac. Another group – including Muhammad and ibn Abbas (again), as well as Abu Huraira and Abu Tufail – hold the son to be Ishmael. Abdullah Yusef Ali, in his commentary on this same verse, said, "The ransom was not made by men, but by God. Here alone in the Quran it is God who pays the ransom."

According to al-Baidawi, "He was ransomed by what was sacrificed instead of him, thus the act by that was fulfilled." Commenting on the same verse, al-Razi quotes al-Suddi in saying that "Abraham was called out. He looked around and all of a sudden he saw a ram intermixed with white and black, descending from the mountain. He got up from beside his son, took the ram, slaughtered it, freed his son and said to him, 'My son, today you were given to me as a gift.' It was said that the ram was a great sacrifice because God accepted it as a ransom for Abraham's son."

Muslims have two annual feasts: *Eid al-Kabir* ("the Great Feast") and *Eid al-Saghir* ("the Minor Feast"). The second, which falls at the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, is also named *Eid al-Fitr* ("Breaking the Fast"). The first is *Eid al-Adha* ("the Feast of Sacrifice"). It commemorates the redemption of Abraham's son. During this feast animals should be slaughtered. Those who perform the *Hajj* slaughter their sacrifices in Mecca. Concerning this the Quran says:

Sura 22:32-36

Whoso magnifies the offerings consecrated to Allah, it surely is from devotion of the hearts. Therein are benefits for you for an appointed term; and afterward they are brought for sacrifice unto the ancient House. And for every

nation We have appointed a ritual, that they may mention the name of Allah over the beast of cattle that He has given them for food. And the camels, We have appointed them among the ceremonies of Allah. Therein you have much good. So mention the name of Allah over them when they are drawn up in lines. Then when their flanks fall, eat thereof and feed the beggar and the suppliant. We made them subject to you, that haply you may give thanks.

Commenting on Sura 37:107, al-Ghazali says, “Slaughtering the sacrifice is a means to draw nearer to God by way of obedience. Therefore perform the sacrifice and hope for God to liberate from hell, by each part of it, a part of you. For as thus came the promise: the bigger the sacrifice is and the more numerous its parts are, the more fully your redemption from hell is...Seek nearness of God by sacrificing an animal.”ⁱ

According to Aisha, Muhammad said concerning the sacrifice on *Eid al-Adha*, “Man has not done anything, on the Day of Sacrifice, more pleasing to God than spilling blood. The animal sacrificed will come on the Day of Resurrection with its horns, its hair and its hooves, and will make the scales of his actions heavy. Verily its blood reaches the acceptance of God before it falls on the ground. Therefore, be joyful in it.”ⁱⁱ

But the term *al-Adha* in Islam has been emptied of its spiritual meaning. *Al-Adha*, the Sacrifice, is not about Abraham eating the meat of the “great sacrifice,” or giving it to the beggars and the suppliants, or earning remission from Hell. Rather it is about the principle of substitution. The ram was sacrificed to redeem Isaac. But God sacrificed Jesus, His only Son, the Lamb of God, to take away the sin of the world (John 1:29,36).

The feast of *al-Adha* reminds us that salvation by a substitute is God’s only way of salvation. “God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Unfortunately the Muslims ignore the offerings of the Law of Moses and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who carries the sin of the world. And by the same token they ignore the real meaning of *al-Adha*, their own feast.

III. GOD'S JUSTICE AND MERCY MUST BE RECONCILED.

The Quran teaches that God is just. "As for those who disbelieve, I shall punish them with a very heavy punishment in the world and the hereafter; and they will have no helpers" (Sura 3:56). Absolute justice must be satisfied. The just God will never overlook sin. Either the sinner has to pay for his sin, or someone else has to pay in his stead.

The Quran also teaches that God is merciful. "Your Lord has prescribed for you mercy, that whoso of you does evil and repents afterward and does right, Allah is forgiving, merciful...And had it not been for the grace of Allah and mercy on you in this world and the hereafter, a great punishment would have befallen you" (Sura 6:54 and 24:14).

The Quran even mentions mercy and justice together. It says, "Know that Allah is severe in punishment, but that Allah is forgiving, merciful...Assuredly your Lord is swift in punishment, and assuredly He is forgiving, merciful" (Sura 5:98 and 7:167).

So the Quran agrees with the Bible that God is both just and merciful. In Him the attributes of mercy and justice go hand in hand. However, a problem arises. If He forgives the sinner, His mercy functions but His justice does not. And if He punishes the sinner, His justice functions but His mercy does not. How, then, can we reconcile these two contradictory attributes?

The Quran has no answer. But the Bible does – it tells that God's mercy and justice *both* functioned on the cross. Mercy and justice were reconciled in Jesus, who carried the penalty for our sins. He could do this because, as we have shown already, He is God who came in human form to save mankind by paying the supreme penalty. The Bible says, "God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

A Muslim asked the author, "How come the merciful God couldn't forgive man's sins without crucifying Jesus, His holy messenger?" This question implies that Jesus was obliged to

die. The truth is that Jesus voluntarily gave His life to save mankind. When Peter tried to defend his Master, Jesus told him, “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” (Matthew 26:51-54). He had said earlier, “The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father” (John 10:17,18).

In voluntarily accepting the cross, Jesus allowed both mercy and justice to be satisfied:

Isaiah 53:4-6

Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

The Psalmist wrote: “Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:9,10). The Psalmist’s prophecy was fulfilled one thousand years later in the cross of Jesus Christ, where God’s mercy and justice embraced. And because of what was done on the cross, Christ transforms whoever believes in Him:

II Corinthians 5:17-21

The old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God was making His appeal through us. We

implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is why Jesus came to our world! He came to die for our sins. When Simeon took the baby Jesus in his arms, he praised God, saying, "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel." Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul, too" (Luke 2:25-35). That was the sword of the crucifixion.

Jesus said, "As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way, the son of man must be lifted up so that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:14-16). This is the salvation Jesus prepared for us on the cross. How true is the saying of the Scripture:

Hebrews 10:19-23

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.

A pastor of a small village church was about to move to another post. He wanted to know if the villagers had understood what he continually taught about the salvation of Christ. He went to the field where many of his members were working. After greeting them, he asked, "Who can explain to

me what salvation is?” A villager made a circle of straw, then took a worm and put it in the middle of the circle. He lit the straw with fire. The creature squirmed, sensing the danger, but unable to save itself. At this point, the villager reached down and lifted the worm to safety. Then he said, “Salvation is a caring, powerful hand reaching down to the perishing soul, transferring it from the fire to safety. This is what Jesus had done for me and for all mankind.”

The pastor’s heart was satisfied. “God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

IV. WHY DO MUSLIMS REFUSE THE ATONEMENT OF CHRIST?

Dialogue with Muslims reveals two main reasons why they refuse the atonement of Christ:

1. Muslims think that sin does not hurt God or transgress His laws.

To the Muslim, God is great. No sin disturbs Him or saddens His heart. There is no meaning to the charge, “You have wearied the Lord with your words” (Malachi 2:17). No Muslim says to God, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51:4).

To a Muslim, sinning is like getting the wrong answer in an exam. Saying “2+2=5” is technically wrong, but it does not hurt the teacher of arithmetic, nor does it damage arithmetic laws. To Muslims, therefore, Jews and Christians appear to magnify the wickedness of sin, creating a problem that should not exist.

2. Muslims think God forgives whom He wills.

In Muslim thinking, forgiveness and the offering of paradise are God’s decisions. They depend on nothing except His will. So why the need for the atoning death of Christ? Having complicated matters already by magnifying the problem of sin, Christians complicate them still further by proposing

that God should have to die in order to put things right!

The simple Christian answer to these two points is that we are not the ones to decide how serious sin is in the sight of God. It is for God to tell us. Moses in the Old Testament, David in the Psalms, and Jesus in the Gospels harmoniously reveal to us God's plan of salvation. The Scripture says, "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10,12).

V. CRUCIFIXION LEADS TO A HOLY LIFE.

The cross of Christ shows us that sin is costly. God "did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). Sin is an attack against God Himself. When David sinned, he confessed to God, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge" (Psalm 51:4).

Uniting with Christ in baptism, the believer says, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The word of God says:

Romans 6:3-12

Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with Him like this in His death, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin...Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts

of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.

II Corinthians 5:14-21

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that One died for all, and therefore all died. And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again. So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view...Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!...God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Finding this new life in the crucified Christ, we say, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

VI. THE CROSS SPEAKS THE LOGIC OF LOVE.

A university professor, a Muslim, had two doctorates and was working on his third. For his research, he had to interview a Christian pastor. The pastor received him graciously, and answered his questions in detail. Finally the professor asked the pastor, "How come you are such a good thinker – and still a Christian? How can you believe that Almighty God has a Son, or that He would allow His only Son to be crucified without rescuing Him from the hands of the wicked? And how can you believe that Jesus, the miracle-performer, failed to perform a miracle to kill His enemies and save Himself?"

Humbly, the pastor lifted up a fast prayer for guidance. Then he asked the professor, "Do you have children?"

"Yes, I have a daughter," the professor answered.

"Have you ever given your daughter a ride on your back?"

With a big smile the professor said, "Yes. And which father did not?"



The Logic of Love

The pastor said, "I will ask another question. I hope it will not provoke you. In asking it, I am trying to make a point."

"Please do," answered the professor.

"Why don't you let your university students ride your back?"

The professor was offended. However, the pastor quieted him by saying, "I am merely making the point that the mind and the heart have different logics. At home you apply the logic of your heart. You offer your daughter a ride on your back, and you are right to do so. This is the logic of love. In the university you apply the logic of your mind. You ask for respect and honor, and you are right to do that, too."

The pastor went on to say, "The Bible teaches us that God is love. Applying the logic of the heart, He had compassion on us. The book of Romans says, 'You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'" (Romans 5:6-8).

A Muslim lady, a Parliamentarian, visited the same pastor, and raised the same question: "How come you are still a Christian? How do you believe that Almighty God has a Son, and sends His only Son to die?"

The pastor asked her how she reacted when her three-month-old daughter, who was completely dependent on her for everything and unable to render her any service, cried after midnight and woke her up? Was it not true that, physically, she benefited nothing from her daughter? Wasn't the daughter a trouble and an inconvenience? The mother had done a long day's work, and would have another long day tomorrow. She could do without being woken in the middle of the night. Surely, the pastor went on to say, the logical thing to do was to throw the useless, bothersome child out of the window!

At first, the Parliamentarian thought that the pastor was out of his mind. But he went on to explain that she treated her child, not with the logic of the mind, but with the logic of the heart. Love motivates the mother to wake up in the early

hours, and to do whatever is necessary for the comfort of that crying child. She will not leave the child until she is satisfied. Likewise, God in His love cannot leave a suffering sinner to perish in hell. "He wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4).

Some see in the cross the logic of the love of God. Others see only irrationality and weakness. "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (2 Corinthians 1:18, 22-24).

Aren't we lucky that our parents used with us the logic of love, not the logic of the mind? Had they applied the logic of the mind we would not be in the land of the living! And just as we receive and pass on the logic of love in our relations with children, so we are empowered by the cross to pass on the logic of God's love to all around us:

1 John 3:16-18

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 John 4:7-12

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed His love among us: He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:19-21

We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

John 3:16 summarizes the Gospel message. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." When Jesus was asked, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" His answer was, "The most important one is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

VII. THE CROSS TEACHES US LOVE.

1. The cross teaches us to love our family.

The Scripture points to Christ's love for the church as the model for family love. It says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to Himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of His body. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Ephesians 5:25-32).

2. The cross teaches us to love even our enemies.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

This great example teaches us to love our enemies. Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

The apostle Paul added, “Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:19-21).

In the cross we see and touch the logic of love. We learn to love because God first loved us. The cross of Jesus Christ is not only a historical fact – it is a life-changing daily experience. If you put your faith in what Jesus had done for you on the cross, you can experience the saving power of His atonement. There is power in the “Great Sacrifice.”

ⁱ Al-Ghazali, *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, Vol.1 (Cairo: n.d.), pp.243,250.

ⁱⁱ *Mishkat*, Book IV, Chapter 42, section 2.

Why Christians Believe in the Holy Trinity

14

Doctrinal arguments about the Trinity – the three Persons of the Christian Godhead – can seem dry and remote. But in writing about prayer, C.S. Lewis shows how Christians experience God the Trinity in their everyday life:

An ordinary simple Christian kneels down to pray. He is trying to get in touch with God. He knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God: God, so to speak, inside him. But he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God – that Jesus is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. You see what is happening. God is the thing to which he is praying – the goal he is trying to reach. God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on – the motive power.¹

Christianity is unique in its doctrine of the Trinity. The ancient Egyptians believed in a triad of gods – Osiris, the father; Isis, the mother; and Horus, the son. But these were never seen as a single deity. They were a family, only becoming a triad when Osiris and Isis gave birth to their son. Similarly, the Hindu triad (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva), which corresponds to the Hindu cosmic cycle of Being, Becoming and Dissolution, has never been described as “three in one.” At best, the divine triads of other religions only foreshadow the full truth about God – a truth only Christianity would announce.

I. THE TRINITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

This does not mean, however, that glimpses of the Trinity cannot be found in the Old Testament. What becomes explicit in the New Testament remains implicit in the Old. But it is clearly present, as these examples show:

- **God's name.** The common Hebrew name for God – *Elohim* – is always in the plural. Some have claimed that the plural form expresses respect and honor, but this is not the rule in the Hebrew language. God usually speaks in the singular, and so, when He uses the plural form, this reveals His unity to be complex and dynamic rather than simple. When He created man, He said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Genesis 1:26).
- **Babel.** Later in Genesis, worldly-minded people said to each other, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.” They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. So God said, “Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other.” So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city” (Genesis 11:3,7,8).
- **Wisdom.** The Old Testament personifies the creative aspect of God and His governance as “Wisdom.” Scripture says, “I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence; I possess knowledge and discretion...I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power. By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just...The LORD brought Me forth as the first of His works, before His deeds of old; I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began...I was there when He set the heavens in place, when He marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when He established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when He gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep His command, and when He marked out the

foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at His side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in His presence, rejoicing in His whole world and delighting in mankind” (Proverbs 8:12-31).

- **The Spirit of God.** The Old Testament reveals the Holy Spirit as the source of blessings, strength, courage, culture and sound government. To construct the tabernacle, God chose Bezalel of the tribe of Judah, and said, “I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” (Exodus 31:3). The Holy Spirit appears in another incident from this period: “Moses...brought together seventy of their [the Jewish] elders and had them stand around the Tent. Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and He took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again” (Numbers 11:24,25).
- **Isaiah.** The prophet Isaiah heard God speaking of Himself as singular and plural: “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for Us?’” Isaiah responds, “Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6:8). Also, in a prophetic vision Isaiah heard these words of Jesus: “Come near me and listen to this: From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there. And now the Sovereign LORD has sent Me, and His Spirit” (Isaiah 48:16).

II. THE TRINITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

What the Old Testament glimpses afar off in its references to a “plural” God, the New Testament begins to reveal in more detail.

First, the Holy Spirit emerges far more clearly as a character. John the Baptist announced, “After me will come One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11). Earlier we are told that God the Father sent the Holy Spirit to the Virgin Mary to give her a Son (Matthew 1:18-25).

The first view of the Triune God occurs at the baptism of Jesus. Matthew reports, “As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:16,17).

The New Testament makes clear that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have different roles in the work of saving mankind. God the Father thought of it; God the Son accomplished it; God the Holy Spirit convinces us to accept it. This is clear from the following passage:

Ephesians 1:3-14

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The Father:

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will – to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.

The Son:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory.

The Holy Spirit:

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory.

III. THE HISTORY OF THE TRINITY DOCTRINE

The word “Trinity” is not found in the Bible, but it sums up what the Bible teaches about God. The term itself was probably coined in the second century AD, by Tertullian. In an advanced exposition of the Trinity, he said, “We believe in only one God...that the only one God has also a Son, His Word, who has issued out of Himself...the Son then sent, according to His promise, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, out of the Father.” Tertullian balanced the divine unity “into Trinity, setting forth Father, Son and Spirit as three.”ⁱⁱ

One of the earliest creeds is the Apostles' Creed. Its exact date and origin are unknown. It says, “I believe in God the Father almighty, and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary...I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

But the creed did not win universal support in the Christian church. The Alexandrian monk, Arius (AD 250-336) denied it, teaching that the “Word” was God's greatest creation. This heresy was refuted by St. Athanasius of Alexandria (AD 296-373), who said that the “Word” and the Father are consubstantial (of one substance), co-equal (identical in rank) and co-eternal (equally timeless), and asserted the full deity of the Holy Spirit. In the year AD 325 St. Athanasius composed the Nicene Creed, which formally condemned Arianism as a heresy and proclaimed the Trinity as official church doctrine:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth...

And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of

God, Light of Light, very God of very God...being of one substance [Greek: Homousios] with the Father, by whom all things were made...

And I believe in the Holy Spirit...

The Council of Constantinople adopted this teaching about the Holy Spirit in AD 381. The church Councils also rejected another heresy about the Trinity, put about by Sibalius. This asserted that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three manifestations of one God, each manifested in a certain period. The Father's period ended with the incarnation of Christ, and the period of the Holy Spirit, which began with the day of Pentecost, continues to the present. The Church rejected the teaching of Sibalius, arguing that all three Persons of the Trinity co-existed from eternity.

Since the Councils of AD 325 and AD 381, the church worldwide has officially accepted the doctrine of God as a threefold Unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church believes (to use the words of St. Athanasius) that "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, yet they are not three gods, but one God. The Father is Eternal, the Son is Eternal, the Spirit is Eternal, but One Eternal."

IV. BIBLICAL PROOFS OF THE HOLY TRINITY

A lecturer once mocked the doctrine of the Trinity saying, "How can three be one and one be three?" Someone in the audience replied by asking him, "How does this candle burn?" The lecturer answered, "Wax, wick and air unite to give this light you see." The listener then asked, "Do you understand how these three different materials produce one light?" "No" was the answer. The listener concluded, "Then how do you believe in this light without understanding how it comes to be?"

There is no reason why the innermost nature of God should be easy to understand. To that extent, objections based on the idea that "the Trinity doesn't make sense" are rather beside the point. The fact that we can't make sense of it doesn't mean it can't exist; nor does it mean that the idea itself is absurd. We don't understand subatomic particles, or

the functioning of the human brain, or the nature of time. Yet we accept them, even depend on them, in order to function in the material world. How much more will this be true of the spiritual world?

The doctrine of the Trinity can be summarized in six points:

- The Bible introduces to us three Persons, considering them as one God.
- The Trinity is one essence, not three Gods.
- Each Person has His special personality.
- This Trinity is true and eternal, not superficial or time-bound.
- The three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – are co-equal.
- This doctrine is the key to understanding all the other Christian doctrines.

1. God is one.

All those who speak to us through the pages of the New Testament demonstrate a clear understanding that God is one in essence:

- **Jesus.** When Jesus was asked about the most important commandment, He answered, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31). Before His ascension, Jesus ordered, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name [not “names”] of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19).
- **Paul.** The apostle Paul says, “There is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith” (Romans 3:30). Paul also says, “There is one God” (1 Timothy 2:5) and penned the

Christian Benediction: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God [the Father], and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

- **James.** The apostle James says, “You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder” (James 2:19).
- **John.** The apostle John says, “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). This verse, sometimes said to be missing from the most ancient Bible manuscripts, has been shown by archeology to belong to the very earliest versions of John’s epistles.

2. The Father is God.

Besides asserting the oneness of God, the Bible makes very clear the distinct identity and role of each Person in the Trinity. Some of the things we are told about the Father are:

- **The Father blesses believers.** “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).
- **The Father gives us new birth.** “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3).
- **The Father is omnipresent.** According to Paul we have “One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6).
- **The Father is worthy of worship.** Jesus said, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23).
- **The Father is holy.** Jesus said, “Holy Father, protect by the power of your name” (John 17:11).

3. Jesus is God.

The Bible also speaks about Jesus Christ as God. Some of the things we are told about Jesus are:

- **Jesus is God with us.** “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a Son, and will call Him Emmanuel [‘God with us’]” (Isaiah 7:14).
- **Jesus is the Mighty God.** “For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).
- **The origin of Jesus is from eternity.** Addressing Bethlehem, the city where Jesus was born, the prophet Micah said, “From you shall come forth for me One who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days” (Micah 5:2).
- **Jesus will rule forever.** The writer to the Hebrews quotes the prophecy of Psalm 45:6 as referring to Jesus. He says, “But about the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom’” (Hebrews 1:8).
- **Jesus contains the fullness of God.** Paul says, “In Him [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Colossians 2:9).
- **Jesus is the eternal Alpha and Omega.** Jesus Himself said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8).
- **Jesus is Lord.** “This is the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36).
- **Jesus is omnipresent.** He said, “Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20) and, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).
- **Jesus is worthy of worship.** “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:10-11).
- **Jesus is holy.** The angel said to the Virgin Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High

will overshadow you. So the Holy One to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

- **Jesus is Lord and God.** Jesus accepted the worship of Thomas when Thomas said, “My Lord and my God” (John 20:28).

4. The Holy Spirit is God.

Some of the things the Bible tells us about the Holy Spirit are:

- **The Holy Spirit inhabits God’s people.** The bodies of all believers in Christ, in all ages, are His temples. He dwells in them all at the same time. “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19).
- **The Holy Spirit is God.** Sinning against the Holy Spirit is sinning against God. Peter said to the lying disciple Ananias, “How is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?...What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God” (Acts 5:3, 4).
- **The Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets.** Paul said to his disbelieving audience, “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your forefathers when He said through Isaiah the prophet, ‘Go to this people and say, You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving’” (Acts 28:25, 26).
- **The Holy Spirit is everlasting.** The Bible says, “How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God” (Hebrews 9:14).
- **The Holy Spirit knows everything.** “It is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him’ – but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches all things,

even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9-11).

- **The Holy Spirit is Lord.** "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17).
- **The Holy Spirit is omnipresent.** The psalmist said to God, "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast" (Psalm 139:7-10).

V. HOW THE PERSONS OF THE TRINITY INTERRELATE

The Old Testament testifies to the oneness of God, expressing it as a composite and dynamic oneness. It says, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4). At the same time, Psalm 110:1 reads, "The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand." And Proverbs 30:4 asks, "Who has ascended to heaven and come down?...What is His name, and what is His Son's name?"

From the earliest, then, we see an understanding that God is not a simple unity, as the Muslims believe about Allah. He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of the three Persons is God. And since God is one, these three Persons must be one.

Finally, then, what does the Bible tell us of the way the three Persons of the Trinity relate to one another?

- **The Three Persons in the Trinity praise each other.** The Father glorifies the Son (Matthew 3:17, 17:5, John 5:20-23). The Son honors the Father (John 5:19, 30, 31, 12:28). The Holy Spirit honors the Son (John 15:26, 16:8-10,14).
- **The Three cooperate in intercession for believers.** Paul says, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself inter-

cedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will" (Romans 8:26, 27). Jesus too intercedes: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:33, 34). The writer to the Hebrews adds of Jesus, "He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

- **The Three have eternal, mutual love between them.** Jesus said, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24).
- **The Three have mutual respect.** Jesus makes this reference in His prayer: "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5).
- **The Three mutually share thought and counsel.** Paul refers to: "A faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2). And at the end of the letter to the Romans he gives this benediction: "Now to Him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past" (Romans 16:25).
- **The Three share mutual happiness.** "And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ" (Ephesians 1:9).

ⁱ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1975), p.137.

ⁱⁱ R. T. Kendall, *Understanding Theology* (London: Christian Focus, 1999), p. 29.

15

Explaining the Trinity to Muslims

Finally, it is important to realize that the Trinity rejected by Muslims is not the Trinity of Scripture. What Muslims reject is a misunderstanding of the Trinity – a misunderstanding that Christians will reject as well. The misunderstanding has two foundations:

I. WHY MUSLIMS REJECT THE TRINITY

1. Muslims think that the Trinity must be structured like a human family.

To the Muslim, the idea that God contains Father and Son automatically implies that God must have married, and that the Son is therefore not eternal but a later addition to the Godhead.

Christians, of course, believe no such thing. The fatherhood of God is not physical, but spiritual. It is not bound by the same laws as human fatherhood. Human fatherhood is really only an analogy to help us understand a little of what, in reality, lies far beyond our grasp. The Biblical usage of “Father” and “Son” explains the relation between the Father and His eternal “Word.” Both are beyond time. Both are united in the Holy Spirit. Both are fully and equally God.

We have seen already that such a figurative use of the title “Father” is common in the Arabic language. An adopted son has a father, but has not been “fathered” by him in a physical sense. In a looser way, the Quran draws on fatherhood

as a metaphor when it calls Muhammad's foe "*Abu Lahab*," or "Father of Flames" (see Sura 111:1-5) and the Preserved Tablet "*Umm al-Kitab*," or "Mother of the Book" (see Sura 3:7, 13:39, 43:4). Christians do the same when they refer to early bishops as "the fathers of the church," as does Scripture when it describes Abraham as "the father of all believers."

The idea that members of the Godhead have *literal* parent-child relationships originates far outside of Christianity. A pre-Islamic Arab myth said that Allah had three daughters: Allat, Uzza and Manat (Sura 53:19). Another said that Allah fathered children through intimacy with a Jinn (Sura 6:101). A third said that Allah adopted females from among the angels (Sura 17:40), and a fourth that Allah, having begotten children, chose the daughters for Himself and gave the sons to the Meccans (Sura 37:151-153 and 43:16).

Muhammad rightly found these crude beliefs offensive. He also reacted against the Mariamite heresy, which imported the idea of "literal fatherhood" into the Christian Godhead and taught that the Trinity consisted of Father (God), Mother (Mary) and Son (Jesus). This heresy plainly distorts Scriptural teaching, as does the belief that Jesus asked mankind to worship Him and His mother apart from God (see Sura 5:116). Orthodox Christianity has stood firm against both, and Islamic attacks on them are attacks on heresies, not attacks on Biblical truth.

2. Muslims think that Three cannot, by definition, be the same as One.

Again, it is a fact accepted by both Muslims and Christians that $1 + 1 + 1$ does not equal 3. Christianity emphasizes the oneness of God no less than Islam does. But God is not a mathematical concept. Nor does any Scripture, Christian or Muslim, interpret "oneness" as meaning that God has only one attribute or only one characteristic. Dr. R. Thomas puts it like this:

The word in dispute is "one." Muslims insist that it must stand for a static arithmetical unit, whereas we see oneness in terms of dynamic unity – a unity moving forward towards an end, when God will be all in all. Muslims regard oneness as absolute, in the sense of standing apart from all else, and

so exaggerate Allah's aloofness and distance from man. He could not be described as loving, pitying, suffering. Yet paradoxically the Quran talks of God's anger, approval, hatred and affection.

Natural phenomena belie the static concept of oneness. Is there any entity of which we are aware that is an absolute indivisible unity? Space has three dimensions, length, breadth and height. Time can be conceived only as past, present and future. There are three primary colors in the spectrum of light. Our mental life operates on thinking, willing and feeling. Yet each of us is one not three.

Several levels of unity are conceivable, familial, political, and nuclear. We used to think of the atom as indivisible, for that is what atomos means. Now we know that it holds together the electron, proton and neutron, a unity that can be split. Most intimate of all is the family unit consisting of two, three or more persons.

May we not then fairly assume that beyond these observable unities there lies a deeper, greater more stable oneness, binding three Persons in a Trinity of essence and loving outreach?

The Quran admits that Christ the Son of Mary is God's Word and Spirit (Sura 4:171). This is a recognizable deformation of the truth, but it concedes enough for believers to see in the Word and the Spirit the completion of God's unity.¹

II. QURANIC VERSES ATTACK ONLY FALSE DOCTRINES OF THE TRINITY.

No Quranic verse attacks the real Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which is the unity of God the Father, His Word Jesus Christ, and His Holy Spirit. Verses dealing with the unity of the Godhead – all of which are quoted below – in fact target false doctrines and aberrations:

Sura 2:116, 117

They say, "Allah has taken a son." Glory be to Him, To Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him. Originator of the heavens and the earth: when He decrees a matter, He says to it, "Be," and it is.

- Christians never said that God “took a son.” They believe that the Son was with the Father from the beginning. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4).

Sura 3:59

The likeness of Jesus with Allah is as the likeness of Adam. He created Him of dust, then he said to him, “Be!” And he is.

- This analogy fails, mainly because in other verses the Quran says that Jesus and Adam are different – Adam being created from dust, and Jesus born by the Holy Spirit.
- About Jesus the Quran says, “The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary was a messenger of Allah, and His Word which He conveyed to Mary and a Spirit from Him, so believe in Allah and His messengers” (Sura 4:171). The Bible teaches that when God sent the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, he said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a Son, and you are to give Him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; His kingdom will never end.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy One to be born will be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:26-35).
- By contrast, Sura 7:12 agrees with Genesis 2:7 that “The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.” Sura 2:36 adds that Adam sinned and led mankind to destruction. Yet according to Sura 19:19, Jesus is holy and faultless.

Sura 3:64

O People of the Book [Jews and Christians]! Come to common terms as between us and you: that we worship none but Allah; that we associate no partners with Him; and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah.

Sura 9:31

They have made their rabbis and their monks and the Messiah son of Mary apart from Allah, though they were only ordered to worship one God. There is no God but Him. Transcendent is He above what they associate.

- By calling Jesus “God” and “Son of God,” Christians do not “associate partners” with God. The Quran itself calls Jesus “Word of God” and “a Spirit from Him.” If Muslims think that Jesus is outside God, they are implying that God is without a word and without a mind!
- Second, this verse specifically attacks Christians who would bow down to their religious leaders. This might have been a cultural habit. Nevertheless, true believers will agree with Muslims that mere human beings should not be thought of, or treated, as though they were on a par with God.

Sura 4:171, 172

O People of the Scripture [Jews and Christians]! Commit no excess in your religion, nor say nothing but the truth about Allah. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, is a messenger of Allah, and His word, which He conveyed to Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not “three.” Cease! [It is] better for you! Allah is only one God. Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son. His is all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. And Allah is sufficient as Defender. The Messiah will never disdain to be a slave to Allah, nor will the favored angels. Whoso disdains His service and is proud, all such will He assemble to Him.

- The creed of the Trinity does not say “three” but “One God in three Persons.” Commenting on these verses, al-Baidawi says, “Say not three, that is, Allah, Christ and Mary. Or do not say that God is three persons.” He then interprets

Father as *dhat*, or “essence,” Son as *ilm*, or “knowledge,” and the Holy Spirit as *hayat*, or “the life of God.”

- The statement “Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son” negates any physical relationship or childbearing between God and a wife or spouse. The idea is mentioned twice in the Quran (Sura 6:102 and Sura 72:3), both times attacking a pagan doctrine that is equally alien to Christianity. The Bible teaches that God is Spirit (see John 4:24). The relation of Jesus to the Father is therefore a spiritual one.

Sura 5:17

They indeed have disbelieved who say, “Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary.” Say, “Who then has the least power against God, if He had willed to destroy the Messiah son of Mary, and His mother and everyone on earth?” Allah’s is the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them. He creates what He will. And He has power over all things.

- “Allah is the Messiah son of Mary.” But Christians do not believe that God is Christ, the Messiah. They believe that God is Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus is God – but God is not Jesus. God is more than Jesus: He is the Triune Godhead.
- “Who then has the least power against God, if He had willed to destroy the Messiah son of Mary, and his mother and everyone on earth?” We answer this Quranic quotation by saying that God’s attributes do not allow Him to destroy Jesus and His mother. He chose Mary to be the mother of the Messiah, and sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world! God’s power, holiness and love work harmoniously together.

Sura 5:72-76

They do blaspheme who say: “Allah is Christ the son of Mary.” But Christ said, “O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.” Whoever ascribes partners to Allah, for him Allah has forbidden paradise, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrongdoers be no one to help. They do blaspheme who say, “Allah is the third of three”

for there is no god except one God. If they desist not from so saying, a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them. Why turn they not to Allah and seek His Forgiveness? For Allah is Oft Forgiving, Most Merciful. Christ, the son of Mary, was only a Messenger; many were the Messengers that passed away before Him. His mother was a saintly woman. They both used to eat food. See how We make the revelations clear for them; and see how they are turned away. Say, "Do you worship in place of Allah that which has no power either to harm or benefit you? But Allah, He it is that hears and knows all things."

- As for the statement, "They do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is Christ'" we repeat what has been said already about God being Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Therefore this verse cannot be seen as an attack on Christ's deity.
- "Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord." Jesus said to the disciples concerning His ascension, "I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God" (John 20:17). He did not say "Our Father and Our God," because His relationship to God is different from that of His disciples. His is original and merited sonship; our sonship is unearned and bestowed through grace. As God appearing in the flesh, Jesus had two natures. Only as the Son of Man does He say "My Father...My Lord" – because at that time He had humbled Himself and taken the form of a man. He "made Himself of no reputation, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:7).
- "Ascribing partners to Allah." Jesus is not a partner to Allah. He is God Himself. He is not a part of God. He is the very God.
- Christians never said that God is "the third of three." Our God is one God. Yes, God's oneness is a combined and dynamic unity, but He is still one.
- Jesus and His mother did "eat food" because He is God incarnate. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God

in the beginning...The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1,2,14).

- “Worshipping in place of Allah that which has no power either to harm or benefit.” Christians never worshipped Jesus in the place of Allah. Allah is Father and Son and Holy Spirit.
- As Savior, Jesus benefits those who accept Him as a redeemer. Those who refuse to believe in Jesus will perish. He said, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son” (John 3:16-18).

Sura 5:116-118

And when Allah said, “O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to mankind, Take me and my mother for two gods apart from Allah.” He said, “Be glorified! It was not mine to say that to which I had no right. If I used to say it, then You knew it. You know what is in my mind, and I know not what is in Your mind. Assuredly, You, only You, are the Knower of things hidden. I spoke to them only that which You commanded me, [saying]: Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when You took me You were the Watcher over them. You are Witness over all things. If you punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, You, only You, are the Mighty, the Wise.”

- Jesus never said, “Take me and my mother for two gods apart from Allah.” And Christians never said that He did! There is no basis for such a statement in God’s revealed Scriptures.

- With all respect to the Virgin Mary, Scripture never includes her in the Holy Trinity.
- “I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when You took me You were the Watcher over them.” According to this statement, Jesus does the same work the Father does. They both witness. The authority of Jesus equals the authority of the Father.

Sura 6:102

How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort.

- The same idea is repeated in Sura 72:3, and has been dealt with at the beginning of this chapter. The sonship of the Messiah is spiritual not physical, and there was no physical relationship between God and the Virgin Mary.

Sura 9:30

The Jews said, “Uzair is the son of God.” The Christians said, “Jesus is the son of God.” That is a saying from their mouth. They but imitate what the unbelievers of old used to say. Allah’s curse be on them! How they are deluded away from the Truth!

- There is no mention in the Old Testament that Uzair is the son of God. Some Muslim commentators say that Uzair is Ezra, the scribe. If Uzair is the Biblical Ezra, the Jews never called him the son of God. Possibly that was an invention of a heretical cult in the Arab Peninsula during the days of Muhammad.
- There is no similarity between the sonship of Jesus to God and the sonship of Uzair. The analogy does not stand.

Sura 112:1-4

Say: He is Allah, One God, the Eternal, Absolute; He did not beget, and has not been begotten; And equal to Him is not any one.

- Christians agree with the Muslims on the content of these verses, though perhaps a Christian would like to re-phrase them: “Say, He is God, one God, the Eternal, Absolute; who has not been begotten, and does not beget; And equal to Him is not any one.”

- Such re-phrasing is necessary for the following reasons: (1) It is a displacement of order to say “He did not beget, and has not been begotten.” No one can beget without being begotten first. (2) “He did not beget” negates the fact in the past tense only, while “does not beget” covers all possible tenses.

III. ISLAMIC PROOFS OF THE TRINITY

1. The Quran mentions the Holy Trinity implicitly.

Although Jews, Christians and Muslims differ in the way they talk about God, in fact they all believe in God, His Word, and His Spirit.

Jewish Scriptures say, “Behold My servant whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom my soul delights. I have put my Spirit upon him. He will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1).

Christian Scriptures say, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:8).

The Quran says, “We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear proofs, and we strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit” (Sura 2:87). The words are repeated in the same Sura (verse 253). Sura 5:110 quotes God as saying, “O Jesus, son of Mary, remember My favor to you and to your mother; how I strengthened you with the Holy Spirit.”

In these three Quranic verses we find the Father who strengthens, Jesus, the One strengthened, and the Holy Spirit through whom the strengthening took place.

2. The Quran considers Christians to be monotheists.

Sura 29:46

Argue not with the People of the Book, unless it be in a way that is better, save with such of them as have dealt wrongfully with you: And say, “We believe in that which has been revealed unto us and revealed unto you; our God and your God is one, and to Him we surrender.”

As noted at the beginning of this book, Sura 29:46 lays strict responsibilities on the Muslim to treat good Jews and good Christians well; to believe in the Old Testament revealed to the Jews and the New Testament revealed to the Christians;

and to believe that the God of the Jews and the Christians is their own God, to whom they must surrender. In other words, Christians are seen neither as infidels nor as polytheists.

Sura 5:5

This day are [all] things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. [Lawful unto you in marriage] are [not only] chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book, revealed before your time, when you give them their due dowers, and desire chastity, not lewdness, nor secret intrigues. If any one rejects faith, fruitless is his work, and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost.

Though it allows a Muslim male to marry a Christian or Jewish female, the Quran forbids him to marry a polytheist. Sura 2:221 says, “Do not marry unbelieving women until they believe: a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allure you. Nor marry [your girls] to unbelievers until they believe: a slave man who believes is better than an unbeliever even though he allure you. Unbelievers do beckon you to the Fire. But Allah beckons by His Grace to the Garden and forgiveness, and makes His Signs clear to mankind: that they may receive admonition.” Clearly, therefore, the Quran distinguishes Christians from polytheists.

Sura 4:48

Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives anything else, to whom He pleases; to set up partners with Allah has indeed forged a mighty sin.

This means that God may forgive all sins except the sin of polytheism. Yet the Quran says that Allah forgives the Jews, the Christians and the Sabaeans on the grounds that their faith is monotheistic. It says, “To those who believe, Jews, Christians and Sabaeans, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does what is right; shall be rewarded by their Lord; no fear shall come upon them, neither shall they regret” (Sura 2:62). The idea is repeated in Sura 5:69 and Sura 22:17.

IV. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY SOLVES A PROBLEM.

Muslims believe that God's characteristics are eternal and numerous, but that He is one in essence. They include among His characteristics such things as life, knowledge, ability, will, hearing, seeing, speaking, and love. The Quran quotes Allah as saying to Moses, "I endued you with love from me" (Sura 20:39).

The problem is that many of these characteristics only have meaning when another person is present. No one – not even God – can see, hear, know, address or love what is, by definition, not there. If God is "one" in a simple, monolithic sense, then we have to suppose that such characteristics remained static, or unused, until the creation of angels or human beings with whom love and communication could be exchanged. In other words, creation caused a change in the state of God's attributes. If God's oneness was as Muslims insist it is – unitary and simple – then before the creation God did not love anyone. He did not talk to anyone. He did not listen to anyone. Nothing existed but Himself in perfect and unvarying unity.

This problem is neatly resolved in the fact of the Trinity. St. Augustine of Algeria expressed it this way: "God is love. Love is eternal. God needed an object of everlasting love. The Father loved the Son. The Son loved the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit loved the Father. Then God said, 'Let us make man in our own image.'"

The doctrine of the Trinity explains that God has never changed. Creation did not alter the state of his characteristics. He is truly one throughout eternity, unchanging, existing in a state of combined and dynamic unity. There is love, talking, and hearing between the Father, His Word, and the Holy Spirit, with or without the created order. In fact, far from making love possible for God, creation was itself the result of the love that has been in Him from the first. Love has always been God's very essence. The Father loved the Son before creating the world. The Son loves the Father. And they both love the Holy Spirit. This eternal love between the three Persons has merely

spilled over into God's relationship with mankind.

This love answers prayers. The Quran quotes God as saying, "Call on Me and I will answer your prayer" (Sura 40:60). God answers His people. This is what Jesus said: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6).

From eternity God has been knowing and known, understanding and understood, wanting and wanted, seeing and seen, hearing and heard, loving and loved, entirely within Himself. Such self-sufficiency cannot exist in a God who is absolutely, abstractly and mathematically "one." In fact the "oneness" Muslims believe in is really not oneness at all, because the attribute of love Allah displays toward His creation is an attribute that He could not have possessed before creation existed. Therefore Allah Himself has changed from being one thing to being another.

V. ANALOGIES TO EXPLAIN THE TRINITY

There are several analogies to explain the doctrine of the Trinity. If any of these analogies are helpful, use them. However, remember that analogies have limits. They are only catalysts, enabling us to perceive the shape of an unseen truth. Ali ibn Abu Talib is quoted as saying, "Disputation about the nature of God is blasphemy." Also: "Whatever has entered in your mind is your own state, and God is the converse of that."

Possible analogies for the Triune God include the following:

- Man: is made of body, mind and spirit, but is a single being.
- Mind: is imagination, understanding and memory, but it is a single phenomenon.
- Fire: is heat, light and flame, but it is one fire.
- The sun: has form, and gives heat and light, but is a single body.
- Fruit: has a size, a taste and a smell, but is a single object.
- Water: can exist as liquid, vapor, or ice, but is a single substance.

- A cube: has three dimensions, but is a single shape.

Perhaps the best explanation of the Trinity – and of how Christians came to understand it – is given by C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*.ⁱⁱ He writes:

You know that in space you can move in three ways – to the left or right, backwards or forwards, up or down. Every direction is either one of these three or a compromise between them. They are called Three Dimensions. Now notice this if you are using only one dimension, you could draw only straight lines. If you are using two, you could draw a figure: say, a square. And a square is made up of four straight lines. Now a step further. If you have three dimensions you can then build what we call a solid body: say, a cube, a thing like a dice or a lump of sugar. And a cube is made of six squares.

Do you see the point? A world of one dimension should be a straight line. In a two-dimensional world, you still get straight lines, but many lines make one figure. In a three-dimensional world, you still get straight lines, but many lines make one solid body. In other words as you advance to more real and more complicated levels, you do not leave behind the things you found on the simpler levels: you still have them, but combined in new ways – in ways you could not imagine if you knew only the simpler levels.

Now the Christian account of God involves the same principle. The human level is simple and rather an empty level. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings just as in two dimensions (say on a flat sheet of paper) one square is one figure and any two squares are two separate figures. On the Divine level you still find personalities, but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a Being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube.

Of course we cannot fully conceive a Being like that: just as if we were so made that we perceived only two dimensions

in space, we could never properly imagine a cube. But we can get a sort of faint notion of it. And when we do, we are then, for the first time in our lives getting some positive idea, however faint, of something super-personal – something more than a person. It is something we could never have guessed, and yet, once we have been told, one almost feels to have been able to guess it because it fits in so well with all the things we know already.

You may ask, “If we cannot imagine a three personal Being, what is the good of talking about Him?” Well, there isn’t any good talking about Him. The thing that matters is being actually drawn into that three personal life, and that may begin any time, now, tonight if you like.

Lewis concludes:

And that is how theology started. People already knew about God in a vague way. Then came a man who claimed to be God and yet he was not the sort of man you could dismiss as a lunatic. He made them believe Him. They met Him again after they had seen Him killed. And then, after they had been formed into a little society or community, they found God somehow inside them as well: directing them, making them able to do things they could not do before. And when they worked it all out they found they had arrived at the Christian definition of a three personal God.

ⁱ R. Thomas, *op.cit.*, p.180ff.

ⁱⁱ C.S. Lewis, *op.cit.*, p.137ff.

Important Dates in Islamic History

AD 570	Birth of Muhammad.
AD 595	Muhammad marries Khadija.
AD 610	Muhammad receives his first revelation.
AD 622	The <i>Hijra</i> - Muhammad moves to Medina, the first year of the Islamic era.
AD 624	Battle of Badr - Muslims defeat the forces of Mecca.
AD 625	Meccans defeat Muslim forces at Uhud.
AD 627	Battle of the Ditch, Siege of Medina, Muslims win.
AD 629	Byzantine forces defeat Muslim army.
AD 630	Muhammad's forces take Mecca.
AD 632	Muhammad's last pilgrimage to Mecca, and death.
AD 632-634	Caliphate of Abu Bakr.
AD 634-644	Caliphate of Umar.

AD 644-656	Caliphate of Uthman.
AD 656-661	Caliphate of Ali.
AD 661-750	Rule of the Omayyad Dynasty.
AD 674	Muslims siege Constantinople.
AD 680	Death of Husain at Karbala'.
AD 711	Muslims cross from North Africa to Spain.
AD 732	Battle of Tours – Charles Martel defeats the Muslims.
AD 750-1258	Rule of the Abbasid Dynasty.
AD 786-809	Caliphate of Haroun al-Rashid in Baghdad.
AD 870	Muslims take Malta.
AD 1091	Christian forces recover Sicily and Malta.
AD 1099	Crusaders capture Jerusalem.
AD 1187	Battle of Hittin – Saladin defeats the Crusaders.
AD 1203	Muslim rule begins in north India.
AD 1227	Death of Genghis Khan.
AD 1405	Death of Tamerlane.
AD 1453	Fall of Constantinople to the Muslims.
AD 1492	Muslims expelled from Spain.
AD 1517	Caliphate taken over by the Ottoman sultans.
AD 1923	Abolition of the Caliphate.

Glossary

B

ABU

An element in many male Arab names, meaning “father of” – thus Abu Dawud means “Father of Dawud.”

ADHAN

The Muslim call to public prayer.

AHL AL-KITAB

“People of the Book” – the title the Quran gives to the Jews and Christians, because they received divine revelations (see Sura 3:72,113). In the beginning, Muhammad said, “He who wrongs a Jew or a Christian will have myself as his accuser on the Day of Judgement.” However in his last hour he apparently changed his mind, saying “Two religions in the Arabian Peninsula are not to be tolerated.” Abu Bakr applied this principle in his message to Ahl al-Kitab living in Arabia.

AHMADIA

A heretical Muslim sect, started by Mirzi Ghulam Ahmad Kadiani (of Kadian in the Panjab). The most striking differences with Islam center on Christology, the Mahdi (“Messiah”) and the Jihad (“Holy War”). The Ahmadia hold that Jesus did not die on the cross, but after his apparent death and resurrection migrated to Kashmir, in order to preach the gospel. There he is said to have lived to 120. The Ahmadia believe that Jesus is buried in Srinagar, and that His tomb is mistakenly identified as that of a prophet

called Yuz Asaf. Regarding the vocation of the Mahdi and the Jihad, the Ahmadia teach that the mission of the Mahdi is one of peace, and that the Jihad against the unfaithful must be conducted by peaceful means and not with instruments of war. Under all circumstances sincere obedience must be given to the Government. The Mahdi himself must be considered an incarnation of both Jesus and Muhammad and at the same time an avatar of Krishna.

AL-BAIDAWI

Naser el-Din Abdulla, a well-known Muslim commentator, who died AD 1286. His commentary is called *Anwar al-Tanzil Wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*.

AL-JALALAN

A commentary written by Jalal el-Deen Al-Suyuti, and Jalal el-Deen al-Mahalli.

AL-KALBI

Ibn al-Saaeb, narrator of the *Hadith* and historian. Died AD 763.

AL-RAZI

Fakhr al-Din, a Muslim commentator. His commentary is called *Al-Tafsir al-Kabir*.

AL-SUDDI

Ismail ibn Abdul Rahman, who heard the *Hadith* from Anas ibn Malik and saw Husain ibn Ali ibn Abu-Talib.

AL-SUYUTI

Jalal el-Deen Abdul Rahman, Muslim theologian and commentator (AD 1445-1505).

AL-TABARI

Abu-Gaafar Muhammad ibn Jarir (died AD 923), a Muslim commentator. His commentary is called *Jami al-Baian fi Tafsir al-Quran*.

AL-ZAMAKHSHARI

Abu al-Qasem Mahmood (AD 1075-1144), a well-known commentator of the Quran. His commentary is called *Al-Kashaf*.

ARABIC

A Semitic language from the same group as Hebrew and Syriac. The language of the Quran and the stated Muslim prayers.

ASHURA

The name given by Shia' Muslims to the first ten days of the month of Muharram, when they commemorate the death of Husain at Karbala'.

AYATOLLAH

The most senior title for a Shia' scholar.

BASMALA

Saying *Bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim* ("In the name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate").

CALIPH

The title given to the religious and political leader of Islam after the death of Muhammad.

DA'WA

The call to join Islam.

EKREMA

One of Muhammad's *sahaba*, ("close friends"). Died AD 634.

FATIHA

The first Sura in the Quran.

HADITH, THE

Collectively, the stories of what Muhammad said, did, allowed, and commanded. Only some books of *Hadith* are recognized as authoritative, and Shia' and Sunni Muslims differ in those they recognize. The *Hadith* is second only to

the Quran as a source of Islamic law and life, and as such forms a model of conduct and a basis for law.

HIJRA

The emigration of Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina, from which date Muslim chronology begins. Year 1 of the Muslim calendar was AD 622.

IBN

An element in many male Muslim names, meaning “the son of.” Thus *ibn Abbas* means “Son of Abbas.”

IBN ABBAS

Muhammad’s cousin. He narrated many of the Hadith of Muhammad. His commentary on the Quran is entitled *Tanwir al-Miqbas*.

IKHWAN AL-SAFA’

Literally “Brethren of Purity” – a secret Arab confraternity founded at Basra, Iraq. The group produced a philosophical and religious encyclopaedia, *Rasa’il ikhwan al-safa’ wa khillan al-wafa’* (“Epistles of the Brethren of Purity and Loyal Friends”), in the second half of the 10th century AD.

IMAM

An Islamic religious leader or saint. Also a leader of services in a mosque.

INJIL

The Arabic for “Gospel.” However, the Quran uses the word to denote the whole New Testament.

ISLAM

The religion founded by Muhammad. The word comes from a root meaning “surrender,” “submission” or “subjection.”

ISTIA’ZA

Literally, “Seeking-for-Refuge” by saying *A’uzu Billah min al-Shaitan al-Rajim* (“I seek God’s refuge from the outcast

devil”). A Muslim formula to make a believer sacred and safe from Satan’s interference.

JINN, THE

Angel-like superhuman beings (sing. *Jinni*, cf. the English “genie”). Created of fire, the Jinn heard the preaching of Muhammad. Some of them believed and became Muslims; others rejected him and are destined for hell. Belief in the Jinn is common in popular Islam. It was accepted by the official Islam of earlier centuries, and remains so in some groups today.

KA’ABA

This literally means “square” or “cube.” The small building in Mecca that bears this name (also called *Bait Allah*, or “House of God”), stands in the court of the Great Mosque and contains the famous black stone. The Ka’aba is the center of pilgrimage and worship and the point toward which all Muslims turn in prayer.

MU’ADHIN

The one who shouts the *adhan*, (“the call to prayer”) from the minaret of a mosque at five stated times during the day.

QURAN

The sacred book of Islam. The entire volume is about two-thirds of the size of the New Testament.

RA’INA

Arabic for “listen to us” – said by the Jews to Muhammad. In the vernacular it means, “We hear and disobey” or “We hear as one who hears not.”

SHARIA’

The religious law based on the Quran and the Hadith.

SHIA’

A sect of Islam founded by the followers of Ali, the fourth Caliph, who was the husband of Fatimah, Muhammad’s daughter.

SUFI

The term for a mystic of Islam. Many great Islamic scholars and poets have held to a mystic interpretation of the religion.

SUNNI

The orthodox branch of Islam, by far the largest division, to which belong most Muslims in Arabia and the Mediterranean countries, as well as the majority in India and the East.

SURA

A chapter of the Quran.

TORAH

Strictly, the first five books of the Bible. However, the Quran uses the word to denote the entire Old Testament.

WAHB IBN MUNABBEH

A historian with extensive knowledge of the ancients and the prophets. Died AD 732.

ZEMZEM

The well in Mecca where, according to Muslim tradition, Hagar quenched the thirst of her son.

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