

THE QURAN

THE QURANIC DESCRIPTION OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS

(Zachariah, Mary, John the Baptist, and Jesus)

AND

MONOTHEISM OF ISLAM
VERSUS CHRISTIAN TRINITY

VOLUME TWO

By

FAROOQ MIRZA

The First Ever Rendition of the Quran
According To Specific Topics and the Subject Matter
A New Paradigm in Understanding the Quran

THE QURAN
THE QURANIC DESCRIPTION OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS

From
The Quran Foundation
(thequranfoundation.com)

All rights reserved
Copyright © 2014 by Farooq Mirza

Interior Book Design and Layout by
www.integrativeink.com

ISBN: 978-0-9913743-2-8

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the written permission of the author or publisher.

DEDICATION

This work is based upon “THE MESSAGE OF THE QURAN” by Muhammad Asad, which is the best translation and explanation of the Quran and the first ever attempt at a really idiomatic, explanatory rendition of the Quranic message into English.

Muhammad Asad was born Leopold Weiss in July 1900 in the city of Lvov (German Lemberg), now in Poland, then part of the Austrian Empire. He was the descendant of a long line of rabbis, a line broken by his father, who became a barrister. Asad himself received a thorough religious education that would qualify him to keep alive the family’s rabbinical tradition.

He left Europe for the Middle East in 1922 for what was supposed to be a short visit to an uncle in Jerusalem. There he came to know the Arabs and was struck by how Islam infused their everyday lives with existential meaning, spiritual strength, and inner peace. Weiss now became, at the remarkably young age of 22, a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, one of the most prestigious newspapers of Germany and Europe. As a journalist, he traveled extensively, mingled with ordinary people, held discussions with Muslim intellectuals, and met heads of state in Palestine, Egypt, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan.

Back in Berlin from the Middle East a few years later, Weiss underwent an electrifying spiritual epiphany—reminiscent of

the experience of some of the earliest Muslims—that changed his mind and his life. “Out of the Quran spoke a voice greater than the voice of Muhammad.” Thus it was that Weiss became a Muslim. He converted in Berlin before the head of the city’s small Muslim community and took the names Muhammad, to honor the Prophet, and Asad—meaning “lion”—as a reminder of his given name.

Asad spent some six years in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, where he studied Arabic, the Quran, the hadith—the traditions of the Prophet and Islamic history. He mastered the Arabic language, not only through academic study, but also by living with the tribe who spoke the Arabic dialect of the Quran. At 80, after 17 years of effort, he completed the work that had been his life’s dream, and for which he felt all his life till then had been an apprenticeship: a translation and exegesis, or tafsir, of the Quran in English: *THE MESSAGE OF THE QURAN*.

WHY THIS BOOK?

A NEW PARADIGM IN UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN

Traditional arrangement

The Quran is a unique book and unlike any other book, it does not have a beginning, middle, or end. It is not arranged according to different topics or subject matter. The traditional Quran is arranged in accordance with the inner requirements of its message as a whole, and not in the chronological order in which the individual passages were revealed. The seemingly abrupt transition from one subject to another is also in accord with the Quranic principle of deliberately interweaving moral exhortation with practical legislation. This in pursuance of the teaching that man's life—spiritual and physical, individual and social—is one integral whole, and therefore requires simultaneous consideration of all its aspects if the concept of the good life is to be realized. In accordance with the system prevailing throughout the Quran, a lengthy passage dealing with purely moral or ethical questions is usually followed by verses relating to social legislation, and this with a view to bringing out the intimate connection between man's spiritual life and his social behavior.

Rearrangement according to the subject matter

In retrospect, a discussion of varying subjects within a same chapter may appear unconnected and may cause confusion and misunderstanding, especially for those not familiar with the uniqueness of the Quran. In this book, a new radical approach is taken as the Quran is presented according to the subject matter. One of the cardinal principles in understanding the Quran is that its message must not be viewed as a compilation of individual injunctions and exhortations but as one integral whole. For example, the subject of divorce is discussed in the Quran in chapters 2, 33, 58, 60, and 65. Compiling all the verses about divorce in one place makes it easier to understand. This easy-to-understand format will make the Quran more accessible to a common man, rather than limiting its study to academics, Islamic scholars, and clerics. With the help of a computer, the author of this book has rearranged “THE MESSAGE OF THE QURAN” by Muhammad Asad, according to the specific topics and subject matter.

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	xi
Chapter 1 New Testament Prophets Zachariah, Mary, and John the Baptist	1
Chapter 2 Jesus (Isa in Arabic).....	13
Chapter 3 Christian Concept of Trinity	33
Chapter 4 Death of Jesus, Salvation, and the Original Sin	63
Chapter 5 Errors of the Jews and Christians and Moral Lessons for All Believers	81
Chapter 6 Objections of Jews of Medina to Islam and the Quranic Rebuttal	121
Chapter 7 Sectarianism among Muslims, Jews, And Christians ..	143
Chapter 8 Diversity in Monotheism (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam)	165
Chapter 9 Common Beliefs.....	173
Chapter 10 Monotheists as One Single Community	187
Chapter 11 Parable of Men of Cave and Their Dog	199
<i>References</i>	209

PREFACE

Jesus, or Isa in Arabic, is mentioned in the Quran more than one hundred times. The Quran describes Jesus in the most exalted terms as righteous and pure. Jesus holds the distinction among all other prophets in his supernatural birth and is referred as Messiah more than ten times. His commission takes the form of an enabling act. The proofs are the miracles he performed. Not only does Jesus heal the sick, but he performs miracles while in the cradle, which echoes the story in the Gospel of the Infancy of which a Coptic copy is extant. He is described as an apostle, limited to men like Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad. The apostle brought new dispensation as opposed to prophets, whom God has entrusted with the enunciation of ethical principles on the basis of an already-existing dispensation. Hence, every apostle is a prophet as well, but not every prophet is an apostle. However, the Quran differs in three key aspects considered foundation of Christianity: (1) Nature of Jesus. The Quran categorically rejects the Christian claim that Jesus was God in human flesh. Despite Jesus' supernatural birth and all his miracles, nonetheless, Jesus was still a human being. When it comes to functioning, Christ is no different from any other apostle. (2) The second major difference is about the circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus. According to the Quran, Jesus was neither killed nor crucified, especially by the Jews. (3) The Quran also rejects the Christian

concept of salvation, where Jesus was offered as a sacrificial lamb for the sins of humanity. From the theological standpoint, there is a wide gulf between Islam and Christianity, which can only be bridged by the second advent of Jesus himself.

The most important commonality between Islam and Christianity is the teachings of Jesus. Most of the teachings of Jesus as documented in the first three Synoptic Gospels are consistent with Islamic teachings. At least, Muslims and Christians can agree on what Jesus said and what he stood for and what he has to teach us even today. From Islamic point of view, what is more important is how Jesus lived a righteous life and a reminder to rest of us to follow his example. Whether or not he died on the cross, or exactly how you frame the nature of his identity may be critical for Christian theology, are separate issues.

The Quran also condemns all the myriad of sects among Muslims, Jews and Christians. All believers in the One God, whatever their historical denomination, should regard themselves as one single community of monotheists (42:13 and 15). Disagreements are inevitable and will always occur because of proneness to intellectual dissension is a permanent characteristic of human nature. Thus, the Quran impresses upon all who believe in God—Muslims and non-Muslims alike—that the differences in their religious practices should make them vie with one another in doing good works rather than lose themselves in mutual hostility. Muslims and Christians have to make a choice both as individuals and as communities. We can dwell on our differences and continue age-old conflict between two great monotheistic religions, or we can emphasize our commonalities in the interest of peace and vie with each other in doing good works. The Quran teaches us (Muslims) that we should adopt the latter course of action.

CHAPTER ONE
NEW TESTAMENT PROPHETS
ZACHARIAH, MARY, AND JOHN THE BAPTIST

INTRODUCTION

Contacts with Christians

Muhammad was forty years old when his mission began in 610 with the revelation of the first five verses of the ninety-sixth surah (Al-Alaq, the germ-cell). With the advent of the first revelation, Muhammad was emotionally overwhelmed and his wife Khadijah consulted her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, who was a Christian and had translated part of Evangel into Arabic. When she finished telling him what Muhammad had seen and heard, Waraqah broke into these words: “Holy, Holy! By Him who dominates Waraqah’s soul, this must be the Great Spirit that spoke to Moses. Muhammad must be the prophet of this nation. Tell him that he must be firm.”

There was no Christian community close to either Mecca or Medina comparable to that of established Jewish Community in Medina. While Islam was in its formative state, Muhammad’s contacts with Christians were limited to personal contacts with a few Christian individuals. Besides a Christian (Coptic) wife, he had a Christian (Abyssinian) ex-slave and a Christian adopted son, Zayd. The nearest Arabian Christian communities were on the southern border of Hijaz (Najranites), the northeastern border of Syria (Ghassanids), and the northwestern frontier of Persia (Lakhmids). All three communities belonged to the Syrian

Church, whose views on the nature of Christ and the relation of his humanity to his divinity were later considered heretical by both Catholic and Orthodox churches. On the whole, Christian's attitude toward Islam was not as hostile as Jews of Arabia and most conflicts between Christians and Muslims occurred in later caliphates.

The first exile of Muslims to Christian Ethiopia (615)

Profoundly afflicted by the suffering of his disciples at the hand of Quraysh, the Prophet advised them to seek refuge in the neighboring Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. Less than a hundred Muslims secretly immigrated to Abyssinia. The Quraysh sent two of their ambassadors to king Negus in order to extradite these fugitives back to Mecca. The major charge was the abjuration of their old religion and adoption of a new one. King Negus sent for the exiles and inquired of them whether what their enemies had stated was true. Jafar, son of Abu Talib, and brother of Ali, acting as a spokesman for the group, spoke thus: "O King! We were in a state of immorality, worshiping idols, eating carrion, committing all sorts of iniquity. We honored no relative and assisted no neighbor. The strong among us exploited the weak. Then God sent us a prophet, one of our own people, whose lineage, truthfulness, loyalty, and purity were well known to us. He called us to worship God alone and to repudiate all the stones and idols whom we and our ancestors used to worship. He commanded us always to tell the truth, to remain true to trust and promise, to assist the relative, to be good neighbors, to abstain from blood and things forbidden, and to avoid fornication, perjury, and false witness. He commanded us not to rob the wealth of the orphan or falsely accuse the married woman. He ordered us to worship God alone and never to associate any other being with Him, to hold prayers, to fast, and to give charity (the five pillars of Islam were here enumerated and explained).

We believed in him and what he brought to us from God and followed him in what he enjoined and forbade. Our people, however, tried to sway us away from our religion and persecuted us and inflicted upon us great suffering that we might re-enter into the immoral practices of old. As they vanquished and berated us unjustly and made life intolerable for us in Mecca, we chose you and your country and came thither to live under your protection in justice and peace.” Thereupon the Negus asked, “Will you show me some of the revelations which your Prophet claims to have come to him from God?” Jafar answered, “Yes!” and recited to Negus the surah of Mary (The Nineteenth Surah Maryam [Mary] Mecca Period). When the Negus and the patriarchs heard this statement, they were pleasantly surprised and said, “These words must have sprung from the same fountainhead from which the words of our master Jesus Christ have sprung.” Negus asked them to tell him more about Jesus. Jafar ibn Abu Talib answered, “Our judgment of Jesus is exactly as that which was revealed to our Prophet; namely, that Jesus is the servant of God, His Prophet, His spirit, His command given unto Mary, the innocent virgin.” The Negus drew a line on the floor with his cane and said, “Between your religion and ours, there is really no more difference than this line.” At this, the king denied the extradition of Muslims to Mecca. (Excerpt from *The Life of Muhammad*, chapter five, by Husein Haykal.)

Prediction of coming of Muhammad in New Testament: *And [this happened, too,] when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: “O children of Israel! I am an apostle of God unto you, [sent] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give [you] the glad tiding of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.” (61:6-9)*

This prediction is supported by several references in the Gospel of St. John to the Parakletos (usually rendered as “Comforter”) who was to come after Jesus. This designation is most likely a corruption of Periklytos (“the Much-Praised”), an exact Greek translation of the Aramaic term or name Mawhamana. Aramaic was the language used in Palestine at the time of, and for some centuries after, Jesus, and was thus undoubtedly the language in which the original—now lost—texts of the Gospels were composed. In view of the phonetic closeness of Periklytos and Parakletos it is easy to understand how the translator—or, more probably, a later scribe—confused these two expressions. It is significant that both the Aramaic Mawhamana and the Greek Periklytos have the same meaning as the two names of the Last Prophet, Muhammad and Ahmad, both of which are derived from the verb hamida (“he praised”) and the noun hamd (“praise”). An even more unequivocal prediction of the advent of the Prophet Muhammad—mentioned by name, in its Arabic form—is said to be forthcoming from the so-called Gospel of St. Barnabas, which, though now regarded as apocryphal, was accepted as authentic and was read in the churches until the year 496 of the Christian era, when it was banned as “heretical” by a decree of Pope Gelasius. However, since the original text of that Gospel is not available (having come down to us only in an Italian translation dating from the late sixteenth century), its authenticity cannot be established with certainty.

The House of Imran (Amram of the Bible)

Of the New Testament characters four are given clear mention in the Quran: Zachariah, Mary, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

Noble Line of Descent of House of Imran: God raised Adam, and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the

House of Imran above all mankind, in one line of descent and God was all-hearing, all-knowing. (3:33-34)

This is an allusion not merely to the physical descent of those prophets but also to the fact that all of them were spiritually linked with one another and believed in one and the same fundamental truth. Thus, the above passage makes God's approval contingent upon obedience to His chosen message-bearers. The names that appear in this sentence circumscribe, by implication, all the prophets mentioned in the Quran as most of them were descendants of two or more of these patriarchs. The House of Imran comprises Moses and Aaron, whose father was Imran (the Amram of the Bible). Aaron's descendants, the priestly caste among the Israelites included John the Baptist, both of whose parents were of the same descent (see Luke, I, 5, where John's mother Elisabeth is described as one "of the daughters of Aaron"), as well as Jesus, whose mother Mary—a close relation of John—is spoken of elsewhere in the Quran (19:28) as a "sister of Aaron," in both cases embodying the ancient Semitic custom of linking a person's or a people's name with that of an illustrious forebear. The reference to the House of Imran serves as an introduction to the stories of Zachariah, John, Mary, and Jesus.

Mary

Birth of Mary and in the care of Zachariah: *When a woman of [the House of] Imran prayed: "O my Sustainer! Unto Thee do I vow [the child] that is in my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!" But when she had given birth to the child, she said: "O my Sustainer! I have given birth to a female"*—the while God had been fully*

aware of what she would give birth to, and [fully aware] that no male child [she might have hoped for] could ever have been like this female—“And I have named her Mary. And I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed.” And so her Sustainer accepted her with goodly acceptance, and caused her to grow up in goodly growth, and placed her in the care of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: “O Mary, whence came this unto you?” She would answer: “It is from God; behold, God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.” (3:35-37)*

The male child for whom she had prayed for could not have been like the female whom she was granted—which implies that Mary’s excellence would go far beyond any hopes which her mother had ever entertained. The guardianship of Mary was entrusted to Zachariah—who was not only her relative but also a priest attached to the Temple—after lots had been drawn to decide which of the priests should have the responsibility for this girl who, in consequence, of her mother’s vow, was to be dedicated to Temple’s service. There is no indication either in the Quran or in any authentic tradition that the provisions of food provided to Mary were of a miraculous origin. Mary’s answer to Zachariah reflects no more and no less than her deep consciousness of God as the ultimate Provider.

Exalted Status of Mary: *And lo! The angels said: “O Mary! God has elected you and made you pure, and raised you above all the women of the world. O Mary! You remain truly devout to thy Sustainer, and prostrate yourself in worship, and bow down with those who bow down [before*

Him].” This account of something that was beyond the reach of your perception We [now] reveal unto you: for you were not with them when they drew lots* as to which of them should be Mary’s guardian, and you were not with them when they contended [about it] with one another. (3:42-44)*

The above passage (“This account of something”) addressed to the Prophet is meant to stress the fact that the story of Mary, as narrated in the Quran, is a direct outcome of revelation and, therefore, inherently true in spite of all the differences between this account and that given in the scriptures regarded by the Christians as authentic. The phrase rendered above as “they drew lots” reads literally, “they cast their reeds”—obviously a reference to an ancient Semitic custom, perhaps similar to the divination by blunt arrows practiced by the pre-Islamic Arabs. The pronoun “they” relates to the priests, of whom Zachariah was one.

Story of Mary and God consciousness: *[We have propounded yet another parable of God-consciousness in the story of] Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity. Whereupon We breathed of Our spirit into that [which was in her womb], and who accepted the truth of her Sustainer’s words—and [thus,] of His revelations—and was one of the truly devout. (66:12)*

The daughter of Imran refers to a descendant of the House of Imran (see 3:33).

John the Baptist

According to the account in the Gospels, not contradicted by the Quran, Zachariah's wife Elisabeth was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus (See Luke, I, 36).

Zachariah's prayer for a successor: *An account of the grace which thy Sustainer bestowed upon His servant Zachariah: When he called out to his Sustainer in the secrecy of his heart, he prayed: "O my Sustainer! My bones have become feeble, and my head glistens with grey hair. But never yet, O my Lord, has my prayer unto Thee remained unanswered. "Now, I am afraid of [what] my kinsfolk [will do] after I am gone, for my wife has always been barren. Bestow, then, upon me, out of Thy grace, the gift of a successor who will be my heir as well as an heir [to the dignity of the House of Jacob]; and make him, O my Sustainer, well-pleasing to Thee!" (19:2-6)*

He evidently anticipated that his kinsfolk—who, like himself, were priests attached to the Temple—would be morally too weak to fulfill their duties with dignity and conviction, and thus, perhaps, unable to safeguard the future of Mary, whose guardian he was (see 3:37).

Angel bringing glad tiding of birth of John: *In that self-same place, Zachariah prayed unto his Sustainer, saying: "O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me [too], out of Thy grace, the gift of goodly offspring; for Thou, indeed, hear all prayer." Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out to him. [The angels said:] "O Zachariah! We bring you the glad tiding of [the birth of] a son whose name shall be John. [And God says,] 'Never have*

We given this name to anyone before him.’ He shall confirm the truth of a word from God, and [shall be] outstanding among men, and utterly chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous.” (3:38-39) (19:7)*

The expression kalimah (word from God) is often used in the Quran to denote an announcement from God, or a statement of His will, or His promise (e.g., 4:171, 6:34 and 115, 10:64, 18:27). The above passage, too, the “word from God” which would be confirmed by the birth of John (described in the Gospels as John the Baptist) refers to a divine promise given through revelation. In the context under discussion of kalimah with kitab (revelation or divine writ) is agreeable with a similar announcement conveyed to Mary regarding the birth of Jesus (see 3:45). The name Yahya (John) signifies “he shall live,” i.e., he will be spiritually alive and will be remembered forever, and the fact that God Himself had chosen this name for him was a singular distinction, equivalent to a divine promise.

[Zachariah] exclaimed: “O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when my wife has always been barren, and I have become utterly infirm through old age?” Answered [the angel]: “Thus it is; [but] thy Sustainer says, ‘This is easy for Me—even as I have created you aforetime out of nothing.’” (19:8-9)

This stress on God’s unlimited power to bring into being a new chain of causes and effects forms here, as in Al Imran, a preamble to the announcement, expressed in very similar terms, of the birth of Jesus (see 19:19).

Prayer and contemplation for three days: [Zachariah] prayed: “O my Sustainer! Appoint a sign for me!” Said [the angel], “Your sign shall be that for three days you will not speak unto men other than by gestures. And remember thy Sustainer unceasingly, and extol His limitless glory by night and by day.” And [thus We did deliver] Zachariah when he cried out to his Sustainer: “O my Sustainer! Leave me not childless! But [even if Thou grant me no bodily heir, I know that] Thou wilt remain when all else has ceased to be!” And so We responded unto him, and bestowed upon him the gift of John, having made his wife fit to bear him a child: [after her previous barrenness] [and] these [three] would vie with one another in doing good works, and would call to Us in yearning and awe; and they were always humble before Us. (3:41) (21:89-90)

Zachariah was merely enjoined not to speak to anyone during the period of three days, and not struck dumb as in the New Testament narrative (Luke, I, 20-22): thus, the sign was purely spiritual, and was to consist in Zachariah’s utter self-abandonment to prayer and contemplation.

John the Baptist a prophet of God: [And when the son was born and grew up, he was told,] “O John! Hold fast to the divine writ with [all your] strength!”—For We granted him wisdom while he was yet a little boy, as well as, by Our grace, [the gift of] compassion and purity; and he was [always] conscious of Us and full of piety toward his parents; and never was he haughty or rebellious. Hence, [God’s] peace was upon him on the day when he was born, and on the day of his death, and will be [upon him] on the day when he shall be raised to life [again]. (19:12-15)

John was declared Prophet when he was old enough to receive and understand God's commandant and was granted a special divine gift "compassion from Us."

CHAPTER TWO
JESUS (ISA IN ARABIC)

Angel Appearing Before Mary

In the nineteenth surah, Maryam (Mary), as well as in Al Imran (3rd surah), the story of the birth of John is followed by that of Jesus. Firstly, John (called “the Baptist” in the Bible) was to be a precursor of Jesus, and, secondly, because of the obvious parallelism in the form of the announcements of these two births.

Call to mind, through this divine writ, Mary. Lo! She withdrew from her family to an eastern, place and kept herself in seclusion from them, where upon, We sent unto her Our angel of revelation, who appeared to her in the shape of a well-made human being. She exclaimed: “I seek refuge from you with the Most Gracious! [Approach me not] if you are conscious of Him!” [The angel] answered: “I am but a messenger of thy Sustainer [who says], ‘I shall bestow upon you the gift of a son endowed with purity.’” (19:16-19)

Mary went into seclusion in order to devote herself undisturbed to prayer and meditation. The “eastern place” possibly signifies an easterly chamber at the temple; to the service of which Mary was dedicated by her mother (see 3:35-37). There

Angel of revelation appeared before Mary. Since—as is implied in 6:9—mortals cannot perceive an angel in his true manifestation, God caused him to appear to Mary “in the shape of a well-made human being,” i.e., in a shape accessible to her perception. As pointed out in 2:87 and 16:2, the term *ruh* often denotes “divine inspiration.” Occasionally, however, it is used to describe the medium through which such inspiration is imparted to God’s elect: in other words, the angel (or angelic force) of revelation. The designation of the angel as *ruh* (“spirit” or “soul”) indicates that this category of beings is purely spiritual, without any physical element.

Christ Jesus the Masih: Lo! The angels said: “O Mary! God sends you the glad tiding, through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those who are drawn* near unto God. And he shall speak to men* in his cradle, and as a grown man, and shall be of the righteous.” Said she (Mary): “How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?—for, never have I been a loose woman!” [The angel] answered: “Thus it is; [but] thy Sustainer says, ‘this is easy for me’; God creates what He wills: when He wills a thing to be, He but says onto it, ‘Be’—and it is.* And [you shall have a son,] so that We might make him a symbol* to mankind and an act of grace from Us.”* And it was a thing decreed [by God]. “He will impart to your son revelation, and wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel, and [will make him] an apostle unto the children of Israel.” (3:45-46) (19:20-21)*

Christ, lit., “whose name shall be ‘the Anointed’ (al-masih).” The designation al-masih is the Arabicized form of the Aramaic

meshiha which, in turn, is derived from the Hebrew mahsiaha, “the anointed” - a term frequently applied in the Bible to the Hebrew kings; their accession to power used to be consecrated by a touch with holy oil taken from the Temple. This anointment appears to have been so important a rite among the Hebrews that the term “the anointed” became in the course of time more or less synonymous with “king”. The honorific “the Anointed” was applied to Jesus in his own lifetime. In the Greek version of the Gospels - probably based on a now-lost Aramaic original, this designation is correctly translated as Christos (a noun derived from the Greek verb chriain, “to anoint”): and since it is in this form - “the Christ” - that the designation al-masih has achieved currency in all Western languages. The expression “of those who are drawn near,” i.e., to God, see 56:11, where the most excellent among the inmates of paradise are thus described. “He shall speak to men” is a metaphorical allusion to the prophetic wisdom that was to inspire Jesus from a very early age. “He but says onto it, **‘Be’**—and it is.” In the context of the story of Mary in Al Imran, the announcement made to her, as well as the parallel one to Zachariah is meant to stress God’s unlimited power of creation. In both cases, His power to create the circumstances in which His will is to manifest itself—and thus to bring about any event, however, unexpected or even improbable it might seem at the time of the announcement. Since neither the Quran nor any authentic Tradition tells us anything about the chain of causes and effects which God’s decree “Be” was to bring into being, all speculations as to the “how” of this event must remain beyond the scope of a Quran-commentary. One of the several meanings of the term ayah is “a sign” or “a **symbol**” (see 17:1). However, the sense in which it is most frequently used in the Quran is “a divine message”: hence, its metonymic application to Jesus may

mean that he was destined to become a vehicle of God's message to man—i.e., a prophet—and, thus, a symbol of God's grace.

Birth of Jesus

Although born in Bethlehem, according to Mathew and Luke, Jesus was a Galilean from Nazareth. He was born to Joseph and Mary shortly before the death of Herod the Great (Matthew 2; Luke 1:5) in 4 BC. Jesus became a carpenter just like Joseph. According to Matthew and Luke, however, Joseph was only his father legally. Mary was a virgin when Jesus was conceived and that she “was found to be with a child from the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35). Parthenogenesis is a process in which egg becomes an embryo without male fertilization. It has been seen in about 70 animal species. This phenomenon in humans can only be described as a miracle. The Gospel and the Quranic accounts describing Jesus' conception are identical: as a supernatural conception. When the labor pain became intense, compelling Mary to cling to a palm tree for support: thus stressing the natural, normal circumstances of this childbirth attended—as is the case with all women—by severe labor pains.

And [remember] her who guarded her chastity, whereupon We breathed into her of Our spirit and caused her, together with her son, to become a symbol [of Our grace] unto all people. She withdrew with him to a far-off place. And [when] the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm-tree; she exclaimed: “Oh, would that I had died before this, and had become a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!” Thereupon [a voice] called out to her from beneath that [palm-tree]: “Grieve not! Thy Sustainer has provided a rivulet [running] beneath you; and shake the trunk of the*

palm-tree toward you: it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon you. Eat, then, and drink, and let your eye be gladdened! And if you should see any human being, convey this unto him: 'Abstinence from speech have I vowed unto the Most Gracious; hence, I may not speak today to any mortal.'*"
(21:91) (19:22-26)

The “**saying**” implies a communication by gestures. The allegorical expression, (breathed into him of My spirit) used here concerning Mary’s conception of Jesus, has been widely—and erroneously—interpreted as relating specifically to his birth. As a matter of fact, the Quran uses the same expression in three other places with reference to the creation of man in general—namely in 15:29 and 38:72, “when I have formed him... and breathed into him of My spirit” and in 32:9, “and thereupon He forms him fully and breathes into him of His spirit.” In particular, the passage of which the last-quoted phrase is a part (i.e., 32:7-9) makes it abundantly and explicitly clear that God “breathes of His spirit” into every human being. The breathing of the spirit of God into a body signifies the endowing it with life. As for the description of Mary as “one who guarded her chastity” is but meant to stress her outstanding chastity and complete abstinence, in thought as well as in deed, from anything unlawful or morally reprehensible: in other words, a rejection of the calumny (referred to in 4:156 and obliquely alluded to in 19:27-28) that the birth of Jesus was the result of an illicit union.

***Jesus spoke in a cradle** (in defense of his mother)—And in time, she returned to her people, carrying the child with her. They said: “O Mary! You have indeed done an amazing thing! O sister of Aaron!* Your father was not a wicked man, nor was your mother a loose woman!” Thereupon she*

pointed to him. They exclaimed: "How can we talk to one who [as yet] is a little boy in the cradle?" [But] he said: "I am a servant of God. He has vouchsafed to me revelation and made me a prophet, and made me blessed wherever I may be; and He has enjoined upon me prayer and charity, as long as I live, and [has endowed me with] piety toward my mother; and He has not made me haughty or bereft of grace. "Hence, peace was upon me on the day when I was born, and [will be upon me] on the day of my death, and on the day when I shall be raised to life [again]!" (19:27-33)

In ancient Semitic usage, a person's name was often linked with that of a renowned ancestor or founder of the tribal line. Since Mary belonged to the priestly caste, and hence descended from Aaron, the brother of Moses, she was called a "sister of Aaron" (in the same way as her cousin Elisabeth, the wife of Zachariah, is spoken of in Luke, I, 5, as one of the "daughters of Aaron").

Although the Quran mentions in 3:46 that Jesus would "speak unto men while yet in his cradle"—i.e., would be imbued with wisdom from his early childhood. Verses 30-33 seem to be in the figurative sense, projecting the shape of things to come by using, for the sake of emphasis, the past tense to describe something that was to become real in the future. Since it is not conceivable that anyone could be granted divine revelation and made a prophet before attaining to full maturity of intellect and experience, thus God vouchsafing revelation unto Jesus is as an allusion to the future. The same interpretation can be applied to the next verse, explaining it thus: "He has decreed that He would enjoin upon me prayer and charity." However, the whole of this passage (verses 30-33) may also be understood as having been uttered by Jesus at a much later time. Namely, after he had

reached maturity and been actually entrusted with his prophetic mission: that is to say, it may be understood as an anticipatory description of the ethical and moral principles which were to dominate the adult life of Jesus and particularly his deep consciousness of being only “a servant of God.”

***Higher station for Mary and Jesus**— For their refusal to acknowledge the truth and the awesome calumny* which they utter against Mary. We made the son of Mary and his mother a symbol [of Our grace], and provided for both an abode in a lofty place of lasting restfulness and unsullied springs. (4:156) (23:50)*

The calumny referred to is the popular Jewish assertion that Jesus was an illegitimate child. Jesus and his mother Mary are mentioned here specifically because they, too, had to suffer persecution and slander at the hands of “those who were bent on denying the truth.” The expression “unsullied springs” or “running waters” signifies and thus symbolizes the spiritual purity associated with the concept of paradise, the “gardens through which running waters flow.”

***Continuation of Divine revelation**—We sent forth Noah and Abraham [as Our message-bearers], and established prophethood and revelation among their descendants; and some of them were on the right way, but many were iniquitous. And thereupon We caused [other of] Our apostles to follow in their footsteps; and [in the course of time] We caused them to be followed by Jesus, the son of Mary, upon whom We bestowed the Gospel; and in the hearts of those who [truly] followed him, We engendered compassion and mercy. (57:26-27)*

Jesus saw his own teachings not as a departure from Judaic traditions but as unbroken continuation of that tradition—just as Muhammad saw Quran and his own teachings as a continuation of the existing scriptures. Islam and Christianity are not simply overlapping ideas, or merely compatible, but in the most central sense, they are one continuum. Most of the teachings of Jesus are consistent with the Quranic teachings and here lies a great hope for reconciliation between the East and the West. The key to this process is an emphasis on the teachings of Jesus—not the religious or theological claims about him.

Brief Description of the Mission and Teachings of Jesus

Teachings of Jesus—Jesus and his disciples were itinerant; they traveled around Galilee, and its immediate environs and Jesus taught and healed in various towns and villages, as well as in the countryside and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Foundations of Christian faith: There have been many speculations regarding the nature of Jesus’ mission and teachings. The most incredible aspects of Jesus sayings are what he did not say. The Bible never records Jesus saying the precise words, “I am God.” He said that he was a Son of God but never said he is God’s son. He never said he is going to die on the Cross for the sins of mankind. He never ever uttered any word such as “Trinity.”

Is Christianity a new religion?—Did Jesus intend to start a new religion? There is not a single verse in the entire New Testament that stated or even implied that Jesus promoted, began, or intended to begin any religion. The word “Christianity” does

not appear anywhere in the text of the Bible. The book of Acts reports that the followers of Jesus were referred as “Christian” but this was used as a term of derision by the pagans of Antioch. The disciples of Jesus called themselves “followers of the way.” Jesus did not convert his disciples from Judaism to Christianity. Neither Jesus nor any of his followers ever advocated that anyone converted from one religion to another. The proselytizing Christian missionary enterprises are thus flatly contrary to Jesus’ teachings.

Eschatology—The public ministry of Jesus began when he was baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:2-28), an eschatological prophet. Understanding of eschatology is central to interpreting Jesus’ world. Although eschatology is the doctrine of last things, the Jews who anticipated future redemption did not expect the end of the world and thought that God would intervene in human history and make the world perfect. The Jews would live in the holy land free from foreign domination and in peace and prosperity. Many Jews, including John the Baptist, expected final judgment to precede this golden age, and he taught that people should repent in view of its imminence (Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:3-9). God will restore the twelve tribes of Israel, including the ten lost tribes and that Jesus shared this view is indicated by his call of the twelve disciples (Matthew 19:28). Moreover, Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God; He predicted the destruction of the temple (Mark 13:2) and possibly its rebuilding (Mark 14:58); He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, symbolizing His kingship (Mark 11:4-8); Matthew 21:1-11); see Zechariah 9:9 for the symbol; He had a final meal with his disciples in which He said that He “drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day, when I drink it in the kingdom of God” (Mark 14:25).

Kingdom of God—While the Gospels agree that Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God, they offered different versions of his view of that kingdom. One is that the Kingdom of God exists in heaven and that individuals may enter it upon death (Mark 9:7). The parable that the Kingdom is like yeast which gradually leavens the entire loaf (Matthew 13:33) indicates that Jesus may have understood the Kingdom of God to be beginning in the present. Statements about the Kingdom as partially present on earth do not negate the eschatological nature of Jesus' message. At the end of time, the Kingdom would come to earth in its full power and glory, at which time God's will would be done "on the earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus said, "Our father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom comes. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen" (Matthew 6:9-13).

Jesus and the Jewish law—Jesus was an exceptionally dedicated and accomplished rabbi who knew the Torah inside out. He repeatedly insisted that he meant to uphold and fulfill the Jewish scripture, not contradict or supersede them. Jewish law is the focus of many passages in the Gospels. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus admonished his followers to observe the law unwaveringly (Matthew 5:17-48). Jesus also held that observance of the law should not be only external but internal as well and argued that the whole of the Law could be summed up in the maxim: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Laws pertaining to food—Jews are not allowed to eat carnivores, rodents, insect, as well as pork and shellfish (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14) and the last two prohibitions set them apart from other people. According to Mark 7:19: Jesus “declared all foods clean.” If he did so, Jesus directly opposed the law of God as given to Moses. More importantly, Peter seems to have first learned of this after Jesus’ death, by means of a “heavenly revelation” (Acts 10:9-16). Jesus did not, then, directly oppose any aspect of the sacred law.

Ethics and Morality—Jesus was a moral perfectionist and advocated ethical purity. He demanded complete devotion to God, putting it ahead of devotion to self and even to family (Mark 3:31-35; Matthew 10:35-37), and taught that people should give up everything in order to obtain what was most precious (Matthew 5:21-26 and 5:27-30). Jesus abhorred hatred and lust, as well as murder, adultery, and divorce.

Love your enemies and neighbors—The most revolutionary thing Jesus ever said was that we should love our enemies to the point of blessing them. The concepts Jesus taught are as radical today as they were two thousand years ago because they are counterintuitive to our divisive human nature and humanity’s historic compulsion to be at war with itself.

“But I say to you, love your enemies, bless anyone who curses you, do good to anyone who hates you and pray for those who carry you away by force and persecute you, so that you may become sons of your Father who is in heaven, who causes His sun to shine upon the good and the bad, and who pours down His rain upon the just and upon the unjust” (Matt. 5:44-48). *“You must love your neighbors as yourself”* (Mark 12:31). The radical idea of

reconciliation taught by Jesus was later reiterated in the Quran (see chapter “The Concept of War and Peace in Islam”).

Miracles and healing of a Canaanite child—In the first century, healers and miracle workers were not considered to be superhuman beings. Jesus himself granted that others were capable of performing miracles, such as exorcisms, regardless of whether they followed him (Matthew 12:27; Mark 9:38-41; 6:7). In his own day, miracles were proof neither of divinity nor Messiahship, and, at most, they might be used to validate an individual’s message or way of life. Jesus asked for no rewards for his miracles and begged the people not to mention these powers of his. The reason for his dislike of being known as a miracle worker was besides being pestered to give exhibitions to satisfy curiosity; it diverted attention from his message. Jesus as a human being and as a Jew clearly carried his own prejudices against gentiles as the incident with a Canaanite woman who begged Jesus to heal her daughter demonstrates: *Now Jesus withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon, and there a Canaanite woman came to him and cried. “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely possessed by a demon.” But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples begged him, “Send her away, for she is crying after us.” He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But the woman knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” “It is not fair,” he answered, “to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” Then she said, “Yes even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” “O woman, Jesus answered, “Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed (Matthew 15:21-28).* According to Bernard Shaw, referring to the above incident in *Androcles and the lion* wrote, “she melted the Jew out of him and made Christ a Christian. This is somehow one of the most touching stories in

the Gospel; perhaps because the woman rebukes the prophet by a touch of his own finest quality.” This incident clearly proves that Jesus was a fallible human being, who, as a Jew, carried prejudice against gentiles.

Mission of Jesus according to the Quran—[Jesus said]: “I have come to you with a message from your Sustainer. I shall create for you out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breathe into it, so that it might become [your] destiny by God’s leave; and I shall heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead back to life* by God’s leave: and I shall let you know what you may eat and what you should store up in your houses. In all this, there is indeed a message for you, if you are [truly] believers. “And [I have come] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to make lawful to you some of the things which [aforetime] were forbidden to you. And I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer, remain, then, conscious of God, and pay heed unto me. “God is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer, so worship Him [alone]: this is a straight way.” (3:49-51)*

“The shape of [your] **destiny**,” lit., “something like the shape of a bird, and then I shall breathe into it, so that it might or whereupon it will become a bird...” The noun *tayr* is a plural of *tair* (flying creature or bird). In pre-Islamic usage, as well as in the Quran, the words *tair* and *tayr* often denote fortune or destiny, whether good or evil. Thus, in the parabolic manner so beloved by him, Jesus intimated to the children of Israel that out of the humble clay of their lives, he would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny, and that this vision, brought to life by his God-given inspiration, would become their real destiny

by God's leave and by the strength of their faith. It is probable that the "raising of the **dead**" by Jesus is a metaphorical description of his giving new life to people who were spiritually dead. See 6:122—"Is then he who was dead in spirit, and whom We thereupon gave life, and for whom We set up a light whereby he can see his way among men—is then he like unto one who is lost in darkness deep, out of which he cannot emerge?" If this interpretation is correct, the healing of the blind and the leper has a similar significance: namely, an inner regeneration of people who were spiritually diseased and blind to the truth. "What you may eat and what you should store," i.e., "what good things you may partake of in the life of this world, and what good deeds you should lay up as a treasure for the life to come."

***Strengthening Jesus with Holy Inspiration** (ruh al-qudus)—For, indeed, We vouchsafed unto Moses the divine writ and caused the apostle after apostle to follow him; and We vouchsafed to Jesus, the son of Mary, all evidence of the truth, and strengthened him with holy inspiration. (2:87)*

There is a stress upon the continuous succession of prophets among the Jews, which, in fact, deprives them of any excuse of ignorance. The rendering of ruh al-qudus (lit., "the spirit of holiness") is based on the recurring use in the Quran of the term ruh in the sense of "divine inspiration." It is also recorded that the Prophet invoked the blessing of the ruh al-qudus on his Companion, the poet Hassan ibn Thabit just as the Quran (58:22) speaks of all believers as being "strengthened by inspiration (ruh) from Him." The mention of Jesus by name is intended to stress the fact of his having been a prophet, and to refute the claims of those who deify him.

***Gospel bestowed on Jesus**—We caused Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in the footsteps of those [earlier prophets], confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah; and We vouchsafed unto him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah, and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious. Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge in accordance with what God has revealed therein: for they who do not judge in the light of what God has bestowed from on high—it is they, they who are truly iniquitous! (5:46-47)*

The Gospels (Injil, from Gr. Evangel) are mentioned eleven times in five different surahs, but there is no reference to Paul or the Epistles in the Quran. The classical Greek word Evangelion means the “good news.” The term Gospel has connotations of the traditions of Jesus’ earthly ministry that were written in the accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were written from the post-resurrection perspective as they deal with the earthly ministry of Jesus from hindsight. Very few of Jesus’ actual words seem to have been recorded in the Gospels, and much of their material has been affected by later development in the Churches that was founded by St. Paul and St Augustine.

Both men were controversial figures in their personal and religious lives. The letters of Paul were the earliest Christian text written in AD 50. The Gospel of Mark was written in AD 60-80, followed by Matthew, Luke and John in AD 75-90. The source of these Gospels is not known. One theory is the existence of an Aramaic original Gospel, which is now lost, as the first Gospel from which a later Mark in Greek was translated and arranged. “Peshitta” is the earliest known Aramaic New Testament dating

back to the third or fourth century. The English translation of Peshitta is also available.

Differences between Synoptic Gospels and Gospel of John—

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree so closely with one another that they can be studied together in parallel columns in a work called a synopsis and are hence called the Synoptic Gospels. The gospel of John is so different that it cannot be reconciled with the Synoptics, except in a general way. Even in the Synoptic Gospels there are many differences in details: (1) In the Synoptics, Jesus' public career appears to have lasted less than one year, since only one Passover is mentioned; in John, three Passovers occur, implying a ministry of more than two years. John also describes several trips to Jerusalem, but only one is mentioned in the Synoptics. (2) In all four Gospels, Jesus performs miracles, especially healings, but while exorcisms are prevalent in the Synoptics, there are none in John. (3) The greatest difference, though, appears in the methods and content of Jesus' teaching: In the Synoptic Gospels, he speaks about the Kingdom of God in short aphorisms and parables, making use of similes and figures of speech, many drawn from agricultural and village life. He seldom refers to himself and when asked for a "sign" to prove his authority, he refuses (Mark 8:11-12). In John, on the other hand, Jesus employs long metaphorical discourses, in which he himself is the main subject. His miracles are described as "signs" that supports the authenticity of his claims. Most Christian apologists quote the Gospel of John for supposedly indirect references to divinity of Jesus. (4) Not all the saying and deeds in the gospels are reports of things that Jesus actually said and did. After the death of Jesus, the early Christians spoke to him in prayer and sometime Jesus answered (2 Corinthians 12:8-9, 1 Corinthians 2:13). These early Christians failed to distinguish

between “the historical Jesus” and “the heavenly Lord” and some sayings heard in prayer almost certainly ended up in the Gospels as uttered by Jesus during his lifetime. (5) If Jesus is God and sinless, why did he receive John’s baptism—a symbol of washing away of sin and spiritual purification? Matthew apparently found it to be embarrassing that Jesus received John’s baptism of repentance. Thus he had John protest against the baptism and claim that Jesus should instead baptize him (Matthew 3:13-17); however, this objection is not noted in Mark or Luke.

***Twelve Disciples** (The White-Garbed one)—When Jesus became aware of their refusal to acknowledge the truth, he asked: “Who will be my helpers in God’s cause?” The white-garbed ones replied: “We shall be [your] helpers [in the cause] of God! We believe in God: and you bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves unto Him! O our Sustainer! We believe in what Thou hast bestowed from on high, and we follow this Apostle; make us one, then, with all who bear witness [to the truth]!” (3:52-53)*

When the majority of his people, and particularly the Pharisees were opposing Jesus, he asked who will be my helper or my disciple. Al-hawariyyun (sing. hawari) is the designation applied in the Quran to the disciples of Jesus. The term hawari was used to denote a member of the Essene Brotherhood, a Jewish religious group that existed in Palestine at the time of Jesus, and to which he himself possibly belonged. The Essenes were distinguished by their strong insistence on moral purity and unselfish conduct, and always wore white garments as the outward mark of their convictions, and this would satisfactorily explain the name given to them. The fact that the Prophet once said, “Every prophet has his hawari” does not conflict with the above view, since he obvi-

ously used this in figuratively, recalling thereby Jesus' helpers in God's cause. (Lit., "write us down" or "inscribe us.") The verb *kataba* means also he drew together or brought together: hence the noun *katibah*, "a body of men."

O you who have attained to faith! Be helpers [in the cause of God—even as Jesus, the son of Mary, said to the white-garbed ones, [Al-hawariyyun] "Who will be my helpers in God's cause?"—Whereupon the white-garbed [disciples] replied, "We shall be [your] helpers [in the cause] of God!" And so [it happened that] some of the children of Israel came to believe [in the apostleship of Jesus], whereas others denied the truth. But [now] We have given strength against their foes to those who have [truly] attained to faith: and they have become the ones that shall prevail. (61:14)

This verse exhorts followers of Prophet Muhammad to help him in the cause of God just like apostles of Jesus did. Some of the children of Israel recognized him as a prophet—and, therefore, as no more than a created, human being—whereas others denied this truth in the course of time by regarding him as "the son of God"—and, therefore, as "God incarnate"—while still others rejected him and his message altogether. We have strengthened all who truly believe in Jesus as God's Apostle and, thus, as a forerunner of the Last Prophet, Muhammad, whose message confirms and expands the true message of Jesus.

Why Jews rejected Jesus? In his mid-30s, Jesus had a short public career, lasting perhaps less than one year, during which he attracted considerable attention. The primary language of Palestinian Jews was Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew and Arabic. There were many important Jewish reli-

gious groups that differed from each other in several ways: (1) Scribes and Pharisees were two distinct groups, though some scribes were Pharisees. The Scribes had the knowledge of the law and could draft legal documents such as contracts for marriage, divorce, loan, inheritance, etc. The Pharisees, a largely lay group that had the reputation of being the most precise interpreters of the law, and they believed in the resurrection of the dead. They also relied on the non-biblical “traditions of the fathers.” Like the scribes, Pharisees were also well-known legal expert: hence the partial overlap of these two groups. (2) The Essenes were a more radical sect, with extremely strict rules. One branch of the group lived at Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea and produced the Dead Sea Scrolls. (3) Many aristocratic priests, as well as some prominent laymen, were Sadducees. They rejected the traditions of the fathers and denied the resurrection, which had recently entered Jewish thought from Persia and, which was accepted by most Jews in the first century.

The Torah prophesies forty-seven times of coming of a messiah who would be anointed by the spirit of God. To serve in all three positions: prophet, king, and priest. Both the New Testament and later the Quran identifies Jesus as this messiah. Ancient Judaism knew no hope of resurrection and the old Jewish view of the fulfillment of the history of salvation was guided by the idea that at the end of the history of the Jewish people the Messiah will come from the house of David and establish the Kingdom of God—an earthly Kingdom in which the Anointed of Lord will gather the tribes of the chosen people, and from Jerusalem will establish a world Kingdom of peace. Jesus disappointed the political expectations of the Jews and did not let himself be made a political Messiah. Since Jesus was unable to establish a world kingdom of peace during his lifetime, the Jews rejected him.

CHAPTER THREE
CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF TRINITY

In order to understand the nature of Jesus, a historical review of Trinity is in order, as many non-Christians misunderstand this complex concept of God. According to Christian theology, God's name is Jehovah and his only begotten son is Jesus Christ of the seed of Abraham and Isaac, whose mother was the Jewish virgin, Mary. Christians believe that God is Trinitarian who is three persons in one—Father (God), Son of God (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost). Jesus is both man and God.

God the Father—Jesus himself embraced the God of the Hebrew patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). The special relationship of Jesus to God is expressed through his designation of God as Father. In prayers, Jesus used the Aramaic word *abba* (“father”) for God, which is otherwise unusual in religious discourse in Judaism. When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, He was thinking of God's fatherhood as embracing all mankind. Every human being was to him a child of God. Jesus himself said: “Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, He who is in heaven” (Matt 23:9).

The Holy Spirit—The Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost of God becomes one of the most elusive and difficult themes in Christian theology, because it refers to one of the three persons in the

Godhead but does not evoke a concrete image as the “Father” or “Son” does. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit tends to be present more as a power than as a person, though there was distinctive personal representation in the form of the dove at Jesus’ baptism. A characteristic view of the Holy Spirit is sketched out in the Gospel according to John: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit takes place only after the Ascension of Christ; it is the beginning of a new time of salvation, in which the Holy Spirit is sent as the Paraclete (Counselor) to the Church remaining behind in this world. The idea of the complete essence of the Holy Spirit to the Son and to the Father was achieved. This was in opposition to all earlier attempts to subordinate the Holy Spirit to the Son and to the Father and to interpret the Spirit—similar to anti-Trinitarian Christology—as a prince of the angels. The Quran clearly supports the latter view of Holy Spirit.

Quranic View of Holy Spirit—The term ruh often denotes “divine inspiration.” Occasionally, however, it is used to describe the medium through which such inspiration is imparted to God’s elect: in other words, the angel (or angelic force) of revelation. Since—as is implied in 6:9—mortals cannot perceive an angel in his true manifestation, God caused him to appear to Mary “in the shape of a well-made human being,” i.e., in a shape accessible to her perception. The designation of the angel as ruh (“spirit” or “soul”) indicates that this category of beings is purely spiritual, without any physical element.

God the Son

Jewish concept of the Son of God—The phrase “son of God” is found in the Hebrew Bible, which has many possible meanings, referring to angels, humans, or even all mankind. It was

sometimes used for the expected messiah figure. It also denotes a human judge or ruler (Psalm 82:6), and “children of the Most High.” In a more specialized sense, “son of God” is a title applied only to the real king over Israel (II Samuel 7:14), with reference to King David and those of his descendants who carried on his dynasty (Psalm 89:27-28). In the Jewish interpretation of the Gospels, the being of Jesus as “son of God” corresponds to pious holy man who by divine intervention performs miracles and exorcisms. Indeed, in the Dead Sea scrolls, the term Son of God is used in the similar sense.

Pagan concept of the Son of God—In the Greek and Roman polytheistic culture, rulers and heroes were called sons of Zeus or Poseidon or Apollo or some other god among many. In Greek mythology, Heracles and many other figures, human and divine, were considered to be sons of gods such as Zeus, their highest god, and Zeus himself was represented as one of the sons of another god. Historians believe Alexander the Great implied he was a demigod by actively using the title “Son of Ammon-Zeus.” (His mother Olympias was said to have declared that Zeus impregnated her while she slept under an oak tree sacred to the god.) The Christian concept of Son of God is more in tune with the pagan view.

How Jesus Evolved from Man to God

A historical review—The doctrine that Jesus had been God in a human flesh was not finalized until the fourth century. The development of Christian belief in the incarnation was a gradual, complex process because of an apparent impossibility of confining the unlimited divine into a human body. Jesus himself certainly never claimed to be God. The first full-length account

of Jesus' life was St. Mark's Gospel, which was not written until about the year 70, some forty years after his death. By this time, historical facts had been overlaid with mythical elements, which expressed the meaning Jesus has acquired for his followers. It is this meaning that St. Mark primarily conveys rather than a reliable straightforward portrayal. It seems that he may originally have been the disciple of one John the Baptist, a wandering ascetic. John regarded the Jerusalem establishment as hopelessly corrupt and preached excoriating sermons against it. As Mark tells us about the Baptism of Jesus, "No sooner had Jesus come out of the water than he saw the heaven torn apart and the Spirit, like a dove, descending on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the beloved; my favor rests upon you.'" John the Baptist had immediately recognized Jesus as the Messiah. There was nothing particularly unusual about such a proclamation from above. Jesus himself used to call himself "the son of man," which simply stressed the weakness and mortality of the human condition. The first Christians saw him as a new Moses, a new Joshua, the founder of a new Israel. During his lifetime, many Jews in Palestine had believed that he was the Messiah. By the time of Jesus' death in about 30 CE, the Jews were passionate monotheists, so nobody expected the Messiah to be a divine figure, but instead an ordinary, if privileged, human being. Yet despite the scandal of a Messiah who had died like a common criminal on the cross, his disciples could not believe that their faith in him had been misplaced and that Jesus had somehow presented an image of God. From a very early date, they began to pray to him.

Conversion of Paul and his innovations—Paul was born probably in AD 10 in Tarsus (now in Turkey). He was granted Roman citizenship as a reward for his mercenary service for

Rome. This fact explains his two names. He used his Jewish name, Saul, within the Judaic community and his Roman surname, Paul, when speaking Greek. He received training as a rabbi in Jerusalem. Paul was not one of the Jesus' disciples and had never met Jesus in person. He first appears on the scene of history as a persecutor of the newly founded church. Stephen, a new convert to Christianity, was stoned to death and the murderers "laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:58). In Acts, Paul, on his way to Damascus to persecute the Church, is stopped by a visionary experience of Jesus. Bernard Shaw in "Androcles and the lion" explain Paul's conversion in the following words: "The conversion of Paul was no conversion at all: it was Paul who converted the religion that has raised one man above sin and death into a religion that delivered millions of men so completely into their dominion that their own common nature became a horror to them, and the religious life became a denial of life. There is not one word of Pauline Christianity in the characteristic utterances of Jesus." Converted only a few years after the death of Jesus, Paul became the leading missionary of the new movement and played a decisive part in extending it beyond the limits of Judaism to become a worldwide religion. Paul was clearly a controversial individual and there is no reference of him in the Quran.

St. Paul believed that non-Jews could become members of the New Israel even though they did not observe the full Laws of Moses. This offended the original group of disciples, who wanted to remain a more exclusive Jewish sect, and they broke with Paul after a passionate dispute. Paul never called Jesus "God." He called him "the Son of God" in its Jewish sense: He certainly did not believe that Jesus had been the incarnation of God himself—he had simply possessed God's "powers" and "Spirit," which manifested God's activity on earth and were not

to be identified with the divine essence. Not surprisingly, in the Gentile world the new Christians did not always retain the sense of these subtle distinctions, so that eventually a man who had stressed his weak, and mortal humanity was believed to have been divine. If one looks at Jesus' career objectively it is hard not to conclude that Jesus' mission ended as a failure. With all his miracles, Jesus could attract only a handful of followers, one of which betrayed him in the end. As somebody said, if it were not for the apostle Paul, Christianity would have been a footnote in the annals of human history.

Neoplatonic doctrine—By the first century, Philo of Alexandria interpreted the Old Testament concept of God in terms of the logos idea of Hellenistic philosophy. In the Gospel of John in the New Testament there appeared the first traces of the concept of Christ as the Logos, the “word” that issues from eternity. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God* (John 1:1). The question regarding the relationship of the oneness of God to the “triplicity” of divine manifestations was answered through the Neoplatonic philosophy developed by Plotinus in Alexandria, which postulates a single source from which all form of existence emanates and with which the soul seeks mystical union. God is divested of divine transcendence and in a first act of becoming self-conscious, the logos recognize itself as the divine mind (Greek: nous), characterized as the “Son” who goes forth from the father. The next step by which the transcendent God becomes self-conscious consists in the appearance in the divine nous of the heavenly world, the idea of the world in its individual forms as the content of the divine consciousness. In Neoplatonic philosophy, both nous and the idea of the world are designated the hypostasis or the substance of the transcendent God. In transferring the Neoplatonic doc-

trine to the Christian interpretation of the Trinity there existed the danger that different manifestations of God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) would be transformed into a hierarchy of gods and thus into polytheism. This danger was consciously avoided by the stress on complete sameness of essence of the three manifestations of God; there arose the danger of a relapse into triplicity of equally ranked gods, which would replace the idea of the oneness of God.

Relation of God the Father and the Son of God

The question as to how to reconcile the encounter with God in this threefold figure with faith in the oneness of God, which was characteristic of the Jews and distinction from paganism, agitated the piety of ancient Christendom in the deepest way. From the beginning of the church, different interpretations of the person of Jesus and his relationship with God have existed alongside one another. The following is some of the examples: (1) Adoptionist: A concern to safeguard the true humanity of Jesus led some early Christians to teach that Jesus of Nazareth, an ordinary man, was adopted as the son of God in the moment of his baptism or after his resurrection; this was called adoptionism. (2) Modalist: Some early Christians were so intent on asserting his identity with the Father that the distinction of his person was lost, and he became merely a manifestation of the one God. Because of this idea that Christ as a “mode” of divine manifestation a proponents of this view were dubbed as “Modalist.” (3) Subordinationist: On the opposite extreme, some insisted so strenuously upon the distinctness of his person from that of the father that they subordinated him to the father. (4) Docetists: Some Christians wanted to protect Jesus against involvement in the world of matter, which they regarded as essentially evil, and therefore

taught that Jesus had only an apparent, not a real body; they were called Docetists. By the third century, it was already apparent that all attempts to systematize the mystery of the divine trinity with the theories of Neoplatonic metaphysics were unsatisfying and led to a constant series of new conflicts. The Neoplatonic concept of substance was foreign to the New Testament itself. It is no wonder that the continuation of the dispute based on the metaphysics of substance, likewise, led to concepts that have no foundation in the New Testament—such as the question of the *sameness* of essence (homoousia) or *similarity* of essence (homoiousia) of the divine persons. Two major theological schools of thought developed within the Christian Church.

Antioch school of theology and Arian controversy—One associated with Antioch in Syria followed the interpretation which proceeds from the humanity of Jesus and views his divinity in his consciousness of God, founded in the divine mission that was imposed upon him by God through the infusion of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of Mark understood the baptism of Jesus Christ as the adoption of the man Jesus into sonship of God, accomplished through the descent of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the earliest followers of Jesus regarded him as merely human is evident from the many theological controversies, which persisted during the first three or four centuries of the Christian era. Thus, some renowned theologians, like Theodotus of Byzantium, who lived toward the end of the second century, and his followers—among them Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch in the year 260—maintained that the “sonship of God,” mentioned in the then-existing texts of the Gospels, was purely symbolic, denoting no more than that Jesus was a human being exalted by God.

Arius belonged to the Antiochene School of theology, which placed a strong emphasis upon the historicity of the man Jesus

Christ. The great Arian controversy of the fourth century, which spilt the Church into two, stemmed from his preaching that the Son was a created being who did not eternally exist and therefore, subordinate to the father. Christ was thus less than God, but more than man; he was divine, but he was not God.

Theological school of Alexandria—Athanasius from the doctrinal school of Alexandria in Egypt adopted another view. Here, the divinity of the person of Jesus is understood not as an endowment of the man Jesus with divine powers but rather as the result of the descent of the divine logos (word)—a preexistent heavenly being—into the world: the logos taking on a human body of flesh. The Gospel according to John, as described above expresses this view.

Nicene Creed—Roman Emperor Constantine was a pagan who later converted to Christianity. Rome’s official religion was sun worship, and Constantine was its head priest. Due to rising numbers of Christians, the conflict among Christians and between pagans and Christians was growing. Constantine knew that something had to be done to unify Rome under a single religion. The Emperor Constantine summoned the first ecumenical council of the Church at Nicea in 325 to settle the religious dispute and to reunify the Church. It condemned the teaching of Arius and produced a creed that declared that the Son was the one substance with and co-eternal with the Father. Christ was begotten and not made, and therefore, he is not a creature but a creator. The son became the mediator of the glory of the Father. In the Christian understanding of Christ as being one with the Father, there is a constant possibility that faith in God will be absorbed in a “monochristism”—i.e., that the figure of the Son in the life of faith will overshadow the figure of the Father, and thus

it to disappear and that the figure of the Creator and Sustainer of the world will recede behind the figure of the Redeemer.

It was not clear how the position of Nicea, and of Athanasius differed from modalism and a fuller clarification of the doctrine of Trinity was needed. Ratified at the Council of Constantinople in 381, the statement made official the terminology developed by the supporters of Nicene Creed: one divine essence or substance, three divine persons (*una substantia—tres personae*). The three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were distinct from one another but were equal in their eternity and power. Although this doctrine seemed to make problematical the unity of God, it provided an answer to the first of the two issues confronted by the Church—the Christ relation to the Father. It now became necessary to clarify the second issue—the relation to the divine and the human within Christ.

Two Natures of Christ and Nestorius Dispute—The Alexandrian school of thought stressed the divine character of all that Jesus had done, but its enemies accused it of absorbing the humanity of Christ in his divinity. Monophysitism, with a one-sided stress upon the divine nature of Christ, emerged from the Alexandrian school of theology. The mode of thought employed at Antioch, on the other hand, emphasized the true humanity of Christ, but its opponents maintained that, in so doing, it had split Christ into two persons.

The monk Nestorius was the patriarch of Constantinople in 428, and Cyril, patriarch of Alexandria. The conflict regarding two natures (divinity and humanity) of Christ between Antioch and Alexandria came to a head, when Nestorius emphasized the humanity of Christ and so took exception to the traditional description of Mary as *Theotokos* (mother of God), declaring her proper title to be “mother of Christ,” since she was the mother

of the human nature alone. Cyril, the Alexandrian theologian, responded by charging that Nestorius was dividing the person of Christ, which according to him was only one nature, the divine before incarnation, but that after the incarnation, there were two natures indissolubly joined in one person. Once again, the state intervened and held the third council of the Church at Ephesus in 431, which was one in a series of gatherings, to settle this conflict. It condemned Nestorianism and Nestorius was exiled to the Egyptian desert. (The teachings of Nestorius were, however, perpetuated in Christian School at Edessa, which was transferred to Nisibis in 489 and received the support of the Persian King.) The actual settlement was not accomplished until the calling of the **Council of Chalcedon in 451**. It declared: "We all unanimously teach...one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in deity and perfect in humanity...in two natures, without being mixed, transmuted, divided, or separated." Once again, the Neoplatonic metaphysics of substance offered the categories to settle conceptually these various theological concerns. The fifth century theologians could describe the relationship between the divine and the human Christ by analogy to the relation between the Father and the Son in the Trinity. Since there were three divine persons in one divine essence, similarly, there were two natures, one of them divine and the other human, in one-person Jesus Christ. This interpretation of the person of Christ affirmed both oneness with God and his oneness with humanity while still maintaining the oneness of his person; this was the doctrine of the person of Christ ever since. The concept of a person, taken from Roman law, served to join the fully divine and fully human natures of Christ into an individual unity. The debate around the divine versus human nature of Jesus just would not die; in the year 681, half a century after the death of Muhammad, the **seventh Ecumenical Council** was still dealing with this issue.

Eastern Orthodox Christians, who subscribe to some but not all the Ecumenical Councils, say they believe in one God with three attributes rather than three persons. Those of the Nestorius sect also preferred the Aramaic word for “attributes” to the Greek concept of “persons.” Islamic theology makes a distinction between the attributes of God and the divine essence. Muhammad is also reported to have said in a famous hadith: “There are ninety-nine (symbolic number representing infinitude) names of God, one hundred minus one. He who enumerates [and believes in them and the one God behind] they would get into Paradise.” By endorsing Jesus as the Son of God, **Constantine** turned Jesus into a deity who existed beyond the scope of the human world, an entity whose power was unchallengeable. By fusing pagan symbols, dates, and rituals into the growing Christian traditions, Constantine created a hybrid religion that was accepted to the pagans of Roman Empire and Christians who believed in Christ’s divinity. The pre-Christian God Mithras also called the Son of God, and the light of the world was born on December 25, and Christian service on Sunday morning coincides with the pagan sun god’s weekly tribute. Later in Christian history, Gospels that spoke of Christ’s human traits were omitted and those Gospels that made Jesus godlike were selected. More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament and only four were chosen (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). The earlier gospels were outlawed, collected, and burnt. According to Adolf von Harnack, the great German Scholar, the Christian dogma appeared to be a corruption of the essentially simple faith of Jesus and the early Christians. It was seen as an intrusion of Greek philosophy, an “acute Hellenization” that obscured the Christian truth it set out to guard. The Gospels do not quote Jesus as using the title “Son of God” for himself in so many words, although sayings like Matt. 11:27 come close to it. As Gospel shows, the

application of the name of “Son of God” to Jesus was offensive to the Jews, because it seemed to smack of gentile polytheism. This also made it all too intelligible to the pagans. Facing both the Jews and the Greeks, the church offered a compromise that Jesus Christ was “God’s sole Son”: the Son of God in antithesis to Jewish claims that the eternal could have no sons; the only Son, in antithesis to Greek myths of divine procreation. It took almost four hundred years to define the doctrine of the Trinity and elevate Jesus into Godhead. Thus Hellenistic ideals of godly plurality overshadowed Christianity’s monotheism. Some of the great Western thinkers such as Sir Isaac Newton believed that Christianity went astray in the fourth century, when the first Council of Nicea propounded erroneous doctrines of the nature of Christ, and that Trinitarian passages in the Bible were latter-day corruptions of the original text. The doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Jesus has always scandalized Jews, and, later, Muslims would also find it blasphemous.

The accretions of councils and theologies have carried Christian doctrine a long way from the simple purity of the Nazarene. The originally widespread teachings of Bishop Arius (280-326) centered on the concept of Jesus as a mortal man chosen by God for a specific task, and in the concept of God as absolutely One, unknowable, and separate from every created being; this doctrine gradually ceased to have any influence over the Christian masses.

The Quranic Response to Jesus Being Son of God And The Dogma of Trinity

Quran rejects all the pagan innovations, which entered Christianity such as Jesus being God, trinity, and human sacrifice and restored the original religion of Jesus. The suggestion that Jesus holds any aspect of deity is perhaps the single most

critical issue dividing Islam and Christianity. Islam honors Jesus as a true apostle of God. It even accepts the Christian doctrine of his virgin birth. But at the doctrine of the Incarnation and Trinity, it draws the line, seeing these as concessions to man's inclination to seek a compromise between the human and the divine. The Quran describes immaculate birth of Jesus as a miracle of God, similar to parting of the sea by Moses and many other miracles described in the Bible and the Quran. Being a holy man and a great Prophet, Jesus is nonetheless still a human being. By elevating Jesus' status to Godhead, Christians violate the first and second commandant: "You shall have no other God before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image." Christians have, in Islam's eyes, compromised their monotheism by deifying Christ.

In Greek, Roman, and Hindu mythology, the gods routinely had sexual intercourse with human women. The very idea of God begetting a son through an animal act is not only heresy and blasphemy but downright abhorrent for both Jews and Muslims.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), one of the great literary geniuses of his time, in his essay "THE HERO AS PROPHET," compared Islam and Christianity: "Muhammad's creed we called a kind of Christianity, and really, if we look at the rapid earnestness with which it was believed and laid to heart, I should say a better kind than that of those miserable Syrian Sects, with their vain janglings about Homoiousion and Homoousion, the head full of worthless noise, the heart empty and dead! Islam devoured all these vain jangling Sects, and I think had a right to do so. It was a Reality, direct from the great Heart of Nature once more. Arab idolatries, Syrian formulas, whatsoever was not equally real, had to go up in flame, mere dead fuel, in various senses, for this, which was fire."

The Quranic View of Jesus

Jesus was human—like Adam—In the sight of God; the nature of Jesus is as the nature of Adam, whom He created out of dust and then said unto him, “Be”—and he is? (3:59)

Lit., “The parable of Jesus is as the parable of Adam...,” etc. The expression *mathal* (rendered above as “nature”) is often metaphorically employed to denote the state or condition (of a person or a thing), and is in this sense synonymous with *sifah* (the “quality” or “nature” of a thing). The above passage is part of an argument against the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. The Quran stresses here, as in many other places, the fact that Jesus, like Adam—by which name, in this context, the whole human race is meant—was only a mortal “created out of dust,” i.e., out of substances, both organic and inorganic, which are found in their elementary forms on and in the earth. See also 18:37, 22:5, 30:20, 35:11, 40:67, where the Quran speaks of all human beings as created out of dust. That Adam stands here for the human race is clearly implied in the use of the present tense in the last word of this sentence.

Jesus mortal like all other prophets—The Christ, son of Mary, was but an apostle: all [other] apostles had passed away before him; and his mother was one who never deviated from the truth; and they both ate food [like other mortals]. How clear We make these messages to them: and then how perverted are their minds! (5:75)

The purport of this passage is that Jesus was but a mortal like all the other apostles who lived before him, and that Mary never claimed to be “the mother of God” and how turned away

they are from the truth and thus, their mind became perverted or deluded.

Preposterous claim: *As it is, some assert, “The Most Gracious has taken unto Himself a son!” Indeed, [by this assertion] you have brought forth something monstrous, whereat the heavens might well-nigh be rent into fragments, and the earth be split asunder, and the mountains fall down in ruins! That men should ascribe a son to the Most Gracious, although it is inconceivable that the Most Gracious should take unto Himself a son! (19:88-92) Furthermore, [this divine writ is meant] to warn, all those who assert, “God has taken unto Himself a son” No knowledge whatever have they of Him, and neither had their forefathers: dreadful is this saying that comes out of their mouths, [and] nothing but falsehood do they utter! (18:4-5)*

The above phrase means that they who make such a preposterous claim (God has taken unto Himself a son) have no real knowledge of Him, since they attribute to the Supreme Being something that is attributable only to created, imperfect beings. This refers to the Christian belief in Jesus as “the son of God”—and, in general, to every belief in God’s “incarnation” in a created being—namely, the deification of powers or beings other than God “with a view to their being a source of strength” to those who turn to them. The present passage refers to people who, while believing in God, deify prophets and saints, too, in the subconscious hope that they might act as “mediators” between them and the Almighty. Since this deification offends against the principle of God’s transcendent oneness and uniqueness, it implies a breach of man’s “bond with God” and, if consciously persisted in, constitutes an unforgivable sin (see 4:48 and 116).

The idea that God might have a son—either in the real or in the metaphorical sense of this term—would presuppose a degree of innate likeness between the father and the son, but God is in every respect unique, and “there is nothing like unto Him” (42:11) and “nothing could be compared with Him” (112:4).

God’s perfection precludes the possibility of progeny—Some people assert, “God has taken to Himself a son!” No, but His is all that is in the heavens and on earth; all things devoutly obey His will. Had God willed to take to Himself a son, He could have chosen anyone whom He wanted out of whatever He has created—[but] limitless is He in His glory! No evidence whatever you have for this [assertion]! Would you ascribe unto God something, which you cannot know? (2:116) (39:4) (10:68)*

Since God is almighty, He can have or do anything that He wills, and so, if He wanted, He could “take unto Himself a son.” God is “limitless in His glory”—i.e., complete in His excellence and perfection. The expression *subhana*—applied exclusively to God—connotes His utter remoteness from any imperfection and any similarity, however, tenuous, with any created being or thing. He is ipso facto remote from the incompleteness inherent in the need of, or desire for, progeny, which logically precludes the possibility of His having “son” either in a literal or a metaphorical sense. Moreover, the concept of “progeny” implies an organic continuation of the progenitor or of part of him, in another being and, therefore, presupposes a degree of incompleteness before the act of procreation (or incarnation, if the term “sonship” is used metaphorically): and the idea of incompleteness, in whatever sense, negates the very concept of God’s perfection.

Refusal to acknowledge God's uniqueness—Indeed, [O you sinners,] We have conveyed the truth unto you; but most of you abhor the truth. Why can they [who deny the truth ever] determine what [the truth] should be? Or do they, perchance, think that We do not hear their hidden thoughts and their secret confabulations.* Yea, indeed, [We do,] and Our heavenly forces [angels.] are with them, recording [all]. Say [O Prophet]: “If the Most Gracious [truly] had a son, I would be the first to worship him!” Utterly remote, in His glory, is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth—the Sustainer, in almightiness enthroned—from all that they may attribute to Him by way of definition! But leave them to indulge in idle talk and play [with words]* until they face that [Judgment] Day of theirs, which they have been promised: for [then they will come to know that] it is He [alone] who is God in heaven and God on earth, and [that] He alone is truly wise, all-knowing. (43:78-84)

Above is a reference to the truth of God's oneness and uniqueness, which those who believe in Jesus as “the son of God” refuse to acknowledge. Then what the truth should be—i.e., in contradiction to what the Quran postulates as the truth. Their hidden thoughts and secret confabulations are an allusion to the centuries-long subtle Christian controversies over the question as to whether or not Jesus was “the son of God” and, hence, divine. These controversies were often influenced by a subconscious leaning of some of the early Christian thinkers toward ancient, mostly Mithraistic, cults and concepts, which were in the beginning strongly opposed by Unitarian theologians, foremost among them Arius, Patriarch of Alexandria (about 280-336 CE.).

However, at the politically motivated Council of Nicea (325 C.E.), the Arian views—which until then had been shared by the overwhelming majority of articulate Christians—were condemned as “heretical,” and the doctrine of Christ’s divinity was officially formulated in the so-called Nicene Creed as the basis of Christian beliefs. The play with words is evidently an allusion to the verbal subtleties of the Nicene Creed, and particularly the statement, “Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten, not made [i.e., not created], by the Father as His only Son, of the same substance as the Father, God of God...,” etc.

The idea that God might have a “son”—either in the real or in the metaphorical sense of this term—would presuppose a degree of innate likeness between “the father” and “the son.” But God is in every respect unique, so “there is nothing like unto Him” (42:11) and “nothing could be compared with Him” (112:4). But even if the idea of “sonship” is meant to express no more than one of the different “aspects” of the One Deity (as is claimed in the Christian dogma of the Trinity), it is described in the Quran as blasphemous as it amounts to an attempt at defining God who is “sublimely exalted above anything that men may devise by way of definition” (see 6:100).

Controversy about nature of Jesus—Such was, in the words of truth, Jesus the son of Mary, about whose nature they so deeply disagree. It is not conceivable that God should have taken to Himself a son: limitless is He in His glory! When He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it “Be”—and it is! And [thus it was that Jesus always said]: “God is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer; so worship [none but] Him: this [alone] is straight way.” And yet, the sects [that follow the Bible] are at Variance among themselves [about the nature of Jesus]! (19:34-37)

The conflicting views about the nature of Jesus and his origins, ranging from the blasphemous Jewish assertion that he was a “false prophet” and the product of a shameful, illicit union (see 4:156), rejecting him entirely, to the Christian belief of deifying him as “the son of God” and, therefore, God incarnate.

***Nature of Jesus and the Day of Regrets**—Woe, then, unto all who deny the truth when that awesome Day will appear! [Day of Judgment] How well will they hear and see [the truth] on the Day when they come before Us! Today, however, these evildoers are obviously lost in error: hence, warn them of [the coming of] the Day of Regrets, when everything will be decided—for as yet they are heedless, and they do believe [in it]. (19:37-39)*

***Ezra and Christ as Sons of God**—And the Jews say, “Ezra is God’s son while the Christians say, the Christ is God’s son.” Such are the sayings, which they utter with their mouths, following in spirit assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the truth! [They deserve the imprecation:] “May God destroy them!” How perverted are their minds! (9:30)*

The charge of shirk (ascribing of divinity or divine qualities to others besides God) is leveled against both the Jews and the Christians in amplification, as it were, of the statement that they do not follow the religion of truth which God has enjoined upon them. As regards the belief attributed to the Jews that Ezra (or, in the Arabicized form of this name, Uzayr) was God’s son, only the Jews of Arabia, and not all Jews, have been thus accused. According to a Tradition, some of the Jews of Medina once said to Muhammad, “How could we follow you when you have

forsaken our qiblah and do not consider Ezra a son of God?” On the other hand, Ezra occupies a unique position in the esteem of all Jews, and has always been praised by them in the most extravagant terms. It was he who restored and codified the Torah after it had been lost during the Babylonian Exile, and edited it in more or less the form, which it has today, and thus he promoted the establishment of an exclusive, legalistic type of religion that became dominant in later Judaism. Ever since then he has been venerated to such a degree that his verdicts on the Law of Moses have come to be regarded by the Talmudists as being practically equivalent to the Law itself. In Quranic ideology, this amounts to the unforgivable sin of shirk, as it implies the elevation of a human being to the status of a quasi-divine law-giver and the blasphemous attribution to him—albeit metaphorically—of the quality of “sonship” in relation to God. See in this connection Exodus iv, 22-23 (Israel is My son) or Jeremiah xxxi, 9 (I am a father to Israel): expressions to which, because of their idolatrous implications, the Quran takes strong exception. Originally, the Arabs used the expression “may God destroy him” in the sense of a direct imprecation, but already in pre-Quranic Arabic it had assumed the character of an idiomatic device meant to circumscribe anything that is extremely strange or horrifying and, according to many philologists, this, rather than its literal meaning, is the purport of this phrase here.

***Only God is all-powerful**—Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the Christ, son of Mary.” Say: “And who could have prevailed with God in any way had it been His will to destroy the Christ, son of Mary, and his mother, and everyone who is on earth—all of them? For, God’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is*

between them; He creates what He wills: and God has the power to will anything!” (5:17)

God Is Not Trinity

There is no record of Christ having ever said that God is trinity. The word “Trinity” does not exist in the New Testament. The Quran objects to the dogma of the Trinity and its related doctrine of incarnation. A belief in Trinity collided head-on with the Islamic dogma of the oneness of God.

O followers of the Gospel! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs, and do not say of God anything but the truth. The Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was but God’s Apostle—[the fulfillment of] His promise that He had conveyed unto Mary, and a soul created by Him. Believe, then, in God and His apostles, and do not say, “[God is] a trinity.” Desist [from this assertion] for your own good. God is but One God; utterly remote is He, in His glory, from having a son: unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth; and none is as worthy of trust as God. Never did the Christ feel too proud to be God’s servant, nor do the angels who are near unto Him. (4:171-172)

Since the Christians are specifically addressed below, the term kitab is rendered as “Gospel.” The Quran points out that Jesus, like all other human beings, was a soul created by Him and by raising Jesus to the rank of divinity, the followers of Gospel overstep the bounds of truth.

God is not third of trinity—Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the Christ, son of Mary; seeing that the Christ [himself] said, “O children of Israel! Worship God [alone]; who is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer.” [See Matthew iv, 10; Luke iv, 8; John xx, 17.] Whoever ascribes divinity to any being beside God, unto him will God deny paradise, and his goal shall be the fire; and such evildoers will have none to succor them! Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the third of a trinity”—seeing that there is no deity whatever saves the One God. And unless they desist from this their assertion, grievous suffering is bound to befall such of them as are bent on denying the truth. Will they not, then, turn toward God in repentance, and ask His forgiveness? For God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (5:72-74)

Overstepping the bounds of truth: Say: “O followers of the Gospel! Do not overstep the bounds [of truth] in your religious beliefs; and do not follow the errant views of people who have gone astray aforetime, and have led many [others] astray, and are still straying from the right path.” (5:77)

This passage is addressed to the Christians, whose love for Jesus has caused them to overstep the bounds of truth by elevating him to the rank of divinity and are persisting in this condition, until now, just like the many communities who, throughout time, have come to attribute divinity to their spiritual leaders—a phenomenon frequently encountered in the history of religions.

Christ's Divinity, Idolatrous Worship by Arabs, And Monotheism of Islam

Worship of angels by Arabs and son of God—Now whenever [the nature of] the son of Mary is set forth as an example, [O Muhammad,] lo! Your people raise an outcry on this score, and say, “Which is better—our deities or he?” [But] it is only in the spirit of dispute that they put this comparison before you: yea, they are a contentious folk! (43:57)*

The sonship of Christ aided and comforted the Meccan idolaters, who believed God had sons and daughters. The pagan Quraysh objected to the Quranic condemnation of their idolatrous worship of angels—whom they describe as “our deities” pointed to the parallel Christian worship of Jesus as the son of God, and even as God incarnate. They argued more or less thus: The Quran states that Jesus was purely human—and yet the Christians, whom the same Quran describes as followers of earlier revelation (ahl al-kitab), consider him divine. “Hence, are we not rather justified in our worshiping angels, who are certainly superior to a mere human being?” The fallacy inherent in this argument is disposed of in the sequence. Since the Quran condemns explicitly, and in many places, the deification of Jesus by the Christians, this unwarranted deification cannot be used as an argument in favor of the pagan worship of angels and, thus, against the Quran because such an argument amounts to applying a false analogy to a false proposition.

False deification of Jesus and the last hour—[As for Jesus,] he was nothing but [a human being] a servant [of Ours] whom We had graced [with prophethood], and whom We made an example for the children of Israel. And

had We so willed, [O you who worship angels,] We could have made you into angels succeeding one another on earth! This [divine writ] is indeed a means to know [that] the Last Hour* [is bound to come]; hence, have no doubt whatever about it, but follow Me: this [alone] is a straight way. And let not Satan bars you [from it]—for, he is your open foe! (43:59-62)*

“We could indeed have made you into angels” implying not only that Jesus was not a supernatural being, but that the angels, too, are mere created beings finite in their existence—as indicated by the phrase “succeeding one another”—and, therefore, utterly removed from the status of divinity. The specific mention of the Last Hour in the above context is meant to stress man’s ultimate responsibility before the Creator and the fact that worship is due to Him alone: and so this parenthetical passage follows logically upon the mention of the false deification of Jesus.

Teachings of Jesus and divergent views—Now when Jesus came [to his people] with all evidence of the truth, he said: “I have now come to you with wisdom, [of divine revelation.] and to make clear to you some of that* on which you are at variance: hence, be conscious of God, and pay heed unto me. “God is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer; so worship [none but] Him: this [alone] is a straight way!” But factions from among those [who came after Jesus] began to hold divergent views:* woe, then, to those who are bent on evildoing—[woe] for the suffering [that will befall them] on a grievous Day! Are they [who are lost in sin] but waiting for the Last Hour—[waiting] that it comes upon them of a sudden, without their being aware [of its approach]? On that Day, [erstwhile] friends

*will be foes to one another—[all] save the God-conscious.
(43:63-67)*

The restrictive allusion to “some of that...,” etc., bears on the realm of faith and morals alone, since it was not a part of Jesus’ mission to deal with problems of his people’s worldly life. This observation coincides with the image of Jesus forthcoming from the (admittedly fragmentary) description of his teachings available to us in the Synoptic Gospels. Hold divergent views regarding the nature of Jesus and the inadmissibility of worshiping anyone but God: an allusion to subsequent developments in Christianity. They will hate one another on the Judgment Day—those who realize that they have been led astray by their erstwhile friends, and the latter, because they see that they will be held responsible for the sins of those whom they have led astray.

No intercession by falsely deified prophets—And hallowed be He unto whom the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them belongs, and with whom the knowledge of the Last Hour rests, and unto whom you all shall be brought back! And those [beings] whom some invoke beside God have it not in their power to intercede [on Judgment Day] for any but such as have [in their lifetime] borne witness to the truth, and have been aware [that God is one and unique]. Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than God] as to who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, “God.” How perverted, then, are their minds! [But God has full knowledge of the true believer] and of his [despairing] cry: “O my Sustainer! These are people who will not believe!” Yet you bear* with them, and say, “Peace [be upon you]!”—For in time they will come to know [the truth]. (43:85-89)*

“Beings whom some invoke beside God” is a reference to falsely deified saints or prophets and, particularly in view of the context, to Jesus. See 10:3—“There is none that could intercede with Him, unless He grants leave there for.” The words “that God is one and unique” implies that a mere oral bearing witness to the truth is useless if it is not the outcome of an inner awareness of God’s oneness and uniqueness. Every believer (of any denomination) who is distressed at the blindness of people are advised to “bear with them” who attribute divinity or divine qualities to any being other than God Himself.

Challenge to Christian of Najran (regarding the true nature of Jesus): When in 630, a Najran Christian delegation presented itself freely, and with no preceding hostility, to pay homage to Muhammad, it received favorable consideration. In return for a specified amount of taxes and a variety of services the people of Najran were granted a treaty, a copy of which has been preserved by an early historian: “They are entitled to the protection of God and the security of Muhammad the Prophet, the Messenger of God, which security shall involve their persons, religion, lands, and possessions—including those of them who are absent as well as those who are present their camels, messengers, and images [church pictures and crosses]. The status they held shall not be changed, nor shall any of their religious services or images be altered. No attempt shall be made to turn a bishop from his office as a bishop; a monk from his office as a monk, nor a sexton of a church from his office, whether what is under the control of each is great or small. These Christians shall not be held responsible for any wrong deed or bloodshed in pre-Islamic time. They shall neither be called to military service nor compelled to pay the tithe.”

*[This is] the truth from thy Sustainer; be not, then, among the doubters! And if anyone should argue with you about this [truth] after all the knowledge that has come unto you, say: "Come! Let us summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves; and then let us pray [together] humbly and ardently, and let us invoke God's curse upon those [of us] who are telling a lie."** This is indeed the truth of the matter, and there is no deity whatever saves God; and God—He alone—is almighty, truly wise. And if they turn away [from this truth]; God has full knowledge of the spreaders of corruption. (3:60-63)

“Who is telling a **lie**” regarding the true nature of Jesus. In the year 10 H., on the occasion of a dispute between the Prophet and a deputation of the Christians of Najran who, like all other Christians, maintained that Jesus was the son of God and, therefore, God incarnate. Although they refused the “trial through prayer” proposed to them by the Prophet, the latter accorded to them a treaty guaranteeing all their civic rights and the free exercise of their religion (see below).

Distortion of Bible—*There are indeed some among them who distort the Bible with their tongues, and make you think that [what they say] is from the Bible, the while it is not from the Bible. They say, “This is from God the while it is not from God: and thus do they tell a lie about God, being well aware [that it is a lie].” (3:78)*

The above-mentioned distortion of the Bible does not necessarily presuppose a corruption of the text as such. The altered meaning can also be brought about by attributing to an expres-

sion a meaning other than the one that was originally intended. As an example, in the Gospels, the term “my Father” with reference to God, as is evident from the Lord’s Prayer, was obviously meant the “Father”—i.e., the Originator and Sustainer of all mankind. Subsequently, however, some of those who claimed to be followers of Jesus lifted this expression from the realm of metaphor and transferred it to the realm of positive reality concerning Jesus alone: and thus they gave currency to the idea that he was literally “the son of God”; that is, God incarnate.

Rejection of adoration of prophets, saints and angels—*It is not conceivable that a human being to whom God had granted revelation, and sound judgment,* and prophethood, should thereafter have said to people, “Worship me beside God”; but rather [did he exhort them], “Become men of God by spreading the knowledge of the divine writ, and by your own deep study [thereof].” And neither did he bid you to take the angels and the prophets for your lords: [for] would he bid you to deny the truth after you have surrendered yourselves unto God? (3:79-80)*

The term *hukm* or “sound judgment” is synonymous, in this context, with *hikmah* (wisdom). “Become men of God,” a *rabbani* is one who devotes himself exclusively to the endeavor to know the Sustainer (*ar-rabb*) and to obey Him: a connotation fairly close to the English expression “a man of God.” Do not attribute divine or semi-divine powers to them: a categorical rejection of the adoration of saints and angelic beings.

Enmity among Christians—*And [likewise,] from those who say, “We are Christians.” We have accepted a solemn pledge: and they, too, have forgotten much of what*

they had been told to bear in mind. Therefore, We have given rise among them to enmity and hatred, [to last] until Resurrection Day: and in time God will cause them to understand what they have contrived. (5:14)

The Quran elliptically rejects their claim of being true followers of Jesus, for by wrongfully elevating him to the status of divinity, they have denied the very essence of his message and thus “forgotten much of what they had been told to bear in mind.” Their going astray from the genuine teachings of Jesus—and thus from true faith in God—is the innermost cause of the enmity and hatred which has so often set the so-called Christian nations against one another and led to unceasing wars and mutual persecution.

***We all are God’s children**—And [both] the Jews and the Christians say, “We are God’s children, and His beloved ones.” Say: “Why, then, does He cause you to suffer for your sins? No, you are but human beings of His creating. He forgives whom He wills, and He causes to suffer whom He wills: for God’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, and with Him is all journeys’ end” (5:17).*

“We are God’s children, and His beloved ones”: see Exodus iv, 22-23 (Israel is My son), Jeremiah xxxi, 9 (I am a father to Israel), and the many parallel expressions in the Gospels.

CHAPTER FOUR

DEATH OF JESUS, SALVATION, AND THE ORIGINAL SIN

Death of Jesus

Palestine in Jesus' day was part of the Roman Empire and ruled by a prefect Pontius Pilate. The prefect did not govern his area directly; instead, he relied on local leaders. On day-to-day basis, the Jewish high priest Caiaphas, who was assisted by a council, governed Jerusalem. It was well known to both Caiaphas, who governed the city, and Pilate, the prefect to whom the high priest was responsible, that the festivals were likely times of uprisings.

Gospels' description of death of Jesus—In about the year AD 30, Jesus and his disciples went to Jerusalem from Galilee to observe Passover. The holiday meant to commemorate the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and liberation from foreign bondage. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, perhaps intending to recall Zechariah 9:9, which Matthew (21:5) quotes: “Your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey.” This touched off a demonstration by his followers, who hailed Jesus as either “Son of David” (Matthew 21:9) or as “the one who comes in the name of Lord” (Mark 11:9). Jesus spent some time teaching and debating (Mark 12) and also told his disciples that the Temple would be destroyed (Mark 13:1-2). He entered the part of the temple where worshipers exchanged coins to pay the annual temple tax

and bought pigeons for sacrifice. Jesus turned over some of the tables (Mark 11:15-17), which led the chief priest and the scribes to plan to have him executed (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47). Later, Jesus and his disciples had a Passover meal. Judas Iscariot, however, one of the twelve disciples, betrayed Jesus to the authorities. After supper, Jesus took his disciples to the Mount of Olives to pray. While he was there, Judas led armed men sent by the chief priests to arrest him (Mark 14:43-52). Caiaphas asked Jesus if he was “the Christ, the Son of God.” According to Mark (14:61-62), Jesus said “yes” and predicted the arrival of the Son of Man. According to Matthew (26:63-64), he said, “You say so, but I tell you that you will see the Son of Man,” apparently implying the answer was no. According to Luke, he was more ambiguous: “If I tell you, you will not believe” and “You say that I am” (22:67-70). Whatever the answer, Caiaphas evidently had already decided that Jesus had to be crucified. In the Gospel according to Luke, in the Crucifixion scene, the discussion between the robbers and Jesus’ assurance that one of them would be with him in paradise, as well as the words, “Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit!”—which are in contrast to the cry of dereliction in Matthew and Mark (15:34: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). When evening had come, since it was the day of Preparation, the day before the Sabbath, Jesus’ body was placed in a tomb. When the Sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus went into the tomb and found it empty. Later, resurrected Jesus appeared to some of his followers.

The Quranic description of death of Jesus—And the unbelievers schemed [against Jesus]; but God brought their scheming to nothing: for God is above all schemers. Lo! God said: “O Jesus! I shall cause you to die, and shall exalt you to Me, and cleanse you of [the presence of] those*

who are bent on denying the truth; and I shall place those who follow you [far] above those who are bent on denying the truth, unto the Day of Resurrection. In the end, unto Me, you all must return, and I shall judge between you with regard to all on which you differ. And as for those who are bent on denying the truth, I shall cause them to suffer a suffering severe in this world and in the life to come, and they shall have none to succor them; whereas to those who attain to faith and do good works, He will grant their reward in full: for God does not love evildoers.” This message We convey to you, and this tidings full of wisdom. (3:54-58)*

The unbelievers who schemed against Jesus were those among the Jews who refused to acknowledge Jesus as a prophet and tried to destroy him. “I shall judge between you with regard to all on which you differ” refers to all who revere Jesus, i.e., the Christians, who believe him to be the son of God, and the Muslims, who regard him as a prophet as well as those who deny him altogether. Regarding God’s promise to Jesus, “I shall exalt you unto Me,” see 4:158 below.

Mystery of crucifixion of Jesus—*Their boast [referring to Jews], “We have slain the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, [who claimed to be] an apostle of God!” However, they did not slay him, and neither did they crucify him, but it only seemed* to them [as if it had been] so; and those who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not slay him: No,* but God exalted him to Himself—and God is indeed almighty, wise. Yet there is not one of the followers of earlier revelation who*

does not, at the moment of his death, grasp the truth about Jesus; and on the Day of Resurrection, he [himself] shall bear witness to the truth against them. (4:157-159)

According to this verse, all believing Jews and Christians realize at the moment of their death that Jesus was truly a prophet of God—having been neither an impostor nor the son of God. Thus, the Quran categorically denies the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. It was certainly not Jews who put Jesus to death. Even today, “Christ-killer” is an epithet still hurled at Jews. There exist, among Muslims, many fanciful legends telling us that at the last moment God substituted for Jesus, a person closely resembling him (according to some accounts, that person was Judas), who was subsequently crucified in his place. However, none of these legends finds the slightest support in the Quran or in authentic Traditions, and must be summarily rejected. They represent no more than confused attempts at harmonizing the Quranic statement that Jesus was not crucified with the graphic description, in the Gospels, of his crucifixion. The story of the crucifixion as such has been succinctly explained in the Quranic phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum*, which is rendered as “but it only appeared to them as if it had been so.” Implying that in the course of time, long after the time of Jesus, a legend had somehow grown up (possibly under the then-powerful influence of Mithraistic beliefs) to the effect that he had died on the cross in order to atone for the original sin with which mankind is allegedly burdened. This legend became so firmly established among the latter-day followers of Jesus that even his enemies, the Jews, began to believe it—albeit in a derogatory sense for crucifixion was, in those times, a heinous form of death-penalty reserved for the lowest of criminals. Nowhere in the Quran is there any warrant for the popular belief that God has taken up Jesus bodily, in

his lifetime, into heaven. The expression “God exalted him unto Himself” in the above verse denotes the elevation of Jesus to the realm of God’s special grace—a blessing in which all prophets partake, as is evident from 19:57, where the verb *rafa nahu* (“We exalted him”) is used with regard to the Prophet Idris. See 3:55 above, where God says to Jesus, “I shall cause you to die, and shall exalt you unto Me.” The verb *rafa ahu* (lit., “he raised him” or “elevated him”) has always, whenever the act of elevating of a human being is attributed to God, the meaning of honoring or exalting. The “no” at the beginning of the sentence is meant to stress the contrast between the belief of the Jews that they had put Jesus to a shameful death on the cross and the fact of God having “exalted him unto Himself.

Explaining ignominious death of Jesus (Paul’s explanation)—The evolution of the Christian doctrine of salvation was a complicated process essentially linked to the gradual definition of belief in the divinity of Jesus in order to placate the pagans of Roman Empire. Since Jesus was raised to the level of godhead, the next dilemma early church leaders faced was how to explain the humiliating death of Jesus on the cross. In Romans 5:12-19, Paul establishes a parallelism between Adam and Christ, stating that whereas sin and death entered the world through Adam, grace and eternal life have come in greater abundance through Christ. Paul said that Jesus suffered and “died for our sins,” showing at a very early stage, Jesus’ disciples, shocked by the scandal of his death, had explained it by saying that it had somehow been for our benefit. Paul and the other New Testament writers never attempted a precise, definitive explanation of the salvation and there were no detailed theories about the crucifixion as atonement for some “original sin” of Adam in the early Church. This theology did not emerge until the Fourth century.

St. Augustine's Explanation

Merging of Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian religious traditions—One of the decisive developments in the western philosophy was the widespread merging of the Greek philosophical concepts with the Judeo-Christian religious and scriptural traditions. Augustine was one of the main figures through whom this merging was accomplished and the classical philosophy in general and Neo-Platonism, in particular, entered into the mainstream of early and subsequent medieval philosophy. Augustine can be called the founder of the Western spirit. No other theologian, apart from St. Paul, has been more influential in the West.

Brief life history of Augustine—Although raised as a Catholic, Augustine left the Church to follow the Manichaen religion, much to the despair of his mother. As a youth Augustine lived a hedonistic lifestyle for a time and, in Carthage, he developed a relationship with a woman who would be his concubine for over thirteen years and who gave birth to his son. Later in life, Augustine adopted Catholicism. **Inheritance of Original Sin**—St. Augustine believed that God had condemned humanity to an eternal damnation, simply because of Adam's one sin. The original sin is a so-called condition or state of sin into which every human being is born because of the first man, Adam, who disobeyed God in eating the forbidden fruit (of knowledge of good and evil) thus transmitting his sin and guilt by heredity to his descendants. All human beings are predestined to go to hell. Even at birth, a child is already deserving of God's wrath for its share in the original sin of mankind, and before it acquires the guilt of its own actual sin.

Divine wrath upon mankind—Sin was a violation of the honor of God. Only a life that was truly human and yet had infinite worth would have been enough to give such a satisfaction to the violated honor of God on behalf of the entire human race. God was supposedly so angry because of man’s sinfulness that the sacrifice of his only-begotten son would have pacified His anger. Christ was the sacrificial lamb who was offered up to God as a means of stilling the divine anger. No person can, by his own volition and effort, save himself but must depend absolutely upon the saving grace of Christ. Crucifixion of Christ may then be viewed as a vicarious sacrifice offered to God as propitiation or atonement for human sin. Alternatively, it may be seen as the price paid to redeem man from the devil. Christ, therefore, was the second Adam, creating a second humanity; his death shows people how much God loves them. To an evangelical Christian, only faith in the divinity of Christ gets one into paradise. Good works are simply a manifestation of that faith. In short, God sent his only-begotten son on a suicide mission in order to save the rest of the humanity from eternal damnation; a concept that defies rationality.

Flaws in Christian Concept of Salvation

Inheriting original sin—The human condition (suffering, death, and a universal tendency toward sin) is accounted for by the story of the fall of Adam in the early chapters of the book of Genesis. However, the Old Testament says nothing about the transmission of hereditary sin to the entire human race. In the Gospels also there is no more than allusions to the notion of the Fall of Man and universal sin. The concept of “inheriting sin” negates one of the most fundamental principles of freedom that every single individual is responsible for its own actions.

Misplaced divine wrath—Since God is an omniscient and also creator of Adam and Satan, He must have known that Adam and his progeny will be a sinful lot. Why then God was so angry at this world on account of sins? If God hated sin so much then why did He created Satan to begin with? Since God is all-knowing, He must have known that Satan will entice mankind into sin. Adam eating the forbidden fruit was truly such a grave sin that the whole human race should be condemned? Is God is that irrational? On the contrary, the original sin had a silver lining because Adam, who was living in an innocent but animal-like state became conscious of right and wrong, a major evolutionary step, separating human beings from the animal kingdom.

Forgiving Adam—Why God did not forgive Adam to begin with, instead of going through a ritual of human sacrifice? The God who demands shedding of human blood because of the sinful condition of man, which He created in the first place, does not strike as a loving or infallible God.

Appeasing sinners without demanding reformation—It is enough for salvation, as long as one believes that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of mankind. The emphasis on getting a “free gift” of salvation negates the need for behavioral change to become a better person. Bernard Shaw in *Androcles and the Lion* said about the Christian concept of salvation: “There is no record of Christ having ever said to any man: ‘Go and sin as much as you like: you can put it all on me.’ He said ‘Sin no more,’ and insisted that he was putting up the standard of conduct, not debasing it, and that the righteousness of his followers must exceed that of the Scribe and Pharisee. The notion that he was shedding his blood in order that every petty cheat and adulterator and libertine might wallow in it and come out whiter than

snow, cannot be imputed to him on his own authority.” Thomas Jefferson said about the God of Christianity who “elects some of his creations to salvation...and others to damnation even in the wombs of their mothers.” Jefferson viewed humankind not as “abject, helpless, depraved victims of original sin, dependent on God’s grace for salvation but as “independent moral agents.” Indeed, had he established a religion, Jefferson wrote, salvation would come from good works.

Cult of Death—Since Jesus was God incarnate, he had in his power to save himself from death on the cross, but he did not. In other words, he voluntarily chose suicide. The obsession of some Christians with the macabre death of Jesus on the Cross and “the blood of the Lamb of God” drowns the positive teachings of this great teacher.

Jesus’ Explanation—There is not a single verse in the synoptic Gospels where Jesus said that he would die on the cross for the sins of mankind. When asked about eternal life, this is what Jesus said: “Behold, one came to him and said, ‘Good teacher, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘*Why do you call me good? (Jesus stressing his humanness) No one is good but one; that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.*’ He said to him, ‘Which ones?’ Jesus said, ‘*You shall not murder.*’ ‘*You shall not commit adultery.*’ ‘*You shall not steal.*’ ‘*You shall not offer false testimony.*’ ‘*Honor your father and mother.*’ And ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’ The young man said to him, ‘All these things I have observed from my youth. What do I still lack?’ Jesus said to him, ‘*If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.*’ But when the young man heard the saying, he went

away sad, for he was one who had great possessions. Jesus said to his disciples, ‘*Most assuredly I say to you, a rich man will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven with difficulty. Again, I tell you, it is easier for a rope to go through a needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God.*’ When the disciples heard it, they were exceedingly astonished, saying, ‘Who then can be saved?’ Looking at them, Jesus said, ‘*With men this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible*’” (Matthew 19:16–19:26). It is only through righteous deeds and God’s mercy that one will enter eternal life—concept consistent with the Quranic teaching.

The Quranic Rebuttal of Christian Concept of Salvation

Rejection of the doctrine of vicarious atonement—No bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another’s burden; and if one weighed down by his load calls upon [another] to help him carry it, nothing thereof may be carried [by that other], even if it be one’s near of kin. In time, to your Sustainer you all must return, and then. He will make you [truly] understand all that you were doing [in life]: for He has full knowledge of what is in the hearts [of men].
(35:18/39:7)

Thus, any transfer of moral responsibility from one person to another is shown to be impossible. Whereas the first part of the above statement implies a negation of the Christian doctrine of “original sin” with which mankind is supposedly burdened, the second part categorically refutes the doctrine of the “vicarious atonement” of that sin by Jesus. On the Judgment Day—for “whatever wrong any human being commits rests upon him alone” (6:164). “And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear

another's burden." This statement occurs in the Quran five times in exactly the same formulation (6:164, 17:15, 35:18 and 53:38—this last being the earliest in the chronology of revelation).

Myth of Messiah

Jews are waiting for the second coming of Messiah who will bring Jewish victory over their enemies and create paradise on earth for them. Christians are waiting for the second coming of Jesus for past two thousand years. The Quran does not mention the second advent of Jesus, Messiah, or Mahdi. Among many myths that have found their way into Hadith literature is the belief in the Mahdi. Those Muslims who believe in the second advent of Jesus based their arguments solely on the several Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad where he supposedly mentioned the arrival of Jesus close to the end of times to defeat "Dajjal," the antichrist. These Traditions are dubious in authenticity because the Quran repeatedly stresses that the onset of the Last Hour will be sudden and that only God knows the timing of the Last Hour. If Jesus suddenly appeared on the world stage, then we will know that the Judgment Day is imminent. Many pseudo prophets have misconstrued these Traditions of "promised Messiah" or Mahdi, resulting in the formation of new sects and further divisions in Islam. These so-called Traditions give a false hope that somehow a white knight will appear from the cloud with angels to save all believers from evil, rather than believers struggling to control their own destinies. If Jesus is coming the second time, then Jesus will be the last Prophet and not Muhammad, which contradicts one of the fundamental teachings of Islam.

Dialogue between God and Jesus on The Day of Judgment

Assembly of all prophets—On the day when God shall assemble all the apostles and shall ask, “What response did you receive?” They will answer, “We have no knowledge; it is Thou alone who fully know all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being’s perception.”

See verse 5:99: “No more is the Apostle bound to do than deliver the message”—for, neither can he force people to follow the right path, nor can he know what is in their hearts. (See also 4:41-42.)

God’s blessings on Jesus—Lo! God will say: “O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember the blessings, which I bestowed upon you and your mother. How I strengthened you with holy inspiration [see 2:87], so that you could speak to men in your cradle. And as a grown man; and how I imparted unto you revelation and wisdom, including the Torah and the Gospel. And how by My leave you did create out of clay, as it were, the shape of [your followers’] destiny, and then did breathe into it, so that it might become, by My leave, [their] destiny. [See 3:49.] And how you did heal the blind and the leper by My leave, and how you did raise the dead by My leave. And how I prevented the children of Israel from harming you when you came to them with all evidence of the truth, and [when] those of them who were bent on denying the truth were saying, ‘This is clearly nothing but deception!’”*

“I imparted unto you revelation and wisdom, including the Torah and the Gospel.” The conjunction “and” at the beginning

of this clause is meant to stress the fact that both the Torah and the Gospel were included in the revelation (al-kitab) vouchsafed to Jesus. Although the Torah was an earlier revelation, it is described as imparted to Jesus because his own prophetic mission was based on the Law of Moses, which was only confirmed, and not abrogated, by the Gospel (Matthew v, 17-19). As regards the expression “in your cradle,” see 3:46

Request of disciples for a heavenly repast—*And [remember the time] when I inspired the white-garbed ones: [the disciples of Jesus (see 3:52).] “Believe in Me and in My Apostle!” They answered: “We believe; and bear Thou witness that we have surrendered ourselves [to Thee].” [And] lo, the white-garbed ones said: “O Jesus, son of Mary! Could thy Sustainer send down unto us a repast from heaven?” [Jesus] answered: “Be conscious of God, if you are [truly] believers!”*

As regards the disciples’ request—and Jesus’ subsequent prayer—for a heavenly “repast” (maidah, the word which gave the title to this surah), it might be an echo of the request for daily bread contained in the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew vi, 11). Since, in religious terminology, every benefit that accrues to man is sent down from heaven—that is, by God—even if it comes into being through man’s own efforts. But, on the other hand, the way the disciples are said to have asked for the repast—and particularly their explanation given in the next verse—rather seems to point to a request for a miracle, which would assure them of God’s acceptance of their faith.

Said they: “We desire to partake thereof, so that our hearts might be set fully at rest, and we might know that

you have spoken the truth to us, and we might be of those who bear witness thereto!" Said Jesus, the son of Mary, "O God, our Sustainer! Send down upon us a repast from heaven: it shall be an ever-recurring feast for us—for the first and the last of us—and a sign from Thee. And provide us our sustenance, for Thou art the best of providers!" God answered: "I [always] do send it down to you: and so, if any of you should henceforth deny [this] truth, on him, will I inflict suffering the like of which I have never [yet] inflicted upon anyone in the world!"

Lit., "I am sending it down to you" implies a continued recurrence of bestowal. This stress on God's ever-recurrent provision of sustenance, both physical and spiritual, explains the extreme severity of His condemnation of all who—in their arrogant presumption that man is self-sufficient and independent—deny this obvious truth, and, in addition, it implies a condemnation of any demand for a miracle as a proof of God's existence.

Worship my mother and me? *And lo! God said: "O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say unto men, 'Worship me and my mother as deities besides God'?" [Jesus] answered: "Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [say]! Had I said this, Thou would indeed have known it! Thou knew all that is within myself, whereas I know not what is in Thy Self. It is Thou alone who fully know all the things that are beyond the reach of a created being's perception. Nothing did I tell them beyond what Thou did bid me [to say]: 'Worship God, [who is] my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer.' And I bore witness to what they did, as long as I had dwelt in their midst; but since Thou hast caused me to*

die, Thou alone hast been their keeper: for Thou art witness to everything. If Thou cause them to suffer—they are Thy servants; and if Thou forgive them—Thou alone art almighty, truly wise!” This implies God’s exclusiveness in His function as keeper, elliptically described here as “alone.”*

Rewards for those who were true to their words— *[And on Judgment Day] God will say: “Today, their truthfulness shall benefit all who have been true to their word: theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; well-pleased is God with them, and well-pleased are they with Him: this is the triumph supreme.” God’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth, and all that they contain; and He has the power to will anything. (5:109-120)*

Intercession and Son of God— *[Those whom they regard as God’s “offspring”* are but His] honored servants: they speak not until He has spoken to them, and [whenever they act,] they act at His behest. They cannot intercede for any, but those whom He has [already] graced with His goodly acceptance, since they themselves stand in reverent awe of Him. And if any of them was to say, “I am a deity beside Him”—that one We should requite with hell: thus do We requite all [such] evildoers. (21:26-29)*

God’s offspring refers to Jesus, whom the Christians regard as the son of God, as well as to the angels, whom the pre-Islamic Arabs considered to be God’s daughters (since they were erroneously conceived of as females). These honored servants of God proclaim only what He has revealed to them and bidden them to proclaim.

Christian rejection of Muhammad's teachings—But when he [whose coming Jesus had foretold] (i.e., Muhammad) came unto them with all evidence of the truth, they said: “This [alleged message of his] is [nothing but] spellbinding eloquence!” And who could be more wicked than one who invents [such] a lie about [a message from] God, seeing that he is [but] being called to self-surrender unto Him? But God does not bestow His guidance upon evil-doing folk. They aim to extinguish God’s light* with their utterances: but God has willed to spread His light in all its fullness; however, abhorrent this may be to all who deny the truth. He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with [the task of] spreading guidance and the religion of truth, to the end that He made it widespread over all [false] religion; however, loathsome this may be to those who ascribe divinity to others but God. (61:6-9)

The later followers of the Bible by describing God’s message as nothing but spellbinding eloquence on the part of Muhammad aim at extinguishing God’s light. See 3:19—“the only true religion in the sight of God is man’s self-surrender unto Him.”

Christian’s prejudice against Muhammad—While Muslims revere and honor Jesus as one of the great prophets of God, some Christians have made Muhammad as a target of their hatred and bigotry. In his book *Islam as a Way of Life*, Philip K. Hitti described Christian’s virulent prejudice against the founder of Islam in the following words: “Christians of Medieval times depicted Muhammad as a despicable character. His earliest portrait as a false prophet and imposter, sketched by ninth-century Greek chronicler, was later embellished with the bright colors of over sexuality, dissoluteness, bloodthirstiness and brigandage.

In clerical circles, Muhammad became antichrist. His dead body was suspended somewhere between Heaven and Earth until an Italian convert in 1503 visited Medina and was evidently surprised not to find it in that position. Dante bisected the trunk of Muhammad's body and consigned it to the ninth hell as befits the chief of the damned souls, bringer of schism into religion. Western fablers used Maumet—one of forty-one variants of Muhammad's name listed in the Oxford English Dictionary—in the sense of idol. It came to mean "puppet" or "doll." In this sense, Shakespeare used the words in *Romeo and Juliet*. Another variant of the same name, Mahoun, was used in English medieval encyclical plays as an object of worship. Ironically the greatest iconoclast and the leading champion of the oneness of God in history was metamorphosed into an object of worship.

CHAPTER FIVE

ERRORS OF THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS AND MORAL LESSONS FOR ALL BELIEVERS

INTRODUCTION

The reference to the children of Israel, as in so many other places in the Quran, arises from the fact that their religious beliefs represented an earlier phase of the monotheistic concept, which culminates in the revelation of the Quran. Since the Jews were the first people who embraced monotheism, they enjoyed God's special blessing throughout history, as long as they fulfilled their covenant with God. Jews were persecuted and even banished from their land because they worshiped one God, circumstances very similar to what Muslims of Medina found themselves in after their migration from Mecca.

The Jews of Medina gave Muhammad a good welcome in the hope of winning him as an ally, and they were expecting Muhammad to help them fight against the Christians, their historical persecutors. Muhammad, too, returned their greeting with like gestures and sought to consolidate his relations with them. He bound himself to them in a bond of friendship on the ground that they were monotheists. So much so, Muhammad supported the Jews that he fasted with them on the days they fasted and prayed toward Jerusalem as they did. He proclaimed

equal rights for Jews and accorded their religion an equal status in the Constitution of Medina.

The Muslims expected that the Jews, with their monotheistic beliefs, would be the first to rally to the message of the Quran or at least stay neutral in the deadly struggle against paganism of Arabia. A hope that was disappointed because the Jews regarded their own religion as a kind of national heritage reserved for the children of Israel alone, and did not believe in the necessity—or possibility—of a new revelation. The Jews considered themselves as God's chosen people, the only seed of Abraham; they neither accepted others into Judaism nor did themselves leave it in favor of other religions. The expected Messiah could rise from no other tribe than theirs. Short of conversion to Judaism, Muhammad tried everything in his powers to win Jewish support and trust, but in the end, it was of no avail. The Jews of Medina used to assemble to listen to the stories of the Muslims and laugh and scoff at their religion. It was very easy for them, with their superior knowledge of scripture, to pick holes in the stories of the Quran, some of which differed markedly from the Biblical version. They began to criticize and since they could say, for example, that some passages in the Quran contradicted their own ancient scriptures, they were in a position to make some men doubt whether Muhammad was a prophet. They also jeered at Muhammad's pretensions, saying that it was very odd that a man who claimed to be a prophet could not even find his camel when it went missing.

The potential impact of Jewish criticism of the Quran was far greater as compare to the pagan Quraysh. The Quran met this intellectual challenge by developing several key concepts. The references to the Biblical prophets already existed from Mecca period and the Quran further expanded by citing both positives and negative aspects of the Jewish religious history. It

is within this context the Quran described the errors of the Jews and answered their objections regarding Islam.

Although, the Quran is critical of the Jews and Christians for deviating from their revealed scripture, but it reserved its harsh condemnation for Arab contemporaries of the Prophet, who were idol worshippers and rejected monotheism. The criticism of the Jews and the Christians should not be viewed as inferiority of their religions as both of those religions were God inspired but rather a lesson for the Muslims as how to avoid their errors in our religious life. Some Muslims of today are also guilty of same mistakes, which the Quran accuses the Jews and Christians. In accordance with the method of the Quran, the story of children of Israel and Christians is made an object-lesson for all believers in God of whatever community or time. The criticism of the Jews and Christians is broadly described under the following categories:

- (1) God's chosen people;
- (2) Ascribing divine qualities to human beings;
- (3) Rejecting and slaying of Prophet;
- (4) Corrupting Bible;
- (5) Abandoning the middle way;
- (6) Afterlife;
- (7) Consequences of breaking covenant with God.

(1) God's Chosen People

Exalted status of descendants of Abraham (Jews and Arabs)? The reason God favored Jews above all people because they were the foremost to accept monotheism in its pure form and not because of their descent from a great Prophet Abraham. The ethnocentric concept of chosen people is not unique to the Jews. Brahmins in Hindu religion consider themselves superior to the lower castes. Even some misguided Arabs believe in exalted status

because of their descent from Abraham and Prophet Muhammad. Shia Muslims believe in the divine right of Muhammad's family to rule. All above examples contradict the basic Quranic teaching that all human beings are equal, and it is only the man's character that determines his status in the eyes of God. In the gospel according to St. Luke in New Testament, chapter 3, verse 8, John the Baptist condemned the concept of chosen people: "Bring forth; therefore, fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

And [remember this:] when his Sustainer tried Abraham by [His] commandments and the latter fulfilled them, He said: "I shall make you a leader of men." Abraham asked: "And [wilt Thou make leaders] of my offspring as well?" [God] answered: "My covenant does not embrace the evildoers." (2:124)

The passage above refutes the contention of the children of Israel that by virtue of their descent from Abraham, whom God made "a leader of men," they are "God's chosen people" and their belief that their descent from Abraham would "ransom" them on the Day of Judgment. The Quran makes it clear that the exalted status of Abraham was not something that would automatically confer a comparable status on his physical descendants, and certainly not on the sinners among them. The Quran does not specify commandants ("when his Sustainer tried Abraham by [His] commandments"); it must be presumed that what is meant here is simply Abraham's complete submission to whatever commandments he received from God.

***Those who consider themselves pure**—Are you not aware of those who consider themselves pure*? It is God who causes whomever He wills to grow in purity; and none shall be wronged by as much as a hair's breadth. (4:49)*

Those who consider themselves **pure**, i.e., the Jews, who believe that they are “God’s chosen people” and, therefore, a priori destined for God’s grace, and the Christians, who believe in Jesus’ “vicarious atonement” for the sins of mankind. Spiritual purity is not the privilege of any particular group or community, and one can become or remain pure only by God’s grace, for “man has been created weak” A fatil is any slender thread which one rolls between one’s fingers—a term which is also, but by no means exclusively, applied to the tiny fiber adhering to the cleft of the date-stone. Idiomatically, it is best rendered as “**a hair’s breadth.**” God will render perfect justice on the Day of Judgment, and none shall be wronged the slightest. There are many misguided Muslims who believe that being followers of Muhammad, they will automatically receive his intercession on the Judgment Day.

***Refusal to share revelations:** Have they, perchance, a share in [God’s] dominion? But [if they had], lo, they would not give to other people as much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone! Do they, perchance, envy other people for what God has granted them out of His bounty? But then, We did grant revelation and wisdom to the House of Abraham, and We did bestow on them a mighty dominion: and among them are such as [truly] believe in him, and among them are such as have turned away from him. (4:53-55)*

Above is the reference to the Jewish belief that they occupy a privileged position in the sight of God, and they do not see the need to share revelation, which has been reserved to them alone. However, revelations were granted to the house of Abraham and among them are they who are faithful to his message. The Prophet Muhammad, too, was a direct-line descendant of Abraham, whose message is confirmed and continued in the Quran.

God's message for Jews only—*The parable of those who were graced with the burden of the Torah, and thereafter failed to bear this burden, is that of an ass that carries a load of books [but cannot benefit from them]. Calamitous is the parable of the people who are bent on giving the lie to God's messages—for God does not bestow His guidance upon such an evildoing folk! (62:5)*

The God's revelation is a sacred trust as well as a bounty and man's betrayal of this trust, exemplified by the Jews of post-Biblical times. They were entrusted by God with the task of carrying the message of His oneness and uniqueness to all the world, but they failed at this task as they came to believe that they were God's chosen people because of their descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that, therefore, the divine message was meant for them alone and not for people of other nations.

Torah and chosen people—*It is We who bestowed from on high the Torah, wherein there was guidance and light. On its strength did the prophets, who had surrendered themselves unto God, deliver judgment to those who followed the Jewish faith; and so did the [early] men of God and the rabbis, as some of God's writ* had been entrusted to their care; and they [all] bore witness to its truth. There-*

fore, [O children of Israel,] hold not men in awe, but stand in awe of Me; and do not barter away My messages for a trifling gain: for they who do not judge in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high are, indeed, deniers of the truth! (5:44)*

Bestowing of Torah gives Jews the illusory feeling of superiority based on the spurious belief that the children of Israel are “God’s chosen people” and, therefore, the sole recipients of God’s grace and revelation. The expression “**some** of God’s writ,” implies that the Torah did not exhaust the whole of God’s revelation, and that more was yet to be revealed. The “**messages**” referred to in this sentence relate to the Quran as well as to the Biblical prophecies concerning the advent of Muhammad. The same feeling of “spiritual superiority” is present among Christians when they claim they are already “saved.” Some misguided Muslims also suffer from the similar spiritual arrogance.

***Divergence from the true creed of Abraham**—[And know that the observance of] the Sabbath was ordained only for those who came to hold divergent views about him; [Abraham] but God will judge between them on Resurrection Day with regard to all on which they differ. (16:124)*

The implication is that the majority of the Jews had deviated from the true creed of Abraham (which is the meaning of the phrase, “those who came to hold divergent views about him”) as most of them became convinced that they were “God’s chosen people” simply because of their physical descent from that great Prophet, an assumption which obviously runs counter to every truly religious principle. As the Quran repeatedly points out, this spiritual arrogance was punished by God’s imposition on

the children of Israel—and on them alone—of all manners of severe restrictions and rituals, of which the obligation to refrain from all work and even travel on the Sabbath was one. In its widest implication, this passage is meant to stress the fact that all God-imposed rituals are only a means toward the achievement of spiritual discipline, and never a religious goal in themselves. On the Resurrection Day, God will judge between those who are convinced of their ultimate salvation based on their alleged status of “God’s chosen people,” and those who believe in man’s individual responsibility before God.

(2) Ascribing Divine Qualities to Human Beings

Judaism, standing in the tradition the Quran culminates, was correctly instructed in its great Shema: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.” Alas, from the Muslim perspective, the Jews prior to Muhammad’s reminder departed tragically from this truth. They reverted to the worship of household gods and golden calves and other material objects. In the persons of the Scribes and Pharisees, they approached idolatry in their worship of the Law.

God does not forgive the ascribing of divinity to anything beside Him, although He forgives any lesser sin unto whomever He wills: for he who ascribes divinity to others besides God has indeed contrived an awesome sin. (4:48)*

The continuous stress, in the Quran, on God’s transcendental oneness and uniqueness aims at freeing man from all sense of dependence on other influences and powers, and thus at elevating him spiritually and bringing about the purification. Since this objective is vitiated by the sin of shirk (“the ascribing of

divine qualities to anything besides God”), the Quran describes it as “**unforgivable**” so long as it is persisted in, i.e., unless and until the sinner repents. The Jews and the Christians, while not actually believing in the existence of any deity apart from God, ascribe divine or semi-divine qualities, in varying degrees, to certain human beings. The Christians, by their elevation of Jesus to the status of a manifestation of God in human form and their open worship of a hierarchy of saints, and the Jews, by their attribution of law-giving powers to the great Talmudic scholars, whose legal verdicts are supposed to override, if need be, any ordinance of the scriptures (9:31). It goes without saying that this condemnation applies also to those Muslims who have fallen into the sin of worshiping saints and according them something of the reverence that is due to God alone.

***Rabbis or monks cannot prescribe moral law**—They have taken their rabbis and their monks—as well as the Christ, son of Mary—for their lords besides God, although they had been bidden to worship none but the One God, save whom there is no deity: the One who is utterly remote, in His limitless glory, from anything to which they may ascribe a share in His divinity! They want to extinguish God’s [guiding] light with their utterances: but God will not allow [this to pass], for He has willed to spread His light in all its fullness; however, abhorrent this may be to all who deny the truth. He it is who has sent forth His Apostle with the [task of spreading] guidance and the religion of truth, to make it widespread over all [false] religions*—however, loathsome this may be to those who ascribe divinity to anything besides God. (9:31-33)*

See 3:64. Only God has the authority to declare what is lawful or unlawful. When human beings such as monks, rabbis, and Islamic clerks assume the role of law giving, they are essentially elevating themselves to lords besides God. However, God brings His light to completion, or to perfection. The expression “for He has willed” (i.e., contrary to what the erring ones want), is here elliptically implied. For “all [false] **religion**,” see 3:19: “the only true religion in the sight of God is man’s self-surrender unto Him.”

(3) Rejecting and Slaying of Prophets

The passages below refer to persistent and ever-recurring traits in Jewish history of rejecting prophets and even slaying them, to which also the New Testament refers.

As for those who deny the truth of God’s messages, and slay the prophets against all right, and slay people who enjoin equity—announce unto them a grievous chastisement. It is they whose works shall come to no good both in this world and in the life to come; and they shall have none to succor them. And so, ignominy and humiliation overshadowed them, and they earned the burden of God’s condemnation: all this, because they persisted in denying the truth of God’s messages and in slaying, the prophets against all right: all this, because they rebelled [against God], and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right. And Lo! We accepted your solemn pledge, raising Mount Sinai high above you, [and saying,] “Hold fast with [all your] strength to what We have vouchsafed you, and bear in mind all that is therein, so that you might remain conscious of God!” And you turned away after that! And

had it not been for God's favor upon you and His grace, you would surely have found yourselves among the lost. (2:61-64) (3:21-22)

This passage refers to a later phase of Jewish history. That the Jews actually did kill some of their prophets is evidenced, for instance, in the story of John the Baptist, as well as in the more general accusation uttered, according to the Gospel, by Jesus: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee” (Matthew xxiii, 37). See also Matthew xxiii, 34-35, Luke xi, 51—both of which refer to the murder of Zachariah—and I Thessalonians ii, 15. We raised the mountain (attur) above you: i.e., letting the lofty mountain bear witness, as it were, to their solemn pledge. The expression attur is rendered as “Mount Sinai,” since it is invariably used in this sense alone.

Overshadowed by ignominy are they wherever they may be, save [when they bind themselves again] in a bond with God and a bond with men; for they have earned the burden of God's condemnation, and are overshadowed by humiliation: all this [has befallen them] because they persisted in denying the truth of God's messages and in slaying, the prophets against all right: all this, because they rebelled [against God], and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right. (3:112)

They will not be overshadowed by ignominy, if they (Jews) return to the concept of God as the Lord and Sustainer of all mankind, and give up the idea of being “Chosen people,” which creates a barrier between them and all other believers in the One God and prevented the divine message to reach other nations.

Jews also denied the possibility of prophethood being bestowed on anyone who did not belong to their tribe.

Rejecting prophets not to their liking—Indeed, We accepted a solemn pledge from the children of Israel, and We sent apostles unto them; [but] every time an apostle came unto them with anything that was not to their liking, [they rebelled:] to some of them, they gave the lie, while others they would slay, thinking that no harm would befall them; and so they became blind and deaf [of heart]. Thereafter, God accepted their repentance: and again many of them became purblind and deaf. But God sees all that they do. (5:70-71)

Rejecting prophets (Who did not conform to Law of Torah): As for those who maintain, “God has bidden us not to believe in any apostle, unless he comes to us with burnt offerings”—say [to them, O Prophet]: “Even before me there came unto you apostles with all evidence of the truth, and with that whereof you speak: why, then, did you slay them, if what you say is true?” And if they give you the lie—even so, before your time, have [other] apostles been given the lie when they came with all evidence of the truth, and with books of divine wisdom, and with light-giving revelation. (3:183-184)

God has bidden us not to believe in any apostle, unless he conforms to Mosaic Law, which prescribes burnt offerings as an essential part of divine services. Although this aspect of the Law had been left in abeyance ever since the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the Jews of post-Talmudic times were convinced that the Messiah promised to them would restore the

Mosaic rites in their entirety, and so they refused to accept as a prophet anyone who did not conform to the Law of the Torah in every detail. At the time of the martyrdom of John the Baptist and of Zachariah, the Second Temple was still in existence, and burnt offerings were a daily practice. Thus, the refusal of the Jews to accept the prophets alluded to, culminating in their killing, could not be attributed to those prophets' lack of conformity with Mosaic Law.

(4) Corrupting Bible

Scholars corrupting the Bible—Woe unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be] divine writ, and then say, “This is from God” in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby; woe unto them for what their hands have written, and woe unto them for all that they may have gained! (2:79)*

The reference here is to the scholars responsible for corrupting the text of the Bible and thus misleading their ignorant followers. The “trifling gain” is their feeling of pre-eminence as the alleged chosen people because of their descent from Abraham. Although there is no evidence of any alteration or corruption of the Quran but same cannot be said about the Ahadith literature. At the time of collection, the Ahadith were being “forged either to please rulers and kings or to corrupt, the religion of Islam.” This fact is mentioned in the introduction of Sahih-Al-Bukhari. The corruption of Ahadith has resulted in introduction of many perversions in Muslim's life today.

Spiritual barrenness—And yet, after all this, your hearts hardened and became like rocks, or even harder: for,

there are rocks from which streams gush forth; and, there are some from which, when they are cleft, water issues; and, there are some that fall down for awe of God. And God is not unmindful of what you do! (2:74)

The simile of “the rocks from which streams gush forth” or “from which water issues” serves to illustrate its opposite, namely, dryness and lack of life, and is thus an allusion to the spiritual barrenness with which the Quran charges the children of Israel. The spiritual barrenness in today’s world is, however, not limited to Jews alone.

***Belief in baseless mysteries:** They attribute their own lying inventions to God—than which there is no sin more obvious. Are you not aware of those who, having been granted their share of the divine writ, [now] believe in baseless mysteries* and in the powers of evil,* and maintain that those who are bent on denying the truth are more surely guided than those who have attained to faith? It is they whom God has rejected: and he whom God rejects shall find none to succor him. (4:50-52)*

“They attribute their own lying inventions to God” refers to various theological statements of an arbitrary nature, such as the Jewish assertion that they are “the chosen people” and, thus, immune from God’s condemnation, the Christian doctrine of “vicarious atonement,” the definition of God as a “trinity” with Jesus as its “second person,” and so forth. The word *al-jibt* rendered as “**baseless mysteries**” refers to all manners of mythical divination and soothsaying, combination of confusing ideas, fanciful surmises and fictitious stories. As regards the expression “the **powers** of evil,” it seems to refer here to superstitious

beliefs and practices—like soothsaying, foretelling the future, relying on “good” and “bad” omens, and so forth—all of which are condemned by the Quran. See 2:256.

Suppression of Biblical truth—As for those who suppress the evidence of the truth, and of the guidance which We have bestowed from on high, after We have made it clear to mankind through the divine writ (Bible)*—these, it is whom God will reject, and whom all who can judge will reject. Excepted, however, shall be they that repent, and put themselves to rights, and make known the truth: and it is they whose repentance I shall accept—for I alone am the Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace. As for those who are bent on denying the truth and die as deniers of the truth—their due is a rejection by God, and by the angels, and by all [righteous] men. In this, state shall they abide; [and] neither will their suffering be lightened, nor will they be granted respite. (2:159-162)

The divine writ mentioned here is the Bible; thus, the above verse refers to the Jews and the Christians. God will reject all those righteous persons who were able to judge moral issues, and they suppressed truth and guidance. God’s rejection denotes exclusion from His grace.

Paying lip service to Biblical truths—Say: “Who has bestowed from on high the divine writ which Moses brought to men as a light and a guidance, [and] which you treat as [mere] leaves of paper, making a show of them the while you conceal [so] much—although you have been taught [by it] what neither you nor your forefathers had ever known?”

Say: "God [has revealed that divine writ]!" And then leave them to play at their vain talk. (6:91)

This passage is addressed to those followers of the Bible who pay lip-service to its sacred character as a revealed scripture but, in reality, treat it as mere leaves of paper—that is, as something that is of little consequence to their own conduct: for, although they pretend to admire the moral truths which it contains, they conceal from themselves the fact that their personal lives have remained empty of those truths. This fundamental truth can also be applied to the majority of Muslims today.

***The way of righteousness through Torah—And lo!** We accepted this solemn pledge from [you,] the children of Israel: "You shall worship none but God; and you shall do good unto your parents and kinsfolk, and the orphans, and the poor; and you shall speak unto all people in a kindly way; and you shall be constant in prayer; and you shall spend in charity." And yet, save for a few of you, you turned away: for you are obstinate folks! (2:83)*

The Quran reminds the children of Israel of the fact that the way of righteousness has indeed been shown to them by explicit social and moral injunctions: and this reminder flows directly from the statement that the human condition in the life to come depends exclusively on the manner of one's life in this world, and not on one's descent. The Old Testament contains many allusions to the waywardness and stubborn rebelliousness of the children of Israel—e.g., Exodus xxxii, 9, xxxiii, 3, xxxiv, 9; Deuteronomy ix, 6-8, 23-24, 27.

Selective following of the Bible—[For, you are the bearer of a divine writ] such as, We have bestowed from on high upon those who [afterward] broke it up into parts, [and] who [now] declare this Quran to be [a tissue of] falsehoods! But, by thy Sustainer! [On the Day of Judgment] We shall indeed call them to account, one and all, for whatever they have done! (15:90-93)

This is a reference to the followers of the Bible, who “believe in some parts of the divine writ and deny the truth of other parts” (2:85) and who act in accordance with those principles of the Bible which suit their inclinations and the prevailing social trends, and disregard the others, thus denying, by implication, their validity. The same is also true regarding many Muslims sects, where they pick and choose specific parts of the Quran to their liking and ignoring the rest. Some even make blasphemous claim that certain parts of the Quran, which they do not like is abrogated.

Surrender yourselves to God—O you who have attained to faith! Surrender yourselves wholly to God,* and follow not Satan’s footsteps, for he is your open foe. And if you should stumble after all evidence of the truth has come unto you, then know that God is almighty, wise. Are these people [followers of earlier revelation] waiting, perchance, for God to reveal Himself* unto them in the shadows of the clouds, together with the angels—although [by after that]] all will have been decided, and unto God, all things will have been brought back? Ask the children of Israel how many a clear message We have given them! And if one alters God’s blessed message after it has reached him—God is severe in retribution! Unto those who are

bent on denying the truth, the life of this world [alone] seems goodly; hence, they scoff at those who have attained to faith: but they who are conscious of God shall be above them on Resurrection Day. (2:208-212)

Since a self-surrender to God is the basis of all true beliefs, the address, “O you who have attained to faith” cannot refer here to Muslims—a designation which, throughout the Quran, literally means “those who have surrendered themselves to God.” It must relate to people who have not yet achieved such a complete self-surrender; that is, to the Jews and the Christians, who do believe in most of the earlier revelations but do not regard the message of the Quran as true. This interpretation would seem to be borne out by the subsequent passages.

God will only reveal Himself on the Day of Judgment, and then it will be too late for repentance. All commentators agree in that the “decision” relates to the unequivocal manifestation of God’s will on the Day of Judgment, which is alluded to in the words, “when unto God, all things will have been brought back.” Since, in the next verse, the children of Israel are addressed, it is possible that this rhetorical question is connected with their refusal, in the time of Moses, to believe in the divine message, unless they “see God face to face” (see 2:55).

***Why the laws of Moses differ from the Quran?** And yet, now that the truth has come to them from Us, they say, “Why has he not been vouchsafed the like of what Moses was vouchsafed?” But did they not also, before this, deny the truth of what Moses was vouchsafed? [For] they do say, “Two examples of delusion,* [seemingly] supporting each other!” And they add, “Behold, we refuse to accept either of them as true!” “Produce, then, [another] revelation from*

God which would offer better guidance than either of these two—[and] I shall follow it, if you speak the truth!” And since they cannot respond to this your challenge, Say: know that they are following only their own likes and dislikes: and who could be more astray than he who follows [but] his own likes and dislikes without any guidance from God? God does not grace with His guidance people who are given to evildoing! (28:44-50)

As the Quran frequently points out, the basic ethical truths enunciated in it are the same as those of earlier revelations. It is this very statement, which induced the opponents of Muhammad—in his own time as well as in later times—to question the authenticity of the Quran: “If it had really been revealed by God,” they argue, “would so many of its propositions, especially its social laws, differ so radically from the laws promulgated in that earlier divine writ, the Torah?” By advancing this argument, the opponents of Muhammad’s message deliberately overlook the fact, repeatedly stressed in the Quran, that the earlier systems of law were conditioned by the spiritual level of particular people and the exigencies of a specific chapter of human history, and therefore, had to be superseded by new laws at a higher stage of human development (see 5:48). However, as is evident from the immediate sequence—the above specious argument is not meant to uphold the authenticity of the Bible as against that of the Quran. But, rather, aims at discrediting both—and, through them, the basic religious principle against which the irreligious mind always revolts—namely, the idea of divine revelation and of man’s absolute dependence on and responsibility to God, the Ultimate Cause of all that exists.

Two examples of **delusion** are a contemptuous allusion, to Old Testament predictions of the coming of the Prophet Muham-

mad (2:42) and to the often-repeated Quranic statement that this divine writ was revealed to confirm the truth of earlier revelations. We refuse to accept either the Torah or the Quran. The Gospel is not mentioned in this context because, as Jesus himself stressed, his message was based on the Law of Moses, and was not meant to displace the latter. The Quran challenges them to produce another revelation from God, which would offer better guidance, implying that they are unable to accept this challenge.

Abrogation of the Biblical dispensation and supersession by the Quran—Islam assumes that the Bibles of the Jews and Christians too were originally authentic revelations from God, which, in fact, entitles those who hold them sacred to be classed with Muslims as “People of the Book.” Nevertheless, the Old and New Testaments share two defects from which the Quran is free. Having been revealed at earlier stages in man’s spiritual development, it varied in accordance with the exigencies of the time and of each community’s cultural development. Beyond this, the Jewish and Christian Bible has in the process of transmission over thousands of years become partially corrupted, a fact that explains the discrepancies that occasionally appear between their accounts and parallel ones in the Quran. Exemption from these two limitations makes the Quran the final and infallible revelation of God’s will.

Neither those from among the followers of earlier revelation who are bent on denying the truth, nor those who ascribe divinity to other beings besides God, would like to see any good ever bestowed upon you from on high by your Sustainer; but God singles out for His grace whom He wills—for God is limitless in His great bounty. Any message which We annul or consign to oblivion, We replace with a*

better or a similar one. Do you not know that God has the power to will anything? Do you not know that God's is the dominion over the heavens and the earth and that besides God, you have none to protect you or bring you succor? Would you, perchance, ask of the Apostle* who has been sent to you what was asked aforetime of Moses? But whoever chooses to deny the [evidence of the] truth, instead of believing in it, has already strayed from the right path. Out of their selfish envy, many among the followers of earlier revelation would like to bring you back to denying the truth after you have attained to faith—[even] after the truth has become clear unto them. Nonetheless, forgive and forbear, until God shall make manifest His will: God has the power to will anything. (2:105-109)*

“Any good ever **bestowed** upon you” refers to revelation—which is the highest good and the unwillingness of the Jews and the Christians to admit that revelation could have been bestowed on any community but their own. Any message which We annul and **replace** is the principle laid down in this passage is the abrogation of the Biblical dispensation and supersession by that of the Quran. Read this verse in conjunction with the preceding one, which states that the Jews and the Christians refuse to accept any revelation, which might supersede that of the Bible. “Ask of the **Apostle**” refers to the Prophet Muhammad, whose message supersedes the earlier revelations that which was asked of Moses aforetime was the demand of the children of Israel to see God face to face (see 2:55). Whoever takes a denial of the truth in exchange for belief—i.e., whoever refuses to accept the internal evidence of the truth of the Quranic message and demands, instead, an “objective” proof of its divine origin has already strayed from the right path.

(5) Extremism Greed for Material World or Asceticism

Usury and devouring other's possessions—Among the followers of earlier revelation, there is many a one who, if you entrust him with a treasure, will [faithfully] restore it to you; and there is among them many a one who, if you entrust him with a tiny gold coin, will not restore it to you unless you keep standing over him—which is an outcome of their assertion, “No blame can attach to us [for anything that we may do] with regard to these unlettered folks”: and [so] they tell a lie about God, being conscious [that it is a lie]? [God is aware of] those who keep their bond with Him, and are conscious of Him: and God loves those who are conscious of Him. Those who barter away their bond with God and their own pledges for a trifling gain—they shall not partake in the blessings of the life to come; and God will neither speak unto them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them of their sins; and grievous suffering awaits them. And [for] their taking of usury, which was forbidden to them and wrongful devouring of other people's possessions. For those from among them who [continue to] deny the truth, We have readied grievous suffering. (3:75-77) (4:161)

As is evident from many Traditions, the people referred to are the Jews. They falsely claim that God Himself has exempted them from all moral responsibility toward non-Jews (contemptuously described as unlettered folk), knowing well that their own scriptures provide no basis whatever for such a claim. Many male Muslims of today are also guilty of devouring the inheritance of their related females today

Clinging to a material world—Say: “O you who follow the Jewish faith! If you claim that you [alone] are close to God, to the exclusion of all other people, then you should be longing for death—if what you say is true!” But never will they long for it, because [they are aware] of what their hands have wrought in this world; and God has full knowledge of evildoers. Say: “The death from which you are fleeing is bound to overtake you—and then you will be brought back to Him who knows all that is beyond the reach of a created being’s perception as well as all that can be witnessed by a creature’s senses or mind, whereupon He will make you truly understand all you were doing [in life].” (62:6-8)

Worship of wealth and power by rabbis and monks
 - O you who have attained to faith! Many of the rabbis and monks do indeed wrongfully devour men’s possessions and turn [others] away from the path of God. But as for all who lay up treasures of gold and silver and do not spend them for the sake of God—give them the tidings of grievous suffering [in the life to come]. On the Day when that [hoarded wealth] shall be heated in the fire of hell and their foreheads and their sides and their backs branded therewith, [those sinners shall be told:] “These are the treasures which you have laid up for yourselves! Taste then, [the evil of] your hoarded treasures!” (9:34-35)

There is a similar parallel allegory, in 3:180, of the suffering that will befall the avaricious and the niggardly in the life to come. The above verses are an allusion to the wealth of the Jewish and Christian communities and their misuse of this wealth. Some of the commentators, however, are of the opinion that the

reference is wider, comprising all people, including Muslims, who hoard their wealth without spending anything thereof on righteous causes.

Violating the Law of Moses: The Quran frequently points out the Mosaic laws and its great role in the history of man's monotheistic beliefs, and stresses again and again its (time-bound) importance as a means of enforcing spiritual discipline on the children of Israel. Their repeated, deliberate breaches of the Mosaic Law are shown as evidence of their rebellious attitude toward that discipline and, thus, toward God's commandments in general.

***Breaking Sabbath for worldly gains:** You are well aware of those from among you who profaned the Sabbath, whereupon We said unto them, "Be as apes despicable!" And set them up as a warning example for their time and for all times to come, as well as an admonition to all who are conscious of God. (2:65-66)*

As for the substance of God's decree, "Be as apes despicable," this is but a metaphor coined by God with regard to them, similar to the metaphor of "the ass carrying books" (62:5). The expression "like an ape" is often used in classical Arabic to describe a person who is unable to restrain his gross appetites or passions.

The Story of Sabbath breaker: And ask them about that town which stood by the sea: how its people would profane the Sabbath whenever their fish came to them, breaking the water's surface, on a day on which they ought to have kept Sabbath—because they would not come to them on other than Sabbath-days! Thus did We try them by their [own]

iniquitous doings. Some people among them asked [those who tried to restrain the Sabbath-breakers]: “Why do you preach to people whom God is about to destroy or [at least] to chastise with suffering severe?” The [Truly] pious ones would answer, “In order to be free from blame before your Sustainer, and that these [transgressors, too,] might become conscious of Him.” And thereupon, when those [sinners] had forgotten all that they had been told to take to heart, We saved those who had tried to prevent the doing of evil, and overwhelmed those who had been bent on evildoing with dreadful suffering for all their iniquity. When they disdainfully persisted in doing what they had been forbidden to do, We said unto them:* “Be as apes despicable!” (7:163-166)*

Under Mosaic Law, they were obliged to refrain from all work and, therefore, also from fishing—on Sabbath-days, with the result that the fish were more plentiful and would come closer to the shore on those days. The inhabitants of the town took this as an excuse to break the Sabbath-law. The Quran does not mention the name of the town nor give any indication as to the historical period in which those offenses were committed. It may be assumed that the story of the Sabbath-breakers is a general illustration of the tendency, so often manifested by the children of Israel, to offend against their religious laws in pursuit of their passions or for the sake of worldly gain. Some **people** of the town, who did not themselves participate in this profanation of the Sabbath, while not actively protesting against the impiety of their environment, asked the truly pious one, why you preach to people whom God has condemned. The expression “We said unto them” is here synonymous with “We decreed with regard

to them”—God’s “saying” being in this case a metonym for a manifestation of His will.

***Preferring worldly gains over an afterlife**—They have been succeeded by [new] generations who—[in spite of] having inherited the divine writ—clutch but at the transient good of this lower world and say, “We shall be forgiven.”* They are ready, if another such fleeting good should come their way, to clutch at it [and sin again]. Have they not been solemnly pledged through the divine writ not to attribute to God anything but what is true, and [have they not] read again and again all that is therein? Since the life in the hereafter is the better [of the two] for all who are conscious of God—will you not, then, use your reason? For [We shall requite] all those who hold fast to the divine writ and are constant in prayer: We shall not fail to requite those who enjoin the doing of what is right! (7:169-170)*

We shall be forgiven for breaking God’s commandments in their pursuit of worldly gain: an allusion to their persistent belief that they are “God’s chosen people” and that, no matter what they do, His forgiveness and grace are assured to them by virtue of their being Abraham’s descendants. However, God’s forgiveness can only be obtained through sincere repentance. The divine writ mentioned twice in this passage is the Bible.

Clergy without Conscious—There are corrupt religious leaders, who have been exploiting vulnerable people for their own self-gratification since the dawn of religion. Exploitations by these so-called pious leaders can be witnessed in all religions and not limited to Christianity or Judaism. Below are some of the examples how evil masquerades under religion.

The Prosperity Theology is a religious belief, mainly among some fundamentalist Protestants centered on the notion that God provides material prosperity for those He favors. It implies both that people who are favored by God will be wealthy and materially prosperous, and also affluent people are successful because God favored them. The prosperity gospel is often used by its promoters to elicit donations for their Church, on the premise that donations will be materially repaid and rewarded through divine intervention. The only purpose of this theology is to make clergy rich and with money comes power. The prosperity theology is a perversion of teachings of Jesus, who always stood for the poor.

Faith Healing is a concept that religious belief can bring about healing—either through prayers or ritual that evokes a divine presence and power toward correcting disease and disability. There is nothing wrong in praying for healing, but claims that faith can cure blindness, deafness, cancer, AIDS, etc., are always frauds perpetrated mostly by religious figures. If the patient is not cured, then he will be blamed for not having strong faith. The purpose usually is to extract money from the sick and the poor, who are already down on their luck.

Sexual Abuse of boys by clergy is a common problem in the Catholic Church. When the abuser is a clergy person—an individual who is expected to act at the highest spiritual and moral level—it represents a gross violation of trust by a perpetrator who is supposed to be among the most trustworthy. Instead of addressing this issue head on, the Catholic Church leadership systematically concealed sexual abuse by destroying the lives of countless innocent children.

Islamic Clergy: The evils of pedophilia and faith healing, although not as rampant as in Christian Churches but is not unheard of within Islamic clergy.

Practice of Self-Mortification and Asceticism

Do not declare forbidden that is wholesome—O you who have attained to faith! Do not deprive yourselves of the good things of life, which God has made lawful to you, but do not transgress the bounds of what is right: God does not love those who transgress the bounds of what is right. Thus, partake of the lawful, good things, which God grants you as sustenance, and be conscious of God, in whom you believe. (5:87-88)

Do not declare as forbidden all that is good and wholesome in life—the delightful things human beings desire and toward which their hearts incline. It refers to the self-mortification practiced, in particular, by Christian priests and monks.

But as for monastic asceticism—We did not enjoin it upon them: they invented it themselves out of a desire for God's goodly acceptance. But then, they did not [always] observe it as it ought to have been observed: and so We granted their recompense to such of them as had [truly] attained to faith, whereas many of them became iniquitous. (57:27)

The term rahbaniyyah combines the concepts of monastic life with an exaggerated asceticism, often amounting to a denial of any value in the life of this world—an attitude characteristic of early Christianity but disapproved of in Islam. See 2:143—“We

have willed you to be a community of the middle way.” They invented asceticism themselves, for We did not enjoin it upon them: We enjoined upon them only the seeking of God’s goodly acceptance. However, not all of them observed it in the right spirit, as many of those who came after the early ascetics—corrupted their devotions by accepting the ideas of Trinity and of God’s incarnation in Jesus, and by lapsing into empty formalism and thus were deprived of Our grace. The next verse is addressed to the followers of earlier revelation (ahl al-kitab), and in particular, the true—i.e., Unitarian followers of Jesus.

(6) Afterlife

Denial of Afterlife—Until the Greeks desecrated the Jewish temple in 167 B.C., the Jews had a largely inchoate idea of the hereafter. It was called Sheol, and it was a kind of numb darkness—not an end or existence either. When the Greeks, with their many gods and their decadent habits, began to threaten the Jewish way of existence, their leaders came up with a powerful incentive to stay faithful and fight back. “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall be awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and endless contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever” says a passage in the Book of Daniel, written around 165 B.C. This is the first clear reference to resurrection in the Bible. Over the centuries, the mainstream Jewish concept of an afterlife has evolved into something like a spiritual journey. Jews also believe that at the end of time, paradise will exist on earth, and souls will be reunited to their bodies. Theologians stress, though, that the here and now is what matters for Jews, not the hereafter.

We chose them knowingly above all other people, and gave them such signs [of Our grace]* as would clearly presage a test. [Now] these [people] [Israelites] say indeed: “That [which is ahead of us] is but our first [and only] death, and we shall not be raised to life again. So then, bring forth our forefathers [as witnesses], if what you claim is true!” (44:32-36)*

The stress on God’s having “chosen them **knowingly**” alludes to His foreknowledge that in later times, they would deteriorate morally. The sign of God **grace** is an allusion to the long line of prophets rose in their midst, as well as to the freedom and prosperity which they were to enjoy in the Promised Land. All this presaged a test of their sincerity with regard to the ethical principles, which in the beginning raised them “above all other people” and of their willingness to act as God’s message-bearers to the entire world. The formulation of the above sentence implies elliptically that they did not pass that test as they soon forgot the spiritual mission for which they had been elected, and began to regard themselves as God’s “chosen people” simply on account of their descent from Abraham. Apart from this, the majority of the children of Israel very soon lost their erstwhile conviction that the life in this world is but the first and not the final stage of human life, and—as their Biblical history shows—abandoned themselves entirely to the pursuit of material prosperity and power. For it is a historical fact that up to the time of the destruction of the Second Temple and their dispersion by the Roman Emperor Titus, the priestly aristocracy among the Jews, known as the Sadducees, openly denied the concepts of resurrection, divine judgment and life in the hereafter, and advocated a thoroughly materialistic outlook on life. They believed that death is final, with nothing beyond

it. If an afterlife exists, bring our forefathers back to life and let them bear witness that there is a hereafter.

No exemption from punishment in the hereafter—
Are you not aware of those who have been granted their share of revelation [aforetime]? They have been called upon to let God's writ be their law. [Decide all disputes between them according to the Torah.] Yet some of them turn away [from it] in their obstinacy, simply because they claim, "The fire will most certainly not touch us for more than a limited number of days." Say [unto them]: "Have you received a promise from God—for God never breaks his promise—or do you attribute to God something which you cannot know?" And thus the false beliefs, which they invented have [in time] caused them to betray their faith. How, then, [will they fare] when We shall gather them all together to witness the Day about [the coming of], which there is no doubt, and every human being shall be repaid in full for what he has done, and none shall be wronged? Yea! Those who earn evil and by their sinfulness are engulfed—they are destined for the fire, therein to abide; whereas those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds—they are destined for paradise, therein to abide. (2:80-82) (3:23-25)

According to popular Jewish belief, even the sinners from among the children of Israel will suffer only very limited punishment in the life to come, and will be quickly reprieved by virtue of their belonging to “the chosen people”: a belief the Quran rejects. Such erroneous belief is also prevalent among Muslims that being followers of Muhammad their salvation is assured.

Paradise is not for Jews only: Say: “If an afterlife with God is to be for you alone, to the exclusion of all other people, then you should long for death—if what you say is true!” [The Jewish belief that paradise is reserved for the children of Israel alone.] But never will they desire for it, because [they are aware] of what their hands have sent ahead in this world: and God has full knowledge of evildoers. And thou wilt most certainly find that they cling to life more eagerly than any other people, even more than those who are bent on ascribing divinity to other beings besides God: every one of them would love to live a thousand years, although the grant of long life could not save him from suffering [in the hereafter]: for God sees all that they do. (2:94-96)

Salvation not reserved for any particular denomination—And they claim, “None shall ever enter paradise, unless he be a Jew”—or “a Christian.” Such are their wishful beliefs! Say: “Produce an evidence for what you are claiming if what you say is true!” [I.e., from your own scriptures.] Yea, indeed: everyone who surrenders* his whole being unto God, and is a doer of good withal, shall have his reward with his Sustainer; and all such need have no fear, and neither shall they grieve. Furthermore, the Jews assert, “The Christians have no well-founded ground for their beliefs while the Christians assert, “The Jews have no valid ground for their beliefs”—and both quote the divine writ! Even thus, like unto what they say, have [always] spoken those who were devoid of knowledge; but it is God who will judge between them on Resurrection Day with regard to all on which they differ. (2:111-113)

The expression, “Who **self-surrender** unto God,” repeated in the Quran several times, provides a perfect definition of Islam, which—derived from the root-verb *aslama*, “he surrendered himself”—means “self-surrender to God”—and it is in this sense that the terms Islam and Muslim are used throughout the Quran. Thus, according to the Quran, salvation is not reserved for any particular “denomination,” but is open to everyone who consciously realizes the oneness of God, surrenders himself to His will and, by living righteously, gives practical effect to this spiritual attitude. Such are their wishful beliefs, those who assert that only the followers of their own denomination shall partake of God’s grace in the hereafter. God will confirm the truth of what was true in their respective beliefs and show the falseness of what was false therein. The Quran maintains throughout that there is a substantial element of truth in all faiths based on divine revelation, and that their subsequent divergence was the result of “wishful beliefs” (2:111) and of a gradual corruption of the original teachings. (See 22:67-69.)

(7) Consequences of Breaking Covenant with God

First and second destruction of Temple of Solomon—In 827 BCE, King Solomon dedicated the first Jewish Temple. Later, The Kingdom of Israel practiced idolatry. God sent prophets repeatedly to admonish the Jews, but they refused to change their ways, choosing instead to deride these prophets as false messengers coming to discourage them with predictions of destruction. The prophet **Zechariah** chastised the nation for their sins, warning them of the grave punishments that would befall them if they did not change their ways. Rather than accept his rebuke, the nation stoned Zechariah to death in the Temple courtyard. **Jeremiah** prophesied about the Babylonian threat

and warned the Jews of the terrible devastation they would incur if they did not stop worshipping idols and mistreating each other. King Solomon's Temple has been called one of the Seven Wonders of the World due to its extraordinary beauty. After more than 400 years of splendor, however, the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar, destroyed the First Temple by fire in 586 BCE.

The Babylonians, who had destroyed the First Temple, were vanquished by the rising Persian Empire. The Persian king, Cyrus the Great, soon authorized the Jews to rebuild the Temple and later, King Darius also ratified their effort. The Second Temple was completed in 349 BCE. Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, the community in Judea became vibrant and secure. Under the Romans, Herod was considered a cruel ruler; he was a brilliant builder. Herod's crowning achievement was the reconstruction of the Temple. Herod's building campaign and Roman technology made Jerusalem a beautiful city. Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroy the Second Temple in 70 CE. The reference below to the religious history of the Hebrews is because the revelations granted to their prophets represent the earliest formulation of monotheism, which makes it ideologically important for its later development.

We vouchsafed revelation unto Moses, and made it a [source of] guidance for the children of Israel, [commanding them:] "Do not ascribe to any but Me the power to determine your fate, O you descendants of those whom We caused to be borne [in the ark] with Noah! He was a most grateful servant [of Ours]!" And we made [this] known to the children of Israel through revelation:* "Twice,* indeed, will you spread corruption on earth and will indeed become grossly overbearing!" Hence, when the prediction of the first of those two [periods of iniquity] came true, We*

sent against you some of Our bondmen of terrible prowess in war, and they wrought havoc throughout the land: and so the prediction was fulfilled.*

The term **wakil** translated as “the power to determine your faith” denotes one who is entrusted with the management of another person’s affairs. When applied to God, it is sometimes used in the sense of God’s exclusive power to determine the fate of any created being or thing. **Revelations** here are used in the generic sense of the word, and probably applying to predictions contained in the Torah (Leviticus xxvi, 14-39 and Deuteronomy xxviii, 15-68) as well as the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, John, and Jesus. Since both the Bible and the Quran mention that the children of Israel rebelled against the law of God on many occasions, there is every reason to assume that the expression “**twice**” does not refer to two single instances but, rather, to two distinct, extended periods of their history. The term “**bondmen**” denotes every kind of “created beings” (in this case, obviously human beings) as all of them are, willingly or unwillingly, subservient to God’s will (see 13:15). It is probable that the phrase “Our bondmen of terrible prowess in war” relates to the Assyrians, who overran Palestine in seventh century B.C. and caused the disappearance of the greater part of the Hebrew nation (the ten “lost tribes”), and to the Babylonians who, about one hundred years later, destroyed Solomon’s Temple and carried off the remainder of the children of Israel into captivity, or to both thus comprising all these events within one “period.” God’s “sending” tribulation upon reprobate sinners is here, as elsewhere in the Quran, a metonym for the natural law of cause and effect to which, in the long run, the life of man—and particularly the corporate life of nations and communities—is subject.

And after a time We allowed you to prevail against them once again, and aided you with wealth and offspring, and made you more numerous [than ever]. [And We said:] "If you persevere in doing good, you will but be doing good to yourselves; and if you do evil, it will be [done] to yourselves." And so, when the prediction of the second [period your iniquity] came true, [We raised new enemies against you, and allowed them] to disgrace you utterly, and to enter the Temple as [their forerunners] had entered it once before, and to destroy with utter destruction all that they had conquered. Your Sustainer may well show mercy unto you; however, if you revert [to sinning], We shall revert [to chastising you]. And [remember this:] We have ordained that [in the hereafter] hell shall close upon all who deny the truth. This Quran shows the way to all that is most upright, and gives the believers who do-good deeds the glad tidings that theirs will be a great reward: and [it announces, too,] that We have readied grievous suffering for those who will not believe in the life to come. (17:2-10)*

“We allowed you to prevail” refers to the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity in the last quarter of the sixth century B.C., resulting in the partial establishment of their state, and the building of a new temple in the place of the one that had destroyed. Most probably, this passage relates to the priori of the Second Temple and of Jewish statehood by Titus in the year 70 of the Christian era. This Quran shows the way conformable to ethical rectitude and beneficial to man’s individual and social life. Thus, showing that sinning is synonymous with denying the truth and God always offers guidance to man through the revelations He bestows upon His prophets.

Denying certain good things of life—*And lo! Thy Sustainer made it known that most certainly He would rouse against them, unto Resurrection Day, people who would afflict them with cruel suffering. Thy Sustainer is swift in retribution—yet He is [also] much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. And We dispersed them as [separate] communities all over the earth; some of them were righteous, and some of them less than that. The latter We tried with blessings as well as with afflictions, so that they might mend their ways. [And might return to righteousness] For the wickedness committed by those who followed the Jewish faith did We deny unto them certain of the good things of life which [aforetime] were allowed to them; and [We did this] for their having so often turned away from the path of God. (7:167-168) (4:160)*

The punishment spoken of here is the age-long deprivation of the Jewish people of the many “good things of life” for having so often turned away from the path of God, the humiliation and suffering which they have had to undergo throughout most of their recorded history, and particularly after the time of Jesus. The refractory nature of the Children of Israel is repeatedly stressed in the Quran and there is abundant evidence to this effect in the Old Testament.

Dietary Restrictions—*All foods were lawful for the children of Israel, save what Israel had made unlawful unto itself [by its sinning] before the Torah was bestowed from on high. Say: “Come forward, then, with the Torah and recite it, if what you say is true!” And all who henceforth invent lies about God—it is they, they who are evildoers! “And [only] to those who followed the Jewish faith did*

We forbid all beasts with claws. We forbade them the fat of both oxen and sheep, except which is in their backs or entrails [internal organs] or within the bone: thus did We requite them for their evildoing—for, We are true to Our word!” And if they give you the lie, say: “Limitless is your Sustainer in His grace; but His punishment shall not be averted from people who are lost in sin.” And [only] to those who followed the Jewish faith did We forbid all that We have mentioned to you before this; and no wrong did We do to them, but it was they who persistently wronged themselves. And once again: Thy Sustainer [shows mercy] to those who do evil out of ignorance and afterward repent and live righteously. After such [repentance] thy Sustainer is indeed much forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (3:93-94) (6:146-147) (16:118-119)*

The prohibition of “all manners” of fat of ox, sheep or goat was imposed specifically on the Jews, to the exclusion of believers of later times. See Leviticus vii, 23. The Jews, however, believed that the Mosaic food restrictions are eternal law decreed by God. The verses above are devoted to a refutation of the objections on the part of the Jews to what they consider to be an infringement, by the Quran, of Biblical laws. The objections relate to the Quranic annulment of certain dietary injunctions, and prohibitions laid down in the Torah. In order to answer the objection relating to Jewish food laws, the Quran calls to mind that originally all wholesome foods were allowed to the children of Israel, and the severe restrictions subsequently imposed upon them in the Torah were but a punishment for their sins and were, therefore, never intended for a community that truly surrenders itself to God. As against this claim, the Quran stresses that no food restrictions had been imposed before the time of Moses. Secondly, that the

restrictions arising from the Mosaic Law were imposed on the children of Israel alone. To claim that they represent an eternal divine law is described here as “inventing lies about God.” The pronoun “**they**” refers to the Jews as well as to the pagan Arabs, both of whom claim that God has imposed on man various complicated restrictions in the matter of food. According to the Quran, the Jews are mistaken in their claim as they overlook the fact that the severe Mosaic food laws were a punishment for their past misdeeds (see 3:93) and, therefore, intended for them alone, and the pagan Arabs were wrong because their taboos have no divine basis whatsoever and are due to mere superstition.

CHAPTER SIX

OBJECTIONS OF JEWS OF MEDINA TO ISLAM AND THE QURANIC REBUTTAL

Rejecting Muhammad and His Message

The Jews denied the possibility of prophethood being bestowed on anyone who did not belong to their tribe (2:90 and 94) and so they summarily rejected the idea of Muhammad's prophethood despite the clear predictions of his advent in the Torah itself (2:42).

The Prophecies regarding Muhammad in the Bible—

And do not barter away My messages for a trifling gain;
And of Me, of Me be conscious! And do not overlay* the
truth with falsehood, and do not knowingly suppress* the
truth; and be constant in prayer, and spend in charity, and
bow down in prayer with all who thus bow down. Do you
bid other people to be pious, the while you forget your own
selves—and yet you recite the divine writ? Will you not,
then, use your reason? And seek aid in steadfast patience
and prayer: and this, indeed, is a hard thing for all but the
humble in spirit, who know with certainty that they shall
meet their Sustainer and that unto Him, they shall return.
(2:41-46)*

Above is a reference to the persistent Jewish belief that they alone among all nations have been graced by divine revelation. The “**trifling gain**” is their conviction that they are “God’s chosen people” because of their descent from Abraham—a claim, which the Quran consistently refutes. By “**overlaying** the truth with falsehood” is meant the corrupting of the scriptural text, of which the Quran frequently accuses the Jews (and which has since been established by objective textual criticism). The “**suppression** of the truth” refers to their disregard or deliberately false interpretation of the words of Moses in the Biblical passage, “The Lord, thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of, thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deuteronomy xviii, 15). The words attributed to God Himself, “I will raise them up a prophet from among, thy brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in his mouth” (Deuteronomy xviii,18). The “brethren” of children of Israel are obviously the Arabs, and particularly the Arabianized group among them, which traces its descent to Ishmael and Abraham; since it is to this group that the Arabian Prophet’s own tribe, the Quraysh, belonged, the above biblical passages must be taken as referring to his advent.

Some of the followers of earlier revelation would love to lead you astray: yet none do they lead astray but themselves, and perceive it not. O followers of earlier revelation! Why do you deny the truth of God’s messages to which you yourselves bear witness? O followers of earlier revelation! Why do you cloak the truth with falsehood and conceal the truth of which you are [so well] aware? How would God bestow His guidance upon people who have resolved to deny the truth after having attained to faith, and having borne witness that this Apostle is true, and [after] all evidence of*

the truth has come to them? For, God does not guide such an evildoing folk. Their requital shall be rejection by God, and by the angels, and by all [righteous] men. In this, state shall they abide; [and] neither will their suffering be lightened, nor will they be granted respite. But excepted shall be they that afterward repent and put themselves to rights: for, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (3:69-71) (3:86-89)

Why do you conceal the truth about the Biblical prophecies relating to the coming of the Prophet Muhammad? Their acceptance of the Bible, which predicts the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, has made them witnesses to the truth of his prophethood.

And lo, God accepted a solemn pledge from those who were granted earlier revelation [when He bade them]: “Make it known unto mankind, and do not conceal it!” But they cast this [pledge] behind their backs, and bartered it away for a trifling gain: and how evil was their bargain! Think not that those who exult in what they have thus contrived, and who love to be praised for what they have not done—think not that they will escape the suffering: for grievous suffering does await them [in the life to come]. (3:187-188)*

The advent of the Prophet Muhammad was predicted in both the Old and New Testaments, and that the followers of the Bible had been called upon to spread this prophecy and not—as they actually have done—to suppress it (see 2:42). They bartered it away for a **trifling** gain refers to the belief of the Jews that they are “God’s chosen people” and to the conviction of the Christians that their belief in Jesus’ “vicarious atonement” automatically

assures to them salvation—the “bargain” being, in both cases, an illusion of immunity in the life to come. “What they have not done,” in spite of all their claims, preserved the integrity of the Bible and of Abraham’s faith.

Rejecting the Quran

Can you (Muslims), hope that they will believe in what you are preaching—seeing that a good many of them listen to the word of God and then, after having understood it, to pervert it knowingly? For, when they meet those who have attained to faith, they say, “We believe [as you believe]”—but when they find themselves alone with one another, they say, “Do you inform them of what God has disclosed to you so that they might use it in argument against you, quoting the words of your Sustainer?* Will you not, then, use your reason?” Do they not know that God is aware of all that they would conceal as well as of all they bring into the open? And there are among them (Jews) unlettered people who have no real knowledge of the divine writ, [the Old Testament] following only wishful beliefs and depending on nothing but conjecture. (2:75-78)*

Here the Muslims of Medina are addressed. In the early period of Islam, and especially after their exodus to Medina, where many Jews were then living, the Muslims expected that the Jews would be the first to rally to the message of the Quran. A hope that was disappointed because the Jews regarded their religion as a kind of national heritage reserved for the children of Israel alone and did not believe in the necessity or possibility of a new revelation.

Discordant views about the divine writ—As for those who suppress the revelation, which God has bestowed from on high, and barter it away for a trifling gain—they but fill their bellies with fire. And God will not speak to them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He cleanse them [of their sins]; and grievous suffering awaits them. It is they who take error in exchange for guidance, and suffering in exchange for forgiveness: yet how little do they seem to fear the fire! Thus, it is: since it is God who bestows the divine writ from on high, setting forth the truth, all those who set their own views against the divine writ are most deeply in the wrong. (2:174-176)

The term revelation above is used in its generic sense, comprising both Quran and the earlier revelations and those who hold discordant views about the divine writ—i.e., either suppressing or rejecting parts of it, or denying its divine origin altogether are deeply in wrong.

Are you not aware of those who, having been granted their share of the divine writ now barter it away for error, and want you [too] to lose your way? But God knows best who your enemies are: and none can befriend as God does, and none can give succor as God does. Among those of the Jewish faith, there are some who distort the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of their context by saying, [as it were,] “We have heard, but we disobey and “Hear without hearkening, and “You hearken unto us, [O Muhammad]”—thus making a play with their tongues, and implying that the [true] Faith is false. And had they but said, “We have heard, and we pay heed and “Hear [us], and have patience with us,” it would indeed have been for

their own good, and more upright. But God has rejected them because of their refusal to acknowledge the truth—for it is in but few things that they believe. O you who have been granted revelation [aforetime]! Believe in what We have [now] bestowed from on high in confirmation of whatever [of the truth] you already possess, lest We efface your hopes and bring them to an end—just as We rejected those people who broke the Sabbath: for God’s will is always done. (4:44-47)

The people referred to are the followers of the Bible. The Quran expounds here its cardinal theme: man’s responsibility for his actions and, in particular, for the way he responds to the guidance offered to him through God’s revelations. The meaning of hearken is to listen carefully. The figure of speech “hear without hearkening” addressed by the Jews to themselves, describes their attitude toward both their own scriptures and the message of the Quran. The saying “you hearken unto us” is meant to convey the conviction of the Jews that they had nothing to learn from the teaching propounded by the Prophet Muhammad, and that he should rather defer to their views on religious matters. See, in this connection, their assertion, “Our hearts are already full of knowledge,” in 2:88.

Distorting the Quran (taking its message out of context): *O apostle! Be not grieved by those who vie with one another in denying the truth: such as those who say with their mouths, “We believe,” the while their hearts do not believe; and such of the Jewish faith as enthusiastically listen to any falsehood, eagerly listen to other people without having come to you [for enlightenment]. They distort the meaning of the [revealed] words, taking them out of*

their context, saying [to themselves], “If such-and-such [teaching] is vouchsafed unto you, accept it; but if it is not vouchsafed unto you, be on your guard!” [Be not grieved by them] for, if God wills anyone to be tempted to evil; you can in no wise prevail with God in his behalf. It is they whose hearts God is not willing to cleanse. Theirs shall be ignominy in this world, and awesome suffering in the life to come—those who eagerly listen to any falsehood, greedily swallowing all that is evil! (5:41-42)*

Although these verses are addressed to the Prophet, it concerns all followers of the Quran and is, therefore, valid for all times. The same observation applies to the people of whom these verses speak. Although it mentions only the hypocrites and the Jews, it refers, by implication, to all people who are prejudiced against Islam and willingly lend an ear to any false statement about its teachings, preferring to listen to unfriendly non-Muslim “experts” rather than to turn to the Quran itself for enlightenment—which is the meaning of the phrase, “without having come to thee (O Muhammad).” They are prepared to accept such of the Quranic teachings as might suit their preconceived notions, but are not prepared to accept anything that goes against their own inclinations. The “**swallowing** of evil,” denotes anything that is sinful in itself. In the above context, it may denote “those who greedily devour all that is forbidden” (i.e., illicit gain), or, more probably, “those who covetously swallow all that is evil”—i.e., every false statement made about the Quran by its enemies with a view to destroying its impact.

***Denying authenticity of the Quran:** Say: “O followers of earlier revelation! Why do you [endeavor to] bar those who have come to believe [in this divine writ] from the*

path of God by trying to make it appear crooked, when you yourselves bear witness [to its being straight]? For, God is not unaware of what you do.” (3:99)

This is an allusion to the attempts of Jews and Christians to prove that Muhammad had borrowed the main ideas of the Quran from the Bible and twisted them out of context to suit his own alleged ambitions.

God’s bounty of revelation for all—*The followers of earlier revelation should know that they have no power whatever over any of God’s bounty, seeing that all bounty is in God’s hand [alone]: He grants it to whomever He wills—for God is limitless in His great bounty. (57:29)*

The followers of earlier revelation have no exclusive claim to any of God’s bounty, in the present context, bestowal of divine revelation. This is addressed in the first instance to the Jews, who reject the revelation granted to Muhammad in the belief that the office of prophethood is a sole preserve of the children of Israel, as well as to the Christians who, as followers of the Bible, implicitly accept this unwarranted claim.

Self-Righteousness and False Pride

Is it not time that the hearts of all who have attained to faith should feel humble at the remembrance of God and of all the truth that has been bestowed [on them] from on high. Lest they become like those who were granted revelation aforetime, and whose hearts have hardened with the passing of time so that many of them are [now] depraved? [But] know that God gives life to the earth after it has been*

lifeless! We have indeed made Our messages clear unto you, so that you might use your reason. (57:16-17)

The remembrance of God and His revelation should make believers humble rather than proud, lest they become like the spiritually arrogant among the Jews, who regard themselves as God's chosen people and, therefore, predestined for His acceptance. Christians who claim that they are already saved and some misguided Muslims who believe that Muhammad's intercession will guarantee their salvation. They act contrary to the ethical precepts of their religion, implying that the purpose of all true faith is to make man humble and God-conscious rather than self-satisfied, and that a loss of that spiritual humility invariably results in moral degeneration. "God gives life to the **earth**" is a parabolic allusion to the effect of a reawakening of God-consciousness in the hearts that had become deadened by self-satisfaction and false pride. The passage above is an emphatic warning against all smugness, self-righteousness and false pride at having "attained to faith"—a failing that only too often attains to such as consider themselves pious regardless of religious affiliations.

***Spiritual arrogance**—They say, "Our hearts are already full of knowledge."* No, but God has rejected them because of their refusal to acknowledge the truth: for, few are the things in which they believe. And whenever there came to them a [new] revelation from God, confirming the truth already in their possession—and [bear in mind that] aforetime they used to pray for victory over those who were bent on denying the truth. Whenever there came unto them something, which they recognized [as the truth], they would deny it. And God's rejection is due of all who deny the truth. Vile is that [false pride] for which they have sold*

their own selves by denying the truth of what God has bestowed from on high, out of envy that God should bestow His favor upon whomsoever He wills of His servants: and thus have they earned the burden of God's condemnation, over and over. And for those who deny the truth, there is shameful suffering in store. For when they are told, "Believe in what God has bestowed from on high they reply, "We believe [only] in what has been bestowed on us"—and they deny the truth of everything else, although it be a truth confirming the one already in their possession. (2:88-91)*

Our hearts are repositories of **knowledge**—an allusion to the boast of the Jews that the religious knowledge which they already possess; they are in no need of any further preaching. All their beliefs are centered on themselves and their alleged exceptional status in the sight of God. A reference to their assertion that they believe in what has been revealed to them—i.e., the Law of Moses, which obviously prohibits the killing not only of prophets but of any innocent human being. They reject this revelation out of envy that God should bestow revelation upon anyone but a descendant of Israel—in this particular instance, upon the Arabian Prophet, Muhammad.

For, clear messages indeed have We bestowed upon you from on high; none denies their truth save the iniquitous. It is not so that every time they made a promise [unto God]; some of them cast it aside? No, indeed: most of them do not believe. And [even now,] when there has come unto them an apostle from God, confirming the truth already in their possession, some of those who were granted revelation aforetime cast the divine writ behind their backs as though unaware [of what it says]. (2:99-101)*

The divine writ referred to here is the Torah. By disregarding the prophecies relating to the coming of the Arabian Prophet, contained in Deuteronomy xviii, 15 and 18, the Jews rejected, as it were, the part of the revelation granted to Moses.

Mockers and hypocrites—Say: “Shall I tell you who, in the sight of God, deserves a yet worse retribution than these? They whom God has rejected and whom He has condemned, and whom He has turned into apes and swine* because they worshipped the powers of evil:* these are yet worse in station, and farther astray from the right path [than the mockers].” For, when they come to you, they say, “We do believe”: whereas, in fact, they come with the resolve to deny the truth, and depart in the same state. But God is fully aware of all that they would conceal. And you can see many of them vie with one another in sinning and tyrannical conduct and in their swallowing of all that is wicked. Why do not their men of God and their rabbis forbid them to make sinful assertions and to swallow all that is evil? Vile indeed is what they contrive! And so We have cast enmity and hatred among the followers of the Bible, [to last] until Resurrection Day. Every time they light the fires of war, God extinguishes them; and they labor hard to spread corruption on earth: and God does not love the spreaders of corruption. (5:60-64)

The reference to “**apes and swine**” is a metaphorical description of the moral degradation that such sinners undergo. They become wildly unpredictable like apes and as abandoned in the pursuit of lusts as swine. The expression “**powers of evil**” denotes, primarily, anything that is worshiped instead of God and, thus, all that may turn man away from God and lead him to evil. The

sinners who are even worse than the mockers are the hypocrites and particularly those among them who claim to be followers of the Bible, for the obvious reason that, having been enlightened through revelation, they have no excuse for their behavior. God does not allow any of the warring parties to resolve their conflicts through a final victory, with the result that they continue to live in a state of enmity and hatred.

Arrogance: According to several authentic Traditions, the Jews of Medina were given to satirizing the phraseology of the Quran, and especially 2:245—“Who is it that will offer up unto God a goodly loan, which He will amply repay with a manifold increase?” Abu Bakr once invited Finhas, a Jew, to Islam. Finhas answered, “We do not need God, and rather; it is He who needs us. It is not I who pray to Him; it is He who prays to us. We are self-sufficient, and He is not. If God is self-sustaining, He would not borrow our wealth as your prophet claims.” It was after this incident that this verse was revealed.

God has indeed heard the saying of those who said, “God is poor while we are rich!” We shall record what they have said, and We shall say [unto them on Judgment Day]: “Taste suffering through fire in return for what your own hands have wrought—for never does God do the least wrong to His creatures!” And the Jews say, “God’s hand is shackled!” It is their own hands that are shackled; and rejected [by God] are they because of this assertion. Wide are His hands stretched out: He dispenses [bounty] as He wills. But all that has been bestowed from on high upon you [O Prophet] by, thy Sustainer is bound to make many of them yet more stubborn in their overweening arrogance and in their denial of the truth. (3:181-182) (5:64)

The phrase “one’s hand is shackled” is a metaphorical expression denoting stinginess and lack of power, just as its opposite—“his hand is stretched out wide”—signifies generosity and unlimited power. It would appear that the Jews of Medina, seeing the poverty of the Muslims, derided their conviction that they were struggling in God’s cause, and the Quran was divinely revealed. Thus, the saying of the Jews mentioned in this verse, “God’s hand is shackled,” as well as the parallel one in 3:181, “God is poor while we are rich,” is an elliptical description of their attitude toward Islam and the Muslims. This attitude of disbelief and sarcasm, which could be therefore, paraphrased: “If it were true that you Muslims are doing God’s will; He would have bestowed upon you power and riches; but your poverty and your weakness contradict your claim—or else this claim of yours amounts, in effect, to saying that God cannot help you.” This outstanding example of the elliptic mode of expression (*ijaz*) so often employed in the Quran has, however, a meaning that goes far beyond the historical circumstances to which it refers: it illustrates an attitude of mind, which mistakenly identifies worldly riches or power with one’s being, spiritually, “on the right way.” In the next sentence, the Quran takes issue with this attitude and declares, in an equally elliptical manner, that all who see in material success an alleged evidence of God’s approval are blind to spiritual truths and, therefore, morally powerless and utterly self-condemned in the sight of God.

Hostility—You will certainly find that, of all people, the most hostile to those who believe [in this divine writ] are the Jews as well as those who are bent on ascribing divinity to others besides God. [Pagans of Arabia] Now whenever such [people] approach you, [O Muhammad,] they salute you with a greeting, which God has never countenanced;

and they say to themselves, “Why does not God chastise us for what we are saying?” Hell shall be their allotted portion: they shall [indeed] enter it—and how vile a journey’s end! (5:82) (58:8)

The reference to “approaching” the Prophet has here a twofold meaning, relating literally to his unbelieving contemporaries, and figuratively to an intellectual “approach” to his person and his teachings by hostile critics of all later times. The same observation is valid with regard to the next clause as well. “Greeting which God has never countenanced,” historically, this is an allusion to the hostile attitude of the Jews of Medina toward the Prophet. It is recorded that instead of pronouncing the traditional greeting “Peace be upon you” when encountering him, some of them used to mumble the word salam (“peace”) in such a way as to make it indistinguishable from sam (“death”), and they employed the same scurrilous play of words with regard to the Prophet’s Companions also.

***Demand for miracles**—They say, “Why have no miraculous signs ever been bestowed upon him from on high by his Sustainer?” Say: “Miracles are in the power of God alone; and as for me—I am but a plain warner.” Why—is it not enough for them that We have bestowed this divine writ on you from on high, to be conveyed [by you] to them? For in it is [manifested Our] grace, and a reminder to people who will believe. Say [to those who will not believe]: “God is witness enough between me and you! He knows all that is in the heavens and on earth; and they who are bent on believing in what is false and vain, and thus on denying God—it is they, they who shall be the losers!” (29:50-52)*

This verse refers to the objections of the Jews and the Christians to the message of the Quran. The people who were not able to perceive the intrinsic truth of the messages conveyed to them by the prophets, but rather insisted on a miraculous demonstration that those messages really came from God, and thus failed to benefit from them. In other words, “are the contents of this revelation not enough for them to make them grasp its intrinsic truth without the help of some supernatural proofs of its divine origin?”

Demand for direct revelation—*The followers of the Old Testament demand of you [O Prophet] that you cause a revelation to be sent down to them from heaven. [In proof of your prophethood] And an even greater thing than this did they demand of Moses when they said, “Make us see God face to face”—whereupon the thunderbolt of punishment overtook them for this their wickedness. And [only] those who are devoid of knowledge say, “Why does God not speak unto us?” Even thus, like unto what they say, spoke those who lived before their time: their hearts are all alike. Indeed, We have made all the signs manifest to people who are endowed with inner certainty. (4:153) (2:118)*

Challenge to hasten God’s chastisement—*Now they challenge you to hasten the coming upon them of [God’s] chastisement: and indeed, had not a term been set [for it by God], that suffering would already have come upon them! But indeed, it will most certainly come upon them of a sudden, and they will be taken unawares. They challenge you to hasten the coming upon them of [God’s] chastisement: but hell is bound to encompass all who deny the truth—[encompass them] on the Day when suffering*

overwhelms them from above them and from beneath their feet, whereupon He shall say: "Taste [now the fruit of] your own doings!" (29:53-55)

Practice of deception to confuse Muslims—*And some of the followers of earlier revelation say [to one another]: "Declare your belief in what has been revealed unto those who believe [in Muhammad] at the beginning of the day, and deny the truth of what came later,* so that they might go back [on their faith]. But do not [really] believe anyone who does not follow your own faith." Say: "All [true] guidance is God's guidance, consisting in one's being granted [revelation] such as you have been granted." Or would they contend against you before your Sustainer? Say: "All bounty* is in the hand of God; He grants it unto whom He wills: for God is infinite, all-knowing, singling out for His grace whom He wills. And God is limitless in His great bounty." (3:72-74)*

This would imply the Judeo-Christian attempts at confusing the Muslims by declaring alternating beliefs and disbeliefs in the Quranic message. On the other hand, this verse may imply that some Jews and Christians have been and are hoping to achieve this end by admitting, however, reluctantly, that there may be some truth in the early Quranic revelations (that which has been revealed at the beginning of the day), while they categorically reject its later parts as they clearly contradict certain Biblical teachings. On the ground that it conflicts with parts of their own scriptures, the Jews and the Christians are not prepared to accept the Quranic message. In this context, the bounty is synonymous with the bestowal of divine revelation.

Judge non-Muslim fairly—A number of rabbis, elders, and noblemen from the Jewish community of Medina one day went to see Muhammad and said, “You know well our prestige with our people, and you know that if we should follow you, Jews would do likewise. Would you then not help us against our people by giving a verdict in our favor when we bring to you our litigation with them to arbitrate? If you do so, we will follow you.” At this, the following divine words were revealed.

Hence, if they come to you [for judgment], you may either judge between them or leave them alone: for, if you leave them alone, they cannot harm you in any way. But if you do judge, judge between them with equity: God knows those who act equitably. But how is it that they ask you for judgment—seeing that they have the Torah, containing God’s injunctions—and thereafter turn away [from your judgment]? Such as these, then, are no [true] believers. (5:42-43)

Although, this passage refers to a specific judicial case, or cases, which the Jews of Medina brought before the Prophet for decision, but in view of the inherent Quranic principle that every historical reference contained in it has also a general import.

Judge between them as to what is true and what is erroneous in the sight of God, and based on the ethical laws revealed by God and not in accordance with their personal, arbitrary likes or dislikes. The “judgment” alluded to in this verse relates to deciding as to whether any of their beliefs—other than those which the Quran explicitly confirms or rejects—are right or wrong. This verse illustrates the strange mentality of the Jews of Medina, who—although they believe the Torah to contain all of the Divine Law—surreptitiously turn to a religious dispensa-

tion in which they do not believe, in the hope that its verdict on certain ethical questions might confirm some of their own wishful beliefs, which happen to run counter to the Torah. In other words, they are not really prepared to submit to the judgment of the Torah—although they assert their belief in it—nor the judgment of the Quran, which confirms some of the laws of the Torah and abrogates others, for as soon as they come to realize that the Quran does not agree with their preconceived ideas, they turn away from it.

Unto you [O Prophet] We have vouchsafed this divine writ, setting forth the truth, confirming the truth of whatever there still remains of earlier revelations and determining what is true therein. Judge, then, between the followers of earlier revelation in accordance with what God has bestowed from on high, and do not follow their errant views, forsaking the truth that has come to you. And beware of them, lest they tempt you away from what God has bestowed from on high upon you. And if they turn away [from His commandments], then know that it is but God's will [thus] to afflict them for some of their sins: for, a great many people are iniquitous indeed. Do they, perchance, desire [to be ruled by] the law of pagan ignorance? But who could be a better law-giver than God for people who have an inner certainty? (5:48-50)*

Judgment based upon the truth applies not merely to judicial cases but also to opinions as to what is right or wrong in the ethical sense. The people spoken of here are both the Jews and the Christians. The implication is that a conscious disregard of God's commandments brings with it its own punishment: namely, a gradual corruption of the community's moral values and, thus,

growing social disruption and internecine conflict. By “pagan ignorance” is meant here not merely the time before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad but, in general, a state of affairs characterized by a lack of moral perception and a submission of all personal and communal concerns to the criterion of “expediency” alone for short-term gains without any regard to right or wrong. This “law of expediency” is fundamentally opposed to the concepts of morality preached by every higher religion; it is described in the Quran as “the law of pagan ignorance.”

Prohibition of Moral Alliance With Hostile Jews and Christians

O you who have attained to faith! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your allies: they are but allies of one another—and whoever of you allies himself with them becomes one of them; God does not guide such evildoers. And yet you can see how those in whose hearts, there is a disease vie with one another for their good will, saying [to themselves], “We fear in case a fortune turns against us.” But God may well bring about good fortune [for the believers] or any [other] event of His own devising,* whereupon those [waverers] will be smitten with remorse for the thoughts which they had secretly harbored within themselves—while those who have attained to faith will say [to one another], “Are these the selfsame people who swore by God with their most solemn oaths that they were indeed with you? In vain are all their works, for now, they are lost!” (5:51-53)*

Each of these two communities extends genuine friendship only to its own adherents—i.e., the Jews to the Jews, and the Christians to the Christians. They cannot, therefore, be expected

to be allies with the followers of the Quran. Those who ally with them deliberately sin in this respect because of believer's loss of his moral identity if he imitates the way of life of, or "allies himself" with, non-Muslims. However, as has been made abundantly clear in 60:7-9, this prohibition of a "moral alliance" with non-Muslims does not constitute an injunction against normal, friendly relations with such of them as are well-disposed toward Muslims. "Those in whose hearts there is a disease" refer to hypocrites within the Muslim community vying with one another and trying to imitate the way of life of the **hostile** Jews and Christians seeking their good-will. God may bring "opening"—namely, the opening of good fortune for the believers. The "other event of God's own **devising**" may conceivably refer to a divine punishment of the hypocrites apart from the good fortune that might be in store for the true believers.

God's guidance is the only true guidance—We have sent you [O Prophet] with the truth, as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner: and you shall not be held accountable for those who are destined for the blazing fire. For Jews will never be pleased with you, nor yet the Christians, unless you follow their own creeds. Say: "God's guidance is the only true guidance." And, indeed, if you should follow their errant views after all the knowledge that has come unto you, you would have none to protect you from God, and none to bring you succor. Those unto whom We have vouchsafed the divine writ [and who] follow it as it ought to be followed—it is they who [truly] believe in it; whereas all who choose to deny its truth—it is they, they who are the losers! (2:119-121)

Believers are those who follow the divine writ and try to absorb its meaning and to understand its spiritual design or: “apply themselves to it with true application.”

CHAPTER SEVEN
**SECTARIANISM AMONG MUSLIMS, JEWS,
AND CHRISTIANS**

Sectarianism among Muslims

The historical occasion to which the verses below refer may be thus summarized: Ever since his exodus from Mecca to Medina the Prophet was violently opposed by one Abu Amir (The Monk), a prominent member of the Khazraj tribe, who had embraced Christianity many years earlier and enjoyed a considerable reputation among his compatriots and among the Christians of Syria. From the very outset, he allied with the Prophet's enemies, the Meccan Quraysh, and took part on their side in the battle of Uhud. Shortly thereafter he migrated to Syria and did all he could to induce the Emperor of Byzantium, Heraclius, to invade Medina and crush the Muslim community once and for all. In Medina itself, Abu Amir had some secret followers among the members of his tribe, with whom he remained in constant correspondence. In the year 9 H., he informed them that Heraclius had agreed to send out an army against Medina, and that large-scale preparations were being made to this effect (which was apparently the reason for the Prophet's preventive expedition to Tabuk). In order that his followers should have a rallying-place in the event of the expected invasion of Medina, Abu Amir suggested to his friends that they should build a mosque of their

own in the village of Quba, in the immediate vicinity of Medina (which they did). Thus obviate the necessity of congregating in the mosque that the Prophet himself had built in the same village at the time of his arrival at Medina. It is this “rival” mosque to which the above verse refers. It was demolished at the Prophet’s orders immediately after his return from the Tabuk expedition. Abu Amir himself died in Syria shortly afterward. Although the whole of this verse relates primarily to the historical occasion explained in the preceding note, it has a definite bearing on all attempts at creating sectarian divisions among Muslims, and is thus a clear amplification of an earlier injunction to this effect (see 6:159).

And [there are hypocrites] who have established a [separate] house of worship in order to create mischief, and to promote apostasy and disunity among the believers, and to provide an outpost for all who from the outset have been warring against God and His Apostle. And they will surely swear [to you, O believers], “We had but the best of intentions!” The while God [Himself] bears witness that they are lying. Never set foot in such a place! [To pray therein] Only a house of worship founded, from the very first day, upon God-consciousness is worthy of your setting foot there in—[a house of Worship] wherein there are men desirous of growing in purity: for God loves all who purify themselves. Which, then, is the better: he who has founded his building on God-consciousness and [a desire for] His goodly acceptance—or he who has founded his building on the edge of a water-worn, crumbling river-bank, so that it [is bound to] tumble down with him into the fire of hell? For, God does not grace with His guidance people who [deliberately] do wrong: the building which they have

built will never cease to be a source of deep disquiet in their hearts until their hearts crumble to pieces. And God is all-knowing, wise. (9:107-110)

“Indeed, a house of worship founded... upon God-consciousness is most deserving...,” etc. Some of the commentators believe that this is a reference to the mosque founded by the Prophet at Quba, a village close to Medina, on his arrival there in the month of Rabi al-Awwal in the year 1 H., since it was the first mosque ever built by him or his followers. There are, however, authentic traditions to the effect that the Prophet applied the designation of “a house of worship founded on God-consciousness” to his (later-built) mosque at Medina as well. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that it applies to every mosque sincerely dedicated by its founders to the worship of God: a view, which is supported by the next verse.

Origin of Sunni and Shiah Islam (Arabic Shii, plural Shiah, or Shia)

The great evil that persists in Islamic societies is sectarianism. Breaking unity of Islam has been devastating throughout the history of Islamic world. The word Sunni comes from the word Sunnah (Arabic), which means the words and actions or example of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad. The Sunnis represent the traditionalist and orthodox branch of Islam. The term Shiah denotes a distinct group of people having in common the identical persuasion or adhering to the same principles of behavior, and is sometimes used in the sense of sect. The major difference between the Shiah and Sunni is based primarily on the question, who have the right to succeed after the Prophet's death? After 1400 hundred years, we are still harping on this very

question. It makes us Muslims look ridiculous and a laughing stock around the world.

Political Differences (Choosing Successors)

Successor to the prophet: Despite the notion of a unified and consolidated community, as taught by the Quran and the Prophet, serious differences arose within the Muslim community immediately after his death. Although Muhammad succeeded in breaking Arab tribalism and uniting them, but the tribal spirit did not die completely and reared its ugly head after his death. According to traditionalists (later identified as Sunni), the Prophet designated no successor, but chose Abu Bakr to lead prayer during his illness. Later, Abu Bakr, father of the Prophet's wife Aishah, was elected through consensus of the tribal elders in Medina. While Ali and the Prophet's closest kinsmen were preparing the body for burial, Abu Bakr, Umar, and Abu Ubaydah from Muhammad's Companions in the Quraysh tribe, met with the leaders of Medinans and agreed to elect Abu Bakr as the successor (khalifah, hence "caliph") of the Prophet.

According to Shiah, or "Partisans" of Ali, the Prophet had designated as his successor his cousin and son-in-law Ali ibn Talib, husband of his daughter Fatima and father of his only surviving grandsons, Hasan and Husain. Because of the very strong prohibition against sectarianism and the fact, they were unable to use the Quran to support factional interest; the competing parties resort to Ahadith in support of their position. Many such ahadith are self-contradictory. Ali and his kinsmen were dismayed at the election of Abu Bakr as a caliph, but agreed for the sake of unity to accept the fait accompli because Ali was still young.

Successor of Ali: After the murder of Uthman, the third caliph, Ali was invited by the Muslims at Medina to accept the caliphate. Thus, Ali became the fourth caliph (656-661), but the disagreement over his right of succession brought about a major schism in Islam between Shiah and traditionalists (Sunni). After Ali's death, the Shiah party demanded the restoration of the rule to Ali's family and from that, demand developed the Shiite legitimism, or divine right of the holy family to rule (see below). In 680, Ali's son Husain was brutally murdered at the hands of the Umayyad troops at the battle of Karbala.

Civil Wars: During the first few centuries, a spilt within Islam resulted in many conflicts where the proponents of competing doctrines, and the wielders of rival authorities struggled to overcome each other either by persecution or war. At the turn of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, the Ottoman Empire (Sunni) and Iran (Shiah) entered into series of conflict, which lasted until the nineteenth century.

Busbecq was the ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor in Constantinople from 1555-62. He stated that it was only the threat from Persia that saved Europe from imminent conquest by the Turks. The hatred between Sunnis and Shiahs was so great that in 1523, Shah Ismail of Iran sent a letter to the Emperor Charles V expressing surprise that the European powers were fighting each other instead of joining forces against the Ottomans.

Even today, the sectarianism among Muslims has been devastating. In Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), Iraq (mostly Sunni army) committed aggression against Shiah Iran resulting in more than one million casualties. After the American aggression and occupation of Iraq, both Shiah and Sunni groups committed unspeakable crimes of torture and widespread slaughter of fel-

low Muslims. To this day, sectarian violence is common in many parts of the Islamic world.

Divine right of the holy family—The concept of the divine right of the holy family to rule contrasts with the Quranic teachings for two reasons.

And who respond to [the call of] their Sustainer and are constant in prayer; and whose rule [in all matters of common concern] is consultation among themselves. (42:38)

(1) Rule by consensus and consultation. This particular qualification of true believers—regarded by the Prophet’s Companions as so important that they always referred to this surah by the key-word “consultation” (shura)—has a double import: Firstly, it is meant to remind all followers of the Quran that they must remain united within one single community (ummah), and secondly, it lays down the principle that all their communal business must be transacted in mutual consultation. (2) The Quran repeatedly criticizes the Jews for the concept of the “chosen people” because of their descent from Abraham. If the head of the state belongs only to the Prophet’s tribe or his family, then the Quraysh and Prophet’s family are given the status of the “chosen people.” The basis of rule should be the righteous character and superior qualifications rather than hereditary alone. Any Muslim, irrespective of race, color, and sex is eligible to be a ruler—provided he or she has the qualifications.

Theological Differences

The political differences arising from out the question of leadership, doctrinal differences developed over time. All Mus-

lim sects believe in the infallibility of the Quran, but both Shia and Sunni sects have their own sets of fabricated Ahadith, which is the basis of division in Islam.

Esoteric knowledge—Under Old Iranian (dualistic) influences, the figure of the political ruler, the imam (exemplary leader), was transformed into a metaphysical being, a manifestation of God. Through the imam alone the hidden and true meaning of the Quranic revelation can be known, because imam alone is infallible. The Shiah thus developed a doctrine of esoteric knowledge. The orthodox Shiahs recognize twelve such imams, the last having disappeared in the 9th century. Since that time, the mujtahids (i.e., the Shii divines) have been able to interpret law and doctrine under the putative guidance of the last imam (Mahdi), who will return at the end of time to fill the world with truth and justice. The Shiah Imams are believed to be inerrant interpreters of law and tradition; they have come to be imbued with Pope-like infallibility. Shiah religious hierarchy resembles that of Catholic Church in structure and religious powers. This system a vestige of a pre-Islamic era gives all powers and prestige to Mullahs to rule and govern ordinary people.

False claim of infallibility: The only person who can claim infallibility in interpreting the Quran is the Prophet Muhammad himself because of the phenomenon of divine revelations. In his personal life, God rebuked Muhammad many times in the Quran and corrected him when he was wrong. The claim that any human being is infallible is blasphemy. Only God is truly infallible in every respect. In fact, the Quran prohibits giving religious authorities legal validity side by side with the Quranic ordinance.

Blindly following ancestor's religion: There is no mention of imam possessing esoteric knowledge or the last imam Mahdi in the Quran and that imam alone can know the true meaning of the Muslim Holy Scripture has no Quranic basis. The blind following of ancestor's religion or religious authority does not always guarantee the soundness of concepts. It only discourages ordinary people from studying and understanding the Quran. It is the sacred duty of every Muslim to study the Quran because it is through faculty of reason and self-understanding that the firm foundation can be laid in the matter of faith. On the Day of Judgment, every human being will be responsible for his own actions and clergy of any religious leaning will be of no help.

A divine writ has been bestowed from on high upon you—and let there be no doubt about this in your heart—in order that you may warn [the erring] thereby, and [thus] admonish the believers: “Follow what has been sent down unto you by your Sustainer, and follow no masters* other than Him.” How seldom do you keep this in mind! (7:2-3)*

The construction of the whole sentence makes it clear that the “**doubt**” does not relate to the origin of the divine writ but to its purpose: namely, to warn the rejecters of the truth and to guide those who already believe in it. Both the warning and the admonition are summarized in the sequence. The expression “**masters**” denotes “authorities” in the religious sense of the word, implying a prohibition of attributing legal validity—side by side with Quranic ordinances—to the subjective opinions of any person below the Prophet. See also 5:101.

Evil of Sectarianism

The well-authenticated saying of the Prophet: *“The Jews have been split up into seventy-one sects, the Christians into seventy-two sects, whereas my community will be split up into seventy-three sects.”* In classical Arabic usage, the number “seventy” often stands for “many”—just as “seven” stands for “several” or “various”—and does not necessarily denote an actual figure. Hence, what the Prophet meant to say was that the sects and divisions among the Muslims of later days would become many, and even more numerous than those among the Jews and the Christians.

***One God one community**—And this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all: remain, then, conscious of Me! But they [who claim to follow you] have torn their unity wide asunder, piece-by-piece, each group delighting in [but] what they themselves possess [by way of tenets]. (23:52-53)*

The above verse is addressed to all who truly believe in God, whatever their historical denomination, and it applies to the followers of all the prophets. The various religious groups such as the followers of one or another of the earlier revelations who, in the course of time, consolidated themselves within different “denominations,” each of them jealously guarding its own set of tenets, dogmas, and rituals and intensely intolerant of all other ways of worship (see 22:67). The above condemnation applies to the latter-day followers of Muhammad as well, and thus constitutes a prediction and condemnation of the doctrinal disunity prevailing throughout the world of Islam in our times.

***Greed and power behind sectarianism**—But leave them alone,* lost in their ignorance, until a [future] time.*

Do they think that by all the wealth and offspring with which We provide them, We [but want to] make them vie with one another in doing [what they consider] good works? (23:54-55)

But leave them **alone** until they themselves realize their error. This sentence is addressed to the last of the apostles, Muhammad, and thus to all who truly follow him. Do they think that by bestowing on them worldly prosperity God but wants them to vie with one another in their race after material goods and comforts, which they mistakenly identify with doing good works? The material prosperity is not the ultimate good, and, secondly, that the breach of the unity spoken of in the preceding passage was, more often than not, an outcome of mere worldly greed and of factional striving after power.

***Suffering on the Day of Judgment**—No, but they do not perceive [their error]! [As for those who have torn asunder the unity of faith] their hearts are lost in ignorance of all this! But apart from that [breach of unity] they have [on their conscience even worse] deeds; and they will [continue to] commit them until—after We shall have taken to task, through suffering, those from among them who [now] are lost in the pursuit of pleasures—they cry out in [belated] supplication. [But they will be told:] “Cry not in supplication today: for, you shall not be succored by Us!” (23:56-65)*

“No, but they do not perceive their error,” and, hence, lost in their ignorance. Their worst deeds are actions and dogmatic assertions, which utterly contradict the teachings of the very apostles whom they claim to follow, like ascribing divine qualities to beings other than God, worshiping saints, or rejecting

divine revelations, which do not accord with their own likes and dislikes or with their customary mode of thinking. The practice of sectarianism will only lead to negative consequences in this life and afterlife. People who at present are lost in the pursuit of pleasures will be taken to task through suffering on the Day of Judgment or—as in 17:16—to the inevitable social ruin which, in the long run, wrong beliefs and actions bring with themselves in this world.

***Breach of unity and good works**—[O you, who believe in Me,] this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all: worship, then, Me [alone]! But men have torn their unity wide asunder, [forgetting that] unto Us; they all are bound to return. And yet, whoever does [the least] of righteous deeds and is a believer withal, his endeavor shall not be disowned: for, We shall record it in his favor. (21:92-94)*

The principle of oneness as it ought to be reflected in the unity of all who believe in Him. The sudden turn of the discourse from the second person plural to the third person is indicative of God's severe disapproval for those who are or were guilty of breaking the believers' unity. Even a breach of religious unity may not be unforgivable so long as it does not involve a worship of false deities or false moral values. This is the meaning, in this context, of man being "a believer withal"—an echo of the principle clearly spelt out in 2:62 and several other Quranic passages.

***Shun those who broke the unity of faith**—As for those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects—you have nothing to do with them. Their case rests*

with God: and in time He will make them understand what they were doing. (6:159)

This is a reference primarily to the Jews and the Christians, who have departed from the fundamental religious principles which they had originally shared in their entirety, and have gone different ways in respect of doctrine and ethics (see 3:105). Beyond this primary reference, it also relates prophetically to the followers of the Quran as well. In other words, it expresses a condemnation of all sectarianism arising out of intolerant, mutually-exclusive claims to the only true exponents of the Quranic teachings.

[Turn, then, away from all that is false,] turning unto Him [alone]; and remain conscious of Him, and be constant in prayer, and be not among those who ascribe divinity to others beside Him, [or] among those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects, each group delighting in but what they themselves hold [by way of tenets]. (30:31-32)

Attributes of an ideal community—*In this way God makes clear His messages unto you, so you might find guidance, and there might grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good, and enjoy the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state! And do not be like them who have drawn apart from one another and have taken to conflicting views after all evidence of the truth has come to them: so for these it is for whom tremendous suffering is in store. (3:103-105)*

Be not like the followers of the Bible, who became “Jews” and “Christians” although their beliefs have a common source and are based on the same spiritual truths (see 6:159).

***Brotherhood of Islam**—And as for those who henceforth come to believe, and who forsake the domain of evil and strive hard [in God’s cause] together with you—these [too] shall belong to you; and they who are [thus] closely related* have the highest claim on one another in [accordance with] God’s decree. God has full knowledge of everything. All believers are but brethren. Hence, [whenever they are at odds,] make peace between your two brethren, and remain conscious of God, so that you might be graced with His mercy. (8:75) (49:10)*

They who come to believe, turn away from evil and strive to do good, too, shall belong to the brotherhood of Islam, in which the faith held in common supplies the decisive bond between believers. The reference to “close **relations**” comes at the end of a passage which centers on the injunction that the believers must be the friends and protectors of one another, and that all later believers shall, similarly, be regarded as members of the Islamic brotherhood. The above verses are meant to stress the bonds of faith among true believers, as well as the moral obligations arising from these bonds. All true believers, of all times, form one single community in the deepest sense of this word, and all who are thus closely related in spirit have the highest claim on one another in accordance with God’s decree that “all believers are brethren.”

Sectarianism among Jews and Christians

***Breaking unity of faith**—Now those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime* did break up their unity [of faith] after such an evidence of the truth had come to them. And withal, they were not enjoined anything, but that they should worship God, sincere in their faith in Him alone, turning away from all that is false; and they should be constant in prayer; and spend in charity:* for this is a moral law endowed with ever-true soundness and clarity. Those who [despite all evidence] are bent on denying the truth—[be they] from among the followers of earlier revelation or from among those who ascribe divinity to others besides God—will find themselves in the fire of hell, therein to abide: they are the worst of all creatures. [And] those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds—it is they, they who are the best of all creatures. Their reward [awaits them] with God: gardens of perpetual bliss, through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; well-pleased is God with them, and well-pleased are they with Him: all this awaits him who of his Sustainer stands in awe! (98:4-8)*

“Those who have been vouchsafed revelation **aforetime**” is a general definition, comprising the followers of all religious teachings revealed before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, and not only the Jews and the Christians. Most of them strayed from the teachings of the prophets sent to them, all of whom had preached the same fundamental truths. The phrase “spending in **charity**” should be understood in the general sense, since the term zakah has here obviously a wider meaning than the obligatory tax incumbent on Muslims (which, as its name

indicates, is meant to purify their income and their possessions from the taint of selfishness).

The above definition of **moral law** outlines, in a condensed form, all the basic demands of true religion: a cognition of God's oneness and uniqueness and, implicitly, of man's responsibility to Him; a turning-away from all false concepts, values and dubious beliefs, all over-estimation of oneself, and all superstitions, and, finally, kindness and charity toward all of God's creatures. Those who deny the self-evident principles formulated in the preceding verse as the beginning and the end of all moral law will suffer in the afterlife.

The only [true] religion in the sight of God is [man's] self-surrender unto Him; and those who were vouchsafed revelation aforetime took, out of mutual jealousy, to divergent views [on this point] only after knowledge [thereof] had come unto them. [As for the followers of earlier revelation,] they broke up their unity, out of mutual jealousy, only after they had come to know [the truth]. And had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from thy Sustainer, [postponing all decisions] until a term set [by Him], all would indeed have been decided between them [from the outset]. [For an explanation, see 10:19.] As it is, they who have inherited their divine writ from those who preceded them are [now] in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it portends. (3:19) (42:14)*

The above passages refer not only to the follower of the Bible, but to all communities that base their views on a revealed scripture, extant in a partially corrupted form, with parts of it entirely lost. All these communities at first subscribed to the doctrine of God's oneness and held that man's self-surrender to Him (Islam

in its original connotation) is the essence of all true religion. The followers of earlier revelation did not break up their unity until after knowledge had come to them—i.e., the knowledge that God is one, and that the teachings of all of His prophets were essentially the same. See 2:213 and, more explicitly, 23:53, which comes immediately after the statement that “this community of yours is one single community.” Their subsequent divergences were an outcome of sectarian pride and mutual exclusiveness. They who inherited their divine writ, referring to the Bible and its followers in later times are in **doubt** as to whether the relevant scripture has really been revealed by God, and, ultimately, as to whether there is any truth in the concept of divine revelation as such.

Anti-Semitism

The word anti-Semitism means prejudice against Jews in general, often rooted in hatred of their ethnic background, culture, and/or religion.

Anti-Semitism among Christians—The role Jews played in the supposed crucifixion of Jesus is one of the main reasons for anti-Semitism among Christians. Racial and economic reasons also play a role in the hatred of Jews, which is deeply embedded in the Western civilization. Jews had the misfortune of being crucial to Christian theology—once Christianity decided, in the second century, that it would supersede Judaism. Christianity required the disappearance of the Jews—the Christian religion could therefore fulfill a new covenant that invalidated the old one. The persistence of Jews, however tiny their numbers, served as a constant reminder of this failure. The response was, historically, to destroy the Jews, but with every massacre, the survivors also served to remind Christianity of the hypocrisy just beneath

its message of peace. Even the Christian eschatology is anti-Semitic. According to a literal reading of the Book of Revelation, when the rapture comes, Christians will be taken to heaven, and Jews will be left behind to deal with the Antichrist, plagues, sores, boils, frogs, and other torments. According to the Quran, the crucifixion of Jesus was a myth and Christians had no religious basis to persecute the Jews.

Anti-Semitism among Muslims—Anti-Semitism is a Christian vice but unfortunately, it is a growing phenomenon among some Muslims. The major cause of anti-Semitism among Muslims is political in nature. Hatred of Jews became marked in the Muslim world only after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The massacre, ethnic cleansing, and continuous persecution of Palestinian Arabs by the Jews of Israel has laid the foundation of hatred for the Jews in the Islamic world.

Evil of the Jewish occupation of Arab land and its people led to another evil of suicide bombings by Palestinian Arabs, causing the deaths of many innocent Jewish victims. The phenomenon of suicide bombings in the Middle East was born only after the 1967 war in which more Arab land was grabbed, and more Palestinians were victimized. Jewish subjugation has perverted Palestinian's culture and spawned the cult of death—a growing cancer in the Islamic world.

In our times, fundamentalist Christians and Jews in spite of their two thousand years of enmity have found a common enemy “Islam.” Christian world for the large part has supported Israel's occupation and atrocities of Palestinians. Christians of Russia are involved in the genocide of Chechen Muslims. In the Balkan, tens of thousands innocent Muslims were murdered and their women raped by the Christians of Serbia and Croatia. It is

the collective failure of Jews, Christians, and Muslims that has resulted in international terrorism.

Anti-Semitism is anti-Islamic—It is significant that Muslims were compelled to import anti-Jewish myths from Europe, and translate into Arabic such virulent anti-Semitic texts as the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, because they had no such traditions of their own. Because of this new hostility toward Jewish people, some Muslims now quote the passages in the Quran that refer to Muhammad’s struggle with the three rebellious Jewish tribes to justify their prejudice. These Muslims with an anti-Jewish agenda will only quote the passages of the Quran which are critical of Jews but conveniently ignore those passages which praise them. By taking these verses out of context, they have distorted both the message of the Quran and the attitude of the Prophet, who himself felt no such hatred of Judaism.

Five times a day, every Muslim ends the prayer by saying, “You are the most praised, the most glorious, O God, bestow Your grace on Muhammad and his family as You bestowed it on Abraham and his family. You are the most praised, the most glorious.” How can a Muslim hate all Jews, when he blesses them in his prayer? The following verses from the Quran remind Jews of their special status in the eyes of God and their favored status above all people. These verses should dispel all sentiments of anti-Semitism and stereotyping of Jews among Muslims.

God’s Blessings for the Jews

Read the chapter on Moses (volume one) and how God empowered Jews and liberated them from the clutches of Pharaoh. The Quran describes Pharaoh as the arch-type of God’s enemy for his anti-Semitism.

The blessed land of Palestine for Jews—Whereas unto the people who [in the past] had been deemed utterly low, (as slaves in Egypt) We gave as their heritage the eastern and western parts of the land that We had blessed. And [thus] thy Sustainer's good promise to the children of Israel was fulfilled in result of their patience in adversity; whereas We absolutely destroyed all that Pharaoh and his people had wrought, and all that they had built. (7:137)

Palestine is spoken of as blessed because it was the land in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had lived, and because so many other prophets were to appear there. The promise of God referred to here is the one given to the children of Israel through Moses. The above verse establishes the right of Jews to live in Palestine and attempts to destroy them will never succeed.

Liberation from Pharaoh and forerunner of monotheism—O children of Israel! [Thus] We saved you from your enemy, and [then] We made a covenant with you on the right-hand slope of Mount Sinai, and repeatedly sent down manna and quails unto you, [saying,] “Partake of the good things which We have provided for you as sustenance.” Pharaoh exalted himself in the land and divided its people into castes. One group of them, he deemed utterly low; he would slaughter their sons and spare [only] their women: for, he was one of those who spread corruption [on earth]. But it was Our will to bestow Our favor upon those [very people] who were deemed [so] utterly low in the land, and to make them forerunners in faith, and to make them heirs [to Pharaoh's glory]. We vouchsafed unto Moses [Our] revelation as a means of insight for men, and as a

guidance and grace, so that they might bethink themselves [of Us]. (20:80-81) (28:4-5, 43)

The above paragraph is the historical fact that Jews were the first to accept a monotheistic creed in a clear, unequivocal formulation, and thus became the forerunners of both Christianity and Islam. The Torah inaugurated a new phase in mankind's religious history being the first divinely inspired Law.

I favored you above all other people—O children of Israel! Remember those blessings of mine with which I graced you, and fulfill your promise to Me, [whereupon] I shall fulfill My promise unto you; and of Me, of Me stand in awe! Believe in that which I have [now] bestowed from on high, confirming the truth already in your possession, and be not foremost among those who deny its truth. O Children of Israel! Remember those blessings of mine with which I graced you, and how I favored you above all other people; and remain conscious of [the coming of] a day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall intercession be accepted from any of them, nor ransom* taken from them, and none shall be succored. And [remember the time] when We saved you from Pharaoh's people, who afflicted you with cruel suffering, slaughtering your sons and sparing [only] your women—[see exodus, I, 15-16, 22], which was an awesome trial from your Sustainer. And when We cleft the sea before you, and thus saved you and caused Pharaoh's people to drown before your very eyes. (2:40-41, 47-50)

The “taking of ransom” is an obvious allusion to the Christian doctrine of vicarious redemption as well as to the Jewish idea that

the chosen people—as the Jews considered themselves—would be exempt from punishment on the Day of Judgment. Both these ideas are categorically refuted in the Quran.

O children of Israel! Remember those blessings of Mine with which I graced you, and how I favored you above all other people; and remain conscious of [the coming of] a Day when no human being shall in the least avail another, nor shall ransom be accepted from any of them, nor shall intercession be of any use to them, and none shall be succored. (2:122-123)

CHAPTER EIGHT
DIVERSITY IN MONOTHEISM
(JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM)

Same Spiritual Truths but Divergent Religious Laws

Now had God so willed, He could surely have made them all one single community: nonetheless, He admits unto His grace him that wills [to be admitted]—whereas the evildoers shall have none to protect them and none to succor them [on Judgment Day]. (42:8)*

If God had so willed, He could have made mankind into one single community, the implication being, “but He has not willed it”: see 5:48 above, 16:93, and also 10:19. “He admits whomever He wills unto His grace”—similar to the double meaning inherent in the often-recurring phrase, which can be understood either as “God guides whomever He wills and lets go astray whomever He wills,” or, alternatively, as “God guides him that wills to be guided and lets go astray him that wills to go astray.”

***Unity within religious diversity**—Unto every one of you* have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test* you by what He has vouchsafed unto you.*

Vie, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God, you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you differ. (5:48)

The expression “every one of **you**” denotes the various communities of which mankind is composed. The basic, unchanging spiritual truths which, according to the Quran, have been preached by every one of God’s apostles, while the particular body of laws promulgated through them, and the way of life recommended by them, varied in accordance with the exigencies of the time and of each community’s cultural development. This unity in diversity is frequently stressed in the Quran (e.g., in 2:148, 21:92-93, and 23:52, see above under evils of sectarianism). There is diversity in all God’s creation and in various religious laws imposed on them, “in order to **test**, their willingness to surrender to God and to obey Him,” and thus to enable them to grow, spiritually and socially, in accordance with the God-willed law of evolution. In the end God will, lit., “inform you of that wherein you used to differ” (2:113). There is a misperception among some Muslims that Islam being the great religion will be widely accepted by all human beings. This is contrary to the teachings of the Quran as the above verses indicate.

Diversity of worship—*Unto every community have We appointed [different] ways of worship, which they ought to observe. Hence, [O believer,] do not let those [who follow ways other than yours] draw you into disputes* on this score, but summon [them all] unto thy Sustainer: for, you are indeed on the right way. And if they [try to] argue with you, say [only]: “God knows best what you are doing.” [For, indeed,] God will judge between you [all] on Resurrection Day with regard to all on which you differ. [See 2:113.] Do*

you not know that God knows all that occurs in heaven as well as on earth? All this is in [God's] record: [to know] all this is easy for God. (22:67-70)

Do not allow yourself to be drawn into disputes regarding different modes of worship. In the end, God will judge and “To me shall be accounted for my doings, and to you, your doings: you are not accountable for what I am doing, and I am not responsible for whatever you do” (10:41).

Divergent views among Jews and Christians—Indeed, [already] unto the children of Israel did We vouchsafe revelation, and wisdom, and prophethood; and We provided for them sustenance out of the good things of life, and favored them above all other people [of their time]. And We gave them clear indications of the purpose [of faith], and it was only after all this knowledge had been vouchsafed to them that they began, out of mutual jealousy, to hold divergent views: [but,] thy Sustainer will judge between them on Resurrection Day regarding all whereon they differ. (45:16-17)

We gave the revelation to children of Israel and favored them above all other people because at that time they were the only truly monotheistic community (2:47). In the same way and for the same purpose as We now bestow this revelation of the Quran—thus stressing the fact of continuity in all divine revelations.

Divergent views and Quranic explanation—And [thereafter], indeed, We assigned unto the children of Israel a most goodly abode, and provided for them sustenance out

of the good things of life. And it was not until knowledge [of God's revelation] was vouchsafed to them that they began to hold divergent views: [but,] thy Sustainer will judge between them on Resurrection Day regarding all on which they differ. (10:93)

The people of Moses remained of one religious persuasion and of one opinion, without any disagreement, until they began to study the Torah, whereupon they became aware of the various problems and obligations involved, and disagreements regarding their interpretation arose among them. And so God makes it clear in the above Quran-verse that this kind of disagreement is inevitable and will always occur in the life of this world. This is in tune with the often-repeated Quranic statement that proneness to intellectual dissension is a permanent characteristic of human nature.

And so, [O man,] if you are in doubt about [the truth of] what We have [now] bestowed upon you from on high, ask those who read the divine writ [revealed] before your time: [and you will find that,] surely; the truth has now come unto you from thy Sustainer. Be not, then, among the doubters and neither be among those who are bent on giving the lie to God's messages, lest you find yourself among the lost. They against whom thy Sustainer's word [of judgment] has come true will not attain to faith—even though every sign [of the truth] should come within their ken—until they behold the grievous suffering [that awaits them in the life to come]. (10:94-97)*

The “**reading**” is here a metonym for belief, namely, in the Bible, which—even though its text has been altered during the course of time—still contains clear references to the advent of

the prophet Muhammad and thus, by implication, to the truth of the divine message revealed through him. In its wider sense, the above verse alludes to the unbroken continuity of man's religious experience and to the fact, frequently stressed in the Quran, that every one of God's apostles preached one and the same basic truth.

Behold, this Quran explains to the children of Israel most [of that] whereon they hold divergent views; and it is a guidance and a grace unto all who believe [in it]. [O believer,] thy Sustainer will judge between them in His wisdom—for He alone is almighty, all-knowing. Hence, place your trust in God [alone]—for, behold, that in which you believe is truth self-evident. [But,] you cannot make the dead hear: and [so, too,] you cannot make the deaf [of heart] hear this call when they turn their backs [on you] and go away, just as you cannot lead the blind [of heart] out of their error; none can you make hear save such as [are willing to] believe in Our messages, and thus surrender themselves unto Us. (27:76-81)*

Divergent views: where they differ from the truth made evident to them in their scriptures. The term “children of Israel” comprises here both the Jews and the Christians as both follow the Old Testament. It is precisely because of the alteration of the Bible, and because of the great influence, which Jewish and Christian ideas exert over a large segment of mankind, that the Quran sets out to explain certain ethical truths to both these communities. The above reference to “most” (and not all) of the problems alluded to in this context shows that the present passage bears only on man's moral outlook and social life in this world and not on ultimate, metaphysical questions which—as the

Quran so often repeats—will be answered only in the hereafter. The passage above corresponds to the often-repeated Quranic statement that God guides him that wills to be guided.

Quran and followers of other religions—Hence, they unto whom We have vouchsafed this revelation rejoice at all that has been bestowed upon you [O Prophet] from on high; but among the followers of other creeds, there are such as deny the validity* of some of it. Say [unto them, O Prophet]: “I have only* been bidden to worship God, and not to ascribe divine powers to anything beside Him: unto Him do I call [all mankind], and He is my goal!” (13:36)

Those who believe in this revelation, there will be guidance for them in this world and the promise of ultimate happiness in the life to come. The followers of other creeds deny its **validity**, while admitting that the Quran contains much that coincides with the spiritual concepts taught by their own religions. The particle “**only**” at the beginning of the above sentence “clearly shows that there is in Islam no obligation, no ordinance and no prohibition that is not connected with this principle.”

Why Quran differs from earlier divine revelations?
Every age has had its revelation: God annuls or confirms whatever He wills [of His earlier messages]—for with Him is the source of all revelation. And upon you [too] have We bestowed from on high this divine writ for no other reason than that you might make clear unto them all [questions of faith] on which they have come to hold divergent views, and [thus offer] guidance and grace unto people who will believe. (13:38-39) (16:64)

Revelation or: “a divine writ.” See 5:48—“Unto every one of you have We appointed a different law and way of life,” which explains the succession of divine messages culminating in, and ending with, the revelation of the Quran. This interpretation of the above phrase connects it plausibly with the preceding mention of the apostles who came before Muhammad, and with the subsequent reference to the supersession of the earlier divine messages by that of the Quran.

Apart from this, the statement that every age had a revelation suited to the particular needs of the time, and the people concerned constitutes an answer to the objection, often raised by followers of other creeds that the message of the Quran differs in many respects from the earlier divine revelations. God is the fountainhead or source of all revelations. As regards the preceding reference to the abrogation of earlier divine dispensations and their supersession by later ones—ending with the final revelation, the Quran—see 2:106. The passage under consideration has the same purport as 2:106.)

Conclusion: It is clear from the above verses that those who call themselves Sunni, Shiah, etc., among Muslims, are breaking the unity of faith because the Quran condemns every kind of sectarianism, as Prophet Muhammad was neither a Sunni nor a Shiah. The honest differences of opinions among various groups within Islam should be respected but designating oneself to any particular sect crosses the bond of unity.

CHAPTER NINE
COMMON BELIEFS

Our God and Your God Is One And The Same

Do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner—unless it be such of them as are bent on evildoing—and say: “We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: for our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender ourselves.” For it is thus* that We have bestowed this divine writ from on high upon you [O Muhammad]. And they to whom we have vouchsafed this divine writ believe in it—just as among those [followers of earlier revelation] there are some who believe in it. (29:46-47)*

Argue **kindly** with the followers of earlier revelation, except those who are evildoers and are therefore not accessible to friendly argument—the implication being that in such cases all disputes should a priori be avoided. As regards religious discussions in general, see 16:125. “For it is **thus**,” or in this spirit: a reference to the sameness of the fundamental truths in all revealed religions, God has bestowed his revelation and to whom

God grants the ability to understand this divine writ, except for those who deny or reject something which he knows to be true.

Worship of one God as the only true religion—Thus, [O Prophet,] if they argue with you, say, “I have surrendered my whole being unto God, and [so have] all who follow me!” And ask those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime, as well as all unlettered people, [who have no revealed scripture of their own] “Have you [too] surrendered yourselves unto Him?” And if they surrender themselves unto Him, they are on the right path; but if they turn away—your duty is no more than to deliver the message: for God sees all that is in [the hearts of] His creatures. Say: “O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet* which we and you hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and we shall not ascribe divinity to anything beside Him, and we shall not take human beings for our lords besides God.” And if they turn away, then say: “Bear witness that it is we who have surrendered ourselves unto Him.” For, if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come, he shall be among the lost. (3:20, 64, 85)

Tenets we and you hold in common (lit: a word that is equitable between you and us). The term kalimah, primarily meaning “word” or “utterance,” is often used in the philosophical sense of proposition or tenet. We shall not take human beings for our lords, lit., “that we shall not take one another for lords besides God.” Since the personal pronoun “we” obviously applies to human beings, the expression “one another” necessarily bears the same connotation. In its wider implication, the above call is

addressed not merely to the Christians, who attribute divinity to Jesus and certain aspects of divinity to their saints, but also to the Jews, who assign a quasi-divine authority to Ezra and even to some of their great Talmudic scholars (see 9:30-31).

Divine Origin of the Quran, Gospel, and Torah

Step by step has He bestowed upon you from on high this divine writ, setting forth the truth which confirms whatever there still remains [of earlier revelations]: for it is He who has bestowed from on high the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, as a guidance unto mankind, and it is He who has bestowed [upon man] the standard by which to discern the true from the false. As for those who are bent on denying God's messages—grievous suffering awaits them: for God is almighty, an avenger of evil. (3:3-4)

“Whatever there still remains of earlier revelations.” (a) The fact—frequently stressed in the Quran and since established by objective scholarship—that in the course of the millennia, the Bible has been subjected to considerable and often arbitrary alteration. (b) With the fact that many of the laws enunciated in the Quran differ from the laws of the Bible, brings us forcibly to the conclusion that the “confirmation” of the latter by the Quran can refer only to the basic truths still discernible in the Bible, and not to its time-bound legislation or to its present text. In other words, a confirmation of whatever was extant of its basic teachings at the time of the revelation of the Quran. In this context as well as in 5:46 and 48 or in 61:6 where it refers to Jesus’ confirming the truth of whatever there still remained (i.e., in his lifetime) of the Torah. The Gospel frequently mentioned in the Quran is not identical with what is known today as the Four

Gospels, but refers to an original, since lost, revelation bestowed upon Jesus and known to his contemporaries under its Greek name of Evangelion (“Good Tiding”), on which the Arabicized form Injil is based. It was probably the source from which the Synoptic Gospels derived much of their material, and some of the teachings attributed to Jesus. The fact of its having been lost and forgotten is alluded to in the Quran in 5:14.

Same source of divine revelation—The divine origin of the revelation granted to Muhammad, which, as the passage below points out, proceeds from the same source as that granted to Moses (the last of the great apostles of God accepted as such by all the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Furthermore, the identity of the fundamental truths in all divine revelations, stressed in the verse below, implies an identity of the moral demands made of the followers of those revelations irrespective of period, race, or social environment.

And, indeed [O Muhammad,] We did vouchsafe revelation unto Moses [as well]: so be not in doubt of [you] having met with the same [truth in the revelation vouchsafed to you]. And [just as] We caused that [earlier revelation] to be a guidance for the children of Israel, and [as] We raised among them leaders who, so long as they bore themselves with patience and had sure faith in Our messages, guided [their people] in accordance with Our behest—[so, too, shall it be with the divine writ revealed unto you, O Muhammad]. (32:23-24)

We raised leaders from among the followers of Jewish faith to guide their people in accordance with the divine ordinances enunciated in and for their time in the Torah. There was decline

in faith among the children of Israel of later times, and the tendency among many of their leaders and learned men to corrupt the text of the Torah and, thus, to “overlay the truth with falsehood” (see, e.g., 2:42, 75, 79). The Quran is also destined to provide guidance and light so long as the community’s religious leaders are patient in adversity and steadfast in their faith, an interpretation that implies the Quran will cease to be of benefit to people who have lost their moral virtues and their faith.

Torah divinely inspired—*And [then,] indeed, after We had destroyed those earlier generations [of sinners], We vouchsafed unto Moses [Our] revelation as a means of insight* for men, and as a guidance and grace, so that they might bethink themselves [of Us]. (28:43-50)*

Means of insight by virtue of its being the first divinely-inspired Law, the Torah inaugurated a new phase in mankind’s religious history (cf. the reference to the children of Israel as “forerunners in faith” in verse 5 of this surah).

Quran confirms the truth of the Torah—*And yet, before this, there was the revelation of Moses, a guide and a [sign of God’s] grace; and this [Quran] is a divine writ confirming the truth [of the Torah] [In its original, uncorrupted form.] in the Arabic tongue, to warn those who are bent on evildoing, and [to bring] a glad tiding to the doers of good: for all who say, “Our Sustainer is God,” and thereafter stand firm [in their faith]—no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve: it is they who are destined for paradise, therein to abide as a reward for all that they have done. (46:12-14)*

***Sacredness of houses of worship** (mosques, churches, and synagogues) Hence, who could be more wicked than those who bar the mention of God's name from [any of] His houses of worship and strive for their ruin, [although] they have no right to enter them save in fear [of God]? For them, in this world, there is ignominy in store; and for them, in the life to come, awesome suffering. (2:114)*

It is one of the fundamental principles of Islam that every religion, which has a belief in God as its focal point, must be accorded full respect, however, much one may disagree with its particular tenets. Thus, the Muslims are under an obligation to honor and protect any house of worship dedicated to God, whether it be a mosque or a church or a synagogue (see 22:40 below), and any attempt to prevent the followers of another faith from worshiping God according to their own lights is condemned by the Quran as a sacrilege. A striking illustration of this principle is forthcoming from the Prophet's treatment of the deputation from Christian Najran in the year 10 H. They were given free access to the Prophet's mosque, and with his full consent celebrated their religious rites there, although their adoration of Jesus as "the son of God" and of Mary as "the mother of God" was fundamentally at variance with Islamic beliefs.

Those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying: "Our Sustainer is God!" For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in [all of] which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed [before now]. (22:40)

“If God had not enabled people to defend themselves,” lit., “was it not that God repels some people by means of others” (see the identical phrase in the second paragraph of 2:251). The implication is that the defense of religious freedom is the foremost cause for which arms may—and, indeed, must—be taken up (see 2: 193 and the corresponding note), or else, as stressed in the concluding clause of 2:251, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth.”

Abraham as Father of All Monotheistic Faiths

While Abraham was regarded as the ancestor of both Jews and Arabs, it was also an undeniable fact that he was not a Jew or Christian, since the Jews are either to be taken as the followers of Moses or as the descendants of Abraham’s grandson Jacob. At the same time, Abraham stood for the worship of God alone.

O followers of earlier revelation! Why do you argue about Abraham, seeing that the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed till [long] after him? Will you not, then, use your reason? Lo! You are the ones who would argue about that which is known to you; but why do you argue about something, which is unknown to you? Yet God knows [it], whereas you do not know: Abraham was neither a “Jew” nor a “Christian,” but was one who turned away from all that is false, having surrendered himself unto God; and he was not of those who ascribe divinity to anything beside Him. The people who have the best claim to Abraham are surely those who follow him—as does this Prophet and all who believe [in him]—and God is near unto the believers. (3:65-68)

Why do you argue about the true creed of Abraham, who followed principles before Torah and Gospel were revealed? “That which is known to you” is an allusion to their knowledge of the obvious fact that many of the teachings based on the extant versions of the Torah and the Gospels conflict with the teachings of the Quran. According to the Jewish faith, Torah is considered to be the Final Law of God, and Christians consider Gospel as the final word, which conflicts with the former in many respects.

Creed of Abraham—*And they say, “Be Jews”—or, “Be Christians”—“and you shall be on the right path.” Say: “No, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false,* and was not of those who ascribe divinity to anything besides God.”*

The expression hanif literally means “he inclined toward a right state.” In pre-Islamic times, this term had a monotheistic connotation. It was used to describe a man who turned away from sin and worldliness and from all dubious beliefs such as idol-worship.

Say: “We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.”*

The “descendants” refer to the twelve tribes of Israelites, which evolved from this ancestry. We regard them all as true prophets and make no distinction between them.

And if [others] come to believe in the way you believe, they will indeed find themselves on the right path; and if they turn away, it is but they who will be deeply in the wrong, and God will protect you from them: for He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing. [Say: “Our life takes its] hue from God! And who could give a better hue [to life] than God, if we but truly worship Him?” Say [to the Jews and the Christians]: “Do you argue with us about God? But He is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer—and unto us shall be accounted for our deeds, and unto you, your deeds; and it is unto Him alone that we devote ourselves.”

Do you argue with us about God’s will regarding the succession of prophethood and man’s ultimate salvation? The Jews believe that prophethood was a privilege granted to the children of Israel alone, while the Christians maintain that Jesus—who, too, descended from the children of Israel—was God’s final manifestation on earth, and each of these two denominations claims that salvation is reserved to its followers alone. The Quran refutes these ideas by stressing that God is the Lord of all mankind, and that every individual will be judged on the basis of his own beliefs and his own behavior alone.

“Do you claim that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants were ‘Jews’ or ‘Christians’?” Say: “Do you know more than God does?” And who could be more wicked than he who suppresses a testimony given to him by God? Yet God is not unmindful of what you do.*

“Now those people have passed away; unto them shall be accounted what they have earned and unto you, what you have earned; and you will not be judged on the strength of what they did.” (2:135-141)

The Quran alludes to the fact that the concept of “Jewry” came into being many centuries after the time of the Patriarchs, and even long after the time of Moses, while the concepts of “Christianity” and “Christians” were unknown in Jesus’ time and represent later development. “He who **suppresses** a testimony given to him by God,” is a reference to the Biblical prediction of the coming of the Prophet Muhammad (see 2:42), which effectively contradicts the Judeo-Christian claim that all true prophets, after the Patriarchs, belonged to the children of Israel.

Belief in All the Prophets

And, lo, God accepted, through the prophets, this solemn pledge [from the followers of earlier revelation]: “If, after all the revelations and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession; you must believe in him and succor him. Do you—said He—“acknowledge and accept My bond on this condition?” They answered: “We do acknowledge it.” Said He: “Then bear witness [thereto] and I shall be your witness. And, henceforth, all who turn away [from this pledge]—it is they, they who are truly iniquitous!” Do they seek, perchance, a faith other than in God, [Any other than God’s religion] although it is unto Him that whatever is in the heavens and on earth surrenders itself, willingly or unwillingly, since unto Him all must return? Say: “We believe in God, and in that which*

has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed by their Sustainer unto Moses and Jesus and all the [other] prophets: we make no distinction between any of them. And unto Him do we surrender ourselves.”
(3:81-84)

In the verse above, what is meant by this solemn **pledge** taken from the community as a whole: a pledge consisting in their acceptance of the messages conveyed through the prophets.

Parable of Three Prophets—The story below is a parable; it must be understood as such and not as an historical narrative. We have here an allegory of the three great monotheistic religions, successively propounded by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, and embodying, essentially, the same spiritual truths. The township mentioned in the parable represents, common cultural environment within which these three religions appeared. The apostles of the first two are said to have been sent together, implying that the teachings of both were—and are—anchored in one and the same scripture, the Old and New Testament of the Bible. When, during the course of time, their impact proved insufficient to mold the ethical attitude of the people or peoples concerned, God strengthened them by His final message, conveyed to the world by the third and last of the apostles, Muhammad.

And set forth unto them a parable—[the story of how] the people of a township [behaved] when [Our] message-bearers came unto them. Lo! We sent unto them two [apostles], and they gave the lie to both; and so We strengthened [the two] with a third; and thereupon they said: “We have

been sent unto you [by God]!” [The others] answered: “You are nothing but mortal men like ourselves; moreover, the Most Gracious has never bestowed any [revelation] from on high. You do nothing but lie!”

See 6:91—“no true understanding of God have they when they say, ‘Never has God revealed anything unto man.’” Both these passages, as well as the one above, allude to people who like to think of themselves as believing in God without, however, allowing their belief to interfere in the practical concerns of their lives, and this they justify by conceding to religion no more than a vaguely emotional role, and by refusing to admit the fact of objective revelation—for the concept of revelation invariably implies a promulgation, by God, of absolute moral values and, thus, a demand for one’s self-surrender to them.

Said [the apostles], “Our Sustainer knows that we have indeed been sent unto you; but we are not bound to do more than clearly deliver the message [entrusted to us].” Said [the others], “Truly, we augur evil from you! Indeed, if you desist not, we will surely stone you, and grievous suffering is bound to befall you at our hands!” [The apostles] replied: “Your destiny, good or evil, is [bound up] with yourselves! [Every human being’s destiny have We tied to his neck.] [Does it seem evil to you] if you are told to take [the truth] to heart? You are people who have wasted their own selves!” At that, a man came running from the farthest end of the city, [and] exclaimed: “O my people! Follow these message-bearers! Follow those who ask no reward of you, and themselves are rightly guided! “[As for me,] why should I not worship Him who has brought me into being, and to whom you all will be brought back? Should I take

to worshipping [other] deities beside Him? [But then,] if the Most Gracious should will that harm befall me, their intercession could not in the least avail me, nor could they save me: and so, I would have indeed, most obviously, lost myself in error! “[O my people,] in the Sustainer of you all have I come to believe: listen, then, to me!” [And] he was told, “[You shall] enter paradise!”—[whereupon] he exclaimed: “Would that my people knew how my Sustainer has forgiven me [the sins of my past], and has placed me among the honored ones!” (36:13-27)*

“And he was told,” by the apostles or, more probably in view of the allegorical character of this story, by his own insight. The intervention of the man who “came running from the farthest end of the city” is evidently a parable of the truly believing minority in every religion, and of their desperate, mostly un-availing endeavors to convince their erring fellow-men that God-consciousness alone can save human life from futility.

CHAPTER TEN
MONOTHEISTS AS ONE SINGLE COMMUNITY

Call for Unity among Jews, Christians, and Muslims

*And this community of yours is one single community,
since I am the Sustainer of you all: remain, then, conscious
of Me! (23:52)*

The above verse is addressed to all who truly believe in God, whatever their historical denomination, and it applies to the followers of all the prophets. The fact that all prophets, at all times, preached one and the same essential truth—namely, the existence and oneness of God—and the same ethical principles, either of which makes it imperative that all believers in the One God, whatever their historical denomination, should regard themselves as “one single community” (see verse 42:13 and 15 below). Hence, all divisive speculations about the nature of God are null and void in their Sustainer’s sight (verse 16), because “there is nothing like unto Him” (43:11), and, therefore, nothing by which to define Him. And because God is indefinable and unfathomable, man cannot grasp even the real nature of His activity beyond the fact that He has imposed on all creations the law of cause and effect—so that in the life to come man will only harvest what his own hands have wrought in this world.

Same spiritual and moral principles—*In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that which He had enjoined upon Noah—and into which We gave you [O Muhammad] insight through revelation—as well as that which We had enjoined upon Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus: Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein. [And even though] that [unity of faith] to which you call them appears oppressive to those who ascribe to other beings or forces a share in His divinity, God draws unto Himself everyone who is willing, and guides unto Himself everyone who turns unto Him. (42:13-18)*

The emphasis of the above verses is on the unchanging sameness of the spiritual and moral principles underlying all revealed religions. It was only through revelation that the Prophet Muhammad came to know “that which God had enjoined upon Noah.” Since, as the sequence shows, the term *din* (faith) cannot apply in this context to “religion” in its widest connotation, including religious Laws—which, by their very nature, have been different in each successive dispensation (see 5:48)—it obviously denotes here only the ethical and spiritual contents of religion, i.e., “faith” in its most general sense. “Do not break up your unity” is as an unequivocal reference to the ecumenical unity in all religions based on the belief in the One God, notwithstanding all the differences with regard to the specific statutes and practices enjoined for the benefit of the various communities in accordance with their time-bound conditions. See 3:19—“the only true religion in the sight of God is man’s self-surrender unto Him,” and 3:85—“if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him.” Parallel with this principle, enunciated by all of God’s apostles, is the categorical statement in 21:92 and 23:52—“Verily, O you

who believe in Me, this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all.”

Summon all mankind to unity and equality—*Because of this, then, summon [all mankind], and pursue the right course, as you have been bidden [by God]; and do not follow their likes and dislikes, but say: “I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high; and I am bidden to bring about equity in your mutual views. God is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer. To us shall be accounted for our deeds, and to you, your deeds. Let there be no contention between us and you: God will bring us all together—for with Him is all journeys’ end.”*

Because of this breach of the original unity of men’s faith in the One God summon all mankind and to induce them to be more tolerant of one another: evidently, an allusion to the bitterness which stands in the way of an understanding between the various sects and schools of thought in all revealed religions.

Do not argue about God—*And as for those who would [still] argue about God after He has been acknowledged [by them]—all their arguments are null and void in their Sustainer’s sight, and upon them will fall [His] condemnation, and for them is suffering severe in store: [for] it is God [Himself] who has bestowed revelation from on high, setting forth the truth, and [thus given man] a balance [wherewith to weigh right and wrong]. And for all, you know, the Last Hour may well be near! Those who do not believe in it [mockingly] ask for its speedy advent—whereas those who have attained to faith stand in awe of*

it, and know it to be the truth. Oh, they who call the Last Hour in question have indeed gone far astray! (28:51-55)

Arguments about God's attributes and the "how" of His Being is null and void; it is beyond the grasp of the limited human mind. God Himself has given man, through successive revelations, a standard whereby to discern between right and wrong; it is presumptuous and futile to argue about the nature of His Being and His ultimate judgment: hence the reference, in the second half of this and the next verse, to the Last Hour and, thus, the Day of Judgment. Those who do not believe in the last hour and ask to bring about their speedy chastisement in proof of his being God's message-bearer is not merely a reference to the sarcastic demand of Muhammad's opponents (mentioned several times in the Quran) but also an oblique allusion to unbelievers of all times who, without having any proof either way, categorically reject the idea of resurrection and judgment.

***Affection from some Christians**—You will surely find that, of all people, they who say, "We are Christians," come closest to feeling affection for those who believe [in this divine writ]. This is so because there are priests and monks among them, and because these are not given to arrogance. For, when they come to understand what has been bestowed from on high upon this Apostle, you can see their eyes overflow with tears, because they recognize something of its truth; [and] they say: "O our Sustainer! We do believe; make us one, then, with all who bear witness to the truth. And how could we fail to believe in God and in whatever truth has come to us, when we so fervently desire that our Sustainer count us among the righteous?" And for this, their belief God will reward them with gardens through*

which running waters flow, therein to abide: for such is the requital of the doers of good; whereas they who are bent on denying the truth and giving the lie to Our messages—they are destined for the blazing fire. (5:82-86)

Christians do not believe, as do the Jews, that revelation is God's exclusive gift for the children of Israel, and their priests and monks teach them that humility is the essence of all true faith. It is noteworthy that the Quran does not in this context include the Christians among those who are bent on ascribing divinity to anything besides God, as the last sentence above clearly states that righteous Christians will enter paradise in contrast to idol-worshiper who are destined for the blazing fire. The element of intent being expressed in the use of the past tense, for although by their deification of Jesus, they are guilty of the sin of shirks (the ascribing of divinity to anyone or anything besides God), the Christians do not consciously worship a plurality of deities. Theoretically, their theology postulates belief in the One God, who is conceived as manifesting Himself in a trinity of aspects, or "persons," of whom Jesus is supposed to be one. Their worship of Jesus is not based on conscious intent, but rather flows from their overstepping the bounds of truth in their veneration of Jesus (see 4:171, 5:77).

Righteous among Jews and Christians: *[But] they are not all alike: among the followers of earlier revelation, there are upright people, who recite God's messages throughout the night, and prostrate themselves [before Him]. They believe in God and the Last Day, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and vie with one another in doing good works: and these are among the righteous. And whatever good they do; they shall never*

be denied the reward thereof: for, God has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him. And, behold, among the followers of earlier revelation, there are indeed such as [truly] believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon you as well as in that which has been bestowed upon them. Standing in awe of God, they do not barter away God's messages for a trifling gain. They shall have their reward with their Sustainer—for, behold; God is swift in reckoning! O you who have attained to faith! Be patient in adversity, and vie in patience with one another, and be ever ready [to do what is right], and remain conscious of God, so that you might attain to a happy state! (3:113-115) (3:199-200)

Believers from among Jews and Christians—Now, indeed, We have caused this word [of Ours] to reach mankind step by step, so that they might [learn to] keep it in mind. As for those unto whom We have vouchsafed* revelation aforetime—they [are bound to] believe in this one [as well]; and whenever it is [clearly] conveyed unto them, they [are bound to] profess, “We have come to believe in it, for it is the truth from our Sustainer—and even before this have we surrendered ourselves unto Him!” These it is that shall receive a twofold reward for having been patient in adversity,* and having repelled evil with good, and having spent on others out of what We provided for them as sustenance, and whenever they heard frivolous talk, having turned away from it and said: “Unto us shall be accounted for Our deeds, and unto you, your deeds. Peace be upon you—[but] we do not seek out such as are ignorant [of the meaning of right and wrong].” (28:51-55)

The above verse points to the gradual, step-by-step revelation of the Quran during the twenty-three years of Muhammad's prophetic ministry. The conversion of Jews and Christians to Islam in Muhammad's lifetime was both a statement of historical fact and a prophecy. In the above context, God's **vouchsafing** revelation implies a conscious, sincere acceptance of its teachings by those to whom it has been conveyed, for it is this sincerity that has enabled them—or will enable them—to realize that the Quran preaches the same ethical truths as those forthcoming from earlier revelations. The reference to “patience in **adversity**” and “repelling evil with good” evidently relates to the loss of erstwhile communal links, social ostracism, and all manners of physical or moral persecution, which is so often the lot of persons who accept religious tenets different from those of their own community. The “frivolous talk” refers to attempts, based on prejudice, at deriding the spiritual reorientation of the person concerned.

***Path leading to salvation**—O followers of the Bible! Now there has come unto you Our Apostle, to make clear unto you much of what you have been concealing [from yourselves] of the Bible, and to pardon much. Now there has come unto you from God a light, and a clear divine writ, through which God shows unto all that seek His goodly acceptance the paths leading to salvation* and, by His grace, brings them out of the depths of darkness into the light and guides them onto a straight way. O followers of the Bible! Now, after a long time during which no apostles have appeared, there has come unto you [this] Our Apostle to make [the truth] clear to you, lest you say, “No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us, nor any Warner”: for now there has come unto you a bearer of*

glad tidings and a warner—since God has the power to will anything. (5:15-16, 19)

Verses above are addressed to the Jews and the Christians, the term al-kitab may suitably be rendered here as “the **Bible**.” The phrase, “there has come unto you Our Apostle to make clear unto you” is the concealing of something from oneself: In other words, it is a reference to the gradual obscuring, by the followers of the Bible, of its original verities which they are now unwilling to admit even to themselves. The word salam, here rendered as **salvation**, has no proper equivalent in the English language. It denotes inner peace, soundness, and security from evil of any kind, both physical and spiritual, and the achievement of what, in Christian terminology, is described as salvation: with the difference, however, that the Christian concept of salvation presupposes the existence of an a-priori state of sinfulness, which is justified in Christianity by the doctrine of original sin, but is not justified in Islam, which does not subscribe to this doctrine. Consequently, the term “salvation”—used here for want of a better word—does not adequately convey the full meaning of salam. Its nearest equivalents in Western languages would be the German Heil or the French salut, both of which express the idea of spiritual peace and fulfillment without being necessarily (i.e., linguistically) connected with the Christian doctrine of salvation.

Salvation by observance of Torah and Gospel—If the followers of the Bible would but attain to [true] faith and God-consciousness, We should indeed efface their [previous] bad deeds, and indeed bring them into gardens of bliss; and if they would but truly observe* the Torah and the Gospel and all [the revelation] that has been bestowed from on high upon them by their Sustainer, they would

indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth. Some of them do pursue a right course; but as for most of them—vile indeed is what they do! Say: “O followers of the Bible! You have no valid ground for your beliefs unless you [truly] observe the Torah and the Gospel, and all* that has been bestowed from on high upon you by your Sustainer!” (5:65-66) (5:68)*

The phrase “if they would but truly **observe** the Torah and the Gospel,” etc., implies an observance of those scriptures in their genuine spirit, free of the arbitrary distortions due to that wishful thinking of which the Quran so often accuses the Jews and the Christians—such as the Jewish concept of the chosen people, or the Christian doctrines relating to the alleged divinity of Jesus and the vicarious redemption of his followers. The expression “**partake** of all the blessings of heaven and earth” is an allusion to the blessing which accompanies the realization of a spiritual truth, as well as to the social happiness which is bound to follow an observance of the moral principles laid down in the genuine teachings of the Bible. You should truly observe the Torah and Gospel and all the other God-inspired books of the Old Testament, which stresses the oneness of God and are full of prophecies relating to the advent of the Prophet Muhammad.

***Three criteria for salvation**—Those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—All who believe in God and the last day and do righteous deeds—shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. For, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the*

Christians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds—no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (2:62) (5:69)

The above passage—which recurs in the Quran several times—lays down a fundamental doctrine of salvation in Islam. It is of timeless import and transcends all religious affiliations. It applies to Adam and to the last human on this earth. Since Islam is not the sole way that leads to God, salvation is not restricted to Muslims. Perhaps Islam is the only major religion, which categorically states that people from other religions will also go to heaven. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, the idea of “salvation” is here made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment, and above all, righteous actions in this life.

Faith in God—God is the only objective source of all moral law from which to judge the true and false or right and wrong and, thus with a standard of ethical valuation binding on the individual and on the society.

Judgment Day—Belief in the Judgment Day is acceptance of responsibility for one’s own actions and an incentive to avoid evil deeds and to do good works. In the final analysis, man is a master of his conduct and completely responsible for the decisions he makes. This belief in man’s freedom and responsibility leads directly to Islam’s doctrine of the afterlife. For the Muslim life on earth is the seedbed of an eternal future. It will be followed by a day of reckoning and depending on how it fares in this accounting the soul will then repair either to Heaven or Hell.

Good Works—The belief in God and the Judgment Day is a powerful motivation to do good deeds and to avoid evil, a major cause of misery in our world. It is only through righteous deeds of men a better, and a just society can be established.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PARABLE OF MEN OF CAVE AND THEIR DOG

The story of the Men of the Cave illustrates the principle of world-abandonment for the sake of faith, and is deepened into an allegory of death, resurrection and spiritual awakening. As regards the story of the Men of the Cave as such, most of the commentators incline toward the view that it relates to a phase in early Christian history—namely, the persecution of the Christians by Emperor Decius in the third century. Legend has it that some young Christians of Ephesus, accompanied by their dog, withdrew into a secluded cave in order to be able to live in accordance with their faith, and remained there, miraculously sleeping for a great length of time (according to some accounts, for about three centuries). When they finally awoke—unaware of the long time during which they had lain asleep—they sent one of their companies to the town to purchase some food. In the meantime, the situation changed entirely: Christianity was no longer persecuted and had even become the official religion of the Roman Empire. The ancient coin (dating from the reign of Decius) with which the young man wanted to pay for his purchases immediately aroused curiosity; people began to question the stranger, and the story of the Men of the Cave and their miraculous sleep came to light.

However, the origin of the legend of the Men of the cave may go back to pre-Christian, Jewish sources of a much older oral

tradition. There are several well-authenticated ahadith according to which it was the Jewish rabbis of Medina who induced the Meccan opponents of Muhammad to “test his veracity” by asking him to explain, among other problems, the story of the Men of the Cave. This allegory may relate to a movement which played an important role in Jewish religious history during the centuries immediately preceding and following the advent of Jesus, namely the ascetic Essene Brotherhood and which lived in self-imposed solitude in the vicinity of the Dead Sea and come to be known as the “Qumran community.” Since they lived in complete seclusion from the rest of the world and were highly admired for their piety and moral purity, it is probable that their mode of life made so strong an impression on the imagination of their more worldly co-religionists that it became gradually allegorized in the story of the Men of the Cave who “slept”—that is, were cut off from the outside world—for countless years, destined to be “awakened” after their spiritual task was done.

But whatever the source of this legend, and irrespective of whether it is of Jewish or Christian origin, it is used in the Quran in a purely parabolic sense: namely, as an illustration, of God’s power to bring about death (or “sleep”) and resurrection (or “awakening”), and, secondly, as an allegory of the piety that induces men to abandon a wicked or frivolous world in order to keep their faith unsullied, and of God’s recognition of that faith by His bestowal of a spiritual awakening which transcends time and death. This is a story of eternal hope, arising from spiritual awakening, which transcends time and death.

Test of attachment to the material world—We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which We put men to a test, [showing] which of them are best in conduct; and [in time] We shall reduce all that is on it to barren

dust! [And since the life of this world is but a test,] do you [really] think that [the parable of] the Men of the Cave and of [their devotion to] the scriptures could be deemed more wondrous than any [other] of Our messages?

Putting men to test, meaning that God lets them reveal their true characters in their respective attitudes—moral or immoral—toward the material goods (beauty on earth) and benefits which the world offers them. This passage implies that the real motive underlying men’s refusal to believe in God’s spiritual message is almost always their excessive, blind attachment to the good of this world, combined with a false pride in what they regard as their own achievements. The allegory or parable based on this story is entirely in tune with the ethical doctrine propounded in the Quran as a whole, and therefore, not more wondrous than any other of its statements.

When those youths took refuge in the cave, they prayed: “O our Sustainer! Bestow on us grace from Thyself and endow us, whatever our [outward] condition, with consciousness of what is right!” And thereupon We veiled their ears in the cave for many a year, and then We awakened them: [and We did all this] so that We might mark out [to the world] which of the two points of view showed a better comprehension of the time-span during which they had remained in this state.

This is an introduction to the allegory of the Men of the Cave, giving a broad outline of what is expounded more fully in later verses. God caused them to remain cut off—physically or metaphorically—from the sounds and the bustle of the outside world, or that God veiled their ears with sleep. Later, “We awakened

them,” indicating a return to the active life of this world. We did this so that We might take cognizance of which of the two parties or the two viewpoints mentioned—was better at computing the time-span...etc. Since God embraces all past, present and future with His knowledge, His taking cognizance of an event denotes His causing it to come into being and, thus, allowing it to become known by His creatures: hence, marking it out to the world.

Standing up to misguided fellow-men and rulers—[And now] *We shall truly relate to you their story: They were young men who had attained to faith in their Sustainer: and [so] We deepened their consciousness of the right way and endowed their hearts with strength, so that they stood up and said [to one another]: “Our Sustainer is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth. Never shall we invoke any deity other than Him: [if we did,] we should indeed have uttered an enormity! These people of ours have taken to worshipping [other] deities instead of Him, without being able to adduce any reasonable evidence in support of their beliefs; and who could be more wicked than he who invents a lie about God.*

We truly relate this story without the many legendary embellishments, which, in times past, have obscured the purport of this story or parable. These young men stood up to their misguided fellow men, or to the rulers who persecuted the believers, regarding their worship of deities other than God, without any clear evidence accessible to reason or authority in their support. Those who invent imaginary deities give the lie to the truth of His oneness and uniqueness or even deny His existence altogether.

Withdrawal into utter seclusion—Hence, now that you have withdrawn from them and from all that they worship instead of God, take refuge in that cave: God will spread His grace over you, and will endow you—whatever your [outward] condition—with all that your souls may need!”* And [for a many a years] you might have seen the sun, on its rising, incline away from their cave on the right, and, on its setting, turn aside from them on the left, while they lived on in that spacious chamber, [bearing witness to] this of God’s messages: He whom God guides, he alone has found the right way; whereas for him whom He lets go astray you can never find any protector who would point out the right way. And you would have thought that they were awake, whereas they lay asleep. And We caused them to turn over repeatedly, now to the right, now to the left; and their dog [lay] on the threshold, its forepaws outstretched. Had you come upon them [unprepared], you would surely have turned away from them in flight, and would surely have been filled with awe of them.

“Your soul may need”: a spiritual connotation, marking the young men’s abandonment of the world and withdrawal into utter seclusion. The cave opened to the north, so that the heat of the sun never disturbed them, and this is an echo of the many Quranic allusions to the happiness of the righteous in paradise, symbolized by its everlasting shade. An accidental onlooker would immediately have felt the mystic, awe-inspiring aura that surrounded the Men of the Cave, and would have become conscious that he stood before God’s elect.

Relativity of time—And so, [in the course of time] We awakened them; and they began to ask one another [as to

what had happened to them]. One of them asked: “How long have you remained thus?” [The others] answered: “We have remained thus a day, or part of a day.” Said they [who were endowed with deeper insight], “Your Sustainer knows best how long you have thus remained. Let, then, one of you go with these silver coins to the town, and let him find out what food is purest there, and bring you thereof [some] provisions. But let him behave with great care and by no means make anyone aware of you: for if they should come to know of you, they might stone you to death or force you back to their faith—in which case you would never attain to any good!”

How long have you remained in the cave? The above verse alludes to the deceptive, purely earthbound character of the human concept of time. See 2:259 where exactly the same question is asked, and the same wondering answer is given in the parable of the man whom God caused to be dead for a hundred years and thereupon brought back to life. The striking verbal identity of question and answer in the two passages is not accidental. It points, in a deliberately revealing manner, to the identity of the idea underlying these two allegories, namely God’s power to bring forth the living out of that which is dead and the dead out of that which is alive (3:27, 6:95, 10:31, 30:19), i.e., to create life, to cause it to disappear and then to resurrect it. They understood—in contrast to their companions, who were merely concerned about what had actually happened to them—that the lapse of time between their falling asleep, and their awakening had no reality of its own and no meaning, just as it has no reality or meaning in connection with a human being’s death and subsequent resurrection (see 17:52). This explains the reference to the “two viewpoints” in verse above.

During their sleep, time had stood still for the Men of the Cave, and so they assumed that the outside world had remained unchanged and was, as before, hostile to them. At this point, the story as such ends abruptly for, as we know, the Quran is never concerned with narratives for their own sake and is revealed in the sequence as an allegory of death and resurrection and of the relativity of time as manifested in man's consciousness.

***God's promise of resurrection is true**—And in this, way have We drawn [people's] attention to their story, so that they might know—whenever they debate among themselves as to what happened to those [Men of the Cave] that God's promise [of resurrection] is true, and there can be no doubt as to [the coming of] the Last Hour. And so, some [people] said: "Erect a building in their memory; God knows best what happened to them." Said they whose opinion prevailed in the end: "Indeed, we must surely raise a house of worship in their memory!"*

We have drawn attention to this story by means of the legend, which has grown up around the Men of the Cave and, more particularly, by the allegoric use which the Quran makes of this legend. An indication of this fact is that the legend of the Men of the Cave did occupy men's minds for a long time, leading to many discussions and conflicting interpretations. The next sentence explains why God has drawn people's attention to this story in the context of the Quran that God's promise of resurrection is true.

***Speculation about numbers**—[And in times to come]*some will say, "[They were] three, the fourth of them being their dog while others will say, "Five, with their dog*

as the sixth of them”—idly guessing at something of which they can have no knowledge—and [so on, until] some will say, “[They were] seven, the eighth of them being their dog.” Say: “My Sustainer knows best how many they were. None but a few have any [real] knowledge of them. Hence, do not argue about them otherwise than by way of an obvious argument, and do not ask any of those [story-tellers] to enlighten you about them.”*

The future tense (and in the time to come) points once again to the legendary character of the story as such, and implies that all speculations about its details is irrelevant to its parabolic, ethical purport. Do not ask storytellers for the sake of the self-evident ethical lesson to be derived from their story.

***If God so will?** And never say about anything, “I shall do this tomorrow without [adding], “if God so wills.” And if you should forget [yourself at the time, and become aware of it later], call thy Sustainer to mind and say: “I pray that my Sustainer guide me, even closer than this, to a consciousness of what is right!”*

The parenthetic passage above is primarily addressed to the Prophet, who, on being asked by some of the pagan Quraysh as to what really happened to the Men of the Cave, is said to have replied, “I shall give you my answer tomorrow”—whereupon revelation was temporarily withheld from him in token of God’s disapproval; in the second instance, this exhortation expresses a general principle addressed to all believers.

***Idle guesses about length of time—**And [some people assert], “They remained in their cave three hundred years”*

and some have added nine [to that number]. [This connects with the idle guesses mentioned above—guesses refuted by the subsequent statements.] Say: “God knows best how long they remained [there]. His [alone] is the knowledge of the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth: how well does He see and hear! No guardian they have apart from Him, since He allots to no one a share in His rule!” (18:7-26)

REFERENCES

1. Ali, Ameer: A short history of the Saracens (Pakistan, 1927).
2. Ali, Ameer: The spirit of Islam (Pakistan, 1998).
3. Armstrong, Karen: Islam a short history (New York, 2002).
4. Armstrong, Karen: A history of God (New York, 1993).
5. Buchanan, Patrick: The death of the West (New York, 2002).
6. Carlyle, Thomas: The Hero as Prophet.
7. Esposito, John L: Islam the straight path.
8. Haykal, Muhammad, Husein: The life of Muhammad (Kuala Lumpur, 1976).
9. Hitti, Philip K: Islam a way of life (South Bend Indiana, 1970).
10. Holt, Lambton and Lewis: The Cambridge history of Islam (New York, 1970).
11. Lewis, Bernard: What went wrong? (New York, 2002).
12. Parrinder, Geoffrey: World's religions (New York, 1971).
13. Radford, Mary F: The inheritance rights of women under Jewish and Islamic law.
14. Smith, Huston: The religions of man, chapter on Islam, pages 193-224 (New York, 1964).
15. Encyclopedia Britannica (2004): Islam, Shariah.
16. The Reader Digest Bible (1982).
17. The Holy Bible (authorized King James Version).
18. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, Origins, Philosophy and Theology by Allen Jayne, University of Kentucky Press.

19. Encyclopedia Britannica (2004): Moses, Christianity, Jesus Christ, Synoptic Gospels, Constantine, Original Sin, Salvation, Saint Paul, Biblical literature.
20. Mark D. Siljander: *A Deadly Misunderstanding—A congressman quest to bridge the Muslim-Christian divide* (2008).
21. Smith Jane Idleman and Haddad Yvonne Yazbeck: *Islamic understanding of death and resurrection*, Oxford University Press (2002).

