

**ISLAM
AND
CHRISTIANITY**

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Preface to the Sixth Edition

Islam (which means submission to the will of God and peace) is the name given in the Qur'an to the religion of each and every prophet of God, including Jesus Christ. God has no 'Chosen People'; the people of all races and countries are equally dear to Him. He is the loving Creator and Sustainer of all mankind. He has provided generously for the satisfaction, not only of the physical and mental needs of man, but also of his spiritual and moral needs. He has raised His prophets in every community and in all parts of the world to guide the people to the right path. As the prophets of all the nations received their inspiration from the same God – the one and only God – their religions were very similar. The differences that we find today between one religion and another are of later growth and are due to the invention of dogmas and practices for which there was no authority in the teachings of the prophets. The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, did not come with a new religion. His religion was the same as that of Jesus and the other prophets; he revived and completed the religions of the prophets who had come before him.

In this book an attempt has been made to present the original gospels of Jesus and Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon them!) and to show that their religions were essentially the same.

Islam and Christianity was first published by the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i Islam from Lahore in 1958. This is the sixth revised edition. I am deeply indebted to Mr. Nasir Ahmad of Lahore and Mr. Abdul Razak of Bombay who have all along encouraged and guided me in the writing of this and other books of mine on the history of religion and Comparative Religion. Grateful acknowledgement is also hereby extended to the New American Library, New York, for permission to reproduce a somewhat long passage from *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls* by A Powell Davies

Peshawar
December 22, 1993.

ULFAT AZIZ-US-SAMAD

INTRODUCTION

Fourteen hundred years ago the Holy Qur'an invited the followers of all revealed religions, including Christians and Jews, to join hands with the Muslims in forming a League of Faiths on the basis of mutual understanding and goodwill, to keep alive the faith in the unity and goodness of God and to promote and strengthen the universal moral and spiritual values in the hearts of men and in human relations and society. Said the Qur'an:

"Say: 'O people of the Book (i.e. followers of all scriptural or revealed religions)! Let us not wrangle or quarrel over what may be regarded as controversial subjects. Let us at least agree and unite on that which is recognised alike by you and by us, i.e. that we worship none but God and associate nothing with Him, and that some of us take not others for lords beside God.' If even then they turn away, say 'Bear ye witness that the refusal comes from your side and we are those resigned to God alone' " (3:64).¹

Now it seems that after centuries of ignorance and prejudice, the Christians are responding to the call of the Qur'an and showing genuine interest in a Christian-Muslim dialogue. The ecumenical Vatican Council II has called for better and more sympathetic understanding by the Catholics of the non-Christian religions. In pursuance of this aim Pope Paul VI launched his appeal to the whole world inviting everyone to join in a dialogue for a more fraternal and active collaboration for the good of all humanity. He created a special commission for the rapport with Islam "to shorten the distance to the Muslim brethren." The office for Non-Christian affairs at the Vatican has produced a document, bearing the title *Orientation for a Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, which recognizes "the past injustice towards the Muslims for which the West, with its Christian education, is to blame." Similar voices have been heard from certain liberal Protestant circles also.

Never in the long history of mankind was the need of developing better understanding between the peoples of different races, cultures and religions so great as it is today. The modern world finds itself one single unit. Science and technology have overcome the barriers of space and time. Economic, social and political phenomena are increasingly imposing upon us the obligation to regard all humanity as a single family. The time of monolithic predominance of a religion within definite cultural areas is gone. The development of our present world tends towards a pluralistic world society in which no religion can escape the necessity of maintaining dialogue with other creeds.

What a dialogue between Christians and Muslims should aim at is first of all mutual understanding. Some might say that this is stressing the obvious, but we believe it to be of the utmost importance. It is a well known fact that Christians and Muslims have been enemies for many centuries. Ages of animosity have created between them a deep rift. There are many misunderstandings and misconceptions that have to be removed.

However, all of us must realize that even if dialogue between Muslims and Christians is possible, it is not easy. There are two pitfalls, both equally disastrous, that must be avoided, viz., polemics and compromise. The spirit of polemics (controversial proselytism) has done much damage in the past and has caused a lot of misunderstanding and falsification.² Unfortunately even now the danger is not past.

On the other hand, excessive compromise and syncretism are equally harmful to dialogue. Genuine convictions cannot be treated as a merchandise which is easily exchangeable. Dialogue is not a form of politics, or the art of forging compromises, in order to find the lowest common denominator of religions. It exists on a higher level of human encounter. To be fruitful it demands commitment to truth and complete sincerity to one's own conviction, without fanaticism or

aggressiveness. It is mutual openness, a relentless pursuit of truth for the confirmation and deepening of spiritual and moral values.

The Islamic view is that God has not chosen any particular nation, to the exclusion of other nations, for the purpose of revealing Himself and His messages. He is the loving Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds and the supreme guide of all mankind. He has raised His messengers or prophets with the true religion at sundry times and in every nation of the world. Says the Qur'an: "There is not a people but a warner has gone among them" (35:24) and "Every nation had a Messenger from God" (10:47). The Muslim is directed by the Qur'an to have faith in the prophets of all the nations (including, of course, Jesus Christ) and in the original revealed books or scriptures of all the religions (including the Gospel of Jesus). We read in the Qur'an:

"O Muslims! Declare, 'Our way is this: we believe in God and we believe in the Qur'an which has been sent down to us and we believe in all those truths which were imparted to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and his children. And we believe also in the scriptures which were delivered to Moses and Jesus. Not merely this, but we believe also in all those truths which were revealed to all the prophets of the world by their Lord and we make no distinction between any of them. We are resigned to God (and will believe in the truth of God revealed anywhere and to anyone)'"(2:136).³

It is, therefore, with a feeling of profound love and reverence for both Jesus and Muhammad and for the Divinely-inspired religions which they preached that I embark upon a comparative study of Christianity and Islam and invite the Christians of all denominations to an unbiased and meaningful Christian-Muslim dialogue. If at times I find myself differing with the Christians it is not over the religion of Jesus (in which I have as much faith as the Christians have) but over the somewhat altered shape and features that it developed after the

departure of Christ. In the words of Lord Headley, "Islam and Christianity, *as taught by Christ himself*, are sister religions, only held apart by dogmas and technicalities which might very well be dispensed with."⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (translator), *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an* (English Version), Vol. II, p. 159; Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1968.
2. See N.A. Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image*, University Press, Edinburgh, 1962.
3. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (translator), *The Tarjuman al-Qur'an* (English version), vol. 2, pp. 52-53.
4. Lord Headley, *A Western Awakening to Islam*, Woking Muslim Mission, Woking (England) and Lahore, second edition, 1949; p.15.

THE SCRIPTURES OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

PART I

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY**

Chapter 1

**THE SCRIPTURES OF ISLAM AND
CHRISTIANITY**

Both Christianity and Islam claim to be revealed religions. Jesus Christ declared that the message which he had given to the people was not his own but God's: "I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father Who sent me has Himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49). He described himself as "a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God" (John, 8:40). Similarly it is claimed in the Qur'an that the revelation which came to the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, was from the Lord of the worlds: "And this is truly a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon thy heart (O Muhammad) that thou mayest be of the warners" (26:192-194). From this it follows that the truth of either religion depends on the accuracy with which the inspired words of its Founder have been recorded and on the textual purity of its scripture. If the message which was revealed by God to the Founder of a religion has been misreported or altered, then to that extent that religion may be regarded as having deviated from the truth. In this chapter we shall see how far the Gospel of Jesus (i.e., the message or truth which Jesus "heard from God" and conveyed to his people) and the revelations vouchsafed by God to the Prophet Muhammad have been faithfully recorded and preserved in the four canonical Gospels and in the Qur'an respectively, and how far these scriptures have remained free from any kind of human distortion or interpolation.

The Sources of the Gospels

There are four Gospels included in the Bible – the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They were

composed between forty and eighty years after the departure of Jesus. The inspired sayings and discourses of Jesus were not written down during his lifetime. None of those who had conversed with him wrote any account of what they had seen and heard. But, as the first generation began to die away, a few collections of his "Logia" or "Sayings" were put together. Some of these, though now irretrievably lost, were available to the evangelists (or writers of the Gospels), who made use of them in writing their Gospels. One such record is known in critical nomenclature as Q (German Quelle = "Source"), an Aramaic document which reached the evangelists in a Greek translation. The writers of the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke incorporated this document in their Gospels. Another of these early documents is known to the Biblical scholars as L, a collection of reports about Jesus used only by Luke. Then there was Urmarcus, an early draft of Mark's Gospel, believed to have been written by him (so Papias tells us) on the basis of Peter's discourses. This document is also referred to as the "Triple Tradition," because it became the foundation of three of the four canonical Gospels namely, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke.

The four canonical Gospels were written on the basis of oral traditions and some of the documents mentioned above. However, a comparison of the four Gospels will show that the evangelists handled their sources with considerable freedom. They appear to have felt no hesitation or compunction in changing, adapting or even coining Sayings of Jesus to bring his teachings in line with the outlook and viewpoint of their respective sects. "The results of this scriptural research," writes Dr. Maurice Bucaille, "are of great importance. They show how the Gospel texts not only have a history... but also a 'pre-history,' to use Father Boismard's expression. What is meant is that before the final versions appeared, they underwent alterations at the intermediate Document stage."¹

The four Gospels included in the Bible do not anywhere claim to be Divinely-inspired, nor were they regarded as such

by the early Christians. What was Divinely-inspired was the Gospel or message which Jesus himself had "heard from God" and delivered to his people. Thus William Greg writes:

"The Gospels nowhere affirm or even intimate their own inspiration, a claim to credence which, had they possessed it, they assuredly would not have failed to put forward. Nor do the Apostolic writings bear any such testimony to them."²

The Gospel according to Mark

Mark's Gospel is the shortest of the four Gospels. It is also the oldest, but in spite of this it is not a book written by an apostle. It was written in Greek at Rome about 70 C.E. for the use of the local Church. Many Biblical scholars regard it as an expanded version of Urmarcus, and it is difficult to say whether the elaboration and revision were done by Mark himself or by some other person. The oldest manuscripts do not contain verses 9 to 20 of the last chapter of the Gospel of Mark as we now have it, dealing with Jesus' post-resurrection appearances and ascension. They appear to have been added later by some editor or copyist. Dr. C. J. Cadoux, who was Mackennal Professor of Church History at Oxford, thus sums up the conclusions of many eminent Biblical scholars:

"It was written after Peter's martyrdom (65 A.D), and at a time when Mark, who had not himself been a disciple of Jesus, apparently had none of the personal disciples of Jesus within reach by whose knowledge he could check his narrative. These circumstances of its composition account for the existence in it, side by side, of numerous signs of accuracy and a certain number of signs of ignorance and inaccuracy."³

The Gospel according to Matthew

This Gospel was written in Greek at Antioch about 90 C.E. No independent scholar regards it as the work of Matthew, the apostle of Jesus. However, Matthew may have been the author of Q, which this Gospel incorporated. According to the widely accepted "two-document" hypothesis, the Gospel according to

Matthew is a blend of Q and Urmarcus plus matter derived from oral tradition. Q and Urmarcus represented two opposite traditions the former that of the Jerusalem-based Nazarene community, and the latter that of Paul and his followers. It has been plausibly suggested by many scholars that the author of Matthew's Gospel desired to bridge the gulf between the Nazarene and the Pauline factions not only by utilizing these various sources, but by placing Peter in the position of the chief of the Apostles.

Perhaps the most striking feature in the Gospel of 'Matthew' is supernaturalism. Dreams abound and all sorts of prophecies, many of which have to be sadly distorted for the purpose, are "fulfilled". Regarding the liberties taken by the unknown author of this Gospel with his sources, C.J. Cadoux writes:

"But a close examination of the treatment he gives to his borrowings from Mark shows that he allowed himself great freedom in editing and embroidering his material in the interest of what he regarded as the rightful honouring of the great Master. The same tendencies are often visible elsewhere when he is reproducing Q or providing matter peculiar to himself. Anything, therefore, strictly peculiar to 'Matthew' can be accepted as historical only with great caution."⁴

The Gospel according to Luke

The third Gospel, the Gospel of Luke, was written somewhere in Greece about 100 C.E. for the benefit of the "most excellent" Theophilus, probably a high official of the Roman Empire. It is an apologetic addressed to non-Jews and is widely admitted to have had "Luke the physician," Paul's travelling companion on several of his missionary journeys, for its author.

It appears that Luke had succeeded in amassing a valuable collection of traditions about Jesus' sayings and deeds, which scholars call L. Finding later a copy of Q, he is thought to have compiled a complete Gospel-story by interweaving Q with his L-

material. This preliminary Gospel is called "Proto-Luke." Later still, finding a copy of Mark's Gospel (or perhaps Urmarcus), he inserted nearly the whole of it in large blocks at certain points in his "Proto-Luke" and, by prefixing his narrative of the birth and boyhood of Jesus, produced the Gospel of Luke as we now have it. Scholars have pointed out that the author, who wished to make his Gospel acceptable to the non-Jews and bring it in line with the Pauline point of view, took even greater liberties with his sources than the earlier evangelists had done. "As to the work of Luke," writes Ernest Renan, "its historical value is sensibly weaker."⁵ And this is what a more orthodox Protestant writer, E.E. Kellett, says:

"Luke is a Greek writer, and writes like a Greek historian. In some cases, it is to be feared, he makes speeches of his own for his heroes, and a beautiful story seems true to him because it is beautiful The whole story is a popular legend, taken over and rewritten by a man of Herodotean gifts."⁶

The Gospel according to John

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke are called "Synoptic Gospels," because they proceed on the basis of the same document and have much in common. The Gospel according to John is very different from these. A. Powell Davies, late pastor of All Souls Church in Washington, D.C. writes the following in this connection:

"The first three, or Synoptic Gospels, tell much the same story. There are discrepancies, but it is possible, to a considerable extent, to reconcile them. John's Gospel, however, tells quite a different story from the other three. If John is right, then the other three are wrong; if the Synoptics are right, John's Gospel must surely be in error."⁷

As Professor Kellett points out, John's Gospel "is not history in our sense at all, nor even history in the sense of Mark, Matthew and Luke." The fourth evangelist starts not with fact or history but with a doctrine, and the so-called 'history' is invented to provide a substratum for the doctrine. He makes

Jesus say and do the things that would illustrate and support his pre-conceived Christ-doctrine. We have, in John's Gospel, the presentation of Jesus not as a man but as a personified idea. The Logos (the Word or Reason of God), which was from the beginning and by which all things were made (a personification derived through Philo from Greek philosophy), is said to have become flesh in Jesus. Jesus' divinity and pre-existence are affirmed in this Gospel alone. Jesus acts and speaks like a divine being, his discourses are all of theological, self-glorificatory type, and have nothing in common with the ethical injunctions in the Synoptics.

The fourth Gospel was written at or near Ephesus between the years 110 and 115 of the Christian era by some unknown man who was influenced by Greek philosophy and was anti-semitically inclined. No independent scholar regards it as the work of John the son of Zebedee, who, according to R. H. Charles, Alfred Loisy, Robert Eisler and several other scholars, was beheaded, together with his brother James, by Herod Agrippa I in the year 44 C.E., long before the fourth Gospel could have been written. The modern Biblical scholars, including several Church dignitaries, not only question the historical value of this Gospel, but also reject the genuineness of the words put by the author in the mouth of Jesus. This is what C.J. Cadoux writes:

"The speeches in the Fourth Gospel (even apart from the early messianic claim) are so different from those in the synoptics, and so like the comments of the Fourth Evangelist himself, that both cannot be equally reliable as records of what Jesus said. Literary veracity in ancient times did not forbid, as it does now, the assignment of fictitious speeches to historical characters: the best ancient historians made a practice of composing and assigning such speeches in this way."⁸

The character of the Four Gospels

The Gospels were written after the early Christians had become divided into different factions. The two main factions were the Nazarenes and the Pauline Christians. They had different conceptions of Jesus and his mission, different views of salvation and different attitudes towards the Law of Moses. There were other factions also. The Gospels were written to propagate the special points of view and teachings of the different factions and their authors showed no hesitation in tampering with the earlier documents and other traditional material about the life and teaching of Jesus to bring them in line with the attitudes and viewpoints of their respective sects. The Rev. T.G. Tucker writes:

“Thus Gospels were produced which clearly reflected the conceptions of the practical needs of the communities for which they were written. In them the traditional material was used, but there was no hesitation in altering it or making additions to it, or in leaving out what did not suit the writer’s purpose.”⁹

The four Gospels included in the New Testament section of the Bible were not the only Gospels written during the early centuries of the Christian era. There were many more, but they were suppressed by the dominant Church.

One of the suppressed Gospels was the “Gospel of the Hebrews,” which was written in Palestine in Aramaic (the language spoken by Jesus) about 65 C.E. It was regarded as their scripture and read in their religious congregations by the Nazarenes, as the Jerusalem-based early followers of Jesus were called. Another of the suppressed Gospels was the “Gospel of Barnabas.” The author was an apostle of Jesus (Acts 14:14) and a cousin of Mark (Colossian 4:10). The Gospel of Barnabas was accepted as a canonical Gospel and read in the churches (particularly in Alexandria) until it was condemned by the Catholic Church through three successive Decrees. This Gospel has come down to us in an Italian translation, which is preserved in the Imperial Library at Vienna. It is remarkable not only because it presents the viewpoint of the earliest followers of Jesus, the Nazarenes, as opposed to the followers of

Paul, but also because it contains many prophecies of Jesus in which he foretold the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, who is mentioned in the Gospel by name.¹⁰

Towards the end of the second century or the beginning of the third century, the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John were included in the Canon and the rest were declared to be heretical or apocryphal by the Catholic Church. By then the Pauline Christianity had triumphed over the Nazarene version of the religion of Jesus after a long and bitter struggle, and only those Gospels were included in the canon which more or less supported the Pauline viewpoint.

Before they were canonized and accepted as holy scriptures, the four Gospels did not have that sanctity which they now have and no one felt any compunction in altering them if anything contained in them did not suit his purpose or the purpose of his sect. The fact is that even after they were included in the Canon and declared to be the Word of God, changes continued to be made in them, as is clear from the differences in the various extant codices or manuscripts. Referring to this, the Rev. J. R. Dummelow writes the following in his famous *Commentary on the Holy Bible*:

“To begin with, the writers of the Gospels report in Greek (although they may have had some Aramaic sources) the sayings of Jesus Christ who for the most part probably spoke Aramaic. Nor is it likely that these writers or their copyists had any idea that their records would go beyond the early Churches with which they themselves were familiar Nor even in later centuries do we find that scrupulous regard for the sacred text which marked the transmission of the Old Testament. A copyist would sometimes put in not what was in the text, but what he thought ought to be in it. He would trust a fickle memory, or he would even make the text accord with the views of the school to which he belonged.”¹¹

The Summing up

In considering how far four canonical Gospels faithfully present the Gospel or message of Jesus we must bear the following facts in mind: (1) that no written copy was made of the inspired sayings of Jesus in his lifetime; (2) that the earliest records of the sayings and deeds of Jesus, which were made sometime after his departure, have all been irretrievably lost; (3) that in the Gospels, which were written between forty and eighty years after the departure of Jesus on the basis of some of those lost documents, the matter contained in the latter was handled with considerable freedom; the evangelists feeling no hesitation in altering it for what they considered the greater glory of Christ or to bring it in line with the viewpoints of their respective sects; (4) that the evangelists very often put their own words into the mouth of Jesus; (5) that none of the evangelists had known Jesus or heard him speaking; (6) that the Gospels were written in Greek, whereas the language spoken by Jesus was Aramaic; (7) that they were written to propagate the views of the different factions and that they were chosen from many others that represented different viewpoints; (8) that for about a century after they were written they were not included in the 'Canon' and so could be and were in fact altered by the copyists of the different sects to bring them in harmony with the views of the sects to which they belonged; (9) that the earliest extant manuscripts of the Gospels – the codex Sinaiticus and the codex Vaticanus – belong to the fourth century, and no one knows how much the Gospels had been altered during the centuries of which no manuscript is available; (10) that there are many differences at many places in the various ancient manuscripts; and (11) that the Gospels are full of inconsistencies and contradictions.

These facts, disclosed by a large number of Western scholars, including several dignitaries of the Church, go to show that the Gospel of Jesus, by which we mean the message which Jesus "heard from God" and delivered to his people, has not reached us in its pure form. The four Gospels included in the Bible cannot be considered identical with the inspired

Gospel of Jesus. The manner of their composition and the circumstances through which they have passed are such that they cannot be relied upon to give us exact knowledge of what Jesus had said and taught. C.J. Cadoux sums up the position in these words:

"In the four Gospels, therefore, the main documents to which we must go if we are to fill-out at all that bare sketch which we can put together from other sources, we find material of widely-differing quality as regards credibility. So far-reaching is the element of uncertainty that it is tempting to 'down-tools' at the outset, and to declare the task hopeless. The historical inconsistencies and improbabilities in parts of the Gospels form some of the arguments advanced in favour of the Christ-myth theory. These are, however, entirely outweighed – as we have shown – by other considerations. Still, the discrepancies and uncertainties that remain are serious – and consequently many moderns, who have no doubt whatever of Jesus' real existence, regard as hopeless any attempt to dissolve out the historically-true from the legendary or mythical matter which the Gospels contain, and to reconstruct the story of Jesus' mission out of the more-historical residue."¹²

The authenticity of the Qur'an

In the above lines it has been shown that the Gospel of Jesus – i.e., The truth which Jesus had "heard from God" and conveyed to the people – has not come down to us in its original form. The four Gospels included in the Bible are not reliable records of the inspired sayings and teachings of Jesus. In the words of Dr. Maurice Bucaille, "When we read the Gospel, we can no longer be at all sure that we are reading Jesus's word."

It is otherwise with the Qur'an, which has come down to us exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. The Qur'an contains nothing but the Divine revelations which came to the Holy Prophet. It was revealed piecemeal in the course of more than twenty-three years. As soon as a revelation was received by him, he used to communicate it to his disciples and ask them not only to

write it down but also to commit it to memory. On each such occasion he indicated in a precise manner the place to which the new fragment belonged in the fabric of what had already been received. This method of doubly preserving the text both in writing and by memorization proved to be of the utmost importance in safeguarding the purity and authenticity of the Qur'an.

After the passing away of the Holy Prophet, Hazrat Abu Bakr, the first caliph, charged Zaid ibn Thabit, the chief scribe, with the task of collecting and compiling the written leaves in the form of a book. As long as the Holy Prophet was alive and the possibility existed of a fresh revelation coming to him, this could not be done. Zaid consulted all the information he could assemble at Madina: the witness of those who had learnt the Qur'an by heart (*Hafizun*), copies of the Book written on various materials belonging to private individuals, all with the object of avoiding possible errors in transcription. Thus an absolutely faithful copy of the Book was obtained.

Hazrat Usman, the third Caliph, entrusted a commission of experts to prepare seven copies of the Qur'an from the text prepared in Hazrat Abu Bakr's lifetime. The commission rechecked and verified the authenticity of the document produced under Hazrat Abu Bakr's instruction by comparing it with all the extant copies and by consulting the Muslims who knew the text by heart. The seven copies thus prepared were sent by Hazrat Usman to seven different centres of the rapidly expanding Islamic world. His aim was to ensure the spread all over the Islamic world of a text which was absolutely authentic. One of these seven copies is still in existence in Tashkent. The Czarist government of Russia had published it with a facsimile reproduction; and we see that there is complete identity between this copy and the text otherwise in use all over the world.¹³

From the time of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, to our own time the practice of learning the Qur'an by heart has continued unbroken, and the number of those who have preserved the Qur'an in their memories

(*Hafizun*) can now be counted in the world by hundreds of thousands. The result is that no scholar, Eastern or Western, Muslim or non-Muslim, friendly or hostile, has ever cast any doubt on the purity of the text of the Holy Qur'an. Even such an unfriendly critic as Sir William Muir admits: "There is probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text."¹⁴

FOOTNOTES

1. Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, American Trust Publication, Indianapolis (U.S.A.), 1979, p.75.
2. William Greg, *The Creed of Christendom*; Macmillan and Co., London, 1907; p.23.
3. C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, a Pelican Book, Penguin Books, West Drayton, Middlesex; 1948; p.13.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.14-15.
5. Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*; Modern Library, New York; p.51.
6. E.E. Kellett, *A Short History of Religions*; a Pelican Book, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex; 1962; p.173.
7. A Powell Davies, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, a Mentor Book, the New American Library, New York; tenth edition, 1960; p.106.
8. C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, a Pelican Book, p.16.
9. T.G. Tucker, *The History of the Christians in the Light of Modern Knowledge*; Blackie and Sons Ltd., London; 1929; p.320.
10. An English translation of the *Gospel of Barnabas* was prepared by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg and published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1907. It has been reprinted by the Begum Aisha Bawany Wakf, Karachi, eighth edition; 1980.
11. J. R. Dummelow, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*; Macmillan and Co., London, 1917; Introduction, p.xvi.
12. C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, a Pelican Book; pp.16-17.
13. The subject of the purity of the text of the Qur'an has been very ably and thoroughly discussed by Maulana Muhammad Ali in the introduction to his renowned translation and commentary: *The Holy Qur'an*, Arabic text, English translation and commentary; the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i Islam, Lahore; fourth edition, 1951.
14. Sir William Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, John Grant, Edinburgh; New edition, 1923 Introduction, p.xxxiii.

Chapter 2

**THE FOUNDERS OF ISLAM AND
CHRISTIANITY**

Nothing brings out the contrast between Islam and Christianity so much as a comparison between the Islamic attitude towards Jesus and the Christian attitude towards Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him. For, while Muslims believe in Jesus as a great prophet of God and revere and love him as they revere and love the Holy Prophet Muhammad, the Christians not only reject Muhammad, but are never tired of speaking about him in the most disparaging manner possible.

An impartial study of their lives will, however, show that the founders of Islam and Christianity were both godly men, completely dedicated to the task of preaching God's religion, of delivering men from error, superstition and sin, and making the will of God prevail in the world.

The life and mission of Jesus Christ

Jesus was born a few years before the beginning of the Christian era (C. 7-5 B.C.) in an humble home in Palestine. Two of the four canonical Gospels state that he was born of a virgin mother without the agency of a male parent. However, the Gospels of Mark and John advance no such claim on behalf of Jesus. And even 'Matthew' and Luke, who begin their Gospels by stating that Jesus' mother, Mary, was still a virgin when he was born, go on to name Joseph the carpenter as his father.¹

Very little is known of the early years of the life of Jesus. Luke gives a brief but beautiful summary: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke

2:52). When Jesus was between thirty-three and thirty-five years of age, a prophet appeared in the wilderness of Judea preaching "a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." The name of this prophet was John, and among the many people who went to John the Baptist and repented and were baptised by him was Jesus. After receiving baptism, while he was praying, the Holy Spirit came down upon him and revealed to him that he had been chosen by God as the expected Messiah of the Jews to revive the true religion and establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men.

The religion of God was not unknown to the Jews, but at the time when Jesus began his ministry, the spirit of the true religion had been stifled by the worldliness of the Sadducees and the formalism and trivial legalism of the Pharisees. They declared in the words of the *Talmud*, "He who lightly esteems handwashing will perish from the earth." And Jesus rebuked them, saying: "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!". They had absurd rules about the Sabbath. For instance, a man might walk two thousand cubits on the Sabbath, but no more. In case death threatened, a physician could be summoned, but a fracture may not be attended to on the Sabbath. Vinegar, if swallowed, could be used to relieve a sore throat, but it could not be gargled. Jesus impatiently brushed aside all such artificial and unedifying regulations. He said that the Sabbath was for man and not man for the Sabbath, and he warned them:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faith; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!" (Matthew 23:23-24).

Jesus had not come with a new religion. His religion was the same as that of every other prophet. "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets," he said, "I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them." (Matthew 5:17). He

emphasized three things: God's love for man, man's faith in and love for God and man's love for and service to fellow-men. He referred to God as "Our Father in Heaven" in order to lay stress on God's loving-kindness and care for human beings. Jesus was not the first to call God "Father"; that had been done before, and not only by the prophets of his own race; religious teachers of other races had done the same. He tried to impress these teachings on the hearts of his followers by means of his inspired sermons and beautiful parables.

But the most impressive thing about the teachings of Jesus was not that he taught them but that he lived them. His entire life was one of complete humility, self-giving, and love which sought not its own. "The supreme evidence of his humility," writes E.C. Colwell, "is that it is impossible to discover precisely what Jesus thought of himself. He was not concerned that men should know what he was. His concern was for people to know God and His will for their lives. By indirection this tells us something about what Jesus thought of himself too, but it is the obvious; he thought infinitely less of himself than he did of God."²

The Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes and others, instead of listening to his inspired teachings and accepting him as the Messiah, about whose coming the earlier Israelite prophets had given clear prophecies, turned his mortal enemies and had him arrested and forced the Roman procurator to sentence him to crucifixion.³

Jesus Christ was undoubtedly one of the noblest and most inspiring characters of history. He was a man of surpassing charm and winsomeness. He liked people, and they liked him in turn. He loved children. He led a pure, virtuous and godly life. He showed a rare combination of mildness and courage in carrying out the will of God and in dealing with his misguided compatriots. He was all gentleness, selflessness and humility, serving his friends and praying for his enemies. He worked many wonders yet never took credit for them, ascribing them

always to the "finger of God" and even admitting others' ability to do the same. He had totally resigned and surrendered himself to the will and purpose of God. He declared: "I can do nothing on my own authority, as I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek not my own will, but the will of Him Who sent me" (John 5:30). His compassion for the sinners and sufferers was truly touching and admirable. About him it may well be said that he had made his will one with the will of God and completely conquered the devil.

The Prophecies of Jesus about Muhammad

The crimes of the Jews against Jesus deprived them of God's favours and blessings. Jesus announced to them that after him God will not raise any other prophet from among them, and added: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:43). He reminded them of what was written in the Scriptures: "The very stone which the builders rejected had become the head of the corner." The stone that was rejected symbolised the Children of Ishmael (i.e. the Arabs). The children of Israel had disowned and rejected the children of Ishmael (as is evident from the *Genesis* and other Old Testament books); but Jesus declared that God would reject the children of Israel, because of their wickedness and crimes against His Messengers, in particular against Jesus the Messiah. He would choose instead the children of Ishmael and make them the "head of the corner" in the grand Temple of Faith. He would raise the World-Prophet, who would complete and perfect the revealed religion, from among the children of Ishmael (the Arabs). Jesus gave the good news of his coming in no uncertain terms:

"I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When he, the spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:12-13).⁴

When we turn from the canonical Gospels to the Gospel of Barnabas, we find in the latter several prophecies of Jesus in which he foretold the advent of the Prophet Muhammad, peace

and blessings of Allah be upon him, by name. Of these just one is reproduced below:

"Jesus went into the wilderness beyond Jordon with his disciples, and when the midday prayer was done he sat down near a palm-tree, and under the shadow of the palm-tree his disciples sat down. Then said Jesus: 'So secret is predestination, O brethren, that I say unto you, verily, only to one man shall it be clearly known. He it is whom the nations look for, to whom the secrets of God are so clear that, when he cometh into the world, blessed shall they be that shall listen to his words, because God shall overshadow them with His mercy even as this palm-tree overshadoweth us. Yea, even as this tree protecteth us from the burning heat of the sun, even so the mercy of God will protect from satan them that believe in that man.' The disciples answered: 'O Master, who shall that man be of whom thou speakest, who shall come into the world?' Jesus answered with joy of heart: 'He is Muhammad, messenger of God, and when he cometh into the world, even as the rain maketh the earth to bear fruit when for a long time it hath not rained, even so shall he be occasion of good works among men, through the abundant mercy which he shall bring. For he is a white cloud full of the mercy of God which mercy God shall sprinkle upon the faithful like rain!'"⁵

The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

The Comforter, the spirit of truth, the Messenger of God, about whose advent Jesus had given the glad tidings, was born in Arabia in the year 571 C.E. At the time of his birth people all over the world had either totally forgotten the true religion or if they at all remembered it, it was in very much altered and distorted forms. There was complete death all around him – intellectual, moral and spiritual death. The people among whom he was born, the Ishmaelite Arabs, were polytheists and idolaters. They were sunk in vice and superstition of every kind.

Among these people, who had drifted far from God's way, Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, grew up to be the Man of God. What distinguished him from others was his pure and spotless character, his sincerity and love of truth, his compassion for the weak, the poor and the downtrodden. They called him *Al-Amin*, the faithful, the trustworthy one.

The superstitions and the evil and cruel ways of the people grieved his heart very much. He had great love for mankind, and even before he received the call to prophethood he had joined the League called *Hilf al-Fuzul* to help the widows and orphans and to protect the helpless victims of injustice and cruelty. He spent hours in a cave outside Mecca in communion with his Creator and in meditation on the aim of man's life and the purpose of creation. He longed to bring people to the Straight Path, to "render God unto man and man unto God." When he was forty years of age the Divine Light shone in its full resplendence in his heart and mind and he was chosen by God as His Messenger to all mankind.

He preached to them of the one and only God, the Loving Creator, Sustainer and Ruler of all the world. He ardently desired that the people should know the true God and that they should enter into right relation with Him and, through Him, establish right relation with one another. He longed to lift men's thoughts to an immutable and eternal good. He earnestly exhorted them to have faith in God, to give up falsehood, evil and injustice, and to love and serve one another. He told them that religion in its true sense was the removal of the want, misery and suffering of others and the selfless service to fellowmen; that the religious faith and worship were of no use at all if they did not inspire and train man to become God-fearing and work lovingly and selflessly for the good of others:

"Hast thou observed him who belieeth religion? That is he who repelleth the orphan, and urgeth not the feeding of the needy. Ah, woe unto worshippers who are heedless of their

prayer; who would be seen at worship yet refuse small kindnesses!" (The Qur'an, Ch, 107)

The Holy Prophet, struck at the false sense of superiority based on colour, caste, family, wealth, sex, race or nationality, declaring that all human beings were equal and brothers.

The treatment meted out to the Prophet Muhammad by his people was not different from that meted out to the other prophets. He was rejected by people with vested interests and subjected to bitter persecution. Many of those who believed in his Divine mission were brutally tortured and killed. A combined attempt was made by all the tribes of Makkah to put an end to his life. The courage, patience and forbearance with which he faced the insane fury of his opponents have won the admiration of all those who have studied his life. The Prophet, desired nothing but the good of all human beings, even of his most ruthless enemies.

After enduring the tortures inflicted on him and his followers for thirteen long years, the Holy Prophet at last migrated to Madina, where a large number of people had already embraced Islam. Now a new phase began in his life; the people of Madina not only believed in him and his message but also made him the head of their state. Here, in addition to his moving appeals for individual change of heart and transformation of character, the Prophet also got the opportunity to develop and put into practice the wider social implications of his message. The many revolutionary changes that he introduced included the raising of women to a status of equality with men, improving the lot of the slaves and taking steps for the total abolition of slavery, complete prohibition of all kinds of intoxicating-drinks and of gambling, putting an end to the exploitation of man by man, doing away with priesthood and granting religious freedom to all individuals and communities, and the establishment of a welfare state and a form of administration which was an ideal blend of justice and mercy. He made education and acquisition of knowledge compulsory

for every Muslim, male and female, and brought into existence a universal brotherhood embracing people of many races and nationalities. The distinguishing feature of those who joined this fold was zeal for the service to the one God and to humanity.

His rise to power as the head of the state did not bring about in the Prophet any change in his personal and domestic life and in his dealings with other men. He remained simple, modest, humble and sincere all his life, never placing himself on a higher footing than the humblest of human beings. He strictly disallowed any special show of respect to himself and would mix and move about freely among the people. He continued to wear patched clothes, to mend his own shoes, to milk the goats and sweep the floor with his own hands. At the height of his power he used to work as a common labourer along with others. His food was of the simplest kind and very often he went to bed on an empty stomach. He loved children and would frequently stop to laugh and play with them in the streets.

After accomplishing his mission, the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, "the most successful of all the prophets and religious personalities," as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* described him,⁶ departed from this world in 632 C.E. He has left behind the Qur'an, which was revealed to him by God, and his own sayings and the example of his life to guide mankind.

The Ideal Character

The Prophet of Islam, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, led a life which was in the truest and highest sense exemplary and godly. He was model *par excellence* for all men, as the Qur'an says:

"Certainly you have in the Messenger of God an excellent exemplar for him who hopes in God and the latter day and remembers God much" (33:21).

“O Prophet! We have sent thee as a witness, and as a bearer of good news and as a warner, and as one inviting to God by His permission, and as a light-giving sun” (33:45-46).

He lived up to the highest ideals of the Holy Qur'an and exemplified in his life the virtues mentioned in the Book of God. When his wife, Ayesha, was questioned about his morals, her reply was: “His morals are the Qur'an.” Conversely, when she was asked to explain certain ethical precepts of the Qur'an she did so by illustrating them with examples taken from the Holy Prophet's life.

To say that he was sinless would be only a negative description of the Man of God who had completely conquered all temptations, passions and selfish urges and lived only for the sake of God and in total harmony with the will of God:

“Say (O Muhammad): ‘My prayer and my sacrifice and my life and my death are all for God, the Lord of the worlds. No associate has He; and this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit’ (6:163-164).

He was, as the Qur'an describes him, “a mercy to the nations.” His compassion extended to friends and foes alike. “Do you love your Creator?” he asked: “Love your fellow-creatures first.” He felt extremely concerned at the depraved and corrupt state of the people around him. It grieved his heart very much when, as the head of the state, he had to pass an order of chastisement on anyone for the sake of justice or for the security of the young republic. But for his own sake he never even lifted his finger against anyone. When at a critical moment someone asked him to invoke God's curse on his enemies and persecutors, he replied: “I have not been sent to curse, but as a mercy to mankind. O Lord, guide the people for they know not.” At the conquest of Makkah (to give just one instance out of many) he freely forgave his enemies, who had spared no effort to annihilate him, his religion and his followers and were guilty of persecution and shedding

innocent blood. With a look of compassion he told them: "No reproach or blame shall be on you this day. may God forgive you. He is the most Merciful of all those who show mercy." Here is a practical example of the laudable precept: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." He had come to reform and reclaim the fallen humanity and he won the hearts of the anti-social elements and the outcastes of his age by love and kindness. The Qur'an says: "The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with that which is best, and lo, he between whom and thee was enmity would be as if he were a warm friend" (41:34). His charity and readiness to help the people in all possible ways were proverbial. He was the greatest friend of the poor, the sufferers and the downtrodden.

He strove all his life to lead mankind to the one true God, to make them godly, to rescue them from error, superstition and sin, but in inviting them to the truth he faithfully observed the Qur'anic injunction: "There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256). His life demonstrates that the greatest things that one can do can be done only in obedience to transcendent imperatives and inspired by the conviction that the eternally true and right are realities which must take precedence of everything else in one's allegiance. He was and remains an inexhaustible principle of moral regeneration for humanity. Yet he was always humble and modest, conscious always of his nothingness before God, and from the highest peak of moral and spiritual perfection to which he had attained he cried out to the people: "I am only a mortal like you" (41:6).

Non-Muslims' Tributes to the Holy Prophet

With the passing of the Oriental and Islamic studies from the hands of Christian missionaries and divines into those of more independent scholars, the appreciation of the Prophet Muhammad and his message is increasing in the West.

Here are two extracts about the Holy Prophet Muhammad from a recent book by a learned American professor:

"Pure-hearted and beloved in his circle, he was, it is said, of sweet and gentle disposition. His bereavements having made him sensitive to human suffering in every form, he was always ready to help others, especially the poor and the weak. His sense of honour, duty and fidelity won him as he grew older the high and enviable titles of 'The True', 'The Upright', 'The Trustworthy One'. Yet despite his concern for others he remained removed from them in outlook and ways, isolated in the midst of an effete and chaotic society. As he grew from childhood to youth and from youth to manhood the lawless strife of his contemporaries, the repeated outbursts of pointless quarrels among the tribes frequenting the Meccan fairs, and the general immorality and cynicism of the day combined to produce in the prophet-to-be a sustained reaction of horror and disgust. Silently brooding, his thoughts turned inward."⁷

"In an age charged with supernaturalism, when miracles were accepted as the stock-in-trade of the ordinary saint, Muhammad refused to traffic with human weakness and credulity. To miracle-hungry idolaters seeking signs and portents he cut the issue clean: 'God has not sent me to work wonders; He has sent me to preach to you. My Lord be praised! Am I more than a man sent as an apostle?' From first to last he resisted every impulse to glamorize his own person. 'I never said that Allah's treasures are in my hand, that I knew the hidden things, or that I was an angel . . . I am only a preacher of God's words, the bringer of God's message to mankind.' If signs be sought, let them be not of Muhammad's greatness, but of God's, and for these one need only open one's eyes. The heavenly bodies holding their swift silent course in the vault of heaven, the incredible order of the universe, the rain that falls to relieve the parched earth, palms bending with golden fruit, ships that glide across the seas laden with goodness for man — can these be the handiwork of gods of stone? What fools to cry for signs when creation harbours nothing else! In an age of credulity, Muhammad taught respect for the world's

incontrovertible order which was to awaken Muslim science before Christian."⁸

And this is how the distinguished historian Stanley Lane-Poole, sums up the character of the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him:

"There is something so tender and womanly, and withal so heroic, about the man, that one is in peril of finding the judgment unconsciously blinded by the feeling of reverence, and well-nigh love, that such a nature inspires. He who, standing alone, braved for years the hatred of his people, is the same who was never the first to withdraw his hand from another's clasp; the beloved of children, who never passed a group of little ones without a smile from his wonderful eyes and a kind word for them sounding all the kinder in that sweet-toned voice. The frank friendship, the noble generosity, the dauntless courage and hope of the man, all tend to melt criticism into admiration.

"He was an enthusiast in that noblest sense when enthusiasm becomes the salt of the earth, the one thing that keeps men from rotting whilst they live. Enthusiasm is often used spitefully, because it is joined to an unworthy cause, or falls upon barren ground and bears no fruit. So was it not with Muhammad. He was an enthusiast when enthusiasm was the one thing needed to set the world aflame, and his enthusiasm was noble for a noble cause. He was one of those happy few who have attained the supreme joy of making one great truth their very life-spring. He was the messenger of the one God, and never to his life's end did he forget who he was or the message which was the marrow of his being. He brought his tidings to his people with a grand dignity sprung from the consciousness of his high office, together with a most sweet humility, whose roots lay in the knowledge of his own weakness."⁹

Major A.G. Leonard refers to the sincerity of the Holy Prophet and the truth of his message in these words in his book, *Islam Her Moral and Spiritual Value*:

"If ever man on this earth found God, if ever man devoted his life to God's service with a good and a great motive, it is certain that the Prophet of Arabia was that man."¹⁰

"To thoroughly comprehend the spirit of Muhammad or the soul of Islam, the student himself must be thoroughly in earnest and sincere. He must in addition possess that moral, mental and intellectual sympathy which gives the ego an insight into human subtleties as well as simplicities. He must take Muhammad and Islam as he finds them - in the same intensely sincere spirit that constituted the one and inculcated the other. He must at the outset recognize that Muhammad was no mere spiritual pedlar, no vulgar timeserving vagrant, but one of the most profoundly sincere and earnest spirits of any age or epoch. A man not only great, but one of the greatest - i.e. truest - men that Humanity has ever produced. Great, i.e. not simply as a prophet, but as patriot and a states-man: a material as well as a spiritual builder who constructed a great nation, a greater empire, and more even than all these, a still greater Faith. True, moreover, because he was true to himself, to his people, and above all to his God. Recognizing this, he will thus acknowledge that Islam is a profound and true cult, which strives to uplift its votaries from the depths of human darkness upwards into the higher realm of Light and Truth."¹¹

Finally, this is what Lamartine, one of the greatest poets of France, writes about the greatness of Holy Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him:

"Never has a man set for himself, voluntarily or involuntarily, a more sublime aim, since this aim was superhuman: to subvert superstitions which had been interposed between man and his Creator, to render God unto man and man unto God; to restore the rational and sacred idea of divinity amidst the chaos of the material and disfigured gods of idolatry, then existing. Never has a man

undertaken a work so far beyond human power with so feeble means, for he had in the conception as well as in the execution of such a great design no other instrument than himself, and no other aid, except a handful of men living in a corner of a desert. Finally, never has a man accomplished such a huge and lasting revolution in the world, because in less than two centuries after its appearance, Islam, in faith and arms, reigned over the whole of Arabia and conquered in God's name Persia, Khorasan, Transoxania, Western India, Syria, Abyssinia, all the known Continent of Northern Africa, numerous islands of the Mediterranean, Spain, and a part of Gaul.

"If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history to Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws, and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislation, empires, people, and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and the souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which has blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race. He has left us the indelible characteristic of this Muslim nationality, the hatred of false gods and the passion for the One and Immaterial God. This avenging patriotism against the profanation of Heaven formed the virtue of the followers of Muhammad; the conquest of one-third of the earth to his dogma was his miracle; or rather it was not the miracle of a man but that of reason. The idea of the unity of God proclaimed amidst the exhaustion of fabulous theogenies, was in itself such a miracle that upon its utterance from his lips it destroyed all the ancient temples of idols and set on fire one-third of the world. His life, his meditations, his heroic revilings against the superstitions of his country, and his boldness in defying

the furies of idolatry; his firmness in enduring them for fifteen years at Mecca, his acceptance of the role of public scorn and almost of being a victim of his fellow countrymen: all those and, finally, his flight, his incessant preaching, his wars against odds, his faith in his success and his superhuman security in misfortune, his forbearance in victory, his ambition which was entirely devoted to one idea and in no manner striving for an empire, his endless prayers, his mystic conversations with God, his death and his triumph after death: all these attest, not to an imposture but to a firm conviction. It was his conviction which gave him the power to restore a dogma. This dogma was twofold, the unity of God and the immateriality of God; the former telling what God is, the latter telling what God is not. . . .

“Philosopher, orator, apostle, legislator, warrior, conqueror of ideas, restorer of rational dogmas, of a cult without images, the founder of twenty terrestrial empires and of one spiritual empire, that is Muhammad. As regards all standards by which human greatness may be measured, we may well ask; is there any man greater than he?”¹²

Historicity

The Christian missionaries are never tired of making invidious comparisons between the characters of Jesus and Muhammad, but a moment's thought will show that the Jesus of the Gospels and the Holy Prophet Muhammad offer no comparison at all. For, while Muhammad is a thoroughly historical character, every detail of whose life, from birth to death, is preserved in critically-tested books of Hadith and history, the life and personality of Jesus are shrouded in mystery. There are several eminent scholars who totally reject the historicity of Jesus and regard him as a character not of history but of mythology.¹³

This is undoubtedly an extreme view which is as unacceptable to the Muslims as it is to the Christians; yet the fa

remains that the historical facts about Jesus' life are inextricably mixed up with myths and legends. Our information about him is so fragmentary and uncertain that no clear picture of his life and personality emerges in our minds. There are doubts about the date, place and manner of his birth; there is nothing known about the first thirty years of his life; there are differences on the question of his death. The Gospels tell us of barely two or three years of his life, and that too in a manner that can hardly pass the test of historical criticism. In an earlier chapter Dr. C.J. Cadoux, who was Mackennal professor of Church History at Oxford, was quoted as having written that many scholars and critics regard as hopeless any attempt to separate the historically-true from the legendary or mythical matter which the Gospels contain and to reconstruct the story of Jesus out of the more historical residue. As we find him in the Gospels, Jesus appears a shadowy, glorified and apotheosized figure. We have in the Gospels, as Thomas Sheehan points out, not the Jesus of history, but the Christ of faith.

Perfect Model

Although on the basis of the Qur'an, I regard the characters of Jesus and Muhammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon them both) to be equally godly, pure, noble and inspiring, yet Jesus did not get the opportunity to become a perfect model for men in all situations and walks of life as the Holy Prophet Muhammad did. We have no doubt that if Jesus had got the chance he would have behaved exactly as the Prophet Muhammad did; for both were prophets of the same God. Jesus never married and so could not become an ideal husband and father. He did not triumph over his enemies and so had no opportunity of showing how a victor should behave towards his vanquished foes who had spread no pains to annihilate him and his followers. He did not have his persecutors at his mercy and so had no occasion to display forbearance, mercy and forgiveness. Jesus did not rise to power to become a perfect ruler and judge, a model for the rulers and judges of the world.

We must turn to the Prophet Muhammad, and not Jesus, if we wish to see the picture of an ideally happy and virtuous married life and of a wise, just and benevolent ruler whom nothing could corrupt or divert from working for the material, mental and moral reform and amelioration of his people. The Prophet Muhammad, witnessed in his life both failure and success, defeat and triumph, adversity and prosperity, helplessness as well as power and authority, persecution at the hands of his opponents as well as finding his persecutors at his mercy. He showed rare patience, fortitude, courage and loving kindness for his enemies as a persecuted preacher of religion and in the hour of deepest gloom, and unparalleled self-control, forbearance, mercy and forgiveness when his bitterest foes and opponents were helpless before him.

Jesus did not get the chance to put into practice many of his precepts and teachings. For instance, he announced: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). He advised his followers: "Let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one" (Luke 22:36). But he could not enlighten them, and show by his own example, the proper occasion and right use of the sword. The result has been that the sword has always been in the hands of his followers. It was repeatedly used by the crusaders to attack and slaughter innocent inhabitants of non-Christian lands, and sometimes even by Christian sects to kill each other in the name of Christ and Christianity. It was used by the imperial powers, with the blessings of the Church, to conquer, kill and exploit the peoples of Asia and Africa and to wipe out the Maoris of New Zealand, the aborigines of Australia, the Red Indians, Aztecs and other natives of North and South America. The use of the sword to subjugate and exploit people or to grab the land of others or to impose one's religion on others has indeed been one of the worst evils of human history. But, on the other hand, there are occasions when the use of the sword to resist aggression, to protect the lives and liberties of men and to restore religious freedom for all becomes a moral necessity. It was the Prophet Muhammad, and not Jesus, who

showed how a true soldier of God – the protector of the victims of tyrants, genocidal maniacs and religious fanatics – should behave on the battlefield and in moments of defeat and triumph.

Religion cannot confine itself to the private life of individuals and shirk its responsibility of providing guidance to people in their public life and of reorganising it on the basis of justice and righteousness and for the maximum benefit and welfare of all sections of humanity. Religion must make the will of God prevail in the hearts of men and in their private life as well as in their social, political, economic and international affairs. An apostle of God is needed to guide and be a model for men in their private as well as in their public activities, and it is obvious that Muhammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him,) and not Jesus, is that apostle *par excellence*.

The life of Jesus runs parallel to the early life of the Prophet Muhammad, but Jesus did not live long enough to give a practical shape to his teachings and to develop and put into practice the social implications of his message. He did not have the chance to enlarge his teachings to cover all the situations of life and to bring about the great social reforms that the Prophet Muhammad did. The modern man, who has to lead life as a son, a husband, a father, a poor worker, a neighbour, a citizen, a despised advocate of new ideas and ways, a social reformer, a victim of religious and political intolerance, a man in adversity and also a man in prosperity, a successful leader of men, a man with power and authority, a business man, a soldier, a judge, a ruler, will find the Prophet Muhammad, (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) a perfect model in all situations and walks of life.

FOOTNOTES

1. The subject of the birth of Jesus has been discussed, in the light of modern research, in chapter 6 (part II) of this book.
2. E.C. Colwell, *An Approach to the Teachings of Jesus*; quoted by Huston Smith in *The Religions of Man*, a Mentor Book, the New American Library, New York, 1959; p.281.
3. The subject of the death of Jesus has been discussed in the light of modern research, in chapter 7 (Part II) of this book.
4. For the significance of this and many other prophecies about the advent of the Prophet Muhamamd, See *Muhamamd in World Scriptures* by Maulana Abdul Haq Vidhyarthi, published by the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam, Lahore-7.
5. *The Gospel of Barnabas*, translated by Lonsdale and Laura Ragg; published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1907. Reprinted by the Begum Aisha Bawany Wakf, Karachi; eighth edition, 1980; p. 211-212.
6. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, article on the "Koran".
7. Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, a Mentor Book, the New American Library, New York, 1959; p. 203.
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9. Stanley Lane-Pole, *Studies in a Mosuqe*, London, 1883 Reprinted by Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, Lahore; Introduction, p. 84.
10. Major Arthur Glyn Leonard, *Islam: her Moral and Spiritual Value*, Luzac and Co., London, 1909. Reprinted by Accurate Printers, Lahore; pp. 18-19.
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13. See J.M. Robertson, *Christianity and Mythology*, London, 1900; P.L. Couchoud, *The Creation of Christ: An Outline of the Beginnings of Christianity*, London, 1939; L.G. Rylands, *The Evolution of Christianity*, London; 1927; Edward Dujardin, *Ancient History of the God Jesus*, London, 1938.

Chapter 3

THE DOCTRINES OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

Christianity, as understood and believed by the Christians of both the Roman Catholic and Protestant persuasions, has been summarised in the doctrines and statements of the *Three Creeds* – namely, the Apostles' Creed (c. third century C.E.), the Nicene Creed (fourth century) and the Athanasian Creed (c. sixth century). The fundamental doctrines of Christianity are (1) the Trinity, (2) the Deity of Jesus (3) the Divine-sonship of Jesus, (4) the Original sin, and (5) the Atonement.

The religion of Islam has no place in it for any of these dogmas. It believes in the oneness of God (i.e. the single person of God) as against the Triune God of Christianity. It considers the Christian deification of Jesus to be a reversion to paganism. According to the Qur'an, Jesus was not the incarnation of God but a prophet or messenger of God, and, like all other prophets (including the Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), he was every bit a human being. Islam also rejects the Divine-sonship of Jesus. He may be called a son of God in the sense in which all righteous and merciful human beings may be called the children of God, but not in a literal or unique sense. In the same way Islam rejects the dogmas of the Original sin, the Vicarious Sacrifice and the Atonement as being contrary both to reason and to the Divinely inspired teachings of Jesus.

The fundamental doctrines of Islam are (1) The unity and goodness of God, (2) the belief in the Prophets raised by God in all the nations of the world, (3) the belief in the Revelations sent down by God to the Prophets to guide human beings to and along the path of truth and righteousness, (4) the sinlessness of man at birth and his capacity for unlimited moral and spiritual

man at birth and his capacity for unlimited moral and spiritual progress (through belief in God and by sincerely and faithfully putting into practice the inspired teachings of the prophets), (5) the personal accountability of every man for his actions, (6) the life after death, and (7) the equality and universal brotherhood of man.

The Trinity

Though Christians declare faith in one God, yet they also affirm that there are three separate persons in the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – each one of whom is God: the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. The Athanasian Creed states:

“There is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Ghost uncreated . . . the Father eternal, the Son eternal, the Holy Ghost eternal . . . so the Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet they are not three Gods, but one God . . . For like as we are compelled by the Christian truth to acknowledge every Person by Himself to be God and Lord, so we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say, there are three Gods or three Lords.”¹

The doctrine of the Trinity is obviously self-contradictory. If there are three separate and distinct persons and each is by himself God, then there must be three Gods. Christianity recognizes the impossibility of reconciling the belief in the three Persons of the Godhead, each one of whom is by himself God, with the oneness of God, and hence declares the doctrine of the Trinity to be a mystery, in which a man must have blind faith. This is what the Rev. J. F. De Groot writes in his book *Catholic Teaching*:

“The Most Holy Trinity is a mystery in the strictest sense of the word. For reason alone cannot prove the

existence of Triune God; Revelation teaches it. And even after the existence of the mystery has been revealed to us, it remains impossible for the human intellect to grasp how the Three Persons have but one Divine Nature."²

And this is what the Protestant author of *What the Bible Teaches* writes:

"The Bible teaches not only that there is one God, but also that there are three persons in the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is a mystery to the human mind, but although it cannot be understood, it can be believed because God's Word says it is so." (An Emmaus Correspondence Course).³

However, in another book published by the Emmaus Bible Correspondence School we find the following on the same subject:

"The doctrine of the Trinity is not spelled out in the Bible, but it is the only logical solution to seeming contradictions therein."⁴

It would not be irrelevant to point out that the "contradictions", referred to by the above author, appeared in the Bible as a result of the efforts on the part of Paul and the Fourth Evangelist to deify Jesus after his passing away. However, the Christian Church has not resolved the contradiction between the oneness of God and the trinity of Divine Persons in the Godhead; it has merely declared it to be a mystery which must be accepted blindly by the believers.

Strangely enough, Jesus Christ himself never even mentioned the Trinity. He knew nothing at all about there being three Divine Persons in one Godhead. His conception of God was in no way different from that of the earlier Israelite prophets, each one of whom had preached the pure, unadulterated monotheism. The doctrine that God is in three persons, each one of whom is by himself God, would have been strongly condemned by them as a compromise with

polytheism. Jesus merely echoed the earlier prophets when he said:

"The first commandment is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one: and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength' (Mark 12:29-30).

He believed in *One God: One Divine Person and One only*. "You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve" (Matthew, 4:10).

"And this is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God" (John 17:3).

The theologian John B. Hygen, Professor at the University of Oslo, admits that the doctrine of the Trinity is found nowhere in the Bible:

"Most theologians today recognise that this doctrine (i.e. the Trinity) is not found in the Bible. The most conservative Region Prenter even says that it is altogether useless to look for it there."⁵

The fact is that the doctrine of the Trinity was coined by the Christians about three centuries after Jesus. The four Gospels, written between 70 and 115 C.E., contain no reference to the Trinity. Even Paul, who made Jesus into a Divine Saviour and imported many foreign ideas into Christianity, knew nothing of the Triune God. *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia* (bearing *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur*, indicating official Church approval and doctrinal soundness of its contents) admits that the doctrine of the Trinity was unknown to the Christians of the early centuries of the Christian era and that it was formulated in the last quarter of the fourth century:

"It is difficult in the second half of the twentieth century, to offer a clear, objective and straightforward account of the revelation, doctrinal evolution and theological elaboration of the mystery of the Trinity. Trinitarian discussion, Roman Catholic as well as other, presents somewhat unsteady silhouette. Two things have happened. There is the

recognition on the part of exegetes and Biblical theologians, including a constantly growing number of Roman Catholics, that one should not speak of Trinitarianism in the New Testament without serious qualification. There is also the closely paralleled recognition on the part of historians of dogma and systematic theologians that when one does speak of an unqualified Trinitarianism, one has moved from the period of Christian origins to, say, the last quadrant of the 4th century. It was only then that what might be called the definitive Trinitarian dogma 'One God in three persons' became thoroughly assimilated into Christian life and thought."⁶

A little later the same *Encyclopaedia* says even more clearly:

"The formulation 'One God in three persons' was not solidly established into Christian life, and its profession of faith, prior to the end of the fourth century. But it is precisely this formulation that has first claim to the title the *Trinitarian dogma*. Among the Apostolic Fathers, there had been nothing even remotely approaching such a mentality or perspective."⁷

So the doctrine of the Trinity was not taught by Jesus Christ; it is nowhere found in the Bible (both the Old and the New Testaments); it is completely foreign to the mentality and perspective of the early Christians; it became part of the Christian faith towards the end of the fourth century!

Rationally considered also the dogma of the Trinity is unsound and untenable. It is not only beyond reason, it is repugnant to reason. As we said earlier, the belief in three separate and distinct Persons, each of whom is by himself God, is incompatible with the oneness of God. If there are three distinct and separate persons, then there must be three distinct and separate substances, for every person is inseparable from his own substance. Now if the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, then unless the Father, the Son and the

Holy Spirit are three distinct *Nothings*, they must be three distinct substances, and, consequently, three distinct Gods. Furthermore, the three Divine persons are either infinite or finite. If infinite, then there are three distinct Infinities, three Omnipotents, three Eternals, and so three Gods. If they are finite, then we are led to the absurdity of conceiving of an Infinite Being having three finite modes of subsisting or of three persons who are separately finite making an infinite conjunctly.

The doctrine of the Trinity was developed as a consequence of the deification of two creatures, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and their association with God as partners in His Godhead. As explained by some Christian apologists, it amounts to the separate personification of three attributes or functions of God. Howsoever we may consider it, it is a regression from revealed and rational theology to mythology. For, at the root of all mythologies lies the irrational tendency of the human mind to deify great men and personify non-personal forces and attributes and to present them as Divine Persons.

Islam preaches the pure and simple unity of God. It rejects, not only the plurality of gods, but also the plurality of persons in Godhead. It is free from all forms of anthropomorphism and mythological fancies. It affirms the uniqueness of God and declares that He has no partners in His Godhead. He is one in substance and one in person. He is self-existing; the self-sufficient One, on whom all depend and who depends not on anyone. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all, the All-good, the Almighty, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise, the All-Loving, the All-Merciful, the Eternal and the Infinite. Nothing can emanate from Him and become His equal and partner in His Godhead. Says the Qur'an:

“Say He, God, is one. God is He on Whom all depend. He begets not, nor is He begotten; and none is like Him” (chapter 112).

"He is God besides whom there is no God: the Knower of the unseen and the seen; He is the Loving-kind, the Merciful. He is God, besides Whom there is no God; the sovereign Lord, the Holy One, the Source of peace, the Granter of security, Guardian over all, the Mighty; the Supreme, the Possessor of every greatness. Holy is God, far above that which they associate with Him (as partners in His Godhead). He is God alone, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner; His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth declares His glory, and He is the Mighty, the Wise " (59:22-24).

"So be careful of your duty to God, for God is Oft-returning to mercy (Acceptor of repentance, Effacer of sins), Most Merciful" (49:12).

The Deity of Jesus

The second Christian dogma is that of the deity of Jesus. The Nicene Creed, adopted by the First Council of Nicaea (325 C.E.) and revised by the First Council of Constantinople (381 C.E.), states:

"I believe in . . . one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten son of God. Born of the Father before all ages. God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God. Begotten not made; being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made."⁸

Christians (Roman Catholics, Protestants, and also Orthodox) believe that Jesus Christ is God from all eternity, the second person of the Holy Trinity, that nearly two thousand years ago he chose to appear in a human body and was born of the Virgin Mary, becoming thereby perfect God and perfect Man – i.e. God-Man or God-incarnate.

The author of *Catholic Teachings* writes in this connection: "The teaching about Christ's divinity which is to be found in so many places of Scripture, has always been proclaimed by the Church as one of the most important truths of Catholic faith. The Council of Nicaea, which was the first

General Council after the persecutions, solemnly condemned Arius who contended that Christ was not God but a creature."⁹

The Protestant author of *The Truth of Christianity* has the following to say on this subject:

"Evidently then this expression, the Son of God, meant to him (i.e. John), and therefore presumably to other New Testament writers, who use it frequently, that Christ was truly God – God the son – my Lord and my God – in the fullest and most complete sense."¹⁰

The Christian belief, according to R.E. Harlow of the Emmaus Bible School, is that "Christ is distinct from the Father, but He also is God," that he has all the attributes which God alone has, and that even when incarnate in a human body, he was omnipotent, omniscient, etc.¹¹

This doctrine also, that Jesus was God, has no support of the words of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Gospels. The truth is that Jesus strongly disclaimed even divine goodness, let alone Godhood. Here are his own words:

"Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone"
(Mark 10:18)

He spoke of God as "My Father and your Father, my God and your God" (John 20:17), showing that he stood in the same relation to God as any other man; he was a creature of God.

In his agony on the cross, Jesus cried out: 'Eli, Eli, Iama sabach-thani?' that is, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). Can anyone imagine these words coming out of the mouth of God? Here we have the words of a helpless man, crying in his agony and despair to his God and Creator.

The Christian theology declares that Jesus was perfect God and perfect man at the same time. Now God is omnipotent

whereas the power and capability of man are limited; God is omniscient, whereas man has strictly limited knowledge; God is perfect whereas man is imperfect. If Jesus was God-Man, then he must have been all-knowing as well as limited in his knowledge, almighty as well as limited in his power and capability, perfect as well as imperfect at one and the same time, which is clearly absurd. R.E. Harlow says that even when he was incarnate in a human body Jesus was Omnipotent and Omniscient. The sayings of Jesus and the recorded incidents of his life, however, do not support this view. Jesus candidly admitted the limitations of his own power and knowledge, declaring that God alone was almighty and all-knowing: "I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me" (John 8:28), "I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of Him Who sent me" (John 5:30), "For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father Who sent me has Himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak" (John 12:49), "But of that day and that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father" (Mark 13:32). In fact, he frankly acknowledged his own inferiority to the Father, who alone was God: "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28).

The divinity of Jesus is sometimes advanced in the Christian apologetic literature on the strength of his reported miracles. But Jesus himself confessed that he performed the miracles with the help of God: "It is by the finger of God that I cast out demons" (Luke 11:20). He always prayed to God for His help before performing a miracle and thanked Him for helping him after performing it. Besides, Jesus was not the only prophet to have performed miracles; similar miracles were, according to the Bible, performed by other prophets as well. Naaman was cured of leprosy by Elisha (2 Kings 5:1-14); Jacob got his eyesight when Joseph put his hands on his eyes (Genesis 46:4, 30); a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse were increased by Elijah to feed a family for many days (1 Kings 17:12-15). Jesus walked on the sea, but the elements obeyed the

orders of others also. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and made it dry land and the waters were divided (Exodus 14:21-22). The greatest miracle of Jesus is said to be the raising of a dead man to life. According to the Bible, however, this very miracle was performed by at least two earlier prophets. The soul of a dead child "came into him again and he revived" by the words and miraculous acts of Elijah (1 Kings 17:20-24). Elisha also brought back a dead child to life (2 Kings 4:32-37). Moreover, according to Jesus, even false prophets could perform miracles. On the other hand, Jesus could do no "mighty work" where there was unbelief (Mark 6:5-6).

The fact is that Jesus never claimed to be "God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God," but only a messenger or prophet of God. He was a *man* to whom God had revealed His message for the guidance of other men. To give his own words:

"Jesus said to them, 'If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God" (John 8:39, 40).

"And this is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

These words of Jesus prove conclusively (1) that there is only one Divine Person, and that Jesus knew nothing of the Trinity ("Thee the only true God"), (2) that Jesus laid no claim to Godhood or divinity, for he referred to a person other than himself ("The") as the "only true God", (3) that Jesus claimed only to be a messenger of God ("a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God", "Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent").

Like the Trinity, the doctrine of the deity of Jesus also was invented long after Jesus. In fact the scholars have traced the various stages through which Jesus was progressively deified. In Q the first written record of the sayings and deeds of Jesus, he was regarded as a Prophet of God to the children of Israel, a human being and nothing more. He faithfully observed the

Law of Moses and advised others to do the same. In Mark's Gospel we find a deliberate attempt to idealize and glorify him and to attribute many miracles to him, but for Mark also, Jesus was a man and not a God-incarnate. This process of glorification is taken a step further in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. In the letters of Paul we find Jesus being presented as a sort of divine being, the heavenly son of God and the Lord and Saviour of man. But even for Paul, Jesus is not God in the full sense; he is not co-equal with the Father or of the same substance as the Father. In John's Gospel Jesus is declared to be the incarnation of Logos, the personified Reason or Word of God, through whom all things were made. John considered him to be the first emanation from God, but not the equal of God. He derived all his knowledge and power and authority from God, and his greatness lay in revealing the Father and doing the Will of the Father. During the second and third centuries the different Christian factions held different views of Christ, but in the fourth century the triumphant Catholic Church suppressed all the other views and formulated the Nicene Creed in which Jesus was said to be "God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God", and since his incarnation "Perfect God and Perfect Man".

However, reason refuses to accept a man who was born of a woman, suffered from human wants, ignorance and limitations and gradually grew in stature, power and wisdom, like any other human being, as God. To put human limitations upon God and to believe in His incarnation in a human body is to deny the infinitude and perfection of God.

The dogma of the Incarnation was taken over into Christianity, like several other dogmas, from paganism. In the pre-Christian mythologies we often read of the hero being regarded as God. The Hindus of India even today worship their ancient heroes, Rama and Krishna, as incarnations of Vishnu, the second Person of the Hindu Divine Trinity.

Islam has saved its followers from the superstition and blasphemy of taking a man for God by repudiating the doctrine of the Incarnation. The Qur'an rejects the divinity of Jesus:

"They surely disbelieve who say: 'God is the Messiah, son of Mary.' The Messsiah himself said: 'O Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord' "(5:72).

According to the Sacred Book of Islam, Jesus was a Prophet of God – sinless, pure and godly, like every other Prophet – but a human being and nothing more. It is significant to see that among Christians themselves, there are growing bodies like the Unitarians and the Free Churchmen, who deny that Jesus at all regarded himself as being more than human. Among some accredited members of the Church of England, too, the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus is being given an interpretation which is more and more in conformity with the teaching of Islam. Recently a book, entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate*, written by seven leading British Bishops, was published from England. In it the distinguished authors state on the basis of sound evidence that Jesus in his lifetime did not lay claim to divinity and that he was promoted to divine status through pagan and other influences surrounding the Christians in the early years of the Christian era. In the Preface to the book, its editor, John Hick, Professor of Theology at Birmingham University and a member of the United Reform Church, writes:

"In the nineteenth century, Western Christianity made two major new adjustments in response to important enlargements of human knowledge The writers of this book are convinced that another major theological development is called for in this last part of the twentieth century. The need arises from growing knowledge of Christian origins, and involves a recognition that Jesus was (as he was presented in Acts 2:21) 'a man approved by God' for a special role within the divine purpose, and that the later conception of him as God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, is a mythological or poetic way of expressing his significance for us. This recognition is called for in the interests of truth; but it also

has increasingly important practical implications for our relationship to the people of the other great world religions."¹²

Later in the book, in the chapter "Jesus and the world Religions," he writes:

"It is clearly literally meaningful to say that Jesus was a man, part of the genetic stream of human life; finite in intelligence, information and energy; and conditioned by a particular cultural and geographical milieu."¹³

The Islamic view is that the prophets were all human beings. God chose them from among men and revealed Himself and His message to them for the guidance of men. Only a human prophet can be a guide and model for human beings. The prophets had the same nature as other men, they faced the same temptations and problems as other men face, and they overcome them with the means available to all human beings. A God-incarnate or an angel cannot be a guide and model for men, as the Qur'an says:

"Nothing prevents people from believing, when the guidance comes to them, except that they say: 'Has God raised up a mortal to be a messenger?' Say: Had there been in the earth angels walking about secure, God would have sent down to them from heaven an angel as messenger" (17:94-95).

The prophets, one and all, led virtuous and sinless life in total submission to and harmony with the will and purpose of God. They not only conveyed to men the message revealed to them by God but also served as exemplars and models of godliness, by themselves practising what they preached. The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, declared:

"I am only a mortal like you. It is revealed to me that your God is one God, therefore follow the straight path to Him and ask His forgiveness" (41:6).

The Divine Sonship

The Christian apologists often refer to the Biblical verses in which Jesus has been described as the "Son of God" in support of the Christian doctrine of the Deity of Jesus. They maintain that Jesus was the Son of God in an exclusive or unique sense. However, this dogma also is not in harmony with the sayings and teachings of Jesus. In the Bible this expression has been used for many other prophets. For instance, David has been called the son of God in the Book of Psalms. This is what David says:

"I will tell of the decree of the Lord: He said to me, 'You are My son, today I have begotten you' " (The Psalms 2:7).

After David, Solomon also was described by God as His son: "He shall build a house for My name. He shall be My Son, and I will be his Father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel for ever" (1 Chronicles, 22:10).

In the Bible this very title was given by God to Israel also, as we read in the second book of Moses:

"And you shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, Israel is My first-born son' " (Exodus 4:22).

The fact is that in the Bible the phrase "Son of God" means nothing more than a man's nearness to God, one whom God loves. Jesus Christ himself spoke of all those who had love and compassion for their fellow-men and lived in peace with them as "Sons of God". Is this not what Jesus says in the following beautiful words?

"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father Who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45).

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

These words should leave no doubt in the mind of anyone as to what this expression meant for Jesus. With the phrase "Son of God" having been frequently used in the Bible for

several earlier prophets, and Jesus himself explaining what this phrase meant, there seems no justification for regarding Jesus as the Son of God in any special or unique sense. If at any time he referred to himself as the Son of God, it was no doubt in the same sense in which Adam, Israel, David and Solomon had been called the Sons of God before him and in which he himself had described those who had endeared themselves to God by their goodwill and compassion for their fellowmen as "Sons of God". The fact is that the expression which Jesus used most often for himself was the "Son of Man", which shows that he regarded himself as a human being and nothing more. This is what the Rev. R. J. Campbell writes in this connection:

"His favourite self-designation was Son of Man. Much has been said and written about this choice of title, but it does not seem to have excited any wonderment in his followers, nor is there any obscurity in his use of it. It was an Old Testament phrase used of a prophet as representative of a particular age and people, and as the vehicle of God's message thereto."¹⁴

Jesus, then, was a man and a prophet or messenger of God, who had extraordinary love for God and compassion for fellowmen and who, by attuning his will to the will of God, had come as close to God as a son is to his father. The Holy Qur'an accepts Jesus as a great Prophet of God but rejects the Christian dogma that Jesus was God, the second person of the Divine Trinity, and the son of God in a literal or unique sense; says the Qur'an:

"And they say: 'God has taken to Himself a son.' Glory be to Him! Rather, whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His. All are obedient to Him" (2:116).

"It beseems not God that He should take to himself a son. Glory be to Him! when He decrees a matter He only says to it, 'Be', and it is" (19:35).

Reason is again on the side of Islam. Henri Bergson, the great French philosopher, writes that no being from whom another being can emanate and exist as a separate individual and become his equal and partner can be regarded as perfect. To

attribute a son to God would, therefore, be a denial of the perfection and uniqueness of God. (*Creative Evolution*, p. 16).

The Doctrine of The Atonement

The Bible states that when God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, He forbade them to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. But they disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. Thus they became sinners. The Christian view is that the sin of Adam and Eve is inherited by all their children: "Every man is born sinful, with an utterly depraved nature." Sin being an offence or outrage against God, the requirement of God's holiness and justice is that expiation or reparation *must* be made for *every* sin before man can be allowed to enter the Kingdom of heaven. "God cannot and will not allow a single sin to go unpunished." Now, according to Christianity, the penalty of sin is death; God demands the shedding of blood to forgive sins: "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin" (Hebrews 9:22). But the blood that God will accept as a penalty or compensation for sin must be of a sinless man, and all men are sinners. "As the original sin, being directed against God, was of infinite proportion, it demanded infinite recompense." So, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came from heaven to atone for the sins of men by his blood shed on the cross. "Through Christ's death and resurrection, this salvation has been provided, to God's complete satisfaction. As Christ willingly hung upon the cross, He assumed the full liability of our guilt and sin, bore our sins on His own body, and died as a substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of sinners. All God's judgment against sin fell on Him, and all God's righteous claims against the sinner were fully satisfied by Christ's death on our behalf." The death and blood of Christ clear every man who accepts him as his Lord and saviour of all his sins, original (inherited) as well as acquired. But those who do not believe in him and his death on behalf of man shall burn for ever in the fires of hell. "To the sinner, who dies without accepting God's atonement, God's only remedy for sin (the vicarious sacrifice and blood of the Lord

Jesus Christ), there awaits in addition the certainty of Eternal Punishment."¹⁵

Thus, the Christian scheme of salvation has three parts: (1) That Adam's original sin is inherited by all the human race; every child is a sinner by birth, having an utterly depraved nature; (2) that the requirement of God's justice is that no sin should be allowed to go unpunished; (3) that Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross for the sins of men to satisfy God's outraged justice, and that only those who believe in his vicarious sacrifice on their behalf and accept him as their Lord and saviour will obtain salvation and enter the Kingdom of heaven.

The Original Sin

Regarding the first part of the Christian scheme of salvation, the Original Sin and the sinfulness of all men, the author of the *Catholic Teaching* writes:

"Scripture teaches us that Adam's sin passed unto all men (our Blessed Lady excepted). For in the words of St. Paul: 'Therefore as by the offence of one (Adam) unto all men to condemnation; so also by the justice of one (Christ) unto all men to justification of life. For as by the disobedience of one man (Adam) many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (Christ) many shall be made just' (Romans 5:18, 19). These words make it plain that all men have inherited Adam's sin."¹⁶

And this is what a fundamentalist Protestant writer, R.E. Harlow, says on the same subject:

"Adam's sin was personal, and because of it all men inherit a sin nature and have his sin imputed to them. For us today the order is the opposite. We have the inherited sin nature and hence we sin personally. We are not sinners merely because we sin. . . , but we sin because we are sinners."¹⁷

Like many other Christian beliefs, the doctrine that all men have inherited Adam's sin and are sinners by birth also finds

no support in the sayings of Jesus or of the prophets who had come before him. They taught that every man was responsible and accountable for his own actions and that the sin of one man will not be imputed to another man. The children will not be punished for the sins of the father. It is written in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah:

"In those days they shall no longer say: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But every one shall die for his own sin: each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge."¹⁸

The Prophet Ezekiel also rejected the dogma of the Original sin in almost the same words:

"The word of the Lord came to me again: What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine: The soul that sins shall die. If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right – if he does not eat upon the mountains or lift up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, does not defile his neighbour's wife or approach a woman in her time of impurity, does not oppress any one, but restores to the debtors his pledge, commits no robbery, gives his bread to the hungry and covers the naked with a garment, does not lend at interest or take any increase, withholds his hand from iniquity, executes true justice between man and man, walks in My statutes, and is careful to observe My ordinance – he is righteous, he shall surely live, says the Lord God. . . The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if a wicked man turns away from all his sins which he has committed and keeps all My statutes and does what is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die."¹⁹

That Jesus himself regarded children as innocent and pure and not as sinners by birth, having an utterly depraved nature, is clear from his reported sayings:

“Let the children come to me, do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (Mark 10:140-15).

Islam rejects the dogma of the Original sin and regards the children as pure and sinless at birth. Sin, it says, is not inherited. It is something which a man acquires for himself by doing what he should not do and not doing what he should do.

Rationally considered also, it would be the height of injustice to condemn the entire human race for the sin committed thousands of years ago by the first parents. If a man sins because he is a sinner by birth, having an utterly depraved and sinful nature, then he is not responsible for his sins and deserves no punishment for them. As a matter of fact, sin is a wilful transgression of the law of God or the law of right and wrong. The responsibility or blame for it must lie only on the person committing it, and not on his children.

Man is born with a free will, with the inclination and capacity to do evil and also to fight against it and do good. It is only when as a grown-up man, capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, he makes a wrong use of his freedom and falls a prey to temptation, that he becomes guilty of sin. That many men and women have resisted and conquered evil inclinations and lived their lives in harmony with the will of God is clear from the sacred records of all nations. The Bible itself mentions Enoch, Noah, Job, Joseph, John the Baptist and many others as being perfect and upright and among those who feared God and eschewed evil.

It is nothing short of misanthropy to consider children to be sinners by birth. How unreasonable and hard-hearted a person

can become by believing in the dogma of the inherited sin is shown by the theological dictum of St. Augustine that all unbaptized infants are doomed to burn eternally in hell. Till recently, the unbaptized children, when they died, were not buried in consecrated grounds in Christendom, because they were believed to have died in original sin.

The very basis of the doctrine of the Atonement, that is the belief in the Original sin, having been found to be wrong on the authority of both reason and Jesus Christ, the superstructure of dogma built on it must *ipso facto* be wrong. But let us consider the Christian scheme of salvation a little further.

God's Justice

The second part of the Christian scheme of salvation is that God's justice requires that "the penalty of sin must be paid. God *must* punish sin." If God were to pardon a sinner without exacting the penalty of sin, it would be a denial of His justice. The Rev. W. Goldsack writes in this connection:

"It should be as clear as daylight to anyone that God cannot violate His own law. He cannot forgive a sinner without first inflicting the full measure of punishment. If He acted otherwise who would call Him just?"²⁰

This view shows complete ignorance of the nature of God. God is not a mere judge or king. He is, as the Qur'an describes Him, "Master of the Day of Judgement." He is not only just, but also Merciful and Forgiving. If He finds some real good in a man or sees that he is sincerely repentant, having the desire and resoluteness to conquer his own evil impulses, then He may forgive his failings and sins altogether. And this can by no stretch of imagination be called a violation of His justice. After all, the only right motive or reason for punishing a man is to check evil and reform the offender. To punish a person for the past transgressions, even after he has repented and reformed himself, is a sign of vengeance and not of justice. A God, whose 'justice' demands the meting out of the full measure of punishment for every fall and sin of man is no better than

Shylock. The God of the Qur'an – the Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds – is the God of love and mercy. He judges a man on the basis of his intentions and efforts. If He prescribes a law and a way and demands obedience, it is not for His own benefit, but for the benefit of mankind. If He punishes a man for his transgressions and sins it is not for His own satisfaction, as the Christian theology proclaims, but to check evil and purify the sinner. When a man commits a sin, he does not harm God, he harms his own soul. Hell itself is like a hospital, where the spiritually and morally ill – those suffering from the diseases of selfishness, malice, hatred, falsehood, dishonesty, greed, impurity, etc. – are cured by the fire of remorse and distress. But those who have the persistent urge to do good and the sincerely repentant will find God ever-ready to forgive their failures and sins without punishing them or any other person on their behalf. It is wrong to say that God *must* punish sin. True repentance erases sin, in the sight of God. Is this not what the Prophet Ezekiel declared in the verses of the Bible that we have quoted above? And is this not what Jesus taught in his beautiful parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Prodigal Son? Jesus taught us to pray in these words: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). And he added: "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:14-15). He also said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). Forgiveness of a sinner after inflicting the full measure of punishment on him, or on some other person on his behalf, is no forgiveness at all. God can and does forgive the shortcomings and sins of those who are trying their best to eschew evil and do good, and of the sincerely repentant, without punishing them or any other person on their behalf – and this is not a violation of God's justice. In fact, this alone is true forgiveness. Thus, we read in the Qur'an:

“Say: O my people, who have acted extravagantly against your own souls, do not despair of the mercy of God; for God forgives the sins altogether; for He is the Forgiving, the Merciful, so turn to your Lord repentant and submit to him before there comes to you the chastisement, then you will not be helped” (39:53-54).

“And whoever does evil or wrongs his own soul, then asks forgiveness of God (and reforms himself), will find God Forgiving, Merciful. And whoever commits a sin, commits it only against himself. And God is All-knowing, Wise” (4:110111).

Vicarious Sacrifice

The third part of the Christian scheme of salvation is that Jesus suffered and died vicariously in place of the sinners to give satisfaction to God’s outraged justice, and that no one can obtain forgiveness of sins and gain salvation and eternal life except by believing in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and accepting his vicarious or substitutionary sacrifice on his behalf. This is what we read in the First Epistle of St. Peter:

“For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”²¹

And this is what two modern Christian writers (a Roman Catholic and a Protestant) have written:

“Since Christ, God and man, has taken upon Himself our sin (by His death on the cross) in order to atone for them by giving satisfaction to God’s outraged justice, He is the Mediator between God and man.”²²

“On the cross He bore our sins, took our place, endured all the judgment due to our sins, and by His death, satisfied all God’s demands against the sinner. God has indicated His acceptance of the substitutionary sacrifice of His son by raising Him from the dead.”²³

This dogma is not only a denial of the mercy of God but also of His justice. To inflict the full measure of punishment and demand the price of blood to forgive the sins of men is to show a complete lack of mercy, and to punish a man who is not guilty for the sins of others is the height of injustice.

The Christian apologists try to defend the dogma of the Vicarious Sacrifice by saying that Jesus Christ *willingly* suffered death to pay the penalty for the sins of men. To this our reply is:

Firstly, it is historically incorrect to say that Jesus had come to die willingly and deliberately for the sins of men. We read in the Bible that he did not wish to die on the cross. For, when he learnt that his enemies were plotting against his life, he declared that his "soul was exceedingly sorrowful unto death". He asked his disciples to keep watch over him, to protect him from his enemies, and he prayed to God: "Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what Thou will" (Mark 14:36). Commenting on this, the author of *The Messianic Psalms* (An Emmaus Correspondence Course) writes the following:

"Here is our blessed Lord pleading with His Father, while His three favoured disciples, a stone's throw away, sink in sleep. It is not that He feared that Satan would overwhelm and slay Him, as some have deduced, but rather He is speaking as a man. He has borne heavy trials and tremendous physical burdens. His humanity cried out for life, and naturally shrank from a termination of that life in the midst of His days."²⁴

Secondly, we fail to see how the suffering and death of one man can wipe out the sins of other men. It seems something like the physician breaking his own head to cure the headache of his patients. Even if the innocent person is willing to become a scapegoat for other persons, it would still be wrong and unjust to slay the innocent in place of the guilty. The Christian apologists sometimes compare the penalty of sin to a debt of money that one man owes to another, and the payment of the

penalty of sin by Jesus on behalf of the sinners to the payment of the debt of money by a friend of the debtor on the latter's behalf. This analogy is totally wrong. The taking of the life of a man as a punishment cannot be compared to the payment of a debt of money. Life is something organic to a man, whereas money is something external to him, something which he possesses as an object extraneous to and apart from him. Money may be paid by one man on behalf of another. But if the penalty is in the form of death, it cannot be inflicted on an innocent person in place of the guilty person. The idea of substitutionary or vicarious sacrifice is absolutely unjust and inhuman.

Thirdly, the idea that shedding of blood is necessary to appease the wrath of God has come into Christianity from the primitive man's image of God as an all-powerful demon, who had to be propitiated by bloody sacrifices. We see no connection at all between sin and shedding of blood. What is necessary to wash away sin is not the shedding of blood, but repentance, remorse, constant struggle against evil inclinations and desires, the performance of good and kind deeds, and the determination to carry out the will of God as revealed to us through the Prophets. The Qur'an says, "There does not reach God their flesh nor their blood, but to Him is acceptable righteousness on your part" (22:37).

The doctrine of the Atonement makes the First Person of the Godhead into a blood-thirsty tyrant in order to demonstrate the self-sacrificing love of the second Person. To a dispassionate student, the sacrifice of the Second Person appears as much misplaced and purposeless as the demand of the First Person is cruel and sadistic.

Arthur Weigall makes the following significant comment on the doctrine of the Atonement:

"We can no longer accept the appalling theological doctrine that for some mystic reason a propitiatory sacrifice was necessary. It outrages either our conception of God as Almighty or else our conception of Him as All-loving. The

famous Dr. Cruden believed that for the purpose of this sacrifice 'Christ suffered dreadful pains inflicted by God', and this, of course, is a standpoint which nauseates the modern mind and which may well be termed a hideous doctrine, not unconnected with the sadistic tendencies of primitive human nature. Actually, it is of pagan origin, being, indeed, perhaps, the most obvious relic of heathendom in the Faith."²⁵

The Christian scheme of salvation is not only morally and rationally unsound, but it also has no support of the words of Jesus. Jesus may be said to have suffered for the sins of men in the sense that, in order to take them out of darkness into light, he incurred the wrath of the hard-hearted fanatics and evil-doers and was persecuted by them. But that does not mean that his death was an atonement for the sins of others and that only those who believe in him as their Saviour and accept his vicarious sacrifice on their behalf will be forgiven and saved. Jesus had come to rescue men from sin by his teachings and the example of his godly life, and not by deliberately dying for them on the cross and offering his blood as a propitiation for their sins. When a young man came and asked him: "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" he mentioned nothing about faith in him as the Redeemer or his vicarious sacrifice for the sins of men. His reply was the same as that of every other prophet of God; he said:

"Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."²⁶

"Keep the commandments" – that, according to Jesus, was the way to eternal life. Salvation could be gained by believing in God, eschewing evil and doing good and kind deeds, and not by making Jesus the scapegoat for one's sins and believing in his so-called substitutionary atonement.

The doctrine of the Atonement is unsound, for (1) man does not inherit Adam's sin and is not born in sin, (2) God's

justice does not demand penalty for every sin; it is not correct to say that sin must be punished before God can forgive the sinner, (3) the idea of vicarious or substitutionary sacrifice is unjust and inhuman. By sinning we do not harm God, but ourselves. The stain of sin on our souls can be removed, not by the suffering and death of any other person, but by our own repentance, turning away from evil and doing good. And so, when Adam, after the act of disobedience, repented and submitted himself completely to God, his sin was forgiven. Neither is the sin of Adam inherited by the children of Adam, nor was it necessary for Jesus to suffer and die to atone for the original and other sins of Adam's race. The truth is that Jesus did not die on the cross at all.²⁷

Islam rejects the doctrine of the Atonement. It declares that the forgiveness of sins cannot be obtained by the suffering and sacrifice of any other person, but by the grace of God and our own sincere repentance and persistent efforts to fight against evil and do good. Says the Qur'an:

"That no bearer of burden bears another's burden, and that man can have nothing but what he strives for, and that his striving will soon be seen. Then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward; and that to thy Lord is the goal" (53:38-42).

"Whoever goes aright, for his own soul does he go aright; and whoever goes astray, to its detriment only does he go astray. And no bearer of burden can bear the burden of another" (17:15).

Islam promises salvation and eternal life to all those who believe in God and do good deeds:

"Nay, whoever submits himself entirely to God and he is the doer of good to others, he has his reward from his Lord, and there is no fear for such nor shall they grieve" (2:112).

"The healthy balance Islam insists upon between Faith and Works," writes Duncan Greenlees, "was a needed corrective to the doctrine that a God's suffering has magic power to take

away our sins if we declare belief in it. The great trend in the modern West towards Unitarian belief and Theism is largely due to the influence of Islam as Europe's nearest neighbour . . . Islam has always stood manfully against priestcraft, magic, fetichism, and the worship of the dead and of the saints. Thus it has been a strong force working towards sane religion."²⁸

Islam – A Rational Religion

We have examined above the basic doctrines of Christianity. Our study has led us to the conclusion that the doctrines of the Trinity, the Divinity of Jesus, the Divine-Sonship of Jesus, the Original Sin and the Atonement are neither rational nor in conformity with the teachings of Jesus. These dogmas were formulated long after Jesus, as a result of pagan influence. They show that the Christianity of the various Churches is not the religion of Jesus.²⁹

Islam is a revival and restatement of the religion of Jesus and of all other prophets. The religion revealed to the prophets of the different nations was the same, but in the course of time it was misinterpreted, became mixed up with superstitions and false beliefs, and degenerated into magical practices and meaningless rituals. The conception of God, the very core of religion, was debased by (a) the anthropomorphistic tendency of making God into a being with a human form and human passions, (b) the association of other persons with the one and only God in His Godhead (eg., the plurality of gods in Hinduism, and the trinity of persons in the Godhead in Christianity), (c) the deification of the angels (eg., the Devas in Hinduism, the Yazatas in Zoroastrianism, and the Holy Spirit in Christianity), (d) the deification of the prophets: making them into the incarnations of God (eg., Jesus Christ in Christianity, the Buddha in Mahayana Buddhism, and Rama and Krishna in Hinduism), (e) the personification of the attributes of God into separate Divine Persons (eg., the Christian Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; the Hindu Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva; and the Amesha Spentas of Zoroastrianism). The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings

of Allah be upon him, criticised these irrational theologies and restored to its pristine purity the conception of God as the One Self-existing Reality, the Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds, the Loving-kind, the Acceptor of Repentance, the Effacer of sins, the All-Merciful, the All-Forgiving, the All-Good, the Holy, the Omnipotent, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent, the Eternal, the Infinite. He purged religion of all superstitions, false beliefs and meaningless rituals, widened its scope to make it a source of inspiration and guidance to the entire human race, and united the peoples of all races, colours and nations into one Faith and one universal brotherhood.

Islam is a religion without mythology. Its teachings and doctrines are simple and rational. Its appeal is to human reason and conscience. The truth of the Islamic doctrine of the unity and Goodness of God is brought home to us by the study and contemplation of the cosmos, where we find the all-pervading unity behind the manifest diversity, by the experiences of the mystics of all religions and nations, by the teachings of all the prophets, and finally by the apologies of the Trinitarians, who, despite their belief in three Divine Persons, declare that there is but one God. The truth of the other Islamic doctrines follow logically from the belief in the unity and goodness of God. If there is only one God, then all human beings are the creatures of the same God and are equal in His sight – and hence, the Islamic belief in the equality and brotherhood of all men. If God is the Creator and Nourisher of all the worlds, He must provide not only for the physical needs of man, but also for his moral and spiritual needs, by revealing to man the path of truth and righteousness – and hence, the Islamic belief in Divine Inspiration. Moreover, Divine Inspiration must come wherever and whenever needed, and for revealing His messages, God must choose men who are completely devoted to truth and are leading godly and sinless life, men who can serve as perfect models for other men and inspire them to follow the true path – and hence, the Islamic belief in the Prophets of all the nations. And finally, if God is the God of Goodness and His plan of creating the world and making man a free moral agent is not

frivolous and meaningless, then there must be the Life-after-death, where men may reap the fruits of their beliefs and actions and continue their blissful journey to God and in God – and hence, the Islamic belief in the Here-after.

The famous Italian Orientalist, Dr. Laura Veccia Vaglieri, writes the following about the universal and rational spirit of Islam in her book *An Interpretation of Islam*:

“The Arabian Prophet, with a voice which was inspired by a deep communion with his Maker, preached the purest monotheism to the worshippers of fetish and the followers of a corrupt Christianity and Judaism. He put himself in open conflict with those regressive tendencies of mankind which lead to the association of other beings with the Creator.

“In order to lead men to a belief in one God, he did not delude them with tales of happenings which deviate from the normal course of nature – the so-called miracles; nor did he compel them to keep quiet by using celestial threats which only undermine man’s ability to think. Rather, he simply invited them, without asking them to leave the realm of reality, to consider the universe and its laws, being confident of the resultant belief in the one and indispensable God, he simply let men read in the book of life. Muhammad Abduh and Ameer Ali both state that Muhammad was content to appeal to the intimate conscience of the individual and to the intuitive judgment of man.”³⁰

After quoting some relevant verses from the Holy Qur’an, the learned author continues:

“Thanks to Islam, paganism in its various forms was defeated. The concept of the universe, the practices of religion, and the customs of social life were each liberated from all the monstrosities which had degraded them, and human mind was made free of prejudice. Man finally realized his dignity. He humbled himself before the Creator, the Master of all mankind. . .

“The spirit was liberated from prejudice, man’s will was set free from the ties which had kept it bound to the will of other men, or other so-called hidden powers. Priests, false guardians of mysteries, brokers of salvation, all those who pretended to be mediators between God and man and consequently believed they had authority over other people’s wills, fell from their pedestals. Man became the servant of God alone and towards other men he had only the obligations of one free man towards other free men. While previously men had suffered from the injustices of social differences Islam proclaimed equality among human beings. Each Muslim was distinguished from other Muslims not by reason of birth or any other factor not connected with his personality, but only by fear of God, his good deeds, his moral and intellectual qualities.”³¹

Islam is the universal message of unity – the unity of God, the unity of all religions, the unity of the prophets of all the nations, and the unity of all mankind.

FOOTNOTES

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Chapter 4

ETHICS OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

Both Islam and Christianity exhort men to virtuous deeds and pious life. They condemn selfishness, falsehood, dishonesty, hypocrisy, injustice, cruelty, hard-heartedness, apathy, intolerance, malice, vindictiveness, greed, pride, ingratitude, intemperance, impurity, hurtful speech and violence. Both enjoin upon their followers faith and trust in God, repentance, truth, integrity, purity, courage, justice, tolerance, benevolence, compassion, sympathy, mercy, modesty, self-control and uprightness. The chief virtues enjoined by Islam and Christianity alike may be divided into two categories. Firstly, those which prevent a man from injuring the life, property and honour of others – such as chastity, honesty, politeness, self-control and peacefulness. Secondly, those that prompt man to do good to others – such as truthfulness, courage, patience, kindness, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, sympathy and love.

Now I shall give brief summaries of the moral teachings of Islam and Christianity in the words of their scriptures.

On Chastity

Christianity: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew :27).

Islam: "And go not nigh to fornication (totally abstain from its preliminaries and everything likely to lead to it); for it is an obscenity and evil is the way" (The Qur'an 17:32).

"And draw not nigh to indecencies, whether open or secret" (The Qur'an 6:152). "The adultery of the eye is to look with an

eye of desire on the wife of another, and the adultery of the tongue is to utter what is forbidden" (Hadith).¹

On Honesty

Christianity: "You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's " (Exodus 20:17). "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need" (Ephesians 4:28)

Islam: "Do not covet that by which God has made some of you excel others; men shall have the benefit of what they earn and women shall have the benefit of what they earn" (The Qur'an 4:32). "And do not swallow up your property among yourselves by false means, nor seek to gain access thereby to the judges, so that you may swallow up a part of the property of men wrongfully while you know" (2:188). "Give full measure and be not of those who diminish; and weigh with a true balance; and wrong not men of their dues, and act not corruptly in the earth, making mischief" (26:181-183). "On the day of resurrection I shall be the adversary in dispute of a person . . . who employs a servant and receives fully the labour due from him, then does not pay his full remuneration" (Hadith).¹

On Politeness

Christianity: "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:22). "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29).

Islam: "Turn not your face away from people in anger and contempt, nor go about in the land exultingly. Surely God loves not any self-conceited boaster. And pursue the right course in your going about and lower your voice. Surely the most hateful

of voice is braying of asses" (The Qur'an 31:18-19). "O you who believe, let not people laugh at people, perchance they may be better than they; nor let women laugh at women, perchance they may be better than they. Neither find fault with your own people, nor call one another by nick-names. Evil is a bad name after faith, and whoso turns not in repentance, these it is that are the iniquitous. O you who believe avoid most of suspicion, for surely suspicion in some cases is sin; and spy not nor let some of you backbite others" (49:11-12). "A man can not be a Muslim till his heart and tongue are so" (Hadith).¹

On Peacefulness

Christianity: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16). "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

Islam: "Whoever kills a person . . . it is as though he had killed all men. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he has saved the lives of all men" (The Qur'an 5:32). "A Muslim is he from whose tongue and hands people are safe, and a *muhajir* is he who forsakes what God has forbidden" (Hadith). "Shall I inform you of a better act than fasting, alms and prayers? Making peace between one another: enmity and malice tear up heavenly rewards by the roots" (Hadith).¹

On Truth and Justice

Christianity: "Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another" (Ephesians 4:25). "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" (Exodus 20:16). "You shall not pervert justice, you shall not show partiality and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God gives you" (Deuteronomy 16:19-20).

Islam: "No man is true in the truest sense of the word but he who is true in word, in deed and in thought" (Hadith). "O you who believe, be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness for God, even though it be against your own selves or your parents or near relatives, whether the case be of a rich man or a poor man, for God is nearer to both than you are. So follow not your low desires, lest you deviate. And if you distort or turn away from truth, surely God is ever aware of what you do" (The Qur'an 4:135). "O you who believe, be upright for God, bearers of witness with justice; and let not hatred of a people for you incite you not to act equitably. Be just; that is nearer to observance of duty. And keep your duty to God. Surely God is aware of what your do" (5:8).

On Courage and Patience

Christianity: "As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast" (James 5:10-11). "Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved. When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next; for truly, I say to you, you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes . . . So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. What I tell you in dark, utter in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim upon the house-tops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear Him Who can destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matthew 10:21-28).

Islam: "O you who believe, seek assistance through patience and prayer; surely God is with the patient" (The Qur'an 2:153). "And We shall certainly try you with something of fear and hunger and loss of property and lives and fruits. And give good news to the patient and steadfast, who, when a misfortune befalls them say: 'Surely we are God's, and to Him we shall return" (2:155-156). "Those to whom men

said: 'Surely people have gathered against you, so fear them'; but this increased their faith, and they said: 'God is sufficient for us and He is an excellent Guardian' " (3:172).

On Forgiveness

Christianity: "Then Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?' Jesus said to him, 'I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven' " (Matthew 18:21). "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven, may forgive you your trespasses" (Mark 11:25-26).

Islam: "And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord and a Garden as wide as the heavens and the earth; it is prepared for those who ward off evil; and those who spend, in ease as well as adversity, to help the needy and on human welfare, and those who restrain their anger and pardon men. And God loves the doers of good to others" (The Qur'an 3:132-133). "Many of the people of the Book (i.e. followers of other religions) wish that they could turn you back into disbelievers after you have believed, out of envy from themselves, after truth has become manifest to them. But pardon and forgive, till God bring about His command. God is Possessor of power over all things" (2:109). "So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them, and consult them in important matters" (3:158).

On Doing Good to Others

Christianity: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1:27). "But he (a lawyer), desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him,

passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay when I come back. Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise' " (Luke 10:29-37).

Islam: "Have you observed him who belies religion; That is he who repels the orphan, and urges not the feeding of the needy. Ah, woe to worshippers who are heedless of their prayer; who would be seen at worship yet refuse small kindnesses!!" (The Qur'an, 107). "All God's creatures are His family, and he is the most beloved of God who tries to do the greatest good to God's creatures" (Hadith). "What actions are the most excellent? To gladden the heart of a human being, to feed the hungry, to help the afflicted, to lighten the sorrow of the sorrowful, and to remove the wrongs of the injured" (Hadith).¹

On Love and Sympathy

Christianity: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Mark 12:31). "So whatever you wish that men should do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12). "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 12:34-35). "So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (I Corinthians 13:13).

Islam: "Do you love your Creator? Love your fellow creatures first." "No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." "You will see the faithful in their having love and sympathy for one another and

in their kindness towards one another like the body; when one member of it ails, the entire body ails, one part calling out the other with sleeplessness and fever" (Hadith).¹

Non-Resistance to Evil

However, some of the ethical precepts of Christianity appear to be at once too vague to be of practical use and too idealistic for literal acceptance. Take, for instance, the following:

"But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles" (Matthew 5:39-41).

This was perhaps a necessary corrective to the vindictiveness and hard-heartedness produced as a result of literally practising the Old Testament precept "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But can this teaching of "turning the other cheek also" be regarded as universally applicable? Can it be practised as a wholesome moral precept in all cases and on all occasions? Submission to bullies and tyrants will only increase evil and misery. It will embolden them to oppress and exploit others and increase disorder and injustice. On the other hand, non-resistance to evil when the target of evil is not oneself but someone else is a sign of apathy and cowardice. Islam says that evil in all cases must be repelled. If the evil-doer can be reformed and prevented from causing injury and harm by kindness and mercy, then this would certainly be the best way to deal with him. But if non-resistance makes him bolder in doing harm to others, then chastisement in proportion to his crime must be meted out to him. The Islamic teaching in this respect also is of universal nature. The Qur'an says:

"And not alike are the good and the evil. Repel evil with what is best, when lo! he between whom and you is enmity would be as if he were a warm friend" (The Qur'an 41:43).

"And the recompense of evil is punishment like it; but whoever forgives and amends (the evil-doer by kindness

and love), his reward is with God. Surely He loves not the wrong-doers" (42:40).

Monasticism and Celibacy

Christianity is too other-worldly. Jesus Christ is reported to have said: "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). And again: "Whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33). When a man told him that he would follow him, but he should first be allowed to go and bury his dead father, Jesus said to him, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Matthew 8:22). He even told his followers to "make themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:12). The result of following such teachings can only be the production of stunted and contorted hypocrites, instead of full grown human beings.

Christianity stands for asceticism, regarding the body and the world as evil and obstacles in the way of a moral, spiritual and God-pleasing life. It preaches the suppression of the natural desires, instincts, functions and needs of man. And as, broadly speaking, the body represents the social and public part of a man and the soul represents the private part, Christianity separates religious morality from worldly affairs and public responsibilities. It regards monasticism and celibacy as the highest way of life. With regard to this aspect of Christian ethics, Bertrand Russell writes:

"Social virtue came therefore to be excluded from Christian ethics. . . The most virtuous man was the man who retired from the world; the only men of action who were regarded as saints were those who wasted the lives and substance of their subjects in fighting the Turks, like St. Louis. The church would never regard a man as a saint because he reformed the finances, or the criminal law, or the judiciary. Such mere contributions to human welfare would be regarded as of no importance. I do not believe

there is a single saint in the whole calender whose saintship is due to work of public utility. With this separation between the social and the moral person there went an increasing separation between soul and body, which has survived in Christian metaphysics and in the systems derived from Descartes."²

Islam, on the other hand, keeps a healthy balance between the body and the soul, this world and the next world, the private and the public aspects of man's life, individualism and collectivism. It stands not for life-denial, but for life-fulfilment. It says that the soul cannot grow by neglecting and crushing the body. Human instincts are not intrinsically bad. They must not be killed, but wisely controlled, channelized and purposefully directed to make the life of man richer and better. This world has a meaning and purpose, and it is only by leading a normal and fruitful life in this world, and by appreciating and enjoying the beautiful gifts of God, that man can come closer to God, be of service to others, and prepare himself for the next world. Islam favours the middle path and is against asceticism and renunciation of the world. The Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, declared that there was no monasticism in Islam.

Wine, Gambling, self-display

While on the one hand, Christianity favours monasticism, on the other, it nowhere seems to have prohibited the three gateways to many crimes and sins – wine, gambling and improper display of physical attractions. Wine, in fact, forms a necessary element of the Eucharist or the Holy Mass, and the first miracle of Jesus, as reported in John's Gospel, was the converting of water into wine. It is in the Qur'an, which gives comprehensive and complete moral guidance, that these evils have been expressly prohibited. Regarding wine and gambling, the Qur'an says:

“O you who believe, intoxicants and games of chance and sacrificing to stones set up and divination by arrows (or otherwise) are only an abomination, the devil's work. So

shun it that you may succeed. The devil desires only to create enmity and hatred among you by means of intoxicants and games of chance, and to keep you back from the remembrance of God and from prayer. Will you not then abstain?" (The Qur'an 5:90-91).

Jesus prohibited his followers from looking with eyes of lust at the wives of others, but Islam goes a little further. It prevents men and women from unnecessary staring at each other and wants them to be decently dressed. It condemns the shameless display of physical charms:

"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and be modest. That is purer for them. Surely God is Aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and be modest, and that they should not display their adornment except what appears thereof. And let them wear their headcoverings over their bosoms and not display their adornment."

(The Qur'an 24:30-31).

FOOTNOTES

1. *The Sayings of Muhammad*, English translation by Sir Abdullah Suhrawardy, *Wisdom of the East series*, John Murray, London; 1945.
2. Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1958; pp. 25-26.

Chapter 5

THE UNIVERSAL RELIGION

The basic principles of the religion of Jesus and Islam were essentially the same. Both enjoined faith in the unity and loving-kindness of God and instilled love for Him in the hearts of the believers. Both declared that the way to please God and attain eternal life was to do good and love and serve God's creatures. Both believed in the innocence of the infant-heart and that everyone was born sinless. Both averred that every man was personally responsible and accountable for his good and bad deeds and that no one can atone for the sins of others. Both taught that sincere repentance and struggle to eschew evil and do good effaces all sins in the sight of God. Both had firm conviction in the immortality of the soul and in life after death. Both impressed on their followers the importance of prayers and charity. The moral teachings of the two were very similar. But when we turn from man's personal and private life to his social and civic life, we find that the religion of Jesus offers no guidance on the organization and conduct of public affairs. Islam, on the other hand, is a complete way of life. It offers instructions and guidance on all aspects and spheres of man's life – individual and social, private and public, spiritual and mundane, this worldly and other worldly, moral and political, national and international. Islam is the complete and perfect shape of the religion of Jesus, revived and established by the Prophet Muhammad, through Divine Revelation, for all mankind and all times.

During the countless centuries of human history, when different races and communities of mankind were living in more or less complete isolation and there was no quick means of communication between one and another of the nations, God was sending different Prophets to different nations. Jesus was

one of these national prophets. He was the Messiah of the Israelites. This is what Dr. C. J. Cadoux, an author whom we have already quoted several times in this book, writes with regard to this restricted and limited (national) scope of Jesus' mission:

"The office of Messiahship with which Jesus believed himself to be invested, marked him out for a distinctly national role: and accordingly we find him more or less confining his preaching and healing ministry and that of his disciples to Jewish territory, and feeling hesitant when on one occasion he was asked to heal a gentile girl. Jesus' obvious veneration for Jerusalem, the temple, and the scriptures indicate the special place which he accorded to Israel in his thinking; and several features of his teaching illustrate the same attitude. Thus, in calling his hearers 'brothers' of one another (i.e. fellow-Jews) and frequently contrasting their ways with those of gentiles, in defending his cure of a woman on the sabbath with the plea that she was a 'daughter of Abraham' and befriending the tax-collector Zachaeus 'because he too is a son of Abraham,' and in fixing the number of his special disciples at twelve to match the number of the tribes of Israel – in all this Jesus shows how strongly Jewish a stamp he wished to impress upon his mission."¹

Each nation having been separately guided to the truth by the 'national' prophets, the time was ultimately ripe in the plan of God to raise the World-Prophet and reveal the Universal Religion. And so, when the world was on the eve of becoming one, God raised the Prophet Muhammad to re-present the essential message of all the prophets, shorn of all that was of temporary or limited nature and purged of all the later accretions and misinterpretations. He amalgamated the religious traditions of the different nations into a single universal faith and brought together the people of all races and lands in a single worldwide brotherhood. He gave the world the perfect religion and a complete code of life for all mankind.

To establish the truth of his religion, the Prophet Muhammad did not resort to miracles, which may win over the few who witness them but fail to carry conviction to those of subsequent generations. The appeal of his religion is to the reason and conscience of man. To carry the truth home to us he draws our attention to the phenomena and laws of nature, the lessons of history, and the teachings and experiences of the prophets of various nations. There is nothing in Islam which is of significance or value only to the people of a particular region or age. The Qur'an enjoins nothing which is not uniformly inspiring and edifying to the people of all lands and does not provide adequate guidance to men in all stages of a changing and advancing society. It meets the religious, spiritual, moral and social needs of all nations and ages. The teachings of Islam are of universal nature.

In considering the proposition that Islam and not Christianity is the universal religion, the readers must bear the following facts in mind:

1. The mission of Jesus was for the people of Israel alone, but the Prophet Muhammad came with God's message for the whole of mankind. Jesus clearly stated:

"I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).

He chose twelve special disciples to match the number of the tribes of Israel and he expressly told them:

"Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6).

On the other hand, the Prophet Muhammad from the very beginning of his ministry addressed himself to the entire humanity. It was revealed to him:

"We have not sent you (O Muhammad) but as a mercy to all the nations" (The Qur'an 21:107) "Say (O Muhammad): 'O men! surely I am the Messenger of God to you all, of Him, Whose is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth. There is no God but He" (The Qur'an 7:158).

2. Christianity believes that the people of Israel are God's chosen people. God has sent His prophets and revealed books to them alone. The Christians accept only the prophets of Israel. All other claimants to prophethood they regard either as self-deluded or as impostors. But Islam says that it would be a denial of the universal providence of God to say that prophets were raised in one nation only. According to the Qur'an, God is the Lord and Cherisher of all the worlds. He has not discriminated between nations in sending down His revelations. He has raised prophets with His messages among all the peoples of the globe. The same religion was revealed to people all over the world through different prophets. The Holy Qur'an says:

"To every nation was sent a Messenger" (10:47).

"Surely, We have sent you (O Muhammad) with the truth as a bearer of good news and a warner; and there is not a people but a warner has gone among them" (35:24). "The same religion has He established for you (O mankind) as that which He enjoined on Noah - and that which He has revealed to you (Muhammad) - and that which He enjoined on Abraham and Moses and Jesus. So, you should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein" (42:13).

The Prophet Muhammad had come to complete, not to abolish or destroy, the work of the earlier prophets. He told his followers to have faith in the prophets and revealed books of all religions and nations:

"Say: We believe in God and in that which has been revealed to us, and in that which was revealed to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the various tribes, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and in that which was given to all the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them (i.e. the prophets) and to Him do we submit" (The Qur'an 2:136).

"And certainly We sent Messengers before you - of them are those We have mentioned to you and of them are those We have not mentioned to you" (40:78).

Islam is the consummate form of all religions. By accepting the prophets and scriptures of all religions and nations, Islam declares its faith in the universality of Divine revelation and prophethood, and seeks to unite all mankind in a single all-embracing faith and world-wide brotherhood.

3. Islam, and not Christianity, gives complete guidance for all aspects and conditions of life, individual as well as social, national as well as international. Jesus Christ himself admitted that he had not come with the final or complete divine message for mankind, for the time was not then ripe for it:

"I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16: 12-13).

Five centuries after him the spirit of truth appeared in the person of the Prophet Muhammad to convey the whole truth to mankind. God revealed to him:

"This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My favour to you and chosen for you Islam as a religion" (The Qur'an 5:3).

The Holy Prophet is thus the last Prophet and the message which he brought from God is the final and complete message for mankind. The reforms that he introduced cover all aspects of life. On the other hand, the mission of Jesus was only for a small nation and limited period. He was the Messiah of the Jews. He introduced reforms in the teachings of the earlier Israelite prophets where he felt such reforms were due. He reinterpreted some of the precepts and commands of Moses to bring them in line with the needs of his age, but others he left as they were. The so-called Old Testament of the Bible advocates massacre, condones polygamy, accepts slavery and orders the burning of witches. Jesus, who had come "not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them", apparently had no time or opportunity to do away with these evils. For, he said or did nothing to humanise the 'Mosaic' laws of war or to abolish slavery or to raise the status of women. He said nothing to abolish or restrict polygamy. The result of this has been, in the words of Bertrand Russell:

"You find as you look around the world that every single bit of progress in humane feeling, every improvement in the criminal law, every step towards the diminution of war, every step towards better treatment of the coloured races, or every mitigation of slavery, every moral progress that there has been in the world, has been consistently opposed by the organized Churches of the world. I say quite deliberately that the Christian religion, as organized in its Churches, has been and still is the principal enemy of moral progress in the world."²

Let us compare some aspects of Islam and Christianity to see why we regard Islam and not Christianity as the perfect religion for all mankind.

Women in Islam and Christianity

There is nothing in the reported sayings of Jesus which might serve as an incentive to raise the status of women. His whole attitude towards the female sex was one of distrust, as is clear from his treatment of his own mother. The polemic against the family in the Gospels is a matter that has not received the attention that it deserves.

St. Paul, who is the real founder of Christianity, regarded woman primarily as the temptress; he thought of her mainly as the inspirer of impure lusts. He laid the entire blame for the fall of man and genesis of sin on woman. In his Epistles, which are included in the Bible as holy scriptures, he wrote:

"Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Timothy 2:11-14).

"For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a woman ought to have a veil on her head, because of the angels" (1 Corinthians 11:8-10).

“Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church, his body, and is himself its saviour. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands” (Ephesians 5:22-24).

The combined influence of the Old Testament writings and of the Epistles of Paul in the New Testament (both of which are included in the Holy Bible), was shown in those fierce invectives against woman which form so conspicuous and so grotesque a portion of the writings of the Christian Fathers and saints, – of which the following is a fair sample:-

“Woman, you are the devil’s doorway. You have led astray one whom the devil would not dare attack directly. It is your fault that the Son of God had to die; you should always go in mourning and in rags” (Tertullian).

“Adam was led to sin by Eve and not Eve by Adam. It is just and right that woman accept as lord and master him whom she led to sin” (St. Ambrose).

“Among all savage beasts none is found so harmful as woman” (St. John Chrysostom).³

Woman had no separate identity, no legal status, in Christianity. In England, which was the most advanced Christian country, “up till the 1st of January 1883, it was true to state that, as a general rule, the contract of a married woman was void.” she could not sue or be sued apart from her husband. The Married Woman’s Property Act, giving her the right to possess property in her own name, was passed in England as late as 1882.

As regards marriage, the teaching of Christianity has been, and still is, that celibacy is best. “To the unmarried and the widows I say,” writes St. Paul, “that it is well for them to remain single as I do. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (1 Corinthian, 7:8-9). It was in the same spirit that St. Jerome wrote: “Let us take axe in hand and cut off at the roots

the fruitless tree of marriage." Nevertheless, the Bible has nowhere made polygamy unlawful for the average Christian believer. ⁴

When we turn from Christianity to Islam, we find that the Qur'an clears woman of the responsibility for the fall of Adam and vindicates her honour and dignity. It raises the status of woman to make her man's equal. Islam gave woman the same rights as those of man:

"And women have rights similar to those of men against them in a just manner" (The Qur'an 2:228).

The modern man recognises that there can be no true freedom and dignity without economic rights. Fourteen hundred years ago Islam gave woman the right to inherit the property of her father and husband and to acquire, own and dispose of wealth as she liked. The Qur'an says:

"For men is the benefit of what they earn. And for women is the benefit of what they earn" (4:32). "For men is a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave, and for women a share of what the parents and the near relatives leave, whether it be little or much – an appointed share" (4:7).

In marriage woman is considered by Islam to be an equal and free partner. Marriage in Islam is a sacred contract between a man and a woman and the consent of both the parties has to be taken before marriage can take place. The Qur'an describes woman as the companion of her husband – as object of love and source of peace and solace to him, as he to her:

"And of His signs is this, that He created mates for you from yourselves that you might find quiet of mind in them, and He put between you love and compassion. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect" (30:21).

Islam is the first religion to put restriction on polygamy. It allows a man to marry more than one wife in rare circumstances and under conditions which make it a well nigh impossibility. "If," says the Qur'an, "you will not do justice then marry only one" (4:3). And a little later it adds:

“you cannot do justice between wives, even though you wish it” (4:129). From this it is clear that Islam disallows polygamy to man in normal circumstances. However, in abnormal circumstances – as after a devastating war, in which numerous men have died, leaving behind homeless widows and orphans and an excess of female population – Islam allows conditional and limited polygamy. It does this to provide homes to homeless women, to protect them from being exploited by men, and to save the society from moral corruption.

To impress upon his followers the exalted position of the mother and sacredness and dignity of womanhood, the Prophet Muhammad declared: “Paradise lies at the feet of the mother.” He said: “Women are the twin-halves of men” and that men and women are made of the same essence and have the same soul. Islam makes no distinction between them as regards their intellectual, moral and spiritual capabilities and rewards:

“The believers, men and women, are friends one of another. They enjoin good and forbid evil and keep up prayer and pay the poor-rate, and obey God and His Messenger. As for these, God will have mercy on them. Surely God is Mighty, Wise” (9:71).

“Whoever does good, whether male or female, and has faith, we shall certainly make him (or her) live a good life, and we shall certainly give them their reward for the best of what they did” (16:97).

“Surely the men who submit and the women who submit, and the believing men and the believing women, and the obeying men and the obeying women, and the truthful men and the truthful women, and the patient men and the patient women, and the humble men and the humble women, and the charitable men and the charitable women, and the fasting men and the fasting women, and the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard, and the men who remember God much and the women who remember – God has prepared for them forgiveness and a mighty reward” (33:35).

Elimination of Slavery

Jesus said or did nothing to emancipate the slaves or even to improve their lot. In the Bible (in both the old and the New Testaments) the slaves are told to completely submit themselves to their masters and to remain content with their lot, however miserable:

“Servants (i.e. slaves), be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to the kind and gentle but also to the overbearing. For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly” (1 Peter, 2:18).

Christianity failed utterly to abolish slavery or to alleviate its evils. The Church itself held slaves and recognised in explicit terms the lawfulness of this baneful institution. Under its influence the highly cultured Christians of America practised the cruellest inhumanities upon the unfortunate beings whom they held as slaves and shed torrents of blood for the maintenance of the curse of slavery in their midst.

The first religion to improve the condition of slaves and to take steps for the total abolition of slavery is Islam. To begin with, the Prophet Muhammad made kind and brotherly treatment of the slaves obligatory on the Muslims. They were to be considered as members of one’s family:

“Your slaves are your brothers. So if any one of you happens to have a slave, let him give him the same food that he himself eats, and the same clothing that he himself wears. And do not give them such work as is beyond their power to perform, and if you ever happen to give them such work, you should help them in doing it” (Hadith).⁵

The following are just two of the many verses of the Qur’an exhorting men to emancipate the slaves:

“And what will make you comprehend what the uphill road is? It is to free a slave, or to feed in a day of hunger an orphan nearly related, or the poor man lying in the dust.

Then he is of those who believe and exhort one another to patience, and exhort one another to mercy" (90:12-17).

"It is not righteousness that you (perform rituals), turning your faces towards the East and the West, but righteous is the one who believes in God, and the Last Day . . . and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask and to set slaves free. . . ." (2:177)

The institution of slavery being opposed to the Islamic teaching of the equality and dignity of man, the Prophet Muhammad prohibited the taking of fresh slaves in very strong words:

"God says, 'There are three persons whose adversary in dispute I shall be on the Day of Judgment: a person who makes a promise in My name then acts unfaithfully, and a person who enslaves a free person, sells him and devours his price, and a person who employs a man to do a work and exacts full work from him but does not pay him his full remuneration' " (Hadith).

Finally, came the categorical command of God not only to emancipate the slaves but also to give them a part of one's wealth to rehabilitate them:

"And those of your slaves who ask for a writing of freedom, give them the writing, if you know any good in them, and give them of the wealth of God which He has given you" (The Qur'an 24:33).

Islamic Political Theory

Islam does not only aim at transforming the outlook and character of the individual and guiding him in his private life, but it also seeks to build a social order founded on the principles of freedom, equality, justice and peace. "While Christianity," writes Dr. W. Cantwell Smith, "in recent years has moved towards a social gospel, Islam has been a social gospel from the start."

Jesus Christ is reported to have said: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21). The result of the separation of religion and politics in Christianity has been the growth of Machiavellism in the West. In Islam there is no dichotomy between the temporal and the spiritual. Being the last revealed religion, and foreseeing the eventual evolution of humanity, Islam has formulated a basic code of comprehensive guidance for mankind in all their activities and relations, whether they fall within the public or the private sphere. Islam ensures justice and social and international harmony by regulating the political, economic and international affairs according to the will of God and morality and by defining the basic duties of the State towards the individual and of the individual towards the state and of one state towards another state. It lays down some basic political, social and economic principles which every community is enjoined to adopt and then gives each the liberty to develop its structure according to the needs of the age, provided this superstructure observes the basic principles and remains within their scope.

The constitution of the Islamic State rests on the following fundamental principles:

1. The sovereignty belongs to God alone. "To God alone belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them," says the Qur'an (5:120). The concept of human sovereignty is completely absent in the political philosophy of Islam. People in the Islamic state are free from subjection to any human being, because their government is the government of law and they are subjects of God alone. There is no room in Islam for kingship or dictatorship. There is no ruler and no ruled. Everyone is free within the limits of divine law. Freedom of expression and liberty of conscience are the corner stones of Islamic polity.

2. The right to legislate also belongs basically to God. "Surely We," says God in the Qur'an, "have revealed this Book to you with truth that you may judge between people by the law that God has given you" (4:105). Muslims are of course free to

reinterpret the laws and to frame new laws for meeting the exigencies of new situations, but the new laws should be in conformity with the Divine guidance contained in the Qur'an.

3. Man is God's vicegerent (caliph). There is only one Sovereign (i.e., God) and all human beings are His vicegerents. A society in which every man is vicegerent (caliph) of God, and an equal participant in this caliphate, cannot tolerate any class distinction based on race, caste, colour, creed or sex. All human beings enjoy equal status and are equal before law. They have equal political rights and share equally in the running of the State. In the Islamic state no one, not even the head of the State, is above law. The same law applies to all and for the breach of any law even the head of the State can be summoned in the court and punished, if found guilty.

4. The authority or power to administer the affairs of the State is a trust of the people and not the birthright of anyone. The Qur'an says:

"Surely God commands you to give over the trusts to those worthy of them, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice" (4:58).

The concept of trust brings in automatically the concept of accountability, because a trustee appointed by the people has to render account to those by whom he is appointed. As the head of the state and all other state officers and administrators are appointed by the people and are trustees, they can also be removed by the people, if the people find that they are not conducting the affairs of the state in accordance with the commandments of God and in the best interests of the people.

5. All affairs of the State must not only be regulated in accordance with the principles of the Holy Qur'an but also conducted democratically by mutual consultation through a parliament elected on the basis of universal franchise. Says the Qur'an:

"And those who respond to the Lord and keep up prayer and whose government is by consent among themselves and who spend on others out of what God has given them" (42:38).

“So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them upon the conduct of affairs. And when you are resolved, then put your trust in God. Surely God loves those who trust Him” (3:158).

6. The objectives of the Islamic state are to maintain internal order, ward off external aggression, establish absolute justice for all citizens, do all that lies in its power and employ all means and media for the establishment of “all that is right” and the elimination of “all that is wrong”, and organize institutions for spiritual and social welfare, economic well-being and intellectual development of all citizens.

The final picture, therefore, that emerges is that an Islamic state is a state set up by the will of the people in a constitutional manner following the democratic principle of decision-making in which every citizen has an equal right to participate and governance is a trust which has to be regulated on the principles of equality, liberty and fraternity, enunciated in the Qur’an, with absolute fairness and impartiality, without giving any preference to anyone, for the welfare of the entire community and in such a manner that the basic needs of all are satisfied and everyone enjoys equality of opportunity without distinction of race, colour, birth, rank or religion.

The Economics of Islam

Islam is opposed to monasticism and other-worldliness. It regards the economic activity of man as quite lawful, rewarding, and even obligatory. It approves of the economic progress of man. Notwithstanding all this, Islam does not consider the economic activity to be the main problem of man, nor does it view economic progress as the be-all or *summum bonum* of human life. When wealth is sought for its own sake and by any and every means and the true goal of life is forgotten, then economic activity becomes sinful and wealth an “allurement or delusion of this world’s life.” Islam severely condemns the tendency to give importance to people on the basis of their property and status. The mark of a man’s worth, it

says, is not his wealth, but his greater humanity, character and integrity. Above all, in the pursuit of livelihood, man must all the time keep in mind the distinction between right and wrong and never lose sight of the higher values of life.

Islam considers God to be the Absolute Owner of all wealth. Men are only trustees. They can keep and make use of their honestly acquired property only if by their doing so the interests of other individuals and of the society as a whole are not unjustly affected and if their economic activities are carried on within the limits prescribed by God.

Islam regards all forms of unearned income as unlawful. According to the Qur'an, "Man shall have only that for which he works and makes effort" (53:39). It upholds the dignity of labour. The Prophet Muhammad said: "No one eats better food than that which he eats out of the work of his own hands."

There is nothing more reprehensible in the sight of God than the exploitation of man by man. Islam severely condemns profiteering, black-marketing, hoarding, speculation, gambling, manufacture and sale of goods that are harmful to man, and all such practices by which a man takes undue advantage of the needs of others. It is opposed to the formation of cartels and monopolies and takes necessary measures to prevent the concentration of wealth in few hands. It wants the wealth of a nation to be fairly and equitably distributed among all the citizens, so that "it may not circulate only among the rich of you" (59:7).

Most important of all, Islam interdicts *Riba* – that is, the practice of investing or lending money with a view to increasing it by exploiting others or by appropriating to oneself the fruits of the labour of others, without employing one's own physical and mental powers to productive or creative use. Says the Qur'an:

“O you who believe, devour not *Riba* (usury, surplus value), doubling and redoubling, and keep your duty to God, that you may be successful” (3:129).

“Those who swallow *Riba* (the fruits of the labour of others) cannot arise except as he arises whom the devil prostrates by his touch” (2:275).

“And whatever you lay out at *Riba* (i.e. invest or lend money with the intention of multiplying it by exploiting others), so that it may increase in the property of men, it increases not with God, and whatever you give in charity, desiring God’s pleasure – these will get manifold” (30:39).

On the one hand Islam is against hoarding, miserliness and avarice, and, on the other, it censures squandering of wealth on vanities and luxuries and all forms of wasteful expenditure. It requires every man to be personally responsible for the well-being of the society. The Holy Prophet said: “He is not a Muslim who eats his fill and leaves his neighbour hungry.”

In order to reduce inequality and make sure that everyone gets the basic necessities and has equal opportunities in life, Islam imposes a tax, called *Zakat*, on the capital of the rich for the benefit of the poor and the needy. Moreover, it repeatedly exhorts men to spend generously “out of what God has given them” to help the less fortunate and for the welfare of the society. The wealth that a man has earned is not absolutely his. It is a trust with him from God. He has acquired it by employing his God-given faculties and talents and by the aid and facilities provided by the society. He must repay his debt to the society and spend as much as possible, out of what he has honestly earned by his own labour, in the way of God.

Religious Freedom

Just as Islam has made the State subject to the same ethical principles as govern individuals and has brought international relations within the scope of morality, making the subjugation and exploitation of one nation by another as reprehensible as the subjugation and exploitation of one man by another, in the

same way Islam has ordained justice, equality, freedom and mutual respect between one religion and another. In the Islamic social order all individuals and religious communities are free to follow the religion of their own choice. No individual or religious community has the right to impose its own beliefs on others or to restrict in any way the adoption, profession, preaching and practice by others of the religion which appeals to them. Says the Holy Qur'an:

"There is no compulsion in religion" (2:256).

The fact is that Islam not only preaches toleration, but it also enjoins upon its followers equal faith in the founders of all the great religions of the world. It invites people of all religions to join the Muslims in forming a League of Faiths to uphold the principles of the unity of God, moral integrity and the brotherhood of man.

In Muslim countries Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists and Zoroastrians have enjoyed the freedom which, till recently, was totally denied to the non-Christians in Christendom.

Knowledge and Science

After careful study of the histories of Islam and Christianity, Canon Isaac Taylor came to the conclusion that "Islam has done more for civilization than Christianity." While the Muslims rose to the pinnacle of learning and culture in a few decades after the promulgation of Islam, the Christians remained steeped in ignorance for more than a thousand years. It is a fact that the people of Europe came out of the Dark Ages and made progress in science and learning only after the hold of Christianity over their minds and lives had considerably weakened. Whatever little education there was in Christian Europe during the Dark Ages, it was confined to the priests. The laymen had to blindly accept whatever they were told by the Church and were not allowed to use their intellect or judgment. Whenever anyone conceived a new idea or propounded a new theory, he was condemned by the Church as a heretic and

subjected to inhuman tortures, which often ended in his being burnt alive. Professor J.B. Bury writes:

“Doctrines and implications in Christianity, forming a solid rampart against the advance of knowledge, blocked the paths of science in the Middle Ages and obstructed its progress till the latter half of the nineteenth century. In every important field of scientific research, the ground was occupied by false views which the Church declared to be true on the infallible authority of the Bible.”⁶

The Christians emerged from the night of ignorance and superstition only when the light of learning from the Muslim universities penetrated the darkness of Europe and led to the Renaissance. “It is to the Mussalman science, to Mussalman art, to Mussalman literature that Europe has been in great measure indebted for its extrication from the darkness of the Middle Ages,” says the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava.⁷

Islam, unlike Christianity, makes the acquisition of knowledge and exercise of reason a duty of the believers. Said the Prophet Muhammad:

“The acquisition of knowledge is a duty incumbent on every Muslim, male and female.”

“Go in quest of knowledge even unto China.”

“The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr.”

“God has not created anything better than reason, or anything more perfect or more beautiful than reason. The benefits which God gives are on its account and understanding is by it, and God’s wrath is caused by the disregard of it.”⁸

The Qur’an repeatedly exhorts the believers to observe and investigate the phenomena of nature:

“In the creations of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits men, and the water that God sends down from the sky, then gives life therewith to the

earth after its death and spreads in it all kinds of animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between heaven and earth, there are surely signs for a people who understand" (2:164).

Islam gives the greatest possible impetus to scientific research by declaring that all that is in the heavens and the earth is subservient to man, and that it is man's duty to control and harness the forces of nature for the benefit of the human race:

"And He has made subservient to you the night and the day and the sun and the moon. And the stars are made subservient by His command. Surely there are signs in this for a people who understand" (16:12).

The result of these teachings was that all over the Islamic world outstanding centres of learning sprang up in no time and produced great scientists and scholars. There is no branch of learning to which Muslims did not make valuable contribution. But more important than their contribution to particular branches of science, according to Robert Briffault, is their invention of the scientific method itself.

He writes:

"It is highly probable that but for the Arabs modern European civilization would never have assumed that character which has enabled it to transcend all previous phases of evolution. For although there is not a single aspect of human growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic culture is not traceable, nowhere is it so clear and momentous as in the genesis of that power which constitutes the paramount distinctive force of the modern world and the supreme source of its victory – The natural science and the scientific spirit . . . science owes its very existence to Arabic culture . . . what we call science arose in Europe as a result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the methods of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of mathematics in a

form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs."⁹

The Brotherhood of Man

The Islamic belief in the oneness of humanity is the corollary which naturally follows from the doctrine of the oneness of God. All men are the creatures of one God: they are equal and together form a single brotherhood. "Mankind is a single nation," says the Qur'an (2:213). The differences of race, colour, language, culture, creed, wealth and sex are all superficial; they do not affect the fundamental unity and equality of all human beings. Says the Qur'an:

"O mankind, surely We have created you male and female and made you nations and tribes that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with God is the best in conduct. Surely God is Knowing, Aware" (49:13)

In his famous farewell sermon, the Holy Prophet declared: "No Arab has any superiority over a non-Arab and no non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; no white man has any superiority over a black man, and no black man has any superiority over a white man. The criterion of superiority in the sight of God is greater piety and righteousness."

Never in their long history have the Muslims in any part of the world been guilty of racial discrimination, colour bar, apartheid or ethnic cleansing. According to the famous historian Arnold Toynbee:

"The extinction of race consciousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue."¹⁰

Nor does Islam recognise the distinction between the so-called clergy and laity, which is a prominent feature of other religions. There is no priesthood in Islam.

The Qur'an enjoins love and sympathy among human beings and unites them as brothers.

It says:

"And hold fast by the covenant of God all together and be not disunited. And remember God's favour to you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so by His favour you became brethren. And you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He saved you from it. Thus God makes clear to you His messages that you may be guided" (3:102).

"All God's creature," said the Prophet Muhammad, "are His family, and he is the most beloved of God who tries to do the greatest good to God's creatures".

Thus it will be seen that Islam gives guidance regarding many matters about which Christianity is silent. The Prophet Muhammad completed what was left incomplete by Jesus. Islam is the true religion of Jesus, revived by a fresh revelation and perfected to cover all aspects of human life and to provide guidance to the men of all times and all nations. It is, in short, the universal religion. It does not only respond to man's devotional urges but to human life as a whole. It does not only give an infallible metaphysics, but also a comprehensive and sublime code of individual and social ethics, a sound economic system, a just political ideology, and many other things besides. It is not a solitary star, but a whole solar system, encompassing the whole and illuminating the whole.

FOOTNOTES

1. C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, a Pelican Book, Penguin Books, West Drayton, Middlesex; pp. 80-81.
2. Bertrand Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, London; 1957, p. 15.
3. Simone de Beauvoir, *Nature of the Second Sex*; the New English Library, London, 1968; pp. 121-122.
4. See John Milton, *A Treatise on Christian Doctrine*; London, 1825, pp. 231-241.
5. *A Manual of Hadith*, Arabic text, with English translation and explanatory notes by Maulana Muhammad Ali; Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i Islam, Lahore.
6. J. B. Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought*, London, pages 46-47.
7. Marquis of Dufferin and Ava, *Speeches Delivered in India*, London, 1890; p. 24.
8. Al-Suhrawardy (translator), *The Sayings of Muhammad*, Wisdom of the East series, John Murray, London, 1941.
9. Robert Briffault, *Making of Humanity*, London, 1928; pp. 190-191.
10. Arnold Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial*, New York, 1948; p. 205.

PART II

**JESUS AND THE ORIGINS
OF CHRISTIANITY**

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Chapter 6

THE BIRTH OF JESUS

Christians believe that Jesus was born of a virgin on the 25th of December. His nativity is reported to have taken place in a manger at Bethlehem. It is written in the Gospel according to Matthew:

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ ” (Matthew :18-21).

The gospel according to Luke mentions the virgin birth as a proof of the Divine - sonship of Jesus:

“And the angel said to her (Mary), ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.’ ” (Luke 1:35).

Was Jesus Born of a Virgin?

The contemporaries of Jesus knew nothing of his virgin birth. They regarded him as one of the many children of Joseph the carpenter and his lawfully wedded wife Mary, as is clear from many references in the Gospels:

“Philip found Nathanael, and said to him, ‘We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ ” (John 1:45).

"They said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?' " (John 6:42). "And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious word which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' " (Luke 4:22).

"And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his own country he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all this?' " (Matthew 13:53-56).

And what is more significant, even Mary, the mother of Jesus, spoke of Joseph as his father. Luke opens his account of the visit of Jesus, along with Joseph and Mary, to the Temple in Jerusalem with these words: "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover." (Luke 2:41). So when Jesus was about twelve years of age, the carpenter and his wife took him to the capital city of Jerusalem to be present at the great festival of Passover. So intense was the interest of Jesus in the Temple as *par excellence* the House of God that he stayed there, humbly yet intelligently listening to and questioning the religious teachers, while his unsuspecting parents had already started on their way home. When they found that Jesus was not with them, they went back to the temple to look for him. On finding him, after three days' anxious search, his mother thus remonstrated with him:

"Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, YOUR FATHER and I have been looking for you anxiously" (Luke 2:48).

Of the four canonical Gospels, only two contain any reference to the virgin birth of Jesus. Mark and John do not mention anywhere that Jesus was born of a virgin without the agency of a male parent, which they would undoubtedly have done if this miraculous event had really taken place. Their

silence is sufficient to disprove the Christian view of the miraculous birth of Jesus. Peter, Paul and James also appear to know nothing of his virgin birth. Even Luke at several places in his Gospel refers to Joseph as the father of Jesus. The following is just one such reference:

“And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him” (Luke 2:33).

Thus the solitary reference in Luke’s Gospel to Jesus being born of a virgin, which we have quoted earlier, is either a later interpolation and Luke, like Mark, John, Peter, James and Paul, knew nothing about it, or, at least, the earliest records on the basis of which Luke built his narrative clearly recognised Joseph as the father of Jesus.

Moreover, according to some ancient prophecies mentioned in the Bible, the Messiah of the Jews was to be of the line of David. Both the genealogies of Jesus, given in the Gospels, trace his descent from David through Joseph the carpenter. Matthew’s version of the genealogy of Jesus is as follows:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king, and David the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthen, and Matthen the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.” (Matthew 1:1-16).

In Luke’s Gospel we find the following genealogy of Jesus: “Jesus when he began his ministry, was about thirty years of age, being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph, the son of

Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melchi, the son of Jannai the son of Menna, the son of Mettatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminabad, the son of Admin, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham . . . the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.” (Luke 3:23-38).

There are many discrepancies between these two genealogies, but they are both agreed on declaring Jesus to be the son of Joseph. The words in the brackets in Luke’s Gospel – i.e., “as was supposed” — are obviously later interpolations. For, if Jesus was not in fact the son of Joseph, there would be no sense in giving these genealogies; as, in that case, they would be genealogies not of Jesus but of Joseph, and Jesus would not be proved to be the descendant of David. It must also be stated that the verse 16 of the first chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, which in the Revised Standard Version (quoted above) reads as “And Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ” read differently in what is virtually the oldest manuscript, *Sinaiticus Palimpsest*, as “Jacob begat Joseph, and Joseph . . . begat Jesus, who is called Christ.”

The sayings of Jesus’ mother and of his contemporaries and the genealogies included in the Gospels leave no doubt in our minds that Jesus was not born of a virgin, but was the son of Joseph and Mary. The absence of any mention of his virgin - birth in the Gospels of Mark and John and the Epistles of Peter, James and Paul lead us to the same conclusion.

How Did This Belief Originate?

The sacred records of many nations show that nearly all teachers of religions were ridiculed and persecuted while they

were alive and raised to the divine pedestal after their deaths. Death and distance grant a halo to every great man. Like many other teachers of religions, Jesus also was deified after his death by his followers. The more they recalled his inspiring sayings and wondrous works the larger did Jesus loom in their imagination, till they began thinking that he was something more than human. They seized upon the expression "Son of God" which was occasionally used for him. It had been no doubt used only in the sense of his being the beloved or chosen of God. He himself had taught his followers to address God in their prayers as "Our Father Who art in heaven", meaning thereby that all human beings, and not Jesus alone, were the children of God. He had referred to all those who had love for their fellow-men as "Sons of God". As a matter of fact, this expression was not new in Jewish literature. Many earlier prophets, including Adam, David and Solomon had been called "sons of God" in the Bible.¹ But a section of Jesus' credulous and dazzled followers, from among the gentiles and the Jews of the dispersion, began to think of him as the Son of God in a literal and unique sense. They somehow concluded that Jesus was God who had come to live among men in a human body. This dogma developed gradually over a long period, and there were many followers of Jesus who continued to regard him as a man and a prophet till as late as the end of the fourth century. But these were outnumbered and suppressed by the believers in the deity and divine-sonship of Jesus.

Once the dogma of Jesus' divinity and Divine sonship had gained currency, the belief that he was born of a virgin was the next and perhaps a necessary step. It would have been incongruous for the Son of God to take birth in this world as a result of the normal and natural congress of a man and a woman. Karl Barth states the case frankly: "Christ being the saviour of mankind, his existence on earth must depend on Divine agency alone, and cannot have been due to an act of the human will, as it would have been if a human father had begotten him, whether the historical evidence be good, bad, or indifferent."² One impossibility leads to another. Setting aside

all historical evidence, some early Christian writers declared that Jesus was conceived by Mary of the Holy Spirit before her marriage to Joseph the carpenter.³ This is what we find in the Gospel according to Luke:

“And the angel said to her (Mary): ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’ ” (Luke 1:35).

Such beliefs did not seem impossible or extraordinary in those days. All around the land of Jesus there lived people who had been for centuries believing in virgin born sons of God.

Virgin-Born Sons of God of the Ancients

The Greeks regarded their sun-god Apollo and their hero Perseus as sons of God, born of virgins Leto and Danae respectively.⁴ The Egyptian sun-god Ra was regarded by the priests of Sais to be born of the virgin Neith.⁵ Mithras, the Persian god of light and wisdom, was believed by his devotees to be born of a virgin.⁶ Tammuz and Adonis were the virgin-born Sons of God of the Babylonians. The Nordic hero Balder was believed to be the son of the All-Father Odin and the virgin Frigga. And even in the far off Mexico, the culture-hero Quetzalcoatl was regarded as the son of the virgin Chimalman and the god Mixcoatl.⁷

Was Jesus Born on 25th December?

The Gospels lend no support to the view that Jesus was born on the 25th of December. If what Luke says, in the second chapter of his Gospel, is correct, then we shall have a strong reason for believing that Jesus was not born in December. The Gospel of Luke states that when the angels appeared to the shepherds to give them the good news of the birth of Jesus, they were in the fields “keeping watch over their flock by night” (2:8). This could not have taken place in December, for that month is the height of rainy season in Palestine, when neither

flocks nor shepherds could have been at night in the fields of Nazareth or Bethlehem.

The 25th of December was fixed as the date of the nativity of Jesus more than five centuries after the event by a Scythian monk Dionysius Exiguus. Ernest Renan writes in his famous *Life of Jesus*:

“It is known that the calculation which served as basis of the common era was made in the sixth century by Dionysius the Less. The calculation implies certain purely hypothetical data.”⁸

The significance of 25th December in the Calendar of Sun-Worshippers

Like the belief that Jesus was the virgin born son of God, the date of his birth also was taken from pagan religions and mythologies. According to Wallace K. Ferguson, Professor of History, New York University:

“Christian celebrations were created to replace pagan feasts and holidays. For example, the date of Christmas was set on the birthday of Mithras (the unconquered Sun), which had long been a day of joyous celebration in the pagan world. The assimilation by Christianity of so much of popular belief and practice was in no small degree responsible for its almost universal acceptance during this period, but it involved the sacrifice of its early purity and simplicity.”⁹

25th of December was an important date in the calendar of the Sun-worshippers. All the Sun-gods of the ancient world were supposed to have been born on or very near that date. Mithras, the sun-god of the Persians, was said to be born on the 25th of December. Apollo, the Greek sun-god, was also born on the same date. Horus, the Egyptian god, was born on the 28th of December.

The ancient sun-worshippers had a special reason for holding this date sacred. After the Autumnal Equinox the day

starts becoming shorter; the powers of darkness keep on gaining the upper hand over the powers of light; the sun grows weaker and weaker. This goes on till the Winter Solstice, that is, the 25th of December, according to the calendars of the ancients. From that day, however, the day again starts becoming bigger; the sun begins to grow in strength and glory. The ancients, therefore, concluded that on that date the sun was born. And, according to cyclic theory believed by the ancients, what happened once, happens every year. The 25th of December was therefore regarded as the birthday of the Sun-god. So, not only the belief in the divine-sonship and the virgin-birth of Jesus, but also the date of his birth was taken over from the cults of the ancient sun-worshippers. This shows the extent to which the pagan beliefs and practices were superimposed on the simple religion of Jesus, the Prophet of God.¹⁰

Was Jesus Born at Bethlehem?

Finally we take up the question of the birth-place of Jesus. Of the four canonical Gospels, two – viz., the Gospels of Matthew and Luke – mention Bethlehem as the place of birth of Jesus. What weighed with them in fixing Bethlehem as the birth-place was the Old Testament prophecy of Micah. Bethlehem had been the home of the family of King David; and when the Prophet Micah (shortly before 700 B.C.) wanted to depict the coming of the Messiah, who would belong to David's stock, he naturally glorified Bethlehem as the place of his origin. For Luke and Matthew this was a sufficient reason for believing that Jesus was born at Bethlehem. Thus it is that Matthew says that the Wise Men, on being asked by King Herod where the Messiah had been born, replied: "In Bethlehem of Judaea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel'" (Matthew 2:5-6).

Historically, however, there is no evidence for believing that Jesus was born at Bethlehem. The reasons which Luke gives in order to explain how it came about that a Nazarene

couple were at this moment at Bethlehem are in the last degree unconvincing. History makes no mention of any census being held by order of the Roman Emperor Augustus in the territory of King Herod in Palestine. Moreover, no government in its senses would have required a village-carpenter to undertake a journey of seventy miles simply in order to fill up the census-paper at the place where his *ancestors* had lived centuries before. And lastly, is it likely that, even if Joseph *had been required* to go to Bethlehem, he would have taken with him on such a journey his wife, who would not be required for the census, and who was moreover in a very advanced stage of pregnancy?

Many modern scholars, therefore reject the statements of Matthew and Luke and consider Nazareth to be the birthplace of Jesus.

The correct historical position with regard to the birth of Jesus, therefore, is that he was the first-born son of a Jewish girl named Mary and her husband Joseph, and that he was born at Nazareth sometime between 7 and 5 B.C. on a date which it is not now possible to determine.¹¹

The Views of Modern Scholars

The following are the views of a few modern Western scholars on the subject of the birth of Jesus.

When Ernest Renan, in *The Life of Jesus* (1863) came out with the simple, yet devastating statement, "Jesus was born at Nazareth, a small town of Galilee He proceeded from the ranks of the people. His father, Joseph, and his mother, Mary, were people in humble circumstances,"¹² the world simply gasped in astonishment and horror. In two sentences there disappeared the lovely Bethlehem story, the dogma of the Virgin Birth, the whole theology of the Incarnation and the Atonement. It brought down upon Renan's devoted head such a whirlwind of rage and calumny as few have ever endured, and fewer still survived. But truth will ultimately prevail. Before the

close of the century, nearly all the independent minds of the West, including several Church dignitaries, were acknowledging the correctness of Renan's views.

Cecil John Cadoux, Professor of New Testament at the Yorkshire United Independent College, Bradford (1919-1933) and Mackennal Professor of Church History at Mansfield College, Oxford (1933-1947), writes this in his *Life of Jesus*:

"Jesus was the first-born son of a Jewish girl named Mary and her husband Joseph, a descendant of King David, who worked as a carpenter at a small town of Nazareth in the region of Palestine known as Galilee. The date of birth was about 7-5 BC., and the place in all probability Nazareth itself. Towards the end of the first century A.D., it came to be widely believed by Christians that at the time of his birth his mother was still a virgin, who bore him by the miraculous intervention of God. This view, however, though dear to many modern Christians for its doctrinal value, is unlikely to be true in point of fact."¹³

And this is what Edgar J. Goodspeed, "America's greatest New Testament scholar" writes:

"In Matthew's story of the virgin birth of Jesus the idea of his divine sonship is translated into narrative form. The Jewish mind instinctively cast its doctrines in the form of narrative. But while the manner of the story is clearly Jewish – the casting of dogma into narrative – the subject matter of it is just as definitely Greek; Greek legend was full of demigods – sons begotten by Zeus, with human mothers. It was a way of stating Jesus' divine sonship in terms intelligible and acceptable to the Greek mind. And to this day many people cannot think of his sonship in any other way. But while Luke takes a very similar view of his birth, our earliest sources, Mark and Paul, show no knowledge of it, and Matthew and Luke are not consistent about it, as both of them trace Jesus' ancestry through Joseph to David."¹⁴

Finally, this is what Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, another very distinguished and widely read scholar, writes on the same subject:

“There is no evidence in the Gospels, apart from the birth stories themselves, that any member of Jesus’ family or any of his first disciples ever thought of him as virgin born. Mark, who gathered from Peter the facts of Jesus’ life, does not mention it. In Matthew and Luke, where the birth stories appear, are two genealogies, so inconsistent that they cannot possibly be reconciled, both of which in tracing Jesus’ lineage come down to Joseph, not to Mary. These genealogies are inconceivable except on the supposition that when they were prepared Joseph was thought to be Jesus’ father. Indeed in the Monastery of St. Catherine on the traditional Mount Sinai is an ancient Syriac translation of Matthew’s Gospel rendering, so scholars feel assured, an older manuscript of Matthew than any which we now possess, and ending the genealogy with its only logical conclusion: ‘Joseph begat Jesus.’ As for Luke, he quotes the genealogy he has before him, but destroys its meaning as a record of Jesus’ lineage by his parenthesis: ‘Jesus . . . being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph.’

“The category of virgin birth was alien to Jewish thinking. The passage in Isaiah, in which the church, at the time Matthew and Luke were written, found prophecy of Mary’s virginity — ‘Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son’ — was taken not from the original Hebrew but from the mistaken rendering in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which even Paul and much more the later church commonly used. The original Hebrew says not ‘virgin’, but ‘young woman.’ It was the Greek world in which virgin births were a common way of explaining unusual personalities. So Plato was said to be virgin born, and Alexander the Great, and Asclepius, and Pythagoras and Simon Magus and Apollonius of Tyana, and many more. In the second century, when Justin Martyr stated the case, he even put Jesus’ birth, for argument’s sake, in the same category with such legends:

'When we declare that the Word, who is the first-born of God, came into being without sexual intercourse . . . we do not report anything different from your view about those called sons of Zeus.'

"If, then, it was in the later Hellenistic area of the church that the story of the virgin birth arose, this would explain why the early records of Jesus' first contemporaries reveal no slightest sign that they ever thought of him as physically begotten by the special act of God. Had they so thought of him, those closest to him, his 'friends', his 'family', would never have said that he was 'beside himself' in undertaking his mission. As his first, immediate contemporaries saw him, therefore, he was not yet being explained by the category of virgin birth, and one of the strongest indications of this is the alienation between himself and his mother."¹⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. See the Holy Bible: Luke 3:38, the Psalms 2:7, 87:26-27, 1 Chronicle 22:10; Exodus 4:22-23.
2. Quoted by C.J. Cadoux in his *Life of Jesus*, a Pelican Book, Penguin Books, West Drayton, Middlesex, 1948; p. 29.
3. Since 1854 it has been a Catholic dogma that Mary also was miraculously conceived free from the original sin.
4. *Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary*, articles: Apollo, Perseus, Danae; Everyman's Library, J.M. Dent, London, 1942.
5. *Everyman's Dictionary of Non-Classical Mythology*, article: Neith; Everyman's Library, J.M. Dent, London, 1953.
6. J.M. Robertson, *Pagan Christs*; Watts and Co., London; p. 338.
7. Ivar Lissner, *The Living Past*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1965; p. 374.
8. Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, Modern Library, New York, p. 83, footnote 3.
9. Wallace K. Ferguson, *A Survey of European Civilization*, Part I, Houghton Mifflin Company, Cambridge, Massachusetts (U.S.A.) 1939; p. 112.
10. See Khwaja Kamal-ud-Din, *The Sources of Christianity*, the Woking Muslim Mission, Woking, England, and the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat-i Islam, Lahore.
11. For the Qura'nic view of the birth of Jesus see Maulana Muhammad Ali's *Muhammad and Christ* and Khwaja Nazir Ahmad's *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*; both published by the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i Islam, Lahore.
12. Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, Modern Library, pp. 81, 83.
13. C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, a Pelican Book, p. 27.
14. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *A Life of Jesus*, Harper Torchbook, Harper and Row, New York; p. 29.
15. Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Man from Nazareth*, Pocket Book, Inc., New York, 1953; pp. 118-119.

Chapter 7

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Christians regard Jesus as the Divine scapegoat for the sins of man. St. Peter is reported as having written: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19). St. Paul wrote that as by the disobedience of one man, Adam, the entire human race has become sinful, so by the atoning sacrifice of one man, Jesus Christ, the sins of all those who believe in him are washed away and they will enjoy eternal life (Epistle to Romans 5:18-19). Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross to atone for their sins.

Jesus Christ was arrested in the garden called Gethsamane, where he had gone, together with some of his closest disciples, to take refuge and pray. He was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, one of his chosen apostles. When Jesus was arrested all his disciples forsook him and fled.

The Gospels give contradictory accounts of his trials. But it appears that he was first taken to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of Caiaphas the High Priest. Annas, however, sent him on to the house of Caiaphas, by whom he was subjected to a cross-examination, presumably in preparation for a later hearing before the Jewish Sanhedrin. Finally the Sanhedrin was assembled at the High Priest's house. The members of the Sanhedrin "sought testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many bore false witness against him, and their witness did not agree" (Mark 14:55-56). At last the High Priest asked him directly: "Are you the Christ (Messiah), the son of the Blessed?" Jesus answered: "So you say. But I tell all of you: from this time on you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Almighty and coming on the clouds of heaven!" (Matthew 24:64) ' While the claim to be the Messiah,'

writes C.J. Cadoux, 'was not necessarily blasphemous in itself, it was so regarded if the claimant were – as the Sanhedrin held Jesus to be – an obviously unworthy person.' Sentence of death for blasphemy was then unanimously passed.

However, the Roman Government did not allow the Jews to inflict a capital sentence. In order therefore that the Sanhedrin might obtain the execution of the death sentence in this case, it was needful that they should get a decision to that effect from Pilate. Accordingly at an early hour they repaired with Jesus to the Procurator's house. The proceedings before Pilate are not clearly recorded; but it seems likely that the enemies of Jesus took the most promising line and accused him of being a political rebel. To Pilate's direct question: "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered: "you have said so" (Mark 15:2). Pilate was not convinced of the charge brought against Jesus by the Jews and could find nothing that would justify his sentencing Jesus to death. Accordingly, he made repeated attempts to save him. But the Jewish leaders were determined to see him crucified, and Pilate apparently acceded to their demand under pressure.

The scene of execution was at a place called Golgotha, situated outside Jerusalem. Jesus was divested of his garments, and fastened to the cross. Two robbers who were slated for execution were crucified at the same time, one at his right and one at his left. Crucified men often lingered for many hours – sometimes even for as many as five days – before death came to their relief. But Jesus remained on the cross for only six hours, according to Mark and Matthew – from the third hour (9 a.m.) to the ninth hour (3 p.m.) – or for only three hours, according to John – from the sixth hour (12 noon) to the ninth hour (3 p.m.).

The Synoptics state that there was three hours' preternatural darkness from 12 noon to 3 p.m., and that the Temple-curtain was torn in two from top to bottom. At about 3 p.m. Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabach-thani?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). Soon after this, according to the Gospels, "Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit."

With sunset the fifteenth of Nisan (April 8th), the first day of the solemn Passover - season, and as it happened this year also a Sabbath, would begin. It was undesirable to have the bodies of dying men exposed in public on such a day; so the Jewish authorities asked Pilate that they might be immediately dispatched and removed. Accordingly, Pilate sent his soldiers and they broke the legs of the two robbers and killed them and took their bodies down from the crosses. But when they came to Jesus, it appeared to them that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. But when "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, at once there came out blood and water" (John 19:34).

Soon after the body of Jesus was taken down from the cross, Joseph of Arimathaea, a member of the Sanhedrin and a secret disciple of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked to be allowed to take the body of Jesus away. Pilate could not at first believe that he was already dead; but having ascertained from the centurion that it was so, he gave Joseph the permission he sought. Joseph, with the help of Nicodemus, applied myrrh, aloes and other herbs to the body of Jesus and wrapped it in a linen sheet. They did not bury it in an ordinary tomb, but laid it in a fairly large rock-hewn cave and rolled a circular stone to close the door of the cave. The faithful Galilean women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, Mary of Magdala, and Mary, Joseph's mother, witnessed Joseph's action and saw where the body was laid.

"Next day, which was a Sabbath," writes Matthew, "the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, 'Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive. After three days I will rise again. Therefore order the sepulchre to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away, and tell the people: He has risen from the dead. And so the last error will be worse than the first'" (Matthew 27:62-64). So Pilate allowed them to seal the sepulchre - "This was done", we read in a footnote in *The Living Bible*, "by stringing a cord across the rock, the cord being sealed at each end with clay"¹ - and a guard was set over it.

On the Sunday morning, the women, Mary Magdalene the first, came very early to the rock cave. The stone was displaced

from the opening, and the body was no longer in the place where they had laid it. Mary Magdalene ran and reported the matter to Peter, and he and another disciple went into the cave. They found the linen cloth lying there, but the body of Jesus was not there.

Later, John tells us, while Mary stood weeping, she saw Jesus in the garden but did not recognise him; she thought he was the gardener:

“Saying this, she turned and saw Jesus standing, but she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, why are you weeping? Whom do you seek?’ Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, I will take him away’ ” (John 20:14-15).

Similarly, Jesus appeared in a disguise to two other disciples on the road to Emmaus. “They saw him,” says Luke, “but somehow did not recognise him.” To his question, “What are you talking about to each other?” they replied: “Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. . . Moreover, some women of our community amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.” (Luke 24:19-23). Somehow they failed to recognise that the man about whom they were talking was walking with them.

Later still he went to his eleven chosen disciples. “They were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit has no flesh and bones as you see that I have.’ And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, ‘Have you

anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them" (Luke 24:37-43).

Jesus Had Fainted and Not Died, on the Cross

Christians believe that Jesus died on the cross, but on the third day he miraculously came back to life (Resurrection), and after a brief stay with his disciples, ascended bodily to heaven, to sit at the right hand of God the Father (Ascension). The Apostles' Creed, which is believed by the Christians of all denominations, states.

"We believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried: He descended into hell: the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven. And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty: from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead."²

However, a careful study of the details of the crucifixion and of the so-called post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, as given in the Gospels, will show that the belief that Jesus had died on the cross arose as a result of a misunderstanding. What was supposed to be the death of Jesus was actually a coma into which he had fallen. His so-called resurrection was nothing more than a recovery from unconsciousness and injury. The following facts must be kept in mind when considering this question:

1. It is believed by the Christians that Jesus had come to this world to willingly lay down his life as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of man. But the events that took place in the garden of Gethsemane can hardly be taken to support this view. It is obvious that Jesus did not wish to die. Having come to know that one of his chosen apostles, Judas Iscariot, had betrayed him to his enemies and that any moment he might be arrested, he asked his apostles to keep watch over him the whole night, while he prayed earnestly to God to save him from an

ignominious death on the cross. Matthew reports: "He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here and watch with me' " (Matthew 26: 37-38). Luke adds: "In great anguish he prayed even more fervently; his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." (Luke 22:44). "And going a little farther," says Mark, "he fell on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him, and he said:

"Abba, Father, all things are possible to Thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:35-36).

His appearance in the same body to his disciples the third day after the crucifixion, – for he showed them the wounds on his body and asked them to touch him with their hands – shows that his prayer in distress that his life may be spared and that he should not die on the cross was granted by God.

The Epistle to the Hebrews in the Bible clearly and unequivocally says that it was so:

"In his life on earth Jesus made his prayers and requests with loud cries and tears to God, who could save him from death. Because he was humble and devoted, God heard him" (The Letter to the Hebrews. 5:7)⁵

2 Jesus, like all similarly condemned men of his time, was stretched upon a cross, after having been stripped of his clothes. A projecting peg came in between his legs to take the main weight of the body and on it he sat as on a saddle.⁴ Sometimes there was also a support for the feet, but whether Jesus was provided that support for his feet is not known. His hands and feet were then fastened to the beams with great nails. The injuries produced by nailing in this manner, while causing great pain at the time, specially at the wrists, were not in themselves of great importance. The bleeding soon stopped and was never fatal.⁵ The real cause of death, whenever it took place, was the unnatural position of the body which brought on a frightful disturbance of the circulation, terrible pains in the

head and the heart and the frequent rigidity of the body. The condemned man was left on the cross in this condition and it usually took him two to three days to die; sometimes he lingered on for as many as five days before death came to his relief. But Jesus remained on the cross for only three hours, according to John, or, at the most for six hours, as Mark would have it. John's version seems more probable, as it is difficult to imagine how all the business recorded in the Gospels could have been got through by 9 a.m. But even if the longer period is accepted, it is most unlikely that Jesus had died within six hours. It appears that what the centurion thought to be death was only a coma into which Jesus had fallen.

3. This probability, that Jesus was only in a death-like swoon and was still alive when he was taken down from the cross, becomes almost a certainty when we take into consideration what John says about one of the soldiers piercing a spear in Jesus' side and the flowing out of blood and water. The coming out of blood shows that the heart of Jesus had not stopped beating. The "water" mentioned by John was the result, as shown by Dr. W.B. Primroe, of the nervous upset of the blood vessels locally due to the over-stimulating effect of the scourging by staves.⁶

4. The same conclusion is forced upon us by the fact that the two thieves, who were hung together with Jesus, were still alive when they were taken down and their legs had to be broken to cause their death. Jesus was fortunately spared this brutal treatment, as the soldiers mistook his coma for death.

5. Again, it was rather fortunate that the body of Jesus was not buried in an ordinary tomb and covered over with mud and sand. It was taken away by Joseph of Arimathea, who kept it in a rock-hewn cave with a stone rolled over its mouth. It appears that this secret disciple of Jesus had found out that life was still there in the body of Jesus; for he applied an ointment to his wounds to heal them and to bring him back to consciousness. The Eastern medical practitioners have for centuries known the formula of an ointment called "Marham-i Isa" (the ointment of Jesus) and traditions say that it was applied to the wounds of Jesus after he was taken down from the cross.⁷ The ingredients

used in the preparation of this ointment include those mentioned by John.

6. His so-called post-resurrection appearance to Mary shows that he was disguised as a gardner. Such a disguise was not necessary if he had risen from the dead. He had obviously escaped death on the cross and was anxious to avoid being arrested a second time. Indeed, so perfect was his disguise that even his disciples who walked with him on the road to Emmaus could not recognise him. It is significant that on all such occasions he appeared only before his close disciples. He did not think it expedient to appear before his enemies or before the general public. If he were indeed the conqueror of death, such caution would not have been necessary.

7. It has been suggested that Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, had a hand in Jesus' escape. Pilate was very much impressed by Jesus and was convinced of his innocence. He argued against putting him to death and made several attempts to save him:

"Upon this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, 'If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar'" (John 19:12).

And this is what we find on the same subject in the Gospel of Matthew:

"Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. And they had then a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas. So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, 'Whom do you want me to release for you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?' For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, 'Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream' Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the people to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor again said to them, 'which of the two do you want me to release for you?' And they said, 'Barabbas'. Pilate said to them, 'Then what shall I do with Jesus who is

called Christ?' They all said, 'Let him be crucified? And he said, 'Why, what evil has he done?' But they shouted all the more, 'Let him be crucified.' So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves?' (Matthew 27:15-24).

Commenting on this, A Faber-Kaiser writes that Pilate could not afford to jeopardise his rank and antagonise Caesar. "What, then, was he to do? Other than to do exactly as the Jews wished, his only option was to carry out the execution in such a way that Jesus might survive it, unknown to his enemies. In this context, it is particularly interesting that he arranged the crucifixion for shortly before the commencement of the Jewish Sabbath – sunset on Friday – as, under Jewish law, criminals could not be left hanging after the Sabbath had begun."⁸ His expectation and hope was that considering that he would be on the cross only for a short time, Jesus would not die, and Pilate could then arrange to have him taken down alive.

8. It appears that the Jewish chief priests soon found out that the life of Jesus had been mistakenly spared. They went to Pilate and requested him:

"Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, 'He is risen from the dead'; so the last error shall be worse than the first" (Matthew 27:64).⁹

This clearly shows that the Jews knew that Jesus was alive. For, even if the disciples had stolen his dead body they could not have put life in it to be able to say that he had risen from the dead.

9. Finally, Jesus had himself prophesied that he would come down alive from the cross. He compared his fate to that of Jonah the prophet:

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign; but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the Prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of

the whale, so will the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:39-40).

Now Jonah was cast *alive* into the sea, remained *alive* in the belly of the whale for three days and was vomited out *alive*. So Jesus also was taken down *alive* from the cross (in a state of coma), remained *alive* in the sepulchre, and came out *alive* from it.

The Quranic View

Muslims believe in Jesus as God's Prophet and Messiah for the people of Israel. They accept both Jesus and Muhammad as Messengers of God. The same God who "sent Jesus and gave him commandment what to say and what to speak", revealed the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an corrects the errors that had found their way into the Gospels' due to interpolations and misinterpretation and alteration of Jesus' words. The Qur'an declares that Jesus did not die on the cross:

"And for their saying: 'We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God; and they killed him not, nor did they cause his death on the cross, but he was made to appear to them as such; and certainly those who differ therein are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, but only follow a conjecture, and they killed him not for certain" (The Qur'an 4:157).

The Qur'an further states that God gave Jesus and his mother Mary "refuge on a lofty ground having meadows and springs" (23:50). The researches of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, and of his followers, have shown that the place referred to in the Qura'nic verse quoted above is Kashmir. After escaping from Palestine Jesus went to Kashmir in search of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" to preach his gospel to them. He died at the ripe old age of 120 and was buried in Khanyar street, Srinagar, Kashmir, where his tomb exists even today.¹⁰

A Surgeon Looks at the Crucifixion

Several modern scholars are arriving independently at the same conclusion: that Jesus was not dead when he was taken down from the cross. The following is an extract from the article "A surgeon Looks at the Crucifixion" by Dr. W.B. Primrose, senior Anesthetist, Glasgow Royal Infirmary.

"This brief survey of the wounds inflicted in the course of this particular crucifixion shows that there was at no time anything likely to produce so early a death. The actual nail-wounds were surgically trifling as compared with injuries generally from which recovery is the rule. There were no sequelae from the spear-wound; and the other wounds, caused by the carrying of the cross on the right shoulder, the blow upon the side of the face, and the crown of thorns, do not call for comment here. Christ did not have his legs broken and so was spared the shock attendant upon this injury. He was also removed from the cross - a procedure more painful than the crucifixion itself - under complete anesthesia (since the spear - thrust elicited no active response to the pain), so that there was little additional shock from this cause.

"To those present the appearance presented by Christ after his collapse suggested that death had taken place, and there were no reasons for doubting it. It is, however, commonly known that the generally accepted appearances of death might not satisfy a medical jurist, who would insist on evidence of completely arrested circulation, and we seem to be faced with the carefully recorded evidence that after the spear - thrust *some circulation was still present, since active bleeding and secretions generally stop with the cessation of heart-beat which alone is death.*

"Such conditions of low vitality are well-known to the anesthetist of today; further, the nervous mechanism by which such a low-grade circulation is maintained (often for a long time under toxic or other conditions of acute depression) is well understood. It often requires close observation to detect its activity and to realize that life is being continued with the

possibility of recovery once the threatening condition is removed. These medical considerations have, therefore, a direct bearing upon the accounts of the Resurrection.

“With everyone satisfied that Christ had died when he collapsed, little further interest was shown by his enemies. His friends and relatives could do little in their bewilderment; it would also appear that none of them had the influence or the means necessary to claim his body for orthodox Jewish burial; and burial, even of criminals, should take place on the day of the death. This situation was, of course, relieved by Joseph of Arimathaea, who was able to approach Pilate directly and get permission to have the body removed for burial. This and the procuring of the essentials for burial appear to have taken the best part of two hours, leaving very little time for the ritual before sunset – about six o’ clock. The need for haste led to considerable shortening of the ritual when the body was removed from the cross. The body was not washed as it should have been, and there was no time to use the herbs and the bandages which kept them applied to the body. Instead, the shroud was spread with an ointment or paste of aloes and myrrh to “cleanse” the material. The body was then laid on one half of the shroud, the other half being folded over the body from head to feet. In this condition Christ was conveyed on a litter to Joseph’s own tomb, where John and the womenfolk saw the body deposited. They then departed to prepare for the burial which they fully expected to take place on the morning of the third day. Entombment allowed of this delay.

“The weather conditions on this particular day were those usual for the time of the year: warm and sunny during the day with very cold nights. We may suppose that Jesus, practically nude on the cross, did not lose much body heat during his state of shock and collapse. When, however, the body was placed in a much cooler tomb, the difference of temperature would soon show a vital loss of body heat. With the change of decubitus from the vertical to the horizontal, some recovery would be expected to take place, and an early sign of this would be a rigor or shivering fit as the initial muscle effort to produce more body heat. In a person so very exhausted, this would take a little

time. If such a rigor did not take place before John and the womenfolk had left, it must have happened very soon after, and showed Joseph that Jesus was apparently not yet dead and was in a state of incipient revival. Medical knowledge would lead us to suppose that Christ could not have spent any length of time in the tomb, certainly not much more than an hour. It would have been impossible for anyone in his condition to survive even a night in such a place covered only by a linen sheet.

“Judged by purely medical evidence provided in the Gospel accounts, it would appear that such evidence is not sufficient to pronounce (in the light of modern medical knowledge) with absolute certainty that Jesus was actually dead when his body was removed from the cross. This may seem to be a negative conclusion, but it is of great importance in any interpretation of the Resurrection appearances.”¹¹

Arthur Weigall's Views

Arthur Weigall also is of the view that Jesus did not die on the cross. He writes:

“Jesus had not passed beyond recall upon the cross, but that, having sunk into a condition indistinguishable from death, He was carried to the sepulchre, where He recovered, and was perhaps given somebody's clothes to wear, which led to His being mistaken for the gardener. In this case the supposed angelic figures seen by the two Marys would have been mortal men who had helped our Lord during the night. In support of this theory it is to be observed that He had not been much hurt by being crucified.

“To the modern religious mind, in fact, there can be very little difference in saying, as do the orthodox, that Jesus was temporarily dead, but after a few hours came to life again, and saying, as do the critics, that He passed into a condition indistinguishable from death, and then returned to life.

“We can no longer accept the appalling theological doctrine that for some mystic reason a propitiatory sacrifice was necessary. It outrages either our conception of God as Almighty or else our conception of Him as All-Loving. The famous Dr.

Cruden believed that for the purpose of this sacrifice 'Christ suffered dreadful pain inflicted by God'; and this, of course, is a standpoint which nauseates the modern mind, and which may well be termed a hideous doctrine not unconnected with the sadistic tendencies of primitive human nature. Actually, it is of pagan origin, being, indeed, perhaps, the most obvious relic of heathendom in the Faith."¹²

The Evidence of the Turin Shroud

But perhaps the most exciting and convincing confirmation of the fact that Jesus did not die on the cross comes from the recent studies of the Turin Shroud. The linen cloth in question, which is preserved within the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist at Turin (Italy), is believed by many to be the shroud in which the body of Jesus was wrapped after it was removed from the cross. It bears an impression of Jesus' body as he lay in the sepulchre and also marks of blood which flowed out of the wounds on his body and was absorbed into the cloth.¹³ Kurt Berna, secretary of the German Institute at Stuttgart, is one of the many who have made a thorough scientific study of the Turin Shroud. The results of these investigations have been published by Kurt Berna in two books: *Das Linnen* (The Shroud) and *Jesus nicht am Kreuz Gestorben* (Jesus Did Not Die on the Cross).¹⁴ A brief summary by Andreas Faber-Kaiser of a portion of the second of these books is reproduced below:

"Berna says that analysis of the shroud shows that Jesus's head and hands were placed higher than the rest of his body. Had Jesus been dead when wrapped in the shroud, this would have meant that no fresh blood could have flowed from these parts and left traces on the cloth. However, Berna maintains that the cloth shows traces of blood running from the wounds caused by the crown of thorns that the Romans wound round Jesus's head, mocking him as 'King of the Jews', and that, once the body was lowered from the cross and the 'crown' removed, the wounds caused by the thorns started to bleed. If Jesus had been dead for some time, all the blood would have congealed in the lower part of his body. It is nature's law that, provided the

heart continues to pump, the blood will continue to circulate, even in a vacuum. Once the heart has stopped beating, the blood will cease to circulate and will begin to retract in the veins, the capillary blood vessels below the skin surface will drain, and the pallor of death will appear on the body. Thus, as fresh blood could not have flowed from Jesus' head wounds if his heart had stopped beating, there is medical evidence that Jesus was not dead when he was wrapped in the shroud. He may have stopped breathing, and so appeared to be dead; but, provided the heart is still beating, it is possible, in such circumstances, to revive the person by intensive medical treatment.

"A thin line on the shroud shows where blood from the nail wound in the right hand flowed along the right arm when the hand was unnailed. Seeing that the blood was fresh and soaked into the Shroud, this provides additional evidence that Jesus' heart was still active when he was lowered from the cross.

"The Shroud also provides evidence of where the lance that the Roman soldier used to test that Jesus was dead entered and left the body. Bloodstains show that the lance pierced the right side of the chest, between the fifth and sixth ribs, and emerged on the upper left-hand side, making an angle of twenty nine degrees. Since this means that the lance passed close to the heart, but did not damage it, the 'blood and water' that John (19:34) tells us flowed from the wound could not have been drawn from the heart. This shows that the heart was still beating however faintly, and that Jesus was still alive."¹⁵

FOOTNOTES

1. *The Living Bible*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, Illinois, U.S.A., 1974; p. 921, footnote 27K.
2. George Brantl (editor), *Catholicism*, The Apostles Creed, p. 175; published by Washington Square Press, Inc., New York, 1962.
3. *Good News Bible*, Today's English Version, British and Foreign Bible Society, London, 1976.
4. See C.J. Cadoux, *The Life of Jesus*, p. 203.
5. See W.B. Primrose, *A Surgeon Looks at the Crucifixion*, Thinker's Digest, Winter 1949, p. 26.
6. *Ibid*, pp. 27-28.
7. See Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, pp. 197-198.
8. A. Faber-Kaiser, *Jesus Died in Kashmir*, Abacus edition, published by Sphere Books Ltd., London, 1978, p. 25.
9. The Holy Bible, Authorized Version.
10. (i) Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, *Jesus in India* (an English version of *Masih Hindustan Mein*, written in 1899), the Oriental and Religious Publishing Corporation, Rabwah.
(ii) Khwaja Nazir Ahmad, *Jesus in Heaven on Earth*, Woking Muslim Mission, Woking (England) and Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i Islam, Lahore (Pakistan), 1952.
11. Dr. W.B. Primrose, *A Surgeon Looks at the Crucifixion*, Thinker's Digest, London, Vol. 2, No. 6, Winter 1949; pp. 28-29.
12. Arthur Weigall, *The Paganism in Our Christianity*, London, 1928.
13. Ian Wilson, *The Turin Shroud*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1979.
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Chapter 8

THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

In the foregoing pages it has been shown that the religion of Jesus had very little in common with Christianity as it developed sometime after his passing away and as it continues to be believed by the various churches. The religion of Jesus was essentially the same as the religion of the earlier Hebrew prophets. The purpose of his coming was not to introduce a new religion but to revive the spirit of the old religion and to purge it of all its later accretions and misinterpretations. Jesus had the most profound respect for the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets and never opposed them or hinted that they would ever pass away. However, he seems always to have sought to get at the spirit of the law and the prophets and to stress what true obedience to them entailed. He said:

“Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

Dr. Morton Scott Enslin, one of the greatest Christian scholars of this century, writes the following on this subject:

“All this should make clear that the view, which still persists in some circles that Jesus’ aim was to found a Church, different from the Synagogue, is quite improbable. The gospels themselves bear little trace of such a view . . . Thus attempts to picture Jesus as breaking away from Judaism, of conceiving a new religion in which the Jew

and gentile stood alike, equal in the sight of God, would appear to be in flagrant contradiction to probability.”¹

Immediately after the departure of Jesus from Palestine, his followers formed themselves into a community at Jerusalem and chose James, the brother of Jesus, as their head. They called themselves Nazarenes. The name “Christian” was given to the believers in Jesus Christ about a hundred years later in the great Gentile capital of Antioch. The Nazarenes were, according to all accounts, faithful and devoted followers of Jesus. They believed in the unity of God (i.e. in the Single Person of God) and in Jesus as God’s messenger and Messiah for the Jews. To them Jesus was a human being and nothing more. They were of the view that Jesus had not abolished the Law of Moses, and so they faithfully observed the Law as Jesus had taught them. The Nazarenes believed, in the words of the Epistle of James, “that faith apart from works is barren” (2:20) and “that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone” (2:24). Both faith in God and good and kind deeds were necessary for salvation.

However, not long after the departure of Jesus a new kind of religion, absolutely different from the religion of the Nazarenes, began to be preached in the name of Jesus, particularly among the Jews of the Dispersion and their Gentile neighbours. The Jews who lived in Palestine were only a small fraction of the total Jewish population of the world. There were large Jewish colonies in all lands surrounding Palestine.

At the time of Jesus’ birth Alexandria was a great centre of learning and culture. Many religions and schools of philosophy flourished there. The Jews of the Dispersion had come under the influence of Greek philosophy and the Mystery Cults, each with its own saviour-god. It was believed about these saviour-gods that each one of them had met a violent death and that his death was vicarious sacrifice on behalf of his adherents and had brought a new life and salvation to them. When the religion of Jesus spread among these Jews and their gentile neighbours and some of them accepted him as the Promised Messiah, they interpreted him and his mission in the light of Greek philosophy and pagan

cults, and they opened the doors of this new religion to Jews and Gentiles alike. In the words of Dr. Morton Scott Enslin:

“But the transfer from Jewish to gentile soil brought even more radical changes. Not only did the movement speedily become a separate religion, distinct from Judaism, but, as its message was translated into terms intelligible and appropriate to gentile hearers, it became gradually more and more like the other cults with which it found itself in conflict. By the middle of the second century – and probably much earlier – it had become one of the Graeco-Oriental cults, and like the others offered salvation to its converts through its divine Lord.”²

The man who played the decisive role in cutting off Christianity from Judaism and making it “one of the Graeco-Oriental cults” and transforming Jesus from a Jewish Messiah and Prophet into the “Divine Lord” was Paul. This is what H.G. Wells writes about him:

“Chief among the makers of Christian doctrines was St. Paul. He had never seen Jesus nor heard him preach. Paul’s name was originally Saul, and he was conspicuous at first as an active persecutor of the little band of disciples after the crucifixion. Then he was suddenly converted to Christianity, and he changed his name to Paul. He was a man of great intellectual vigour and deeply and passionately interested in the religious movements of the time. He was well versed in Judaism and in the Mithraism and Alexandrian religion of the day. He carried over many of their ideas and terms of expression into Christianity. He did very little to enlarge or develop the original teaching of Jesus, the teaching of the Kingdom of Heaven. But he taught that Jesus was not only the promised Christ, the promised leader of the Jews, but also that his death was a sacrifice, like the deaths of the ancient sacrificial victims of the primordial civilizations, for the redemption of mankind. . . . St. Paul familiarised his disciples with the idea that Jesus, like Osiris, was a god who died to rise again and give men immortality. And presently the spreading Christian

community was greatly torn by complicated theological disputes about the relationship of this God Jesus to God the Father of Mankind."³

To Paul, Jesus was not a mere Prophet or Messenger of God; he was the heavenly Son of God. Though Paul did not believe in the Trinity (this doctrine had not yet been invented and become part of the Christian faith), yet he regarded Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of man: "There is for us only one God, the Father, Who is the Creator of all things and for whom we live; and there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created and through whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:6). Paul was of the view that all men were born sinful and would have suffered eternally in hell, were it not for the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the son of God. He came from heaven and died on the cross as a substitute for the sins of men, to redeem them by his blood: "The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us of every sin" (1 John 1:7), "For by the death of Christ we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven" (Ephesians 1:7). All those who believe in Jesus will be saved. Paul taught that with the advent of Jesus the Law was abolished and that "a person is put right with God (i.e. justified) only through faith, and not by doing what the law commands" (Romans 3:28). Salvation, according to him, was by faith only – faith in Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour – and not by good works: "For by grace are you saved by faith" (Ephesians 2:8), "If you confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from death, you will be saved. For it is by our faith that we are put right with God" (Romans 10:9-10).

That the religion of Paul was completely different from the religion of Jesus has been discussed in detail by Dr. Arnold Meyer, Professor of Theology, Zurich University, in his book *Jesus or Paul*. He writes:

"If by Christianity we understand faith in Christ as the heavenly son of God, who did not belong to earthly humanity, but who lived in the divine likeness and glory, who came down from heaven to earth, who entered humanity and took upon himself a human form through a

virgin, that he might make propitiation from man's sins by his own blood upon the cross, who was then awakened from death and raised to the right hand of God, as the Lord of his own people who believe in him, who hears their prayers, guards and leads them, who, moreover, dwells and works personally in each of them, who will come again with the clouds of heaven to judge the world, who will cast down all the foes of God, and will bring his own people with him into the home of heavenly light so that they may become like His glorified body – if this is Christianity, then such Christianity was founded by St. Paul and not by our Lord."⁴

There were bitter controversies and charges and counter-charges between the Nazarenes and the followers of Paul. Echoes of these controversies can be heard even today at many places in the New Testament. But ultimately the followers of Paul emerged triumphant and wiped out the Nazarenes. Thus, Christianity, as it is believed by the various churches, is not the religion of Jesus, but the religion of Paul, and many of its doctrines and rituals were taken over from pagan sources. I am taking the liberty of reproducing what A. Powell Davies, late pastor of the All Souls Church in Washington, D.C., has written on this topic.

Christian Origins and Pagan Influences

"The traditional view of the founding of Christianity taken by the typical Christian layman is that Jesus preached its gospel, died as Messiah and Redeemer, arose from the dead and founded the Christian Church, which spread out through the world, beginning with the work of the apostles. Or, if he does not believe in the Resurrection, he supposes that the apostles, moved by the spirit of Jesus, founded the church upon his gospel.

"He recognizes that Jesus was a Jew and inherited the Judaic tradition. He further recognizes that the apostles drew out the inferences of Jesus' gospel and thus expanded his doctrine;

and also that the apostles, because of what they had seen and heard during the lifetime of Jesus and because of their experiences afterwards, came to esteem him as what he had been all along but which they had only partly understood: the Saviour and Lord of mankind and Son of God.

"In any case, he assumes the originality of Christian doctrine, and it does not occur to him that much of it existed previously (except perhaps as it was foreshadowed by Moses and the prophets), or that a great deal of it is indebted to sources that do not appear in the Bible.

"What the layman does not know, and the scholar does, is that there were many pagan deities during the time of Jesus and afterwards for whom quite similar claims were made and in whose names were preached quite similar doctrines. Mithras was Redeemer of mankind; so were Tammuz, Adonis and Osiris. The view eventually taken of Jesus as a Redeemer was not a Judaic concept; nor was it held by the first Christians in Palestine. The Messiah the Jews and the Judaic Christian expected was not the Son of God but a messenger from God, not one who saved by blood-atonement but one whose salvation came from his rule of the earth in a Messianic Kingdom. The Judaic Christians were not thinking of a salvation that admitted them to heaven, but of a salvation which would establish a new order on earth, and this remained the case, even though they believed in immortality.

"It was when Christianity spread out into the Pagan world that the idea of Jesus a Saviour-God emerged. This idea was patterned on those already existing, especially upon Mithras. It was the birthday of Mithras, the 25th of December (the winter solstice), that was taken over by the Pagan Christians to be the birthday of Jesus. Even the Sabbath, the Jewish seventh day appointed by God in the Mosaic law and hallowed by his own resting on this day after the work of Creation, had to be abandoned in favour of the Mithraic first day, the Day of the Conquering Sun.

"In the Mediterranean area during the time of Christian expansion, nowhere was there absent the image of the Virgin Mother and her Dying Son. Originally, it was the earth itself

that was the goddess, virginal again with every spring. Her son was the fruit of the earth, born only to die, and in dying, to be implanted once more in the earth, as the seed that would renew the cycle. This was the 'vegetation myth' from which the drama of the 'Saviour-God' and the 'Mater Dolorosa' was drawn, soon to be elaborated.

"The cycle of seasons on the earth was seen to be paralleled by a coordinate cycle in the heavens. There, too, was to be seen the virgin goddess: the constellation Virgo that rose in the eastern sky just when Sirius, the star from the east, was signaling the new birth of the Sun. The passage of the horizon line through Virgo was the conception of the Virgin from the Sun. The earth myth was thus blended with the sky myth and both with the memory of ancient heroes, real or legendary, and so came the saga of the Redeemer.

"The cave, later to be associated with the birth of Jesus, was earlier the birthplace of Horus, who, when he was grown, would become Osiris, who must die for the salvation of his people. Isis was the *Mater Dolorosa*. There were innumerable such salvation cults, as described by such writers as Sir James G. Frazer in his *Golden Bough*, and by the great classical scholar, Professor Gilbert Murray.

"In these cults were found the same sacraments later to be called Christian. The Last supper (Eucharist) belonged to Mithraism, from whence it was borrowed to combine with the sacred meal of Palestinian Christianity. Not only sacraments but such concepts as 'the blood of the Lamb' (or of Taurus the Bull) were likewise taken from Mithraism. And not only cultist concepts but ethical teachings too were absorbed from the cults which entered into Christianity. In addition, there were ethical teachings which were not cultist, such as those of the Stoics.

"The extent of the indebtedness of Christianity to Pagan religion is so great that, provided there was a Judaic - Christian nucleus at all, very little indeed need have been supplied by the Palestinian Christians. It must be remembered that after the earliest days little was said of Jesus the teacher. It was Christ the Saviour who was Lord of the Christians. And whether it had been he or the Lord Mithras would have made very little

difference in the redemptionist doctrines, the sacraments and observances of the Church that at last declared that 'Christ' was the Saviour God, a decision formalized by a majority vote in 325 A.D., at the Council of Nicea.

"It will be seen, then, that what the scholar knows and the layman does not, is the extent to which Christianity would have become what it did without Jesus and his disciples at all. The only element of importance that is found nowhere in Paganism is the portrait of Jesus the teacher; but this, as we have already noted, was not the emphasis of Pagan Christianity. By the third century, it had passed almost out of sight, not to return until the Enlightenment, the Protestant Reformation, and the invention of printing brought the Bible to the people. The Bible, indeed, had been considered too dangerous a book to put into the hands of the laity: they were not equipped to understand it and it might be an incitement to heresy. It was the Christ of the Creeds and the Sacraments, the Salvationist God, that the Christian church for so many centuries was concerned with: Jesus of Galilee it scarcely knew at all.

"The one essential nexus for making the Judaic Christ the victor in the struggle of salvationist religions was Paul of Taurus Pharisee, yet a Hellenist, an inspired Jew with a profound comprehension of Paganism. Supreme master of synthesis, it was he who first conceived the purpose of binding Israel to Athens, the dying Temple of Jerusalem with the Mithraic sacrifice, the Essenic Jehovah with the Unknown God of Areopagus. As the Apostle Paul, this was the world-minded 'Christianos' – never merely a Palestinian Christian – who knew his 'Lord' not in the flesh but through his own 'gnosis', and saw that Apollos, Mithras and Osiris could be made to bow before his own Hebraic Adonai, and that by absorption of their saviourhoods and blood redemptions, the Messiah of Israel could become the World-Christ."⁵

Thus, in the words of the historian Winwood Reade:

"Christianity had conquered paganism, and paganism had corrupted Christianity. The legends which belonged to Osiris and Apollo had been applied to the life of Jesus. The single Deity of the Jews had been exchanged for the trinity,

which the Egyptians had invented and which Plato had idealised into a philosophic system. The man who had said 'Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God,' had now himself been made a god – or one third part of one."⁶

FOOTNOTES

1. Morton Scott Enslin, *Christian Beginnings*, Part II, p .166, Harper Torchbooks, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1956.
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3. H.G. Wells *A Short History of the World*, a Pelican Book, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1943; p. 129-130.
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5. A Powell Davies, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, a Mentor Book, the New American Library, New York, 1960; pp. 89-92.
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