IS THIS THE BIBLE YOU BELIEVE?

A brief examination of the basic doctrines of the Bible

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1. IS THIS THE BIBLE YOU BELIEVE? A brief examination of the basic doctrines of the Bible

- by Mrs. Ulfat Aziz-Us-Samad

This We Believe is a booklet published by "Back to the Bible", an organization that broadcasts the Christian message and teachings five times every week from FERA radio station, Seychelles. The booklet has two parts. The first portion is the Back to the Bible's official Statement of Faith. The remainder is a teaching guide and commentary on the Statement of Faith. It expands and clarifies the Statement and is designed as a guide for those who speak on the radio and write and edit the Back to the Bible publications. Back to the Bible is a Protestant Fundamentalist body with its headquarters in Lincoln, Nebraska, U.S.A., and with branches in many parts of the world, including Pakistan.

In the following lines we shall be critically examining the Christian tenets as set forth in the booklet *This We Believe*.

The Bible

"We believe that the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testaments, is the revelation of God to mankind, is verbally and fully inspired by Him, is sufficient for the knowledge of God and His will that is necessary for the eternal welfare of mankind, is infallible and inerrant, and is the supreme and final authority for all Christian faith and conduct." (This We Believe)

This is a fundamental Christian view. However, there is an evergrowing number of liberal Christians who do not accept the Bible as verbally inspired and infallible. Protestant Liberals do not deny inspiration in the Bible. God speaks to men through the Biblical writers; but the heavenly gold is mixed with much earthly dross. They believe that because of the human element in the Bible, many things in it are erroneous, unscientific and unedifying. There is evidence everywhere of the writers' ignorance, limitations and imperfections, and of later distortions and interpolations. The Bible is inspired only in its spirit, and not in its letter or verbal expression.

The Higher Critics, who include among them many eminent Christian theologians, are of the view that nearly all the books of the Bible are composite works. Many a Biblical book was produced by combining manuscripts of different ages and by different writers. For example, no independent Biblical scholar regards the five books ascribed in the Bible to Moses (the Pentateuch or the Torah) as the works of Moses. In the present form they were written at least a thousand years after the death of Moses by putting together four different documents of widely differing quality and belonging to widely different periods. Similarly, no independent scholar regards the Gospels according to Matthew and John as the works of the apostles whose names they bear. In fact, none of the four Gospels was written by an eye-witness. The first three Gospels proceed on the basis of the same document, which is substantially identical with Mark. However, the writers of the Gospel of Matthew and Luke handled their Marcan source very freely. Used in Matthew and Luke, but not known to Mark, is an older document - a collection of the sayings, parables and some episodes of the life of Jesus - known in critical nomenclature as Q, a lost Aramaic document which reached the evangelists in a Greek translation. The fourth Gospel is very different from the first three; it has hardly any historical value. Many of the 'sayings' put in the mouth of Jesus in John's Gospel are not genuine; they were invented by the fourth evangelist himself.

The Bible contains many things that have been shown to be incorrect by Science. According to the Bible the world was created in six days of twenty-four hours each. The earth and trees were created in a sunless universe on the third day, while the sun was created on the fourth day (Genesis, chap. 1). Woman was created out of the rib of the first man (Genesis 2: 21-27). In the Book of Joshua it is written that God stopped the movement of the sun to prolong the length of the day, in order to enable the Israelite army of Joshua to complete its work of wiping out its enemies (Joshua 10: 12-14).

The Bible is full of myths and legends. It says that the "son of God" came down to the earth and married the "daughters of man" and gave birth to giants and demigods (Genesis, 6: 1-4). God also came down to the earth in a human form and wrestled with Jacob and, but for a foul trick, would have been defeated by him (Genesis, 32: 24-30). Balaam's ass is said to have conversed with her master in a human language (Numbers, 22: 28-30). The wife of Lot was transformed into a pillar of salt because she disobeyed God and looked back at the burning cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis, 19: 23-26).

Opinions in the Bible vary greatly, from God as an Omnipresent Spirit to a very limited Being. In the 'New Testament it is written that God occupies a throne in Heaven and that Jesus ascended bodily to Heaven to go and sit at the right hand of God. The Apostles are to be not far away on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. The Book of Genesis says that when God heard about the son of Sodom and Gomorrah, He said, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come to Me; and if not, I will know" (Genesis 18: 20-21).

Hideous cruelty receives repeatedly a divine sanction in the pages of the Bible. God commanded the Beni-Israel to slaughter and utterly destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan, men, women and children. However, when they made war outside Canaan, they were to slaughter the males; all women and children were to be taken by them as slaves for their own use (Deuteronomy, 20: 13-17). Moreover, the Bible commands the stoning to death of all blasphemers (Leviticus, 24: 16), all the so-called witches and wizards (Leviticus 20: 27, Exodus, 22: 18), all adulterers and adulteresses (Leviticus, 20: 11), and all those who curse their fathers and mothers (Leviticus, 10: 9).

The Bible has many contradictions. To give just one example, the Bible contains two different genealogies of Jesus. In the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, Jesus' descent has been traced through Jospeh, in the former from Adam, the "Son of God" (Luke, 3: 23-30), and in the latter from Abraham (Matthew 1: 1-17). And then both go on to contradict themselves by declaring that Jesus was not the son of Jospeh, but was born of a virgin, without the agency of a male parent. Moreover, they also contradict each other at many points. In Matthew's Gospel the name of Joseph's father is said to be Jacob, but in Luke's Gospel it is Heli. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus is to be the descendant of David through his son Solomon, but in Luke's Gospel he is the descendant of David through his son Nathan.

The Bible is not one book, but a collection of all that was written by the Israelites over many centuries on several different subjects, both religious and secular. For instance, the Song of Songs, which is ascribed to Solomon in the Bible, is not a religious book, but a collection of love lyrics in which a man and a woman express their love for each other in passionate language, often employing erotic and sensual imagery. Similarly, Ecclesiastes — also ascribed to Solomon — is not a religious book. It is the work of a pessimistic cynic, who says, "It is useless, useless. Life is useless, all useless. You spend your life working, labouring, and what do you have to show for it? Generations come and generations go, but the world stays just the same". "Everything that happens was already determined long ago". "God has laid a miserable fate upon us. I have seen everything done in this world, and I tell you, it is all useless. It is like chasing the wind. You can't

straighten out what is crooked; you can't count things that aren't there." "Everything leads to weariness — a weariness too great for words." "What has happened before will happen again. What has been done before will be done again. There is nothing new in the whole world." "I envy those who are dead and gone, they are better off than those who are still alive. But better off than either are those who have never been born, who have never seen the injustice that goes on in this world." "I have found something more bitter then death — woman... I have found one man in a thousand that I could respect, but not one woman." "My life has been useless, but in it I have seen everything. A good man may die while another man lives on, even though he is evil. So don't be too good or too wise — why kill yourself?". "The best thing a man can do is to eat and drink and enjoy what he has earned during the short life that God has given him; this is man's fate."

God

"We believe that there is but one God, whose essential nature is that of a living personal Spirit. He is infinitely perfect in all of His attributes. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and He exists in an inscrutably complex form which is described as "The Trinity'. Although He is only one God. He exists in three Persons — Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are distinct in terms of personality but identical in terms of essential being". (This We Believe).

The unity of God is one of the most important doctrines taught by every prophet. So when the Christians declare that "there is but one God," they are expressing their faith in the truth which is repeatedly taught and emphasized in the Bible. But they go on to say that there are three separate persons in the Godhead, each one of whom is God - the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God - and yet there are not three Gods but one God. This is obviously self-contradictory, for if there are three separate Divine Persons and each is by himself God, then there must be three Gods. The doctrine of the Trinity is not only self-contradictory, but it is also not found anywhere in the Bible: "Most theologians today recognise that this doctrine is not found in the Bible. The most conservative Region Prenter even says that it is altogether useless to look for it there". (Norsk Theologisk Tidsskrift, No. 1, 1967). The Trinity was invented a couple of centuries after Jesus by deifying two creatures — Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit — and associating them with God as partners in His Godhead.

Jesus Christ

"We believe that Jesus Christ is true God and true man; that is, He is fully divine and also fully human. He pre-existed eternally with the Father, was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, lived a perfect life, and died a substitutionary death for the sins of mankind. We believe that He arose bodily from the grave, that He ascended to Heaven, where He is presently High Priest and Advocate for His people and that He will return personally and bodily to the earth at the close of the age. He is the world's only Saviour and is the Lord of all" (This We Believe).

The doctrine of the Deity of Jesus, as defined in the above Statement of Faith, is contrary to all that Jesus said and stood for. He would not even allow anyone to address him as "Good Master". When a man called him "Good Master", he rebuked him: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Mark, 10:18). He spoke of himself as "a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God" (John, 8:40). He made a clear and fundamental distinction between himself and God—"the only true God"—and claimed only to be a messenger of God: "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent" (John, 17:3). Again and again he declared that in everything he said and did, he followed not his own will, but the will of God. He confessed his total and absolute dependence on God and continually prayed to Him for help and guidance; and in his agony on the cross he cried out: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Matthew, 27:46).

Christians say that Jesus was God from all eternity, that he pre-existed eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit as one of the persons of the Divine Trinity; that about two thousand years ago he decided to come down to the earth in human body and was born of the virgin Mary, thus becoming God-Man—"true God and true man". Now God is Almighty, but man is limited in might and power. God is all-Knowing but man is not all-knowing. If Jesus was both true God and true man, then he was at the same time almighty and limited in power, all-knowing and limited in knowledge and wisdom, which is obviously self-contradictory and absurd. The fact is that Jesus was not a God who had appeared in a human body; he was not God-incarnate—for the doctrine of the Incarnation is evidently incompatible with the infinitude and perfection of God— He was a man, in every sense a mortal, who was later on glorified and made into a God by his superstitious followers.

The Holy Spirit

"We believe that the Holy Spirit is a divine person, the third person of the Trinity. We believe that He was sent from the Father by the Son to convict the world, to regenerate and indwell those who trust in Christ, to baptize them into the body of Christ, to seal them for the final day of redemption, to guide them to the truth, to fill them for a life of holiness and victory, and to empower them for witness and service. We believe that He gives spiritual gifts to the believers for the proper functioning of the Body of Christ, which is the Church." (This We Believe.

In Jewish religious thought Holy Spirit is the angel of prophecy. "All the prophets," writes G.F. Moore, "spoke by the Holy Spirit" (Judaism, vol. I, p. 237). This was Jesus' view also, as Dr. Morton Scott Enslin has pointed out in his famous book on the Christian Beginnings. After showing that Jesus' faith was that he was chosen by God as His prophet and messenger, he continues: "If this is the case, he must have believed himself to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, for in the thinking of Judaism the Holy Spirit is specifically the spirit of prophecy" (Christian Beginnings, vol. 2, p. 164). So after his baptism, when the Holy Spirit came upon him, it was no doubt to reveal to him that he had been chosen by God as his Prophet and Messiah to the Jews.

For Jesus and his early followers the Holy Spirit was not a divine being or a person of the Godhead. Like all angels, he was a creature of God. It was only much later that he was made a divine person. The deification of the Holy Spirit followed the deification of Jesus Christ. Jesus is reported to have said, "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in the world to come" (Matthew, 12:52). So, if Jesus, the Son of man, was God, the Holy Spirit must also be God. The basic mistake of the Christian theologians — their first deviation from the revealed religion and teachings of the prophets (including the teaching of Jesus himself) — was to deify Jesus. This led to the deification of the Holy Spirit (the angel of prophecy), and finally to the invention of the doctrine of the Trinity.

Man

"We believe that man was originally created by a definite act of God in His own image and is dependent upon, and accountable to, his Creator. Through disobedience the first man sinned and fell from his original state of moral perfection. As a consequence, he brought upon

himself and upon the whole human race the penalty of sin, which is spiritual and physical death. Since Adam, every person is born with an inherently sinful nature and becomes a sinner in thought, word and deed. Every person, therefore, stands under the just condemnation of God and is unable to save himself or to present deeds worthy of merit before God". (This We Believe).

The doctrine of the Original Sin also is against the teachings of Jesus and the other prophets. Christians believe that by disobeying God and eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam committed a sin. The sin of Adam, they say, is transmitted through heredity to the children of Adam; all human beings are born sinful and with an inherently depraved and sinful nature. The teaching of all prophets, however, has been that sin is not something which passes through heredity from the father to the son. The act of sin makes only the man committing it sinful. The sin of one man cannot make another man a sinner. The sin of the father does not automatically make his children sinful.

In the Bible itself, the Prophet Jeremiah is reported to have said; "In those days they shall say no more, the fathers have eaten a sour grape and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jeremiah, 31: 29 - 30)

And this is what we read in the Book of Ezekiel: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked shall turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ezekiel, 18: 20 - 21).

This was also Jesus' view. There is nothing in his reported sayings to suggest that all men have inherited the original sin of Adam and are born sinners, with an inherently sinful and depraved nature. On the contrary, he believed in the innocence and sinlessness of all children and said: "Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark, 10:15).

To condemn the entire human race because of the sin committed by Adam and to declare all men to be sinners by birth, having an inherently sinful nature, is not only the height of injustice but also an aspersion upon the Creator Himself.

Salvation

"We believe that a person is saved by God's grace alone, made possible through the shed blood of Christ, whereby He died a substitutionary death for mankind, and through the resurrection of Christ. Salvation becomes effective when a person, by an act of faith acknowledges Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour and Lord. The benefits of this salvation include the forgiveness of sins and a new person standing before God. The impartation of new life, and all the privileges that accompany a new family relationship with God. The assurance, of salvation as a present possession is the privilege of every believer in Christ." (This We Believe).

Thus, the Christians believe not only that the disobedience and sin of one man (Adam) has made all men sinners, but also that the sacrificial and substitutionary death of one man (Christ) has washed away the sins of all those who accept him as their Saviour and Lord. But the teachings of all prophets, including Jesus Christ, has been: "Every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Just as the sin of one man cannot make others sinful, so the goodness of one man cannot be attributed to other men. No one can atone or become a sacrifice for the sin of others. In the spiritual and moral realms everyone is accountable for his own actions, or as Jesus said, "Everyone must bear his own cross." The prophet can only point out the right way and serve as a guide and exemplar to others; he cannot bear the cross of others. To quote Jesus, "Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple". (Luke, 14:24).

Moreover, to show grace and forgive men their sins, God does not require the shedding of blood or substitutionary sacrifice and death. What God wants is that men should repent, turn away from evil and keep His commandments. When a man came to Jesus and asked him: "Good Master, what good things shall I do that I may have eternal life?". He said nothing at all about the man's inability to save himself by his good deeds or about his own substitutionary sacrifice and faith in him as the Saviour and Lord. On the contrary, his reply was: "Why callest thou me good? There is none but one, that is, God; but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments". (Matthew, 19: 16-17).

Christians, however, aver that God does not forgive the sins, that it is against God's justice to forgive the sinners without receiving full

compensation or inflicting the full measure of punishment on someone, not necessarily on the sinner himself. So, they contend that Jesus, who was sinless, came forward and died a substitutionary death on behalf of the sinners to satisfy God's justice and win forgiveness for those who believe in him as their Lord and Saviour. Our answer to this is threefold: (1) It is injustice and vengeance, and not justice, on the part of God to punish and kill a sinless person, even if for the sake of argument it be supposed that the latter was willing to gie a substitutionary death on behalf of the sinners. (2) God does punish the unrepentant and the hardened sinner — the sinner himself, and not some other person in his place but only in proportion to his sin, and not for ever and ever. Ultimately His mercy prevails. (3) But, as for the repentant sinner, God forgives him without inflicting chastisement on him or on anyone else on his behalf, and when He does this He is not doing anything against His justice or holiness. To forgive a repentant sinner is not a violation of justice.

God is all-forgiving and all-merciful. It has been the teachings of all prophets, including Jesus, that God is ever willing to forgive the shortcomings and failures of men, provided they repent and try their best to eschew evil and do good. Jesus taught this lesson through his beautiful parables of the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, etc. In fact, this teaching is found on almost every page of the Gospels.

The Christian doctrine of Salvation is not based on the teaching of Jesus. It was invented by Paul, who had not even seen Jesus and knew almost nothing about his teaching. Paul transformed Jesus into a Saviour-God on the pattern of the Saviour-Gods of the various Mystery Cults, with which he was familiar. It was Paul, and not Jesus, who taught that all men were born sinful, because of the sin committed by the first man (Adam), and that the death of Jesus was a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of mankind. It was Paul who said : "Without the shedding of blood there was no remission" (Hebrew. 9: 22) and that by his blood shed on the cross Jesus had paid the price for the sins of men, satisfied the outraged justice of God, and thereby made provision for the salvation of those who believe in him as their Saviour and Lord. Paul taught that salvation was by faith alone, and not by good deeds. The religion that the Christians believe and which is propagated by "Back to the Bible" through its radio broadcasts and publications is not the religion of Jesus, but the religion of Paul, as expounded later by the Chruch Fathers, and in the Church Councils and Creeds, and given a new formulation by the leaders of the Reformation particularly by Luther and Calvin. This is obvious from the fact

that most of the quotations in the booklets *This We Believe* are from the Epistles of Paul; others are from John's Gospel, which was written under Pauline influence.

TRINITY THE DOCTRINE OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity, as understood and believed by Christians of both Roman Catholic and Protestant persuasions, means the *Three Creeds*, namely, the Apostles, the Nicene and the Athanasian. The characteristic doctrines of Christianity are (1) the Trinity, (2) the Godhood of Jesus Christ, (3) the Divine-sonship of Jesus, (4) the Inherent 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 as against the Triune God of Christianity. It considers the Christian deification of Jesus to be a reversion to paganism. Jesus, according to the Holy Qur'an was not an incarnation of God, but a Prophet of God and, like all other prophets (including Prophet Muhammad), he was every bit a human being. Islam rejects the Divine-sonship of Jesus: he may be called a son of God in the sense that all righteous and merciful human beings are the children of God, but not in any literal or special sense. And, likewise it disbelieves in the Christian dogmas of Inherent Sin, Crucified Deity and Atonement.

The cardinal principles of Islam are (1) the Unity of God, (2) the belief in the Prophets raised by God among all the nations of the world, (3) the belief in the Revelations by God to the Prophets to guide human beings to truth and righteousness, (4) the inherent sinlessness of human nature and man's capacity for unlimited moral and spiritual growth (through belief in God and faithful adherence to the inspired teachings of the prophets), (5) Life after death, and (6) the equality and fraternity of all men and women.

The Trinity

The doctrine of Trinity is that three distinct Divine Persons in Godhead — God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. The Athanasian Creed states.

"There is one Person of the Father, another of the Son, and 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. 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 verity, to acknowledge every person by himself to be

God and Lord. So, we are forbidden by the Catholic religion to say that there are three Gods, or three Lords."

All this is obviously unintelligible and contradictory. For if there are three separate persons and each is by himself God, there must be three Gods. Like nearly every article of the Christian creed, the dogma of Trinity is a crude attempt to bring together two entirely different notions without reconciling them. The Christian Church recognizes the impossibility of harmonizing the belief in three distinct Divine Persons with the Oneness of God, and so it declares the doctrine of Trinity to be a mystery which cannot be comprehended by the human mind but has to be just believed in. This is what the Rev. J. F. De.Groot says in his book, Catholic Teaching: (1933) Page 110.

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

Strangely enough, Jesus Christ himself never even mentioned the Trinity. He knew or said nothing at all about there being three Divine Persons in Godhead. His conception of God was in no way different from that of the earlier Hebrew Prophets, who had always preached the Unity of God and never the Trinity. Jesus merely echoed the earlier prophets when he said:

"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." (Mark, 12: 29 - 30).

He believed in $One\ Divine\ Person,\ One\ God$, as is evident from his following saying :

"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and $Him\ only$ shalt thou serve." (Matthew, 4:10).

The doctrine of Trinity was coined by the Christian Church more than a hundred years after the departure of Jesus. The four Canonical Gospels, written between the years 70 and 115 C.E., contain no reference to the Trinity. Even Paul, who, imported many foreign ideas into Christianity, knew nothing of the Triune God.

Rationally considered, the dogma of Trinity is contradictory. It is not only beyond reason, but repugnant to reason developed as a result of the deification of two creatures of God, Jesus Christ and the mysterious Holy Spirit, and their association with God as partners in

His Godhead. As explained in the Christian literature it amounts to the separate personification of three attributes or aspects of God. Whether considered from historical viewpoint or otherwise, it is regression from rational theology to mythology. For, at the root of all mythical systems lies the irrational tendency of the human mind to deify great men and personify non-personal forces and attributes and present them as Divine Persons.

The dogma of Trinity, which recognizes three separate Divine Persons, is a denial of the Oneness and perfection of God. Divinity cannot be divided into two or more persons. God is the Self-sufficient, Eternal and infinite Being, and to attribute divinity to three persons is to deny the essential nature of God. There cannot be three separate eternal and infinite beings.

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