

**The New Testament Prophets in the Quran**

**(Volume 2 of the Quran Series)**

**Part 2**

FAROOQ MIRZA MD

**The First-Ever Rendition of the Quran  
According to Specific Topics and the Subject Matter**

**From  
The Quran Foundation**

## **Table of Contents**

### **PART 2: The New Testament Prophets**

#### **Unitarian or Jewish Christianity**

Chapter 15: House of Imran, Zachariah, and John the Baptist

Chapter 16: Mary and Jesus

Chapter 17: The Ministry of Jesus Christ

Chapter 18: The Teachings of Jesus and Comparison with the Quran

Chapter 19: The Death of Jesus

#### **Trinitarian Christianity in the Post-Jesus Era**

Chapter 20: Pauline Christianity

Chapter 21: The Birth of the Trinity

Chapter 22: The Quranic Rebuttal to Jesus Being the Son of God, Mariolatry, and the Trinity

#### **Salvation Theology**

Chapter 23: Paul's and Augustine's Salvation Theology

Chapter 24: What Did Jesus Say about Salvation?

Chapter 25: The Islamic Perspective of Salvation

#### **Unity in Diversity**

Chapter 26: Evil of Sectarianism

Chapter 27: The Divine Law of Diversity

Chapter 28: Common Beliefs and Call for Unity

Chapter 29: How Did Prophet Muhammad Treat Christians?

## **Unitarian or Jewish Christianity**

## **Chapter 15**

### **House of Imran, Zachariah, and John the Baptist**

#### **Limited Contacts with Christian Communities**

Interaction with Christians was limited during Islam's formative state. The Prophet had contact with only a few Christians in Mecca. No Christian community was close to Mecca or Medina, comparable to Medina's established Jewish community. The nearest Arabian Christian communities were on the southern border of Hijaz (Najranites), the northeastern border of Syria (Ghassanids), and the northwestern frontier of Persia (Lakhmids). All three communities belong to the Syrian church. They believed in monophysitism, the Christological position that Christ's nature was divine only, a view later considered heretical by Catholic and Orthodox churches. In his travel to Syria for caravan trade, the Prophet encountered Christians. He was well-versed in Christianity and Judaism. Muhammad was 40 years old when his mission began in 610 with the revelation of the first five verses of the ninety-sixth surah (al-alaq, the germ-cell). Muhammad was emotionally overwhelmed, and his wife Khadijah consulted her cousin Waraqah ibn Nawfal, a Christian who had translated part of Evangel into Arabic. When she finished telling him what Muhammad had seen and heard, Waraqah broke into these words: "Holy, holy! He who dominates Waraqah's soul must be the Great Spirit that spoke to Moses. Muhammad must be the Prophet of this nation. Tell him that he must be firm."

#### **The First Exile of Muslims to Christian Ethiopia (615)**

Profoundly afflicted by the suffering of his disciples at the hand of the Quraysh, the Prophet advised them to seek refuge in the neighboring Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. Less than a hundred Muslims secretly immigrated to Abyssinia. The Quraysh sent two of their ambassadors to King Negus to extradite

these fugitives to Mecca. The principal charge was the abjuration of their old religion and adopting a new one. King Negus sent for the exiles and inquired whether their enemies had stated the truth. Jafar, son of Abu Talib, and brother of Ali, acting as a spokesman for the group, spoke thus: "O king! We were in a state of immorality, worshiping idols, eating carrion, committing all sorts of iniquity. We honored no relative and assisted no neighbor. The strong among us exploited the weak. Then God sent us a prophet, one of our people, whose lineage, truthfulness, loyalty, and purity were well-known to us. He called us to worship God alone and repudiate all the stones and idols our ancestors and we used to worship. Our Prophet commanded us always to tell the truth, remain true to trust and promise, assist the relative, be good neighbors, abstain from blood and things forbidden, and avoid fornication, perjury, and false witness. He commanded us not to rob the wealth of the orphan or falsely accuse the married woman. He ordered us to worship God alone and never associate any other being with Him, hold prayers, fast, and give charity [the five pillars of Islam were here enumerated and explained]. We believed in him and what he brought to us from God and followed him in what he enjoined and forbade. Our people, however, tried to sway us away from our religion and persecuted us, and inflicted upon us great suffering that we might reenter into the immoral practices of old. As they vanquished and berated us unjustly and made life intolerable for us in Mecca, we chose you and your country and came thither to live under your protection in justice and peace." Thereupon the Negus asked, "Will you show me some revelations which your Prophet claims have come to him from God?" Jafar answered, "Yes!" and recited the nineteenth surah Maryam [Mary]. When the Negus and the patriarchs heard this statement, they were pleasantly surprised and said, "These words must have sprung from the same fountainhead from which the words of our master Jesus Christ have sprung." Negus asked them to tell him more about Jesus. Jafar ibn Abu Talib answered, "Our judgment of Jesus is exactly as that which was revealed to our Prophet; namely, that Jesus is the servant of God, His prophet, His spirit, His command given unto Mary, the innocent virgin." Negus drew a line on the floor with his cane and said, "Between your religion and ours, there is no more difference than this line." At

this, the king denied the extradition of Muslims to Mecca.

### **Noble Line of Descent from Imran (Amram of the Bible)**

*Say [O Prophet]: "If you love God, follow me, [and] God will love you and forgive you your sins. For God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace." Say: "Pay heed unto God and the Apostle." Behold, God raised Adam, Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the House of Imran, above all humanity, in one line of descent. And God was all-hearing, all-knowing (3:31-34)*

The reference to the house of Imran is an introduction to the stories of Zachariah, Mary, John, and Jesus. They were all prophets from the Islamic perspective since God spoke to them. Almost all the prophets mentioned in the Quran were descendants of two or more of these patriarchs discussed above. The house of Imran comprises Moses and Aaron, their father Imran (the Amram of the Bible). Aaron's descendants, the priestly caste among the Israelites— including John the Baptist, both of whose parents were of the same descent, and Jesus, whose mother, Mary, was a close relation of John.

"One line of descent" alludes not merely to the physical descent of those prophets but also suggests that all of them were spiritually linked and believed in the same fundamental truth. The above passage logically follows verses 3:31-32, making God's approval contingent upon obedience to His chosen message-bearers.

### **Birth of John the Baptist**

*An account of the grace which thy Sustainer bestowed upon His servant Zachariah: When he called out to his Sustainer in the secrecy of his heart, he prayed: "O my Sustainer! Feeble have become my bones, and my head glistens with gray hair. But never yet, O my Lord, has my prayer unto Thee remained unanswered. "Now, behold, I am afraid of [what] my kinsfolk [will do] after I am gone, for my wife has always been barren. Bestow, then, upon me, out of Thy grace, the gift*



*of a successor who will be my heir as well as an heir [to the dignity] of the House of Jacob; and make him, O my Sustainer, well-pleasing to Thee!" [Thereupon, the angels called out unto him:] "O Zachariah! We bring thee the glad tiding of [the birth of] a son whose name shall be John. [And God says,] 'Never have We given this name to anyone before him.'" [Zachariah] exclaimed: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when my wife has always been barren, and I have become utterly infirm through old age?" Answered [the Angel]: "Thus. it is [but] thy Sustainer says, 'This is easy for Me—even as I have created thee aforetime out of nothing.'" [Zachariah] prayed: "O my Sustainer! Appoint a sign for me!" Said [the angel]: "Thy sign shall be that for full three nights [and days] thou wilt not speak unto men. Thereupon, he came out of the sanctuary to his people and signified to them [by gestures]. "Extol His limitless glory by day and by night!" [And when the son was born and grew up, was told,] "O John! Hold fast unto the divine writ with [all thy] strength!" For We granted him wisdom while he was yet a little boy, as well as, by Our grace, [the gift of] compassion and purity; and he was [always] conscious of Us and full of piety towards his parents; and never was he arrogant or rebellious. Hence, [God's] peace was upon him when he was born, and on the day of his death, and will be [upon him] on the day when he shall be raised to life [again]. (19:2-15)*

A parallel description of the birth of John is given in the third chapter of the Quran.

*In that self-same place, Zachariah prayed unto his Sustainer, saying: "O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me [too], out of Thy grace, the gift of goodly offspring; for Thou, indeed, hearest all prayer." Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him: "God sends thee the glad tiding of [the birth of] John, who shall confirm the truth of a word from God, and [shall be] outstanding among men, and utterly chaste, and a prophet from among the*

*righteous." [Zachariah] exclaimed: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when old age has already overtaken me, and my wife is barren?" Answered [the Angel]: "Thus it is God does what He wills." [Zachariah] prayed: "O my Sustainer! Appoint a sign for me!" Said [the Angel]: "Thy sign shall be that for three days thou wilt not speak unto men other than by gestures. And remember thy Sustainer unceasingly and extol His limitless glory by night and by day." (3:38-41)*

A summary regarding the birth of John is given in chapter twenty-one.

*And [thus did We deliver] Zachariah when he cried unto his Sustainer: "O my Sustainer! Leave me not childless! But [even if Thou grant me no bodily heir, I know that] Thou wilt remain when all else has ceased to be!" And so, We responded unto him, and bestowed upon him the gift of John, having made his wife fit to bear him a child [and,] verily, these [three] would vie in doing good works and would call unto Us in yearning and awe; and they were always humble before Us. (21:89 -90)*

The father of John the Baptist, Zachariah, was a righteous priest and prophet of God whose office was in the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. He frequently managed the Temple's services and always remained steadfast in prayer to God. He anticipated his kinsfolk—who, like himself, were priests attached to the Temple—would be morally too weak to fulfill their duties with dignity and conviction, according to Razi, and perhaps unable to safeguard the future of Mary, whose guardian he was. Fakhruddin Razi, (who lived from 1150 to 1210), known as the Sobriquet Sultan of the theologians, was a Persian Islamic scholar and pioneer of inductive logic who did various works in medicine, chemistry, physics, astronomy, theology, cosmology, philosophy.

Zachariah's wife, Elizabeth, was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus (cf. Luke 1:36).

The expression *Kalimah* ("word from God") is often used in the Quran to denote an announcement from God, a statement of His will, or His promise. The Arabic name Yahya (John) signifies "he shall live," i.e., he will be spiritually alive and remembered forever. God Himself had chosen this name for him, a singular distinction, equivalent to a divine promise (kalimah). It is identical to the similar announcement conveyed to Mary regarding the birth of Jesus. Zachariah was merely enjoined not to speak to anyone for three days and was not struck dumb as in the New Testament narrative (Luke 1:20-22). The "sign" was purely spiritual and consisted of Zachariah's utter self-abandonment to prayer and contemplation. Besides minor differences, Zachariah, John the Baptist, and Mary's stories are similar in the Quran and the New Testament Gospel of Luke. The statement, "This is easy for me," refers to God's unlimited power to bring into being a new chain of causes and effects.

In the nineteenth and third surah, Jesus follows the miraculous birth of John the Baptist, who was a precursor of Jesus, and there is a similarity in these two miraculous births.

### **Stoning to Death of Zachariah**

In 827 BCE, King Solomon dedicated the first Jewish Temple, called one of the World's Seven Wonders, to its extraordinary beauty. Later, the kingdom of Israel practiced idolatry. God repeatedly sent prophets to admonish the Jews. Still, they refused to change their ways, choosing instead to deride these prophets as false messengers, coming to discourage them with predictions of the destruction of the Temple. The prophet Zachariah chastised the nation for their sins, warning them of the grave punishments that would befall them if they did not change their ways. Rather than accept his rebuke, the people stoned Zachariah to death in the Temple courtyard. (2 Chronicles 24:17-22)

## **Beheading of John the Baptist**

John the Baptist is famous in Christianity for baptizing Jesus and paving the way toward initiating His ministry. The gospels of Matthew (Matthew 14:1–12) and Mark (Mark 6:14–29) recorded that Herod Antipas had John the Baptist arrested and imprisoned after the preacher condemned the king's marriage to his wife, Herodias, as illegal, because she had previously been married to his brother, Philip. Herod Antipas initially resisted killing John because of his status as a holy man. But then his stepdaughter, Salome, danced for him at his birthday party and offered to give her anything she desired. Prompted by her mother, who resented John's judgment of her marriage, Salome requested John the Baptist's head on a platter, and her wish was granted.

## Chapter 16

### Mary and Jesus

#### Birth of Mary

*And God was all-hearing, all-knowing when a woman [mother of Mary] of [the House of] Imran prayed: "O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow [the child] in my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!" But when she had given birth to the child, she said: "O my Sustainer! Behold, I have given birth to a female"—while God had been fully aware of what she would give birth to, and [fully aware] that no male child [she might have hoped for] could ever have been like this female—"and I have named her Mary. And, verily, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed." And thereupon, her Sustainer accepted the girl-child with goodly acceptance, and caused her to grow up in goodly growth, and placed her in the care of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: "O Mary, whence came this unto thee?" She would answer: "It is from God; behold, God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning." (3:35:37)*

The male child that the mother of Mary had prayed for could not have been like this female—which implies that Mary's excellence would go far beyond any hopes that her mother had ever entertained. There is no indication either in the Quran or in any authentic tradition that Mary's provisions were miraculous in origin. Mary's answer to Zachariah reflects her deep consciousness of God as the ultimate Provider.

As stated previously, Zachariah asked the angel how he could have a son when he was old and his wife was barren. One of the purposes of relating John the Baptist's birth story was to convey that the miraculous birth does not confer divine status to that person. A similar story of John the

Baptist's and Jesus' births is mentioned in Luke's gospel.

### **Drawing of Lots**

*This account of something beyond the reach of thy perception We [now] reveal unto thee: for thou wert not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary's guardian, and thou wert not with them when they contended [about it] with one another. (3:44)*

This parenthetical passage (3:44) is addressed to the Prophet. As narrated in the Quran, Mary's story is a direct outcome of revelation and therefore valid despite all the differences between this account and the scriptures regarded by the Christians as authentic (Muhammad Abduh in Manar III, 301 f.). Muhammad Abduh was an Egyptian Islamic scholar, jurist, theologian, Freemason, and writer. He is considered one of the key founding figures of Islamic modernism based on rationalism.

The phrase rendered above as "they drew lots" reads literally, "they cast their reeds"—a reference to an ancient Semitic custom, perhaps like the divination by blunt arrows practiced by the pre-Islamic Arabs. The priests had drawn lots to determine who should have the responsibility for Mary, dedicated to Temple service by her mother's vow. The pronoun "they" relate to the priests, of whom Zachariah was one. Mary's guardianship was entrusted to Zachariah, her relative, and a priest attached to the Temple.

### **Birth of Jesus**

#### **The Announcement by the Angel of Revelation (Gabriel)**

*And call to mind, through this divine writ, Mary. Lo! She withdrew from her family to an eastern place and kept herself in seclusion from them, whereupon We sent her Our Angel of revelation, who appeared to her in the shape of a well-made human being. She exclaimed: "Verily, 'I seek refuge from thee with the Most Gracious! [Approach me not] if thou art conscious of Him!'"*

*[The Angel] answered: "I am but a messenger of thy Sustainer, [who says,] 'I shall bestow upon thee the gift of a son endowed with purity.'" Said she: "How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me? For, never have I been a loose woman!" [The Angel] answered: "Thus it is [but] thy Sustainer says, 'This is easy for Me; and [thou shalt have a son,] so that We might make him a symbol unto mankind and an act of grace from Us.'" (19:16-21)*

Although born in Bethlehem, according to Mathew and Luke, Jesus was a Galilean from Nazareth. He was born to Mary in 4 BC. According to Matthew and Luke, Joseph was only his father legally. A parallel description of the birth of Jesus is also given in the third chapter of the Quran.

### **Immaculate or Supernatural Conception of Jesus**

*And lo! The angels said: "O, Mary! God has elected you and made you pure and raised you above all the women of the world. O, Mary! You remain truly devout to thy Sustainer and prostrate yourself in worship and bow down with those who bow down [before Him]." (3:42-43)*

*Lo! The angels said: "O Mary! Behold, God sends thee the glad tiding through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those drawn near unto God. And he shall speak unto men in his cradle, and as a grown man, and shall be of the righteous." Said she: "O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?" [The Angel] answered: "Thus it is God creates what He wills: when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, 'Be'-and it is. (3:45-47)*

*AND [remember] her who guarded her chastity, whereupon We breathed into her of Our spirit and caused her, together with her son, to become a symbol [of Our grace] unto all people.*

*(21:91)*

When Jesus was conceived, Mary was a virgin, and she "was found to be with a child from the

Holy Spirit." (Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35) Mary went into seclusion to devote herself undisturbed to prayer and meditation. The "eastern place" possibly signifies an easterly chamber at the Temple, to which her mother dedicated Mary. The **angel of revelation** appeared before Mary, identified as angel Gabriel in the Gospel of Luke. Since—as is implied in 6:9—mortals cannot perceive an angel in his true manifestation, God caused him to become visible to Mary "in the shape of a well-made human being," accessible to her perception.

The term *ruh* often denotes "**divine inspiration**." Occasionally, however, it is used to describe the medium through which such inspiration is imparted to God's elect: in other words, the angel (or angelic force) of revelation. The angel's designation as *ruh* indicates this category of beings is purely spiritual, without any physical element. **Christ** (lit., "whose name shall be the Anointed" (*al-Masih*), derives from the Hebrew *Mashiah*, "the anointed," a term frequently applied in the Bible to the Hebrew kings, as their accession to the power was consecrated by a touch of holy oil taken from the Temple. This anointing appears to have been so important a rite among the Hebrews that the term "the anointed" became synonymous with "king" over time. The honorific "the Anointed" was applied to Jesus in His lifetime. This designation is correctly translated as *Christos* in the Greek version of the gospels (a noun derived from the Greek verb *chriein*, "to anoint"). In this form, "the Christ" is the designation *al-Masih*, which has achieved currency in all Western languages.

The expression "those drawn near" to God, mentioned in 56:10-12: ***But the foremost shall be [they who in life were] the foremost [in faith and good works]: they who were [always] drawn close unto God! In gardens of bliss [will they dwell].*** "A symbol unto mankind," one of the several meanings of the term *ayah* is "**sign**" or "a symbol." However, the sense in which it is most used in the Quran is "a divine message." Hence, its application to Jesus may mean that He was destined to become a vehicle of God's message to man—i.e., a prophet—and a symbol of God's grace. **He**



**but says onto it, 'Be'—and it is."** In the context of Mary's story in Al Imran, the announcement made to her, and the parallel one to Zachariah, is meant to stress God's unlimited power of creation. In both cases, His power to create the circumstances in which His will manifests itself. Thus, it brings about any event, however unexpected or improbable it might seem at the time of the announcement.

### **The Agony of Normal Childbirth**

*And in time, she conceived him, and then she withdrew to a far-off place. And [when] the throes of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree, she exclaimed: "Oh, would I have died ere this, and had become a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!" Thereupon [a voice] called out to her from beneath that [palm-tree]: "Grieve not! Thy Sustainer has provided a rivulet [running] beneath thee. And shake the trunk of the palm tree towards thee: it will drop fresh, ripe dates upon thee. Eat, then, and drink, and let thine eye be gladdened! And if thou shouldst meet any human being, convey this unto him: 'Behold, abstinence from speech have I vowed unto the Most Gracious; hence, I may not speak today to any mortal.'" (19:22-26)*

*And [We have propounded another parable of God-consciousness in the story of] Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity. Whereupon We breathe of Our spirit into [her womb]. And who accepted the truth of her Sustainer's words and [thus,] of His revelations – and was one of the truly devout. (66:12) They utter an awesome calumny against Mary, while refusing to acknowledge the truth. (4:156)*

In ancient Semitic usage, a person's name was often associated with a famous ancestor or founder of the tribal line. Since Mary belonged to the priestly caste and hence descended from Aaron, Moses' brother, she was called a "**sister of Aaron.**" Similarly, her cousin Elisabeth, Zachariah's wife, is spoken of in Luke 1:5 as one of Aaron's "**daughters.**" The expression "**breathe Our spirit**" used here concerning Mary's conception of Jesus is the same expression in three other places

concerning the creation of man in general—namely in 15:29, 38:72, and 32:9. God "breathes of His spirit" into every human being, endowing them with life.

Mary's description as "one who **guarded her chastity**" is to stress her complete abstinence from any unlawful or morally reprehensible act. It serves as a rejection of the slander that the birth of Jesus resulted from an illicit union. Historians place Mary's age in the range of 12 to 14 years old when Jesus was born. Mary was an adolescent, and from today's standard seems shockingly young to be a mother. However, in the culture that Mary lived in at that time, young motherhood was commonplace.

### **Parthenogenesis**

Parthenogenesis occurs when an egg becomes an embryo without male fertilization. It has been observed in about seventy animal species but not in human beings. Parthenogenesis in humans never produces viable embryos. The gospel and the Quran describing Jesus' conception are identical: supernatural or miraculous.

### **Jesus Spoke in a Cradle, in Defense of His Mother**

*And in time, she returned to her people, carrying the child with her. They said: "O Mary! You have, indeed, done an amazing thing! Your father was not a wicked man, nor was your mother a loose woman!" Thereupon, she pointed to him. They exclaimed: "How can we talk to one who [as yet] is a little boy in the cradle?" (19:27-29) And he [Jesus] shall speak unto men in his cradle, and as a grown man, and shall be of the righteous." (3:46)*

"He shall speak to men" alludes to the prophetic wisdom that was to inspire Jesus from a very early age. Although the Quran mentions that Jesus would "speak unto men while still in his cradle"—i.e., would be imbued with wisdom from his early childhood—the above verses can be understood literally as a supernatural event or in the figurative sense, projecting the shape of things to come.

## **Lofty Place in Paradise**

*We made the son of Mary and his mother a symbol [of Our grace] and provided both an abode in a lofty place of lasting restfulness and unsullied springs. (23:50)*

The expression "unsullied springs" or "running waters" signifies and symbolizes the spiritual purity associated with the concept of paradise, the "gardens through which running waters flow."

## **Jesus and Purity**

*And lo! The angels said: "O, Mary! God has elected you, made you pure, and raised you above all the women of the world. (3:45) By Our grace, [the gift of] compassion and purity; and he [John] was [always] conscious of Us (19:13) "I shall bestow upon thee the gift of a son [Jesus] endowed with purity." (19:19)*

The Quran declares not only Jesus but also John the Baptist and Mary as "pure." Purity does not translate into sinlessness. The famous incident in the New Testament when Jesus called the woman of Canaan "dog" would be considered a sin, since it was a racial slur. Only God is sinless, and all human beings are sinners.

## Chapter 17

### The Ministry of Jesus Christ

#### Political and Religious Landscapes

The ministry of Jesus and His teachings are best understood in the political and religious conditions prevailing during His lifetime. Palestine in Jesus' day was part of the Roman Empire. During Jesus' public career, the Roman prefect was Pontius Pilate, a minor Roman aristocrat. (Prefect is a magisterial title of varying definition but essentially refers to the leader of an administrative area.) The prefect did not directly govern this area. Instead, he relied on local leaders. The prefect and his small army lived in the predominantly gentile city Caesarea, about two days' march from Jerusalem on the Mediterranean coast. They came to Jerusalem only to ensure peace during pilgrimage festivals—when huge crowds and patriotic themes sometimes combined to spark unrest or uprisings. A Jewish high priest governed Jerusalem on a daily basis, assisted by a council of Jewish leaders. Caiaphas held the office of the high priest during Jesus' ministry. The high priest had the difficult task of mediating between the remote Roman prefect and the local populace, which was hostile toward pagans and wanted to be free of foreign interference. His political responsibility was to maintain order and ensure that tribute was paid.

#### The Jewish Sects

Many important Jewish religious groups differed in several ways:

The **Scribes** knew the Law and could draft legal documents such as contracts for marriage, divorce, loan, inheritance, etc. The **Pharisees** had the reputation of being the most precise interpreters of the Law, and they believed in the resurrection of the dead. They also relied on the non-biblical “traditions of the fathers.” Like the scribes, Pharisees were also well-known legal experts, hence

the partial overlap of these two groups. Most scholars also believe the Pharisaic movement later developed into the rabbinic or orthodox Judaism of today. The Pharisees are often portrayed in the gospels as hypocritical, concerned more with the outward show than sincere faith, “for they preach, but they do not practice” (Matthew 23:3; see also 23:4–5, 25–28).

Many aristocratic priests, as well as some prominent laymen, were **Sadducees**. They rejected the fathers’ traditions and denied the resurrection, which had recently entered Jewish thought from Persia and was accepted by most Jews in the first century. The Sadducees were apparently of the elite, wealthy class, closely allied with the high priestly families, and tied to Roman rule in Palestine. With time, the Sadducees disappeared from history.

### **The Problems with the Four Gospels**

The four different versions of the earthly ministry of Jesus by Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, and differences between them may cause some confusion to the readers. The purpose of relating the gospels’ potential inaccuracies is not to diminish their importance but to understand its limitations. The New Testament is one of the bedrock texts that molded and inspired Western civilization, and its importance cannot be overstated. The gospel accounts can be compared with the Hadith literature, where Prophet Muhammad’s sayings were recorded long after his death.

Despite its inherent inaccuracies, Hadith literature is still considered second only to the Quran.

### **Gospel in Greek and Not in Aramaic**

Paul’s letters and not the gospels were the earliest Christian texts, written in AD 50, about twenty years after the death of Jesus. Highly educated authors wrote the gospels (also from “good news” in Old English). However, the followers of Jesus were generally uneducated peasants, and their language was Aramaic, a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew and Arabic.

### **Anonymous Sources of Gospels**

All four gospels were not eyewitness accounts and not written in the first-person view. Very few of Jesus' actual words seem to have been recorded in the gospels. The authors of the gospels did not reveal their sources. The first full-length account of Jesus' life was St. Mark's gospel, which was not written until forty years after his death in AD 60-80, followed by Matthew, Luke, and John in AD 75-90.

### **Paul's Influence on the New Testament**

It is important to note that Paul's perspective influenced and inspired the entire New Testament. Thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament were written by him. He made an impact as a theologian and letter-writer. He was the first to work through many intriguing questions about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

### **Post-Resurrection Perspective**

Much of the material has been affected by later development in the churches founded by St. Paul. The gospels were written from the post-resurrection perspective, a momentous event in Christianity's history, as they deal with the earthly ministry of Jesus from hindsight. By this time, historical facts had been overlaid with mythical elements, which expressed the meaning Jesus acquired for His followers. This is the meaning the gospels primarily convey rather than a reliable, straightforward portrayal of events.

### **Historical Jesus or the Heavenly Lord**

Not all the sayings and deeds in the gospels are reports of things that Jesus said and did. After the death of Jesus, the early Christians spoke to Him in prayer, and sometimes Jesus answered (2 Corinthians 12:8-9, 1 Corinthians 2:13). These early Christians could not distinguish between "the

historical Jesus” and “the heavenly Lord.” Some sayings heard in prayer almost certainly ended up in the gospels as if uttered by Jesus during His lifetime.

### **Differences between Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John**

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke agree so closely that they can be studied together in parallel columns in a work called a synopsis and are hence called the synoptic gospels. John’s gospel is so different that it cannot be reconciled with the synoptics, except generally.

**Duration of Jesus’ Ministry:** In the synoptics, Jesus’ public career appears to have lasted less than one year since only one Passover is mentioned. In John, three Passovers occur, implying a ministry of more than two years. John also describes several trips to Jerusalem, but only one is mentioned in the synoptics.

**Content of Jesus’ Teaching:** The most significant difference, though, appears in the methods and content of Jesus’ teaching.

**The Kingdom of God:** In the synoptic gospels, he speaks about the kingdom of God in short aphorisms and parables, using similes and figures of speech, many drawn from agricultural and village life. Jesus rarely mentions eternal life. In John, on the other hand, Jesus employs lengthy metaphorical discourses, in which he is the main subject. He seldom mentions the kingdom of God but regularly mentions eternal life.

**Concern for the Poor:** In the synoptics, Jesus shows strong concern for the poor and sinners. In John, Jesus shows little concern for the poor and sinners.

**Miracles:** In the synoptics he seldom refers to himself, and he refuses when asked for a “sign” to prove his authority (Mark 8:11-12). In John’s gospel, His miracles are described as “signs” that support the authenticity of His claims. It comes close to declaring Jesus as God; such statements are absent in synoptic gospels. If He believed and preached, He was God; the synoptic gospels would have recorded such a saying. Even the Gospel of John never categorically states the precise words

of Jesus that “I am God.” The Gospel of John represents today’s orthodox Christianity, and Christian apologists frequently quote John’s gospel to prove the divinity of Jesus.

**Repentance:** Jesus preaches repentance and forgiveness in the synoptics. In John, Jesus never mentions repentance and mentions forgiveness only once (John 20:23)

**Historical Accuracy:** Bart D. Ehrman, a distinguished New Testament scholar, writes in his book *How Jesus Became God*, “Nearly everyone agrees that even though these canonical gospels are problematic as sources for the historical Jesus, they nonetheless do contain some historically accurate recollections of what He said, did, and experienced amid all the embellishments and changes.” However, John’s gospel is the least reliable historically as compared to the synoptic gospels, according to most New Testament scholars, many of whom are Christians.

### **Later Additions to the Gospels**

The final twelve verses were added later to the Gospel of Mark (16:9-20) to offer further proof of the resurrection of Jesus. Verse 1 John 5:7 was added later to bolster the claim of the Trinity. The Earliest Greek manuscripts show that the story of the adulterous woman in John 7:53-8:11 was not originally part of John’s gospel and was a later addition.

## **From Oral Traditions to Written Gospels**

### **Oral Traditions and Proto-Gospel**

The stories and sayings of Jesus were passed on largely as separate, self-contained units and later, as written collections of miracle stories, parables, sayings, etc. Written proto gospels preceded them and served as sources for the gospels. It is believed that Mark was the first gospel to be written and served as the source for the gospels of Mathew and Luke.



## **Q document**

Matthew and Luke also share a large amount of material that is not found in Mark and originated from a lost source called the Q Document (from "Quelle," the German word for "source.") Most of these other passages were sayings of Jesus.

## **M and L Source**

Matthew and Luke contain some material unique to each, called the M source (or Matthew) and the L source (Luke).

## **What Is *Injil* (Gospel) in the Quran?**

In Arabic, the gospel or *Injil* is singular (not gospels, plural) and is mentioned eleven times in five surahs. The *Injil*, a precursor of the four gospels, represents the sayings of Jesus—a direct revelation from God and not the altered version described in the four gospels.

The angel Gabriel addressing Mary: “*And He will impart unto thy son the book, (al-Kitab) wisdom, and the Torah, and the Gospel, and [will make him] an apostle unto the children of Israel.*” (3:48-49)

The word *al-Kitab* or book represents God’s revelation to Jesus, not a physical book. The Quran is also described as a *Kitab* but was delivered orally to Prophet Muhammad. The revelation vouchsafed to Jesus included both the Torah and the gospels. However, the Torah was an earlier revelation described as “imparted to Jesus” because His prophetic mission was based on the Law of Moses, which was only confirmed and not abolished by the gospel (cf. Matthew v, 17-19). The revelation and “wisdom” emphasize divinely inspired philosophical aspects of the gospel, and together with a more legalistic Torah, the Bible forms a comprehensive religious text.

## **Jesus and the Torah**

*One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grain fields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” — Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:23-24, 27)*

*“And [I have come] to confirm the truth of whatever remains of the Torah, and to make lawful unto you some of the things which [aforetime] were forbidden to you. And I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer; remain, then, conscious of God, and pay heed unto me. (Quran 3:50) And know that the observance of] the Sabbath was ordained only for those who held divergent views about him [Abraham], but God will judge between them on Resurrection Day about all on which they differ. (Quran 16:124)*

Jesus had the authority to make changes in the laws of the Torah. The designation “apostle” (*rasul*) is applied to bearers of divine revelations, which comprise a new doctrinal system or dispensation. Jesus was an apostle, and the statement, “make lawful unto you some of the things which [aforetime] were forbidden,” is in tune with the changes he made in the Law of Sabbath.

Why was the Sabbath made for man? The biblical explanation is that the Sabbath was for man’s benefit. He can rest from toil, from the cares and anxieties of the world, to allow him to call off his attention from earthly concerns and direct it to eternity.

The Quranic version of the imposition of the Sabbath on the children of Israel, and all manners of other severe restrictions and rituals, was a form of punishment. The various religious laws imposed on them test their willingness to surrender to God and obey Him, enabling them to grow spiritually and socially according to the God-willed law of evolution. Whether in Judaism or Islam, all God-imposed rituals are only a means to achieve spiritual discipline and self- control. In the end, God will literally inform you of that wherein you used to differ.

## **Healing of a Shriveled Hand**

*And a man with a shriveled hand was there. Searching for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" He said to them, "If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath. Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So, he stretched it out, and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. But the Pharisees plotted how they might kill Jesus.*

*(Matthew 12: 11-13)*

### **Healing of Leprosy**

*A man with leprosy came and knelt before Him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" Immediately he was cleansed of his leprosy. (Matthew 8:2-3)*

According to Jewish Law, if a person touched someone who was leprous, they would become unclean.

### **Jesus and Miracles**

His commission takes the form of an enabling act. The proofs are the miracles he performed. Not only does Jesus heal the sick, but he also performed miracles while in the cradle, which echoes the story in the gospel of the Infancy, of which a Coptic copy is extant. In the first century, healers and miracle workers were not considered superhuman. Jesus Himself granted that others could perform miracles, such as exorcisms, regardless of following Him. (Matthew 12:27; Mark 9:38-41; 6:7) In His day, miracles were proof neither of divinity nor messiahship, and at most, they could be used to validate an individual's message or way of life. Jesus asked for no rewards for His miracles and begged the people not to mention these powers of His. The reason for His dislike of being known as a miracle worker went beyond being pestered to give exhibitions to satisfy curiosity; it diverted

attention from His message.

## **The Advent of Jesus' Ministry**

### **Baptism of Jesus**

*And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan. And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. (Mark 1:9-11)*

The public ministry of Jesus began when he was baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:2- 28). Why did Jesus receive John's baptism—a symbol of washing away of sin and spiritual purification?

Matthew found it embarrassing that Jesus received John's baptism of repentance. Thus, he had John protest the baptism and claim that Jesus should instead baptize him (Matthew 3:13-17); however, this objection is not noted in Mark or Luke.

### **The Jewish Concept of the Son of God**

The phrase "Thou art my beloved son" or "son of God" in the Hebrew Bible has many possible meanings, referring to angels, humans, or even all humanity. It was sometimes used for the expected messiah figure. It also denotes a human judge or ruler (Psalm 82:6) and "children of the Most High." In a more specialized sense, "son of God" is a title applied only to the real king over Israel (2 Samuel 7:14), with reference to King David and those of his descendants who carried on his dynasty (Psalm 89:27-28). In the Jewish interpretation of the gospels, the being of Jesus as "son of God" corresponds to a pious holy man who performs miracles and exorcisms by divine intervention. Indeed, in the Dead Sea scrolls, the term Son of God is used in a similar sense.

### **The Meaning of Messiah**

During Jesus' lifetime, many Jews in Palestine believed he was the Messiah. The term Messiah does not equate with divinity. Christ (lit., whose name shall be the Anointed [*al-Masih*]): the designation *al-Masih* is derived from the Hebrew *mashiah*, "the anointed"—a term frequently applied in the Bible to the Hebrew kings. By the time of Jesus' death in about 30 CE, the Jews were passionate monotheists, so nobody expected the Messiah to be a divine figure, but they did expect an ordinary, if privileged, human being.

### **Apocalyptic Prophets**

In his mid-30s, Jesus had a short public career, perhaps less than one year, during which he attracted considerable attention. The main message of apocalyptic preachers was that the end of history was near, and God would shortly intervene to overthrow the evil Roman Empire and establish His rule on earth. John the Baptist, Jesus, and his disciples believed these end-time events would occur in their lifetimes.

Jesus and John the Baptist believed that evil forces ruled the world through Satan and demons. The God of good and His angels would soon intervene and defeat the satanic forces and usher in God's kingdom. God was soon to send a cosmic judge from heaven, the Son of Man, who would set up God's kingdom on earth. Jesus would be the king of this kingdom, and His twelve disciples would serve under Him.

### **Kingdom of God**

While the gospels agree that Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, they offered different versions of His view of that kingdom. One is that the kingdom of God exists in heaven and that individuals may enter it upon death (Mark 9:7). The parable that the kingdom is like yeast that gradually leavens the entire loaf (Matthew 13:33) indicates that Jesus may have understood the kingdom of God to begin in the present. Statements about the kingdom as partially present on earth do not

negate the eschatological nature of Jesus' message. At the end of time, the kingdom would come to earth in its full power and glory, at which time God's will would be done "on the earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

Jesus proclaimed the arrival of the kingdom of God; he predicted the destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:2) and possibly its rebuilding (Mark 14:58); he entered Jerusalem on a donkey, symbolizing his kingship (Mark 11:4-8, Matthew 21:1-11); see Zachariah 9:9 for the symbol. he had a final meal with his disciples at which he said he would "drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it in the kingdom of God." (Mark 14:25)

### **The Origin of the Term "Christian"**

There is no statement or implication in the New Testament that Jesus promoted, began, or intended to start any religion. The Book of Acts reports that the followers of Jesus were referred to as "Christian," but this was a term of derision by Antioch's pagans. The disciples of Jesus called themselves "followers of the way." Jesus did not convert His followers from Judaism to Christianity. Neither Jesus nor His followers ever advocated that anyone convert from one religion to another.

Jesus was a strict monotheist, as were his followers. He was a practicing Jew who followed the Torah and added to and refined the laws. Jesus was a devoted and accomplished rabbi who knew the Torah inside out. The first Christians saw Jesus as a new Moses, a new Joshua, the founder of a new Israel. They recognized Jesus as a prophet—and therefore, as no more than a created human being.

*And, indeed, [to the same end] We sent forth Noah and Abraham [as Our message- bearers] and established prophethood and revelation among their descendants, and some of them were on the right way, but many were iniquitous. And thereupon We caused [other of] Our apostles to follow in their footsteps; and [with time] We caused them to be followed by Jesus, the Son of Mary,*

*upon whom We bestowed the Gospel; and in the hearts of those who [truly] followed him We engendered compassion and mercy. (Quran 57:26-27)*

## Chapter 18

### The Teachings of Jesus and Comparison with the Quran

#### The Sermon on the Mount

Jesus and His disciples were itinerant; they traveled around Galilee and its immediate environs, and Jesus taught and healed in various towns and villages, in the countryside, and on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. The Sermon on the Mount is probably the best-known of the teachings of Jesus. It is not a stenographic or eyewitness account. With a few exceptions, it is entirely consistent with the Quranic teachings. (The author of this Quran series has used the New International Version of the Bible because it is written in contemporary English and easy to understand rather than a version that is full of obsolete words and twisted syntax.)

#### Beatitudes

The sermon begins with what is commonly called the Beatitudes, short sayings that begin “Blessed are...” The Greek adjective translated “blessed” represents a Hebrew word used often in the Old Testament, especially in Psalms and Proverbs. It means fortunate, well-off, to be congratulated, or the like.

*And seeing the multitudes, he [Jesus] went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the*



*peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. (Matthew 5:1-12)*

It was to the poor, humble, oppressed ordinary people that Jesus promised the blessings of the kingdom of God. Jesus' disciples were also reviled and persecuted for His sake.

### **Salt and Light**

*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything except thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, giving light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)*

This is the first of a series of metaphors immediately following the Beatitudes. In the ancient world, salt was precious; the Greeks thought it contained something almost divine, and the Romans sometimes paid their soldiers with salt. A soldier who didn't carry out his duties "was not worth his salt." Just as salt preserves from putrefaction, the disciples' duty was to protect the purity of the world through good works and strong morals. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. The disciples must not hide from the world. To do so would defeat the purpose for which they were chosen.

### **Jesus and the Jewish Law**

*Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them*

*but fulfill them. For truly I tell you until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. So then, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do likewise will be called least in the Kingdom of heaven; but whoever practices and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of heaven. For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law, you will certainly not enter the Kingdom of heaven. You have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Do not murder' and 'Anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I say, if you are even angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the court. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell. So, if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the Temple and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there at the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God. (Matthew 5:17-24)*

The smallest letter represents the minute details of the Law. The Law is fulfilled when it is fully obeyed and what it demands is thoroughly carried out. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men to do so shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. This seems to imply that a person who breaks the minor commandments and thus commits minor sins will still enter the kingdom of heaven. An offering at the altar must be postponed until any unforgiven offense against a fellow man has been made right. The rights of a human being supersede the duties man owes to God, a concept consistent with Quranic teachings.

Jewish Law is the focus of many passages in the gospels. Jesus repeatedly insisted that he uphold and fulfill the Jewish scriptures, not contradict them. Jesus admonished his followers to observe the Law unwaveringly. Not only does Jesus insist obeying the laws of Torah, he further added that the observance of the Law should not be only external but should also be internal. He argued that the

whole of the Law could be summed up in the maxim commonly called the **Golden Rule**: *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”* Jesus made some common-sense exceptions to the rigid Law and had a different explanation of some of the Laws than the other Jewish leaders had. In the gospels, the Pharisees are often called hypocrites. What Jesus meant by righteousness exceeding that of the scribes and Pharisees (5:20) was a thoroughgoing effort to obey the revealed will of God according to its innermost intent. Not because every item was explicitly commanded or could be logically deduced from the sacred text but because one’s conscience and judgment responded to the underlying principle of it all. The Pharisees’ method of interpretation tended to produce a legalistic emphasis on the letter of the Law. Their elaborate casuistry (deductive reasoning) was the opposite of Jesus’ direct penetration to the Law’s essential spirit and principle. He repudiated the tendency of the scribes and Pharisees to become absorbed in trifles, their failure to put first things first. What is called into question is their whole approach to interpreting the Law. Jesus was no less devoted to the Law of Moses than they were. However, He rejected the oral law as a mere “tradition of men” (Mark 7:8-9; Matthew 15:3). He told the Pharisees and scribes that they were “making void the word of God” by their tradition (Mark 7:13; Matthew 15:6).

### **Paul’s and Jesus’ Contradictory Stances**

Paul’s teachings that gentiles converting to Christianity did not have to follow the laws of Torah contradicts Jesus’ teachings. The wordings of Jesus are so clear and straightforward that it does not leave any wiggle room. Christian apologists have advanced complicated and sometimes incomprehensible explanations to harmonize Paul’s and Jesus’ contradictory stances regarding the sacred Law of Torah.

### **Prayer in Secret Is Better**

*And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the*

*synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly, I tell you they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your unseen Father. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And praying, do not use vain repetitions like the pagans, for they think they will be heard in their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before asking him. (Mathew 6:5-8)*

### **The Dietary Restrictions**

Jews are not allowed to eat carnivores, rodents, insects, pork, and shellfish (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14), and the last two prohibitions set them apart from other people. According to Mark 7:19: Jesus “declared all foods clean.” Peter seems to have first learned of this after Jesus’ death through a “heavenly revelation” (Acts 10:9-16). Jesus did not during His lifetime oppose the Torah’s dietary laws.

### **Fasting**

*And when you fast, don’t make it obvious, as the hypocrites do, for they try to look miserable and disheveled so that people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your unseen Father; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)*

### **Resolve Disputes with Your Accuser**

*Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. Truly, I say you will not come out of there until you have paid up the last cent. (Matthew 5:25- 26)*

The advice is to seek speedy reconciliation with an accuser. Do what is right of your own volition;

don't wait until you are compelled to do it. In the Gospel of Matthew, this verse could be interpreted as practical advice for staying out of prison. In Luke, the context clarifies that it is an eschatological metaphor, with the judge being God and prison eternal punishment.

## **Divorce**

*It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce. But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for unchastity, commits adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:31-32)*

In Islam, divorce is allowed only as a last resort: Prophet Muhammad said, "In the sight of God, the most hateful of all things allowed is divorce."

## **Oath and Vows**

*Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not break your oath, but fulfill the vows you have made to the Lord. But I say to you, do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will' or 'No, I won't'; anything beyond this is from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33-37)*

## **Love Your Enemies and Neighbors**

*You have heard it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You have heard it was said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell*

*you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. In that way, you will be acting as the true children of your Father in Heaven. For He gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. Be perfect; therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:38-48)*

My favorite passage of the Bible. Jesus of Nazareth uttered revolutionary words that we should love our enemies to the point of blessing them. Imagine if all the people started loving their enemies; there would be peace the world has never seen. The concepts Jesus taught are as radical today as they were two thousand years ago because they are counterintuitive to our divisive human nature and humanity's historic compulsion to be at war with itself. Jesus gave the reason for loving one's enemy—it is God who causes His sun to shine upon the good and the bad and who pours down His rain upon the just and the unjust. The radical idea of reconciliation taught by Jesus was later reiterated in the Quran. Loving your enemies means praying for them, blessing them, doing good to them—in short, returning good for evil.

### **Good Samaritan's Neighborliness**

*On one occasion, an expert in the Law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind'; and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this, and you will live." But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" In reply, Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when*

*he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite passed by on the other side when he came to the place and saw him. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the Law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:25-37)*

### **Charity in Secret Is Better**

*Be careful not to perform your righteous acts before men to be seen by them. You will have no reward from your Father in Heaven if you do. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that others may praise them. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing; give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-4)*

Any righteous act in secret is better than an overt act of kindness, a concept consistent with the Quranic teachings.

### **Treasure of Heaven Lasts Forever**

*"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroy them, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. Your heart will be where your treasure is. (Matthew 6:19-21)*

See the similarity with the Quranic verse. *And it is God [alone] who determines all things. Wealth and children are an adornment of this world's life: but virtuous deeds, the fruit whereof endures forever, are of far greater merit in thy Sustainer's sight and a far better source of hope. (Quran 18:45-46)*

If one's treasure is on earth, one's heart and attention will also be on earthly matters, to the exclusion of God.

### **The Lamp of the Body**

*The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. Therefore, if the light within you has turned into darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23)*

### **Do Not Worry about Tomorrow**

*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? Behold how the flowers of the field grow; they do not labor or spin. Yet Solomon, in all his glory, was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. But seek first his Kingdom*



*and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Today has enough trouble of its own.*

*(Matthew 6:24-34)*

### **The Sin of Self-Righteousness**

*“Do not judge so that you will not be judged.” For with the same judgment you pronounce, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck in your brother’s eye but do not notice the log in your eye? Or how can you say to your brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, and behold, the log is in your eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn around to attack you. (Matthew 7:1-6)*

*He is fully aware of you when He brings you into being out of the dust, and when you are still hidden in your mothers’ wombs: do not consider yourselves pure—[for] He knows best as to who is conscious of Him. (Quran 53:32)*

### **Adultery**

*You have heard that you shall not commit adultery. But I tell you, anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)*

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

In Islam, staring at the opposite sex is a sin; however, one passing glance is allowed. It is considered a good deed by not acting upon lust or temptations for the sake of God because one can

control actions, but not feelings.

### **A Woman Caught in Adultery**

The story of a woman caught in adultery was not originally part of John's gospel and was a later addition.

*Jesus returned to the Mount of Olives, but he was back again at the Temple early the next morning. A crowd soon gathered, and he sat down and taught them. As he spoke, the teachers of religious Law and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery. They put her in front of the crowd. "Teacher," they said to Jesus, "this woman was caught in adultery. The Law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, "All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!" Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust. When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, "Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more." (John 8:1-11)*

The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus by forcing Him to say yes to stoning and use that against Him because under Roman law, adultery was not a punishable offense. Stoning to death of the adulterous woman would have contradicted Roman law, and Jesus would have gotten into trouble with Roman authorities. However, Jesus turned the tables with his answer: "let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone."

In the above incident, the other guilty party is the man not facing the crowd's wrath. The Quran has a different take on adultery. It is almost impossible to convict anyone for adultery. The matter must be presented to a duly qualified judge. There must be four eyewitnesses to actual sexual act to

convict. The whole idea behind such stringent requirements for proof was to prevent malicious character-destroying allegations. There is no mention of stoning to death in the Quran.

### **Ask, Seek, and Knock**

*Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. Everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a snake? So, if your sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him. Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about. (Matthew 7:7-12)*

### **False Prophets and Fruits of the Tree**

*Beware of false prophets disguised as harmless sheep but are vicious wolves. You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way, they act. Can you pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Yes, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit, so you can identify people by their actions. Not everyone who says to me, 'Master, Master' will enter the Kingdom of the Heavens, but only those who are obedient to my Father, who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Master, Master, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and Thy name expelled demons, and in Thy name performed many mighty works? And then I will tell them plainly; I never knew you: begone from me, you doers of wickedness. (Matthew 7:15-23)*

According to the Quran, before God's final judgment upon sinners, all the prophets will bear

witness to the fact that they had delivered God's message to their people and explained to them the meaning of right and wrong.

### **The House Built on Rocks**

*Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a tremendous crash. When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, for he taught with real authority—quite unlike their teachers of religious Law. (Matthew 7:24-29)*

### **The Parable of the Two Sons**

*"What do you think?" There was a man with two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, work today in the vineyard. "I will not,' he answered, but later, he changed his mind and went. "Then the Father went to the other Son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you; the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you." For John (The Baptist) came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him. (Matthew 21:28-32)*

Evil sometimes has a silver lining. The sin can bring the evildoer closer to God, provided he repents. Read the story of Adam and Eve previously. After the Fall, when Adam disobeyed God, he became aware of right and wrong and thus became conscious of free will.

## **Healing of a Canaanite Child**

*Now Jesus withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon, and there a Canaanite woman came to him and cried. "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; a demon severely possesses my daughter." But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples begged him, "Send her away, for she is crying after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the woman knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." "It is not fair," he answered, "to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs."*

This Palestinian woman had a brilliant comeback, and she turned the table against Jesus.

*She said, "Yes, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." "O woman, Jesus answered, "Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire." And her daughter was healed (Matthew 15:21-28).*

Jesus displayed utter contempt for Gentiles by calling a Canaanite woman "dog," a racial slur.

Bernard Shaw, referring to the above incident in *Androcles and the Lion*, wrote, "She melted the Jew out of him and made Christ a Christian. It is somehow one of the most touching stories in the gospel, perhaps because the woman rebukes the prophet by a touch of her own finest quality."

## **Conclusion**

The most important commonality between Islam and Christianity is the teachings of Jesus. Most of the teachings of Jesus are consistent with Islamic teachings. At least, Muslims and Christians can agree on what Jesus said, what He stood for, and what He must teach us even today. From an Islamic point of view, more important is how Jesus lived a righteous life, which serves as a reminder to the rest of us to follow His example. Whether or not He died on the cross or exactly how you frame the nature of His identity maybe critical for Christian theology, but they are separate and theoretical issues.

## Jesus of the Quran

Jesus or Isa in Arabic is mentioned by name in the Quran more than twenty-five times. The Quran describes Jesus in the most exalted terms as righteous and pure. Jesus holds the distinction among all other prophets in His supernatural birth and is referred to as Messiah more than ten times. It even accepts the Christian doctrine of His virgin birth. The Quran describes the immaculate birth of Jesus as a miracle of God, like the parting of the sea by Moses and many other miracles described in the Bible and the Quran.

His commission takes the form of an enabling act. The proofs are the miracles He performed. Not only does Jesus heal the sick, but He also performs miracles while in the cradle, which echoes the story in the Gospel of the Infancy, of which a Coptic copy is extant. He is described as an apostle, a description limited to men like Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad. Jesus saw His teachings not as a departure from Judaic traditions but as an unbroken continuation of that tradition—just as Muhammad saw the Quran and his teachings as a continuation of the existing scriptures. Islam and Christianity are not simply overlapping ideas or merely compatible, but they are one continuum in the most central sense.

### Apostle

*The Christ, Son of Mary, was but an apostle: all [other] apostles had passed away before him; and his mother was one who never deviated from the truth, and they both ate food [like other mortals].<sup>89</sup> Behold how clear We make these messages unto them: and then behold how perverted are their minds! Say:” Would you worship, besides God, aught that has no power either to harm or to benefit you—when God alone is all-hearing, all-knowing?” (5:75- 76)*

*AND LO! We did accept a solemn pledge from all the prophets”—from thee, [O Muhammad,] as well as from Noah, and Abraham, and Moses, and Jesus the Son of Mary -: for We accepted a most weighty, solemn pledge from [all of] them, so that [at the end of time] He might ask those*

*men of truth as to [what response] their truthfulness [had received on earth]. And grievous suffering has He readied for all who deny the truth! (33:7-8)*

*Now when Jesus came [to his people] with all evidence of the truth, he said: “I have now come unto you with wisdom, and to make clear unto you some of that on which you are at variance: hence, be conscious of God, and pay heed unto me. “Verily, God is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer; so, worship [none but) Him: this [alone] is a straight way!” But factions from among those [who came after Jesus] began to hold divergent views: woe, then, unto those who are bent on evildoing—[woe] for the suffering [that will befall them] on a grievous Day! (43:63-65)*

The restrictive allusion to “some of that...” bears mostly on the realm of faith and morals and not as much concerning the problems of His people’s worldly life. The “divergent views” refer to the nature of Jesus.

*And they say, “Be Jews”—or “Christians”—“and you shall be on the right path.” Say: “Nay, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God.” Say: “We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus; and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.” (2:135-136) And We vouchsafed unto Jesus, the Son of Mary, all evidence of the truth, and strengthened him with holy inspiration. (2:253)*

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

*ourselves.” (3:84)*

Islam honors Jesus as a true apostle of God, a description limited to men like Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad. The apostle brought a new dispensation as opposed to that of the prophets, whom God has entrusted with the enunciation of ethical principles from an already-existing dispensation. The Quranic view coincides with those early Christians who believed Jesus was the prophet of God sent to reform the Jews. Jesus said, *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24)* Being a holy man and a great prophet, Jesus is still a human being.

### **Teachings of Jesus according to the Quran**

*We vouchsafed unto him the Gospel, wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever remained of the Torah, and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious. Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge by what God has revealed therein: for they who do not judge in the light of what God has bestowed from on high—it is they, they who are truly iniquitous! (5:46-47)*

### **Soaring Destiny**

*[Jesus said]: “I have come unto you with a message from your Sustainer. I shall create for you out of clay, the shape of [your] destiny, and then breathe into it so that it might become [your] destiny by God’s leave; and I shall heal the blind and the leper and bring the dead back to life by God’s leave, and I shall let you know what you may eat and what you should store up in your houses. Behold, in all this, there is indeed a message for you if you are[truly]believers. (3:49)*

*Lo! God will say: “O Jesus, Son of Mary! Remember the blessings which I bestowed upon thee and thy mother-how I strengthened thee with holy inspiration, so that thou couldst speak unto men in thy cradle, and as a grown man; and how I imparted unto thee revelation and wisdom, including the Torah and the Gospel; and how by My leave thou didst create out of clay, as it*



*were, the shape of [thy followers'] destiny, and then didst breathe into it so that it might become, by My leave, [their] destiny; and how thou didst heal the blind and the leper by My leave, and how thou didst raise the dead by My leave; and how I prevented the children of Israel from harming thee when thou camest unto them with all evidence of the truth, and [when] those of them who were bent on denying the truth were saying, 'This is nothing but deception!'" (5:110)*

“The shape of [your] destiny” (lit., “something like the shape of a bird, and then I shall breathe into it so that it might become a bird...”) The noun *tayr* is a plural of *tair* (flying creature or bird), which often denotes fortune or destiny, whether good or evil. Thus, in the parabolic manner so beloved by Him, Jesus intimated to the children of Israel that out of the humble clay of their lives, He would fashion for them the vision of a soaring destiny. And that this vision, brought to life by His God-given inspiration, would become their real destiny by God’s leave and the strength of their faith. “What you may eat and what you should store,” i.e., “what good things you may partake of in the life of this world, and what good deeds you should lay up as a treasure to come.”

### **Disciples of Jesus**

*And when Jesus became aware of their refusal to acknowledge the truth, he asked: “Who will be my helpers in God’s cause?” The white-garbed ones replied: “We shall be [thy] helpers [in the cause] of God! We believe in God and bear witness that we have surrendered ourselves unto Him! O, our Sustainer! We believe in what Thou hast bestowed from on high, and we follow this Apostle; make us one, then, withal who bear witness [to the truth]!” And the unbelievers schemed [against Jesus]; but God brought their scheming to naught: for God is above all schemers. (3:52-53)*

### **Disciples’ Request for a Heavenly Repast**

*And [remember the time] when I inspired the white-garbed ones: [the disciples of Jesus, “Believe in My Apostle and Me!” They answered: “We believe; and bear Thou witness that we have surrendered ourselves [to Thee].” [And] lo, the white-garbed ones said: “O Jesus, Son of Mary! Could thy Sustainer send us a repast from heaven?” [Jesus] answered: “Be conscious of God, if you are [truly] believers!” Said they: “We desire to partake thereof so that our hearts might be fully at rest, and we might know that you have spoken the truth to us, and we might be of those who bear witness to it!” Said Jesus, the Son of Mary, “O God, our Sustainer! Send us a repast from heaven: it shall be an ever-recurring feast for us—for the first and the last of us—and a sign from Thee. And provide us our sustenance, for Thou art the best of providers!” God answered: “I [always] do send it down to you: and so, if you should henceforth deny [this] truth, on him, will I inflict suffering, like of which I have never [yet] inflicted upon anyone in the world!” (5:111-114)*

The word *Maidah*, the title of this surah, was the heavenly repast requested by the disciples. In religious terminology, God sends down every benefit that accrues to a man from heaven—that is—even if it comes into being through man’s efforts. The way the disciples are said to have asked for the repast seems to point to a request for a miracle, which would assure them of God’s acceptance of their faith. Literally, “I am sending it down to you” implies a continued recurrence of bestowal. The stress on God’s ever-recurrent sustenance explains the severity of His condemnation of all who—in their arrogance—presume that man is self-sufficient and independent.

### **Be a Helper to Muhammad, Like Disciples of Jesus**

*O you who have attained faith! Be helpers [in the cause of God—even as Jesus, the Son of Mary, said unto the white-garbed ones, “Who will be my helpers in God’s cause?” Whereupon the white-garbed [disciples] replied, “We shall be [thy] helpers [in the cause] of God!” (61:14)*

This verse urges followers of Prophet Muhammad to help him in the cause of God, just as the disciples of Jesus did.

### **Rejection of Jesus**

*Indeed, we vouchsafed unto Moses the divine writ and caused Apostle after Apostle to follow him. We vouchsafed unto Jesus, the Son of Mary, all evidence of the truth, and strengthened him with holy inspiration. [Yet] is it not so that every time an apostle came unto you with something that was not to your liking, you gloried in your arrogance, and to some of them, you gave the lie, while others you would slay? (2:87) Those of the children of Israel who were bent on denying the truth have [already] been cursed by the tongue of David and Jesus, the Son of Mary? (cf. Psalm 78:21-22, 31-33, and passim; also, Matthew 12, 34, and 23, 33-35) this, because they rebelled [against God] and persisted in transgressing the bounds of what is right. They would not prevent one another from doing whatever hateful things they did: vile indeed was what they were wont to do! (5:78-79)*

During Jesus' lifetime and after His death, some Jews rejected Him altogether. They believed He was a "false prophet" and the product of a shameful, illicit union. The Jews who anticipated future redemption did not expect the world to end and believed God would intervene in human history and make the world perfect. The Jews would live in the Holy Land, free from foreign dominance and in peace and prosperity. Many Jews, including John the Baptist, expected final judgment to precede this golden age, final judgment to precede this golden age, and he taught that people should repent given its imminence (Matthew 3:1-12; Luke 3:3-9). They believed God would restore the twelve tribes of Israel, including the ten lost tribes. That Jesus shared this view was indicated by His calling of the twelve disciples (Matthew 19:28).

### **Why the Jews Reject Jesus**

The Jewish understanding was that the Spirit of God would anoint the Messiah to serve in all three positions—prophet, king, and priest—and affirm at least five things about the Messiah. At the end of the history of the Jewish people, believed this:

- The Messiah will come from the house of David.
- Messiah will establish the kingdom of God—an earthly kingdom.
- The Anointed of Lord will gather the tribes of the chosen people.
- The Messiah will gain sovereignty over the land of Israel.
- He will establish a world kingdom of peace from Jerusalem.

Jesus disappointed the political expectations of the Jews and did not let Himself become a political Messiah. Since He could not establish a world kingdom of peace during His lifetime, some Jews rejected Him.

*And [thus it was that Jesus always said]: “Verily, God is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer; so, worship [none but] Him: this [alone] is a straight way.” And yet, the sects [that follow the Bible] are at variance among themselves [about the nature of Jesus]! Woe, then, unto all who deny the truth when that awesome Day will appear! How well will they hear and see [the truth] on the Day when they come before Us! Today, however, these evildoers are lost in error: hence, warn them of [the coming of] the Day of Regrets, when everything will have been decided—for yet they are heedless, and they do not believe [in it]. (19:36 -39)*

## Chapter 19 The Death of Jesus

### Observing Passover in Jerusalem

In about the year 30 CE, Jesus and His disciples went to Jerusalem from Galilee to observe Passover. The holiday was meant to commemorate the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and their liberation from foreign bondage. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, perhaps intending to recall Zachariah 9:9, which Matthew 21:5 quotes: *“Your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey.”* This touched off a demonstration by His followers, who hailed Jesus as either “Son of David” (Matthew 21:9) or “the one who comes in the name of Lord” (Mark 11:9).

### Revolt in the Temple

Jesus taught and debated (Mark 12) and told His disciples that the Jewish Temple would be destroyed (Mark 13:1-2). He entered the Temple, where worshipers exchanged coins to pay the annual Temple tax and bought pigeons for sacrifice. Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the Temple courts. And as He taught them, He said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?’ But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’” (Mark 11:15-17), which led the chief priest and the scribes to plan to have Him executed (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:47). Later, Jesus and His disciples shared the Passover meal. The following are the twelve disciples of Jesus: Peter and Andrew, the sons of John; James and John, the sons of Zebedee; Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; Thomas; James, the son of Alphaeus; Jude, the son of James; Simon; and Judas Iscariot

### The Traitor

Judas Iscariot, however, one of the twelve disciples, betrayed Jesus to the authorities. After supper, Jesus took His disciples to the Mount of Olives to pray. While Jesus was there, Judas led a group of armed men sent by the chief priests to arrest Him (Mark 14:43-52).

Caiaphas asked Jesus if He was “the Christ, the Son of God.” According to Mark 14:61-62, Jesus said “yes,” and predicted the arrival of the Son of Man. According to Matthew 26:63-64, He said, “You say so, but I tell you that you will see the Son of Man,” apparently implying the answer was no. According to Luke, He was more ambiguous: “If I tell you, you will not believe” and “You say I am” (22:67-70). Whatever the answer, Pontius Pilate had already decided that Jesus had to be crucified. In those times, crucifixion was a heinous form of the death penalty, reserved for the lowest of criminals.

### **Death of Jesus according to the Quran**

#### **Bodily Death of Jesus**

*Lo! God said: “O Jesus! Verily, I shall cause thee to die, and shall exalt thee unto Me, and cleanse thee of [the presence of] those bent on denying the truth; and I shall place those who follow thee [far] above those bent on denying the truth, unto the Day of Resurrection. In the end, unto Me, you all must return, and I shall judge between you regarding all on which you were wont to differ.” (3:55)*

*And as for those who are bent on denying the truth, I shall cause them to suffer a suffering severe in this world and in the life to come, and they shall have none to succor them; whereas unto those who attain faith and do good works, He will grant their reward in full: for God does not love evildoers.” This message do We convey unto thee, and this tiding full of wisdom: (3:56-58)*

In the surah nineteen, Jesus is describing His own death: *“Hence, peace was upon me on the day when I was born, and [will be upon me] on the day of my death, and on the day when I shall be*

*raised to life [again]!" (19:33).*

John the Baptist's death is described in same surah in almost identical words: *Hence, [God's] peace was upon him on the day when he was born, and on the day of his death, and will be [upon him] on the day when he shall be raised to life [again]. (19:15)*

John the Baptist was brutally slain, and his head was placed on a platter.

### **Mystery of Crucifixion**

*And the unbelievers schemed [against Jesus]; but God brought their scheming to naught: for God is above all schemers. (3:54) Their boast [referring to the Jews], "We have slain the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, [who claimed to be] an apostle of God!" However, they did not slay him, nor did they crucify him, but it only seemed to them so. The people who hold conflicting views thereon are indeed confused, having no [real] knowledge thereof, and following mere conjecture. For, of a certainty, they did not slay him: No, but God exalted him to Himself—and God is indeed almighty, wise. (4:157-159)*

### **Crucifixion Was a Myth, a Commonly Accepted Explanation**

The unbelievers who schemed against Jesus were the Jews who refused to acknowledge Jesus as a Messiah and attempted to destroy Him. The Quran refutes their boasts that they killed Jesus Christ. The meaning of the Quranic phrase *wa-lakin shubbiha lahum* is "but it only appeared to them [the Jews] as if it had been so." In other words, the crucifixion of Jesus never happened and was a myth that over time, long after Jesus was gone, grew to include the belief that He had died on the cross to atone for the original sin with which humanity is allegedly burdened. There is almost unanimity of opinion and consensus among Islamic theologians that the crucifixion of Jesus never happened.

## **The Jews Did Not Kill Jesus, the Alternative Hypothesis**

One thing that is certain is that the Jews did not slay Him nor crucify Him. The Quran categorically states that the credit for this heinous act did not go to the Jews. The three pronouns “they” in 4:157-159 refer to the Jews. It was because Roman prefect Pontius Pilate had the authority to order a crucifixion.

It is clear from various verses that Jesus, like any human being, died a physical death, and the Jews were not responsible for it. Whether Jesus’ demise was from natural causes, or He was crucified by the Romans, the Quran did not specify either way.

Unfortunately, even today, “Christ-killer” is an epithet still hurled at Jews, a major cause of antisemitism, for the so-called crimes of their ancestors. Many Christians have justified throughout history the persecution of the Jews for killing the Christian God or committing deicide.

## **Baseless Legends**

There are many fanciful legends believed by some Muslims that God substituted for Jesus a person closely resembling Him (according to some accounts, that person was Judas), who was crucified in His place. Or that Jesus survived the crucifixion and appeared in person to His followers.

However, none of these legends finds the slightest support in the Quran or authentic Traditions and must be summarily rejected. They represent no more than confused attempts to harmonize the Quranic statement with the graphic description in the gospels of His crucifixion.

## **Jesus Was Not Taken Up Bodily to Heaven**

There is another misconception among Muslims that Jesus was taken up bodily into heaven in His lifetime. The expression “God exalted him unto Himself” in the above verse denotes the elevation of Jesus to the realm of God’s special grace—a blessing in which all the prophets partake. In verse 19:57, the verb *rafa nahu* (“We exalted him”) is used in relation to the prophet Elijah. See 3:55



above, where God says to Jesus, "I will cause you to die and shall exalt you to Me." Whenever the act of elevating a human is attributed to God, it always means honoring or exalting. "I shall judge between you regarding all on which you differ" refers to all who revere Jesus, i.e., the Christians, who believe Him to be God, and the Muslims, who regard Him as a prophet and those who deny Him altogether.

### **Conclusion**

From all the verses of the Quran relating to the death of Jesus, we can draw the following conclusion: Some Jews who were bent on denying the truth conspired to kill Jesus but were unsuccessful. Jesus did die a physical death and was exalted to the realm of God's special grace. The Quran did not specify the manner of Jesus' death.

### **Crucifixion Scene in the Bible**

According to Luke, in the crucifixion scene, there is a discussion between Jesus and the robbers. Jesus gave assurance that one of them would be with Him in paradise and spoke the words, "Father, into thy hand I commit my spirit!"—which are in contrast to the cry of dereliction in Matthew and Mark (15:34: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

When evening had come, since it was the day of preparation, the day before the Sabbath, Jesus' body was placed in a tomb. Taking down the body of Jesus on the same day as His crucifixion and placing it in a tomb was not in accordance with brutal Roman practices. It was customary to leave the crucified body on the cross for many days so that it could rot, and birds of prey and animals could feast on it. The desecration of carcass and denying a decent burial was part of crucifixion, meant to humiliate the dead victim and teach a lesson to future troublemakers.

### **Resurrection**

When the Sabbath passed, Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus, went into the tomb and found it empty. Later, the Bible says the resurrected Jesus appeared to some of His followers.

### **The Demise of Unitarian Christianity**

Early Christianity was a widespread community that retained its Jewish roots, beliefs, and practices while adhering to belief in Jesus as the Messiah. The unitarian Christians viewed their mission as almost exclusively to the Jews. One such group was the Ebionites. They followed the Jewish laws and Jewish customs to retain a Jewish identity because Jesus was the Jewish Messiah sent by God to the Jews to the fulfilment of the Jewish laws. Their theological lineage can be traced to the earliest followers of Jesus who believed one can be made right with God by following Christ's example, just as Jesus was fulfilling the Law. After the death of Jesus, the unitarian Christians congregated in Jerusalem around the leadership of Jesus' brother James. The siege of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE and the slaughter of the Jews led to the dissolution of Jewish Christianity. Its teachings died out and later resurfaced in Islam. Most of the teachings of Jesus, as documented in the gospels, are consistent with Islamic teachings. If Jesus enters this world tomorrow, He will be much more comfortable in a Muslim home. Jesus will find the Muslims worshiping one God exclusively without elevating anyone to the godhead. He will not hesitate to partake in a meal in a Muslim home because Islamic dietary laws are similar to the Jewish laws.

## **Trinitarian Christianity in the Post-Jesus Era**

## **Chapter 20 Pauline Christianity**

### **Jesus, Apostle to the Jews, and Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles**

The mission of Jesus was limited to Jews only: *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles (non-Jews) and changed the course of Christianity. Jesus’ unitarian Christianity and Paul’s trinitarian Christianity are two different sects with a shared vision of Jesus as the Messiah of Jews and Gentiles.

Paul became the leading missionary of the new movement and played a decisive role in extending it beyond the limits of Judaism to become a worldwide religion. He traveled tens of thousands of miles around the Mediterranean, spreading the word of the new faith.

#### **Brief Life History of Paul**

Paul was born in Tarsus (now in Turkey). He was granted Roman citizenship as a reward for his mercenary service for Rome. This fact explains his two names. When speaking Greek, he used his Roman surname, Paul. Within the Judaic community, he used his Jewish name, Saul. He received training as a rabbi in Jerusalem. Like many great leaders, Paul was a controversial individual, and there is no reference to him in the Quran.

#### **Paul the Persecutor**

Paul was not one of Jesus’ disciples and had never met Jesus in person. He first appears on the scene of history as a persecutor of the newly founded Christian church about two years after the death of Christ. Stephen, a new convert to Christianity, was stoned to death, and the murderers *“laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul”* (Acts 7:58).

## **Paul's Conversion**

In Acts, Paul, on his way to Damascus to persecute the church, is stopped by a visionary experience of Jesus. What happened has been hard to determine, as the accounts in Acts and Paul's letters differ on the details. For example, when Paul talks about his conversion, he does not mention a journey from Jerusalem to Damascus.

## **Negative Impact of Paul's Teachings**

Jewish Law is the focus of many passages in the gospels. Jesus repeatedly insisted he meant to uphold and fulfill the Jewish scripture, not contradict them. Jesus admonished his followers to observe the Law unwaveringly. Not only does Jesus keep the laws of the Torah, but he also added that the observance of the Law should be not only external but also internal. He argued that the whole Law could be summarized in the maxim commonly called the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Jesus made some common-sense exceptions to the rigid Law and had a different explanation than the other Jewish leaders.

## **Abandonment of the Laws of Torah for Gentiles Only**

Paul replaced the Laws of Torah with faith in Christ and the crucifixion of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for the world's sin. Abandoning the complicated Laws of the Torah was a direct contradiction to the teachings of Jesus.

## **Split in the Early Church**

Paul's insistence on not observing the Laws of Moses offended the original group of disciples, who wanted to remain a more exclusive Jewish sect, and they broke with Paul after a passionate dispute.

## **Salvation Is Free through Grace**

The traditional concept of repentance, the atonement of sins, and leading a righteous life in the quest for salvation requires psychological transformation and radical change in the lifestyle of the sinners. Beliefs alone do not make a better person; behavior does. Islam, as in Judaism, lays stress on orthopraxy (actions or good deeds). Paul's Christianity stresses orthodoxy (correct beliefs), a concept based only on belief systems, without demanding corrective actions. Paul declared salvation to be a free gift, through grace and not good works. All the sinners must believe Jesus died on the cross for the world's sins, thus theoretically undermining the possibility of reformation of the sinners.

To an outsider, it seems that Paul was a great salesman, and he said what he had to say to achieve the objective of attracting pagans to his version of Christianity. Paul even admits that ends justify the means in the following verse:

*To the Jews, I became like a Jew to win the Jews. To those under the law, I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), to win those under the law. To those not having the law, I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), to win those not having the law. To the weak, I became weak to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.*  
(1Corinthians 9:20-22)

By abandoning the laws of the Torah and having two sets of rules, one for Gentiles and another for Jews, and declaring salvation free, Paul made new Christianity irresistible for the pagans of the Roman Empire. The church expanded far and wide, flinging open the doors to pagans.

### **Triune God**

Since Gentiles or pagans were polytheists, the strict monotheism of Jesus was another hurdle for them. Christian leaders in the latter centuries came up with another compromise, in the form of triune God.

## **Bernard Shaw's Take on Paul's Theology**

Bernard Shaw in *Androcles and the Lion* explains Paul's conversion and theology in the following words: "The conversion of Paul was no conversion at all: it was Paul who converted the religion that has raised one man above sin and death into a religion that delivered millions of men so completely into their dominion that their common nature became a horror to them, and the religious life became a denial of life. There is not one word of Pauline Christianity in the characteristic utterances of Jesus."

## **The Importance of Paul's Mission**

Many Islamic authorities tend to reject outright Paul's contributions to the religious history of man for distorting the original message of Jesus and using questionable tactics for the propagation of his message. The dominant religion professed by today's Christians is Paul's Christianity. Without the rise of Pauline Christianity, the Christian movement would have died, and Jesus' message would have faded into the dustbin of history.

Paul's mission was to bring the Gentiles or pagan polytheists into the fold of monotheism. He was wildly successful in converting the pagan idol-worshippers into believing in some form of monotheism. A similar miraculous feat was performed six hundred years later by Prophet Muhammad. The difference is that Muhammad preached absolute and pristine monotheism and rejected any compromise in the unity of God. Without the apostle Paul and Prophet Muhammad, monotheism would have been a small minority today, a needle in a haystack, mainly in the form of Judaism. From an Islamic standpoint, the compromised monotheism of Paul's Christianity is preferable to the dualism of Zoroastrianism and the pagan idol worship (see chapter 22).

## Chapter 21

### The Birth of the Trinity

#### What Is the Trinity?

Christians believe God is trinitarian, i.e., three persons in one—Father (God), Son of God (Jesus), and the Holy Spirit (Holy Ghost). Jesus was elevated to the second person in the Trinity. Nowhere does the New Testament say that there are three persons, all distinct, all equally God, and yet there is only one God. There is no record of Christ having ever said God is a Trinity. No trinitarian doctrine is explicitly taught in the Old Testament. Many Christian theologians, apologists, and philosophers believe the doctrine of the Trinity can be inferred from the Old and New Testaments. The Bible translators of past centuries were so zealous to find support for their belief in the triune God formula in the New Testament that they added the verse found in 1 John 5:7: **“For there are three that bear witness in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit: and these three are one.”** This forgery first appeared in the 1522 third edition.

#### God the Father, Speaking Metaphorically

Jesus said: “Call no man on the earth, your father, for one is your Father, He who is in heaven.”

(Matthew 23:9)

The unique relationship of Jesus to God is expressed through his designation of God as Father. In prayers, Jesus used the Aramaic word *abba* (“father”) for God, which is not unheard-of in religious discourse in Judaism. The term “my Father” is a metaphor that refers to God, the Originator and Sustainer of the entire universe, just like any father involved in procreation, supporting, and nurturing the coming generation. Jesus himself embraced the God of the Hebrew patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob).

Subsequently, however, some followers of Jesus lifted this expression from the realm of metaphor



and transferred it to literality. Anthropomorphism is the perception of a divine being or beings in human form or recognizing human qualities in these beings. Both Judaism and Islam reject an anthropomorphic deity, believing that God is unique and beyond human comprehension. God as a “person,” in a literal sense, compromises the essence of God as transcendent, omnipresent, unique, indefinable, perfect, self-sufficient, and so forth.

### **The Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost of God becomes one of the most elusive and difficult themes in Christian theology. It refers to one of the three persons in the godhead but does not evoke a concrete image as the “Father” or “Son” does. The Holy Spirit tends to be present more as a power than a person in the New Testament, though there was distinctive personal representation in the dove at Jesus’ baptism.

A characteristic view of the Holy Spirit is sketched out in the Gospel according to John. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit takes place only after the ascension of Christ; it is the beginning of a new time of salvation, in which the Holy Spirit is sent as the Paraclete (counselor) to the church remaining behind in this world.

### **The Quranic View of the Holy Spirit**

The term *ruh* often denotes “divine inspiration.” Occasionally, however, it is used to describe the medium through which such inspiration is imparted to God’s elect, in other words, the angel (or angelic force) of revelation. The designation of the angel as *ruh* (“spirit” or “soul”) indicates this category of beings is purely spiritual, without any physical element. In Luke’s gospel, the angel Gabriel was the Holy Spirit who announced the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. Angel Gabriel is also Holy Spirit in the Quran.

## Son of God

### The Pagan Concept of the Son of God

In the Roman and Greek polytheistic culture, rulers and heroes were called sons of Zeus, Poseidon, or Apollo. Historians believed Alexander the Great implied he was a demigod by actively using the title “Son of Ammon-Zeus.” His mother, Olympias, declared Zeus impregnated her while she slept under an oak tree sacred to God. The trinitarian Christian concept of the Son of God is more in tune with the pagan view. (See above for the Jewish idea of the Son of God.)

### Influence of Greek Philosophy

One of the decisive developments in Western philosophy was the widespread merging of Greek philosophical concepts with the Judeo-Christian religious and scriptural traditions. A direct influence on second-century Christian theology was the philosopher and theologian **Philo** of Alexandria (aka Philo Judaeus), who interpreted the Jewish Bible teaching that God created the cosmos by His Word (*logos*). Another influence may have been **Plotinus** (204–270 CE), who postulated a single source from which all forms of existence emanate and with which the soul seeks a mystical union. He also described three hypostases (underlying substance as opposed to attributes) of the soul, the intellect (*nous*), and “the one,” and their sameness using *homoousios* (in Greek, *homo*— “same”; *ousia*—“substance”). The first traces of the divinity of Christ appeared as the Logos, the “word” that issues from eternity in the Gospel of John: *In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (John 1:1).*

### Conflicting Views about the Nature of Jesus

After the death of Jesus, the Jewish followers were at variance about the nature of Jesus Christ.

1. Some Jews rejected Jesus altogether.
2. Many believed that Jesus was the prophet sent for the reformation of Jews.

3. Some thought Jesus was a human being and later was exalted to the godhead.
4. Yet another group claimed he was always God.

There were myriad other controversies about the nature of Jesus.

### **Brief Historical Review: How Jesus Evolved from Man to God**

#### **The Resurrection, the First Step in Jesus' Divinity**

Jesus was subjected to an appalling and humiliating death. Everyone in the Roman Empire knew about the crucifixion and the fact that Jesus died in this way. That God's Anointed One could have been so publicly humiliated seemed outrageous. The scandalous death of a Messiah who died like a common criminal on the cross presented a dilemma to his disciples. They were shocked by the scandal of his death, and they could not believe their faith in him was misplaced.

There is conflicting information regarding the resurrection of Jesus in the gospels. Whether the resurrection of Jesus was real or mere delusion is beside the point. The public humiliation was conquered through the belief in resurrection, which convinced early Christians that Jesus was not a criminal and had died not for his sins; he died for the sins of others. It was simply intolerable to zealous Jews like Paul that God's special envoy could have died a criminal's death. He describes it as a "stumbling block" to Jews (1 Corinthians 1:23). Belief in Jesus' resurrection elevated the humiliated Messiah into a victorious superman and eventually led his followers to claim that Jesus was God. They worshiped Jesus alongside God in the earliest known Christianity.

#### **In What Sense Was Jesus God?**

Jesus being God was understood in many ways. In the second and third centuries, Christian theologians attempted to refine their views about Christ's divinity. Some claimed that Jesus was

fully human but not divine. Others said he was fully divine but not human. Yet others asserted that Jesus was two beings, one divine and another human, coexisting temporarily during his ministry. All these views were later rejected as false dogmas. By the fourth century, the majority of Christians believed that Jesus was God, but the question still remained—in what sense?

### **Arian Controversy: Human Jesus Exalted to God**

Christology is the branch of Christian theology relating to the person, nature, and role of Christ. Jesus was adopted as the Son of God at some point, either at his baptism, resurrection, or ascension. Some early Christians considered Jesus a fully human being until, at some point, God exalted him and made him his Son, the Messiah, the Lord. Therefore, Jesus is not equal but subordinate to God the Father.

Bishop Arius (256–336 CE) of Alexandria, Egypt, was a subordinationist who believed the pre-existent Son of God was directly created by the Father, before all ages, and that he was subordinate to God the Father. Arius's position was that the Son was the first of God's creations and that the Father later created all things through the Son. Arianism became the dominant view in some regions in the Roman Empire. According to Arius, *homoousios* (same substance) and *homoiousios* (of similar substance) were unbiblical, the Father is greater than the Son because in divine scripture nothing is written about *homoousios* or *homoiousios*, and they are above men's knowledge and understanding.

### **Jesus Was Always God, Known as Incarnate Christology**

Arius's teaching was initially opposed by his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria, who believed Jesus existed eternally, and the Son is equal to the Father. Many churchmen, adhering to subordinationist traditions about the Son, rallied to Arius's side. In contrast, others, favoring theologies holding to the eternal existence of the Son and his (in some sense) equality with the Father, joined his

opponents. The dispute threatened to split the church, and a series of councils ensued, variously excommunicating and vindicating Arius and his defenders or their opponents.

### **Conversion of Emperor Constantine**

Roman Emperor Constantine was a pagan who converted to Christianity early in the fourth century. He knew that something had to be done to unify Rome under a single religion. Due to the rising numbers of Christians, the conflict between pagans and Christians grew. Each side successively strove to win the favor of the Emperor, attempting to manipulate imperial power to crush its opposition. He summoned the first ecumenical council of the church at Nicea to settle the religious dispute.

### **Nicene Creed (325)**

In 325, a council of bishops convened by Emperor Constantine (280–337 CE) decreed the **Father and Son were *homoousios* (same substance or essence)**. The same term was later also applied to the Holy Spirit to designate him as “same in essence” with the Father and the Son.

Arius and his party were excommunicated. The intended meaning of *ousia* here was far from clear. They likely settled on the term because it was disagreeable to the party siding with Arius. This new and ambiguous formula fanned the flames of controversy, as subordinationist and anti-subordinationist understood the phrase differently and later argued for its conflicting interpretations. In response to the controversy sparked by Arius, a critical mass of bishops rallied around what eventually became standard language about the Trinity.

### **Council of Constantinople (381 CE)**

By the time of the council of Constantinople (381 CE), *homoousios* was understood as asserting that the Father and Son were not only similar beings but also in **some sense one being**.

It stopped short of saying the Holy Spirit as *homoousios* with the Father and Son. Over the ensuing period, the same argument used to promote the divinity of the Son was reapplied to the Holy Spirit, and eventually, inhibitions applying *homoousios* to the Holy Spirit evaporated.

### **Council of Chalcedon: Jesus Is a Hundred Percent Divine and Human**

The last issue that needed clarification was the relationship between the divine and the human within Christ, which was decided in the Council of Chalcedon. Since there were three divine persons in one divine essence, there were two natures, one divine and the other human, in one person, Jesus Christ. Jesus was not fifty percent human and fifty percent divine; he was one hundred percent human and one hundred percent divine.

### **Unity of Both Natures**

Both natures of Jesus coexist within one person, united “without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.” This interpretation of the person of Christ affirmed oneness with God and his oneness with humanity while still maintaining the oneness of his person. This has been the Catholic doctrine of the person of Christ ever since.

The main idea behind this concept of “unity of divine and human” within Jesus was that only a Savior who is both truly God and true man can secure man’s salvation. **Nestorianism** was declared heresy, as it considered the two natures (human and divine) of Jesus Christ distinct and functioning in parallel. **Monophysitism** was declared heretical because it states that after the union of the divine and the human, Jesus Christ had only a single nature, divinity, as the divine absorbed the human.

### **Summary (The Nature of Jesus)**

**Council of Nicea:** Father and Son were same substance or essence.

**Council of Constantinople:** The Father and Son were not only similar beings but also in some sense one being.

**Council of Chalcedon:** Jesus is a Hundred Percent Divine and Human at the same time, not fifty percent divine and fifty percent human. Both natures of Jesus coexist within one person, united without division, or separation.

### **What Did Jesus Say about Himself?**

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up and knelt before him. “Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “Why do you call Me good?” Jesus replied. ***“No one is good except God alone.” (Mark 10:17-18).*** Jesus humbly stressed his humanness, by stating “Why do you call Me good?” and that only God is good, or in other words, he was not God.

## Chapter 22

### The Quranic Rebuttal to Jesus Being the Son of God

#### Mariolatry and the Trinity

The Quran categorically rejects the Christian claim that Jesus was God in human flesh. Despite Jesus' supernatural birth and all his miracles, nonetheless, Jesus was still a human being. When it comes to functioning, Christ is no different from any other apostle. The Quran presented a multifaceted approach to the complex subject of worship of Jesus, Mary, and the Trinity.

#### He Neither Begets Nor Was Begotten

***SAY: "He is One God: "God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being. He begets not, and neither is He begotten, and there is nothing that could be compared with Him." (112:1-4)***

The concepts of primary cause and eternal, independent being, combined with the idea that everything existing or conceivable goes back to Him as its source, dependent on Him for its beginning and continued existence. "He begets not, neither he is begotten" is a denial of the Christian dogma of Jesus being the Son of God and the pagan Arabs' belief that angels are God's daughters.

#### Jesus Human As Adam

***Jesus was human—like Adam—in the sight of God; the nature of Jesus is as of Adam, whom He created out of dust, and then said unto him, "Be"—and he is. [This is] the truth from thy Sustainer; be not, then, among the doubters! (3:59-60) [As for Jesus,] he was nothing but [a human being] a servant [of Ours] whom We had graced [with prophethood], and whom We made an example for the children of Israel. (43:59)***



The above passage is part of an argument against the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. Here, the Quran stresses that Jesus, like Adam, was only a mortal “created out of the dust,” i.e., out of substances, both organic and inorganic, found in their elementary forms on and in the earth. Here, Adam stands for humanity is implied in the use of the present tense in the last word of this sentence.

### **Relativity of Time**

“Be—and he is” should be understood within the context of God's timelessness and not from the human perception of time. The "time" of which the Quran so often speaks has nothing to do with human time definitions. Instead, it alludes to an ultimate reality in which the concept of time has neither place nor meaning. In other words, a day, an eon, a thousand years, or fifty thousand years are all alike to Him, having an apparent reality of time only within the created world and none with the Creator. (22:47 and 70:4) God is above time, and He alone knows the meaning of “Be—and he is.” It may or may not mean instantaneously.

### **Intercession and the Son of God**

*And those [beings] whom some invoke besides God have it not in their power to intercede [on Judgment Day] for any but, such as have [in their lifetime] borne witness to the truth and have been aware [that God is one and unique]. Now if you ask those [who worship any being other than God] who it is that has created them, they are sure to answer, “God.” How perverted, then, are their minds! (43:86-87)*

*[Those whom they regard as God’s “offspring” are but His] honored servants: they speak not until He has spoken to them, and [whenever they act,] they act at His behest. They cannot intercede for any, but those whom He has [already] graced with His goodly acceptance since they stand in reverent awe of Him. And if any of them (prophets of God) said, “I am a deity besides*

*Him”—that one We should requite with hell: thus, do We requite all [such] evildoers. (21:26-29)*

God’s offspring refers to Jesus, whom the Christians regard as the Son of God, as well as the angels, whom the pre-Islamic Arabs considered God’s daughters (since they were erroneously conceived of as females). These honored servants of God only proclaim what He has revealed to them and bid them to declare. “Beings whom some invoke besides God” refers to deified saints or prophets, and, particularly given the context, to Jesus. See 10:3— “There is none that could intercede with Him unless He grants leave therefor.”

### **The Ascribing of Divinity to Aught Besides God**

#### **Ezra and Christ, Sons of God**

*And the Jews say, “Ezra is God’s son,” while the Christians say, “The Christ is God’s son.”*

*Such are the sayings which they utter with their mouths, following in spirit assertions made in earlier times by people who denied the truth!” [They deserve the imprecation:] “May God destroy them!” How perverted are their minds! They have taken their Rabbis and their monks—as well as the Christ, Son of Mary—for their lords beside God. However, they had been bidden to worship none but the One God, save whom there is no deity: the One who is utterly remote, in His limitless glory, from anything to which they may ascribe a share in His divinity! (9:30-31)*

The charge of shirk (“the ascribing of divinity or divine qualities to aught beside God”) is leveled against the Jews and the Christians, in amplification of the statement that they “do not follow the religion of truth [which God has enjoined upon them].” Regarding the belief attributed to the Jews that Ezra (or, in the Arabicized form of this name, Uzayr) was “God’s son,” only the Jews of Arabia, and not all Jews, have been thus accused. Some of the Jews of Medina once said to Muhammad, “How could we follow thee when thou hast forsaken our Qiblah and dost not consider Ezra a son of God?” Ezra occupies a unique and esteemed position among Jews and has been

praised in the most extravagant terms. He restored and codified the Torah after it was lost during the Babylonian exile and “edited” it into more or less the form it has today. He promoted the establishment of an exclusive, legalistic type of religion that became dominant in later Judaism. Since then, he is revered to such a degree that the Talmudists regard his verdicts on the Law of Moses equivalent to the Law itself. In the Quranic ideology, it amounts to the unforgivable sin of shirk, as it implies the elevation of a human being to a quasi-divine lawgiver.

### **Why God Needs a Son When the Universe Belongs to Him**

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

### **God Is Infinite, While Son Is Finite**

*And God’s is the east and the west: and wherever you turn, there is God’s countenance. Behold, God is infinite, all-knowing. And yet some people assert, “God has taken unto Himself a son!” Limitless is He in His glory! Nay, but His is all that is in the heavens and on earth; all things devoutly obey His will. (2:115-116)*

### **Total Falsehood**

*Furthermore, [this divine writ is meant] to warn all those who assert, “God has taken unto Himself a son.” No knowledge whatsoever have they of Him, and neither had their forefathers: dreadful is this saying that comes out of their mouths, [and] nothing but falsehood do they utter!*

(18:4-5)

### **Son Presupposes Likeness with the Father**

The idea that God might have a “son” would presuppose a degree of likeness between “the father” and “the son.” It contradicts the belief that God is unique in every respect, so “there is nothing like unto Him” (42:11) and “nothing could be compared with Him” (112:4). It amounts to an attempt to define God, who is “sublimely exalted above anything that men may devise by way of the definition” (see 6:100). Islam rejects an anthropomorphic deity (divine being in human form), believing that God is unique and beyond human comprehension.

### **Progeny Presupposes Incompleteness**

The idea of progeny presupposes incompleteness before the act of procreation. In whatever sense, incompleteness negates the concept of God’s perfection. God is remote from the incompleteness inherent in the need or desire for progeny, which precludes the possibility of His having a “son” either in a literal or metaphorical sense.

### **Offspring Implies Continuation to Another Being**

Death is the outcome for all created beings. Having an offspring implies an organic continuation in another being. God is transcendent and everlasting; He had no beginning or end.

### **Rejection of Adoration of Prophets, Saints, and Angels**

*It is impossible that a human being to whom God had granted revelation, sound judgment, and prophethood should, after that, have said to people, “Worship me besides God.” Rather [did he exhort them], “Become men of God by spreading the knowledge of the divine writ, and by your deep study [thereof].” And neither did he bid you take the angels and the prophets for your lords:*

*[for] would he bid you deny the truth after you have surrendered yourselves unto God? (3:79-80)*

Do not attribute divine or semi-divine powers to them; this is a categorical rejection of the adoration of saints and angelic beings.

### **Will I Worship Jesus?**

*Say [O Prophet]: “If the Most Gracious [truly] had a son; I would be the first to worship him!”*

*Utterly remote, in His glory, is the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth—the Sustainer, in almightiness enthroned—from all that, they may attribute to Him by way of definition! (43:81-82)*

### **Only God Is All-Powerful**

*Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the Christ, son of Mary.” Say: “And who could have prevailed with God in any way had it been His will to destroy the Christ, Son of Mary, and his mother, everyone on earth—all of them? For God’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that is between them; He creates what He wills: and God has the power to will anything!” (5:17)*

### **How Christ’s Divinity Comforted the Meccan Idolaters**

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

The sonship of Christ aided and comforted the Meccan idolaters, who believed God had sons and daughters. The pagan Quraysh objected to the Quranic condemnation of their idolatrous worship of angels, whom they described as “our deities,” and pointed to the parallel Christian worship of Jesus as the Son of God and even as God incarnate.

The pagans of Arabia argued thus: The Quran states Jesus was purely human—and yet the Christians, whom the same Quran describes as followers of earlier revelation, consider him divine. “Hence, we are justified in our worshiping angels, who are certainly superior to a mere human being.” The Quran explicitly condemns in many places the deification of Jesus by the Christians. This unwarranted deification cannot be used as an argument for the pagan worship of angels because such an argument amounts to applying a false analogy to a false proposition.

### **The Deification of Jesus and the Last Hour**

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

“Succeeding one another” implies that Jesus was not a supernatural being. The angels are also created beings, finite in their existence, and therefore, utterly removed from the status of divinity. The specific mention of the Last Hour in the above context is meant to stress man’s ultimate responsibility before the Creator and that worship is due to Him alone.

### **Bear with Them**

*[But God has complete knowledge of the true believer] and his [despairing] cry: “O my Sustainer! These are people who will not believe!” You bear with them and say, “Peace [be upon you]!”—For in time, they will know [the truth]. (43:88-89)*

Every believer of any denomination who is distressed at the blindness of people is advised to “bear with them” who attribute divinity or divine qualities to any being other than God Himself and hope they will see the light.

## **Truth about Jesus upon Death**

*Yet there is not one of the followers of earlier revelation who does not grasp the truth about Jesus at the moment of his death, and on the Day of Resurrection, he [himself] shall bear witness to the truth against them. (4:159)*

According to this verse, all believing Jews and Christians will realize upon their death that Jesus was truly a prophet of God—having been neither an impostor nor the Son of God.

## **We All Are God’s Children**

*And [both] the Jews and the Christians say, “We are God’s children and His beloved ones.” Say: “Why, then, does He cause you to suffer for your sins? No, you are but human beings of His creation. He forgives whom He wills, and He causes suffering whom He wills: for God’s is the dominion over the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, and with Him is all journeys’ end” (5:18).*

“We are God’s children, and His beloved ones”—see Exodus 4:22-23 (Israel is My Son), Jeremiah 31:9 (I am a father to Israel), and the many parallel expressions in the gospels.

## **Mariolatry and Dialogue between God and Jesus**

*On the Day when God shall assemble all the apostles and ask, “What response did you receive?”—they will answer, “We do not know; verily, it is Thou alone who fully knowest all the things beyond the reach of a created being’s perception.” (5:109) And lo! God said: “O Jesus, Son of Mary! Did you say unto men, ‘Worship my mother and me as deities besides God?’” [Jesus] answered: “Limitless art Thou in Thy glory! It would not have been possible for me to say what I had no right to [say]! Had I said this, Thou would indeed have known it! Thou knew all within me, whereas I do not know what is in Thy Self. Thou alone fully know all the things*

*beyond the reach of a created being's perception. (5:116)*

Toward the end of the third century of the Christian era, some theologians of Alexandria employed the expression “Mother of God” in connection with Mary. In 431, the Council of Ephesus officially used “Mother of God” for Mary. Subsequently, belief in Mary’s divinity and the practice of Mariolatry (worship of the Virgin Mary) began to spread among Christians.

### **Suffering on a Grievous Day**

*But factions from among those [who came after Jesus] began to hold divergent views: woe, then, to those bent on evildoing—[woe] for the suffering [that will befall them] on a grievous Day! Are they [who are lost in sin] but waiting for the Last Hour—[waiting] it comes upon them suddenly, without their being aware [of its approach]? On that Day, [erstwhile] friends will be foes—[all] save the God-conscious. (43:65-67)*

Some held divergent views regarding the nature of Jesus by raising a human being to godhead, an allusion to subsequent developments in Christianity. They regarded him as “the son of God”—and therefore, as “God incarnate.” They will hate one another on Judgment Day— those who realize they have been led astray and those responsible for leading others astray.

### **Monstrous Claim**

*As it is, some assert, “The Most Gracious has taken unto Himself a son! Indeed, [by this assertion] you have brought forth something monstrous, whereat the heavens might well- nigh be rent into fragments, and the earth be split asunder, and the mountains fall in ruins! That man should ascribe a son to the Most Gracious, although it is inconceivable that the Most Gracious should take unto Himself a son! (19:88-92)*



### **Warn Christians of the Day of Regrets**

*And [thus it was that Jesus always said]: “Verily, God is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer; so, worship [none but] Him: this (alone) is a straight way.” And yet, the sects [that follow the Bible] are at variance among themselves [about Jesus]! Woe, then, unto all who deny the truth when that awesome Day will appear! How well will they hear and comprehend [the truth] on the Day when they come before Us! Today, however, these evildoers are lost in error: hence, warn them of [the coming of] the Day of Regrets, when everything will have been decided—for yet they are heedless, and they do not believe [in it]. Behold, We alone shall remain after the earth, and all who live on it passed away, and [when] unto Us all will be brought back. (19:36-40)*

### **Associationism a Grave Sin**

*Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the Christ, Son of Mary; noting that the Christ [himself] said, “O children of Israel! Worship God [alone]; who is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer.” [See Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; John 20:17.] Whoever ascribes divinity to any being beside God, unto him, will God deny paradise, and his goal shall be the fire, and such evildoers will have none to succor them! (5:72)*

### **Desist from Saying God Is the Third Person of the Trinity**

*Indeed, they who deny the truth say, “God is the third of a trinity”—seeing that there is no deity whatever saves One God. And unless they desist from this assertion, grievous suffering bound to befall, such of them as are bent on denying the truth. Will they not then turn toward God in repentance and ask His forgiveness? For God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. (5:73-74)*

Whoever ascribes divinity to any being besides God will “God deny paradise, and his goal shall be the fire” is a general Quranic warning to all associationists; however, the trinitarian

Christians assert that they intend to worship one God.

### **Appeal to the Followers of the Bible**

*O followers of the Bible! Now there has come unto you, Our Apostle, to clarify much of what you have been concealing [from yourselves] of the Bible and to pardon much. Now there has come unto you from God a light, and a clear divine writ, through which God shows unto all who seek His good acceptance the paths leading to salvation. And, by His grace, brings them out of the depths of darkness into the light and guides them onto a straightway. (5:15-16) O followers of the Bible! Now, after a prolonged time during which no apostles have appeared, there has come unto you [this] Our Apostle to make [the truth] clear to you, lest you say, “No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us, nor any Warner.” For now, there has come unto you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner—since God has the power to will anything. (5:19)*

The concealing of something from oneself is a reference to the gradual obscuring, by the followers of the Bible, of its original verities, which they are now unwilling to admit even to themselves. By following the trinitarian God, the Christians have forgotten the original message of the monotheism of Jesus.

### **Jewish and Gentile Reaction**

As the gospel shows, the application of the name “Son of God” to Jesus was offensive to Jews because it seemed to smack of gentile polytheism. Facing both the Jews and the Greeks, the church declared Jesus Christ God’s sole Son. The Son of God in antithesis to Jewish claims that the eternal could have no sons, the only Son, in antithesis to Greek myths of divine procreation and multiple gods. The doctrine of the Incarnation of God in Jesus has always scandalized Jews, and later, Muslims would also find it blasphemous.

According to **Adolf von Harnack**, the eminent German theologian and scholar, Christian dogma

appeared to be a corruption of the essentially simple faith of Jesus and the early Christians. It was viewed as an intrusion of Greek philosophy that obscured the Christian truth it set out to guard. Such eminent Western thinkers and giants, like **Sir Isaac Newton**, believed Christianity went astray in the fourth century when the First Council of Nicea propounded erroneous doctrines of the nature of Christ and that trinitarian passages in the Bible were latter- day alteration of the original text. It took almost four hundred years to define the doctrine of the Trinity and elevate Jesus into the godhead. Greek ideals of godly plurality overshadowed Christianity's monotheism. The accretions of councils and theologies have carried Christian doctrine a long way from the simple purity of the Nazarene. After his death, the religion of Jesus Christ became a religion about Jesus Christ.

### **The Mystery of Messiah before Judgment Day**

Jews are waiting for the coming of Messiah, who will bring Jewish victory over their enemies and create paradise on earth for them. The Jewish Messiah will not be Jesus Christ. Christians have been waiting for the second coming of Jesus for the past two thousand years. The Quran does not mention the second advent of Jesus, Messiah, or Mahdi. Those Muslims who believe in the second advent of Jesus based their arguments solely on the several Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. He supposedly mentioned the arrival of Jesus close to the end of times to defeat "Dajjal," the Antichrist. These traditions are of questionable authenticity for several reasons:

- The Quran repeatedly stresses the onset of the Last Hour will be sudden and that only God knows the timing of the Last Hour. If Jesus suddenly appeared on the world stage as some Ahadith state, we would understand that Judgment Day is imminent.
- The arrival of this superman gives a false hope that somehow a white knight will appear from the cloud with angels to save all believers from evil, rather than believers who struggle

to improve this world.

- Many pseudo-prophets have misconstrued these traditions of “promised Messiah” or Mahdi, resulting in the formation of new sects and further divisions.
- If Jesus is coming the second time, then Jesus will be the last prophet, not Muhammad, which contradicts one of Islam’s bedrock teachings.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), one of the great literary geniuses of his time, in his essay “The Hero As Prophet,” compared Islam and Christianity: “Mahomet’s Creed we called a kind of Christianity; and really, if we look at the wild rapt earnestness with which it was believed and laid to heart, I should say a better kind than that of those miserable Syrian Sects, with their vain janglings about Homoiousion and Homoousion, the head full of worthless noise, the heart empty and dead! The truth of it is embedded in portentous error and falsehood; but the truth of it makes it be believed, not the falsehood: it succeeded by its truth.”

## **Salvation Theology**

## **Chapter 23**

### **Paul's and Augustine's Salvation Theology**

In this section, three points of view are presented concerning salvation theology—how Paul and St. Augustine, Jesus, and the Quran describe salvation.

#### **Jesus Died for Our Sins**

In Romans 5:12-19, Paul establishes a parallelism between Adam and Christ, stating that whereas sin and death entered the world through Adam, grace and eternal life has come in greater abundance through Christ. Paul said that Jesus suffered and “died for our sins.” Paul and the other New Testament writers never attempted a precise, definitive explanation of salvation. There were no detailed theories about the crucifixion as atonement for Adam's “original sin” in the early church. This theology did not emerge until the fourth century.

#### **St. Augustine's Explanation**

Augustine (354-430 CE) is one of the main figures through whom the merging of Greek philosophy was accomplished, and the classical philosophy in general and Neo-Platonism entered the mainstream of early and subsequent medieval philosophy. Augustine can be called the founder of the Western spirit. No other theologian, apart from St. Paul, has been more influential in the West. Although raised as a Catholic, Augustine left the church to follow the Manichaean religion, much to the despair of his mother. As a youth, Augustine lived a hedonistic lifestyle for a time, and in Carthage, he developed a relationship with a woman who would be his concubine for over thirteen years and gave birth to his son. Later in life, Augustine reverted to Catholicism.

#### **Inheritance of Original Sin**

St. Augustine believed God had condemned humanity to eternal damnation simply due to Adam's one sin. The original sin is a so-called condition or state of sin. Every human being is born because of the first man, Adam, who disobeyed God in eating the forbidden fruit (of knowledge of good and evil), thus transmitting his sin and guilt by heredity to his descendants.

All human beings are predestined to go to hell. Even at birth, a child is already deserving of God's wrath for its share in the original sin of mankind before it acquires the guilt of its actual sin.

### **Divine Wrath upon Mankind**

The first Adam was the representative of fallen humanity in whose transgression we all sinned and came under the penalty of death (Romans 5:12). Sin was a violation of divine honor. God was supposedly so angry because of man's sinfulness that only the sacrifice of His only begotten son would have pacified His anger. Only a Savior who is both truly God and true man can secure man's salvation. Jesus was such a savior; he was one hundred percent human and one hundred percent divine, both of his natures coexisting within him. In other words, a life truly human that had infinite worth would have been enough to give such satisfaction to the violated honor of God on behalf of the entire human race.

Christ was the sacrificial lamb offered up to God to still divine anger. By his own volition and effort, no person can save himself but must depend absolutely upon the saving grace of Christ. The crucifixion of Christ was a vicarious sacrifice offered to God as propitiation or atonement for human sin. Alternatively, it was the price paid to redeem man from the devil. Therefore, Christ was the second Adam, creating second humanity. His death shows how much God loves humanity.

### **Appeasing Sinners without Demanding Reformation**

The Catholic version of salvation is somewhat different from evangelical Christians. Catholics believe they are saved by God's grace alone, but a response of faith and works is necessary.

Protestants believe the only response necessary is an act of faith. Evangelical Christians are theologically conservative Protestants who believe in the free gift of salvation if one believes Jesus died on the cross for the sins of humanity.

In short, God was so angry due to the sinfulness of man, which He created in the first place, that He sent his only begotten son on a suicide mission to save humanity. The emphasis on getting a “free gift” of salvation negates the need for behavioral change in a sinner to become a better human being. There is no biblical verse or passage to support the above position regarding salvation. The whole concept is manmade, without any support from Jesus himself. Jesus never claimed he would die on the cross for the sins of man.

### **Bernard Shaw**

Bernard Shaw in *Androcles and the Lion* said about the Christian concept of salvation: “There is no record of Christ having ever said to any man: ‘Go and sin as much as you like: you can put it all on me.’ He said, ‘Sin no more,’ and insisted that he was putting up the standard of conduct, not debasing it, and that the righteousness of his followers must exceed that of the Scribe and Pharisee. The notion that he was shedding his blood so that every petty cheat and adulterator and libertine might wallow in it and come out whiter than snow cannot be imputed to him on his own authority.



## Chapter 24

### What Did Jesus Say about Salvation?

#### Universal Salvation

In the gospels, Jesus lays down the principles of universal salvation based on good deeds, repentance, and forgiveness of sins. Salvation is not restricted to any denomination or religious affiliations.

#### Lord's Prayer: Forgiveness Begets Forgiveness

Our Father in Heaven hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Today, give us our daily bread and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one. If you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins. (Matthew 6:5-15)

Forgiveness is the central theme of the Lord's Prayer. God will then forgive our sins as we forgive others who sin against us, the concept identical with the teachings of the Quran. *We ordained for them in that [Torah]: A life for a life, and an eye for an eye, and a nose for a nose, and an ear for an ear, and a tooth for a tooth, and a [similar] retribution for wounds. He who shall forgo it out of charity will atone thereby for some of his past sins. (Quran 5:45)*

#### The Salvation of the Poor and the Wealthy

See the description under "beatitudes" for those who will enter the kingdom of God according to Jesus: meek, poor, those who thirst after righteousness, persecuted for the sake of righteousness,

pure of hearts, merciful, peacemakers. Contrast that with what Jesus said about the salvation of the wealthy (see next).

### **Dialogue with a Wealthy Young Man**

When asked about eternal life, this is what Jesus said: *As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good— except God alone." "You know the commandment: 'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honor your father and mother.'*

"Why do you call me good? Only God is good." Jesus emphasizes his humanness and humbleness.

Jesus only mentioned commandments relating to the rights of fellow man (Huquq al Abad), stressing orthopraxy (deeds) over orthodoxy (correct beliefs). Many biblical commentators condemn the rich man for not giving up all his wealth. In Islam, one has the right to keep his wealth earned through honest means after paying the poor tax or *zakah*, equal to 2.5 percent of his net worth annually. If this test is applied today, almost all of us will react the same way as the rich man.

*Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!" The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, "Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel (rope in some translations) to go through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the kingdom of God." The disciples were even more amazed and said, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man,*

*this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God." (Mark 10:17-31)*

Leading a righteous life and doing good deeds exemplify good-faith effort on the believer's part. Good deeds alone may not be enough to be saved (with man, that is impossible), but everything is possible with God's grace and mercy that one can enter eternal life—a concept consistent with the Quranic teachings.

### **Repentance and Restoring Usurped Rights of Victims**

*Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he could not see over the crowd because he was short. So, he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus came to the place, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for today I must stay at your house." And he hurried and came down and received Him gladly. When they saw it, they all began to grumble, saying, "He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." Zacchaeus stopped and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much." And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man has come to seek and save which was lost." (Luke 19:5-10)*

For the true repentance of sins against a fellow man, one must restore the usurped rights, ask forgiveness of the victim and God, and not repeat the same sin, a concept consistent with the Quran. The goal is to learn lessons from one's mistakes and be a better person than before.

### **The Narrow Gate to Heaven and Broad Highway to Hell**

*You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to Hell is broad, and its entrance is wide for the many who choose that way. But small is the gate and narrow the road*

*that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Mathew 7:13-14)*

The righteous enter through the narrow gate, and only a few will find it. Evil has no boundaries or restraints, and the highway to hell is broad for many.

### **The Narrow Door for the Righteous Only**

*He went through towns and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. And someone said to him, "Lord, will those who are saved be few?" And he said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. I tell you, many will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:22–24)*

### **Reply to the Sinners: I Don't Know You**

*When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!' (Luke 13:25–27)*

### **Righteous and the Prophets in the Kingdom**

*In that place, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves cast out. And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last." (Luke 13:28-30)*

### **Sin and Hell**

*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one*

*part than your whole body be thrown into Hell. And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into Hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)*

### **The Fate of the Sheep and the Goats**

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

### **Sheep on the Right, or Commissions of Good Deeds**

*"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me in. I needed clothes, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you looked after me. I was in prison, and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty, and give you something to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and invite you in, or need clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'*

### **Goats on the Left, or Omissions of Good Deeds**

*"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger, and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes, and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison, and you did not look after*

*me.' "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:31-46)*

In this spectacular passage, Jesus made it crystal-clear that people will gain salvation not because they believed in Christ; they have never even seen or heard of the Son of Man: *"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"* They will enter paradise because they have helped people in need. Salvation is not restricted to any denomination or religious affiliations. The concept of universal salvation based on good deeds and not only on belief is identical with the Quran. It is opposite of the apostle Paul's assertions that salvation could not be earned by doing the things the Law required or even doing anything at all. According to Paul, *"I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"* (Galatians 2:21)

The conclusion is that Jesus did not suffer on the cross for the sins of humanity, and his crucifixion becomes irrelevant in the context of salvation.

## Chapter 25

### The Islamic Perspective of Salvation

#### Original Sin

*[Satan said:] "O Adam! Shall I lead you to the tree of life eternal and to a kingdom that will never decay?" And so, the two ate [of the fruit] thereof. Thereupon, they became conscious of their nakedness and covered themselves with pieced-together leaves from the garden. And [thus] did Adam disobey his Sustainer, and therefore he did fall into grievous error. (20:120-121)*

The human condition (suffering, death, and a universal tendency toward sin) is accounted for by the story of the Fall of Adam in the early chapters of the Book of Genesis. However, the Old Testament says nothing about the transmission of hereditary sin to the entire human race. In the gospels, Jesus never mentioned the notion of the Fall of Man and universal sin. The Quran has a different perspective on the story of the Fall.

Sin in Islam is not a state of being. It results from an act of disobedience—failure to do or not to do what God commands or prohibits. Human beings are not sinful by nature but instead are created weak and subject to temptation by Satan. Death follows from the human condition and is not due to sin or the Fall. The consequences of sin, like human responsibility, belong solely to those who sin. In the Bible, the Fall brings a life of shame, disgrace, and hardship, while the Quran teaches that Adam disobeys God but repents, and God extended to Adam His mercy and guidance.

#### Proportionality of Punishment

Was Adam eating the forbidden fruit truly such a grave sin that the whole human race deserves condemnation? Did God not punish him enough by throwing him and Eve out of the garden of Eden?

### **Satan Is Not the Primary Cause of Sin**

Satan has no power over those who have attained faith and, in their Sustainer, place their trust: he has the power only over those willing to follow him and who [thus] ascribe to him a share in God's divinity. (16:99-100)

The Satan of the Quran is not an all-powerful monster lurking above human beings forcing them to commit evil. All Satan can do is tempt man. The power of the negative principle symbolized by Satan has no intrinsic reality. It becomes real only through men willfully choosing the wrong course of action.

### **Predestination Incompatible with Free Will**

The concept of "inheriting sin" is predestination and incompatible with free will. It negates one of the most fundamental principles of freedom—every individual is responsible for his actions.

### **From Animal-like State to Moral Free Will**

On the contrary, the outcome of the original sin had a silver lining because Adam, who was living in an innocent but animal-like state, became conscious of right and wrong, a significant evolutionary step separating human beings from the animal kingdom. It transformed him from a purely instinctive being into a full-fledged human entity as we know it—capable of discerning right from wrong and endowed with moral free will, which distinguishes him from all other sentient beings.

### **Forgiving Adam**

*Say: "Unto God, who has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy." (6:12) "My grace overspreads everything." (7:156) Adam received words [of guidance] from his Sustainer, and He accepted his repentance: for, He alone is the acceptor of repentance, the Dispenser of Grace.*



(2:37)

Why did God not forgive Adam to begin with, instead of going through a ritual of human sacrifice?  
In the Quranic version, God did forgive Adam and Eve.

### **Vicarious Atonement**

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

Any transfer of moral responsibility from one person to another is shown to be impossible. On the Judgment Day—for whatever wrong any human being commits—rests upon him alone. This is one of the metaphoric Quran passages. It doesn't mean that no one can or should help anyone with anything. It refers to moral burdens; you can't ask someone else to absolve you of your sins. You must shoulder them yourself by repenting, repairing the damage you did, and as Jesus said, "Go, and sin no more." Contrary to Paul's and Augustine's, the Quranic and Jesus' versions of salvation are almost identical.

### **Path Leading to Salvation**

*O, followers of the Bible! Now there has come unto you Our Apostle, to make clear unto you much of what you have been concealing [from yourselves] of the Bible, and to pardon much. Now there has come unto you from God a light, and a clear divine writ, through which God shows unto all that seek His goodly acceptance of the paths leading to salvation and, by His grace, brings them out of the depths of darkness into the light and guides them onto a straightway. (5:15-16) O followers of the Bible! Now, after a long time during which no apostles*

*have appeared, there has come unto you [this] Our Apostle to make [the truth] clear to you, lest you say, “No bearer of glad tidings has come unto us, nor any warner,” for now, there has come unto you a bearer of glad tidings and a warner—since God has the power to will anything. (5:19)*

The verses above are addressed to the Jews and the Christians; the term *al-Kitab* may suitably be rendered here as “the Bible.” “What you have been concealing [from yourselves] of the Bible” refers to the gradual obscuring of eternal verities. The followers of the Bible are now unwilling to admit it even to themselves.

The word *salam*, here rendered as salvation, denotes inner peace, soundness, and security from the evil of any kind, both physical and spiritual, and the achievement of what is described as salvation, with the difference that the Christian concept of salvation presupposes the existence of an a priori state of sinfulness, or the doctrine of original sin, not justified in Islam, which does not subscribe to this doctrine. Consequently, the term “salvation”—used here for want of a better word—does not adequately convey *salam*’s full meaning, which expresses the idea of spiritual peace and fulfillment without being connected with the Christian doctrine of salvation.

### **Salvation by the Observance of Torah and Gospel**

*If the followers of the Bible would but attain to [true] faith and God-consciousness, We should indeed efface their [previous] evil deeds, and certainly, bring them into gardens of bliss. If they truly observe the Torah, the Gospel and all [the revelation] bestowed from on high upon them by their Sustainer, they will indeed partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth. Some of them do pursue the right course, but as for most of them—vile indeed is what they do! (5:65-66) Say: “O followers of the Bible! You have no valid ground for your beliefs unless you [truly] observe the Torah and the Gospel, and all that has been bestowed from on high upon you by your Sustainer!” (5:68)*

The phrase “if they truly observe the Torah and the Gospel” implies observance of those scriptures

in their genuine spirit, free of the arbitrary distortions such as the concept of the chosen people or alleged divinity of Jesus and the vicarious redemption of his followers. The expression “partake of all the blessings of heaven and earth” accompanies the realization of spiritual truth and social happiness, which is bound to follow an observance of the moral principles laid down in the genuine teachings of the Bible.

### **Three Criteria of Universal Salvation**

*Those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians—all who believe in God and the last day and do righteous deeds— shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (5:69)*

*For, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], and those who follow the Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians—all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds— no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. (2:62)*

Islam categorically states that people from other faiths will also go to heaven. It applies to Adam and the last human on this earth and is therefore of timeless import and transcends all religious affiliations. The above passages occur in the Quran several times and lay down a fundamental message of pluralism and salvation. Religious pluralism is the state of being where every individual in a religiously diverse society has the rights, freedoms, and safety to worship, or not, according to their conscience. Salvation is not restricted to Muslims because Islam is not the only way that leads to God. With a breadth of vision unparalleled in any other religious faith, the idea of the Quranic “salvation” is made conditional upon three elements only: belief in God, belief in the Day of Judgment, and above all, righteous actions in this life.

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

on the society.

**Judgment Day**—Belief in Judgment Day is accepting responsibility for one's actions and an incentive to avoid evil deeds and do good works. Man is a master of his conduct and entirely responsible for his decisions. For the Muslims, life on earth is the seedbed of an eternal future. It will be followed by a day of reckoning, and depending on how it fares in this accounting, the soul will then repair either to hell or heaven.

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

**Unity in Diversity**

## Chapter 26

### Evil of Sectarianism

#### Definitions of Sectarianism

A narrow-minded adherence to a particular sect (political, ethnic, or religious) often leads to conflict with those of different sects or possessing different beliefs. At a conceptual level, sectarianism includes bigotry, prejudice, and discrimination. In the real world, sectarian conflicts are often breeding grounds for acts of violence and persecution carried out on other sects, denominations, or groups. The breach of the unity is often an outcome of mere worldly greed and of factional striving after power.

#### Mutual Jealousy

*Yet the self-same people granted this [revelation] began, out of mutual jealousy, to disagree about its meaning after all evidence of the truth had come unto them. (2:213)*

The phrase “out of mutual jealousy” refers to the various religious groups from the followers of the earlier revelations who, over time, consolidated themselves within different denominations. Each of them was jealously guarding its own set of tenets, dogma, and rituals and becoming intensely intolerant of all other ways of worship.

*And be not like those who have drawn apart from one another and have taken to conflicting views after all evidence of the truth has come unto them: for these it is for whom tremendous suffering is in store. (3:105)*

The reference in the Quran is to the Jews, Christians, and Muslims who have departed from the fundamental religious principles which they had originally shared in their entirety and have gone different ways in respect of doctrine and ethics (see 3:105). Examples include the Sunni versus Shia within Islam, Orthodox and Reform within Judaism, and Protestants and Catholics within Christianity. The Quran expresses a condemnation of all sectarianism arising out of intolerant,

mutually exclusive claims to the only true exponents, while everybody else is on the wrong side.

## **One God, One Community**

### **Formation of Sects and Denominations**

*They [who claim to follow you] have torn their unity wide asunder, piece-by- piece, each group delighting in [but] what they themselves possess [by way of tenets]. (23:53) And be not among those who ascribe divinity to others beside Him, [or] among those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects, each group delighting in but what they themselves hold [by way of tenets]. (30:31-32)*

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

### **Greed and Power behind Sectarianism**

*But leave them alone, lost in their ignorance, until a [future] time. Do they think that by all the wealth and offspring with which We provide them, We [but want to] make them vie with one another in doing [what they consider] good works? (23:54-55)*

But leave them alone until they themselves realize their error. This sentence is addressed to the last of the apostles, Muhammad, and to all who truly follow him. Do they think that by bestowing on them worldly prosperity God but wants them to vie with one another in their race after material goods and comforts, which they mistakenly identify with doing good works? The material prosperity is not the ultimate good,

and the breach of the unity spoken of in the preceding passage was often an outcome of mere worldly greed and of factional striving after power.

### **Suffering on the Day of Judgment**

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

Their worst deeds are actions and dogmatic assertions, like ascribing divine qualities to beings other than God, worshiping saints, or rejecting divine revelations, which do not accord with their own likes and dislikes or with their customary mode of thinking.

### **Breach of Unity and Good Works**

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

The principle of oneness as it ought to be reflected in the unity of all who believe in Him. The sudden turn of the discourse from the second person plural to the third person is indicative of God's severe disapproval of those who are or were guilty of breaking the believers' unity.

### **Sectarianism among the Followers of Bible**



*And [as for the followers of earlier revelation,] they broke up their unity, out of mutual jealousy, only after they had come to know [the truth]. And had it not been for a decree that had already gone forth from thy Sustainer, [postponing all decision] until a term set [by Him], all would indeed have been decided between them [from the outset]. As it is, behold, they who have inherited their divine writ from those who preceded them are [now] in grave doubt, amounting to suspicion, about what it portends. (42:14) Those who were vouchsafed revelation aforetime took, out of mutual jealousy, to divergent views [on this point] only after knowledge [thereof] had come unto them. But as for him who denies the truth of God's messages—behold, God is swift in reckoning! (3:19)*

The above passages refer not only to the followers of the Bible, but to all communities that base their views on a revealed scripture. All these communities at first subscribed to the doctrine of God's oneness and held that man's self-surrender to Him (Islam in its original connotation) is the essence of all true religion. The followers of earlier revelation did not break up their unity until after knowledge had come to them—i.e., the knowledge that God is one and the teachings of all His prophets were essentially the same. Their subsequent divergences were an outcome of sectarian pride and mutual exclusiveness. They who inherited their divine writ, referring to the Bible, and its followers in later times are in doubt as to whether the relevant scripture has really been revealed by God and ultimately as to whether there is any truth in the concept of divine revelation as such. See 2:213 and, more explicitly, 23:53, which comes immediately after the statement that “this community of yours is one single community.”

### **Shun All the Dividers**

*Shun those who broke the unity of faith—As for those who have broken the unity of their faith and have become sects—you have nothing to do with them. Their case rests with God: and in time He will make them understand what they were doing. (6:159)*

## **What Is True Religion?**

*The only [true] religion in the sight of God is [man's] self-surrender unto Him. (3:19)*

## **Attributes of an Ideal Community**

*In this way God makes clear His messages unto you, so you might find guidance, and there might grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong: and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state! (3:103-104)*

## **Antisemitism**

The word “antisemitism” means prejudice against Jews in general, often rooted in hatred of their ethnic background, culture, and/or religion. Antisemitism is a deadly combination of racism and sectarianism.

The role Jews played in the supposed crucifixion of Jesus is one of the main reasons for antisemitism among Christians. Racial and economic reasons also play a role in the hatred of Jews, which is deeply embedded in the Western civilization. Jews had the misfortune of being crucial to Christian theology.

Once Christianity decided, in the second century, that it would supersede Judaism, it required the disappearance of the Jews. The Christian religion could therefore fulfill a new covenant that invalidated the old one. The persistence of Jews, however tiny their numbers, served as a constant reminder of this failure. The response was, historically, to destroy the Jews, but with every massacre, the survivors also served to remind Christians of the hypocrisy just beneath their message of peace. Even the Christian eschatology is antisemitic. According to a literal reading of the Book of Revelation, when the rapture comes, Christians will be taken to heaven, and Jews will be left behind to deal with the Antichrist, plagues, sores, boils, frogs, and other torments.

## Chapter 27

### The Divine Law of Diversity

#### **Diversity Is the Essence of Existence**

Out of many billions of human beings, not one is exactly alike. From many trillions of leaves on all the trees on earth, not one is the same as any other. In his infinite wisdom, God created people of all colors and creeds. Diversity is ever-present in every sphere of our existence, biodiversity, racial, religious, languages, cultural diversity, and so forth. Hence, discrimination on any basis is a denial of God's creation and a sinful act. People from different cultures, ethnicities, races, countries, or religions are part of the one-world society or Ummah.

#### **Man's Proneness to Intellectual Dissension**

*All humanity was once one single community; [then they began to differ]. After that, God raised the prophets as heralds of glad tidings and as warners, and through them bestowed revelation from on high, setting forth the truth so that it might decide between people concerning all on which they had come to hold divergent views. But God guided the believers unto the truth about which, by His leave, they had disagreed: for God guides onto a straight way him that wills [to be guided]. (2:213)*

At the dawn of man's history, people lived in a relatively homogeneous primitive social order based on following the rules of one's peer group and blind respect for authority. With higher intellectual development, abstract principles such as justice and morality begin to form the basis of a personal code that could conflict with society's expectations and laws. His emotional capacity and his individual needs became more differentiated, conflicts of views and interests came to the fore, and humanity ceased to be "one single community" in its outlook on life and moral valuations. It was at this stage that divine guidance became necessary. Man's proneness to intellectual

dissension is not an accident of history but an integral, God-willed aspect of human nature. It is this natural circumstance to which the words "by His leave" allude.

### **Diversity in Sexes, Languages, and Colors**

*His wonders are this: He creates you out of the dust, and then, lo! You become human beings ranging far and wide! And among His wonders is this: He creates for your mates out of your kind. [From among yourselves] so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you: in this, there are messages indeed for people who think! And among his wonders are the diversity of your tongues and colors. For in this, there are messages for all who are possessed of [innate] knowledge! (30:20-22) Now had God so willed, He could surely have made them all one single community (42:8)*

If God wanted to create homogenous humanity, he could have done so by being almighty. The implication being that He has not willed it: (5:48, 16:93, and 10:19). Besides the world being a boring place, it would be detrimental to humanity. Genetic diversity ensures that individuals or populations will adapt to certain environmental factors, giving them the ability to resist emerging diseases and epidemics.

### **Diversity in Law and the Way of Life**

*Unto every one of you have We appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] to test you by what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God, you all must return, and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you differ. (5:48) Every age had its revelation: God annuls or confirms whatever He wills [of His earlier messages]—for with Him is the source of all revelation. (13:38-39) And upon you [too] have We bestowed from on high this divine writ for no other reason than that you might make clear*

*unto them all [questions of faith] on which they have come to hold divergent views, and [thus offer] guidance and grace unto people who will believe. (16:64)*

The expression "everyone of you" refers to communities in which humanity is composed. All God's apostles preached the primary, unchanging spiritual truths. The laws promulgated through them, and the way of life recommended by them, varied according to each community's cultural, social, and moral requirements. This unity in diversity is frequently stressed in the Quran (e.g., in 2:148, 21:92-93, and 23:52). The various religious laws imposed on them test their willingness to surrender to God and obey Him, thus enabling them to grow spiritually and socially. It explains the succession of divine messages culminating in, and ending with, the revelation of the Quran. In the end, God will literally "inform you of that wherein you used to differ." There is a misperception among some Muslim supremacists that Islam, being the greatest of all religions, will be widely accepted by all human beings. This is contrary to the teachings of the Quran, as the above verses indicate.

### **Diversity of Worship**

*Unto every community have We appointed [different] ways of worship, which they ought to observe. Hence, [O believer,] do not let those [who follow paths other than yours] draw you into disputes on this score but summon [them all] unto thy Sustainer: for, you are indeed on the right way. And if they [try to] argue with you, say [only]: "God knows best what you are doing." [For, indeed,] God will judge between you [all] on Resurrection Day regarding all on which you differ. Do you not know that God knows all that occurs in heaven as well as on earth? All this is in [God's] record: [to know] all this is easy for God. (22:67-70)*

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

## **Common Spiritual Truth**

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

The above verse alludes to the unbroken continuity of man's religious experience, frequently stressed in the Quran, that everyone of God's apostles preached the same fundamental spiritual truth.

## **Validity of the Quran**

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

For those who believe in this revelation, there will be guidance for them in this world and the promise of ultimate happiness in the life to come. The followers of other creeds deny its validity while admitting that the Quran contains much that coincides with the spiritual concepts taught by their religions. The particle "only" in the sentence ("I have only been bidden to worship") shows that there is in Islam no obligation, no ordinance, and no prohibition that is not connected with this principle.

## **Man's Proneness to Difference of Opinion**

*And if God had so willed, they who succeeded those [apostles] would not have contended after all*

*evidence of the truth had come to them. But [as it was], they took to divergent views, and some of them attained faith, while others denied the truth. Yet if God had so willed, they would not have contended: but God does whatever He wills. (2:253)*

The Quran mentions the inevitability of disagreement among human beings. In other words, it is the will of God that their way to the truth should be through the diversity of opinion and by trial and error. Man's proneness to intellectual disagreement is not an accident of history but an integral, God-willed aspect of human nature as such.

## Chapter 28

### Common Beliefs and Call for Unity

#### 1. The Same God

##### **Our God and Your God Is the Same**

*Do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner—unless it is such of them as are bent on evildoing—and say: “We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: for our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender ourselves.” (29:46)*

Argue kindly with the followers of earlier revelation, except those who are evildoers and are therefore not accessible to the friendly argument—the implication being that all disputes should a priori be avoided in such cases.

##### **Worship of One God As the Only True Religion**

*Thus, [O Prophet,] if they argue with you, say, “I have surrendered my whole being unto God, and [so have] all who follow me!” And ask those who have been vouchsafed revelation aforetime, as well as all unlettered people, [who have no revealed scripture of their own] “Have you [too] surrendered yourselves unto Him?” And if they surrender themselves unto Him, they are on the right path; but if they turn away—your duty is no more than to deliver the message: for God sees all that is in [the hearts of] His creatures. (3:20) Say: “O followers of earlier revelation! Come unto that tenet which you and we hold in common: that we shall worship none but God, and we shall not ascribe divinity to anything beside Him, and we shall not take human beings for our lords beside God.” And if they turn away, then say: “Bear witness that it is we*



*who have surrendered ourselves unto Him.” (3:64) For, if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him, and in the life to come, he shall be among the lost. (3:85)*

The term *kalimah*, primarily meaning “word” or “utterance,” is often used in the philosophical sense of proposition or tenet. “We shall not take human beings for our lords” is addressed to the Christians, who attribute divinity to Jesus and certain aspects of divinity to their saints. The Jews assign a quasi-divine authority to Ezra and some of their great Talmudic scholars (see 9:30-31).

### **Do Not Argue about God**

*Those who would [still] argue about God after He has been acknowledged [by them]— all their arguments are null and void in their Sustainer’s sight. Upon them will fall [His] condemnation, and for them is suffering severe in store: [for] it is God [Himself] who has bestowed revelation from on high, setting forth the truth, and [thus given man] a balance [wherewith to weigh right and wrong]. And for all, you know, the Last Hour may well be near! Those who do not believe in it [mockingly] ask for its speedy advent— whereas those who have attained to faith stand in awe of it and know it to be the truth. Oh, they who call the Last Hour in question have indeed gone far astray! (28:51-55)*

Arguments about God’s attributes and the “how” of His Being are null and void; it is beyond the grasp of the limited human mind. God Himself has given man, through successive revelations, a standard whereby to discern between right and wrong; it is presumptuous and futile to argue about the nature of His Being and His ultimate judgment. Hence the reference in the second half of this and the next verse to the Last Hour and the Day of Judgment. Those who do not believe in the last hour and ask to bring about their speedy chastisement in proof of his being God’s message-bearer. The sarcastic demand of Muhammad’s opponents (mentioned several times in the Quran) and an oblique allusion to unbelievers of all times who categorically reject the idea of resurrection and

judgment without having any proof either way.

## 2. The Same Prophets

### Abraham As Father of All Monotheistic Faiths

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

While Abraham was regarded as the ancestor of both Jews and Arabs, it was also an undeniable fact that he was not a Jew or Christian since the Jews are either to be taken as the followers of Moses or as the descendants of Abraham’s grandson Jacob. At the same time, Abraham stood for the worship of God alone. Why do you argue about the true creed of Abraham, who followed principles before the Torah and the gospel were revealed?

### Creed of Abraham

*And they say, “Be Jews”—or, “Be Christians”—“and you shall be on the right path.” Say: “No, but [ours is] the creed of Abraham, who turned away from all that is false, and was not of those who ascribe divinity to anything besides God.” Say: “We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and which has been vouchsafed to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been vouchsafed to all the [other] prophets by their Sustainer: we make no*

*distinction between any of them. And it is unto Him that we surrender ourselves.” And if [others] come to believe in the way you believe, they will indeed find themselves on the right path. If they (unbelievers) turn away, (and reject your teachings) it is they who will be deeply in the wrong, and God will protect you from them: for He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing. [Say: “Our life takes it] hue from God! And who could give a better hue [to life] than God, if we but truly worship Him?” Say [to the Jews and the Christians]: “Do you argue with us about God? But He is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer—and unto us shall be accounted for our deeds, and unto you, your deeds; and it is unto Him alone that we devote ourselves.” “Do you claim that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants were ‘Jews’ or ‘Christians’?” Say: “Do you know more than God does?” And who could be more wicked than he who suppresses a testimony given to him by God? Yet God is not unmindful of what you do. “Now those people have passed away; unto them shall be accounted what they have earned and unto you, what you have earned; and you will not be judged on the strength of what they did.” (2:135-141)*

The expression *hanif* means “he inclined toward a right state.” In pre-Islamic times, this term had a monotheistic connotation. It describes a man who turned away from sin, worldliness, and dubious beliefs, such as idol worship. The “**descendants**” refers to the twelve tribes of the Israelites, which evolved from this ancestry. We regard them all as true prophets and make no distinction among them.

Do you argue with us about God’s will regarding the succession of prophethood and man’s ultimate salvation? The Jews believe that prophethood was a privilege granted to the children of Israel alone. At the same time, the Christians maintain that Jesus—who also descended from the children of Israel—was God’s final manifestation on earth. These two denominations claim that salvation is reserved for its followers alone. The Quran refutes these ideas by stressing that God is the Lord of all humanity and that every individual will be judged based on their own beliefs and behavior

alone.

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

### **Belief in All the Prophets**

*And, lo, God accepted, through the prophets, this solemn pledge [from the followers of earlier revelation]: “If, after all the revelations and the wisdom which I have vouchsafed unto you, there comes to you an apostle confirming the truth already in your possession; you must believe in him and succor him. Do you—said He—“acknowledge and accept My bond on this condition?” They answered: “We do acknowledge it.” Said He: “Then bear witness [thereto], and I shall be your witness. And, subsequently, all who turn away [from this pledge]—it is they, they who are truly iniquitous!” Do they seek, perchance, a faith other than in God, [any other than God’s religion] although it is unto Him that whatever is in the heavens and on earth surrenders itself, willingly or unwillingly, since unto Him all must return? Say: “We believe in God, and in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, and that which has been bestowed upon Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and their descendants, and that which their Sustainer has vouchsafed unto Moses and Jesus and all the [other] prophets: we make no distinction between any of them. And unto Him do we surrender ourselves.” (3:81-84)*

The solemn pledge taken from the community was their acceptance of the messages conveyed through the prophets.

## Same Spiritual and Moral Principles

*In matters of faith, He has ordained for you that He had enjoined upon Noah—and We gave you [O Muhammad] insight through revelation. We enjoined upon Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.*

*(42:13)*

The above verses emphasize the unchanging sameness of the spiritual and moral principles underlying all revealed religions. It was only through revelation that the Prophet Muhammad came to know “that which God had enjoined upon Noah.” Faith denotes here only the ethical and spiritual contents of religion and not the religious law that has been different in each successive dispensation (see 5:48).

## Parable of Three Prophets

*And set forth unto them a parable—[the story of how] the people of a township [behaved] when [Our] message-bearers came unto them. Lo! We sent unto them two [apostles], and they gave the lie to both, and so We strengthened [the two] with a third; and thereupon they said: “We have been sent unto you [by God]!” [The others] answered: “You are nothing, but mortal men like us; moreover, the Most Gracious has never bestowed any [revelation] from on high. You do nothing but lie!” Said [the apostles], “Our Sustainer knows that we have indeed been sent unto you, but we are not bound to do more than deliver the message [entrusted to us].” Said [the others], “Truly, we augur evil from you! Indeed, if you desist not, we will surely stone you, and grievous suffering is bound to befall you at our hands!” [The apostles] replied: “Your destiny, good or evil, is [bound up] with yourselves! [Every human being’s destiny have We tied to his neck.] [Does it seem evil to you] if you are told to take [the truth] to heart? You are people who have wasted their selves!”*

The story is a parable and not a historical narrative. We have here an allegory of the three great monotheistic religions, successively propounded by Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, and essentially

embodying the same spiritual truths. The township mentioned in the parable represents the shared cultural environment within which these three religions appeared. The first two apostles are said to have been sent together since their teachings are anchored in the same scripture, the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. With time, their impact proved insufficient to mold the ethical attitude of the people concerned. God strengthened them by His final message, conveyed to the world by the third and last of the apostles. See 6:91— “no true understanding of God have they when they say, ‘Never has God revealed anything unto man.’” This alludes to people who like to think of themselves as believing in God without allowing their belief to interfere in the practical concerns of their lives. They justify by conceding to religion no more than a vaguely emotional role and by refusing to admit the fact of objective revelation—for the concept of revelation invariably implies promulgation by God of absolute moral values and thus a demand for one’s self-surrender to them.

*At that, a man came running from the farthest end of the city, [and] exclaimed: “O my people! Follow these message-bearers! Follow those who ask no reward of you, and themselves are rightly guided! “[As for me,] why should I not worship Him who has brought me into being, and to whom you all will be brought back? Should I take to worshiping [other] deities besides Him? [But then,] if the Most Gracious should will that harm befall me, their intercession could not in the least avail me, nor could they save me: and so, I would have indeed, most obviously, lost myself in error! “[O my people,] in the Sustainer of you all have I come to believe, listen then, to me!” [And] he was told, “[You shall] enter paradise!”— [whereupon] he exclaimed: “Would that my people knew how my Sustainer has forgiven me [the sins of my past] and has placed me among the honored ones!” (36:13-27)*

The intervention of the man who “came running from the farthest end of the city” is a parable of the truly believing minority in every religion and their desperate endeavors to convince their erring fellowmen that God-consciousness alone can save human life from futility.

### 3. The Holy Books

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

“Whatever there remains of earlier revelations” that over the millennia, the Bible has been subjected to considerable and often arbitrary alteration. Many of the laws enunciated in the Quran differ from the laws of the Bible, bringing us to the conclusion that the “confirmation” of the latter by the Quran can refer only to the fundamental truths still discernible in the Bible.

### 4. The Houses of Worship

**The sacredness of Houses of Worship** (Mosques, Churches, and Synagogues)

*Hence, who could be more wicked than those who bar the mention of God's name from [any of] His houses of worship and strive for their ruin, [although] they have no right to enter them save in fear [of God]? For them, in this world, there is ignominy in-store and in the life to come, awesome suffering. (2:114) Those who have been driven from their homelands against all rights for no other reason than their saying: “Our Sustainer is God!” For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, [all] monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques—in [all] which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed [before now]. (22:40)*

It is one of the fundamental principles of Islam that every religion that has a belief in God as its focal point must be accorded full respect; however, one may disagree with its tenets. Muslims are obligated to honor and protect any house of worship dedicated to God, whether it be a mosque,

church, or synagogue. The defense of religious freedom is the foremost cause for which arms may—and must—be taken up (see 2:193), or else, as stressed in the concluding clause of 2:251, corruption would surely overwhelm the earth.

## 5. Righteous Jews and Christians

*[But] they are not all alike. Among the followers of earlier revelation, there are upright people, who recite God's messages throughout the night, and prostrate themselves [before Him]. They believe in God and the Last Day and enjoin what is right and forbid doing what is wrong and vie with one another in doing good works. These are among the righteous. And whatever good they do, they shall never be denied the reward thereof: for, God has full knowledge of those who are conscious of Him. [But] behold, those bent on denying the truth – neither their worldly possessions nor their children will in the least avail against God: and it is they are destined for the fire, therein to abide. (3:113-116)*

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

### Believers from among Jews and Christians

*Now, indeed, We have caused this word [of Ours] to reach mankind step by step so that they might [learn to] keep it in mind. As for those unto whom We have vouchsafed revelation aforetime—they [are bound to] believe in this one [as well]. Whenever it is [clearly] conveyed*



*unto them, they [are bound to] profess, “We have come to believe in it, for it is the truth from our Sustainer—and even before this, we have surrendered ourselves unto Him!” These it is that shall receive a twofold reward for having been patient in adversity, and having repelled evil with good, and having spent on others out of what We provided for them as sustenance, and whenever they heard frivolous talk, having turned away from it and said: “Unto us shall be accounted for Our deeds, and unto you, your deeds. Peace be upon you—[but] we do not seek out such as are ignorant [of the meaning of right and wrong].” (28:51-55)*

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

### **Call for Unity**

#### **Monotheists As One Single Community**

*[O you, who believe in Me,] this community of yours is one single community, since I am the Sustainer of you all: worship, then, Me [alone]! (21:92) And this community of yours is one single community since I am the Sustainer of you all: remain, then, conscious of Me! (23:52)*

The above verse is addressed to all who truly believe in God, whatever their historical

denomination, and it applies to the followers of all the prophets. Prophets always preached the same essential truth—namely, the existence and oneness of God—and the same ethical principles. It is imperative that all believers in the one God, whatever their historical denomination, regard themselves as “one community” (see verses 42:13 and 15 below).

*Steadfastly uphold the [true] faith, and do not break up your unity therein. [And even though] that [unity of faith] to which thou callest them appears oppressive to those who are wont to ascribe to other beings or forces a share in His divinity, God draws unto Himself everyone who is willing, and guides unto Himself everyone who turns unto Him. (42:13) And yet, whoever does [the least] of righteous deeds and is a believer withal, his endeavor shall not be disowned: for, We shall record it in his favor. (21:94)*

“Do not break up your unity” is an unmistakable reference to the ecumenical unity in all religions based on the belief in the one God, notwithstanding all the diversity of statutes and practices enjoined for the benefit of the various communities. See 3:19—“the only true religion in the sight of God is man’s self-surrender unto Him,” and 3:85—“if one goes in search of a religion other than self-surrender unto God, it will never be accepted from him.” Parallel with this principle, enunciated by all of God’s apostles, is the categorical statement in 21:92 and 23:52—“Verily, O you who believe in Me, this community of yours is one single community since I am the Sustainer of you all.

### **Summon All Mankind to Unity and Equality**

*Summon [all mankind], and pursue the right course, as you have been bidden [by God]; and do not follow their likes and dislikes but say: “I believe in whatever revelation God has bestowed from on high, and I am bidden to bring about equity in your mutual views. God is our Sustainer as well as your Sustainer. To us shall be accounted for our deeds, and to you, your deeds. Let*

*there be no contention between us and you: God will bring us all together—for with Him is all journeys' end.” (42:15)*

This breach of the original unity of man's faith in the one God summons all humanity and induces them to be more tolerant of one another—an allusion to the bitterness that stands in the way of an understanding between the various sects and schools of thought in all revealed religions.

## **Chapter 29**

### **Prophet Muhammad's Treatment of Christians**

Today many Muslims believe that by worshiping Jesus, Christians commit idolatry, an unforgivable sin in Islam. Under the pretense of idolatry, Christians are sometimes persecuted in Islamic lands. Just as many Christians believe that non-Christians are hell-bound, so do the many Muslims who say that non-Muslims are lost souls. There are two outstanding examples from the Prophet's Traditions where he put into practice the twenty-first century concept of pluralism fourteen hundred years ago. Ignorance is our common enemy, and many Muslims are unaware of Prophet's respect and affection for Christians in general.

#### **St. Catherine's Monastery**

At the foot of Mount Sinai is St. Catherine's Monastery, described as the oldest Christian monastery still in use for its initial function. Moses is said to have received the tablets of the Law on that mountain. The monastery was dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria, who was martyred in AD 307. The Roman emperor ordered St. Catherine to be severely beaten and tied to a rolling spiked wheel for her refusal to renounce Christianity. When she survived the ordeal, the emperor ordered her beheading.

When a delegation from the St. Catherine Monastery visited Medina in AD 626, the Prophet personally granted a charter to the monks to protect the rights of Christians and other non-Muslims. In the letter, the Prophet made it known to his followers that Christians had the right to freedom of religion. The copy of this letter with the Prophet's hand imprint is still preserved in the library at the monastery. The following is a summary of this vital document.

#### **Freedom of Religion Guaranteed for Christians**

This is a letter issued by Muhammad, ibn Abdullah, the Messenger, the Prophet, the Faithful, who

is sent to all the people as a trust on the part of God to all His creatures that they may have no plea against God hereafter. Verily God is Omnipotent, the Wise. This letter is directed to the embracers of Islam, as a covenant given to the followers of Jesus the Nazarene in the East and West, the far and near, the Arabs and foreigners, the known and the unknown.

### **Muslims Who Violate This Covenant Are Disbelievers**

This letter contains the oath given unto them, and he who disobeys that which is therein will be considered a disbeliever and a transgressor to that whereunto he is commanded. He will be regarded as one who has corrupted the oath of God, disbelieved His Testament, rejected His Authority, despised His Religion, and made himself deserving of His Curse, whether he is a Sultan or any other believer of Islam.

### **Muslims Shall Protect Christians**

Whenever Christian monks, devotees, and pilgrims gather, whether in a mountain or valley, or den, or frequented places, or plain, or churches, or in houses of worship, verily we are [at the] back of them to protect them and their properties. The protection provided by myself, my friends and assistants, for they are my citizens and under my protection. They shall not be imposed upon to undertake a journey or to be forced to go to wars or carry arms, for the Muslims must protect them and defend them against others. No one is allowed to plunder Christians, destroy, or spoil any of their churches or houses of worship, or take any of the things contained within these houses and bring them to the houses of Islam. And he who takes away anything from there will be one who has corrupted the oath of God and, in truth, disobeyed His Messenger.

### **Independent Judiciary for Christians**

Their judges should not be changed or prevented from accomplishing their offices. No one has the

right to interfere with their affairs or bring any action against them.

### **Peace and Tranquility for Monks**

The monks should not be disturbed in exercising their religious order, or the people of seclusion be stopped from dwelling in their cells. I shall exempt them from that which may disturb them; of the burdens paid by others as an oath of allegiance.

### **Exempt from Taxation**

They must not give anything of their income but that which pleases them—they must not be offended, disturbed, or coerced or compelled. Jizya should not be levied upon their judges, monks, and those whose occupation is the worship of God, nor is any other thing to be taken from them, whether it be a fine, a tax, or any unjust right. No fees or tithes should be received from those who devote themselves to the worship of God in the mountains of the Holy Lands.

Verily this is for aught else and not for them; instead, in the seasons of crops, they should be given a *kadah* for each *ardab* of wheat [about five bushels and a half] as provision for them, and no one has the right to say to them ‘this is too much,’ or ask them to pay any tax. As to those who possess properties, the wealthy and merchants, the poll-tax to be taken from them must not exceed twelve drachmas a head per year [about USD \$200 today].

### **Respect and Favored Status for Christians**

Do not dispute or argue with them but deal according to the verse recorded in the Quran: “Do not dispute or argue with the People of the Book but in that which is best” (29:46). Thus, they will live favored and protected from everything which may offend them by the Callers to religion [Islam], wherever they may be, and in any place, they may dwell.

## **Freedom of Religion for Christian Women**

Should any Christian woman be married to a Muslim, such marriage must not occur except after her consent, and she must not be prevented from going to her church for prayer. Their churches must be honored, and they must not be withheld from building churches or repairing convents.

## **Compact Till the End of Time**

Verily I shall keep their compact, wherever they may be, in the sea, on the land, in the East, West, North, or South. They are under my protection and the testament of my safety, against all things they abhor. It is positively incumbent upon every one of the followers of Islam not to contradict or disobey this oath until the Day of Resurrection and the end of the world. The attacks by so-called Egyptian Muslims on their fellow Egyptian Christian citizens are deplorable.

## **Christians of Najran**

A Christian delegation of Najran (Yemen) visited the Prophet at Medina in 630. Politics, the matters of state, and religion were the topics discussed. Except for the nature of Jesus, both parties agreed on other issues.

*And if anyone should argue with thee about this [truth] after all the knowledge that has come unto thee, say: “Come! Let us summon our sons and your sons, and our women, and your women, and ourselves and yourselves; and then let us pray [together] humbly and ardently and let us invoke God’s curse upon those [of us] who are telling a lie.” Behold, this is indeed the truth, and there is no deity whatsoever save God; and, verily, God—He alone—is almighty, truly wise. And if they turn away [from this truth]—behold, God has full knowledge of the spreaders of corruption. (3:61-63)*

These verses were revealed in a discussion between the Prophet and a visiting delegation of the Christians of Najran. Although they refused the “trial through prayer” (*mubahalah*) proposed by the

Prophet, he accorded them a treaty guaranteeing all their civic rights and the free exercise of their religion. In return for a specified amount of taxes and a variety of services, the people of Najran were granted a treaty, a copy preserved by an early historian: “They are entitled to the protection of God and the security of Muhammad the Prophet, the Messenger of God, which security shall involve their persons, religion, lands, and possessions—including those of them who are absent as well as those who are present their camels, messengers, and images [church pictures and crosses]. The status they held shall not be changed, nor shall any of their religious services or images be altered. No attempt shall be made to remove a bishop, monk, or a sexton of a church from his office, whether great or small under the control of each. These Christians shall not be held responsible for any wrong deed or bloodshed in pre-Islamic time. They shall neither be called to military service nor compelled to pay the tithe.”

### **The Church Service in the Prophet’s Mosque**

Like all other Christians, the delegation of Christians of Najran maintained that Jesus was “the Son of God” and therefore God incarnate. At the end of the talks with the Prophet, Christians wanted to pray. Since there was no church in Medina, the Prophet invited them to conduct their service in his mosque, adding, “It is a place consecrated to God.” The first church service was held in an Islamic mosque, an exemplary display of religious equality. If the Prophet believed that Christians were idol worshipers, he would never have allowed Christians to conduct their service in the Holy Mosque in Medina. The pagans of Arabia were never allowed to worship in the Prophet’s mosque. After conquering Mecca, the pagans of Arabia were banned from entering Kabah. These are the shining examples of how the Prophet of God treated Christians.

### **Jews, Sabians, Christians and Magians among Unitarian Faiths**

*Verily, as for those who have attained faith [in this divine writ] [Muslims], those who follow the*



*Jewish faith, the Sabians, the Christians, and the Magians, [on the one hand]. And those bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God, [on the other,] verily, God will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, God is the witness unto everything. (22:16- 17)*

The followers of Zoroaster (Magians) and Christians are included in the category of unitarian faith, along with Jews, Muslims, and Sabians, in verse 22:16. The Christians and Magians are not included among those bent on ascribing divinity to anything besides God. Zoroastrians believe in one God called *Ahura Mazda* (Wise or good Lord), who created the world. The dualism in Zoroastrianism is the complete separation of good and evil and the existence of an evil spirit with powers that rivals God's power. The Sabians seem to have been a monotheistic religious group intermediate between Judaism and Christianity. They were the followers of John the Baptist. "Those who are bent on ascribing divinity to beings other than God" reject the principle of His oneness and uniqueness (22:17). God will decide their destiny with justice on the resurrection, and they will not be arbitrarily condemned.

### **Do Not Overstep the Bounds of Truth**

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

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

### ***Him. (4:171-172)***

These passages are addressed to the Christians, whose love for Jesus has caused them to overstep the bounds of truth by elevating him to the rank of divinity, and they persist in this assertion. Many communities have come to attribute divinity to their spiritual leaders—a phenomenon frequently encountered in the history of religions. Since the Christians are addressed, the term *Kitab* (book) is rendered as “gospel” in this context. The Quran points out that Jesus, like all other human beings, was a soul created by Him.

### **Why Are Magians and Christians Included in Unitarian Faith?**

The next question is why the Magians, and Christians are included in unitarian faith, although they attribute divine qualities to other beings besides God. Some Muslims argue that the Quran is alluding to earlier unitarian Christians during the lifetime of Jesus and not trinitarian Christians of today. The falsity of this argument becomes evident because of the inclusion of Magians, who believe in the duality of the godhead.

### **The Principle of Intention behind Actions**

Both Christians and Magians intend to worship one God only. Magians worship only *Ahura Mazda* (Wise or good Lord) and not the evil spirit. Christians are guilty of the sin of “shirks” (ascribing divinity to anyone or anything besides God) but do not consciously worship a plurality of deities.

Theoretically, their theology postulates belief in one God, who is conceived as manifesting Himself in a trinity of aspects, or “persons,” of whom Jesus is supposed to be one. Their worship of Jesus is not based on conscious intent but flows from their overstepping the bounds of truth in their love and reverence of him. In Islam, actions are judged based on intentions. The Prophet said: “The reward of deeds depends upon the intentions, and every person will get the reward according to what he has intended.”

### **Compromised Monotheism over Dualism**

The next question is whether God prefers the compromised version of Christian monotheism over the dualism of Magians. The answer to this question is yes. But how do we know this?

*Defeated have been the Byzantines in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, despite this, their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years: [for] with God rests all power of decision, first and last. (30:2-4)*

In the above verses, God favored Christians over Persians. This irrefutable argument is supported by the prediction of the Quran of the victory of Byzantines, who believed in the Trinity as a depiction of monotheism over the dualist Persians, indicating God's favor for Christianity over Zoroastrianism.

### **Refrain from Worshiping Jesus**

From the Quranic perspective, it is better if Christians worshiped God the Father and refrain from worshiping Jesus because he was a human being and not God incarnate. Christ was born like any human being, and he ate and drank and was persecuted and died a physical death. God is not in need of any intercession since God is all-knowing. There is nothing anyone can add that God does not know. Unqualified intercession, whether it is through Jesus or Muhammad, is contrary to Islamic teachings.

### **A Paradise for Righteous Christians**

The Quran categorically states that righteous Christians will enter paradise, not idol worshipers such as pagan Arabs.

*Thou wilt surely find that, of all people, they who say, "Behold, we are Christians," come closest to feel affection for those who believe [in this divine writ]: this is so because there are priests and*

*monks among them, and because these are not given to arrogance. For, when they understand what has been bestowed from high upon this Apostle, thou canst see their eyes overflow with tears because they recognize something of its truth; [and] they say: “O our Sustainer! We do believe; make us one, then, with all who bear witness to the truth. And how could we fail to believe in God and in whatever truth has come unto us, when we so fervently desire, our Sustainer counts us among the righteous?” And for this, their belief God will reward them with gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide for such is the requital of the doers of good. Whereas they who are bent on denying the truth and giving the lie to Our messages—they are destined for the blazing fire. (5:82-86)*

It is noteworthy that the Quran does not include the Christians among those who are bent on ascribing divinity to anything besides God. The last sentence above clearly states that righteous Christians will enter paradise in contrast to idol-worshippers who are destined for the blazing fire. See explanation of 4:171-172 in Chapter 22.

### **A Ray of Hope**

Finally, I would like to end this volume on a hopeful note. In the overview of Muhammad’s life and legacy, prominent scholar Craig Considine provides a sociological analysis of Muhammad’s teachings and example. Considine shows how the Prophet embraced religious pluralism, envisioned a civic nation, stood for antiracism, advocated for seeking knowledge, initiated women’s rights, and followed the Golden Rule. Following are excerpts from the book’s preface by Craig Considine, *The Humanity of Muhammad, a Christian View*.

“I wrote this book to build stronger bridges of understanding and peace between Christians and Muslims, to uplift our common humanity, and to defend the honor of Prophet Muhammad, who has been depicted by many Christians throughout history as the antithesis of Jesus. I hope that the Muslims who read this book feel encouraged about the prospect of better relations between

Christians and Muslims in the future, both in the ‘Western world’ and the ‘Muslim world.’ My wish is that *The Humanity of Muhammad* will further open the hearts and minds of Muslims so that they may be able to view Christians in a more humane light. The bigger challenge is that the following pages effectively reach the hearts and minds of Christians who hold sensational views of the Islamic tradition, Muslims themselves, and the Prophet Muhammad. I am confident that the words to come will galvanize Christians to embrace and even to love Muslims, for love is what Jesus commanded of his followers. My Christian faith pushes me to encounter the Islamic tradition and Muslims themselves with respect, compassion, and peace. Christians completely miss the point of Jesus’ teachings if they do not embody and live these principles in their everyday lives.”

## References

- Ali, Ameer. *A Short History of the Saracens*. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2004. Ali, Ameer. *The Spirit of Islam*. Whitefish Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2003.
- Armstrong, Karen. *Islam A Short History*. New York: Random House, 2002. Armstrong, Karen. *A History of God*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1993.
- Asma Afsaruddin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr. Ali Muslim Caliph Britanica.com. Buchanan, Patrick. *The Death of the West*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002.
- Carlyle, Thomas. *The Hero as Prophet*. Seattle: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2011.
- Esposito, John L. Islam. *The Straight Path*. Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Haykal, Husein. *The Life of Muhammad*. American Trust Publications, 2005. Hitti, Philip K. *Islam: A Way of Life*. South Bend Indiana, 1970.
- Holt, Lambton, and Lewis. *The Cambridge History of Islam*, New York, 1970.
- Kunselman, David E. Arab-Byzantine War, 629-644 AD, Master of Military Art and Science and Military History.
- Lewis, Bernard. *What Went Wrong?* New York: Harper Perennial, 2003.
- New World Encyclopedia. Ali Ibn Talib Parrinder, Geoffrey. World's Religions. New York, 1971.
- Radford, Mary F. *The Inheritance Rights of Women Under Jewish and Islamic Law*. Boston College International and Comparative Law Review, Volume 23, Issue 23, 2000.
- Smith, Huston. *The Religions of Man*. Chapter on Islam, pages 193-224, New York, 1964.
- Encyclopedia Britannica (2004): Islam, Shariah.
- The Reader's Digest Bible (1982).
- The Holy Bible (authorized King James Version).
- The Cambridge History of Islam*. Patriarchal And Umayyad Caliphates
- Allen, Jayne. *Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, Origins, Philosophy and Theology*.

Lexington, University of Kentucky Press, 2000.

Encyclopedia Britannica: Moses, Christianity, Jesus Christ, Synoptic Gospels, Constantine,  
Original Sin, Salvation, Saint Paul, Biblical literature, 2004.

Mark D. Siljander: *A Deadly Misunderstanding—A Congressman's Quest to Bridge the Muslim-Christian Divide*. San Francisco: Harper One, 2008.

William Muir. "The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall."