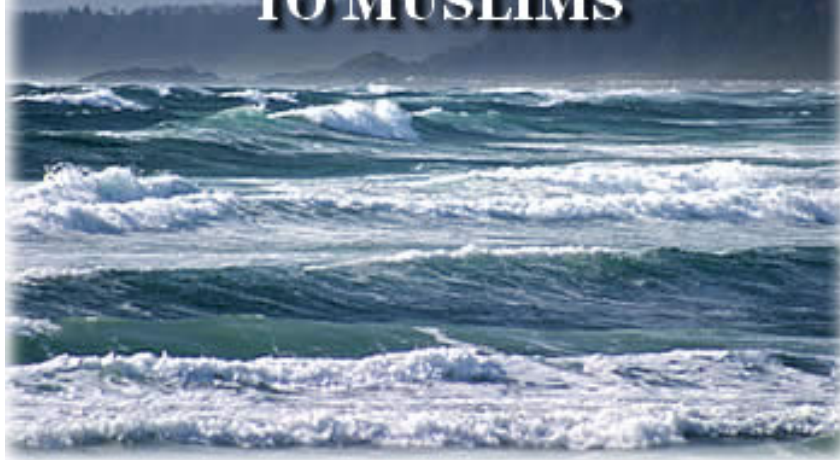


# CHRISTIANITY EXPLAINED TO MUSLIMS



[www.muhammadanism.org](http://www.muhammadanism.org)  
February 20, 2005

# CHRISTIANITY EXPLAINED TO MUSLIMS

A MANUAL  
FOR CHRISTIAN WORKERS

By  
L. BEVAN JONES, B.A., B.D.  
*of the*  
*Baptist Missionary Society*  
*Principal*  
*The Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies,*  
*Lahore.*  
*Author of "The People of the Mosque".*

*"Nothing after all tells in discussion but the positive truth we elicit; the true idea, if we have it, pushes out the false one by its own momentum, and, without open hostilities, reigns in its stead."*

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

Y.M.C.A. PUBLISHING HOUSE  
5 RUSSELL STREET, CALCUTTA

1938

TO  
MY WIFE

KEEN COMPANION  
IN  
THE GREAT EMPLOY

## CORRIGENDA

- p. 7, 1. 9: *for* 'Baidhāwi' *read* 'Baidāwi,' and so elsewhere.
- p. 25, 1. 7: *for* 'contracted' *read* 'contradicted'.
- p. 87, 1. 20: *for* 'Syrian' *read* 'Syriac'.
- p. 129, 1. 9: *after* 'theft' *add* 'murder'.
- p. 137, 1. 14: *for* **19**: 10 *read* **91**: 10.
- p. 145, 4 lines from bottom: *for* 2 Pet. *read* 1 Pet.
- p. 167, 1. 22: *for* 'Joseph' *read* 'Jesus'.
- p. 213, 1. 18: *for* 'Jesus' *read* 'Joses'.

The corrigenda have been corrected  
in the following text.

## CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
INTRODUCTION	ix
CHAPTER I. THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES	3
Support from the Qur'ān for the Scriptures—Meaning of "corruption" in the Qur'ān—The text of Scripture not affected—Confirmation by a modern Muslim—The situation in Muhammad's day—The charges explained—Specious arguments of the Ahmadis—These accusations are opposed to reason—And contradicted by fact—Nor has the Bible been abrogated—Ahmadi views of abrogation—Does the Qur'ān contain all necessary teaching?	
CHAPTER II. REVELATION AND INSPIRATION.	37
The Muslim point of view—The modern Muslim attitude to the Scriptures—The Christian conception of God's method of Revelation.	
CHAPTER III. THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST.	59
The influence of the Qur'ān—Origin and significance of the phrase "Son of God"—The phrase predicates Deity—What then shall we say of the Sonship of Jesus?—How could the Eternal God be in Jesus?—But why should God become Incarnate? Divine in all His ways.	
CHAPTER IV. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY	85
Reference to the Trinity in the Qur'ān—Christians too believe in the Unity—What support has the doctrine in Scripture?—The doctrine in relation to early experience of the Christian revelation—Reason for formulating the doctrine.	

	<i>Page</i>
CHAPTER V. THE HISTORICITY OF THE CRUCIFIXION	99
The orthodox Muslim view: Jesus did not die—A modern rationalist interpretation—The Cross of shame—The Cross still "a stumbling-block"—How came Muhammad to make these statements?	
CHAPTER VI. HOW CHRIST SAVES	125
Islamic views about God and man—Islamic teaching about sin—What the Qur'ān says about fate and hell—The teaching of Islam about salvation—Conflicting views among Muslims—What is involved in salvation?—How does Christ's Death affect the sinner?—God's chosen way—How Christ saves us.	
CHAPTER VII. THE VIRGIN BIRTH	153
A changed attitude towards Christ—Orthodox and rationalist Muslims in conflict—What of the silence of the New Testament?—Are the narratives borrowed?	
CHAPTER VIII. CHRIST'S MIRACLES	173
The testimony of the Qur'ān—Use of miracles by the Christian Church—Recent changed outlook—The evidence of the Gospels.	
CHAPTER IX. THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST	189
'Isā declared to be "pure from sin"—Yet the Ahmadis impute sin to Jesus—What is the evidence of the Gospels?—He knew no sin.	
CHAPTER X. THE RESURRECTION	203
Wresting the meaning of the Gospels—Our evidence for the Resurrection—The dramatic change in the disciples—What caused it?—Paul leaves us in no doubt—The empty tomb—Triumphant Joy.	
APPENDICES	217

## INTRODUCTION

THOSE who seek to present the Christian message to Muslims frequently meet with a rebuff. It does not take them long to discover that these people entertain certain deep-seated prejudices about Christianity and are only too ready to state them. Rightly to account for this we need in the first place to remind ourselves that Islam occupies a position relative to Christianity that is not shared by the other world-religions, inasmuch as it is subsequent to Christianity and was propagated in spite of and, to some extent, as a protest against it.

It is well-known that Muhammad had a controversy not only with the Jews but with the Christians of his day. That controversy is reflected in the pages of the Qur'ān, and references to it abound from the earliest times. It is equally true to say that the influence of that controversy, with the main features still preserved, has persisted down the years, so that whenever and wherever close contacts are made between peoples of the two faiths, it is apt to break out afresh.

Muslims so stress creed and dogma—"mere profession of Islam wards off hell-fire"—that this characteristic prejudice can be shown to be directed against certain doctrines of the Church rather than against the Christian message as such. And yet the message itself is inevitably involved, for if, in order to placate Muslims, we were to discard these doctrines we should most certainly attenuate the message.

The author himself is far from holding, however, that we should demand of any one—least of all Muslims—an understanding of, and acquiescence in, particular dogmas of the Church as a condition of Christian discipleship, or as necessary to faith in Christ as Saviour; nevertheless, it can hardly be

denied that in the case of Muslims it is precisely this traditional prejudice which is one of the stumbling-blocks in the way of their understanding and accepting Christ.

If that be so, then a two-fold obligation rests upon us: (*a*) we need to get down to the root-cause of their prejudice, and (*b*) we should re-think—and if necessary restate—our Christian beliefs so as to remove all possible cause of misunderstanding and offence. But having done this we must be prepared to find that with many a Muslim the chief stumbling-block is the familiar one of the offence of Christ Himself, i.e. the offence of the Cross. That is something which only the grace of God can remove.

It may fairly be claimed by the writer that for many years he has diligently sought a carefully-reasoned, sympathetic and kindly way of approach to Muslims in these matters under dispute, and in fact the chapters that comprise this volume are the expansion of lectures to students of the Henry Martyn School during the past eight years.<sup>1</sup>

The title of the book calls perhaps for a word of explanation. The chapters have been written primarily with the Christian missionary and evangelist in view, and each subject has been treated in such a way that Christians, meeting Muslim objections, may the more readily perceive what lies behind those objections and be helped to present Christianity in a more effective manner.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless the title is bound to suggest that it is meant also for Muslim readers, and it will perhaps be read by some. In that case a second purpose of the author will be fulfilled, and he would ask of such that they believe that he has

---

<sup>1</sup> The gist of most of them will be found in *The People of the Mosque*, pp. 271-306.

<sup>2</sup> As in the case of the author's earlier book, it is planned to translate this volume also into Urdu and Bengali.

earnestly sought to state the facts from the Muslim side as far as he himself knows them, and that he has been careful to avoid the use of any expression which would give unnecessary offence. On the contrary, the book is sent forth in the hope and with the prayer that it may be used of God not only to bring about a better understanding between peoples of the two faiths, but as a means of convincing many a Muslim of the Truth as it is in Christ.

The decision to present the material under each section in the form here adopted was only reached after consulting leading missionaries in the chief mission fields where the Gospel is being proclaimed to Muslims. For more than thirty years an earlier manual, *Muhammadan Objections to Christianity*, the work of the late Rev. W. St. Clair-Tisdall, has proved a most valuable handbook, but it is no longer in print, nor can it be considered as meeting the requirements of the times.<sup>1</sup>

That volume followed the plan of putting Muslim objections in the form of question or statement, with answers from the Christian side, since the author considered "it is absolutely necessary to be ready with a suitable reply to each and every-one of these". Here, however, a list of typical objections faces the opening of each chapter, and the reader is directed to the place in the book where material may be found suggesting what one's attitude should be to particular criticisms.

An honoured friend of the writer, with long experience in the mission field, confirmed the author's own conviction about the form the book should take, when he wrote to say: "Perhaps the wisest thing for young missionaries would be to get them to formulate their own answers from material supplied to them. No cut and dried answer ever meets the need in

---

<sup>1</sup> Another excellent manual on these lines, but much fuller, is *Crusaders of the Twentieth Century*, by Rev. W. A. Rice, C.M.S., London, 1910. This book also is out of print.

controversy, and the missionary ought to be ready to think the matter through for himself, so that his answer is in line with the actual discussion taking place".

The lengthy reply of another correspondent, a worker in the Near East, is full of such valuable comment that the author feels constrained to make rather extensive quotations from it:

"In considering objections our first problem is to be aware of what lies behind them. Why do Muslims attack Christianity? Why, indeed, did His contemporaries attack Christ? In the gospels He is called blasphemer, drunkard, the ignorant son of a carpenter, a breaker of the Sabbath and other Mosaic precepts, and a man for whom none of the authorities had any regard. All kinds of insulting remarks were thrown against Him. Christ Himself analysed all this criticism and in a comprehensive statement declared, 'The world hates me because I testify that its deeds are evil', Jo. 7: 7; cp. the story of Demetrius, silversmith and defender of the goddess Artemis, Acts 19: 24–27 and also Acts 28: 22.

"Much then of this criticism of Christ and Christianity is not specifically Muslim, rather it is human and has existed from the days of the early disciples. This has two sources: (1) due to difference of background, of custom and thought. If this be all, sincere seekers will grasp the truth when they comprehend it, and to such we owe the duty of careful explanation of the Christian position. (2) But the second and the more common objection arises from a spirit of opposition to the moral challenge of Christianity in action. More often than we suspect this will be found to be the real difficulty. In the face of such a challenge, feeling himself to be in the wrong, a man will criticise the source of the ideal presented. So that we need, as physicians of souls, the wisdom and skill to know how to use the criticism itself as a means to the correct diagnosis of the inner needs of those with whom we have to do.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> A very valuable handbook is *Soul Surgery*, by the late H. A. Walter, Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, Calcutta, 12 annas; also Shoemaker, *Children of the Second Birth*.

"It has been said of Christ that when people came to Him with intellectual problems on their mind, He sent them away with moral problems on their hands. If we would copy the Master as our Perfect Example we will do that at times: (a) by direct challenge—as to the rich young ruler; or (b) by a story to answer a problem—as in the parable of the Good Samaritan; or (c) by answering question with question—as did Jesus in the matter of the authority of John the Baptist; or again, (d) by a reference to results—cp. Jesus' answer to the Baptist in prison."

The injunctions of Dr. St. Clair-Tisdall himself in this respect still hold good:

Do not start controversy, yet meet it when you must.

See not so much the Muslim, as the man for whom Christ died.

Make it your aim, not to silence or vanquish in "religious argument", but to win men for Christ:

(a) by removing misconceptions; and

(b) by getting Muslims to read the Scriptures for themselves, especially the New Testament.

Limit the discussion to one or two points, and first settle these before going on to others; also work to a definite conclusion.

Be scrupulously fair in argument and courteous in manner; never let discussion degenerate into quarrel.

Remember that some of your opponents may be trying to make you angry, and anger is proof to them of your defeat.

Show that to you these things are profoundly serious, having to do with things spiritual not carnal.

Refuse to be drawn into answering the question, "What do you think of Muhammad?" Your business is to speak about Jesus Christ.

Give some title of courtesy to Muhammad, *Hazrat*, *Ānhazrat*; and of course to Jesus also.

Be sure that you know the meaning of the theological terms you use; some are Islamic and do not convey to Muslims the idea you may have in your own mind. So, too, our Bible terms are not always understood by them.

Do not rely on your memory in quoting Scripture, especially when a Muslim quotes it; make a point of turning up the references in the Bible. It is of the first importance, and far more necessary, that you should know your Bible well than that you should know the Qur'ān well.

Eagerly acknowledge, and show that you acknowledge, aspects of truth that are in Islam as well as Christianity, and from this lead on to a statement of the fuller truth as you know it in Christ.

Finally, never enter upon controversy without necessity, without knowledge, without love or without prayer.

There is the advice, too, of our own Scriptures which all would do well to ponder:

"Shut your mind against foolish, popular controversy; be sure that only breeds strife. And the Lord's servant must not be a man of strife; he must be kind to everybody, a skilled teacher, a man who will not resent injuries; he must be gentle in his admonitions to the opposition—God may perhaps let them change their mind and admit the Truth; they may come to their senses again and escape the snare of the devil, as they are brought back to life by God to do His will", 2 Timothy 2: 23—26.

"Let your talk always have a saving salt of grace about it, and learn how to answer any question put to you", Coloss. 4: 6.

While it was our Lord Himself who said:

"I will give you words and wisdom that not one of your opponents will be able to meet or refute", Luke 21: 15 (Moffatt's trans.).

Two further explanations are required for the constant reference in this book to the Qur'ān and the Ahmadis.

Because of Muslim presupposition and prejudice we are obliged to quote from their Scripture, though we do not accept it as in any sense authoritative *for Christianity*.

The claims and arguments of the Ahmadis are referred to throughout the volume not only because these are being quoted by the orthodox party who would not own allegiance

to them, but because of definite requests from several quarters.<sup>1</sup>

It remains to make grateful acknowledgment of the generous help received in the compilation of this work. Some indication of my indebtedness to the works of Christian scholars in the West is made in the lists of Books for Reference at the close of each chapter. Moreover, I have combed through the file prepared by Miss Padwick, the indefatigable Secretary of the Central Literature Committee for Moslems, Cairo and Jerusalem, and found many a helpful suggestion. My colleagues, Revs. John Subhan and James Sweetman, have given me ungrudging assistance in reading through the manuscript before it went to the press, and thus helped me to make my "explanation" at once more exact and more adequate. My wife, yet again, has given freely not only of her time in typing the entire material for the press, but of her wise counsel and rare encouragement.

LAHORE,  
*October, 1937.*

L. B. J.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix D, p. 221.

## NOTES

- I. In the transliteration of Arabic names and terms the following diacritical marks have been adopted:

th	for	ث	t	for	ط
h	”	ح	z	”	ظ
kh	”	خ	‘	”	ع
dh	”	ذ	gh	”	غ
z	”	ز	q	”	ق
s	”	ص	’	”	ء
d	”	ض			

2. References to the Qur’ān appear thus, **2**: 5; the bold figure denoting the *sūra*, chapter, the smaller figure the *āyat*, verse. The enumeration of the verses follows that of Rodwell, *The Koran*, Everyman's Library edition.

CHAPTER  
I  
THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE  
SCRIPTURES

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

The present Bible cannot be the original one as it does not agree with the Qur'ān (p. 19).

Though corrupted the present Bible contains some parts of the original truth, e.g. the Unity of God, punishment and reward, and the significance of the coming of the last prophet, Muhammad. It is these parts only which the Qur'ān is said to confirm and protect (pp. 18 and 32).

Where is the Gospel of Jesus? Did he not take it to heaven? (p. 4).

Which of the four gospels is the one which descended on Jesus, the son of Mary?

The Bible was already corrupted and interpolated at the time of the appearance of the prophet Muhammad "by the presence in it of statements about the Divinity and Sonship of Jesus and the teachings of the Trinity and Jesus' supposed death on the cross and his resurrection from the grave".

"The gospels did exist in their present form in the 5<sup>th</sup> century of the Christian era. The corruption, therefore, had already occurred in the Word of God" (pp. 46-7).

Latter day Christians have not been able to preserve the Holy Injīl "on account of their forefathers' erasing the statements concerning the advent of Muhammad" (p. 22).

As the Taurāt was abrogated by the coming of the Zabūr, and the Zabūr by the Injīl, so the entire Bible is abrogated by the Qur'ān (p. 28).

## CHAPTER I

### THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

The primary purpose of this book is to help the Christian evangelist to examine dispassionately certain outstanding difficulties which the Muslim people experience in regard to the Christian faith, and, at the same time, so to restate the truths involved as to leave at least no reasonable ground for misunderstanding.

Some of these difficulties are traditional, and have been handed down without intermission since the early days of Islam. Of these some can be shown to have arisen from original misunderstanding and to have continued for the same reason, or through misrepresentation not necessarily wilful. But more recently there has been bitter criticism of the things we hold dear, due, primarily, to violent reaction against the work of missionary apologists of the nineteenth century, who, in their preaching and writing, not only defended the Christian position but sought to establish its superiority by pointing out defects in Islam and its founder. This new attitude and its significance will also receive our attention.

Before we can deal, however, with those subjects which more properly appertain to the faith of the Church we are obliged, at the outset, to consider in some detail the marked prejudice of Muslims concerning the Bible. They are assiduously taught to believe, and do for the most part profess to believe, that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments now in circulation are not genuine. The reasons commonly advanced for such belief are that the original writings have been,

- (1) corrupted, i.e. tampered with, *muharraḥ*.<sup>1</sup> It is contended that there have been, at some time or other, alterations, omissions, and additions in our Scriptures; in particular, that statements about the Deity and Sonship of Christ, the Trinity, the death on the cross and subsequent resurrection, have been deliberately inserted, while references to Muhammad have been suppressed;
- (2) abrogated, annulled, *mansūkh*; i.e. by the "descent" of the Qur'ān; so that the Bible is no longer authoritative. Closely connected with this idea is the claim that the Qur'ān is in itself a compendium of all true and necessary teaching contained in the earlier books, supplemented by further revelation.

Occasionally the New Testament, as we have it, is declined for the quaint reason, held by some, that Jesus at the time of His Ascension took the original Injīl with Him to heaven.

No matter what particular connotation the term *muharraḥ* may have for him, the Muslim almost invariably rests his case for the corruption of the Bible on what he thinks the Qur'ān has to say about the question. For him that Book is the final court of appeal, seeing that he believes it to contain only the *ipsissima verba* of God.

While reserving to ourselves the right to determine this matter on quite other grounds, we shall nevertheless find it profitable, both for ourselves and Muslims, if we make a close study of the numerous references in the Qur'ān to our Scriptures. In a book of this size, however, a mere summary

---

<sup>1</sup> The act is termed *tahrīf*, a word which, strictly speaking, signifies the transposition of letters in words, thereby effecting "alteration" but Muslims often employ the term when bringing a charge of textual corruption.

of our findings must suffice, but no statement having any real bearing on the subject will be overlooked.

### SUPPORT FROM THE QUR'ĀN FOR THE SCRIPTURES

It is, in the circumstances, of no small interest to find that the Qur'ān always speaks of the earlier books with respect—in such terms, indeed, as to leave the very definite impression that Muhammad, at any rate, believed in their divine origin and genuineness. The impartial student will naturally wish first to scrutinize all such language, and then, in the light of its significance, turn his attention to those passages which Muslims persuade themselves contain charges of corruption in the text of the Bible. That is the course we now propose to follow.

We begin with a consideration of the following facts:

1. The Qur'ān declares that

God Himself gave these Scriptures to His Prophets:

(a) "We did give the Book, Taurāt, to Moses", **32: 23**; cp. **2: 50, 81**; **11: 112**; **21: 49**; **25: 37**; **37: 117**; **40: 56**; **41: 45**; **45: 15**. The Pentateuch is clearly intended in all these passages.

(b) "To David We gave the Psalms, Zabūr", **17: 57**; also **4: 161**.

(c) "We gave him (Jesus) the Evangel, Injīl", **5: 50**; cp. **19: 31**; **57: 27**.

and that

(d) "He sent down the Taurāt and the Injīl for the guidance of mankind", **3: 2**.

2. The earlier books are invariably spoken of in terms of high praise, thus the Taurāt is said to be

(a) "the Book of God", **5: 48**; cp. **2: 95**; **3: 22**.

(b) "the Word of God", **2: 70**.

(c) "Al Furqān", i.e. the Illumination, **21: 49**; **2: 50**; a title of distinction applied also to the Qur'ān.

- (d) "the perspicuous (or enlightening) Book", **3**: 181 Jalāluddīn, in his commentary, says the Taurāt and Injīl are here indicated.
- (e) "a light and guidance to man.....a decision for all matters and a guidance and a mercy.....complete for him who acts aright", **6**: 91, 155.

3. Other passages refer to the inspiration, authority and proper use of the Scriptures then in the possession of "the People of the Book", thus:

- (a) "Verily we have inspired thee (Muhammad) as we inspired Noah and the Prophets after him", **4**: 161; cp. **21**: 7; **42**: 1; **3**: 66.
- (b) "They (the Jews) have inherited the Book", **7**: 168; cp. **42**: 13.
- (c) "they have already the Taurāt in which is God's judgment", **5**: 47; **3**: 75.
- (d) Jews and Christians are said to be diligent readers of their Scriptures, **2**: 41, 107, 115; **10**: 93; cp. **3**: 109.
- (e) Those of the Jews "who hold fast by the Book" will be rewarded, **7**: 169; so, too, "if they (Jews and Christians) observe the Taurāt and Injīl", **5**: 70.
- (f) Jews and Christians are required not only to accept the Qur'ān, but to believe in and observe the Taurāt and Injīl as well, e.g. "Ye have no ground to stand on until ye observe the Taurāt and Injīl", **5**: 72; cp. **4**: 135.
- (g) Muhammad himself is bidden believe in the Scriptures, and declares his unqualified faith in them; "Say, (O Muhammad) 'In whatsoever Books God hath sent down do I believe'", **42**: 14; **29**: 45; **3**: 78; cp. especially, "Ye (Muhammad and his people) believe in the Book, the whole of it", *bi'l kitābi kullihī*, **3**: 115. Also, "If thou art in doubt about that which We have sent down to thee, inquire of those who have read the Scriptures before thee", **10**: 94.
- (h) The Jews who rejected the Injīl are most severely condemned for declaring, "We believe in a part and we reject a part" (of the Book), **4**: 149.

4. Finally, it is stated that the Qur'ān

- (a) verifies, attests, the previous Scriptures, e.g. "He hath sent down to thee (Muhammad) the Book (Qur'ān) in truth, confirming what was before it.....the Taurāt and the Injīl", **3: 2; 10: 38; 46: 12, 29; 6: 92; 2: 38, 83, 91, 95; 4:50.**  
and  
(b) is "their safeguard", **5: 52;** which the commentator Baidāwī (13th cent. A.D.) explains to mean, "A keeper over the whole of the (sacred) Books, such as shall preserve them from change, and witness to their truth and authority".

The general tenor of these passages, scattered throughout the Qur'ān, establishes beyond question the fact that the earlier Books were held by Muhammad to be genuine and authoritative, because of their divine origin. Indeed, his main argument with "the People of the Book" is just this—accept the Qur'ān *also*, because it confirms what was sent down before it, e.g.

"O ye, to whom the Scriptures have been given! believe in what We have sent down (i.e. the Qur'ān), confirmatory of the Scripture which is in your hands", **4: 50.**

#### MEANING OF "CORRUPTION" IN THE QUR'ĀN

We are now in a better position to determine the significance of those other references in the Qur'ān to the earlier Scriptures, which Muslims are wont to cite in support of their contention that the text of the Bible has been wilfully tampered with. In the light of what we have already found, that is the last thing we should expect to hear from the lips of Muhammad. However, let us consider the purport of the following verses, which are typical and representative:

- (a) "A part of them (Jews) heard the word of God and then, after they had understood it, perverted it, *yuharrifūnahu*, altered, corrupted, and knew that they did so", **2: 70**—this is a general charge against the Jews with reference to their own Scriptures.

- (b) "The ungodly ones among them (Jews) changed that word into another than that which had been told them", 7: 161-2; explained as referring to an incident in Jewish history when, instead of saying *hittat* (forgiveness) as Divinely commanded, the Jews wilfully mispronounced the word to make it *habbat* (corn); cp. Jalāluddīn on 2: 56.
- (c) "And, verily, there is a party of them (Jews) who twist their tongues (i.e. pervert it) concerning the Book, that ye may suppose it to be from the Book, but it is not from the Book. They say 'It is from God', but it is not from God, and they tell a lie against God, and they know they do so", 3: 72; cp. 4: 48—the implication is that by a deceptive mode of recitation, in fact mispronunciation, passages were made to appear as coming from the Book, though in reality not there; in other words, the Jews were pretending that they were reading from their Scripture.
- (d) "Woe to those (Jews) who with their own hands write, *yaktubūna*, (i.e. wrongly) the Book, and then say, 'This is from God', so that they may take for it a small price. Woe to them for what their hands have written, and woe to them for what they gain"! 2: 73—said of ignorant Jews who sought to deceive Muhammad by presenting to him passages written out by them from their traditions and rabbinical books, and asserting that they were authoritative and divine.
- (e) "Clothe not the truth with falsehood and hide not the truth when ye know it", 2: 39. The *Tafsīr-i-Raufī* paraphrases thus: "Do not mingle with the truth that the praise of Muhammad is recorded in the Taurāt the lie of a denial". cp. also "Who is more unjust than he who hides a testimony which he hath received from God?" 2: 134. For other instances of such "concealment", see further 2: 141, 154, 169; 3: 64; 6: 91. Commenting on 5: 47,<sup>1</sup> Ibn Ishāq says that when asked to read out the verse of stoning for adultery in the Mosaic law, a Jewish leader actually laid his hand on the incriminating verse, whereupon one named 'Abdullāh ibn Salām, a renegade Jew, struck away the hand of the reader saying: "There, Prophet of

---

<sup>1</sup> A passage referring to the stubbornness of the Jews.

- God, there is the verse of stoning which he refuses to read to thee"
- (f) "Among the Jews are those who pervert, *yuharrifūna*, the words from their places and say, 'We have heard and we have not obeyed'; and 'Hear thou, but (only) as one that hears not'; and, 'Look at us'—distorting (the words) with their tongues, taunting about religion. But if they would say (instead), 'We have heard and we obey'; 'Hear thou and regard us', it were better for them and more right", 4: 48-49. The complaint here made is that the Jews "perverted" words of salutation to make them sound like abuse. cp. "O Apostle! let not those.....vex thee.....who say with their mouths 'We believe', but whose hearts believe not; or the Jews—listeners to a lie—listeners to others—but who come not to thee. They pervert the words from their places", 5: 45.

This charge of perversion, or "dislocation," of words is quite general; the actual illustrations given at this place have nothing whatever to do with the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE TEXT OF SCRIPTURE NOT AFFECTED

Two facts emerge from a consideration of these passages: (1) the people against whom Muhammad brings these charges are Jews, not Christians. No such complaint is made against the latter in any part of the Qur'ān; (2) even so, in no case are the Jews charged with having tampered with the *text* of their Scriptures. Indeed, after the evidence we have had of the high regard in which he held the earlier books it is unthinkable that by these expressions Muhammad intended actual corruption of the text.

On the other hand, it may fairly be argued that these complaints rather testify to the genuineness of the Scriptures in Muhammad's day, for  
"mispronunciation" implies that the right word was there;

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. *Encyc. of Islam*, Vol. IV, p. 619; art. *tahrīf*.

one cannot "write wrongly" unless the correct text be before one;  
there can be no "hiding the truth" unless one has the truth to hide.

#### CONFIRMATION BY A MODERN MUSLIM

Such was the conclusion at which that careful scholar, Sir William Muir, arrived as long ago as 1855, after a most thorough investigation of the meaning of each and every reference in the Qur'ān to the earlier Scriptures.

His view was confirmed later by the eminent Indian Muslim, Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, founder of Aligarh College, who in 1862 wrote a treatise on the subject of *tahrīf* to demonstrate to Muslims that in no place does the Qur'ān charge the Jews and Christians with actual alteration of the text of their Scriptures.

Sir Sayyid pointed out that early Muslim writers recognized, in theory, two forms of *tahrīf*, viz. *tahrīf-i-lafzī*, verbal corruption, i.e. of the text; and *tahrīf-i-ma'nawī*, corruption of meaning, or interpretation. He illustrates the two types as follows:

1. *Tahrīf-i-lafzī* may be effected by
  - (a) adding words or phrases not in the original text;
  - (b) striking out words or phrases from the text;
  - (c) substituting other words, differing in meaning from those struck out.
2. *Tahrīf-i-ma'nawī* may be effected by
  - (a) making verbal changes while reading, so as to convey to the ear words different from what were written;
  - (b) reading only some passages, and omitting others;
  - (c) instructing people in a manner contrary to God's teaching in His Holy word, and yet making them believe that this instruction is the true word;
  - (d) adopting an improper meaning of certain words of ambiguous or equivocal interpretation, which does not suit the sense intended;

(e) misinterpreting those passages which are mystical and allegorical.

These, according to Sir Sayyid, exhaust the possible ways of *tahrīf*, the offence of which lies in doing this kind of thing "knowingly", "wilfully", and with a view to "an obvious perversion of the true meaning of the text". He then goes on to say, "I do not at all intend to assert that all these methods were actually put into practice for the purpose of corrupting the Scriptures. On the contrary, in the opinion of us Muhammadans it is not proved that corruption of the first three kinds was practised. Some doctors of our faith have, indeed, maintained that corruption of the first three kinds above-mentioned must have been practised. . . . but on consideration it will appear that these arguments are not sound; nor do such alterations or interpretations (i.e. as they suggest) pertain to those corruptions which are spoken of in the holy Qur'ān. . . . What we have to consider is whether all the copies of the Scriptures, scattered throughout Christendom and Judaism, did really go forth with corruption of the three kinds indicated . . . . Other more learned doctors of our faith have stated their deliberate conviction that no such corruption (i.e. of the *tahrīf-i-lafzī* type) took place in the Scriptures, and have thus rejected the opinions advanced by those above mentioned."

The learned writer then proceeds to cite Muslim authors of repute in proof of his statement, e.g. Imam Bukhārī (810—870 A.D.) who says, "there is no man who could corrupt a single word of what has proceeded from God, so that the Jews and Christians could corrupt only by misrepresenting the meaning of the words of God"<sup>1</sup>; also Fakhruddīn Rāzī (1150—1210 A.D.) who, commenting on the words, "Verily, they who hide what God hath revealed of the Book, and sell

---

<sup>1</sup> *Kitābu't-Tahrīf*.

it for a little price, they shall eat nothing in their bellies save fire", 2: 169, states, on the authority of Ibn Abbas, a nephew of Muhammad, that

"The Jews and early Christians were suspected of altering the text of the Taurāt and Injīl; but in the opinion of eminent doctors and theologians, it was not practicable thus to corrupt the text, because those Scriptures were generally known and widely circulated, having been handed down from generation to generation. No interpolation could therefore be made in them, although it is admitted that some people used to conceal their true sense and interpretation."

Sir Sayyid devotes the remainder of his treatise to showing that, in the opinion of these and other authorities, the "corruption" which the Qur'ān has in view, in such verses as we have quoted, is perversion of meaning and interpretation.

For instance, he quotes at length from Fakhruddīn Rāzī, who expounds the significance of the words "why clothe ye the truth in falsehood" in 3: 64 and 2: 39 thus: "Those passages from the Old Testament which foretold the advent of our Prophet Muhammad certainly required great judgment and thought for their right apprehension, and the Jews were accustomed to wrest the true sense of these passages, and cavil at the conclusions to which they naturally led when correctly understood". . . . "The Jews were always denying the rightful interpretation of these prophecies, and busied themselves in captious and unprofitable disputations, and in striving, by over-strained arguments and illogical reasoning, to explain away their true meaning. It was then that this *āyat* was sent down from heaven enjoining them not to adulterate truth with falsehood, so as to mislead people by the doubts they cast upon the true sense of the disputed passages of Scripture."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Syud Ahmud, *The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 7th Discourse, Ghazeepore, 1862.

In other words, the Jews are charged with concealing and lying about the contents of their Book and with twisting it with false interpretation. They are even likened in the Qur'ān to an *ass* laden with valuable books, of the contents and value of which it is grossly ignorant, **62**: 5.

#### THE SITUATION IN MUHAMMAD'S DAY

The naive comments of Fakhruddīn Rāzī inevitably suggest to the mind the situation in which Muhammad found himself when confronted with the Jews, more especially at Madina. He had a controversy with them, and a particular aspect of it is reflected in these very passages we have been considering. While in Mecca he had formed a great respect for these people, themselves monotheists with a divinely-inspired Book; and from them he learned of predictions in their Scriptures concerning the advent of a *prophet*, whom God was to raise up.

For a time the Jews were cordial, being gratified at his "strong leaning towards, and respect for, their Scriptures and Histories".<sup>1</sup> Thereafter Muhammad, claiming as he had done from the first, God's call and commission, arrived at the point where he began to claim also that the Scriptures in the hands of the Jews actually foretold his coming. Apart altogether from Muslim comment, the Qur'ān itself makes this fact indubitably clear, e.g. "The *ummi*<sup>2</sup> prophet, whom they find written down with them in the Taurāt (and Injīl)", **7**: 156. cp. **10**: 94; **6**: 20; **13**: 36; **2**: 71. Baidhāwī and Jalāluddīn, explaining the last of these passages, paraphrase the words, "What God hath revealed to you", thus: "that is, made manifest to you in the Taurāt regarding the description of Muhammad".

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Rodwell's note on **13**: 36; p. 337 (Everyman's Library ed.).

<sup>2</sup> The term probably signifies *illiterate*.

But this claim was something which the Jews as a whole stoutly denied, and to this denial also the Qur'ān bears witness; thus: "When there came to them (the Jews) an apostle from God, affirming the previous revelations made to them, some of those to whom the Scriptures were given threw the Book of God behind their backs, as if they knew it not", **2: 95**. Muhammad himself is evidently intended here; but the Jews, in this graphic phrase, indignantly rejected him. After all their denial was quite natural, for what they did know from their Book was that the promised prophet would be through Isaac, the son of promise—a Jew, not through the son of Hagar—an Ishmaelite; for God had said, "My covenant will I establish with Isaac"; "in Isaac shall thy seed (O Abraham) be called", Genesis, **17: 21; 21: 12**. Moreover, it only made them more hostile towards him when they saw that he credited Jesus, son of Mary, with being the Messiah, whom their nation had already rejected. cp. **3: 40; 4: 156, 169**.

### THE CHARGES EXPLAINED

Viewed now in the light of our findings the various complaints in the Qur'ān become intelligible. Muhammad, himself unable to read, was wont to seek information and confirmation about certain matters from their Scriptures at the hands of the Jews. It might be concerning the presence or otherwise in the Mosaic Law of the penalty of stoning for adultery, cp. **2: 73** and **5: 45**. Baidhāwī, commenting on the latter verse, says that it had to do with the Jews' contradictions and contentions with Muhammad concerning the presence of "the verse of stoning" in their Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> More usually, however, it concerned the correct interpretation of passages in the Old Testament which Muhammad and his followers sought to appropriate as confirming his claims to

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. ed. Osmania Press, Istanbul, 1314, A.H. vol. I. 301 (margin).

be the prophet who should come. It was on such occasions that the Jews were charged with "changing", "hiding", and "transposing" words, and with "mispronouncing" them when asked to read out, or copy out, for Muhammad and his adherents, passages from the Scriptures said to have reference to these matters. They adopted these devices, says the Qur'ān, when repudiating the interpretation advanced by the prophet.

Strained relationships followed, as we gather from the Qur'ān; "Hast thou not marked those who have received a portion of the Scriptures, when they are summoned to the Book of God, that it may settle their differences? Then did a part of them turn back, and withdraw far off", **3: 22**; see also vv. 80 and 184. And there seems plenty of evidence that the Jews teased Muhammad—the Qur'ān records the embittered feelings on both sides, "Of all men thou wilt certainly find the Jews . . . to be the most intense in hatred of (Muslims)", **5: 85**. But in this matter of his claim that their Scriptures contained predictions of his advent and his mission, they resolutely withstood him. What happened afterwards is a matter of history—Muhammad, having exhausted all means to gain their support, ruthlessly swept the Jews from his path. To this exasperation also the Qur'ān bears witness, "O ye, to whom the Scriptures have been given! believe in what We have sent down confirmatory of that which is in your hands, ere We deface your features, and twist your head round backward, or curse you as We cursed the Sabbath-breakers", **4: 50**; **2: 73, 154**. May it not be claimed that many of those Jews of Madina gave their lives in defence of their Book?

#### SPECIOUS ARGUMENTS OF THE AHMADIS

The facts and their evidence which we have assembled up to this point are drawn from the Qur'ān and Muslim

commentators, and should suffice to convince any fair-minded person that the Qur'ān nowhere charges even the Jews with altering the text of their Scriptures. And one can but hope that the carefully reasoned statement of a Muslim scholar of the standing of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan will help educated Muslims to realize that the Bible has not in fact been deliberately tampered with.

We find, however, that those who are of the Ahmadi school of thought persist in refusing the conclusion to which this evidence points. They agree, it is true, that many of the verses in the Qur'ān that speak of "alteration" have reference to differences of interpretation put upon certain passages in the Scriptures; e.g. Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his note (73) On 2: 39 says, "'Mixing up the truth with the falsehood' signifies their mixing up the prophecy with their own false interpretation of it, and thus making obscure the prophecy itself; while 'hiding the truth' signifies their concealing the prophecy itself, for they often commanded their followers not to disclose to the Muslims those prophecies which were known to them". But, arming themselves with some of the deductions of modern critical study of the text of the Bible, the Ahmadis commit the anachronism of reading those deductions into the situation which Muhammad faced in the seventh century A.D.

Thus we find the afore-mentioned commentator writing the following note (582) on 4: 48, which speaks of the Jews displacing the words of their Scriptures and "distorting" them with their tongues:

"The corruption of the previous books is constantly referred to in the Holy Qur'ān, and as the words clearly show, it implies a corruption of the text as well as a false rendering of it. It is unreasonable on the part of the apologists of the Bible to deny such corruption when clear instances of it have been pointed out. The subject of the perversion of 'holy writ' is specially dealt with in the Holy Qur'an in

**2:** 75-79; **5:** 13, 41 and here. The 'verification' referred to here (ver. 50) and elsewhere . . . does not in any way negative the corruption and alteration of the text which is only too apparent to be seriously contested."

Nevertheless, our careful scrutiny has failed to reveal the clear evidence of which this writer is so easily assured.

Naturally his commentary, like all the earlier ones, turns repeatedly to the subject of 'prophecies' in the Scriptures alleged to have reference to Muhammad, cp. his note (143) on **2:** 95:

"The covenant referred to in the previous verse as being cast aside, and the throwing of the Book behind their backs, both refer to the Israelites paying no heed to the prophecy of Deut. **18:** 18, which was verified by the advent of the Holy Prophet. So clearly did that prophecy point to the Holy Prophet that it is again and again referred to in this chapter as the most powerful argument against the inimical attitude of the Jews."

Again in his note (951) on **7:** 156, he declares:

"There are many prophecies regarding the advent of the Holy Prophet both in the Old and New Testaments . . . The Gospel is full of the prophecies of the advent of the Holy Prophet; Matt. **13:** 31 (parable of the mustard seed); **21:** 34-40; Mark **12:** 1; Luke **20:** 9 (vineyard and wicked husbandmen—Muhammad being indicated as the 'Lord of the vineyard'); John **1:** 22 (prob. ver. 21 is intended); **14:** 16 and 26 (the Comforter)—all contain such prophecies."

Inasmuch as Christian apologists in the past have frequently cited (rather unwisely), certain passages in the Qur'ān itself by way of proof of the integrity of the Bible, it is interesting to find this modern commentator taking pains to show that the verses really mean something different. Since his view is often quoted by Muslim writers in these days, we should observe how he seeks to remove what support these Qur'ānic statements might afford. Extracts from his notes (697–703)

on the section 5: 48-52, furnish us with a good example of his specious reasoning:

"The first statement made here is that the Torah was a Divine revelation containing light and guidance. This is a statement which no Muslim has ever denied. What is denied is that that light and guidance were kept intact throughout the ages. . . . They certainly contained light and guidance, but only for one people—the Israelites, and for a limited time". . . . "The statement made here is that the masters of Divine knowledge and the doctors 'were required to guard part of the book of Allah', i.e. Torah.<sup>1</sup> Now this statement by no means implies that they actually guarded the Book so as to be able to transmit it in all its purity. They were no doubt required to do it, but it is nowhere stated that they had succeeded in guarding it"...

"Another point worth noting in the statement under discussion is that even the doctors were required to guard *min Kitāb-illāh*, which signifies *a part of the Book of Allah*. The whole is not meant, otherwise the word *min*, signifying *part*, would not have been added". . . . "The Qur'ān is called *muhaimin* or a *guardian* over all previous revelation, thus showing that whatever was of permanent value in the previous scriptures has been preserved in the Qur'ān, and secured from the corruption which it was undergoing in them. The previous books contained a light and guidance for the people for whom they were meant, and they were commanded to judge by those books, but the Qur'ān is now made the Book which judges all truth, wherever it may have been, and therefore is the only Book which should be followed."

With reference to the Maulana's interpretation of the phrase *min Kitāb-illāh*, it should be said that while the preposition *min* certainly can have this partitive significance, yet the weight of Muslim authority is against so taking it

---

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Ali, in his translation facing the Arabic text, puts the word "part" in brackets because, strictly speaking, it has no equivalent in the original, though in his comment he has removed the brackets.

here. For instance, Zamakhsharī, Baidhāwī and Sharbīnī interpret the preposition to be explanatory, with the sense of "viz.", not partitive;<sup>1</sup> likewise Tabarī, Fakhruddīn Rāzī and other commentators, imply that *min* is here explanatory, though they give no note about it.

#### THE MUSLIM'S DILEMMA

The outstanding fact emerging from this old controversy, a fact of which we shall have occasion to speak repeatedly in this volume, is that there is marked disagreement on several vital matters between the Qur'ān and the Bible. This is something which cannot, and does not, escape the notice of the earnest, educated Muslim of to-day. The more he thinks of it, the more embarrassing he feels the dilemma to be. "Is he to believe in the Qur'ān's witness to the Bible and deny the Qur'ān itself—his own Book. Or is he to deny the witness of the Qur'ān and so the Qur'ān itself?" His way out of a hopeless position is to assert that one of the Books must have been corrupted and is, therefore, now untrustworthy. This, he argues, cannot be the Qur'ān for it belongs (so he persuades himself) to an altogether superior category; therefore it must be the Bible; accordingly, he accuses the Christians with having corrupted it. But no one will consider this to be sound reasoning.

The Christian, on the contrary, has proofs to hand whereby it can be demonstrated that the Bible to-day is, substantially, what it was in Muhammad's time. He therefore concludes that, notwithstanding the language of the Qur'ān, the disagreement between the two Books goes back to the time of

---

<sup>1</sup> *Min li'l-tabayīn*, not *min li'l-taba'dīh*. The present writer is indebted to Professor D. S. Margoliouth, of Oxford, for the particulars in this paragraph.

Muhammad; in other words, the Qur'ān has at no time agreed with the Bible.

The most effective answer, however, to such charges of corruption when put forward by Muslims, is not to be found through disputations with them about the precise meaning of this or that phrase in the Arabic Qur'ān. For it requires but a moment's reflection on the part of the unprejudiced student of both Books to realize that the Qur'ān, in the very nature of the case, cannot be looked upon as a criterion, either in the matter of the authenticity of the contents of the Bible, or of the history of the transmission of its text.

There are other and convincing arguments, coupled with irrefutable proofs, whereby we can show that these charges of wilful and base perversion of the text are groundless, because: (1) contrary to reason, and (2) contradicted by fact.

#### THESE ACCUSATIONS ARE OPPOSED TO REASON

(a) The Jews can, and should, be exonerated from any such charge; not only because repeatedly warned in their own Book against the sin of perverting it, cp. Deut. **4**: 2; **12**: 32; Prov. **30**: 5-6; but chiefly for the reason that their extraordinary regard for, and care of, the Scriptures is amply attested. Those early Jewish scholars, known as the Talmudists (c. 270–500 A.D.), laid down the most minute rules to ensure that scribes would make a faithful copying of the text of the Hebrew Scriptures; and this text they handed down to the Massoretes.<sup>1</sup>

The Massoretes, in turn, "numbered the verses, words, and letters of every book. They calculated the middle

---

<sup>1</sup> The Massoretes were a school of Jewish doctors who undertook to provide the Hebrew text of the Old Testament with *points* to indicate the vowels. They commenced their work about the beginning of the seventh century.

word and the middle letter of each. They enumerated verses which contained all the letters of the alphabet, or a certain number of them; and so on. These trivialities, as we might rightly consider them, had yet the effect of securing minute attention to the precise transmission of the text; and they are but an excessive manifestation of a respect for the sacred Scriptures which in itself deserves nothing but praise. The Massoretes were indeed anxious that not one jot or tittle—not one smallest letter nor one tiny part of a letter—of the Law should pass away or be lost"....."When once that revision was completed, such precautions were taken to secure its preservation, to the exclusion of any other form of text, as to make it certain that the text has been handed down to us, not indeed without any errors or variations, but without essential corruption".<sup>1</sup>

The Christians, similarly, encountered the most grave warning against any wilful tampering with their Scriptures:

"If any man shall add unto the words of the prophecy of this book, God shall add unto him the plagues which are written in this book; and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city", Revelation, **22**: 18-19.

These were words of such solemnity that Christians would learn to apply them to the whole of the New Testament writings. Apart from which one has but to consider the tireless labours of expert scholars of recent times, (1) in searching for ancient manuscripts in the Near East; (2) in their minute and fearless scrutiny of the great mass of them;

---

<sup>1</sup> "The importance of the Massoretic edition to us lies in the fact that it is still the standard text of the Hebrew Bible. *All the extant manuscripts of the Hebrew Old Testament contain substantially a Massoretic text.*" Sir Frederick Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, p. 33.

and (3) their zeal and co-operation in the acquisition and preservation of these silent witnesses to the faithful transmission of the text of the Scriptures, to realize that in the case of Christians also the charge of wilful corruption is not only unjust but unreasonable.

(b) In view of these facts one is constrained to ask, What object could ever have induced either Jews or Christians to tamper with the text of Scriptures so sacred?

The Muslims are apt to reply that the one sufficient reason was to suppress Muhammad's name; that is, to conceal or erase all reference to him—the Jews from the Old Testament, and the Christians from the New.

One readily understands why this plea is still persisted in—it follows the lead of the Qur'ān. But so facile an assertion contains a prime fallacy, that of "begging the question"; for it has yet to be proved that the Scriptures ever contained even one remote reference to Muhammad; and the onus of doing so rests, not on the Jew nor the Christian, but on the Muslim. Jew and Christian can unite in this matter and fearlessly declare, in the words of the prophet Nehemiah to Sanballat at the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, "There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart", Nehem. 6: 8.

As all the claims put forward by Muslims based on various passages supposed by them to have reference to Muhammad, including even Deut. 18: 18 on which Maulana Muhammad Ali lays so much stress, have been repeatedly examined and as often repudiated by Christian writers, they need not detain us here.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, the glaring inconsistency of Muslims

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Pfander, *Mizānu' l-Haqq*, Part III, Ch. 2.

Tisdall, *Muhammadan Objections to Christianity*, Chap. VII.

Goldsack, *Muhammad and the Bible*.

Art. by the author on the Paraclete passages in the Fourth Gospel, *The Moslem World* quarterly, Vol. X, 1920.

in this matter should not escape our notice. Though constantly asserting that our Scriptures have already been corrupted and in the manner and with the object just stated, it is amusing to find many of them still claiming that the Bible as it stands, the Bible so "corrupted" that they cannot accept its authority, contains numerous allusions to Muhammad. Witness the length to which, in his misguided zeal, a certain Muslim writer goes. Referring to the words of Jesus, "The prince of this world cometh", etc.,<sup>1</sup> he says, "By this prince of the world is signified prophet Mohammed, for God has made him a leader of both the worlds"....."Jesus Christ would never say believe in a bad person or Satan, and Satan or a bad person (could) never become a prince of the world".<sup>2</sup> This is said in all seriousness.

(c) But look at this charge in the light of the situation in which the Jews found themselves in Muhammad's day. Is it conceivable that they could have been so inane? Rather from what we know of the strong dislike in which Muhammad held them, we feel that had their Scriptures really contained references to him they would have submitted to him and thus escaped his unwelcome attentions.<sup>3</sup> No! their circumstances were so desperate that they must have been sorely tempted at times to manufacture and insert some "prophecies" about him.

Besides, there is the fact that long before the time of Muhammad the Jews had been familiar with claims of the Christians to the effect that certain Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament had received their fulfilment in Jesus of Nazareth; yet they made no attempt to erase these passages,

---

<sup>1</sup> John, 14: 30.

<sup>2</sup> See *Proof of Prophet Mohammad from the Holy Bible*, p. 18. The Mohammedan Tract Depot, Lahore.

<sup>3</sup> cp. *The People of the Mosque*, pp. 24-29.

though in this case also they persistently rejected the interpretation which the Christians put upon them.

(d) It only remains to point out that it would have been utterly impossible for the Jews and the Christians to have effected this kind of textual corruption at or about the time of Muhammad, for the following very good reasons:

By that period they were spread over the whole of the known world and could not have met together to agree to do this thing.

Had sections of them, then, altered the Book without joint agreement, their alterations would most certainly have differed and, in time, been detected.

There was, by then, the further insurmountable difficulty of diversity of language. Jews and Christians were to be found not only in Palestine, Syria, Asia Minor and Armenia, but throughout Europe, in North Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Persia, and even in India, and were making use of the languages current in several of these lands.

Then, too, the Jews and Christians were, unfortunately, mutually hostile; so that the one party would have promptly exposed any alterations or perversions by the other. This hostility is reflected even in the Qur'ān, cp. 2: 107.

And yet the fact remains—the Jews have always accepted, and still use, the same text of the Hebrew Old Testament as that studied by the Christians<sup>1</sup>; while all Christians use the same text of the Greek New Testament.

At that time Christians were divided into a number of hostile sects. Mutual jealousy alone would have prevented these from ever agreeing to do such a thing.

---

<sup>1</sup> The English translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, published by the Jewish Publication Society of America (*The Holy Scriptures*, Philadelphia, 1917) is itself a rare tribute to the accuracy and fidelity of the English translation by Christian scholars.

Finally, several Jews and Christians had by then become Muslims. Had their former co-religionists ever dared to tamper with the text of the sacred Scriptures, these apostates to Islam would have been able to bring forward unaltered copies of the Book to prove the "corruption". We read of no such action, because the need never arose.

#### AND CONTRADICTED BY FACT

Furthermore, the evidence of ancient manuscripts, now in our possession and known to belong to a period prior to the rise of Islam, fully confirms the reasoned argument put forward above. Granted that it is of a nature such as only the few educated Muslims can weigh and appreciate, still since it is true we ought to state it. With the spread of education and closer acquaintance with the facts, this is such proof as will at length bring conviction.

#### *Evidence from Ancient Manuscripts*

1. We actually possess to-day ancient Greek manuscripts of the whole Bible, which were *copied long before the time of Muhammad* by scribes, from still older MSS. It is from these that our modern scholars supply the world with the printed Greek text of the Old and New Testaments.

These pre-Islamic MSS. give us the most reliable information as to the contents of the Bible at the time of Muhammad, because, as we shall indicate, they are known to have been in existence in his day, and, indeed, long before his birth.

They can be seen by anyone who is able to make the journey to the museums where they are being preserved with the utmost care. We shall only mention the most notable:

- (a) The Codex Alexandrinus, in the British Museum, London; written about the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup>

century, i.e. about 170 years before the Hijra, (622 A.D.)

- (b) The Codex Sinaiticus, also in the British Museum, London; purchased in 1933 for £100,000. This was written about the middle of the 4th century, i.e. about 270 years before the Hijra.
- (c) The Codex Vaticanus, in the Vatican Library, Rome; written early in the 4th century, i.e. about 300 years before the Hijra.

These manuscripts are written on vellum, a durable material of skin, and the expert scholars of the world are agreed on their very great age. They are at least as old as we have stated, they may be older still.

Though our oldest extant MS. of the Hebrew Old Testament, containing the Taurāt, Zabūr, and the writings of the Jewish prophets, dates from the 9th century yet "scholars are agreed that the Hebrew books, as we know them to-day, have come down to us without material change since about A.D. 100".<sup>1</sup> Even so, there has been preserved and handed on to us the ancient Septuagint version of the Old Testament, i.e. a Greek rendering which was made from the Hebrew text somewhere between 250–200 years B.C., or about 800 years before the Hijra.

2. In addition to these manuscripts we possess numerous ancient *versions* of the Bible, which were made from the original Hebrew and Greek texts long before the rise of Islam. The chief of these are in Syriac, Latin, and Coptic. Scholars tell us that these translations were prepared before the end of the 3rd century; those in Syriac and Latin may well belong to the 2nd century. Our oldest extant manuscripts of these versions date from the 5th and 6th centuries.

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Bible*, by Sir Frederick Kenyon, p. 13.

3. Finally, we find numerous *quotations* from the sacred Scriptures in the preserved writings of early Christian Fathers. The references in their books are, in fact, so extensive and so clear as to furnish us with remarkable confirmation as to the reading of the text, at these places, in their day. Consider how long prior to Islam the following lived: Irenaeus (c. 135-202), Clement of Alexandria (c. 155–220), Origen (185-253), Tertullian (c. 150–220), Cyprian (c. 200–258), Eusebius (c. 270–340), Chrysostom (c. 347–407), Jerome (c. 345–420), Augustine (354-430).

Expert scrutiny of this mass of material—and it has been made—reveals beyond any manner of doubt that, in all essential particulars, the Bible then was what it is now. In other words, these documents are silent but incontrovertible witnesses to the fact that there has been no such wilful tampering with the text of the Scriptures, as alleged, since the days when they were written, hundreds of years before the Hijra.

#### NOR HAS THE BIBLE BEEN ABROGATED

Let us now give our attention to that other and quite different assertion of the Muslims—that the Bible has been abrogated by the "descent" of the Qur'ān and so, having lost its authority, need not now be read.

So far our impression, *on the testimony of the Qur'ān itself*, has been entirely the reverse of this; moreover, as we shall see, there is not the least support in the Muslim scripture for such a notion. Besides, it is against both common sense and the plain statement of the Bible.

When sometimes the Muslim, seeking a simile, cites the phenomenon of changing dynasties and the rise and fall of kings, he overlooks the fact that, notwithstanding such changes, there tends to persist through all the reigns a body of "common law", which is not subject to frequent fluctuation.

But his illustration is singularly inappropriate, since we are considering the All-Wise God and His revealed Word. He, through time and eternity, is the One Abiding King, and there can be no such periodic cancellation of the Truth He chooses to reveal. He is "the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning".<sup>1</sup>

Would any Muslim suggest either to a Jew or a Christian that, for instance, the Ten Commandments in the Taurāt have been thus abrogated by the Injīl? Certainly not, and if he pauses to think he must see that the notion cannot be seriously entertained. For the Bible may, not inaptly, be likened to a fruit-bearing tree with its roots and stem, its branches and leaves. All its parts serve a useful purpose, but men live by eating the fruit, not the root. Yet the fruit owes much to the root, stem, branches and leaves. So it is with the Bible—there is a Living Word that gives unity to it. Yet that Word attains its perfect unfolding only in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We remember, too, what He Himself said about this very matter, "Think not that I am come to destroy (i.e. annul) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (i.e. to bring to fruition).<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult, however, to see how this notion has grown up among Muslims. It is obvious to all that the differences in the two Books can never be reconciled, and so this plea of abrogation is put forward as an alternative to the charge of corruption; and, once again, support is sought for it in certain statements in the Qur'ān.

The verses commonly cited as establishing this contention are the following:

"And when We change one *āyat*, (verse or sign) for another, and God knoweth best what He revealeth, they say, 'Thou art only a forger'", **16**: 103;

---

<sup>1</sup> Ep. James, **1**: 17.

<sup>2</sup> Mat. **5**:17.

and this,

"Whatever *āyat* We cancel or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better or its like. Knowest thou not that God hath power over all things?" 2: 100; cp. 13: 39; 4: 84.

On the face of it, the first of these statements seems to suggest that Muhammad was found to be making contradictory assertions—"Thou art only a forger", his opponents declared. But they were reminded that since God is the Revealer, He is at liberty to change or abolish His own laws at His discretion. This word *āyat* was thus made to refer, at the very outset, to a verse, or section, of the Qur'ān itself; and that has been the orthodox view of the matter all through. Accordingly we find that the old commentators scrutinized every conflicting statement in the Qur'ān, wherever found, and expounded the doctrine, well-known among Muslims, of ABROGATION. In all the most famous commentaries on the Qur'ān this doctrine is taken for granted, viz: Tabarī (*d.* 310 A.H.), Zamakhsharī (*d.* 538 A.H.), Fakhruddīn (*d.* 606 A.H.), Baidhāwī (*d.* 685 A.H.), and in the *Itqan fī 'ulum al-Qur'ān* of Jalāluddīn as-Suyūtī (*d.* 911 A.H.). Fakhruddīn devotes many pages to a discussion of *naskh* and its meaning, and lays it down as established by the *ijmā'* (agreement) of the Muslim people that the term applies to the Qur'ān, i.e. *that passages now in the Qur'ān text, or once in the Qur'ān text, have been abrogated.*<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with this principle, one *āyat* is said to be *nāsikh*, the canceller, and another *āyat*, *mansūkh*, the cancelled. While difference of opinion existed as to the precise number of the abrogated verses—it has ranged from five to five hundred—a common figure given is 225.<sup>2</sup> We shall quote here three of the more noteworthy to show how the doctrine works:

<sup>1</sup> ed. Cairo, 1307 A.H., Vol. I, pp. 441-447.

<sup>2</sup> cp. *Abrogation in the Koran*, Anwar-ul-Haqq, Lucknow, 1925; the writer has compiled a list of 263.

- (a) 2: 59 reads, "Verily, they who believe (Muslims), and they who follow the Jewish religion, and the Christians, and the Sabeites (i.e. a semi-Christian sect of Babylonia)—whoever of these believeth in God and the last day, and doeth that which is right, shall have their reward with their Lord: fear shall not come upon them, neither shall be grieved".

This *āyat* is held to have been cancelled by,

- 3: 79, "Whoso desireth any other religion than Islam, that religion shall surely not be accepted from him, and in the next world he shall be among the lost".  
 (b) 2: 109 reads: "The East and the West is God's: therefore, whichever way ye turn there is the face of God".

This is held to have been abrogated by,

- 2: 139, "We have seen thee turning thy face towards every part of Heaven, but We will have thee turn to a *qibla* which shall please thee. Turn then thy face towards the sacred Mosque (i.e. the Ka'ba at Mecca), and wherever ye be, turn your faces towards that part."  
 (c) 2: 257 reads: "Let there be no compulsion in Religion".

This has been annulled by the famous *āyatu's-saif*, The Verse of the Sword:

- 9: 5, "When the sacred months are passed, kill those who join other gods with God wherever ye shall find them; and seize them, besiege them, and lay wait for them with every kind of ambush". cp. also verse 29, "Make war upon such of those to whom the Scriptures have been given as believe not in God, or in the last day, and who forbid not that which God and His Apostle have forbidden, etc.".

#### AHMADI VIEWS OF ABROGATION

This doctrine, however, is extremely distasteful to the modern educated Muslim. One such, writing recently in support of a correspondent who had asserted that "the theory of abrogation (as propounded by a madrassa-passed maulvi) is itself contradicted by the Qur'ān, 2: 1; 11: 1;

15: 9", declared: "To say that there are mutually contradictory verses in the Qur'ān is to confess that it is not the word of God; for the Qur'ān itself says that if this book were from any other besides God it would be found to contain many contradictions".<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, by the most unwarrantable exegesis, Maulana Muhammad Ali would have us believe that in the classic passage, 2: 100, "the word *āyat* (which he says 'means a message or a communication') does not signify an *āyat* of the Holy Qur'ān, but the message or the law given to the Jews". So great is this expositor's concern to refute the traditional opinion in this matter that he deems it necessary to write a 700 word note (152) on it in his commentary. He begins with the frank admission: "These words are generally considered as forming the basis of what is known as the doctrine of abrogation in the Qur'ān", but contends that, since there is no agreement among Muslim writers as to the number of the verses so abrogated, the doctrine itself is based on mere conjecture; besides, he says, there is no tradition which traces abrogation back to the authority of Muhammad. It has even been stated that Muslims who adhere to this doctrine are only following the lead of "obscure authors who enjoy no credit for reliability or accuracy".<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on this astonishing assertion, Professor D. B. Macdonald, of Hartford Seminary, U.S.A., has stated, "I know of no evidence that the word *āyat*, or any of its plurals, can refer to our Scriptures; such is certainly not the Muslim use.....I have been unable to find the extant works of any author who denies the doctrine that one part of the Qur'ān has been abrogated by another, and that, on the other hand,

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Light*, Lahore, 16 June, 1937, cp. 4: 84.

<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Qur'ān* with English Translation, Qadian, 1915, Pt. I, p. 89.

such has been the consistent *ijma'*, agreement, of Islam from the first.....and to doubt it would be heresy, if not unbelief.....The Ahmadiya position is an innovation (*bid'a*) in Islam of the gravest kind."<sup>1</sup>

#### DOES THE QUR'ĀN CONTAIN ALL NECESSARY TEACHING?

We have already observed that Muslims seek to dispense with the Bible on the ground that the Qur'ān is a sort of compendium of all that is vitally necessary in our Scriptures. A Quranic passage sometimes quoted in support of this assertion runs thus, "An apostle from God, reciting pure pages, wherein are right scriptures", *kutubun qaiyyimatun*, **98: 2**.

"Right scriptures" in the Arabic is indefinite, with no obvious reference to anything preceding. This makes it the more extraordinary that a writer of the eminence of our Ahmadi commentator should not only use the definite article, but insert the word "all", thus, "wherein are all the right books". That looks uncommonly like the offence which the Qur'ān denounces, viz.: "corruption by wilful misinterpretation". We suspect it to be a case of the wish being father to the thought, for in his note (2783) he says:

"the meaning of the passage is that in the Holy Qur'ān all those right directions are to be met with which were revealed in any other book, as well as those which may not have been previously revealed, but which are necessary for the guidance of man. The Qur'ān thus claims to contain all the good points of other sacred books, and, in addition, to supply their deficiencies. The addition of the word *qayyimah*, or right, to *kutub*, is to show that the Holy Book is freed from all the errors which crept into other sacred books."

The Maulana's claim that whatever is "necessary for the guidance of man" is to be found in the Qur'ān, may be tested

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. The Moslem World Quarterly, 1917, pp. 420-23.

in the light of one matter of supreme importance. While on nearly every one of its 328 pages the New Testament makes mention of Jesus Christ, yet were we to assemble all the references to Him in the Qur'ān, of whatever kind, the lot would only fill some six pages. Again, fully one-fourth of each of the four gospels is devoted to the graphic story of the arrest, trial, scourging, crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of this same Jesus—and the Qur'ān? it reproduces no part of that whole narrative which so moves the heart of man; while it denies outright that He really died on the cross.

But let the reader consider what such omission really involves. Many Muslims are thrusting aside the one and only authentic account of that supreme revelation of the Redeeming Love of God in action, by deluding themselves into thinking that the essence of the New Testament is in the Qur'ān.

The question, however, which we have been debating at length in this chapter, viz.: the integrity and authority of the Scriptures, can, and should, be determined on quite other grounds than those we have been obliged to examine. The intrinsic worth of the Bible will ever rest in its contents, and in the appeal which the Divine message therein, especially in the New Testament, makes to the mind and heart of man. We can safely leave the issue to the Bible itself and to its Divine Interpreter, the Holy Spirit; for we know that God has spoken, and yet speaks to man there, as in no other book.

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

- Muir, *The Coran*, S.P.C.K., 1878.  
Sale, *The Koran*, first pubd., 1734.  
Rodwell, *The Koran* (Everyman's), 1861.  
Palmer, *The Koran* (World's Classics), 1900.

- Wherry, *Commentary on the Quran*, 4 vols. (Trübner), 1882.
- Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Quran with Commentary*, Woking, 1917.
- Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Quran with Commentary*, Lahore, 1934.
- Pfander, *Mizan-ul-Haqq*, in English, R.T.S., 1910.
- Tisdall, *Muhammadan Objections to Christianity*, S.P.C.K., 1919.
- Rice, *Crusaders of the Twentieth Century*, C.M.S., 1910.
- Goldsack, *The Bible in Islam*, C.L.S. Madras, 1912.
- *Muhammad and the Bible*, do. 1915.
- Gairdner, *The Verse of Stoning*, do. 1910.
- Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Clarendon Press, 1907.
- Kenyon, *Our Bible and the Ancient Manuscripts*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1911.
- *The Story of the Bible*, Murray, 1936.
- The Moslem World Quarterly.
- Sayyid Ahmad Khan, *Mohomedan Commentary on the Bible*, Ghazeeepore, 1862.
- The Seventh Discourse (from preface of same) C.L.S. Madras, 1910.
- Proof of Mohammad from the Bible*, Mohammedan Tract Depot, Lahore, 1891.
- Anwar-ul-Haqq, *Abrogation in the Koran*, Meth. Pub. House, Lucknow, 1925.
- Sell, *Qadiani Commentary on the Quran* (Qadian), C.L.S., 1918.
- *Criticism of a Qadiani Commentary* (Woking), C.L.S., 1923.

CHAPTER  
II  
REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

If the Bible were really inspired it would not contain such variations of reading and discrepancies as are found in the manuscripts (pp. 46 and 51).

The gospels cannot be accepted as trustworthy because they were not written down from the dictation of Jesus Christ himself, but passed through a period of oral transmission before being finally committed to writing (p. 51).

Why do not Christians keep the Law of Moses? (p. 50).

Why are there four gospels? (p. 51).

The British and Foreign Bible Society practically admit the corruption of the Bible, or are ready still to corrupt it, by periodic publications of corrected or revised English versions, e.g. 1911 and 1924 (p. 45).

## CHAPTER II

### REVELATION AND INSPIRATION

There is, however, another aspect of this controversy about the Books which requires separate treatment. The Muslim affects to belittle the importance of the Bible by holding it to be something essentially inferior to the Qur'ān, when viewed from the standpoint of Revelation and Inspiration, as he understands those phenomena. In seeking to make clear to ourselves his point of view in these matters we shall have occasion in this chapter to consider,

- (1) the particular belief of Muslims regarding the Qur'ān;
- (2) their criticism of the form of the Christian Scriptures;
- (3) what it is that makes the Christian view of God's method of revelation at once more reasonable and more precious.

#### I

#### THE MUSLIM POINT OF VIEW

*Kalām*, speech, according to orthodox theologians, is one of the eternal attributes of Allah, and as such has no beginning and is never interrupted. That being so, Revelation, or the activity of the speaking of Allah, cannot have arisen through a special act of His creative will, but itself exists from all eternity. From this it follows that Allah's Book of Revelation, the Qur'ān, is uncreated; and this is what the Muslim ordinarily understands by "inspired scripture".

In theory it is believed that Allah reveals His truth in two main ways, as will become evident from a consideration of the meaning attached to the terms *ilhām* and *wahī*.

I. *Ilhām*, literally "causing to swallow or gulp down", is defined as that form of revelation which is granted to men individually, when knowledge is, as it were, cast into their minds, cp. **91**: 8.

The most important, but by no means exclusive, use of this term is in connection with the Islamic doctrine of saints; they, in particular, are the recipients of such revelation because their hearts are purified to receive it.<sup>1</sup> More precisely, *ilhām* differs from *'ilm aqlī*, knowledge acquired by human reason, in that it cannot be gained by deduction or through meditation. It is knowledge communicated suddenly for the most part—how, whence or why, the recipient does not know. It is a pure gift from God, granted for the instruction of that particular individual.

2. *Wahī*, literally "sending", or "writing" a message, is the term used for the superior means of communication between God and the prophets, and is granted either direct as in the case of *ilhām*, or through a voice that is heard, or by means of a messenger, usually an angel. That which distinguishes this mode when used expressly of prophets, from *ilhām*, is the fact that the angel messenger can be seen by the prophet.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the message so conveyed to the prophet must, of necessity, be communicated by him to men. Thus,

"It is not for any mortal that God should speak to him except by revelation (*wahī*), or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger to reveal, by His permission, what He will", **42**: 50-1.

---

<sup>1</sup> Among the Sufis the term in common use for this apprehension of divine truth is *kashf*, illumination; see *The People of the Mosque*, p. 147.

<sup>2</sup> cp. D. B. Macdonald, *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam*, p. 253; also *Encyc. of Islam*, art. *ilhām*, Vol. II, 468; and art. *wahy*, Vol. IV, 1093.

This is the *locus classicus* for the orthodox Islamic view of revelation and inspiration. Three modes are here indicated: (1) *wahī* in its simplest form, where it is practically synonymous with *ilhām*. Instances of this occur at **28**: 6; **8**: 12; and **5**: 111; (2) where the words are heard by the person spoken to as if from behind a veil; (3) where a messenger, an angel, is chosen by God to deliver His message.

It is further believed that all such utterances proceeding from saint or prophet are something reflected on their hearts from *lauhu'l mahfūz*, the Preserved Tablet, on which is engraved all that God has decreed for all time, before time was, **85**: 22. Man's heart is so equipped, in fact, that the revelation can be disclosed in it as in a mirror. Ordinarily the veil of sense hangs heavily between, but by the wind of God's favour it may be blown aside and the reflection takes place.

While dreams and visions are associated with the form of revelation described in the biographies of Muhammad,<sup>1</sup> yet in the Qur'ān, as just indicated, revelation is said to have taken place by audition, e.g.

"Do not move thy tongue thereby to hasten it (i.e. the revelation). It is for Us to collect it and to recite it; and when We have recited it, then follow its recital. And again it is for Us to explain it", **75**: 16-19; cp. also **20**: 113.

The anxiety of Muhammad "that the warning should be given immediately in plain words" is met with the rejoinder that he should not make haste but remain content with what God chooses to reveal to him from time to time. In short, all he is asked to do at the time is to listen.

And thus it comes about that Muslims believe that the very words now found between the two covers of the Qur'an,

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddama*, p. 102ff. Cairo ed. 1329 AH. For a summary of the particulars see *Encyc. Islam*, art. *wahy*.

revealed in time to Muhammad, have existed and been decreed from eternity. More emphatically, they are the very words of God Himself, albeit in Arabic. Not the ideas alone but the words themselves, their spelling and grammar, are all God's own and God's alone. Further, the whole collection of these writings was brought down, in the time of Muhammad, from its place near God's throne, on *lailatu'l qadr*, the night of power, **97**: 1, in the sacred month of Ramadhān, to the lowest heaven, **2**: 181. There it was stored up until Gabriel began to recite it "piecemeal", as occasion required, to Muhammad;

cp. "The infidels say, 'Why has not the Qur'ān been sent down to him all at once'? But in this way would We stablish thy heart by it; in parcels have We parcelled it out to thee", **25**: 34.

Statements are still made, from time to time, even by modern Muslim writers, in support of this extreme orthodox view of both revelation and inspiration. Here are a few:

"The Musalmans look upon the Qur'ān as the Word of God, pure and intact to the minutest vowel-point."<sup>1</sup>

"The Holy Word of God is one which far transcends human faculties, and is characterized by perfection, power and holiness"....."The first condition for the revelation of the Word of God is that human faculties should be in a state of abeyance and inaction. There should be no thinking, no reflection, and man should be like one dead. All means should be cut off, and God, Who has a real and actual existence, should send down His words on the heart of the same one by His special will."<sup>2</sup>

"By Scripture the Muslim understands the revelation that descends upon the prophets, which they and their followers are bound to follow. It is mostly the verbal inspiration that flows upon the recipient in a state of passivity, when all other outer faculties are held in abeyance. Revelation (i.e. such

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Light*, Lahore, 8 Feb., 1932.

<sup>2</sup> Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, in *Barrāhīn-i-Ahmadiyya*.

as this) alone can make a recipient immune from error, for it suspends for the time being all mental activity of the person upon whom the Word of God descends."<sup>1</sup>

The following statement, reasonable enough so far as it goes, alludes to the existence of a more radical view among Muslims. A correspondent had sought an explanation for Muhammad's "supernormal condition at the time of receiving a revelation". The reply given was this:

"The supernatural state of the Prophet at the time of revelation was due to the strain involved in the process of detachment from the physical environment.....Among Muslims, too, there is a school of thought which reduces revelation to a human affair, by characterizing it as the inner voice arising out of the depths of the recipient's own heart. Such a view knocks the very bottom out of Islam, and the Qur'ān, rather than be the Word of God, becomes the word of the Prophet. Revelation comes from *outside*, though its receptacle, the heart of man, is *inside* man.....This difference is vital. For, the view that revelation is an inner voice reduces religion to a man-made affair and as such naturally loses its authority and dynamic force."<sup>2</sup>

## II

### THE MODERN MUSLIM ATTITUDE TO THE SCRIPTURES

Thus convinced of the unique nature of the Qur'ān, the Muslim seeks, further, to argue for its superiority over the Bible by criticizing the form of the latter. He observes, for instance, that the Qur'ān is homogeneous—every word of it falls within the category of *Qāl Allāhu*, "Allah hath said"; whereas, on the face of it, the New Testament, let us say, is not the Book Allah gave to Jesus, because he finds there, not what God said to Jesus, but what Matthew, or Mark, or Luke, or John has to say about what Jesus did and said, where He

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Review of Religions*, Qadian, December, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> *The Light*, July, 1935.

went, what people said to Him, and what He replied, what His disciples did, and so forth. All this to the Muslim is not "scripture", as he understands it, but *hadīth*, tradition.

This attitude can be readily illustrated by a few quotations from the press of today:

"The Muslim believes in pre-Islamic revelation, but he does not believe that the Christian Bible is the actual word of God.....He still believes that Jesus or Moses were the direct recipient of divine revelation. What he contends is that the so-called Christian Scriptures, especially the N.T., do not deserve the title of revealed or inspired Scriptures in the sense he is accustomed to regard revealed Scriptures *per se*. And he has justification.....That the Gospels are not at all inspired books in any sacred sense, but merely human composition, is clear from internal evidence.....Take, for instance, the introductory verses of Luke wherein he says that, being influenced by the attempts of others to record the primitive tradition of Christianity.....he essays the same task, and having taken pains to collect, examine, sift, and arrange the contents of the written and oral tradition, presents the result to Theophilus.....He does not claim any divine origin for it. He is inspired by the example of many others.....There is no question of a divine gift or the Holy Spirit inspiring him."

The writer then turns to the question of the purity of the text and says:

"If ever a Muslim happens to point out the interpolations and pious frauds he is merely told that that does not detract from the sacred character of these writings.....(The Muslim however) is of the opinion that such additions and deletions have robbed these books of their historic character.....There is not a shred of evidence to prove that any of the so-called Christian scriptures is of a revealed nature, as revelation is understood in the religious sense. There is nothing of inspiration, much less of revelation about them. They are man-made things, written with diverse motives."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Review of Religions*, Qadian, December, 1931.

"The Christian missionaries accept and declare the Bible to be the revealed Word of God. This assertion lacks proof and substance, because one fails to find in the Bible much that would lead him to think of its authenticity.....The internal evidence of the Old Testament and New Testament, and also their style and composition, prove them to have been the production of ignorant persons, who possessed queer notions of morality, instead of having emanated from an all-wise and perfect Being."

Again, in reference to the text, it is said: "These mistakes and errors may be regarded as negligible, trifling and very common in the writings of uninspired men, but not in the writings of men who claim to be inspired.....In view of these inconsistencies could the Bible be regarded as a Revealed Book?.....Its votaries seem to have realized the supreme fact that either the text of the Bible must be radically altered or Christianity is doomed. This is why extensive alterations are made in it every now and then, and we have 'revised' editions and 'old' editions."<sup>1</sup>

Further, complaint is made that Christian missionaries do not understand the essential Muslim point of view regarding the Bible. The writer first quoted above declares that this view is summed up in the words of the Qur'ān at 2: 73, which, to suit his immediate purpose, he translates thus:

"Woe to those who write the manuscripts with their own hands and then ascribe them a divine origin".<sup>2</sup> He then proceeds, "It is not merely this or that verse that is objectionable in the Muslim eye; it is the whole mass of the so-called Christian Scriptures that fall under the condemned category. The Muslim absolutely rejects their inspired or revealed character. He regards them as story books, half historical and half legendary, with no pretension to divine authority."<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Review of Religions*, Qadian, August, 1934.

<sup>2</sup> See discussion of this verse above, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Review of Religions*, Qadian, December, 1931.

Similarly Muhammad Ali, commenting on the words,

"Do you then hope that they (the Jews) would believe in you?, and a party from among them indeed used to hear the word of Allah, then altered it after they had understood it, and they know (this)," 2: 70, says: "The meaning of this verse is that the Muslims in vain hoped that the Jews would believe in their Prophet, for they were a people who altered even that which they believed to be the Divine revelation to make it suit their own ends, so there was little hope of their turning penitently to a new revelation. That the Israelites did not preserve their sacred books in their purity is a constant charge laid by the Qur'ān against the Jews, who never disputed its truth, for if they had, the Qur'ān would surely have mentioned their arguments, as it has done in so many other cases."

As we have already shown, the Jews had no need to dispute this charge *because the Qur'ān does not make it*, but they did repeatedly dispute the other, viz.: that they were "altering the meaning" of passages in their Scriptures, and this commentator himself admits as much in his note on 2: 95. He continues:

"In fact, the alteration and corruption of the various books of the Bible is now proved beyond all doubt, and thus recent investigation has laboriously arrived at the conclusion which was announced by the Holy Qur'ān thirteen hundred years ago."

But, we repeat, it is a gross anachronism to read into the words of the Qur'ān the idea that Muhammad was acquainted with minute details about the state of the text of Scripture which, in fact, have come to light only recently after expert scrutiny of a mass of very early documents, the very existence of some of which was not even known to the world at the time of Muhammad.

\* \* \* \*

Before setting forth the Christian view of revelation and the sense in which we believe the Biblical writers to be inspired,

it will be well to deal with the insinuation that "revised" editions of the Scriptures in English, and fresh translations of these revisions into other languages, are a desperate resort to which Christians are driven for the reason that the text of the Bible is hopelessly corrupt and unreliable.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, the need for periodic revision of translations is readily accounted for by the fact that there is constant growth and development taking place in living languages. For instance, as the English of the Authorized Version was an advance on that of William Tyndale, so that of the Revised Version aims at replacing archaisms in the Authorized Version with more modern equivalents.

But there are two further reasons which, in the very nature of a scholarly study of the sources of the Scriptures, necessitate such a course. These were operative at the time of the preparation of the Revised Version in 1885, viz.: (*a*) the revisers had access to far earlier and more reliable MSS. than had the translators of the King James Bible in 1611, and (*b*) they had a more accurate knowledge of the meaning of the original languages than the earlier translators. Let us consider the following facts with regard to the New Testament, as serving to confirm what we have just said.

The Authorized Version of 1611 is a translation of a Greek version issued in 1551, which was itself based on 15 ancient manuscripts, dating from 450 A.D. onwards. But since 1611 a great number of additional manuscripts, both of the original Greek and of early translations into Syriac, Latin, Coptic, etc. have been discovered and collected from different parts of Europe and Asia, some dating back as early as the second

---

<sup>1</sup> Students of the ancient manuscripts of the Scriptures are, it is true, in the habit of using the word "corrupt" in describing the state of the text in various places; but this, as all scholars well know, is a very different thing from saying that the said text has been *corrupted*.

century A.D. So that when expert scholars approached their task of revision in 1881–5 they were able to examine and compare, not 15, but more than 3,000 such manuscripts, and the result of their painstaking work is our Revised Version. This Version has, in a number of places, recovered the original Greek and also gives a more exact translation; but nowhere have the changes affected any Christian doctrine.

So that when it is lightly stated that there have been wilful interpolations, additions, deletions, even "pious frauds", and that these have "robbed the Scriptures of their historical character", it is but right to remind ourselves that some of the most eminent scholars of the Biblical text have emphatically declared that the very opposite is the truth. Thus: "The absence of perceptible fraud in the origination of the various readings now extant may, we believe, be maintained with equal confidence for the text antecedent to the earliest extant variations; in other words, for the purest transmitted text" .....Further, "the books of the New Testament as preserved in extant documents assuredly speak to us in every important respect in language identical with that in which they spoke to those for whom they were originally written". That statement was made at the time of the preparation of the Revised Version, in 1882.<sup>1</sup>

And in our day Sir Frederick Kenyon, formerly Director and Chief Librarian of the British Museum, London, speaking of the still closer knowledge we have of the original text through the thousands of documents now in our possession, says: "The variations of text are entirely questions of detail, not essential substance". It is because that is undeniably true that we would stress the point he next makes, viz.: "It may be disturbing to some to part with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in Greek*, Introd., Vol. 1, p. 284.

conception of a Bible handed down through the ages without alteration and in unchallenged authority; but it is a higher ideal to face the facts, to apply the best powers with which God has endowed us to the solution of the problems which they present to us; and it is reassuring at the end to find that the general result of all these discoveries and all this study is to strengthen the proof of the authenticity of the Scriptures, and our conviction that we have in our hands, in substantial integrity, the veritable Word of God".<sup>1</sup>

### III THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF GOD'S METHOD OF REVELATION

Much of the difficulty in this long drawn-out controversy about the Books is due to the fact that many people, both Christians and Muslims, fail to recognize that the Bible and the Qur'ān belong to quite different types of literature. Certain features in both make this fact quite evident.<sup>2</sup>

The Bible is the product of the work and thought of many authors; whereas throughout the Qur'ān, a single volume, we observe the working of one mind, that of Muhammad.

Again, the Bible is a veritable library of many books—the literature, in fact, of a complete nation, in which is recorded its growth and development through a period of a thousand years and more. The Qur'ān, on the other hand, is the product of the lifetime of a single man, and was written within the space of some thirty years.

Moreover, the Books are quite differently regarded by those who possess and cherish them. As we have already made

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Story of the Bible*, pp. 136, 144.

<sup>2</sup> The writer gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness for much in the following paragraphs to the columns of *The Epiphany*, Oxford Mission, Calcutta.

clear, the Qur'ān is believed by Muslims to be, in no sense whatever, the work of man, but the very words of God. Christians, on the contrary, do not look upon the Bible as the actual words of God coming to earth without any human intermediary, but, as the revelation of God to men *through the medium of human minds*.

There is yet one further, and fundamental, fact which is apt to be overlooked in the stress of argument, and that is this—a whole world of philosophy lies between Christianity and Islam, a philosophy which proclaims God's Nature and His interest in mankind and tells of His plan to redeem the world in the Person of the Man Jesus. In other words, while Muslims believe in truth Divinely revealed, Christians believe in a specific act of Divine Self-Revelation. It is rather of these things that the present volume will speak, and it is about these that the two religions are most at variance.

\* \* \* \*

For the present, however, we are concerned to enunciate certain principles which, in our belief, should, and do, underly all real Revelation and Inspiration.<sup>1</sup> We arrive at these from a consideration of certain facts to which the Scriptures themselves bear witness.

I. The Bible, as already indicated, covers a wide range in time; and during many centuries "the Word of the Lord came" to a variety of people, in a variety of ways. The recipients were men of different temperament, education and outlook. Some were herdsmen, some statesmen, some historians, some mystics, and a few, theologians. Consequently we have in the Bible a varying literature; including law, history, poetry, and philosophy.

---

<sup>1</sup> We understand by "revelation", the essential content of the Divine message, and by "inspiration", the process by which God lays hold of man for the delivery of that message.

2. And, of course, the Bible was written by men; it did not fall from heaven, nor was it transcribed by angels in the sky before being brought to earth. In other words, God condescended to use man for the purpose of revealing His truth to others. Consider some of the implications of this fact:—

- (a) God used man as man, not as a gramophone. He revealed His Word, through an inner ear, to the mind of His messenger, who then clothed it in the garb of his mother-tongue. For God's purpose the accent, grammar, or scholarship of the man did not so much matter. What He required in His messenger was the throbbing heart, the flashing eye, the soul burning with devotion to God and man.
- (b) Some of the ideas in the earlier books are simple, childish, crude; in the words of one of the detractors quoted above, they are "the productions of ignorant persons, who possessed queer notions of morality". Quite so, but it was the best the messenger, at the time, could make of what God was endeavouring to reveal. God was not limited in Himself, but He was limited by the undeveloped mental, moral and spiritual outlook of His messengers.
- (c) Moreover, God chose these men, they were not self-appointed. Far from thinking themselves equal to the task, many of those whom God called besought Him to release them from this "burden", for which they felt themselves mentally and morally unequal. Of such were Moses (Exod. 2: 12; 4: 10), Isaiah (Is. 6: 5), Jeremiah (Jerem. 1: 6), and Jonah. God laid hold of these men so that they felt themselves to be under a Divine

Compulsion—"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me", said the prophet Isaiah; and Paul exclaimed, "Woe is me, if I preach not the Gospel"!

(d) Further, God's Spirit came to these men at various crises in their lives—in joy, in sorrow, in doubt, in despair, in the confidence of faith, and in the fierce struggle with temptation; in fact, while His great work of character-building was still in progress within them.

It is clear, therefore, that they were men with like weaknesses and passions as ourselves—imperfect instruments—yet, by "putting words in their mouth", by "touching their unclean lips", by "purging away their sin", by "making His grace abound to them", God fitted these men for the task He required of them. Thus did He raise them above their fellows in spiritual insight and understanding, in moral character and influence.

The Bible repeatedly testifies to the fact that these men became, and were known to be, "men of God". And just because it was God Himself who was revealing His truth through them, we find that, at times, some of them spoke more than they fully understood, cp. Isaiah, **53**.

3. This being the case, it becomes an instructive study to observe in the Bible definite *progress* in the nature and quality both of the messengers and of the messages proclaimed by them. The earlier revelations are thus seen to be not so much untrue, as immature. This applies to various social and political laws prescribed in the time of Moses for the people of Israel—they were of temporary value. On the other hand, the obligations attendant upon moral and spiritual laws,

wherever found in the Bible, remain, for the simple reason that these are changeless and eternal.

Along with progress we also find variety in the messages revealed by God through the men He inspired. Well-known examples of this may be cited from the New Testament. For instance, we have in the Gospel narratives, four separate, though not independent, accounts of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. These while agreeing in all essential particulars were obviously meant to appeal to different types of people and, when taken together, supplement and enrich each other.

Again, in the writings of the three apostles, Peter, John and Paul, we perceive the work of three different types of mind, each placing on record the truth about Christ, as God made it clear to him through his own personal experience. In this case also, we find the epistles of one writer supplementing those of the others.

4. Within these limits, we likewise observe God's over-ruling care in the recording, preservation and transmission throughout the centuries, of these ancient Scriptures. In this connection we need to remind ourselves of what we have already said, that for this task God used men; not faultless men, much less angels. When, then, our Muslim friends sometimes profess to treat the Bible as unauthentic and untrustworthy because there occur in the manuscripts in our possession variations in the text, it is well for us, as for them, that we frankly face certain facts:

- (a) The most conscientious scribe in the world, whether copying from a manuscript before him, or writing at the dictation of another, may blunder, through the mishearing or mis-rendering of a word, clause or sentence, as also through omission, addition or repetition. Such errors, we freely admit, did occur in the work of copyists of the Biblical manuscripts, and we honestly record and com-

pare all these in whatsoever documents they occur. Far from destroying any we carefully preserve them in the belief that, by studying all of them, we get steadily nearer to the original text. Even so, there is no discrepancy in any matter of vital importance, nor do we fear that any ancient manuscript that may yet be discovered will upset that conviction.

- (b) On the other hand, it is on record that in the very early days of Islam the different manuscripts of the Qur'ān in use in Arabia presented variations of such a nature as to disturb gravely those who believed in the literal and verbal inspiration of the Book. The Khalifa 'Uthmān, in 644 A.D., took the most drastic step to remedy this scandal. He ordered all the extant copies to be collated and compared, and a standard authorized version to be prepared from these, and finally had all the variant versions burnt. That is something the Christian Church has never done.

And now, in conclusion—underlying all that we have been saying about the Bible, its revelation and inspiration, there is to be seen a profound principle. It is that there exists a real kinship between God and man; it is this that makes possible the translation of the Eternal Thought into the language of time. In other words, God's revelation is always found to be intimately linked up with man's experience of Him. This is something that offers striking contrast to the dualism in Islam, which makes Allah to be "altogether Other".

Again, observe what is here implied: there can be no Divine revelation without the co-operation, in some degree, of the mind of man. Contrary to the expressed statements of some modern Muslims, we hold that the spirit of inspiration

cannot, and does not, function in a vacuum.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the message that is meaningless for the recipient is also valueless, and it is contrary to reason either that God should stun or overwhelm the mind of the messenger at the time of imparting His revelation, or that the man "should be like one dead" when receiving it.

Any communication from God to man must be made within the limitation of man's faculties, because, coming through such a channel, it can the better be received and assimilated by the human minds to which it comes. Even so, it remains true that whatever deserves the name of Revelation is God's disclosure, *not* man's discovery; for it is something outside man's normal circle of reasoning.

And God's supreme disclosure is the disclosure of Himself in the Man Jesus. While to the Muslim the true revelation is to be found in a Book, the Qur'ān, to the Christian it is not to be found in the Bible, but in the Person of Christ. Other and earlier channels of God's revelation in the Bible were imperfect instruments, but Jesus, the Son, is the perfectly adequate expression of the Father.

"And so the Word had breath, and wrought  
With human hands the creed of creeds  
In loveliness of perfect deeds,  
More strong than all poetic thought."<sup>2</sup>

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

Paterson Smyth, *How we got our Bible*, Sampson Low.

— *How God inspired the Bible*, do. 1910.

Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in Greek*, Introd. Macmillan, 1882.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tor Andrae, art. *Muhammad's Doctrine of Revelation*, *The Moslem World Quarterly*, July, 1933, p. 252.

<sup>2</sup> Tennyson, *In Memoriam*.

- Horton, R. F., *Verbum Dei*, Unwin, 1893.  
Sanday, *The Oracles of God*, Longmans, 1905.  
Camfield, *Revelation and the Holy Spirit*, Elliot Stock, 1933.  
Rabbi Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, trans. S.P.C.K., 1898.  
Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent*, S.P.C.K., 1906.  
Macdonald, D. B., *The Religious Attitude and Life in Islam*, Chicago, 1908.  
Gairdner, *Inspiration*, C.L.S. Madras, 1909.  
Goldsack, *The Bible in Islam*. C.L.S. Madras, 1922.  
Sell, *The Recensions of the Qur'ān*, C.L.S. Madras, 1909.  
— *Inspiration*, S.P.C.K.  
Muhammad Ali, *Has any Book been revealed by God, if so which?* Lahore.  
Ghulam Ahmad, *The Teachings of Islam*, Lahore, 1921.  
*The Review of Religions*, monthly, London and Qadian.  
*The Islamic Review*, monthly, Woking and Lahore.

CHAPTER  
III  
THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

[Blank page]

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"Does any verse in the Bible teach that Jesus Christ is God?" (p. 79).

"The fact that Jesus called himself the Son of God does not serve as any evidence of his actually being the Almighty God" (p. 79).

"There is nothing in Jesus above an ordinary human being, which may lead us even for a moment to entertain the idea that he was God" (pp. 75, 78-9).

"Never, in any critically well-attested saying is there anything which suggests that his (Jesus') conscious relation to God is other than that of a man towards God" (pp. 66-7).

"Christ only used the word 'Father' in the sense that God is the only Fatherly Protector, and likewise the word 'son' as a term of affection"—that is, in a sense in which "all other men are sons of God" (pp. 71, 77-8).

"To attribute a son to the Divine Being in a literal sense is to attribute an imperfection to Him which is met with in human beings" (pp. 65-6).

"The Christians say the Lord Jesus is the Son of Allah—is Allah male or female? If male, has Allah a wife that He should have a son"? (p. 65).

"It (the idea that God should have a 'son') is merely a relic of pagan and anthropomorphic superstitions" (p. 70).

"The belief in God begetting a son lowers God to the level of an animal."

"His (Jesus') deification was an after-thought on the part of his admirers" (pp. 67-8, 79).

"Wherever there is contradiction there must be falsehood. God cannot be both infinite and limited" (pp. 72-3, 76).

"The coming of God into the limited human form is a degradation of Him, and the conception is absurd and impossible" (pp. 68-9, 73-4, 76).

"Communion is not attained by bringing down God to man in the sense of incarnation, but by man rising gradually

towards God by spiritual progress and the purification of his life" (pp. 71, 78).

"It is absurd to say that if we are to realize divinity we must clothe Him with flesh and invest Him with the form and attributes of humanity, so as to bring Him within the reach of our thought and sympathy" (pp. 70, 74, 76).

"The life of an individual, however holy and pure, is an inadequate and, indeed, impossible medium for the expression of the life of God. His attributes are infinitude, omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence" (pp. 71-2, 75-6).

"The claim to Divinity is the deadliest sin and the greatest outrage upon the sanctity of God's name."

Christ "was only a vessel through which some of the excellent qualities or attributes of God were manifested.....this did not make him divine" (p. 79).

"If Jesus was God then to whom used he to pray? (pp. 73-4) .

"Christ's words, 'My father is greater than me', Jo. **14**: 28; and 'I do not know, only God knows', Mk. **13**: 32—these and other verses prove that Christ was not God" (pp. 74-5).

"If God is such a weak and frail being as Jesus the son of Mary was, we are better alone. We can do without him."

"To find you crying out to one who was only a man, as though he were God, makes our hearts shudder."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See also Appendix E I.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST

Notwithstanding their constant assertion that they respect Jesus Christ quite as much as Christians do, Muslims are quick to repudiate the unique claims which we make for Him. Jesus, "Son of Mary"—as the Qur'ān repeatedly calls Him—is for them only one of the prophets, and even so, not the last nor the best, cp. **43**: 59; **5**: 75.

Loyalty to Muhammad and a natural preference for him are, in themselves, sufficient reasons for their refusing to give to Jesus the name that is above every name.<sup>1</sup> But there is more; there is a kind of "jealousy for God", as they understand Him, that provokes them to denounce as blasphemy any honour paid to Christ which, in effect, makes Him to be more than a man, more than a prophet, and so to encroach on the province of God.

Moreover, this jealousy is deeply rooted in the cardinal doctrine of Islam, *tawhīd*, the Unity, which we find set forth with monotonous reiteration in the Qur'ān. As Maulana Muhammad Ali says: "The Unity of God is the one great theme of the Holy Qur'ān.....There is absolute Unity in Divine nature; it admits of no participation or manifoldness.....(Islam) denies all plurality of persons in Godhead, and any participation of any being in the affairs of the world.....It refuses to acknowledge the incarnation of the Divine Being".<sup>2</sup>

And, as though the insistence of the Qur'ān were, by itself, insufficient to imprint this doctrine on the minds of Muslims,

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. C. R. Watson, *What is this Moslem World?*, pp. 55-59 and 75.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to *The Holy Qur'ān*, pp. viii, ix.

the offence of *shirk*, "associating a partner" with God, is declared therein to be the one unpardonable sin,

"Verily, God pardons not associating aught with Him, *yushraka bihi*, but He pardons anything short of that to whomsoever He pleases; but he who associates aught with God, he hath devised a mighty sin". 4: 51, 116.

Mr. Yusuf Ali's translation is, "God forgiveth not that equals should be set up with Him"; and comments: "Blasphemy in the spiritual kingdom is like treason in the political kingdom.....This is rebellion against the essence and source of spiritual Life"; and the Ahmadi writer explains: "The reference is to polytheism, or the setting up of gods with Allah".

Now, it matters not that Christians might strongly protest against the application of such crude language as this last to their view of Christ, yet the fact remains that in the minds of Muslims we, too, come within the category of those so upbraided. And there seems little doubt that here—in the constant reiteration of the doctrine of *tawhīd*, coupled with the dreaded sin of *shirk*—we come upon the two main factors which so strongly prejudice the minds of Muslims that they are not prepared to entertain any exposition of the Deity of Christ, or any explanation of the Divine Incarnation. In particular, one detects strong resentment in their attitude to our use of the terms "Son", and "Son of God", with reference to Christ; it is not too much to say that, by giving to these terms the connotation they do, Muslims positively abhor the doctrine of the Sonship of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

#### THE INFLUENCE OF THE QUR'ĀN

And inasmuch as the mind of man grows by what it feeds upon we must needs turn again to the Qur'ān if we would estimate aright the influence of that Book in producing and

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. *The People of the Mosque*, p. 277 (Indian ed.).

perpetuating such strong feelings. We find that it not only gives pre-eminence to the Unity of Allah, but repeatedly, and sometimes in the most vehement language, repudiates the notion that Allah "has a son". Commenting on one of the verses referred to below, Muhammad Ali states: "The Qur'ān refers to the error of attributing a son to the Divine Being almost as frequently as to the doctrine of setting up idols with Allah", **39**: 6.

It is customary to classify all such passages in two groups: (1) those that refer to pagan Arabs, and (2) those referring to Christians.

Here are some belonging to the first group:

**112**: 1-4. "Say: He is God alone: God, the Eternal! He doth not beget, and He is not begotten; and there is no one in His likeness at all."

Muhammad Ali says of this short chapter:

"It gives the sum and substance of the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān, which is the declaration of the Unity of the Divine Being.....All other objects are secondary as compared with this. The chapter is one of the earliest revelations and contains a refutation not only of idolatry and Christianity, but of every polytheistic doctrine."

Muhammad himself is credited with having declared that the above chapter "is equal to a third of the Qur'ān".<sup>1</sup>

**43**: 81-2. "Say: 'If the God of Mercy had a son, the first would I be to worship him: but far be the Lord of the Heavens and of the Earth, the Lord of the Throne, from that which they impute to Him!'

**72**: 3. "And He—may the Majesty of our Lord be exalted—hath no spouse, neither hath He any offspring."

**39**: 6. "Had God desired to have a son, He had surely chosen what He pleased out of His own creation. But praise be to Him! He is God, the One, the Almighty."

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. *Mishkatu'l-Masabih*, Book VIII, Chap. I, Pt. 2, p. 508, Vol. I, Matthew's trans.

- 10:** 69. "They say 'God hath begotten children'. No! by His glory, He is sufficient. All that is in the Heavens and all that is in the Earth is His! Have ye any authority for that assertion? What! speak ye of God that which ye know not"?
- 6:** 100-1. "In their ignorance they have falsely ascribed to Him sons and daughters. Glory be to Him! And high let Him be exalted above that which they attribute to Him! Sole Maker of the Heavens and of the Earth! how, when He hath no consort, should He have a son?"

The following passages refer to Christians:

- 19:** 35-36. "This is Jesus, the son of Mary; this is a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It beseemeth not God to beget a son. Glory be to Him!"
- 19:** 91-93. "They say, 'The God of Mercy hath taken to Himself a son'. Now have ye done a monstrous thing! Almost might the very Heavens be rent thereat, and the Earth cleave asunder, and the mountains fall down in fragments, that they ascribe a son to the God of Mercy, when it beseemeth not the God of Mercy to beget a son!"
- 2:** 110. "They say, 'God hath a son': No! Praise be to Him! But—His, whatever is in the Heavens and the Earth!"
- 9:** 31-2. "The Christians say, 'The Messiah is a son of God'. Such are the sayings in their mouths. They resemble the sayings of the infidels of old! God fight them! How misguided they are!.....Far from His glory be what they associate with Him."
- 5:** 19. "They blaspheme indeed who say, 'Verily God is the Messiah, the son of Mary'. Say: and who hath the least power against God, if He chose to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother, and all who are on the earth together?"
- 5:** 76. "They do blaspheme who say, 'God is the Messiah, son of Mary'."

The most cursory study of these verses leaves on the mind two clear impressions: (a) the denunciations of the Qur'ān are hurled at Christians equally with pagan Arabs for using such language in reference to God, and (b) the view of "sonship" underlying the phrases is a grossly carnal one. The comments of so enlightened a Muslim as Mr. Yusuf

Ali, on some of the passages quoted in the second group, abundantly confirm the latter impression in its reference to Christians: "Begetting a son is a physical act depending on the needs of men's animal nature. God Most High is independent of all needs, and it is derogatory to Him to attribute such an act to Him" (19: 35); "the belief in God begetting a son is not a question merely of words or of speculative thought. It is a stupendous blasphemy against God. It lowers God to the level of an animal" (19: 19); "if words have any meaning, it would mean an attribution to God of a material nature, and of the lower animal functions of sex" (2: 110).

As for the Arabs we know that they fully merited Muhammad's strictures. His own townspeople the Meccans, among whom he spent over forty years of his life, worshipped hundreds of blocks of stone, taking them to be male and female deities. A caustic reference to them is made in an early Sura, "What! shall ye have male progeny and God female? This were, indeed, an unfair division!" 53: 21-22.<sup>1</sup>

And what of the Christians? We can be sure that they would have spoken of Jesus as the "Son of God", much as all Christians have from the first century until now. But Muhammad, influenced on the one hand by the current blasphemous expressions of the idolatrous Arabs, and on the other by the calumnies of the Jews who cast a slur on the names of both Jesus and Mary, insisted that He be called Mary's "pure son".<sup>2</sup> And for this reason that, though he himself manifestly believed Jesus to have been supernaturally born, yet still he could only speak of Him as a "son" in the physical sense. Muhammad reprobated the use of such

---

<sup>1</sup> One of the rare lapses in Palmer's excellent translation occurs at this place, and is retained in the latest editions—viz. 'male offspring for God, female for you'. The reverse is correct.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Qur'ān, 19: 19.

language as "Son of God", because it inevitably suggested to him carnal relationship. It is all very well for modern commentators, like the two referred to above, to insinuate that there would have been no objection to the use of such language had it been employed metaphorically, since both Jews and Christians were known to call themselves "sons of God" in the sense that they believed themselves to be specially beloved, or favoured, by the Divine Being. Muhammad himself knew that, yet the fact remains—he seems to have been incapable of attaching any other than a carnal signification to the name Christians give to Christ.

#### ORIGIN AND REAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PHRASE

Since such a gross conception of Christ's Sonship is no less offensive and blasphemous to our minds, a solemn obligation rests upon us to try to explain to Muslims what precisely we do mean when we speak of Jesus Christ as "the Son of God". How is it that we have come to use this phrase, and what is our authority for so doing? Many of us will be ready to confess that we have been accustomed to do so from childhood; the words had already been incorporated into our religious vocabulary before we began to consider their true import. That explains some of our embarrassment when we meet with the contradiction of Muslims.

1. But we did not coin the phrase, nor has it crept into Christian usage in the course of the centuries. It is something that we associate with the very origins of Christianity. It is given to us in Scripture. We use it on the authority of the New Testament.

Consider the following array of passages, by no means exhaustive:

God Himself called Jesus His "Son" at the Baptism, Mk. 1: 11 (Mt. Lk.); and at the Transfiguration, Mk. 9: 7 (Mt. Lk.).

Gabriel declared Jesus would be called 'Son of God', Lk. 1: 35.

The Baptist gave Jesus that name, Jo. 1: 34.

So did the disciples of Jesus, Mt. 14: 33; 16: 16; Jo. 1: 49; 11: 27.

Jesus used it of Himself, Jo. 5: 25; 10: 36; 11: 4.

The enemies of Jesus used it, implying that He so called Himself, Mk. 14: 61; Mt. 26: 63; 27: 43; Lk. 22: 70; Jo. 19: 7. (The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he made himself the 'Son of God'".)

The Apostle Paul so spoke of Him, Acts 9: 20; Gal. 2: 20; and often.

Other writers so referred to Him, Heb. 6: 6; I Jo. 2: 22; 4: 15 ('whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God abideth in him, and he in God'), Rev. 2: 18.

There seems little doubt that Jesus used this phrase of Himself, or permitted its use by others, or let it be understood as being appropriate and applicable to Himself, because we find that the Jews repeatedly took up stones to stone Him for what they considered blasphemous language on His part. And yet His offence, in their eyes, was not so much that He called Himself "Son of God", as that by thus speaking, and by calling God His "Father", He made Himself "equal with God" (Jo. 5: 18) and made Himself "God" (Jo. 10: 33).

That, then, is the first thing to be said about the continuous and universal use of this phrase in the Christian Church—we have scriptural authority for it; to be precise, the authority of the New Testament.

2. We turn next to enquire how this language, Son of God, is used in Scripture.

(a) It goes without saying that in no place is the phrase employed in a carnal sense, such as the Qur'ān has in view.

(b) Nor is it used as indicating that there is present to the minds of the speakers, or writers, the thought of Jesus' birth as having taken place in a special or supernatural manner. In other words, He is not called "Son of God" by virtue of the manner of His birth; conversely, it is not His birth that makes Him "Son of God".

(c) The simple, and one would think obvious, fact is that the phrase serves as a designation, a title. Only in Luke 1: 35 is it used in connection with the annunciation of the birth of Jesus, and even there its significance is that of a name to be given to Him, the "Holy One". As Bishop Gore has well said of this very passage: "Luke's narrative suggests nothing more than that the child to be born was to be the promised Christ. 'Son of the Highest', and 'Son of God' would not, in the context, suggest anything more to Jewish ears".<sup>1</sup> In other words, it *is*, after all, symbolical language—a metaphor, and not to be taken literally. Even so, of all the terms used for Christ it is the one which best does justice to our experience of Him.<sup>2</sup>

(d) Furthermore, the phrase has a history. It was in use in pre-Christian times. Gradually among the Jews the conception of the "Messiah" as also "Son", i.e. of God, became part of a fixed tradition in the period immediately preceding the advent of Jesus. We have indications of this in two places in the Psalms, Ps. 2: 7, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee"; and Ps. 89: 26-27, "I also will make him (my) firstborn". Echoes of these passages are found in the opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "He hath inherited a more excellent name than they", i.e. than prophets and angels. That name is SON.

3. But there is much more to it than this Messianic colouring, prominent though that was to the minds of Jesus and the Jews. In the New Testament the phrase contains the very special idea that the consciousness of Jesus towards God was a truly filial consciousness. God was to Him "Father"; He was to God "Son". To appreciate this point at its full value we need to connect with the usage of

---

<sup>1</sup> *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, S.P.C.K., p. 317.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Son of David, Messiah, Son of Man, Lord, The Word.

the fall phrase "Son of God", that other long series of references in the gospels to God as pre-eminently "The Father", and to Christ as pre-eminently "the Son". These two lines of usage converge and help to establish the conclusion we seek to draw concerning the inner significance of such language.

True, in the Synoptic gospels this filial relationship is felt as an underlying supposition of the narrative rather than directly expressed in it. Yet, even in them, it is occasionally expressly stated, cp. Mt. 11: 25-30, "No one knoweth the Son save the Father; neither doth any know the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him".<sup>1</sup> But in the Fourth Gospel the theme is given great prominence, and is worked out in a variety of detail. Moreover, its author stresses the fact that the relationship existed long before Jesus was born a babe in Bethlehem.

4. Still further significance attaches to this Name from the fact that the early Church, following the apostles and most of all Paul, came to identify Jesus with the "Son of God", and so spoke of Him, on the ground of what He achieved historically. As this subject will be treated in detail in a subsequent chapter it need not detain us here. But consider for a moment the terms in which Paul, for instance, refers to the One who has wrought so great salvation for men: "The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me", Gal. 2: 20. He does not think of speaking of Jesus in this connection as "The Messiah", or "Son of Man", or "The Word". Only the designation "Son of God" will suffice. He and the rest were forced to name Him thus because of their experience; it wasn't that they were predisposed to do

---

<sup>1</sup> These words have been called "the greatest Christological passage in the New Testament" and are held to belong to "the very oldest and safest strand of evidence".

so. To quote the late Bishop Gore again: "Belief in Him as 'the Christ', as 'Lord', and as 'Son of God', was claimed by the original apostles on the ground of what they had themselves seen and heard during their experience extending over all the time the Lord Jesus moved among them. It was claimed also on the ground of their subsequent experience of the Holy Spirit".<sup>1</sup>

#### THE PHRASE PREDICATES DEITY

It may seem to some that in all this explanation of its origin and meaning we are merely exhibiting our anxiety to defend the continued use of an admittedly difficult phrase, and that we might spend our time more profitably on some other topic. But we surely realize, as the Muslim certainly does, that we have yet to address ourselves to the stupendous claim which underlies this designation. At any rate it is true of the Muslim, as of the Jew in the days of Jesus, that the full force of his protest is directed not so much against this title "Son of God", as against the deeper implication of such Sonship, viz.: that there is essential identity between the Father and the Son.

It is to this—the implied Deity of Christ, involving as it does the incarnation of the Divine Being—that the Muslim takes the strongest exception. Allāh is *lā-sharīk*, i.e. He "has no partner"; a dogma which is expounded to mean "He is singular, without anything like Him; separate, having no equal". But now, if this belief of the Christians be admitted, God would be "sharing" His Divine Glory with another; He would have a "partner"—and that is a proposition which the Muslim declares to be both blasphemous and impossible. "Islam refuses to acknowledge the incarnation of the Divine Being."

---

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 31. cp. J. R. Richards, *What Manner of Man is This?*

Yet here is something that is fundamental for Christian faith. We cannot ignore it, much less can we repudiate it; for Christianity is what it is because of what we believe Christ to be. But can we so state the truth about Him as to make it appear to the Muslim less objectionable, less impossible for thought, and yet at the same time surrender no essential part of it? That precisely is the task before us.

The Muslim's error, and his need, will become apparent if we approach the exposition of this subject by way of his own deeply-rooted conviction about the separateness of Allāh. Just as he says in the language of the Qur'ān, "It beseemeth not God to beget a son", so might he retort on the Christian, "Far be it from the God of Mercy *to be found in fashion as a man*". In other words, he considers it to be derogatory to the Majesty of the Most High to become incarnate, even though it be for man's salvation. One might even venture to express his point of view in some such extreme words as these—rather let man "go to hell" than that God should become incarnate to save man from hell.

But the Muslim, in thus seeking to safeguard the High and Lofty One from what he deems derogation, is making at least one unwarranted assumption. He is persuading himself that he knows the Mind of the Eternal. Knowledge of God we certainly have—we perceive His wisdom, His power, His sublimity, even His benevolence—but it were presumption to speak as though the view-point of Deity were our own. And yet, it is just at this point that the Christian claims that he has definite knowledge of that Mind; due, primarily, not to any discovery that man has made, but to a self-revealing act, in time, of the Eternal God Himself.

#### WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY OF THE SONSHIP OF JESUS?

The world is so familiar with unchaste stories in pagan mythology about gods disporting themselves with the

daughters of men, that it is not difficult to understand the prejudice that leads the Muslim to suspect that we have here merely an adaptation from some grotesque legend. But those stories, at best, are expressions of man's guesses about God, and foreshadowings of truth; whereas we take Jesus to be, as one writer has put it, "the unique and essential appearance of God in history".<sup>1</sup>

That phrase is worth pondering, because it holds the key to the "mystery" of the Person of Jesus Christ. We account for Him by predicating an amazing act of God, nothing less than a self-revelation of the Divine Nature. So that we believe Jesus to be the real answer to man's perennial question, "What is God like"? He comes before us, not so much as a problem, as the solution of a problem; for what we see in Him inspires in us a profound and triumphant conviction that the Almighty God Himself, Maker of Heaven and Earth, is, supremely and essentially, HOLY LOVE.

When, then, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of this "Son" as "the radiance of God's Glory and the impress of His Essence"<sup>2</sup> we are already in a position to declare that the highest category which we can apply to that Divine "essence" is ethical. Beholding as we do the love and trust and obedience which mark the life of the Son, we infer that Holy Will and Loving Purpose are of the very essence of God Himself. Beyond this it is profitless to discuss whether Jesus shared the "substance" of God. Here is all that ultimately matters—the will of Jesus, as "Son", was one with the Will of God; not partially, nor intermittently, nor yet in a metaphor, but identically one.

What we have been saying, however, proceeds on the assumption that the Unseen and Eternal God cares sufficiently

---

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *The Person of Christ*, p. 431.

<sup>2</sup> Ep. Heb. 1: 3.

for man as to act in the way we have indicated. Yet this, again, is something we here affirm. The voice of conscience itself is proof to us that the Divine Spirit can and does indwell man, while the lives of prophets and saints bear witness to the way in which God's Spirit endues man with power and insight. This means that man is, by the creative act of God, constituted to receive such Divine self-impartment. The quality and intensity of the Divine indwelling depends, of course, upon the receptiveness of the individual. Moreover, "there has been from the first a tendency or movement of Divine Love towards self-expression within finite consciousness as must at length evoke faith and hope and love in their fulness".<sup>1</sup>

But in the case of Jesus we observe this initial motion of the Divine condescension towards the human, meeting with a perfect human response in order to effect a revelation of the redemptive purpose of God. While prophets were equipped by the Spirit of God for their vocation, that same Spirit sets forth Jesus in the fulness of His humanity as the complete and final vehicle of the self-presentation of God in the human sphere.

Sonship in His case, then, is not something which indicates His likeness to other men, as though He were on their plane. Rather, "It is something which signalises His distinction from them". It proclaims His incomparable and transcendent dignity, for He was to God what no other can be. As has been truly said, "The root-element in the consciousness of Jesus was a sense of 'sonship' to the Divine Father, deeper, clearer, more intimate, more all-embracing and all-absorbing than was ever vouchsafed to a child of man". Any inferior being, indeed, could not enter so perfectly into the mind of God, or reflect it so perfectly to man.<sup>2</sup> That

---

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., p. 434.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Sanday, art. *Son of God*, Hastings, Dict. Bible.

precisely is His own claim, "No one knoweth the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal Him".<sup>1</sup>

#### HOW COULD THE ETERNAL GOD BE IN JESUS?

Yet, still, the Muslim maintains that it is an impossibility for thought that the Maker of Heaven and Earth, the Lord of the Worlds, should be subject to any such limitation as the Incarnation implies. The crudest form in which the objection has been put may be stated thus: "Did God leave His throne and the rule of the worlds for those thirty-three years when He was in Jesus?" It is recorded, for instance, that Ibn Hazm (*d.* 1153) accused the Jacobites of saying that, "Christ is God Most High Himself, and that God Most High (so great is their blasphemy!) died and was crucified and was slain; and that the world remained for three days without a ruler, and the firmament without a ruler; then He rose and returned as He was before".<sup>2</sup> One may well question whether the Jacobites, or for that matter any Christians at any time, have expressed their belief about the Incarnation so fatuously; but if they have, it should be said that it is a notion utterly incongruous with the view of the Divine indwelling that we have put forward above.

Again we perceive that the Muslim's difficulty arises from a further unfounded assumption on his part. Conceiving the Deity to be the Infinite and Self-Sufficient One, he argues that it would be a contradiction of His very Nature were He to become, in any way, incarnate. That is the position at which the mind of man is apt to arrive by *a priori* reasoning; a conclusion to which he is forced by the very premiss he has laid down.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 11: 27.

<sup>2</sup> cp. L. E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, p. 73.

Yet all that we see in Jesus is an emphatic exposure of the fallacy in that kind of reasoning; for He is to us the definite assurance, as we have said above, that the Mighty God is, essentially, HOLY LOVE. As such, God has a boundless capacity for self-determination. Were He other than that—were He to be defined, for instance, first and last, as Power, then His "glory" might be sullied by an act of condescension; or were He, supremely, Intelligence, He might hesitate to appear in lowly guise; or, again, were He best described as Justice, then He might seek some other means to succour mankind; but being Love, Holy Love, He does stoop to save, and, stooping, is not degraded.<sup>1</sup>

But then the Muslim turns to look, as we desire he should, at the life of Jesus as recorded in the gospels, and again he is baffled by what he sees there. Where is the proof, he asks, that God was in such a Jesus? He prays to God, Mt. **26**: 39; He was tempted by Satan, Mk. **1**: 13; was disappointed at men's unbelief, Mk. **6**: 6; sought information, Mk. **5**: 30; manifested surprise, Mt. **8**: 10; was weary and, by implication, thirsty, Jo. **4**: 6-7; He was mocked, spat upon, buffeted, Mt. **27**: 30-31; He was crucified, dead and buried, Mt. **27**: 35, 50, 60. Reading all this the Muslim asks, could "the Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faint and be weary?"<sup>2</sup> Could He be tempted, spat upon, killed? Is it not sheer blasphemy to speak of Him as being "captive, beaten, bound, reviled"?

Moreover, the Muslim thinks he finds repudiation of the Christian assertion of the Deity of Jesus in the very words of Jesus Himself, where He says, for instance, "I can of myself do nothing", Jo. **5**: 30; and, "Of that day and hour knoweth

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. " If God is most truly known as Love, then the glory of God is chiefly seen in the activity of Love". Archbishop Temple, *Christus Veritas*, p. 144.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah, **40**: 28.

no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only”, Mt. 24: 36.

These, indeed, are features drawn from the known facts of the human life of Jesus, and it is upon the recorded facts that we must proceed. But, now, what do these features really denote? Two facts in particular.

I. That Jesus was fully and completely man, though that is not to say that He was only man.

He was a Jew, living His life within a body that was “organic to His self-consciousness”. He possessed limited power that was, at times, thwarted by persistent unbelief. Likewise His knowledge, as we have remarked, was limited.<sup>1</sup> His moral nature was susceptible of growth, and was exposed to life-long temptation; while His very piety and personal religion were marked at all times by dependence upon God. But this only means that the Divine Life within Him found its expression through a truly human nature.<sup>2</sup>

2. That which baffles the Muslim can, in part, be explained if, to what we have already said, we now add that in Jesus we see “a Godhead self-reduced”.<sup>3</sup> For, since the Almighty has a boundless capacity for self-determination, it follows that He also has the power to bring His greatness down to the narrow measures of our human life. But in any case, He could not put more into humanity than humanity will hold, so that this self-limitation, this self-emptying of Deity, which we deduce from the facts of the human life of Jesus, instead of being an impossible conception, becomes the first condition for making any revelation at all. God must act “through the conditions

---

<sup>1</sup> How unhistorical is the kind of uncanny knowledge with which He is credited in the Qur’ān, 3: 43; and how contrary to fact are the words it makes Him say, “I know not what is in Thee (God)”, 5: 116.

<sup>2</sup> cp. H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., p. 469.

<sup>3</sup> P. T. Forsyth, in *The Person and Place of Jesus Christ*.

supplied by humanity". This it is that explains the absence in Jesus of certain attributes and functions which we rightly associate with the infinite glory of God the Absolute, viz. omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, and the like. These are utterly incompatible with humanity, as such.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, it is appropriate in Jesus, the Son, that He should manifest a sense of subordination to the Father. Thus He declares, "The Father is greater than I", Jo. **14**: 28; and, "I am come down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me", Jo. **6**: 38. Nevertheless, He said, and said it because it was entirely true of Himself, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me", Jo. **4**: 34. His whole being was always set to do God's will.

And it is in the sense of all that has just been said that we should understand such sayings of Jesus as, "I and my Father are One", Jo. **10**: 30; and, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father", Jo. **14**: 9. It was in this sense that He could say that His words and works were the words and works of God, and it is this perfect identification with essential Deity that gives the utmost significance to that other saying of His, "This is life eternal, that they may know Thee, the One True God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent", Jo. **17**: 3; because, in the first place, to know Jesus is to know what God is like. And this precisely is what we find; for the character, authority and love of Jesus are to us the character, authority and love of God Himself.<sup>2</sup>

The self-revelation of God, then, in Jesus Christ, is in every way adequate to human need. It is more; it is distinctive—there can be no uncertainty about the quality of the life revealed; and it is decisive and final—we need not wait for more, because revelation can go no further. Having said

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Archbishop Temple, C.V., p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> cp. N. Micklem, in *Mysterium Christi*, p. 156.

that, however, we need not and indeed cannot claim that God is, in Jesus, exhaustively revealed. It has been truly said, "In Christ, God is known as He actually is, yet in Him, even so, there remain regions unknown, which faith can never exhaust....." That is the tenor of Paul's adoring apostrophe, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!", Roms. **11**: 33.<sup>1</sup> Let it not seem strange that we are forced to confess that our faith holds fast to contradictories—God is known, and yet not known. After all, in the revelation of Himself in Jesus we stand face to face with a profound mystery; it is not surprising that we do not fully understand. Was it not Jesus Himself who said, "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father"?, Mt. **11**: 27.

Now, behind all this is a tremendous implication; one which, if the Muslim could be persuaded to accept, would revolutionize his ideas about the Incarnation, viz.; that between the human and the Divine, while there is contrast, there is also mutual affinity. The Great God, the Everlasting Father, is kin to man! As the Scriptures declare, He has made man in His own image, after His own likeness.<sup>2</sup> From this it follows that man is susceptible of God; capable of receiving Him and responding to Him. That is something that immensely heightens our conception of man and adds dignity and solemnity to life. Besides which, it is a refutation of the altogether unfounded notion that the lowliness of our human life is incongruous with Godhead.

For this truth, also, we are indebted to Jesus; because if it is true, as we most certainly believe, that it is only in Him that we get a clear vision of God, it is no less true that it is

---

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Genesis, **1**: 26.

only in Him that we have a clear vision of Man—but with this difference; "the nature that is in all men akin to Deity becomes in Christ a nature in personal union with the Deity".<sup>1</sup> So that we really see in Jesus a new creation, the Perfect Man, a Divine-Humanity.

#### BUT *why* SHOULD GOD BECOME INCARNATE?

This, too, is a form of objection that obtrudes itself in discussions with Muslims. It suggests an attitude of mind comparable to certain marked prejudices in the ancient world with which the early Christian Church had seriously to contend. The typical Muslim stands, like the Hebrew, for the sheer transcendence of God, and like the Greek, for a kind of Divine apathy towards all suffering.<sup>2</sup> Such deep-seated prejudice can only be removed by seeing and believing the revelation of God in Christ; and, in particular, His Glorious Redemptive Purpose. How far many a Muslim is from appreciating this is to be seen in the remark made by an educated Indian Muslim in England, several years ago: "I, for one, would rather be an atheist than accept a God whose character and attributes received their epiphany in the manger and the cross".<sup>3</sup> That, in reality, is a protest against the conception of the character of the God so revealed; it makes no attempt to consider the PURPOSE for which such means were employed.

It is to that glorious purpose that we shall now address ourselves. No words can express it more clearly than those of Paul, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself", 2 Cor. 5: 19; that is to say, in and through Christ

---

<sup>1</sup> Fairbairn, *Christ in Modern Theology*, p. 475.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Archbishop Temple, CV., pp. 129-130.

<sup>3</sup> The late Khwaja Kamal-ud-din, at the Heretics Club, Cambridge, 27 April, 1913; quoted in *Muslim India*, I, 4.

we are to be delivered from sin and united to God. The life and teaching of Jesus Himself amply confirm this, e.g. "The Son of Man has come, not to be ministered unto, but to minister—to seek and to save the lost—and to give His life a ransom for many"; "Come unto Me and I will give you rest", Mt. **20**: 28; Lk. **19**: 10; Mt. **11**: 28. And since there can be no saving without suffering, the Incarnation tells of the Divine sacrifice on man's behalf, reaching its consummation in the Cross. That is why the life of the Saviour of men was one of poverty, suffering and humiliation, but it ended in a triumphant Death and a glorious Resurrection. Our human nature, never in itself sufficient, requires the Divine as its very life, and this need is met by the answer of a Boundless Love.

All this casts an amazing light on God; nothing so much reveals Him as our Father. Too good to be true? But surely the most glorious thought that man can have of God must be the most true! So dear are our souls to Him that He seeks fellowship with us. Kin to Him, we are His "sons", though lost sons; and He would have us realize our proper destiny and rise, through His Holy Son, into newness of life, therein becoming "partakers of His Holiness".<sup>1</sup>

#### DIVINE IN ALL HIS WAYS

We have had frequent occasion in the course of this study of the Person of Jesus Christ to illustrate our contention from the words of Scripture; and yet the strongest testimony to His Deity is not to be found in texts or creeds, but in the experience of His grace and power in the Church, and in the lives of individual believers all through the centuries.

It was so in the days of His flesh. Nowhere in the gospels do we find Jesus proclaiming Himself to His disciples, devout and stern monotheists as they were, in words such as, "I

---

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews, **12**: 10.

am God"; that would have been to go back on His own method and to frustrate His purpose.<sup>1</sup> No, those men continued in His company for many days; they observed closely His dealings with themselves and with all sorts and conditions of men. They witnessed Him endure the contradiction of sinners, and the travesty of a judicial trial. Then came His death on the cross, followed by an utterly unexpected resurrection from the dead. It was then, and only then, that they were constrained to declare, "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth", Jo. 1:14.

This is still true, for Jesus not only lived, He lives. He deals with us in ways which we know to be God's ways. We have proved that His Spirit is a regenerating power in our lives. The fact of Christ is always a fact of conscience. Men go to Him to scrutinize Him, and find that His searching glance scans their inmost souls. His Holy presence condemns them and yet they realize that He has the power, and the purpose, to rescue them from the thralldom of sin. Thus God and Christ have become morally indistinguishable. To do God's will is to do Christ's will. They are one.

Who, then, is this, and how shall we describe Him? We know Him as the One to whom is given "the name that is above every name", for we have found Him to be the power and the love of God unto salvation in our own lives. But, after all, it is only those who owe to Him salvation who can do this, because the vision of His glory comes by way of moral regeneration.

Just for this reason we cannot, and we should not, expect that the Muslim will readily agree to believe in the Deity of

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Bishop Gore, *Belief in Christ*, p. 364 (in "The Reconstruction of Belief"). "We can conceive nothing further from the method of Jesus than that He should have startled and shocked their consciences by proclaiming Himself as God."

our Lord, or find it easy to call Him "Son of God". Nor should we needlessly obtrude that Name upon him as though it were the foundation, rather than the fruit, of faith in Christ. We ourselves first find out what Christ is to us, and how He stands to God, and then we find this "Name above every name" appropriate to Him. But the chief thing is not the Name, but the experience of His redemptive work in our hearts and lives.

Not even Paul was able to call Jesus "Son of God" at the first. He, formerly, bitterly opposed Him, and it was as the result of a very real personal experience that he was at last able to declare, "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, except in the Holy Spirit", I Cor. **12**: 3. "It takes the very power of God to evoke a confession like that!" Paul admits as much when he says, "It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me", Gal. **1**: 15. In other words, this truth about Christ is "revealed knowledge", not something to be come at by the ordinary processes of human reasoning. That is what Jesus meant when He exclaimed to Peter, "Blessed art thou Simon, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven", Mt. **16**: 13-17.

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

- Fairbairn, A. M. *Christ in Modern Theology*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1894.  
Denney, J. *Jesus and the Gospel*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1909.  
Forsyth, P. T. *The Place and Person of Jesus Christ*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1912.  
Forrest, D. W. *The Authority of Christ*, T. & T. Clark, 1906.  
Hermann, W. *Communion with God*, Williams & Norgate, 1906.  
Horton, R. F. *Capacity for God*, Allen and Unwin, 1926.

- Horton, R. F. *My Belief*, Jas. Clarke.
- Mackintosh, H. R. *The Person of Jesus Christ*, T. and T. Clark, 1914.  
— *The Christian Apprehension of God*, S.C.M. Press.
- Temple, W. "The Divinity of Christ", in *Foundations*, Macmillan, 1922.
- Dodd, C. H. "Son of God" in *The Meaning of St. Paul for Today*, Swarthmore Press, 1922.
- Sanday. "The Son of God", *Hastings Dictionary of the Bible*.
- Carnegie Simpson. *The Fact of Christ*, Hodder and Stoughton.
- Baillie, J. *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity*, T. and T. Clark, 1929.
- Micklem, N. The Modern Approach to Christology, in *Mysterium Christi*, Longmans, 1930.
- Hermann Sasse. "Jesus Christ the Lord" in the above.
- Hoskyns and Davey. *The Riddle of the New Testament*, Faber and Faber, 1931.
- Browne, L. E. *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*, Camb. Univ. Press, 1933.
- Gore. *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, S.P.C.K.
- Goldsack, W. *Christ in Islam*. C.L.S. Tract, 1912.
- Richards, J. R. *What manner of Man is this?* C.L.S. Tract, 1936.
- Ghulam Ahmad, *Teachings of Islam*, Lahore, 1921.
- Matthews, Capt. *Mishkat-ul-Masabih*, Calcutta, 2 vols., 1809-10.
- Sinlessness of Prophets*, sect. "The Christian Deity", Mohammadan Tract Depot, Lahore.
- Unity versus Trinity*, sect. "The Divinity of Jesus", Mohammadan Tract Depot, Lahore.

[Blank page]

CHAPTER  
IV  
THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"The plain dictates of human nature are the unity of God and the absence of any rival or partaker."

"From the Book of Genesis to that of Malachi, all the prophets have in unflinching tones declared the Unity of God."

The Jews are a witness that "they were never taught the Doctrine of Trinity; nor did any of their Prophets ever foretell the advent, on this earth, of God, or of anyone who could be described literally as the Son of God."

To expect any evidence of Trinity in the Holy Word of God (Bible) delivered to mankind through the prophets, is as vain a desire as blowing at the sun under the delusion of extinguishing its light" (p. 90).

"The Gospels bear witness to the same teaching, and no trace of Trinity will be observed in them" (pp. 90-1).

"These absurd teachings are the most deadly sins of which man can be guilty."

"Equally detestable is the execrable blasphemy that God is not perfect unless the Holy Ghost and Jesus, son of Mary, join with Him, and that these three lumped together make God" (pp. 88, 91-2).

"We think that such Christian dogmas as Sonship, Trinity, and Atonement constitute the greatest misrepresentation of him (Jesus), in fact a libel on his blessed memory" (p. 91).

"The Muslim believes that Allah is one solitary Almighty Person, without internal distinctions or with relationship—*that* is an irrational conception" (pp. 92-3).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix E 2.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY

The most familiar object of Muslim attack and scoffing is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, for it is judged to be both irrational and unnecessary. That, however, is not surprising. A notable Christian scholar has admitted that much the same attitude is taken towards the doctrine by a large class of people in the West who have little or no interest in theology. He says, "It seems an arithmetical puzzle which shocks the reverence of the most devout; while it provokes the derision of those who pride themselves on a robust common sense".<sup>1</sup>

But, further, the Muslim makes no serious attempt to weigh the reasons put forward by Christian theologians for the origin of this doctrine, or to consider what are its real implications. This criticism applies, for instance, to a book of 154 pages, published in English under the title, "Unity versus Trinity, exhaustively treated".<sup>2</sup> But in fact there is in it no "treatment" of the subject at all. On the contrary, after making the extravagant assertion that "there is no deliverance from eternal punishment but through a belief in the mysterious doctrine of Trinity", the writer devotes approximately half the book to impugning the character of Christ, with the express object of denying His Divinity.

---

<sup>1</sup> A. S. Peake, *Christianity, its Nature and its Truth*, p. 90. A Muslim journal once affirmed that the Christian belief was comparable to the formula  $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$ , a conclusion which if reached by a schoolboy would promptly earn for him a spanking!

<sup>2</sup> Published by The Mohammadan Tract & Book Depot, Lahore It appears to be a conglomeration from the writings of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, of Qadian.

Now, here again, we find the influence of the fundamental doctrine of Islam so dominating the minds of Muslims that any statement about the Nature of God not expressed in conformity with it is rejected out of hand. And, of course, support is found in the pages of the Qur'ān for their protest against what they deem another blasphemous heresy on the part of Christians.

#### REFERENCE TO THE TRINITY IN THE QUR'ĀN

The wording of the relevant verses is, to say the least, curious:

"O ye people of the Book! exceed not the limits in your religion; and of God, say not what is untrue. The Messiah, Jesus, Son of Mary, is only an apostle of God.....Believe, therefore, in God and His apostles, and say not 'Trinity'—forbear—it will be better for you! For God is one God", **4: 169**.

"They surely blaspheme who say, 'God is the third of three'; for there is no god but the one God, and if they refrain not from what they say, a grievous chastisement shall befall such of them as do blaspheme", **5: 77**.

"And when God shall say, 'O Jesus, Son of Mary, hast thou said unto mankind—Take me and my mother as two gods, besides God?' He shall say, 'Glory be unto Thee! it is not for me to say that which I know to be not the truth; had I said that, verily Thou wouldst have known it: Thou knowest what is in me, but I know not what is in Thee'," **5: 116**.

Commenting on the first of these verses Mr. Yusuf Ali says,

"Here the Christian attitude is condemned, which raises Jesus to an equality with God; in some cases venerates Mary almost to idolatry; attributes a physical son to God; and invents the doctrine of the Trinity, opposed to all reason, which according to the Athanasian Creed, unless a man believes, he is doomed to hell for ever."

Maulana Muhammad Ali, in his comments on the above verses, contends that the Qur'ān "nowhere says that the Christian Trinity is formed of Jesus, Mary and God", as some Christian critics of the Qur'ān have concluded. The reference to Mary, he says, has to do with "the Roman Catholic doctrine

of the worship of Mary"; and adds, "Had Mary not been worshipped by the Christians as the 'Mother of God', the conclusion would have been safe that the Qur'ān mistook Mary for the third person of the Trinity". On the contrary, since the Qur'ān nowhere associates *the Holy Spirit* with the Trinity, it seems reasonable to hold that, in some way or other, Mary *was* connected by Muhammad with this doctrine. Moreover, the remarks made by Jalāluddīn on the first two verses, and by Baidhāwī on 4: 169, make it clear that in their opinion at any rate, the Trinity did consist of Father, *Mother*, and Son. The author of a Sufi work called, "The Perfect Man" (c. 1400 A.D.) asserts that the Christians' Gospel begins with the words, "In the name of the Father, the Mother and the Son". The extraordinary veneration known to have been shown by Abyssinian Christians for the Virgin Mary may, conceivably, have given rise to such a notion.

But quite recently a further possible source of confusion has been suggested.<sup>1</sup> In Syriac the word rūhā, spirit, is feminine, and some Syriac-speaking Christians used to think of the Holy Spirit as "she". Indeed, an early apocryphal gospel, called *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, contained the following sentence, referring presumably to the Temptation of Jesus: "Even now did my Mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs, and carried me away unto the great mountain Thabor". Origen (3rd cent.), and Jerome (4th cent.) are found to quote this sentence, and the gospel was known and used as late as the 9th century. As Dr. Browne says, "It is at least possible that while the Abyssinian veneration for the Virgin gave weight to the charge (in 5: 116), the original ground of it was this passage from the Gospel according to the Hebrews or something based on it". Any-

---

<sup>1</sup> L. E. Browne, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22.

how, the idea became widespread, and as late as the 12th century an Egyptian priest was accused of calling the Holy Spirit feminine: "He held that there was a feminine quality in the Godhead, and he taught that this feminine quality is proper to the Holy Spirit. He held that the Eternal Word of God is born through all eternity from the Father and the Holy Spirit."

#### CHRISTIANS TOO BELIEVE IN THE UNITY

The first thing to be said, and said emphatically, is that we, no less than Muslims, believe in the Unity of God; in fact, however varying may be the definition of the Trinity among Christians, it is held at all *only as subject to the doctrine of the Unity*. So that when the Muslim seeks to hold us to a description of the Trinity in the language of the Qur'ān, we can say that, just as our use of the phrase "Son of God" has nothing of a carnal significance, so there is no Christian anywhere who believes in "three gods".

And for this fundamental conviction we have the example and approbation of Jesus Christ Himself, for He quoted, in no formal manner, the words of Moses to the Israelites of old, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord", Deut. **6**: 4. It is noteworthy that He did not stop there, but went on to add the next words, "And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength", Mk. **12**: 29-30; thus giving ethical content to the belief. He even declared this to be "the greatest and foremost commandment". But to the Christian, as to the Jew, the supreme fact disclosed by this utterance is that the Divine Being is a Righteous and Holy God, not that He is one. The latter assertion, by itself, may be merely the expression of a sterile monotheism, an intellectual abstraction.

## WHAT SUPPORT HAS THE DOCTRINE IN SCRIPTURE?

The Muslim may say, however, and with much semblance of truth, that whereas the doctrine of the Unity, which he holds, has abundant support in the actual words of the Qur'ān—its "one great theme" indeed—yet the Christians have departed from the plain teaching of the Bible, as set forth in the passage just cited, and have invented a doctrine which has, contrary to all expectation, no support in their Scriptures.

The objection, so stated, raises two questions which may be dealt with at this point: (1) what is "the one great theme" of the New Testament? (2) what support have we in Scripture for this doctrine?

(1) While it is a fact that some Christian writers have been known to speak, in a particular context, of the Trinity as "the distinctively Christian idea of God", yet in the light of the supreme purpose of the Incarnation that statement could only be viewed as misleading. True, at a very early date the form of Christian doctrine did become Trinitarian, nevertheless, if the distinctively Christian teaching about God were to be compressed into a single phrase, it would be the declaration, not that God is Triune, but that He is redemptive love.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity thus becomes significant for the Christian, *in relation* to this redemptive purpose of God. And while data for the doctrine are to be found in the Gospel narratives, yet the great theme—proclaimed alike by Jesus and the Apostles—is always that of God's offer of grace to sinful men. Indeed, one cannot imagine for a moment that when Jesus Himself went about the towns and villages of Palestine, speaking of God and revealing God through His works of mercy, His chief concern was that the people should grasp the idea that God was to be thought of as "in three

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. J. Baillie, *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity*, pp. 185-6.

persons".<sup>1</sup> The truth is that neither the doctrine of the Trinity, nor the Unity, could ever be received as, in themselves, a Gospel, "Good News" for men in need of a saving knowledge of God.

(2) We are thus led to make the further observation that this doctrine, as a credal statement, is not to be found in Scripture. It is not there because it was not yet formulated when the last book in the New Testament was completed. Its origin is due to the facts which underlie the Christian experience of God's redeeming love, and to prolonged reflection upon that experience. "Nevertheless the experience, to preserve which the dogmas of the Incarnation and the Trinity were formulated, is plainly expressed in the New Testament.....The central point of that experience, as we have seen, is that of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. Christ.....represents and mediates the Divine Life and the redemptive action of the Creator".<sup>2</sup> For instance, it is not possible to give adequate expression to Paul's faith in the Deity of Christ without recourse to a theology which is essentially Trinitarian. Consider these statements of his:

"God.....who shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ", 2 Cor. 4: 6.

In this passage we see the very elements out of which, at a later date, the doctrine of the Trinity was, so to speak, crystallized—God, in His transcendent Being, as inscrutably above the universe; God made manifest to men in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; God present, unseen but very near, in the hearts of men.

"For through Him (Jesus Christ) we both (Jews and Gentiles) have our access in one Spirit unto the Father", Ephes. 2: 18.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*, p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> W. R. Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, p. 86.

<sup>3</sup> cp. another typical passage, Ephes. 3: 14-19.

Foreshadowings of a credal statement may be seen in the following:

"Baptising them into the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit", Mt. **28**: 19—a baptismal formula.

"The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all", 2 Cor. **13**: 14—a form of benediction.

#### THE DOCTRINE IN RELATION TO EARLY EXPERIENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN REVELATION

We turn, then, to consider more closely the nature of that experience which led the early Christians to arrive at conclusions which prepared the way for such a statement of their faith about God, notwithstanding their exceeding strong monotheistic convictions.

In the first place, as we have already seen, they were compelled to account for the Person of Jesus Christ. They could place Him in no known category. Not His teaching particularly, but His character, His personal dealings with them, proclaimed Him to be related to God, to the power and wisdom and love of God, in some unique and unheard-of manner. They owed it to Him that they had become "new creatures",<sup>1</sup> rescued from bondage to evil and filled with a new hope and purpose and power for living.

And though, as Jews, they had been brought up to abominate idolatry as the one unpardonable sin, yet we find them putting their whole faith in Christ. They were thus compelled to adjust their new experience and conviction to the fundamental fact of the Divine Unity. And they solved the problem by concluding that Christ belonged, in some mysterious way, to the category of "God". It became, in time, a necessity of thought for them to declare that there

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. **5**: 17.

must be some hitherto unsuspected "distinction" within the Divine Nature, and their way of indicating this conviction was to call Christ the "Son of God", or the "Word of God". That for these men was, "a triumphant discovery, based on experience, as all scientific truth must be based".<sup>1</sup>

Similarly with their experience of the Spirit. In strict accord with the promise made to them by Jesus Himself while still amongst them, they found that the Spirit took of the things of Christ and revealed them unto men. His words literally came true, for the Spirit carried on the characteristic work of Christ in men's hearts, convicting them of sin and sanctifying them unto righteousness;<sup>2</sup> and, in particular, they themselves, through fellowship with the Spirit, came to apprehend more deeply the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the Love of God. But, again, these ways of the Spirit's dealings with them were the very ways of God Himself, so what could they do but conclude that the Spirit also rightly belonged to the category of "God". In other words, God the Father proclaimed by Jesus, Jesus Himself "the Son of God", and the Holy Spirit at work within them, were essentially ONE in redemptive purpose and activity. That was a fact apprehended in their experience, and from it came the legitimate inference that God is Triune.

After all, what counts for most in the religious life—and how greatly Christians as well as Muslims need to lay this to heart—is not so much the "form of sound doctrine"—though our doctrine must be sound—as a real experience of the Living God in one's soul. How apposite is the remark of Thomas a Kempis, "What doth it avail thee to discourse profoundly of the Trinity, if thou be void of humility and art thereby displeasing to the Trinity?"<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Temple, C.V., p. 112, where the phrase is used of faith in the Godhead of Christ.

<sup>2</sup> John 16: 8, 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> *Imitation of Christ*, Book I, Ch. 1.

If the Muslim can be brought to understand that in the doctrine of the Trinity an attempt is made to explain our apprehension of the redemptive operation of God's Holy Spirit within us, then, though it may still appear unacceptable to him, he will see that it is no longer unreasonable, and certainly not blasphemous. With Paul we can say, "As for me, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ has shined in my heart"; for "faith knows no experience of the actuality of the Holy Spirit which is not at the same time also an experience of the actual presence of Christ. There is no faith in the present Christ, no confession of Jesus as "Lord", which is not mediated by the Holy Spirit".<sup>1</sup>

And, of course, among Muslims themselves there is, notwithstanding the rigidity of the more common doctrine of Allah, a very real belief in God's intimate dealings with men. The Sufis, in particular, have frequently carried their doctrine of "union with the Beloved" to such extravagant lengths that many of them, in days gone by, paid for their temerity with their lives.

Let us, then, invite the Muslim to explore the phenomena of spiritual experience, his and ours.<sup>2</sup> In his heart, as in ours, the Spirit of the Living God is assuredly at work, and it simply is not true, as a Muslim writer has ventured to say, that "the Holy Ghost has performed no works which Jesus has said the Comforter will do—judged not anyone, nor proved him guilty, nor glorified Christ, nor showed anything of Jesus Christ".<sup>3</sup> Christian people everywhere can from their own experience readily refute a baseless assertion like that; and

---

<sup>1</sup> Hermann Sasse, in *Mysterium Christi*, pp. 111-120; cp. in the same volume, Micklem, pp. 143-45.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Wilson Cash, *Christendom and Islam*, p. 176.

<sup>3</sup> *Proof of Prophet Mohammad from the Holy Bible*, p. 4. Mohammadan Tract Depot, Lahore.

their experience may be, and is being, repeated in the lives of Muslims. It is when the Muslim, under conviction by the Holy Spirit, is driven to ask, Who can this be who so deals with me? that he is in the way of understanding something of this great mystery about God.

#### REASON FOR FORMULATING THE DOCTRINE

The early Christians, as has been indicated, were themselves satisfied that they had come, through the Spirit's guidance, to perceive in this "mystery" new clues to the Nature of the One Living and Invisible God. At first they formulated no doctrine about it; there was no need. But the time came when the truths they held were called in question and, by controversy, imperilled; and so, in self-defence, they sought to reduce their convictions to credal form.

The more they thought upon this mystery, the more sure they were that, for this fuller knowledge of God, their experience of Jesus, the Heavenly Father, and the Holy Spirit was, in its very nature, *inseparable*. It was this that led to the conception of what may be called, for want of better language, the "threefoldness" of God, and the Church at length agreed to define the truth she held as indicating "a real distinction within the Godhead—a differentiation of being or function". But the doctrine so formulated did not, and does not, affirm "the reality of independent conscious beings, qualified by separate essences". So that if and when the word "person" is used in speaking of the Trinity it must be understood: (1) that it is a term that has been in use in this connection for many centuries, (2) in a sense quite different from that which the word ordinarily conveys, and (3) that it is still forced upon us by the very poverty of human language.<sup>1</sup> Further, no Christian claims that even the most widely-accepted definition

---

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., p. 452.

of the Trinity is adequate to the ultimate truth about God, but we do claim that it is a contribution to a better understanding of the mystery of His Nature.

Finally, we need not be over-distressed in our minds if we find this attempt to define the truth about God too difficult to grasp. We should remind ourselves that it will always be true that no man *by searching* can find out God.<sup>1</sup> It will be enough if we learn to know God as Father, Jesus Christ as the Revealer and Saviour, and the Holy Spirit as the Divine energy of eternal life in our hearts. If such knowledge enables us to know God's will, *and to do it*, that is about as high an ambition as anyone can have.

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

- Dale, R. W. *Christian Doctrine*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1896.  
 Tisdall, St. C. *The Religion of the Crescent*, Appendix A. S.P.C.K., 1906.  
 Peake, A. S. *Christianity its Nature and Truth*. Ch. vi, Duckworth, 1909.  
 Matthews, W. R. *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, Ch. ix, Nisbet, 1930.  
 Archbishop Temple. *Christus Veritas*, Ch. xv, Macmillan, 1930.  
 Mackintosh, H. R. *The Person of Jesus Christ*, Book iii, Ch. xii.  
 Baillie, J. *The Place of Jesus Christ*, etc. Ch. ix, T. & T. Clark, 1929.  
 Gairdner, W. H. T. *God as Triune*, (Creator, Incarnate, Atoner), C.L.S. Tract, 1916.  
 Mylrea, C. G. and Sh. Abdul Masih. *The Holy Spirit in Qur'ān and Bible*, C.L.S. Tract, 1910.  
*Unity versus Trinity*. Mohammadan Tract Depot, Lahore.

---

<sup>1</sup> Job 11: 7.

[Blank Page]

CHAPTER  
V  
THE HISTORICITY OF THE  
CRUCIFIXION

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"It has been the challenge of the Holy Qur'ān that Jesus did not die upon the cross" (p. 100).

"By promising the sign of Jonas he (Jesus) was thereby giving to understand that like Jonas he shall enter alive into the grave, thus refuting the idea of his death on the cross."

"If the Gospel of Barnabas is false, and Councils of Christians have excluded it, consider that the Gospel of Barnabas existed among the old Christians, for the history of this is written in the books of A.D. 200 and 300"<sup>1</sup> (p. 103).

"Jesus tried to elude arrest. He did not come to die for others; his was not a voluntary death—he was really 'murdered'" (pp. 111-12).

"A whole night's prayer of Christ proved quite barren.....as soon as morn appeared one police constable of the Roman government came, and having arrested him, put him into custody before 10 a.m. Is this the all-powerful God?"

"We cannot attribute the sufferings and trials which Jesus met with to the Almighty Creator, but only to some weak creature whom circumstances had placed at the mercy of his fellow-beings."

"The idea of the physical death of the Infinite God is no doubt the worst blasphemy that has been uttered in the world, even a denial of God coming next to it."

---

<sup>1</sup> Muslims mistakenly, and at times wilfully, confuse this with the *Epistle* of Barnabas.

## CHAPTER V

### THE HISTORICITY OF THE CRUCIFIXION

The Muslim professes not to believe in the death of Jesus, at least that is the view of the great orthodox party. The modern rationalist, on the other hand, asserts it, but contends that it was not on the cross that He died.

We have here an amazing feature in Islam: the vast majority of the Muslim people have always held, and do still hold, that God, in the phrase of the Qur'ān "took up" Jesus to heaven, so that He escaped death that day at the place called Golgotha. But now, over against this centuries-old traditional belief, the Ahmadis have propounded the view that Jesus after all did die and that a natural death, *at some other time and place*. Both parties seek support for their opinions in such verses of the Qur'ān as refer to the subject.<sup>1</sup> We are required, therefore, to examine rather closely the particular language used at these places.

The relevant passages are:

"The peace of God was on me the day I was born, and will be the day I shall die, *amūtu*, and the day I shall be raised to life," **19**: 34.

"And the Jews plotted, and God plotted. But of those who plot God is the best. Remember when God said, 'O Jesus, verily I will cause thee to die, *mutawaffika*, and will take thee up, *rāfi'uka*, to myself and deliver thee from those who believe not'", **3**: 47-48.

---

<sup>1</sup> The clash of opinion is to be observed in a tract on *Doctrine of Atonement*, by Abdul Haq, pubd. by The Mohammadan Tract and Book Depot, Lahore. On p. 21, the writer says, "The truth is that Jesus never went up to the heavens". At this remark the Editor of the Book Depot inserts in parenthesis, "We do not agree to this".

And for their (Jews) saying, 'Verily we have slain the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, an Apostle of God'—yet they slew him not, and they crucified him not, but they had only his likeness. And they who differed about him were in doubt concerning him: no sure knowledge had they about him, but followed only an opinion; and they did not really slay him, but God took him up, *rafa'ahu*, to Himself. And God is Mighty, Wise", **4**: 156.

(Jesus speaks) "I was a witness of their actions while I stayed among them: but since Thou hast taken me, *tawaffaitanī*, to Thyself Thou hast Thyself watched them, and Thou art witness of all things", **5**: 117.

It is to be noticed that it is several times stated in these verses that Jesus will "die". Once that phrase, "God took him up" is used, and once it is emphatically declared that the Jews did not kill him or crucify him. The remarks of Muslim commentators on these words are eloquent of the confusion of mind caused by the vague and conflicting statements in their own Book.

#### THE ORTHODOX VIEW—JESUS DID NOT DIE

We shall consider first the orthodox view—that Jesus did not die (and is not dead), but was "taken up", while yet alive, by God to heaven.

This belief is based on the traditional interpretation of the most interesting of the four passages, **4**: 156. It is argued—somewhat in the spirit of Peter's rebuke to Jesus, "Be it far from Thee, Lord, this shall never be unto Thee", Mt. **16**: 22—that God would never have permitted Jesus to die so shameful a death, otherwise He would have been "accursed of God", Deut. **21**: 23; and that is an impossible fate for a prophet of God. Support for this view is found in **3**: 48, where it is stated that God will "deliver" Jesus from those who believe not; that is, He will frustrate the plans of the Jews to cause Jesus to die upon a cross. What actually

happened was that "they had only his likeness" or, more literally, "one was made to appear to them like" (Jesus). That is how Rodwell translates the phrase *walākin shubbiha lahum*; Palmer has "but a similitude was made for them", and Yusuf Ali, "but so it was made to appear to them". The latter goes on to say, "The Quranic teaching is that Christ was not crucified nor killed by the Jews, notwithstanding certain apparent circumstances which produced the illusion in the minds of some of his enemies; that disputations, doubts, and conjectures on such matters are vain; and that he was taken up to God". The context, however, suggests, not that "disputations, doubts, and conjectures on such matters *are* vain", but that there was confusion, at the time, about the identity of Jesus. Those sent to arrest him, "were in doubt concerning him," *akhtalafū fīhi lafī shakkin minhu*; "no sure knowledge had they about him, but followed only a conjecture".<sup>1</sup>

But the phrase in the verse that has provoked the most remarkable speculation is *walākin shubbiha lahum*, for the meaning of which we may take Palmer's translation as correct enough, "a similitude was made for them". Baidhāwī remarks that some maintained that Jesus was really crucified; others that it was not he who suffered, but another who resembled him in features. Some said he was taken up to heaven, others that his manhood only suffered, while it was his godhead that ascended into heaven. Much is said of the identity of the person mistakenly crucified in place of Jesus. At this place Baidhāwī mentions Titānus as the individual.<sup>2</sup> The curious will find other names scattered

---

<sup>1</sup> What a commentary on this assertion is the plain statement of the gospels, viz. Judas betrayed the Son of Man "with a kiss", Luke 22: 48.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I, p. 315, ed. Osmania Press, Istanbul, 1314 A.H.

here and there in Islamic literature, e.g. Faltīānus,<sup>1</sup> and Shuyūgh, the King of the Jews.<sup>2</sup> In both cases it is stated that God changed these men into the form or appearance of Jesus. Tabarī, commenting on this passage, quotes Ibn Abbās to the effect that Jesus in Gethsemane asked, "Is there anyone who will offer himself in my stead? I will promise him a place in heaven". Thereupon one of the disciples, Sergius by name, gave himself up to Jesus to be transformed into his likeness and to be crucified instead of him. After the crucifixion the disciples discovered that one of their number was missing. It was then that Judas went away and hanged himself, because he realized that he had been the means of a fellow-disciple's death.<sup>3</sup>

In the spurious "Gospel of Barnabas" Judas is the one to suffer crucifixion because of mistaken identity. God, seeing the danger to which Jesus was exposed at the approach of the soldiers with Judas, commanded Gabriel and other archangels to "Take Jesus out of the world". He was in the house and they took him "out by the window"... "...and placed him in the third heaven in the company of angels blessing God for evermore". Judas impetuously entered the chamber while the disciples were sleeping, "whereupon the wonderful God acted wonderfully, insomuch that Judas was so changed in speech and face to be like Jesus that we believed him to be Jesus. And he, having awakened us, was seeking where the Master was. Whereupon we marvelled, and answered: "Thou, Lord, art our Master, hast thou now forgotten us?" And he, smiling, said: "Now are ye foolish, that know not me to be Judas Iscariot!". Thereupon the soldiers entered and laid their hands upon him "because

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Araisu 't-Tijān, pp. 549-50.

<sup>2</sup> Qisasul-Anbiyā, pp. 274-5.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Cairo, Vol. vi, p. 10.

he was in every way like to Jesus". When Judas protested, "the soldiers lost their patience, and with blows and kicks they began to flout Judas and they led him with fury into Jerusalem". Words attributed to Jesus in the Gospel account of the trial and crucifixion are then adapted for use by Judas, and finally he is led away and crucified.<sup>1</sup>

Of such a nature has been the comment following that extraordinary remark at 3: 48, "God is the best of those who plot". Accordingly, we find an Indian Muslim, who represents the orthodox view, affirming that "our Koran also tells us that Jesus was not crucified but they mistook another person for him"; and he adds, "It was a deception by God".<sup>2</sup>

A curious intermediate position, between the view of the orthodox and that of the modern rationalist, is one which interprets 3: 48 to mean that Jesus himself was crucified and that he really died, and remained dead for a brief while, after which God restored him to life and "took him up" into heaven. Thus Baidhāwī remarks: "It is said that Allah caused him (Jesus) to die for seven hours, then took him up to heaven," *rafa'ahu ila-'l-samā'e*.<sup>3</sup> Even Muhammad Ali, who neither believes that Jesus died on the cross nor that he was "taken up alive into heaven", has to admit that *mutawaffika* in this place does mean "I will cause you to die"; in this sense Allah "took his soul"; and adds, "Hence

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, 1907, pp. 471-79. An English translation from the Italian MS. which dates from the 15th or 16th cent., i.e. 1400 years *after* the time of Barnabas. Sale referred to it 200 years ago in the Preface to his English translation of the Qur'ān, and said "it appears to be a barefaced forgery". This is the opinion of Lonsdale and Laura Ragg also. Indian Muslims probably owe their knowledge of it to Sale.

<sup>2</sup> *Proof of Prophet Mohammad from the Holy Bible*, Mohammadan Book Depot, Lahore, pp. 19 and 24.

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 209.

some commentators say that Jesus remained dead (i.e. on the cross) for three hours; others say for seven hours, and so on", (note 436).

Quite clearly the commentators are faced at this point with a serious difficulty, inasmuch as the plain statement of **3: 48** appears to contradict the still more positive assertion in **4: 156**, viz. that Jesus was not killed. For if he were taken up alive to heaven, then this verse would make it necessary for him to have died before being taken up. Consequently, as just stated, some have attempted to solve the riddle by explaining that Jesus only died for a few hours, while others interpret the death figuratively and suppose the significance of the words to be that he was lifted up while he was asleep, or that God caused him to die a spiritual death to all worldly desires.<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly some of this early comment owes its form to the knowledge that Muslim writers had of the speculations of the Gnostics and Docetists in the sub-apostolic period. For instance, a very similar view of this mistaken identity theory is to be found in the heretical teachings of the Manichaeans, centuries before the rise of Islam. Mani (3rd cent.), and before him Basilides, taught that it was Simon of Cyrene

---

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Sale, in *loc. cit.* from Jalāluddīn and Baidhāwī. An interesting interpretation of **4: 156** is to be found in the pages of *Mināratu-l-Masīh* by Chirāgh-ud-dīn Jammawī, of Kashmir. This writer, who quotes the gospels in such a way as to make it clear that he accepts them as authentic, says that Quranic teaching, in effect, makes the death of Jesus a pre-condition of his being "taken up"; e.g. "Every soul shall taste death. Then to Us shall ye return", **29: 58**; cp. **32: 11**. He declares that Muslim belief that someone was changed into Jesus' likeness and crucified, lacks support, because (a) there is no tradition confirming it, and (b) for an unbeliever to be changed into the likeness of a holy prophet is unreasonable and impossible. Furthermore, what the passage denies, he says, is not that Jesus died, but that by being crucified, he was "accursed".

who took the place of Jesus and was crucified. The Gnostics of the second century contended that Jesus had no real share in the material side of human life. They even said that he took on a different guise to different onlookers, at different times. In other words, they stood for a Jesus who was "an abstract phantom".<sup>1</sup>

Some of the leading Muslim thinkers of today are aware that there is this background, in part at least, behind the words of the Qur'ān, yet what do they make of it? Here is what Mr. Yusuf Ali says in his comment on 4: 156,

"The Orthodox Christian Churches make it a cardinal point of their doctrine that his (Jesus') life was taken on the Cross, that he died and was buried, that on the third day he rose in the body with his wounds intact, and walked about and conversed, and ate with his disciples, and was afterwards taken up bodily to heaven. *This is necessary for the theological doctrine of blood sacrifice and vicarious atonement for sins* (the italics are ours), which is rejected by Islam. But some of the early Christian sects did not believe that Christ was killed on the Cross. The Basilidans believed that some one else was substituted for him. The Docetae held that Christ never had a real physical or natural body, but only an apparent or phantom body, and that his Crucifixion was only apparent, not real. The Marcionite Gospel (about A.D. 138) denied that Jesus was born, and merely said that he appeared in human form. The Gospel of Barnabas supported the theory of substitution on the Cross."<sup>2</sup>

Referring to this passage in his note on 3: 48, he says the two verses should be read together, for in 4: 156 "it is said that the Jews neither crucified nor killed Jesus, but that another was killed in his likeness. The guilt of the Jews remained, but Jesus was eventually taken up to God."<sup>3</sup> But what is it that this modern interpreter of the Qur'ān wishes

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., pp. 384-5.

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.* note 663, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> *idem.* note 394, P. 137.

the readers of the Qur'ān to conclude? Did Jesus die that day, or did He not? Does he favour the mistaken identity theory? And what meaning does he wish people to attach to his remark that "Jesus was eventually taken up to God"? Is this the "seven hours' death", or the Qadiani view that Jesus lived to the great age of 120, and then died in Kashmir? Mr. Yusuf Ali would seem to be an illustration of the truth to which a leading Indian Muslim educationalist once gave expression in the presence of the present writer: "Many a devout and thoughtful Muslim simply is not sure, *on the basis of the Qur'ān*, whether Jesus really died on the cross or not". For here is what this latest commentator contents himself with saying in the earlier part of the note on 4: 156, from which we have already quoted: "The end of the life of Jesus on earth is as much involved in mystery as his birth, and indeed the greater part of his private life, except the three main years of his ministry. *It is not profitable to discuss the many doubts and conjectures among the early Christian sects and among Muslim theologians*", (the italics are ours).

But there are the gospels, our earliest and only historical documents on the subject—why not be guided by these? With one voice these proclaim that Jesus of Nazareth was put to death on the cross, by the orders of Pontius Pilate, at the instigation of the Jews. In those records there is not the remotest suggestion either of confusion of identity, or of substitution, nor yet the slightest doubt but that Jesus actually died on the cross. But no, rather than face the FACT the Muslim prefers to dally with an admitted heresy, and—at least some of them—to attest it instead of the only historical account of the event which the world possesses. The pity of it!

We shall deal with the fact in the next chapter, and endeavour to make it unmistakeably clear that we start with a fact, and *not* with some interpretation of it thought to be

"necessary for a theological doctrine". Of what use is it, anyway, to deny a fact of history, merely because one finds a certain *interpretation* of it to be distasteful?

#### A MODERN RATIONALIST INTERPRETATION

In more recent times Muslim rationalists have been busy trying to reconcile these conflicting statements in the Qur'ān, and the Ahmadis are persuading themselves that they have at length found a more correct interpretation of the Arabic. The meaning they have put upon these passages is not only a repudiation of the traditional view in Islam, but a shrewd blow aimed at the very foundation of the Christian faith.

Thus, according to Mirza Ghulām Ahmad of Qadian, "Jesus did not die upon the cross but was taken down by his disciples in a swoon and healed within forty days by a miraculous ointment, called in Persian *marham-i-'Isā*, 'the ointment of Jesus'.<sup>1</sup> He then travelled to the East on a mission to the ten lost tribes of the children of Israel (believed by Ahmad to be the peoples of Afghanistan and Kashmir), and finally died at the age of 120, and was buried in Khan Yar Street, in Srinagar, Kashmir."<sup>2</sup>

It will be noticed that the Mirza makes nothing of the statement in the Qur'ān hitherto taken to mean that those who went to arrest Jesus were in doubt about his identity. Instead, he puts forward this notion, *which has no support whatever in the Qur'ān*, that Jesus merely swooned on the cross and was revived. But this idea was not his own inven-

---

<sup>1</sup> This remedy, which Ahmad declared he had "prepared solely under the influence of divine inspiration", disappeared from the market as the result of an order issued by the Deputy Commissioner of Lahore, dated 19 October, 1899, followed by the decision of the Chief Court of the Panjab in the appealed case, dated 8 June, 1900. cp. H. A. Walter, *The Ahmadiya Movement*, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> H. A. Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

tion, fertile though his imagination undoubtedly was. He borrowed it, and in considerable detail, from the West.

It was advanced over a century ago by the German rationalist Venturini, who wrote a romance in which he suggested that, since death by crucifixion is a very slow process, Jesus when taken down from the cross after some six hours was not in reality dead, but in a swoon. Having been laid in a cool cavern he was revived by the application of healing ointments and strongly-scented spices. Dr. Paulus and the still more famous Schleirmacher lent their support to this extravagant theory, but it was ridiculed by no less a person than the sceptic Strauss, in the following vigorous language:

"It is impossible that a being who had stolen half-dead out of the sepulchre, who crept about weak and ill, wanting medical treatment, who required bandaging, strengthening and indulgence, and who at last yielded to His sufferings, could have given to the disciples the impression that He was a conqueror over death and the grave, the Prince of Life—an impression which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and death.....It could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, or have elevated their reverence into worship."<sup>1</sup>

However, the point to bear in mind is that Ghulām Ahmad sought in this way not only to deny the historicity of the Resurrection, but to proclaim that Jesus is dead. And in this all Ahmadis are simply repeating what he gave out.

We observe the same purpose in the way Maulana Muhammad Ali translates and expounds the verses we have cited above. Of the phrase, *wamā qatalūhu wamā salabūhu*, "for they slew him not and they crucified him not", 4: 156, he says: "The word does not negative Jesus' being nailed to the cross, but it negatives his having expired on the cross

---

<sup>1</sup> Strauss, *Leben Jesu*, I, 412, pubd. 1835.

as a result of being nailed to it".<sup>1</sup> His anxiety to establish his theory may be seen by the way in which he forces a verse elsewhere that has not the remotest reference to this subject to yield confirmation of it; viz. "strike him with part of her", 2: 67-68. The obvious application here is to the *Cow*, or heifer (from which the chapter takes its name), due to be sacrificed in order that a murderer might be discovered through the miracle to be wrought on the corpse by a piece of her flesh. The whole passage has to do with the Jews of the time of Moses, and this particular phrase may be interpreted, as does Mr. Yusuf Ali, in the light of Deuteronomy 21: 1-9. But the Ahmadi writer says,

"it becomes almost certain that this incident refers to Jesus himself, as it was with respect to his death that disagreement took place, and many doubted his death.....The Jews wanted to do away with Jesus, but Allah decided that he should not die.....The act of murder was not completed in the case of Jesus, for after he was taken down from the cross his legs were not broken, as in the case of the thieves."

The meaning of the word "strike" therefore, may be paraphrased, he says: "*strike him with partial death, or liken his condition to that of the partially dead man*"; and thus 'the matter was made dubious', as we have in 4: 156. There is no other case of a murder in Jewish history in which the whole nation may have been guilty and which might answer to the description of these two verses."<sup>2</sup>

Further, he takes the other phrase, *walākin shubbiha lahum*, to mean, "but (the matter) was made dubious to them", so making the reference impersonal; and adds, notwithstanding all that has been quoted above to the contrary,

---

<sup>1</sup> But surely, had that been the sense intended by the Qur'ān, the wording would have been, "for though they crucified him they did not slay him".

<sup>2</sup> Notes 110-12.

"The story that some one else was made to resemble Jesus is not borne out by the words of the Qur'ān, which could only mean, if an object were mentioned, that Jesus was made to resemble (something). And even if we may supply the object that is omitted, that which he was made to resemble must be spoken of in the same passage, and while the resemblance to one crucified is implied in the statement that *they did not crucify him*, there is no mention here or elsewhere of any person who may have been made to resemble him or more properly whom he may have been made to resemble."<sup>1</sup>

### THE CROSS OF SHAME

As for the phrase in **3: 48** which Rodwell, Palmer, and others translate, "take thee up to myself",<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Ali makes it yield the meaning, "Exalt you in my presence"; and says the verb *raf'a* signifies one of two things—"raising", "elevating", i.e. a movement in space; or "exalting", "making honourable". He contends that wherever, in the Qur'ān and in Muslim literature, the phrase is used of man and God, it is always used in the latter sense, which is the one he himself adopts. Accordingly, "*the exaltation of Jesus is mentioned here as a reply to the Jews, whose object was to make him die an accursed and ignominious death on the cross*".<sup>3</sup> The ignominy is explained in his note on the same phrase in **4: 156** where, after quoting from Deut. **21: 23**, he adds,

"as the accursed one cannot be called honourable in the Divine presence, hence the negation of Jesus being killed on the cross and the affirmation that he was exalted before the Divine presence—i.e. he was not accursed".

---

<sup>1</sup> Note 646.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Shaikh Abdul Qādir ibn-i-Shāh Wali Ullāh, Delhi (1790); Maulvi Imād-ud-dīn Lāhiz, D.D., Amritsar, (1900); and Abul Kalām Ahmad, Delhi (1931), who render into Urdu as follows: *Main tujhe apnī taraf uthā lungā*

<sup>3</sup> Note 437.

After stating that both the Jews and the Christians "necessarily believe in the death of Jesus on the cross", although, according to the Qur'ān, "they have really no sure knowledge of it", he continues,

"He (the Christian) admits the truth of Deut. **21**: 23, but says that unless Jesus were accursed he could not take away the sins of those that believe in him: as in Gal. **3**: 13, 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on the tree'."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, this commentator and those who follow him, prefer to believe that the name of Jesus is "exalted" through His escaping death by crucifixion, and, moreover, that it was *by the act of God* that He escaped. How different is the Christian conception of this sublime act of sacrificial love! It is set out in unforgettable language by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, "We see Jesus, *because of the suffering of death*, crowned with glory and honour"; and again by Paul, "He (Jesus) humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross. For which cause also God HIGHLY EXALTED HIM, and gave unto Him the Name that is above every name; that in the Name of Jesus every knee should bow".<sup>2</sup>

But this thought about the inescapable shame attaching to such a death has been effectively dealt with, so far as Jesus is concerned, by Paul in the very passage quoted from Galatians. There he cites the words from Deuteronomy and pointedly says that Christ "became" a curse for us.<sup>3</sup> That is to say, **He voluntarily** underwent the shame of crucifixion for the redemption of mankind; a very different thing. And it is necessary to stress the voluntary nature of Christ's death

---

<sup>1</sup> Notes 649-50.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. **2**: 9; Philip **2**: 8-9.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek verb *genomenos* means "becoming" or "having become", not "was made" as the Authorised Version has it.

because Muslim writers are wont to assert, on the basis of the Gospel narrative, that there was nothing voluntary about it at all.<sup>1</sup> But in doing so they ignore the clear statements of the gospels, e.g. "He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem"; "No one taketh it (my life) away from me, but *I lay it down of myself*".<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, it is part of Paul's purpose at this place to show that Christ by so dying demonstrated the utter futility of the Law's assertion that *everyone* who is hanged on a gibbet is, *ipso facto*, "accursed". Here is One, he seems to say, the Perfect and ever Blessed Son of God, undergoing just this death through the malice of men. That really proved, not that He was "accursed", but that the Law had, in its assertion, over-reached itself.<sup>3</sup>

### THE CROSS STILL "A STUMBLING-BLOCK"

It is, indeed, pathetic to see the lengths to which the Maulana Sahib and others are prepared to go in their determination to deny the death of Jesus *on the cross*.<sup>4</sup> On 4: 156

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. "Crucifixion was not voluntary on the part of Jesus. He tried to evade arrest and even prayed at the last moment to be spared that cup." *The Light*, 16 Sept. 1933.

<sup>2</sup> Luke, 9: 51; Jo. 10: 18. cp. Jo. 11: 7-16.

<sup>3</sup> cp. W. E. Wilson, *The Problem of the Cross*, pp. 97 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Speaking to the author on one occasion about the Crucifixion, an educated Indian Muslim actually used the words, "Yes, I believe that Jesus Christ made the supreme sacrifice". Realizing what the appropriate and really honest meaning of such a phrase should be, we asked him, "Then you do believe that Jesus gave His life on the cross?" The expression on his face changed as he haltingly replied, "Ah! well, you see, we Muslims believe that He did not *quite* die."

And a European convert to Islam, writing for the children's page in *The Light*, said this about the hymn *Abide with me*: "The beautiful lines of Francis Lyte, which I was made to learn when I was a child, now seem to me an echo of the Quranic verse, 'If they turn

he adduces fourteen "testimonies" to demonstrate that, "on the strength of the historical testimony afforded by the gospels themselves", Jesus escaped death on the cross.<sup>1</sup> We proceed to quote as many of these as really bear on the subject before us; some of the fourteen have to do more precisely with the actuality of the Resurrection.

*Jesus remained on the cross for a few hours only, but death by crucifixion was always tardy.* The fallacy lies in the word "always". But the gospels as clearly attest that, in His case, death soon intervened. And it can be readily explained. For a whole week He was subjected to severe strain, then followed the "agony" of Gethsemane, the sleepless night, the long trials, the brutal scourging. Scourging alone, of that kind, often killed a man.

*The two men crucified with Jesus were still alive when taken down from the cross, therefore Jesus also might have been alive.* "Might have been" is not the same as "was". But we are told, on the contrary, "He was dead already", Mk. **15**: 44f; Jo. **19**: 33.

*The breaking of the legs was resorted to in the case of the two criminals but dispensed with in the case of Jesus.* The implication being that death was induced by breaking the legs—but it was done to the two criminals *on the cross*, and it was not done to Jesus because, on approaching Him, the soldiers "saw that He was dead already".

*The side of Jesus being pierced, blood rushed out, and this was a certain sign of life.* To be exact it was "blood and water"; evidently a different phenomenon, and meant by the writer to imply *not* life, but death, Jo. **19**: 34.

*Even Pilate did not believe that Jesus had actually died in so short a time (Mark, **15**: 44).* On the contrary "Pilate was

---

back, say, God is sufficient for me, there is no God but He; on Him do I rely, and He is the Lord of mighty power'." She then proceeded to quote the verses of the hymn, but could not bring herself to include the last, *Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes.* (Ayesha Morrison, 16 Sept. 1934.)

<sup>1</sup> The phrase quoted occurs in his book, *Muhammad and Christ*, p. 159.

surprised that He was dead already",<sup>1</sup> and having ascertained the facts from the soldier "he granted the corpse to Joseph", Mk. 15: 45.

*Jesus was not buried like the two criminals, but was given into the charge of a wealthy disciple of his, who lavished care upon him and put him in a spacious room hewn in the side of the rock. An airy chamber, forsooth, in which He would eventually recover from the "swoon"—Venturini's fancy, again! But we do not gather this from the only sources we have; rather, it was a place prepared for the dead, Mk. 15: 46; Mt. 27: 59-60; Lk. 23: 50-53; Jo. 19: 38-42.*

*Jesus Christ prayed the whole night before his arrest to be saved from the accursed death on the cross, and he also asked his disciples to pray for him, and it is the Divine law that the prayers of a righteous man in distress and affliction are always accepted (again that word "always"). He seems to have even received a promise from his Master (sic!) to be saved, and it was to this promise that he referred when he cried on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"—Heb. 5: 7 making the matter still more clear, for there it is plainly stated that the prayer of Jesus was accepted: "When he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him who was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared". All these testimonies show conclusively that Jesus could not have died on the cross, and therefore the statement in the Qur'ān is perfectly true.*

But the writer to the Hebrews has already referred to, and constantly has in mind, the death of Christ, not escape from it.<sup>2</sup> It is only reasonable, therefore, to suppose that the words at 5: 7 have some other meaning than that which the Ahmadis are seeking to wrest from it. And, as a matter of fact, when we turn to the Gospel narratives we find that the supreme note of the "supplications" offered in Gethsemane, "with strong crying and tears", was "not my will, but Thine be done".<sup>3</sup> Moreover, we find that *that* part of His prayer was "accepted", i.e. God's will was fulfilled. The other part, "let this cup pass from me", though "heard" (Heb. 5: 7),

<sup>1</sup> Mk. 15: 44, Moffatt's translation.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Heb. 2: 9; 7: 27; 9: 14, 26; 10: 10; 12: 2.

<sup>3</sup> cp. Mk. 14: 36; Mt. 26: 39 and 42; Lk. 22: 42.

was *not* "accepted", in that He drank the cup, or, as the phrase of the writer to the Hebrews has it, He did *taste death for every man*.

How desperate must be the plight, and the purpose, of those who so misread and misrepresent the plain statements of Scripture!

And yet that is not the final conclusion of the matter as far as the Ahmadis are concerned. It would never do to let it be assumed that they, too, hold that having escaped the cross Jesus now *lives*. He is dead, and must be declared dead, as did Ghulam Ahmad. And for this purpose also the "uncertain sound" of the Qur'ān is called in as witness. Commenting on the words, "When Thou didst take me to Thyself", 5: 117, Muhammad Ali writes, "This verse is a conclusive proof that Jesus died a natural death, and is not now alive in heaven, according to the theoretic belief of the Christians and the supposition of many Muslims".<sup>1</sup>

#### HOW CAME MUHAMMAD TO MAKE THESE STATEMENTS?

While we too agree that, generally speaking, it is not profitable to discuss mere conjectures, yet it is required that we should try to account for the strange and conflicting references to the death of Jesus in the Qur'ān. Is there discernible any motive in Muhammad's denial of the Crucifixion?

At the outset we need to bear in mind that, in all probability, Muhammad was illiterate<sup>2</sup> and so could not, and did not, read the gospels for himself. For what knowledge he had of their contents he was dependent on such information as was supplied to him by others.<sup>3</sup> Had he known them for himself he could not have been misled about this central

---

<sup>1</sup> Part of note 752.

<sup>2</sup> cp. 7: 156, "the *ummi* prophet"

<sup>3</sup> cp. 16: 105, "Surely a certain person teacheth him".

event, because they afford incontrovertible evidence that Jesus was crucified and that He died on the cross.

May we conclude, however, that Muhammad was in genuine doubt as to what actually took place? In that case the confused and conflicting statements in the Qur'ān would receive explanation. He could not read, and it may be that he never met an ardent evangelist whose one theme was "Jesus Christ and Him crucified". It is, indeed, remarkable that throughout the Qur'ān there is no comment on the Christian interpretation of the meaning of Christ's death. It is for these very reasons that a recent biographer of the life of Muhammad declares that, "Muhammad cannot have had permanent personal relations with Christians who had accurate information concerning their religion".<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, it is not impossible that he heard of the Manichaean view of the Person of Jesus, and that he credited it. We have already seen that a phrase in **4: 156** can be so read, and has been so read by Muslims, as to support this view. In which case we may suppose that Muhammad would have welcomed it and used it to secure the name of the prophet Jesus from the "ignominy" of such a death. The late Sayyid Amir Ali once stated that "success is always one of the greatest criterions of truth",<sup>2</sup> and that seems a point of view typical of much Muslim thought. Judged by this standard the Crucifixion could only be looked upon as tragic failure; yet Jesus, to the mind of Muhammad certainly, was not a failure.<sup>3</sup>

Then there was the part taken by the Jews in this matter. It will be observed that in **4: 156** it is clearly affirmed that it was the Jews who claimed they had slain Jesus. What account of the matter would those at Madina give to

---

<sup>1</sup> Tor Andrae, *Muhammad*, English trans. p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> cp. **3: 40**.

Muhammad? For any one Christian in the place who might seek to explain away the crucifixion of Jesus in the fashion of the Docetists, there would have been hundreds of Jews to swear on oath that He had been put to death on the cross. What then? Muhammad had experienced much trouble at the hands of these people—as the Qur’ān bears testimony, they had teased him and lied to him—how was he to know they were not deceiving him again? After all, the Jews hated the name of Jesus: what was to prevent them lying to Muhammad about this affair also?

Is there yet another possibility? Have we any ground for the conjecture that Muhammad knew the facts about that Death, and that he was also aware of its unique influence, as a spiritual factor, in winning men to the allegiance of Christ? Could this have been why he denied the Crucifixion? That is probably a question that can never be answered with any confidence.

Nevertheless, here is one who called himself a Muslim and claimed to pattern his life on that of Muhammad—Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, of Qadian. He at least leaves us in no doubt about the motive of *his* denial of the Crucifixion. His trenchant assertion, therefore, in what may be called his last legacy to his followers, that Christ died and is dead, is not without deep significance for those who would understand the real attitude of the modern Ahmadi rationalist towards the Cross and Christianity.

"Listen, my friends, to my last injunction. I tell you a secret. Remember it well that you may upset all the arguments which the Christians put forward. Prove to them, that, in reality, Christ, the son of Mary, is for ever dead. Through the victory to be gained by this argument you will be able to wipe the Christian religion off the face of the earth. There is no necessity for you to waste your precious time in other wearisome wrangles. Just concentrate upon

the death of Christ, the son of Mary, and by the use of powerful arguments reduce the Christians to silence. On the day that you succeed in proving that Christ joined the ranks of the dead, and imprint this fact on the minds of Christians, you will know that the Christian religion has made its exit from the world."<sup>1</sup>

But the actual and ample historical evidence for the Crucifixion afforded by the gospels themselves is all that a reasonable man requires in order to be convinced. There is, indeed, a striking contrast between the full and graphic account of actual eye-witnesses in the one set of narratives, and the meagre, vague and contradictory assertions in the other. Frankly, no one would go to the Qur'ān for reliable information about an event like this that had taken place 600 years previously.

Finally, the evidence before the world is wholly against the varying contentions of the Muslims.

Nothing is clearer in the Gospel narrative than the FACT that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified to the death under Pontius Pilate, to placate the Jews.

The grand theme of Paul's writings is *the Cross of Christ*. He himself could never have denied the Crucifixion, yet it was a long time before he saw its sublime meaning; but when he did, he exclaimed, "God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ".<sup>2</sup>

The Jews have never denied it.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Izālatu'l Auhām* ("Refutations of Whims and Fancies", i.e., of Muslims), p. 116. It is interesting to recall that Voltaire, the French atheist, was rash enough to predict in 1760 that, "before the beginning of the nineteenth century Christianity will have disappeared from the earth".

<sup>2</sup> Galat. 6: 14.

<sup>3</sup> cp. Rabbi Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth*. This modern Jew says that the more widely all the branches of Judaism during the period of the Second Temple are studied the more impossible it becomes to cast wholesale doubt on the historicity of the Synoptic gospels, p. 126.

Non-Christian writers attest it. For instance, Tacitus, the Roman historian (b. 56 A.D.) in his account of the persecution of the Christians under Nero, states that, "The author of that sect was Christ, who in the reign of Tiberius was punished with death as a criminal by the procurator, Pontius Pilate".<sup>1</sup> And a Greek writer, Lucian (b. 100 A.D.) in *The Death of Peregrinus*, refers to the Founder of Christianity as "the crucified sophist"; while Celsus, the Epicurean cynic, speaks of Christ as "the crucified Jesus," and "crucified God".

And even as the tenth day of Muharram bears evidence to the Muslim world of the historicity of the sad deaths at Karbalā, so does the frequent celebration throughout the world of the Holy Communion service bear testimony to the actuality of the death of Christ. By this act we do "show forth the Lord's death, till He come".<sup>2</sup>

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

- Gwatkin, H. M. *Selections from Early Christian Writers*, Macmillan, 1905.  
 Zwemer, S. M. *The Glory of the Cross*. Marshall Bros.  
 Walter, H. A. *The Ahmadiya Movement*, Y.M.C.A., Calcutta, 1918.  
 Notovitch, N. *The Unknown Life of Christ*, Hutchinson, 1895.  
 Ahmad Shah, *Four Years in Tibet*, Lazarus, Benares. 1906.  
 Ragg, L. and L. *The Gospel of Barnabas*, Clarendon Press, 1907.  
 Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad and Christ*, Lahore, 1921.

---

<sup>1</sup> Annals xv: 44.

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. **11**: 26.

[Blank Page]

CHAPTER  
VI  
HOW CHRIST SAVES

[Blank Page]

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"Man will not be punished for his sins provided he believes in Jesus, for he has taken upon himself the sins of all men. This is what the Christian doctrine of atonement means" (pp. 143, 149).

If, two thousand years ago, Jesus died for the sins of the world, then all "Christian" sins are automatically forgiven.

"Many have believed in Christ, but the fact of their escape from the consequences of their sins and misdeeds is not visible in time and space" (p. 143).

"This vicarious atonement.....must exercise a deadening effect upon activity, because it leaves naught for the individual to accomplish and removes the whole burden which lies on his shoulders" (p. 143).

"Christians believe that the crucifixion of Jesus is an atonement for sins—"by this am I to believe that human beings will go directly to heaven, notwithstanding that they commit various delinquencies?"

"Is there any believing Christian lady, European or native, who can say that faith in the blood of Jesus has relieved her of the pains of childbirth? (Genesis, 3: 16)."

"All Christian beliefs—Divinity of Jesus, his Atonement, etc.—take the story of the fall of Adam for their basis. It is the bed-rock of the Church, and if *it* be shattered the whole Church must collapse."

"Why did God appear in the flesh and bear shame to save mankind? He could have chosen a better way, as did the prophets" (pp. 145-7).

"No need for death on the cross; God effects what He purposes by merely manifesting His wish" (p. 126).

The Qur'ān teaches that "for the forgiveness of a sinner God does not require to be paid any compensation" (pp. 142, 144).

"If Jesus was God his mission should have been universal and not limited to any particular community.....God is not the Lord of the Jews alone" (p. 149).

"If Jesus Christ came to save Israel only, then who is to save the people not belonging to that race?" (p. 149)

"Christ's death reverses the rule of nature, whereby the inferior is always sacrificed to the superior."

"'Keeping the law' is the narrow path; Christians by following this doctrine take the broad and easy way of 'only believing'."

"As to the spirit of self-sacrifice on the part of Jesus there can be no question whatever—it was a sacrifice in the cause of Truth, not atonement for the sins of human nature."

"A voluntary sacrifice on the part of Jesus in going to the cross, turns out when subjected to the acid test of contemporary evidence—the last chapters of Matthew—to be an act of murder, pure and simple" (pp. 111-12).

Belief by Christians in the death of Jesus on the cross "is necessary for the theological doctrine of blood sacrifice and vicarious atonement for sins, which is rejected by Islam."

(Sonship) "if combined with the doctrine of vicarious atonement amounts to a negation of God's justice and man's moral responsibility."

"The advocates of Christianity rely for salvation on two dogmas solely, viz: the sinlessness of Jesus and atonement through his blood."

"The second indispensable requisite for salvation (the other being the Trinity), according to the Christians, is a belief in the dogma that Jesus Christ died on the cross and by means of this accursed death shared with Satan the curse."

"Belief in the atonement involves disbelief in the mercy of God, for He was not satisfied until He punished Jesus for the sins of mankind" (p. 147).

"I do not see how the cross helps us to repent" (pp. 147-8).

"What effect belief in Christ's death can have on character passes understanding" (pp. 147-8).

"According to Islam, man enters the world without any sin in his nature. Sin is an acquisition, an after-acquisition and not a heritage" (p. 127).

"Belief in the omnipresence of God keeps a man from the commission of secret sins" (pp. 132-4)<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See further Appendix E 3-5.

## CHAPTER VI

### HOW CHRIST SAVES

The Qur'ān refers to the Crucifixion only to deny it. It makes no mention of a belief current among Christians to the effect that on the cross "Christ died for the ungodly",<sup>1</sup> and it is possible that Muhammad never heard of such a thing as a doctrine of the atonement.

But Muslims today frequently raise objection to Christian belief in the atoning work of Christ effected by His death—assuming for the moment that He was crucified—on the ground, more especially, that such "belief" is futile and ineffective. They point out that sin, and punishment for sin, are not thereby eliminated from the life of the believer. "In daily life we see that a Christian who offends against the law of the land is not saved from its consequences for the reason that Jesus has died for his sins and saved him thereby from punishment"—a "Christian thief" gets the same punishment as a "Hindu thief".<sup>2</sup>

And that same journal, in answer to a Muslim's question about salvation, recently said, "Christianity teaches that salvation depends on faith in an historical event that Jesus died on the cross. According to the plainest common sense it is wrong. A man who leads a most wicked life is certainly not entitled to salvation simply because he says that he believes in the crucifixion of Jesus". Yet one more quotation: "Had there been any truth in the dogma of atonement, every grade of Christian society should have morally benefited

---

<sup>1</sup> Romans, 5: 6.

<sup>2</sup> *The Light*, 16 Sept. 1933.

by its wholesome influence in practical life".<sup>1</sup> All of which goes to show how little, still, the average Muslim understands of what is meant by salvation through Christ.<sup>2</sup>

#### ISLAMIC VIEWS ABOUT GOD AND MAN

Yet, in reality, their repudiation of such a doctrine has its root in something deeper—it is to be traced, as a rule, to the typical Islamic conception of Allah. As met with both in the Qur'ān and in prevalent Muslim thought, that conception may for the purpose before us be summarised as follows:

(a) God is Almighty—He does whatever He pleases, and is answerable to no one.

That view-point could be illustrated by several quotations from the Qur'ān, but one must suffice at this place.

"Who hath the least power against God if His Will were to destroy Christ, the son of Mary, and his mother, and all—everyone that is on the earth? For to God belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth and all that is between. He createth what He pleaseth. Verily, God is Almighty," 5: 19-20.

(b) God is Merciful—He forgives whomsoever He pleases,

e.g. "God will not forgive the union of other gods with Himself. But He forgiveth anything else to whom He pleaseth", 4: 51.

So primary and emphatic is this conviction about the dominating and arbitrary will of God that the Muslim sees no place, and no necessity, for any "atonement".

But for the Christian the need is apparent if only because he knows from sad experience that the heart of man is deceitful

---

<sup>1</sup> *Unity versus Trinity*, a tract, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> It does not seem to be realised that Christianity is essentially a personal, not a national or racial religion. Unfortunately, very many people in "Christendom", as the West is sometimes erroneously called, make no profession whatever of following Christ, and no one in the West would ever think of calling them "Christians".

above all things and desperately wicked.<sup>1</sup> Does, then, the teaching of Islam about man essentially differ from this? The answer is that, while the evil of man's heart is admitted, considerable variety of opinion exists as to the means available for eradicating that evil. In order to make clear, by contrast, Christian belief in the necessity for an act of God, we must devote some space to considering Muslim teaching about the nature of man.

The verse in the Qur'ān most often quoted in this connection is,

"God desireth to make your burden light, for man hath been created weak",  
*wakhuliqa'l-insānu za'īfan*, 4: 32.

The context has to do with sexual intercourse. Maulana Muhammad Ali's comment is,

"These verses speak of Allah's great mercy in having shown man the way to truth and guidance, for man, being created weak, could not chalk out a way for himself which was free from error. That is all that man's weakness here signifies".

In other words, while man is represented as universally sinful in act, this is due not to a nature radically sinful but to his weakness—he may have "lost paradise", but he is not thereby estranged from Allah. Thus the late Khwaja Kamal-ud-din once stated "The Qur'ān does not admit that sin was innate in human nature, and that man was, by his own actions, incapable of freeing himself from its bondage".<sup>2</sup>

#### ISLAMIC TEACHING ABOUT SIN

Again, sin is usually represented as rebellion against, and opposition to, the commands of Allah—the doing of that which is "forbidden", *harām*, or the omission of duties that are "obligatory," *fard* or *wājib*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah, 17: 9.

<sup>2</sup> Muslim India, I, 6; p. 207, 1913.

The principal terms in the Qur'ān are,

1. *ithm*,<sup>1</sup> according to Lane, a sin, crime, offence, or act of disobedience. cp. "And he who uniteth gods with God hath devised a great wickedness", *ithman* 'azīman, (i.e. *shirk*), **4**: 51; also, "Those who avoid the heinous things of crime—*kabā'ir-al-ithm*—(i.e. the "great sins"), and filthiness", *wa'l-fawāhish*, **42**: 35.

2. *jurm*, as found in the form *mujrim*, or in parts of the verb from the same root—the signification, according to Lane, being the same as that of *ithm*.

3. *dhanb*, a sin, crime, unlawful deed, transgression, or act of disobedience. "It differs", says Lane, "from *ithm* in being either intentional or committed through inadvertence, whereas *ithm* is peculiarly intentional".<sup>2</sup> A prayer in frequent use among Muslims is, *Astaghfiru'llāhū Rabbī min kull-i-dhanbīm wa atūbu alaihe*, "I ask forgiveness of Allah, my Lord, for all my sins, and I repent before Him".

Other terms are *khatā*, *zulm*, *junāh*, *sayyi'a*, 'isyān.

The Qur'ān makes mention of some of the more grave sins, viz. covetousness, **92**: 8-11; pride, **17**: 39-40; envy, **113**: 5; extravagance, **17**: 28-29 and **7**: 29; niggardliness, **4**: 41; ostentation, **4**: 42; cheating, **83**: 1-6; suspicion, **49**: 12; slander, **4**: 112 and **60**: 12; theft, **60**: 12.<sup>3</sup> These, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Heb. חַטָּא

<sup>2</sup> It should be remarked that Muhammad Ali, having admitted in his note (393) on the use of this term at **3**: 9 that in the Qur'ān it "is applied to all shades of shortcomings, from the grossest transgressions of the wicked to those defects and imperfections of which even the most perfect mortal cannot be free", contradicts that statement in note (2194) on **40**: 57, where he comments on the use of this very term in reference to Muhammad, saying, "the word does not actually mean *sin*."

<sup>3</sup> cp. a very similar list in the novel *Taubatu'n Nisū*, by Nazīr Ahmad, p. 22. He, too, commences his catalogue with *shirk*.

others like them, are classed as the "great sins", *kabā'ir-al-ithm*, or *gunāh-i-kabīra*.<sup>1</sup> Muslim jurists have compiled lists of these, of which the following is typical; *shirk*, constantly committing "little sins" (*gunāh-i-saghīra*), despairing of God's mercy, considering one's self safe from the wrath of God, false witness, accusing a virtuous Muslim man or woman with adultery, taking a false oath, the practice of magic, drinking wine, taking usury, misappropriation of the property of orphans, adultery, unnatural crime, theft, murder, fleeing in battle before the face of an infidel enemy, disobedience to parents.<sup>2</sup> The "seven deadly sins" are, *shirk*, murder, false charge of adultery, misappropriating the property of orphans, usury, desertion in battle, and disobedience to parents.<sup>3</sup>

As pointed out in a previous chapter, the sin of sins, the sin that comprehends and surpasses all other sins alike in the Qur'ān and in the mind of Muslims, is the one that heads every one of these lists without exception, viz, *shirk*; for it is tantamount to idolatry. It is the one sin that Allah "does not forgive".<sup>4</sup> One cannot but compare this feature with the teaching of Jesus. He taught that life was more than creed and conduct than ritual,<sup>5</sup> and He reserved His severest censure for the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of God.<sup>6</sup> The Hebrew prophet's warning is not dissimilar, "Woe unto those that call evil good and good evil.....that put darkness for light and light for darkness".<sup>7</sup> There is the utmost significance for Religion in the contrast presented by these two points of view.

---

<sup>1</sup> *gunāh* is the Persian word for sin most commonly used by Indian Muslims.

<sup>2</sup> T. P. Hughes, *Dictionary of Islam*, p. 594.

<sup>3</sup> cp. *Mishkātu'l Masābih*, Book I, Ch. 2, Pt. I, trans. Matthews, Vol. I, pp. 18-19; where *magic* displaces *disobedience to parents*.

<sup>4</sup> 4: 51, 116.

<sup>5</sup> Mt. 22: 34-50.

<sup>6</sup> Mt. 12: 31-32

<sup>7</sup> Isaiah, 5: 20.

## WHAT THE QUR'ĀN SAYS ABOUT FATE AND HELL

The teaching of the Qur'ān about Fate<sup>1</sup> throws further light on the Muslim conception of, and attitude towards, sin. It is there asserted that the fate of man, whatever happens, great or small, has been fixed by the eternal and unalterable decree of Allah, e.g.

"All things have We created after a fixed decree. Our command was one word, swift as the twinkling of an eye," **54**: 49-50.

The doctrine is often urged, quite legitimately, as the ground of resignation and patience under misfortune, or equanimity on the occasion of success, as well as of calmness in circumstances of danger; much after the manner, indeed, of a Christian prayer of three centuries ago: "Teach me to submit to Thy providence in all things; to be content in all changes of person and condition; to be temperate in prosperity, and in adversity to be meek, patient and resigned".<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, however, Quranic teaching is not always restricted to such innocent purposes. Consider what must be the effect of such pronouncements as these:

"Allah will mislead whom He pleaseth, and whom He pleaseth He will place upon the straight path," **6**: 39.

"Whom Allah causeth to err, no guide shall there be for him," **13**: 33; cp. **2**: 26; **9**: 116.

"Everyman's fate have we fastened about his neck," **17**: 14.

"Had thy Lord pleased He would have made mankind of one religion; but only those to whom thy Lord hath granted mercy will cease to differ. And unto this hath He created them; for the word of the Lord shall be fulfilled, "I will wholly fill jahannam, hell, with jinn and men," **11**: 120.

On this last verse the Ahmadi commentator says,

"Because they went against the ways which Allah had mercifully shown to them, therefore they must pass through another

---

<sup>1</sup> *taqdīr* rather than *qismat*.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Taylor, (1613-1667).

ordeal, so that they may be purged of evil and made fit for spiritual progress."<sup>1</sup>

That ordeal is *Hell*, a place of the most frightful torment, of which the Qur'ān and the Traditions have much to say:

"On that day the wicked shall be dragged into the fire on their faces: Taste ye the touch of Hell," **54**: 48.

"For the evil doers is a wretched home—Hell—wherein they shall be burned: how wretched a bed! Even so. Let them taste it—boiling water and gore, and other things of kindred sort," **38**: 55-58.

"Those who disbelieve our signs We will in the end cast into Hell-Fire; so oft as their skins shall be thoroughly burnt, We will change them for fresh skins, that they may taste the torment. Verily, God is Mighty, Wise," **4**: 59.

"On that day We will cry to Hell, 'Art thou full?' And it shall say, 'Are there more?'," **50**: 29.<sup>2</sup>

Why have we gone to the trouble of citing these verses? It is not by way of finding fault with the Qur'ān—that is not our business—but to show how next to impossible it must be for the average Muslim, brought up on such ideas, to perceive that sin is, essentially, wrong done to the Holy Love of God. Allah is depicted as, and believed to be, so utterly "Other".<sup>3</sup> He is an arbitrary Being, *zabardast*, "overbearing". He does what He likes, and favours "whom He pleases". As for man, he is the '*abd, banda*,<sup>4</sup> or slave of Allah; and his very offences are believed to have been predetermined by an inexorable fate, while towering above them all is that awful bogey, *shirk*. Nor does one find in the Qur'ān words of reassurance for men in sin, such as these:

---

<sup>1</sup> Note 1210.

<sup>2</sup> The absence of any real comment on these terrible verses in the works of modern Muslim expositors is highly significant.

<sup>3</sup> But cp. Mt. 7: 11.

<sup>4</sup> '*abd*, Arabic; *banda*, Persian.

"As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live," Ezek. **33**: 11.

"(God) will have all men to be saved," 1 Tim. **2**: 4.

"The Lord is not willing that any should perish," 2 Peter, **3**: 9.<sup>1</sup>

### THE TEACHING OF ISLAM ABOUT SALVATION

What means, then, are provided by the Qur'ān and Islam for the salvation of the wicked? No more momentous question, surely, can be put than this, and by the answer given we must judge whether in reality Islam is, as is being claimed today, "the religion for humanity", and the Qur'ān the Book which "humanity needs for its redemption".

We propose to quote extracts on the subject from the writings of acknowledged exponents of Islam. The first is from the pen of Maulvi Mohammad Ali, M. A., in a tract written some years ago.<sup>2</sup>

"The Holy Qur'ān has repeatedly said that the means whereby a person can attain to salvation have existed from all eternity as God Himself is eternal, and it rejects the doctrine which represents Him as having come to the conclusion after long ages that all other means of the attainment of salvation having failed, He should give salvation to mankind by submitting Himself to death. A person can, in fact, be said to have attained salvation only when all his sensual passions are burned down, and the will of God becomes his will, when he is so completely annihilated in the love of God that he retains no trace of his own self and knows God to be all in all; and his words and deeds and movements and intentions are all for the sake of God; when he feels in his heart of hearts that all his happiness is in God only and that a separation from Him,

---

<sup>1</sup> Further, cp. Qur'ān, **11**: 20 (quoted above) with John, **3**: 16-17.

<sup>2</sup> *Has any Book been revealed by God, if so, which?* pp. 28-34. Published by The Mohammedan Tract and Book Depot, Lahore. The writer of this tract is no other than the, now, President of the Ahmadi Community in Lahore, author of the commentary.

even for an instant, is death to him.....When the flame of the perfect love of God is lighted within him and he hates sin as the most detestable thing in the world, when he loves God with a love far greater than that with which men love their wives and children and near relatives.....It is when a person reaches this stage of the love of God that all his sensual passions are burned like chaff with the fire of love, and a mighty transformation is brought about within him. Then he is granted a heart which he had not before.....This is the condition which is termed salvation, for in this condition the soul, falling down at the threshold of God with burning love, finds everlasting rest.....Human nature is so made that it has love of God hidden within it, and when that love is cleansed of every kind of dross by the purity of the soul.....it becomes a mirror for the reflection of the Divine Light".....(here follows a passage about the relation of the Islamic doctrine of *Shafa'at*, or intercession, to this process of renewal).

The writer, however, realizes that such a stage of perfection is not easily reached, and so he addresses himself to the question as to how man is to achieve it.

"It is the most difficult thing for a man to attain to a certainty relating to the existence of God, and to have generated in his heart the strong faith that obedience to God is the source of peace and happiness in this life as well as the next, and that going against His will, is the root of all afflictions. If this conviction comes to a man, he shuns every evil, for he knows it for certain that his evil deeds are watched by God who can turn this very life into a hell for him. It is evident that everybody shuns what he knows to be certainly harmful to him. No one thrusts his hand into a hole which to his certain knowledge has a snake in it, nor does anybody devour what he knows to be poison. To shun these harmful things he does not stand in need of any atonement, nor does he ever consider it necessary that anyone should be crucified to save him from these evils. All that he requires is certain knowledge that there is harm in the thing, and this is sufficient to make him fly from it. No one ever knowingly leaps into destruction. Even the patient avoids the taking of a food which he knows would endanger life."

But even Mr. Mohammad Ali recognizes that mere knowledge of what is evil is *not* enough; the facts of life are proof to the contrary. He, therefore, seeks next to meet the question, why is it that even when a man *knows* he still falls into sin? He says:

"The answer is clear, because he has not as sure a conviction of the harm of sin as of the physical things mentioned above. It is, therefore, beyond the shadow of a doubt that what a man needs to avoid sin is, not atonement, but a certain faith in the existence of God and a strong conviction that sin against Him is rank poison. With this faith and this conviction reigning supreme in his heart, man is as sure to fly from sin as he flies from a venomous reptile. We have thus established beyond all doubt that the daring with which sins are committed is due only to want or weakness of faith in God and His retribution."

At the end of it all we seem to be very much where we were when we started—in fact, it is a glaring illustration of arguing in a circle. But, in reality, all this effusive language boils down to a single sentence—once a sinful man is convinced that the Living God will "give him hell" he is driven to obey through sheer fear of the consequences. *But is he?*

We shall next consider an exposition of the Islamic theory that "for the attainment of salvation the very nature of man calls for a mediator". Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian dealt with this in the preface to a book on the sinlessness of prophets in general.<sup>1</sup>

Arguing that everyone feels that he stands in need of the assistance of "some strong and mighty hand", to rescue him from the evils of ignorance, sensual passion, and recurring temptations, and to enable him "to break loose from sin", he says it is all because man "has been created weak", and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sinlessness of Prophets* (from *The Review of Religions*, Qadian), pp. 1-2. Pubd. by The Mohammadan Tract and Book Depot, Lahore The Mirza takes *intercessor* to be equivalent to *mediator*.

therefore "cannot trust his own weak nature for a moment" ..... "The voice of conscience continually draws our attention to our own sad failings and to the necessity of obtaining assistance from some other higher source."

What part, then, has God in this matter? The Mirza tells us:

"Almighty God sits high on the throne of sanctity and transcendent purity, while the masses of mankind are drowned in deep in the sinks of iniquity and the pits of darkness. On account of the absence of all resemblance between the transcendent Divine purity and human pollution, the generality of mankind does not occupy a position in which, available itself of the grace of God, it can attain salvation through its own efforts. Divine Wisdom and Mercy have, therefore, ordained that certain perfect individuals whom nature has endowed with excellences far above their fellow-beings, should serve as mediators between himself and the masses of mankind. Men of this type are granted by nature a proper share of the divine attributes and the best human qualities. Thus on account of their fitness for the realization of things Divine, they draw the grace of heaven towards them(selves) and call down upon them(selves) the blessings of God, and on account of their possessing the human qualities, they transmit the grace and blessings which they have drawn from above to their fellow-creatures below. Upon them the holy spirit descends from above and they infuse a spirit into others."<sup>1</sup>

The Mirza proceeds from this to state that sinlessness is essential in the intercessor. Further,

"What a person needs to be an intercessor is a two-fold relation, and reason attests to the truth of this fact. An extra-ordinary connection with God and a deep sympathy for human beings, can alone enable a man to intercede for the latter with the former.....Our Holy Prophet, having attained all the excellences of the nearness of God and his full share of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Mohammad Ali, *in loc. cit.* contents himself with saying that the "dark" natures among mankind are "lighted by the rays" from these "bright natures". "Such is the true nature of intercession."

Divine manifestation returned (i.e. from his 'ascension towards God'), invested with all the Divine morals, to humanity, and thus having attained all the excellences and holy attributes of humanity, sympathy and love of mankind, he had the other side of his nature perfected.....He thus acquired a position midway between God and men..... In his holy person were, therefore, combined the two qualifications of an intercessor."<sup>1</sup>

The orthodox masses put their faith not only in Muhammad's intercession but also in salvation by works;<sup>2</sup> and for this, too, abundant support is to be found in the Qur'ān:

"Happy now the believers who humble themselves in prayer, and who keep aloof from vain words. And who are doers of alms deeds, and who restrain their appetities.....and who tend well their trusts and their covenants and who keep strictly to their prayers: These shall be inheritors, who shall inherit paradise, and abide there for ever", **23**: 1-11.

"Give ye your alms openly? it is well. Do ye conceal them and give them to the poor? This, too, will be of advantage to you, and will do away your sins: and God is cognisant of your actions", **2**: 273.

"They whose balances shall be heavy, shall be the blest. But they whose balances shall be light—these are they who shall lose their souls, abiding in hell for ever", **23**: 104-5.

With this is included resignation to God and obedience to Muhammad:

"Whoso shall obey God, and His Apostle, and shall dread God and fear Him, these are they that shall be the blissful", **24**: 51. "But whoso believe, and do the things that are right, and believe in that which hath been sent down to Muhammad—for it is the truth from their Lord—their sins will He cancel, and dispose their hearts aright", **47**: 2.

---

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 10.

<sup>2</sup> *cp. A Mohammadan brought to Christ*, the autobiography of Rev. Imad-ud-din, D.D., pp. 12-14. Publ. C.M.S., London.

## CONFLICTING VIEWS AMONG MUSLIMS

Among Muslims, as sometimes among Christians, we find conflicting views on this important subject. For instance, Maulana Muhammad Ali in note (156) cites the following verse as summarizing the Quranic doctrine of salvation,

"Whoever submits himself entirely to Allah and is the doer of good to others, he has his reward with his Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve", 2: 106.

and adds,

"That, and only that, is salvation according to the Holy Qur'ān".

He confirms this impression in his latest book, where he devotes only one short paragraph to the question of *salvation* in a volume of 800 pages.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in his note (2746) on 91: 10 he says, "note the Quranic law of salvation: it is the purification of the soul from all dross that makes a man attain the goal"; and in his note (1571) on 19: 93, he says that the particular point stressed in this chapter "establishes the doctrine that for the forgiveness of a sinner God does not require to be paid any compensation.....This directly contradicts the doctrine of atonement, which is the basis of the theory of the divinity of Jesus".

A few years ago a poser on this question was put to the readers of a vernacular Muslim journal in North India,<sup>2</sup> which sought to know which of two persons would be *nājī*, probable recipient of salvation, and which *nārī*, doomed to the fire (*nār*) of Hell. The question was put thus:

The one who is born a Muslim, is regular at his daily prayers, keeps the prescribed fast, even says the midnight (optional)

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Religion of Islam*, A comprehensive discussion of its sources, principles and practices, p. 458. Pubd. by the Ahmadiyya Anjuman, Lahore, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> *Nigār*, an Urdu monthly, Lucknow, Jan. 1931.

prayer and is given to holy incantations, but his practical life is one of deceit and duplicity, evil and lies, ill-will towards others and misanthropy.

Or

One, a Brahmin who is born a *kāfir* and polytheist, wedded heart and soul to the worship of his idols, but, at the same time, his daily life is devoted to the service of his fellow-men, the care of orphans, and sympathy for widows, and who is a blessing to society?

The question in that form was submitted by the editor to 32 of the leading 'Ulama, doctors of Islamic law, of India. Only 16 undertook to make reply. The list of these contained the names of those supposed to be "the brightest stars in the religious firmament of Muslim India". An analysis of the published replies reveals the fact that while seven voted definitely in favour of the Muslim, nine were just as emphatically against the Hindu.<sup>1</sup> The most typical form of reply was, "The Muslim, however, sinful, is not *nārī*. Mere profession of Islam wards off Hell-fire. The *kāfir* no matter what a blessing his life may be to his fellow-men, will have no credit for it, but 'must pack off to hell'".

The correspondence called forth some characteristic comments from the editor of *The Light*, Lahore.<sup>2</sup> He said,

"In the first place, the question, as it stands, puts one on the wrong track. There is no such thing in Islam as *najāt*, in the sense of salvation.<sup>3</sup> It is a Christian idea imported into Islam, implying that sin is the normal state of this life, and the highest of our ambition should be to get rid of that sin. That is a basic mistake which Islam came to rectify. Islam gives *najāt* to man at his very birth, to man as such, be he a Muslim or a non-Muslim, believer or *kāfir*. All children, according to a saying of the Prophet, are born Muslims. So

---

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A, p. 217 for ten of these replies.

<sup>2</sup> I March, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> It is a remarkable fact that the term *najāt*, salvation, occurs only once in the Qur'ān, 40: 44.

*najāt* is given us as our very start. What is wanted of us, or better still, what we are here for and what religion has come for, is that by observing certain rules of conduct in this life, we may work out our self-unfoldment to the highest point." On another occasion the same paper stated that "Islam teaches that a pure and virtuous life is the only way to Heaven."

This is in keeping with a statement made in the same journal concerning that which the Lahore Anjuman believes and stands for—viz. that the Muslim can "generate" self-reliance. But the editor's remarks called forth an indignant protest from a reader who said, "it is ridiculous to say, according to Islam, that a man leading pure life in a moral sense, but not accepting the Unity of God, is entitled to salvation".<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, that was the kind of statement made in the course of a reply in this same paper, a few years previously, to a distracted correspondent in Baghdad, who had addressed to the editor the following pitiful letter:

"I am a girl of twenty, and from the age of twelve I have done every sin that you can think of. In fact, I have tasted of every leaf of the tree of life. Alas! there is nothing left for me but Hell when I die. I ask you sincerely what am I to do to be saved? I have put this question to a priest. He has told me to repent, but the truth is I cannot repent, as what I have done I have enjoyed doing, though it was a sin. Now will you advise me what I am to do so as to be saved from Hell?"

Again the momentous question—how does Islam propose to meet a case like that? Here is the reply that was given:

"Turn a new leaf. Lead a righteous life hence forward. This alone can wash off past sins. This is the only true atonement. Sins are washed off, the Qur'ān assures us, by good deeds and these alone."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 June, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> cp. 11: 116. *The Light*, August, 1927.

But that wretched girl's need was to have her love of sinning eradicated, and for that no remedy was forthcoming. After this can it be seriously contended that Islam possesses real knowledge of the way of salvation?

One last quotation before we leave this survey; it comes from the pen of Mr. Muhammad Ali, in the tract he wrote some years ago:

“The truth is that no one can attain to salvation by his own deeds, for *salvation can only be attained by the grace of God* ”.<sup>1</sup>

That, surely, is an intuition of the truth!

\* \* \* \*

If this rapid survey has done nothing else it has certainly brought us face to face with a great need and a great task—a service of supreme importance which we owe to Muslims. That task is to lift God's character out of the category in which Islam keeps it.<sup>2</sup> We need to lead them to a worthier view of the Divine Being, by stressing—as we have sought to do in an earlier chapter—His Holiness, Righteousness and Love. Their conception of Allah is so one-sided that they fail to grasp the truth about man, sin and salvation. It is for this reason, primarily, that they fail to see the real significance of Jesus Christ for sinful men.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Has any Book been revealed*, etc., p. 28. The italics are ours. The present writer recently heard Mr. Yusuf Ali make the statement, in a public lecture on the contribution of Islam to the religious life, "the grace of God goes out to meet the sinner in his need".

<sup>2</sup> "In the Muhammadan religion" wrote Hegel, "God is conceived only as 'Lord'. Now, although this conception of God is an important and necessary step in the development of the religious consciousness, e.g. 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom', it yet by no means exhausts the depths of the Christian idea of God". *Werke*, Vol. vi, p. 226.

This service also is required of us—that we help them to see the quality and costliness of Divine Forgiveness, and that sincere repentance is an indispensable condition of that forgiveness; though it must be admitted that many Muslims are aware of the primary importance of sincerity in this matter.

We can shew them that the measure of a man's penitence is the measure of his sense of sin,<sup>1</sup> and in this way go on to affirm that it is only by meditating on the fact, and meaning, and purpose of the Death of Christ on the Cross, that we can come to hold a worthier view of God and a more adequate conception of sin. It must always be a matter of grief to us that so many of them deprive themselves of just the very help man gets from the contemplation of this fact, by denying the fact itself.

#### WHAT, THEN, IS INVOLVED IN SALVATION?

In the entreaty of that Baghdad girl we perceive that she thought of salvation—as do many, not only Muslims—in it terms of "escape from Hell-fire". Yet in reality the problem is not so much to achieve escape from hell—desperate though some feel that need to be—as to have one's sinful nature changed and so to become reconciled to the God from whom, by sin, we are in fact "estranged". The very springs of man's nature, on its physical as well as its moral side, need to be cleansed and directed into right channels. The average man is sin-haunted, and, in consequence, distracted in mind and spirit. He needs the expulsive power of some new affection, which will unify life for him. This is the burden of all Biblical teaching, but not of the Qur'ān.

Just at this point it needs to be seen clearly by us, and explained no less clearly to the Muslim, that it is not God

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Luke, 7: 47.

who requires to be reconciled. He is anxious for the breach to be healed; He always is, for He is Love.<sup>1</sup> It is, therefore, entirely erroneous to think that Christ, by the sacrifice of Himself, was trying to extract something for men from a reluctant God. "The Cross", as has often been said, "did not change God's attitude to men, it revealed His eternal attitude".<sup>2</sup>

On the contrary, man is the obstacle to reconciliation—for he is self-willed and rebellious—enslaved in sin. It is our belief, as Christians, that whereas it is true that man is born into this world with a God-given capacity to respond to the influence of the Holy Spirit, yet just as truly he comes with "a transmitted tendency to selfishness", which is the very root of all sin. And experience, even Muslim experience, amply confirms this. Therefore the problem involved in salvation is to change, not God, but man, so as to make him *desire* to be reconciled to God, the Heavenly Father. It is in the face of this stark fact that we see how far from reality many a Muslim is when he declares there is no need for any such act as may be called atonement.

It becomes necessary at this place to consider the real nature of SIN. Rightly understood, it is an attitude of antagonism to the proffered love of the All-Holy and All-Loving God, and indifference to His Will. The incomparable parable of the Prodigal Son, in the teaching of Jesus, throws a flood of light both on the nature of sin and its consequences. By means of it we see that the son's offence lay not so much in his act, as in his attitude to his father. And, indeed, we get nearer to the truth of the matter when we pass from speaking of "sins" to the use of the comprehensive term SIN. The parable also brings out, with unmistakable clarity, the fact

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. John, 3: 16, "God *so* loved the world....."

<sup>2</sup> cp. Weatherhead, *His Life and Ours*, p. 276.

that sin's great achievement is, notwithstanding Muslim teaching, the tragic separation of man from God, the son from his Heavenly Father.<sup>1</sup>

This estrangement, and all it involves, is sin's "punishment". And no truth, in this connection, needs stronger emphasis than this—sin itself "punishes", in that it degrades and destroys man. Part of that punishment is first observed by others, in the depravity of soul and lack of self-respect in the sinner—a kind of death in life; but with the return of self-consciousness the sinner himself suffers the most awful torments of shame and agony of mind. Who says that any man, even a professed believer in Jesus Christ, escapes *such* punishment of sin—not to speak of civil punishment—on the ground that Christ died to save him? Such an assertion is only a travesty of the truth. And to those endowed with finer perception there is, in the realization by the sinner of his shame and separation from God, punishment enough; what need is there for more?

#### HOW DOES CHRIST'S DEATH AFFECT THE SINNER?

What bearing, then, has the death of Christ on man's sinful nature, and in what sense can it be said to effect salvation for him?

Let us consider briefly what it does not and cannot do. As just stated, it does not exempt the "believer", if he sin, from the proper punishment, moral or civil, involved in his offence. Neither can it restore his innocence again, nor yet efface entirely the consequences of sin, in the mind and in the body. That is the burden of Paul's lament as represented by an English poet:

"Point me the sum and shame of my betraying,  
Show me, O Love, thy wounds which I have made!

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Luke, 15: 11-32.

Yes, thou forgivest, but with all forgiving  
 Canst not renew mine innocence again:  
 Make thou, O Christ, a dying of my living,  
 Purge from the sin but never from the pain!

So shall all speech of now and of tomorrow,  
 All He hath shown me or shall show me yet,  
 Spring from an infinite and tender sorrow,  
 Burst from a burning passion of regret!"<sup>1</sup>

That is one of the precious results of the death of Christ—the creation of a highly sensitive *conscience*.

Yes, there are some things that that death cannot do for us, but, thank God, there meets us at the point of our need His GRACE, the grace that mitigates the worst results of sin and transmutes them into some rare thing which otherwise could not have been. Indeed, we "thankfully acknowledge that sin and weakness, overcome through the grace of God, have become a part of good which could not have been exactly as it is without them".<sup>2</sup>

#### GOD'S CHOSEN WAY

We are now in a position to state, without qualification, the chief significance of the death of Christ for sinful man. It is God's chosen means for reconciling the sinner to Himself: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself".<sup>3</sup> It is, for that reason, the best way for changing the sinful heart of man and bringing him back to God. It is not, as has at times been represented even by Christian writers, "the payment of a debt", or a kind of "compensation" to God<sup>4</sup>;

---

<sup>1</sup> F. W. H. Myres, *Saint Paul*.

<sup>2</sup> W. R. Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 19.

<sup>4</sup> Against the use by Jesus, once, of the metaphor *ransom* of Himself (Mt. 20: 28) we need to set His frequent description of His work as that of "saving the lost", cp. Lk. 19: 10, and the whole of Lk. 15. "Ransom", as used by Him, rather implies the release of the enslaved. cp. W. E. Wilson, *The Problem of the Cross*, pp. 71-72.

nor yet the satisfying of some laws of justice, as though God's laws were something other than Himself. No, God Himself takes the initiative in this matter. It is He who draws near to us, not we to Him—He comes to us "in Christ" and in the death of Christ, that He may impart to us the life abundant.

That death, in the first place, is the *revelation* of three great facts:

the suffering heart of God—"there is something like CALVARY at the heart of the Eternal".

the Divine hatred of sin and its utter condemnation—because God is Holy and because sin destroys His children, His soul "hates iniquity".<sup>1</sup>

the yearning of the Father's heart for His lost and erring children—the Love revealed in the Cross of Christ is God's *own* love.<sup>2</sup> Unless the Passion we look upon in that Cross were a Divine Passion it would not, it could not, avail to change man's relation to God.<sup>3</sup>

If, then, by His death Christ was not paying some debt instead of man, nor yet satisfying some laws of justice, what was it He achieved beyond revealing to us the heart of God? If, by way of answer, we were to compress the teaching of the New Testament writers into a single phrase, we should say it was that "He suffered on our behalf".

"He gave Himself up for me", says Paul, Gal. 2: 20.

"Christ also suffered on your behalf"; and

"He bore our sins", says Peter, 1 Pet. 2: 21 and 24.

For, in view of the Redemptive Purpose of God in Christ, it seemed "necessary that human experience as conditioned by the sin of men should become the personal experience

---

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah, 1: 14.

<sup>2</sup> Romans, 5: 8 (Rev. Ver.).

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B, p. 219.

of God the Son—not an object of external observation but of "inward feeling".<sup>1</sup>

This is a theme to which no one can do justice, one which no one can exhaust, yet we may try to understand something of what Jesus "suffered" there, and the sense in which it was "for us".

He suffered in that He bore the *shame* of man's sin—that shame was epitomized in the ribaldry of the soldiers, in the spitting, the scourging, and nakedness.<sup>2</sup>

"We see Thee best in Him who came,  
To bear for us the cross of shame."

He suffered in that He saw sin as it had never been seen before. He saw it even as God sees it—an affront to His Holy Love, and as blight in the soul of man.

His pure soul came into contact with sin in all its beastliness, and He loathed it with utter loathing, thereby condemning it. As at His Baptism, He here stooped down to identify Himself, as the Son of Man, with sinful men.

Moreover, He suffered in that He bore the bitter fruit of man's sin—the awful agony of a sense of "separation" from the Father; the withdrawal of the consciousness of that dear Presence. It was in the extreme anguish of utter desolation that the cry was wrung from His heart, in the words of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"<sup>3</sup>

Further, He experienced the bitterness of death *in such circumstances*—after a life in which He had spent Himself in the service of others; and, "unkindest cut of

---

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Temple, C.V., p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> cp. S. M. Zwemer, *The Glory of the Cross*, Ch. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 27: 46.

all", on a gibbet used for criminals. He drained the bitter cup.

Thus He offered to God, on our behalf, the sacrifice of a perfect human life, "made perfect through suffering"; and it was a sacrifice well-pleasing to God. But there was no "antagonism" between the Father and the Son, as has sometimes been represented, because in Christ "God Himself bowed down to bless us".

### HOW CHRIST SAVES US

Martin Luther used to say, you must *begin with the wounds of Christ*; and that is so. If we would form a true estimate as to what our sin means to God, we must see it in that Cross. Already we have tried to sound the depths of what that suffering meant to Jesus, and to understand something of the place and purpose in it of God Himself. Now, it is when the Holy Spirit takes these things of Christ and reveals them to us—when in that outrage and that agony we perceive, through the Spirit's help, what sin has caused the One who loves us—it is then that something happens.<sup>1</sup>

That tragic story,

stabs man broad awake—the dying Christ can make us hate sin like hell! This is what we mean by "conviction of sin".

it melts the hardened heart—inducing "contrition for sin".

and brings us back to God—i.e. "conversion to righteousness of life".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, it should be stated here that as widely various as the human personalities which apprehend this "revelation" is the work of that Redeeming Death; so that theories about it are not so much alternative, as complementary.

<sup>2</sup> An authentic story is told of how, some years ago, a daughter of godly parents sinned and deceived them about the matter. She had

Thus something has happened in man that makes it possible for the grace and power of God to work effectively in his heart. He now comes to God surrendering his life, and craving God's pardon; for man must have forgiveness if he is to live in God's sight. The way had been blocked before—blocked by man's antagonism to the Will of God. But with this change of heart the dynamic of God's forgiveness is released. God, we agree, is always willing to forgive—the Old Testament affords many reassurances on that point,<sup>1</sup> for "the principle of redemption is rooted in the very nature of things". Nevertheless, forgiveness only becomes *effective* in the case of the truly penitent.

And yet, of course, of this Divine mystery also it is true that there is much about it that we do not understand: but this we know—men *are* set free from the grip of sin by the indwelling Christ. He comes to our distracted and defeated lives as Master, and, by removing conflicts within, He unifies life around Himself.<sup>2</sup> That Cross of His has somehow proved, and still proves to be, the very power of God for all high endeavour and victorious living. Men everywhere need

---

consented to the sin and came to shame. Her mother tried to win her confidence and get her to speak the truth. She persistently denied the deed, until at last she consented to go with her mother to see the doctor. On their return home, when all was known, the mother said not a word, but with a broken heart kissed her daughter good night. When they met next day the daughter saw that her mother's hair had turned white in the night. There had been no word of reproach or bitterness on the mother's part; but the girl saw herself at last as the innocent eye of the mother had seen her, as love saw her, as love alone could suffer for her. That vision of love broke her own heart. After an agony of penitence she was won, in later years, to become a devoted servant of Jesus Christ.

<sup>1</sup> cp. Isaiah, **38**: 17; **43**: 25; Micah, **7**: 18-19.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Stanley Jones, *Victorious Living*, p. 29.

this assurance today, and what has proved true for one, will be found to be true for all.<sup>1</sup>

Thus man is "converted"; but, because of Muslim misunderstanding and misrepresentation, it needs to be made clear that conversion and full salvation are not one and the same thing, nor is that the teaching of the New Testament. Paul reminds us that we have to "work out" our salvation.<sup>2</sup> It is a life-long task, comprehended by the old term "sanctification". It is, indeed, a gravely misleading notion that, at the moment of conversion, or by mere confession of "belief" in Christ, salvation is so acquired that it is a completed process and, as such, is retained all through life. On the contrary, without subsequent growth in grace, conversion is robbed of a great deal of its meaning and value. Conversion is but the beginning, not the end; and no man is really converted unless he is constantly re-affirming his surrender.<sup>3</sup> This truth has been well-expressed in the poem on Saint Paul:

"Let no man think that sudden in a minute  
All is accomplished and the work is done:  
Though with thine earliest dawn thou shouldst begin it  
Scarce were it ended in thy setting sun."

But the last word is the truest and the most wonderful of all—it is *by grace* that we are saved, through faith; it is

---

<sup>1</sup> Muslims sometimes assert, on the basis of such sayings in the gospels as "I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel," (Mt. 15: 24), that the mission of Jesus was limited to the Jews. There is a sense in which that was true. Jesus at the time was concentrating upon that privileged race. He was giving them, to whom God had in the past shown such marked favour, one last chance to be God's instrument in the establishment of a world-wide kingdom. But that He and His Gospel were for all men, is repeatedly made clear, cp. Mt. 28: 19; Jo. 8: 12; 12: 32. See also a pamphlet, "*Did Jesus Christ found a Universal Religion?*"; L. E. Browne, C.L.S., Madras.

<sup>2</sup> Philip, 2: 12.

<sup>3</sup> cp. A. C. Underwood, *Conversion*, Part III.

not of ourselves, not by our works—"it is the gift of God".<sup>1</sup> Henceforth the love of God in Christ *constrains* us.<sup>2</sup>

We therefore, as Christians, cordially welcome those expressions by leading Muslims today, about the grace of God for sinful men.<sup>3</sup> For if it is true that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom", may we not hope that such perception of the need of the grace of God is the beginning of the discovery of His Redeeming Love in Christ?

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

- Clarke, W. N., *Outline of Christian Theology*, T. & T. Clark, 1901.  
 Moberly, R. C., *Atonement and Personality*.  
 Moberly, W. H., *The Atonement*, in *Foundations*, Macmillan, 1922.  
 Dale, R. W., *The Atonement*.  
 Forsyth, P. T., *The Cruciality of the Cross*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1909.  
 Denney, J., *The Death of Christ*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1911.  
 —*The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1917.  
 Wilson, W. E., *The Problem of the Cross*, Jas. Clarke, 1929.  
 Underwood, A. C., *Conversion*, Christian and non-Christian, Allen & Unwin, 1925.  
 Carnegie Simpson, *The Fact of Christ*, Hodder & Stoughton.  
 Gardner, W. R. W., *The Quranic Doctrine of God, Man, Sin and Salvation*, C.L.S., Madras, 1913-1916.  
 Gairdner, W. H. T., *The Muslim Idea of God*, C.L.S., Madras, 1909.  
 —*Aspects of the Redemptive Act of Christ*, C.L.S., 1916.  
 Goldsack, W., *God in Islam*, C.L.S., 1908.  
 Abdul Haq, *Doctrine of Atonement*, Mohammadan Tract Society, Lahore.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ephesians, 2: 8-9.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 5: 14.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 140.

CHAPTER  
VII  
THE VIRGIN BIRTH

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"The existence of a physical father, in whose lawful wedlock Jesus could have been born, cannot be rationally inferred from the circumstances attending the birth. The plain text of the Qur'ān also rejects such a supposition." (Qadiani) (pp. 156-7).

"The idea of the betrothal of Mary to Joseph and her subsequent conception by him is ridiculously absurd, and contradicts the plain words of the Holy Qur'ān." (Qadiani)

"It is a benefit which the Holy Qur'ān has benevolently conferred upon Jesus and his mother that it made millions of men hold their tongues with respect to the suspicious birth of Jesus. It enjoined upon them to believe in his birth without a father." (Qadiani) (p. 167).

"Much stress is laid upon the birth of Jesus, but what are we to say of the first man, the parent of mankind, who had neither father nor mother? We never consider him God" (p. 162).

"The birth of Jesus is unattended with any such peculiarity as may entitle him to divinity."

"The Quranic statement that Jesus had no father cannot serve as a weapon in the hands of the Christian controversialist.....He cannot avail himself of the testimony of the Holy Qur'ān unless he first admits it to be a Divine Revelation." (Ahmadi).

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VIRGIN BIRTH

#### A CHANGED ATTITUDE

With this chapter we turn to consider a different aspect of the controversy between Muslims and Christians—something foreign to the spirit of Islam, viz.: a new hostility to, and criticism of, Christ Himself. Hitherto His name has occupied a place of high regard among Muslims, and statements about Him in the Qur'ān and the Traditions have had much to do with this. But during the last fifty years or so, there has been apparent a spirit of vexation and bitterness, more especially among the rationalists, because of criticisms, by missionaries, of both Islam and Muhammad.

That this really is one of the causes is admitted:

"The blame lies at the door of Christian missionaries. Had they refrained from carping at the holy prophets of God and injuring Muhammadan feeling by especially levelling their abusive, contemptuous and captious attacks at the Holy Prophet of Arabia, the Muslims had no need to search the pages of Jewish writings and the gospels for the failings of Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

The source from which much of the material for this new attack is drawn was the one from whose writings we have just quoted, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1839-1908). His name is still execrated by millions of orthodox Muslims. Only recently the Muslim editor of a Lahore daily newspaper

---

<sup>1</sup> *Unity versus Trinity*, pp. 23-24, cp. *Has any Book been revealed*, etc., p. 15.

found occasion to recall what he described as "the slanderous ravings" of this man concerning Jesus Christ. He maintained that the Mirza had shown "studied hostility to the basic teachings of Islam; but nowhere is this hostility more pronounced than when he attacks Jesus Christ and [the] Virgin Mary". He stated that the Mirza, in his book *Chashma-i-Masihi* ("The Fountain-head of Christianity") had "openly accused the Virgin Mary of adultery, against the express teachings of the Holy Qur'ān", and that he constantly spoke of Jesus as a "bastard".<sup>1</sup>

The significance of this changed attitude should not escape us. It really means that certain desperate defenders of Islam and Muhammad have become aware that it is now a case of Christ or Muhammad; and so, as a retort to the comments of Christian critics on their prophet, they have gone the way of a certain type of Western rationalist, borrowing their very arguments, in their determination to degrade the Founder of the Christian Faith.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, much of the new anti-Christian polemic differs from the old in that Jesus Himself, not dogmas about Him, is made the chief object of attack. It thus comes about that, in spite of the plain statements of the Qur'ān and the common belief of Muslims, the Ahmadis now deny His supernatural birth, His miracles, and His sinless character. We shall be considering these matters in this and the two succeeding chapters. Moreover, they repudiate the idea, also held by the great majority of Muslims, that Jesus is alive, and assert that, since He died a natural death, there was no

---

<sup>1</sup> The Urdu *Zamindar*, 24 November, 1934. The editor protested against the Mirza's books being allowed "unrestricted publicity" throughout the length and breadth of India.

<sup>2</sup> cp. *The People of the Mosque*, p. 230.

"resurrection on the third day", and that He will not "come again".<sup>1</sup>

A subsidiary, but none the less important, subject of Ahmadi attack is the contention, also borrowed from certain Western writers, that Christianity is indebted for its main ideas concerning Christ, to the mystery cults.<sup>2</sup>

Acquaintance with much of this new polemical literature makes it evident that Christian apologists, in their eagerness to establish their contentions, have at times used careless language as to what belongs to the essence of the Christian faith. This has not only made for confusion in the minds of Muslims, but has afforded opportunity to these new opponents to make capital out of unguarded and incompatible statements. Thus, within the compass of one small book of 160

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. *Muhammad and Christ*, by Muhammad Ali, Ch. 6; also the notes on 2: 68; 3: 138; 21: 95; 23: 102; 39: 43 in his commentary on the Qur'ān.

<sup>2</sup> cp. "Does not this similarity involve an assumption that the events in connection with the life of Jesus were borrowed from the same sources? (i.e. pagan cults). All these mythical gods were of virgin birth; they came to redeem humanity from sin and its consequent punishment, and to redeem it through their blood; their death for this purpose occurring on the Friday before Easter Sunday, on which day they all rose from their tombs". *The Sources of Christianity*, p. 13, by Khwaja Kamal-ud-din, Woking, 1925. It is the fashion nowadays to blame Paul for much of this—"Paul professedly 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews' becomes a 'Hellenist of the Hellenists'." But several facts rule out such a possibility, (a) the early Church consistently refused to come to terms with the syncretistic religions, (b) it was precisely this refusal that led to the great persecutions, and (c) what impressed the pagan world in the new religion was, not the familiarity, but the *difference*. cp. J. S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, pp. 64-80. A most effective reply to Kamal-ud-din has been written by Rev. Barakatullah, Lahore, in Urdu, *Nuru'l-Hudā*, P.R.B.S., Lahore.

pages we find the President of the "Ahmadiyya Anjuman" in Lahore, making these assertions:

"The very basis of the Christian religion is laid in the exclusive sinlessness of Jesus Christ" (p. 48).

"This low view of human nature (sc. original sin) forms the foundation-stone of the Christian religion" (p. 50).

"The Christian religion laid its foundation on the death of Christ on the cross and his subsequent rising" (p. 159).<sup>1</sup>

Again,

"Miracles are the only evidence on which the Deity of Jesus is supported."<sup>2</sup>

The hostility of which we have been speaking is manifested in some prefatory remarks to articles published a few years ago in the Ahmadi Press, Lahore, on the birth of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> The writer there stated that,

"Islam and Christianity are engaged in a deadly struggle for world-mastery. It is, therefore, in the best interest of Islam that Jesus should be brought down from his divine pedestal. In crediting him with a miraculous birth as well as a miraculous flight to heaven, the Musalmans are only confirming the Christian contention that Jesus was divine, not human. It is, therefore, the crying call of the day to prove that Jesus was born in exactly the same way as any other man is born, and that, like all the rest of mortals, he too had to drink the cup of death."

In making this his object the Ahmadi writer is well aware that even now the average Muslim "gets positively shocked" at the very idea that Jesus was born of a human father;

---

<sup>1</sup> *Muhammad and Christ*. This book sets out to demolish a 12-page Urdu tract, *Haqāiq-i-Our'ān*, believed by Muhammad Ali to have been the work of a Christian writer. But that is not so; it was stated to have been by a friendly Muslim maulvi—14 points from the Qur'ān to show the superiority of Jesus.

<sup>2</sup> *Unity versus Trinity*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> Since issued in the form of a booklet entitled, "*Birth of Jesus*", by Dr. Basharat Ahmad, 1930.

for "unfortunately the popular belief among the Musalmans also imitates the Christian superstition that Jesus was born without the instrumentality of a human father". And he rebukes such for their inconsistency, in that while holding to the view of a supernatural birth they "refuse the conclusion", viz. that Jesus was divine.

#### ORTHODOX AND RATIONALIST IN CONFLICT

Since these contradictory views are held partly as a result of differing interpretations of the relevant passages in the Qur'ān, it will be well, at this point, if we briefly examine what is said there about the birth of Jesus.

There is a long passage, in a chapter named after her, about Mary and her Son, on the basis of which Muslims hitherto have implicitly believed in His supernatural birth. Part of the statement runs as follows:

"We sent our spirit (i.e. Gabriel) to her, and he took before her the form of a perfect man. She said 'I flee for refuge from thee to the God of Mercy! If thou fearest Him, begone from me'. He said, 'I am only a messenger from thy Lord, that I may bestow on thee a holy son'. She said, 'How shall I have a son, when man hath never touched me? and I am not unchaste'. He said: 'Even so shall it be. Thy Lord hath said: 'Easy is this with Me; and We will make him a sign to mankind, and a mercy from Us. For it is a thing decreed' .....Then she came with the babe to her people, bearing him. They said, 'O Mary! now thou hast done a strange thing! O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of wickedness, nor unchaste thy mother'. And she made a sign to them, pointing towards the babe.<sup>1</sup> It (from the cradle) said, 'Verily, I am the servant of God; He hath given me the Book, and He hath made me a prophet'.....(I am to be) 'duteous to her that bare me'.....This

---

<sup>1</sup> "The child came to her rescue. By a miracle he spoke, defended his mother, and preached—to an unbelieving audience", Mr. Yusuf Ali, in his note (2482) on this passage.

is Jesus, the son of Mary; this is a statement of the truth concerning which they doubt. It beseemeth not God to beget a son. Glory be to Him! when He decreeth a thing He only saith to it, 'Be' and it is," **19**: 16-41.

A similar statement about God's decree is made at another place,

"Verily, Jesus is as Adam in the sight of God" (literally: the similitude of 'Isā is as the similitude of Adam, i.e. neither of them had a human father). "He created him of dust: He then said to him 'Be' and he was." **3**: 52. Commenting on this verse Mr. Yusuf Ali says, "as stated in verse 59 below<sup>1</sup> Jesus was created by a miracle, by God's word, 'Be' and he was".<sup>2</sup>

There is in the former passage such striking similarity to features in Luke's narrative<sup>3</sup>; such care to clear Mary's character and to rid men's minds of the idea that God *begat* Jesus, that the conclusion seems inescapable—Muhammad, while repudiating the base insinuations of slanderous Jews regarding Mary's chastity, yet believed Jesus to have been conceived by an act of the Divine Will. This, at any rate, has been the view of Muslims through the centuries; and it would be easy to cite numerous statements from modern writers in support of it. For instance, even Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote,

"The Muslims have, in obedience to the Revelation of God granted to them through their Holy Prophet, admitted the miraculous conception and the birth of Jesus, and it forms a part of their belief."<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Yusuf Ali, in the most recent commentary in English, says,

---

<sup>1</sup> Rodwell, verse 52.

<sup>2</sup> Note 381.

<sup>3</sup> Luke, 1: 26-38.

<sup>4</sup> *Unity versus Trinity*, p. 38. cp. *Proof of Prophet Mohammad*, etc., p. 5—"Jesus Christ is begotten without a father".

"Mary the mother of Jesus was unique, in that she gave birth to a son by special miracle, without the intervention of the customary physical means."<sup>1</sup>

But now the Ahmadi author of the booklet referred to above, seeks to establish the conclusion that the birth of Jesus took place according to the ordinary course of nature, and would have his readers believe that he finds support for his contention in the language of the Qur'ān as well as in the gospels. He argues that fatherhood is indispensable in all creation—a law of nature and, being God's law, immutable, **4: 13; 76: 2**. There can be no exception to the universal rule. Why, then, try to make an exception in the case of Jesus? Again,

"If Jesus was really born in some superhuman way he must have been superhuman in nature too. The whole point of the Quranic argument is that Jesus was born in quite a human way and hence he could not but be human. The no-father theory takes the whole bottom out of the argument and is therefore anti-Quranic."<sup>2</sup>

He denies that **3: 52** points to a supernatural birth of Jesus.

As for the narratives in Matthew and Luke, he says that no reliance can be placed on these because they are acknowledged to be late additions and, as such, are unauthentic.<sup>3</sup> He then declares,

"The Christian doctrine as to the immaculate conception of Jesus is based on the well-known prophecy of Isaiah as to the advent of Immanuel"—Isaiah, **7: 14-15**, and on Matthew's "deliberate attempt to fit in this prophecy somehow" into his "tall-tale description of Jesus' birth". Everybody knows, he says, that Matthew uses the Greek word

---

<sup>1</sup> Note 382 on **3: 37**.

<sup>2</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, the account does not come down to us separated by a long interval of years from the rest of the story; and even radical critics admit that the contents of Luke, chh. I and 2, may have been in circulation in the Jewish-Christian communities of that 1st century.

*parthenos* which is not a translation of the Hebrew 'almah,' for that word means "a young woman" (of marriageable age).

But the sufficient answer to this is that the Hebrew word does not exclude the idea of virgin; and as for Matthew, he quotes Isaiah in order to repel the innuendoes against Mary's honour.

It is an interesting fact that a highly educated Muslim prepared and published a very convincing reply to the Ahmadi booklet.<sup>1</sup> In this he confines himself, as a Muslim, to the evidence of the Qur'ān for the virgin birth of Jesus, "which is accepted by Muslims according to the statements of the Holy Qur'ān"; and declares, against the arguments of the Ahmadi writer, that the Quranic statements "are too clear to be distorted to serve any such purpose". He proceeds:

"That Jesus was born without father is accepted by all Muslims except the Motazilites, or the so-called Rationalists who discredit everything which does not appeal to their conscience or sentiment. The famous Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Sayyid Ameer Ali were the exponents of this school in modern times. The Mirzais of Lahore have adopted the principles of the Motazilites for the sake of conveniently reconciling science and religion." He blames them for rejecting what the founder of their sect accepted, and quotes from the writings of the Mirza and present-day Qadianis to prove that they "do not believe Joseph to be the father of Jesus, and that Mary gave birth to Jesus without the agency of man".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Birth of Jesus*, by Maulana Ahmad, M.A., of Meerut College, Pubd., Delhi, 1933.

<sup>2</sup> While it is true, as this writer says, that the Qadianis (or *Mirzais*, adherents of the original sect founded by Mirza Ghulani Ahmad) do uphold the supernatural birth of Jesus, yet they use it *as proof of his inferiority*. Thus, "The virgin birth.....is an illustration of parthenogenesis which is normally seen in the lower animals, as a result of some pathological stimulus.....it is not a normal process of development, but a secondary or degenerate reproduction; it does not belong

"It is clearly given in the Qur'ān, 4: 156 (Rodwell 155) that the Jews accused Mary of fornication, and were cursed by God for that". He says, "this insistence on the purity of Mary's character seems superfluous and irrelevant if there was not occasion for doing so" He stresses God's words of reassurance and explanation to Mary, "Even so", at 19: 21 and 3: 41, and finds confirmation in a similar phrase used to Zacharias, 3: 35. The phrase, he says, explains and confirms "the deviation of nature from its set course". Rebutting Dr. Basharat's suggestion that Mary showed lack of faith, he says, "God gave a son to a virgin as He gave to a barren woman. The birth of John lends support to the birth of Jesus". And against Maulana Muhammad Ali's contention he says, "The throes of childbirth (19: 23) cannot prove that Mary had conceived after being touched by a man. Jesus was after all a human being. This verse is conclusive proof of the fatherless birth of Jesus. Mary's desire, here expressed, to be "a thing forgotten" is significant. This desire was quite according to human nature, because she had conceived without being married and had withdrawn to a remote place out of shame. Then a voice called out to her 'Grieve not!'."

"The above verses remove all the doubts about the virgin birth of Jesus. Dr. Basharat Ahmad has made a muddle of the whole thing and rendered them meaningless."

Reference has been made above to Maulana Muhammad Ali's comments on the passage from Sura *Maryam*. This is what he actually says about Mary's pains.

"This shows that Mary gave birth to Jesus under the ordinary circumstances which women experience in giving birth to children.....The reference to the throes of child-birth clearly shows that an ordinary human child was coming into the world and thus it bespeaks a denial of his divinity." Again on 3: 52, he says that the only meaning is that, as Adam, so was Jesus, "created from dust and then chosen or purified

---

to the higher order of the physical law but to the lower. It does not exalt Christ, but lowers his dignity as a normal man". M. Nawaz, M.B., B.S., in *The Review of Religions*, 1927.

by Allah.....there is no reference to Jesus being brought into existence without the agency of a male parent. The controversy is here carried on with the Christians, and it is their false belief in the divinity of Jesus that is here condemned."<sup>1</sup>

These quotations from the published writings of the Ahmadis make it abundantly clear that, in this matter, they are labouring under the misapprehension that Christians find special proof for their belief in the divinity of Christ in the Gospel narratives of His supernatural birth. But that is not so. On the contrary, neither the question of His "Sonship", nor what is meant by His "sinlessness", nor yet His "Divinity", is bound up with the question of His birth. And while all Christians believe in the Incarnation that does not warrant us in saying that belief in the Virgin Birth is a necessary pre-requisite to that belief. The late Bishop Gore, speaking of the faith of the early Christians, quite rightly insisted that, "The Virgin Birth was certainly not part of the original Apostolic message. It was not among the grounds on which original belief in Jesus was claimed".<sup>2</sup>

The Christian apologist's attitude to this subject, therefore, makes it necessary for him to repudiate, as in the case of the doctrine of the Trinity, the contention of many Muslims that we have here something that is of the essence of the Christian Gospel, and, as such, vital for Christian faith. The fact is, that were the gospels to contain no reference whatever to the manner of Jesus' birth, Christians would still maintain their belief in His Deity, for it is on quite other grounds that they base their conviction.

---

<sup>1</sup> Notes 1539 and 443.

<sup>2</sup> *A New Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 31.

## WHAT OF THE SILENCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Objection has sometimes been raised against this doctrine of the Church on the ground that no reference to the Virgin Birth is to be found in the rest of the New Testament. Though this might at first appear to be a formidable difficulty, yet both the scantiness of such reference as we have and also the remarkable silence elsewhere, have their reasonable explanations.

From the fact that these accounts are found in Matthew and Luke we can safely conclude that the doctrine was current in the Jewish-Christian Church in Palestine in the latter half of the first century. By that time Jewish slanders were already in circulation. The very basis of these was the ascertained fact that Jesus had not been born in normal wedlock. The Church was therefore compelled to answer base imputations, and thus arose the necessity for the account we find in Matthew.

Further, Joseph knew the facts, and knew too what the Law permitted,<sup>1</sup> nevertheless he did not divorce Mary. That is something which goes to prove that he was convinced of her innocence. Moreover, it also shows that though Joseph is spoken of in the gospels as Jesus' father, yet Jesus was not his son. In accepting Mary as innocent, Joseph accepted also her child, and this saved her from the cruelty of unjust disgrace. He thus became the legal father of Mary's child, and is spoken of as such in the gospels. It is possible that it was he who informed Matthew how matters stood. On the other hand, the silence could be accounted for by Mary's natural hesitancy to disclose the fact to the apostles until long after the death of Jesus.

In any case we can say without fear of contradiction, that had it been intended by Him who overruled the sacred records

---

<sup>1</sup> See Deuteronomy, 24; 1

that belief in the Virgin Birth should be vital to salvation, we should have had clear and constant reference to it in the New Testament. As it is, we cannot imagine Jesus insisting on an acceptance of these birth narratives "as a condition or preliminary of personal salvation".<sup>1</sup>

Again, there is no clear indication from his writings that Paul was aware of the virgin birth. But in his case we need to bear in mind that from a very early date he had himself proclaimed Christ's Deity quite apart from any reference to His birth.<sup>2</sup> And, as has often been pointed out, in the circumstances in which he announced the Gospel to converts from paganism, any account of a supernatural birth would, in all probability, have left an entirely erroneous impression; apart from which he knew that it did not belong to the essence of the Gospel message.

We may sum up the whole matter in the words of the late Bishop Gore: "If therefore there was a divine providence presiding over the incidents of our Lord's appearance in the world, certainly we must judge that it was God's intention that His first apostles should come to believe in Him in virtue only of what they saw in Him or heard from Him, and that their converts' faith should be based on the word of those whom He specially trained and inspired to be His witnesses.....Certainly the faith of the world in Jesus as the Christ, and the Son of God, was to rest on nothing else than the personal testimony of the 'chosen witnesses', coupled with the witness of the Holy Scriptures".<sup>3</sup>

#### ARE THE NARRATIVES BORROWED?

It has been suggested by Muslims, following a lead from the West, that the idea of birth from a virgin was borrowed

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., p. 531.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Acts, 9: 20.

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 315-6.

from pagan sources. Plausible as this may seem, there is no valid reason for accepting it, and there is much to be said against it.

When a story of the abnormal occurs in pagan myths it is frequently elaborated with indecent detail. They do not tell of virgin birth at all, but of gods possessed with human passions.<sup>1</sup> A very different tone pervades the whole of the New Testament, and this makes it utterly unlikely that the authors of the Gospel narrative would have stooped to filch material from such degrading stories to write up their account. Besides which, scholars have failed to find any ethnic parallel to birth from a pure virgin, while so great an authority as Harnack definitely ruled out the possibility. "The conjecture", he said, "that the idea of a birth from a virgin is a heathen myth which was received by Christians contradicts the entire earliest developments of Christian tradition".<sup>2</sup> Nor can we believe that the narratives of the birth are the creations of Jewish Christians, because the Jews exalted marriage, not virginity.

On the other hand, one is struck by the exquisite reserve shown by both Matthew and Luke in speaking of this event, lest what is said should be misconstrued. This reticence, together with the freshness and purity of the narratives, is evidence in their favour. There is an entire absence of morbid reflection and vulgar curiosity, such as mar the pages of pagan myth, the apocryphal gospels, and the literature of Islam. If we would see for ourselves what unrestrained human imagination can do we should read some of these fabrications.

For instance, in the popular *Qisasu'l-Anbiyā*, "Stories of the Prophets", current throughout the Muslim world, the compiler must needs explain what Gabriel did to Mary after

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., 530.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Bishop Gore, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

informing her of the Divine message, "Easy is this with me", **19: 21**. We are told that "he breathed in the opening of her chemise; and she had taken it off; and when he departed from her Mary put it on, and so she conceived Jesus, on whom be peace". There follows at this point an indecent explanation of the mode of conception'.<sup>1</sup>

Consider next the following extracts from one of the apocryphal gospels.

"And Annas the scribe turned him about and saw Mary great with child. And he went hastily to the priest and said unto him: 'Joseph, to whom thou bearest witness (that he is righteous) hath sinned grievously'. And the priest said, 'Wherein'? And he said, 'The virgin whom he received out of the temple of the Lord, he hath defiled her and married her by stealth, and hath not declared it to the children of Israel'. And the priest answered and said: 'Hath Joseph done this?' And Annas the scribe said: 'Send officers and thou shalt find the virgin great with child'. And the officers went and found as he had said, and they brought her together with Joseph unto the place of judgment. And the priest said, 'Mary, wherefore hast thou done this, and wherefore hast thou humbled thy soul and forgotten the Lord thy God, thou that wast nurtured in the Holy of Holies and didst receive food at the hand of an angel and didst hear the hymns and didst dance before the Lord, wherefore hast thou done this?'

"But she wept bitterly, saying: 'As the Lord my God liveth I am pure before Him and I know not a man'. And the priest said unto Joseph: 'Wherefore hast thou done this?' And Joseph said: 'As the Lord my God liveth I am pure concerning her'. And the priest said: 'Bear no false witness, but speak the truth: thou hast married her by stealth and hast not declared it unto the children of Israel, and hast not bowed thine head under the Mighty Hand that thy seed should be blessed'. And Joseph held his peace.

"And the priest said: 'Restore the virgin whom thou didst receive out of the temple of the Lord'. And Joseph was

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. S. M. Zwemer, *The Moslem Christ*, p. 62, note.

full of weeping. And the priest said: 'I will give you to drink of the water of conviction of the Lord, and it will make manifest your sin before your eyes'. And the priest took thereof and made Jesus drink and sent him into the hill-country. And he returned whole. He made Mary also drink and sent her into the hill-country. And she returned whole. And all the people marvelled, because sin appeared not in them. And the priest said: 'If the Lord God hath not made your sin manifest, neither do I condemn you'. And he let them go. And Joseph took Mary and departed unto his house rejoicing, and glorifying the God of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

It is plain for all to see that these narratives have been soiled and debased by the coarse touch of a type of writer very different from those who gave us the narratives in Matthew and Luke. "The one account is the reverent description of fact, the others the unclean imagination of fiction". The pity of it is, as scholars unanimously agree, that details for the story in the Qur'ān have been most obviously drawn from these very apocryphal gospels, which the Christian Church has never recognized.<sup>2</sup> It is sheer presumption, therefore, for Muslims to claim that it has been the Qur'ān and Islam that have saved the names of Mary and Joseph from slander and calumny.<sup>3</sup> Joseph's action alone, as recorded in Matthew, was sufficient vindication.

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 44-45; also *The Gospel of the Birth of Mary*, in *Bibles of other Nations*, pp. 97-109.

<sup>2</sup> cp. **19**: 16-41.

<sup>3</sup> cp. "With one word the Qur'ān removes all slur that attaches to the birth of Jesus Christ.....it calls him 'a soul from God'; otherwise he would have been known as a bastard": Khwaja Kamal-ud-din, *Muslim India*, I, iii, p. 89. See also Maulana Muhammad Ali's note 1546, on **19**: 37. The obvious rejoinder to all such remarks is that there is, in the gospels, no suggestion of any slur on the names of Jesus and His mother. These Muslim writers claim too much, for, as one of themselves has pointed out, it was only among *hostile* Jews that any calumny existed.

Finally, what needs to be stressed—for it receives great prominence, alike in the Gospel account as in the Qur'ān—is not the absence of a father (that is a negative argument), but the overshadowing of God's Holy Spirit, something positive. It is this that makes it possible for us to assert that with Jesus, and through Jesus, there has entered into the current of human life a new stream, a pure power, which has *not* been derived from humanity. "It is the creative inflow of the Unseen.....a new humanity, unique in perfectness of initial constitution, but grafted by God's creative act into the older stem".<sup>1</sup> This fact is an effective reply to the blasphemous remark that the tainted blood of His ancestors flowed in Jesus' veins. No! "the succession of sin in a direct line was made to cease in Him ... If He took heredity, it is true also that He gives us *His*".<sup>2</sup> As the Fourth Gospel joyfully declares, Grace and Truth have come to us "by Jesus Christ".<sup>3</sup>

And when all is said, we need to remind ourselves that the case we are considering cannot be treated as that of an ordinary man. The narrative of the life of Jesus in the gospels itself prevents us from doing that. We are dealing with the CENTRAL FIGURE in history, with One whose earthly career closed with the Resurrection. Of *Him* it is not unreasonable to hold that a supernatural entry provides but a fitting prelude to the life He lived. Indeed, *apart from Him*, the idea of a supernatural conception is not even plausible.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., p. 533.

<sup>2</sup> Rendell Harris, *Union with God*, chap. on "Grace and Heredity", p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> John, 1: 17.

<sup>4</sup> H. R. Mackintosh, *op. cit.*, p. 527.

## BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

- Orr, J., *The Virgin Birth of Christ*.  
Mackintosh, H. R., *The Person of Christ*, Appendix.  
Zwemer, S. M., *The Moslem Christ*, Oliphants, 1912.  
Rendell Harris, *Union with God*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1896.  
James, M. R., *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford, 1926.  
Stewart, J. S., *A Man in Christ*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1935.  
Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad and Christ*, Lahore, 1921.  
Kamaluddin, *The Sources of Christianity*, Woking, 1925.  
Basharat Ahmad, *Birth of Jesus*, Lahore, 1929.  
Maulana Ahmad, *Birth of Jesus*, Delhi, 1933.  
Matthews, Capt., *Mishkātu'l Masābih*, Eng. trans. Calcutta, 1809-10.  
Goldsack, W., *Selections from Muhammadan Traditions*, C.L.S., 1923.

[Blank Page]

CHAPTER  
VIII  
CHRIST'S MIRACLES

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"Miracles are the only evidence on which the deity of Jesus is supported—but to speak of his miracles as proof of his divinity is to produce one assertion in support of another" (pp. 177f).

"Had any such occurrence (i.e. raising the dead) actually taken place.....the Jews would have followed Jesus to death instead of planning his death" (pp. 176f).

"The miracles of Jesus are simply variations, in many cases much inferior, of the miracles recorded in the books of the prophets, whom no man ever dreamt of deifying."

"Jesus' life is full of things which no man can do, miracles of healing, stilling the storm, and so on" (p. 185).

"The gospels are abundant with Jesus' signs. But from certain verses it is evident that Jesus could not show a sign, e.g. Mark 8:12 contains a plain denial of signs" (p. 179).

"The wonderful works of Jesus were invented afterwards, because Mark 8: 12 contains a plain denial of signs" (pp. 174, 176, 182).

"You say Jesus never used his miraculous powers for himself, but Lk. 4: 30 and John 8:59 mention that he did" (p. 181).

"If Jesus were God, he could have known before that the fig-tree was fruitless and should not have gone to it" (p. 181).

"The alleged miracles of Jesus are pure romance, so long as they are unaccompanied with solid proof" (pp. 182-5).

## CHAPTER VIII

### CHRIST'S MIRACLES

The wonderful works of Jesus have gained such a place of fame in Muslim lands that to this day a *tabīb*, or *hakīm*, if asked why he does not cure some desperately sick person, is likely to reply "Am I 'Isā, that I can bring the dead to life?" The present writer cherishes a stanza in Urdu, the tribute of a devout Musalman to the miracle-working Christ, which may be construed as follows:

"The dead in a moment rose at the Name of Jesus,  
Lepers and the blind were healed at His command.  
O Aziz! My desire and hope of salvation is  
Always in Jesus Christ, Highly Exalted!"

Yet attempts are now being made to discredit even these. For instance, the Ahmadi writer does so in the book from which we have quoted, with the object of denying Christ's divinity and so His superiority to Muhammad. He says there, and with some truth if we have regard to the views of earlier apologist, "in the miracles wrought by Christ, as in nothing else, is thought to lie the argument for his divinity". He reveals, all too clearly, his eagerness to establish his thesis when he goes on to say, "the central fact in the Christian religion is a miracle (viz.: the resurrection); if then Jesus did not rise from the dead the Christian faith and the preaching of Christianity is in vain".<sup>1</sup>

In view of such an attitude on the part of the rationalist group it becomes necessary to indicate what, in reality, is the ground for continued belief in the miracles of Christ, and to

---

<sup>1</sup> *Muhammad and Christ*, p. 17.

point out the error that lies both in the traditional Christian point of view regarding them, and in Maulana Muhammad Ali's treatment of the whole subject.

When the latter says, "The miraculous in a prophet's life is needed to assure the people of the truth of his message", he not only endorses, though perhaps unwittingly, part of the traditional view about miracles, but admits, in effect, that miracles actually took place. This is implied, also, in his dictum that "the best evidence of miracles consists in the effect they produce"; though he seems to make this a criterion merely to show that those attributed to Christ lack such support. He asks what "success" Jesus obtained through these works of his, and reasons as follows to show that there was very little.

"Many" and "all" are said in different places in the gospels to have been "healed" by Christ, *therefore* "many" and "all"—in fact, multitudes—should have "believed" on him. Yet we know that, in spite of these reported miracles, Christ's disciples were both few and poor in number, quite the reverse of what we should have expected had the miracles really taken place. All of which, he argues, proves that the "stories" were invented afterwards, in order "to compensate for the apparent failure" of Christ's mission.<sup>1</sup>

Then, flying in the face of the plain language of the gospels and with strange inconsistency, he comes to the conclusion that "the whole fault lies with Jesus' too free use of symbolical language". In support of this he actually cites the answer of Jesus to the Baptist in prison,<sup>2</sup> at which place, he says, the word *poor* is used symbolically; "for he (Christ) was not actually preaching the gospel only to the poor"....."but his words being misunderstood, it was thought necessary

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. also his note 428 on 3: 43, a verse quoted on the next page.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Mt. 11: 2-6.

to add to the story of his life these stories of the raising of the dead to life".<sup>1</sup>

### THE TESTIMONY OF THE QUR'ĀN

But what, then, of the evidence of the Qur'ān, which Muslims in general most firmly believe and upon which is based Jesus' reputation for being a great physician? Here are the words:

"Now have I come to you with a sign from your Lord: out of clay will I make for you, as it were, the figure of a bird; and I will breathe into it and it shall become by God's leave, a bird. And I will heal the blind and the leper; and by God's leave will I quicken the dead and I will tell you what ye eat, and what ye store up in your houses. Truly, in this will be a sign to you, if ye are believers." **3**: 43.

Is the Qur'ān also to be charged with similar "necessary addition" in regard to the reputation of Jesus? Realizing the dilemma this Ahmadi author observes that symbolical language is used in the Qur'ān of Muhammad also; and he cites "O ye faithful! make answer to the appeal of God and His apostle when he calleth you to that which giveth you life", **8**: 24. And so, according to the Qur'ān, not Jesus only but Muhammad as well is said to "raise the dead". The Qur'ān, the writer explains, means here the "spiritually dead", for Muhammad could only have given life to such; therefore the Qur'ān must not be forced to yield a meaning for Jesus that it cannot have for Muhammad. Again he says,

"To understand the full significance of this passage it is necessary to bear in mind that the chief characteristic of Jesus' speeches is that he spoke in parables and preferred to clothe his ideas in allegorical language".....This statement about clay birds "is perfectly intelligible if taken as a parable

---

<sup>1</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 29.

.....a prophet's dignity is much above such actions as the making of toy birds"  
 .....The Qur'ān "again and again speaks of the Divine Being *as the Creator of everything*, so that there is nothing of which anyone else may be said to be a creator."<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Yusuf Ali's comment (note 390) on this passage is of another kind.

"This miracle of the clay birds is found in some of the apocryphal gospels; those of curing the blind and the lepers and raising the dead are in the canonical gospels. The original Gospel was not the various stories written afterwards by disciples, but the real Message taught direct by Jesus".

He adduces no proof for his assertion that they were written afterwards. As a matter of fact our oldest extant documents contain them. But we quite agree with Muhammad Ali's statement that the making of clay birds is not in keeping with the dignity of Jesus. It is no wonder that the Church rejected the apocryphal source from which the Quranic story is drawn.

But there need be no confusion in the mind of the unprejudiced reader of the gospels. There, too, we can find passage after passage to parallel the Ahmadi writer's quotation from the Qur'ān, by way of illustrating Jesus' use of strictly symbolical language: e.g. "The words I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life".<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, one must confess astonishment at such a misreading of the gospels and at the unreasonable conclusion which Muhammad Ali draws from the actual record of these miracles. Take one aspect on which he lays particular stress—the question of the number of Jesus' followers. How is it that he failed to come to quite another conclusion? He must have known, for instance, that on the occasion when ten lepers were cleansed Jesus Himself expressed pain

---

<sup>1</sup> note 428 on 3: 48.

<sup>2</sup> John, 6: 63.

surprise that only one of them returned to praise God, "Were there none found to give glory to God, save this stranger, a Samaritan?"<sup>1</sup> What, again, would have been the sense of Jesus' reply to the anxious question of the imprisoned Baptist if, in reality, He had not actually healed the blind, made the lame to walk, cleansed the leper, made the deaf hear, and raised the dead? If, in fact, John's own disciples had not, "at that moment", *witnessed with their own eyes* such mighty works?<sup>2</sup>

#### USE OF THE MIRACLES BY THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Now, part of our difficulty in this matter of the miracles of Jesus arises from the fact that for a long time in the past they were assigned by Christians to the sphere of apologetics, and have been regarded as evidential portents—useful as *proofs*.

Christianity must be in a bad way if and when it seeks to rest its case, in the main, on miracles. That this has been done cannot be denied. It is recorded, for instance, that an aged monk who met Ibn Tūlūn in Egypt, in 873 A.D. unashamedly confessed that Christianity was incapable of intellectual proof! He could only suppose that its acceptance by intelligent people was to be accounted for by miracles which overwhelm the intellect.<sup>3</sup>

But the Christian point of view has entirely changed in recent times. We are no longer required to defend Christianity, as such, by seeking the support of Christ's miracles; nor do we any longer depend on them for proof of His divinity, for "Deity is not necessarily seen in the marvellous deed".<sup>4</sup> Most modern religious thinkers base the

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke, 17: 11-19.

<sup>2</sup> Mt. 11: 4-6; compare Luke, 7: 8-23 (Moffatt's translation).

<sup>3</sup> 3 cp. L. E. Browne, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>4</sup> cp. Weatherhead, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 178.

case for Christianity on the spiritual personality of Jesus. What was His outlook with regard to the people of whom it is recorded that He healed them? Surely He gloried in the great works of God that were being wrought in them through Him. We can be certain that He must have felt towards physical and mental disease much as any high-souled physician or surgeon feels about it to-day, viz.: it is something that should not be, something one should strive to dispel.<sup>1</sup> And the Church of the earliest days maintained a similar attitude. Miracles were then looked upon as manifestations of the presence of the Holy Spirit and proof that God's power was at work in the Church.

It was in mediaeval times that that early point of view was lost sight of, for, since miracles of a kind had come to be associated with saints and shrines, it became the vogue among Christians to read back into the narrative of Christ's miracles something that was not historically there. Theologians of the time made the miracles of the gospels to be, not so much evidence of God's love and compassion, as proofs of His favour. They used them to accredit Christ's mission and to confirm the Church's belief in His divinity. It was an essentially weak position, and the Church felt it to be so when faced with the scepticism that came in with the dawn of rationalism in the 18th century. In her defence of them she found the miracles to be a burden for Christian faith, instead of its glory.

With the development of science and the general application to phenomena of the scientific principle, the Church's weak apology was brushed aside on the ground that, since Nature was a uniformly closed system, miracles simply could not

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. D. S. Cairns, *The Faith that Rebels*, a reconsideration of the miracles of Christ, p. 77; a valuable study to which the present writer is repeatedly indebted in this chapter.

happen. Rationalists declared that the Gospel miracles were an anomaly and that the reports of them must be looked upon as unhistorical. Some, by an unfair use of recorded instances of Christ's refusal to grant signs on request, argued that, in reality, He did not work any miracle at all.<sup>1</sup>

#### RECENT CHANGED OUTLOOK

But once again the position has been modified. Modernists themselves now believe in God's personal intervention in the soul of man. That is to say, they admit that spiritual miracles, "conversions", are not only possible but actually occur. Nor can it be denied that during the past few years the results attending the practice of faith-healing and psycho-therapy, have brought the bulk of the miracles of Christ within the range of human experience. We are living in a day when the ideal power of mind over body is being widely recognized as an irrefutable fact. So notable a scientist as Sir Oliver Lodge has stated that "We need not urge *a priori* objections to miracles on scientific grounds. They need be no more impossible, no more lawless, than the interference of a human being would seem to a colony of ants or bees."

It thus comes about that the modernist is willing to accept most, if not all, of the *healing* miracles of Christ—though he may not call them "miracles"—yet he is only prepared to go to the limits of present-day experience. As for the "nature miracles", they must be ruled out because he finds no analogies to them. But consider what a significant advance this is on the position of sceptics of the last century, men

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Mk. 6: 5-6; 8: 12. Matthew Arnold may be taken as representative of this type of scepticism. In the preface to *Literature and Dogma* he says, "Our popular religion at present conceives of the birth, ministry and death of Christ as altogether steeped in prodigy, brimful of miracles, and miracles do not happen".

like Strauss and Renan, who viewed almost all of the wonderful works of Christ as purely legendary.

But the matter cannot be left there. Is the modernist really consistent when he admits the influence of mind over body and yet clings to the old view that nature is a closed system? Does he not tend to make "whatever God there is a prisoner in the laws of His own world, powerless to assist His children?" Surely the truth is to be sought elsewhere. For if the system of physical nature can be deflected by the mind of man—as it is—what is to prevent its being influenced by the Mind and Will of the Creator Himself?

When we put the question in this form we see that what is really at stake in this controversy about miracles, is the Christian view of God and the World. We humans make our impact felt upon Nature in many ways—some of our modern achievements in this respect would have staggered our grandparents<sup>1</sup>—why then, we ask, may not God, this Living Will, *for beneficent ends*, freely manipulate Nature, which, after all, is but the plastic expression of His own Will?

Nature, like the body, has its origin equally in God, and it is God who heals the body, as it is God who stills the storm. Jesus was but speaking and acting in the name of such a God. "Alike in His words and in the whole mould and fashion of His character, He implies that God is always nearer, mightier, more loving, and more free to help each of us than any of us ever realises." The writer of those words urges that the difficulty felt by the modern mind about the nature miracles of Christ appears less when we realize that they are wrought through the Divine Mind *by prayer*. When we pray "for those in peril on the sea" in a terrible storm, we are not merely asking that they should be kept calm and

---

<sup>1</sup> A popular writer on physics actually uses the word *miracle* for the talking film and radio receiver.

morally intact, but positively that they may be saved from accident and destruction—and that implies a "nature miracle". And these nature miracles, the supreme instance of which is Christ's Resurrection, are required to make manifest "God's victory over all the mortal and tragic powers of the world".<sup>1</sup>

#### THE EVIDENCE OF THE GOSPELS

And there is evidence enough in the Gospel account of the miracles of Jesus to render the old view of them altogether untenable.

They were never displays of power—"prodigies". His works of healing, for instance, are evidence of His deep compassion. Whenever the faith of people permitted it He healed the sick and diseased, in body and mind, because He could not help doing so. Some of His "signs" may have had secondary significance as witnessing to His claims, e.g. to the office of Messiah.<sup>2</sup> Others, like the withering of the fig tree were symbols of great spiritual realities. This last was an acted parable of judgment on Jerusalem. The spiritual life of God's chosen people, the Jews, was *withering away*, because they failed to bring forth fruit for God, though professing to be religious.

Nor did Christ ever work a miracle for private ends<sup>3</sup>; or to convince sceptics.<sup>4</sup> As Dr. Cairns has well said: "Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned by the child-like heart, not forced home upon dazzled senses and stunned minds by the blows of supernatural power".<sup>5</sup>

Further, while Jesus estimated very highly the evidential value of His miracles for those who had in them the rudiments

---

<sup>1</sup> D. S. Cairns, *op. cit.*, p. 167ff.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Hoskyns and Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, p. 169.

<sup>3</sup> cp. Mt. 4: 1-11.

<sup>4</sup> Mk. 8: 11-12; Mt. 16: 1-4; Lk. 23: 8-10.

<sup>5</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 28-29.

of faith, He was, nevertheless, well aware that where there was no faith, miracles had no educative value—they rather created excitement and eagerness for merely physical benefit which distracted men's attention from His teaching. Consider in this connection the significance of the statement that Jesus could read the minds of men.<sup>1</sup> He had no faith in that kind of faith where men "believed" only as far as they could "see"; and He repeatedly "refused" to satisfy curiosity by working "signs".<sup>2</sup>

Nor should we lose sight of the repeated stress which He laid upon both faith and prayer. He often stated that there was a vital relation between His mighty works and faith, and demonstrated that believing prayer does alter things.<sup>3</sup>

When we turn to consider the actual evidence afforded by the records for these miracles we find that it is very striking.

In the first place, and as against the suggestion that the accounts are later inventions, we observe an intimate connection in the narratives between the miraculous and the non-miraculous. The one element cannot be cut out without doing violence to the whole.<sup>4</sup> Consider, for instance, the following from amongst similar sayings of Jesus; they presuppose a miracle:

Mk. 2: 17. "They that are whole have no need of a physician....."

Mk. 3: 22-30. "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

Mk. 6: 4. "What mean such mighty works?....."

"A prophet is not without honour, save etc....."

Mk. 9: 29. "This kind can come out by nothing, save by prayer....."

Mt. 8: 10-12. "Verily I have not found so great faith....."

Jo. 11: 25. "I am the Resurrection and the Life....."

---

<sup>1</sup> John, 2: 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> cp. A. G. Hogg, *Christ's Message of the Kingdom*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Mk. 9: 23; 10: 27.

<sup>4</sup> cp. Hoskyns and Davey, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170 and 177.

Then, too, these narratives bear the stamp of sobriety and dignity, and in this particular they reflect the bearing of the One who performs the miracles. Here again one is struck with the contrast offered by apocryphal accounts. Whereas in the canonical gospels Jesus comes before us as the Compassionate One, quick to meet human need and relieve human suffering, in the apocryphal narratives He is portrayed as both grotesque and repulsive.

It is important that we should have before us some extracts from these apocryphal gospels, so that the contrast may be established. Of special interest is the story in them about the "clay birds", to which the account in the Qur'ān is unquestionably indebted:

"The little child Jesus when he was five years old was playing at the ford of a brook, and he gathered together the waters that flowed there into pools. And having made soft clay, he fashioned thereof twelve sparrows. And it was the Sabbath when he did these things. And there were many other little children playing with him. And a certain Jew when he saw what Jesus did, playing upon the Sabbath day, departed straightway and told his father Joseph: 'Lo, thy child is at the brook, and he hath taken clay and fashioned twelve little birds, and hath polluted the Sabbath day'. And Joseph came to the place and saw, and cried out to him saying: 'Wherefore doest thou these things on the Sabbath, which is not lawful to do? But Jesus clapped his hands together and cried out to the sparrows and said to them: 'Go!' and the sparrows took their flight and went away chirping. And when the Jews saw it they were amazed, and departed and told their chief men that which they had seen Jesus do. But the son of Annas the scribe was standing there with Joseph: and he took a branch of willow and dispersed the waters which Jesus had gathered together. And when Jesus saw what was done he was wroth, and said unto him: 'O evil, ungodly, and foolish one, what hurt did the pools and the waters do thee? behold, now also thou shalt be like a withered tree, and shalt not bear leaves, neither root, nor fruit'. And straightway the lad withered up

wholly, but Jesus departed and went into Joseph's house. But the parents of him that was withered took him up, bewailing his youth, and brought him to Joseph, and accused him, 'for that thou hast such a child that doeth such deeds'."

"After that again he (Jesus) went through the village, and a child ran and dashed against his shoulder. And Jesus was provoked and said unto him: 'Thou shalt not finish thy course', and immediately he fell down and died. But certain when they saw what was done said: 'Whence was this young child born, for that every word of his is an accomplished work?' And the parents of him that was dead came unto Joseph and blamed him, saying, 'Thou that hast such a child canst not dwell with us in the village: or do thou teach him to bless and not to curse: for he slayeth our children'. And Joseph called the young child apart and admonished him, saying: 'Wherefore dost thou do such things, that these suffer and hate us and persecute us?' But Jesus said: 'I know that these thy words are not thine: nevertheless for thy sake I will hold my peace: but they shall bear their punishment'. And straightway they that accused him were smitten with blindness. And they that saw it were sore afraid and perplexed and said concerning him that every word which he spake, whether it was good or bad, was a deed and became a marvel."

"Now after certain days Jesus was playing in the upper story of a certain house, and one of the young children that played with him fell down from the house and died. And the other children when they saw it fled, and Jesus remained alone. And the parents of him that was dead came and accused him that he had cast him down. And Jesus said: 'I did not cast him down', but they reviled him still. Then Jesus leaped down from the roof and stood by the body of the child and cried with a loud voice and said: 'Zeno! arise and tell me, did I cast thee down'? And straightway he arose and said: 'Nay, Lord, thou didst not cast me down, but didst raise me up'. And when they saw it they were all amazed: and the parents of the child glorified God for the sign which had come to pass, and worshipped Jesus."

"And Jesus said unto his teacher: 'If thou be indeed a teacher, and if thou knowest letters well, tell me the power of Alpha, and then I will tell thee the power of Beta. And the

teacher was provoked and smote him on the head. And the young child was hurt and cursed him, and straightway he fell to the ground on his face. And the child returned into the house of Joseph: and Joseph was grieved and commanded the mother saying: 'Let him not forth without the door, for all they die that provoke him to wrath'.<sup>1</sup>

If in reality the miracles of the gospels did not occur, how are we to account for the absence in those records of extravagances such as these? Had the narrators no *facts* to go upon they would most assuredly have blundered in similar fashion. The romances of the nations are full of just such unrestrained writings as these apocryphal legends.

Nor can we account for the narratives by assuming that they owe their origin to the credulity of the people. The records point the other way, e.g. "We never saw it in this fashion"; "Since the world began it was never heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind"; "When the multitudes saw it (the healing of the palsied) they were afraid, and glorified God who had given such power unto men".<sup>2</sup> To be sure, there was "wonder-working" akin to magic, but the more honest detected the difference and knew how to explain it.

The very enemies of Jesus could not deny that He worked miracles, but in their rage they invented the wildest reason by way of explaining them—"He hath a devil".<sup>3</sup>

However, the credibility of the Gospel miracles does not rest primarily, or only, on documentary evidence, necessary though that is; but on the Personality of Jesus Christ Himself. Being what He is, He makes it easier for us to credit them. We see Him to be transparently good, sinless; and that is a greater miracle than any of the others. Indeed, He was so

---

<sup>1</sup> From "The Gospel of Thomas"; cp. M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 49-53.

<sup>2</sup> Mk. 2: 12; Mt. 9: 33; Jo. 9: 32; Mt. 9: 8.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 12: 34; Mk. 3: 22; Lk. 11: 15; Jo. 10: 19-21.

good that the requisite power could be entrusted to Him to be used with economy, without the fear of that kind of misuse almost inevitable in the case of those less good. We have convincing proof of how He regarded the need for restraint, in the story of the temptations in the wilderness.

Finally, His place in history is unique—a new era dates from Him. Should it be thought strange, then, if such unique things happened in His day? In any case it is to unique facts that the records bear witness—not evil and disease alone, but famine, storm and death itself go down before this "Prince of Life".

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

Mozley, J. B., *Eight Lectures on Miracles*, Rivingtons, 1878.

Bruce, A. B., *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1886.

Orr, J., *The Christian View of God and the World*, Edinburgh, 1902.

Cairns, D. S., *The Faith that Rebels*, S.C.M. Press, 1930.

Hoskyns & Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament*, Faber, 1931.

James, M. R., *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1926.

Hogg, A. G., *Redemption from this World*, T. & T. Clark, 1924.

CHAPTER  
IX  
THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"Jesus received the baptism of repentance at the hands of John, which involved a confession of sins, and thus set a seal on his own sinfulness" (pp. 194-5).

"Baptism is the symbol of sins having been washed away. Jesus was baptised.....this shows that before his baptism he was not perfectly righteous; and that's why after the baptism he saw the spirit of God coming upon him" (pp. 194-5).

"Suggestions were made to Jesus by the Devil and this is inconsistent with the theory of his absolute sinlessness" (pp. 195-6).

"In the life of Jesus there is the confession of sin, repentance like that of sinners, and deeds similar to those of the guilty" (pp. 198-9).

"Jesus got himself anointed by a harlot with ointment which was part of her earnings of adultery, and allowed her to take undue liberty with him."

"His descent into hell, the abode of the wicked, is also recognized by the Christians, than which no plainer proof is needed of the guiltiness of Jesus" (Qadiani).

"Jesus uttered words of unbelief in God, saying: 'My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me'?" (p. 146).

"Jesus' refusal to be called 'good' meant nothing but that he deemed himself to be sinful" (p. 197).

"If Jesus was God, or the Son of God, he would not have denied to be called a good master."

Jesus had enemies who sent him to the cross and finished with him, thus depriving him of the opportunity to show in practice—what he preached—his undoubted love for fellowman."

"We believe that Providence protected him (Jesus) from evil" (Qadiani).

"We Muslims yield to no Christian in our love of Jesus. He is as much ours and as dear to us as to Christians" (*The Light*).

## CHAPTER IX

### THE CHARACTER OF CHRIST

It is universally held among Muslims that all prophets, as a class, were sinless; and sometimes there is quoted in support of such a notion the Quranic passage:

"No apostle have we sent before thee (Muhammad) to whom we did not reveal that 'Verily there is no God beside Me; therefore worship Me'.....They speak not till He hath spoken; and they do His bidding", **21: 25, 27**. Commenting on the latter verse a modern exponent of this view says: "This verse gives us a conclusive testimony to the sinlessness of prophets. When they speak they do not precede Allah in speech, i.e. they speak according to what He has taught them, not speaking of their own accord. And when they act, they act according to His commandment. Thus both their speech and their actions are in accordance with Divine will, and therefore it cannot be said that they commit sin."<sup>1</sup>

Occasionally it is stated by Christian writers that Jesus Christ is the one sinless prophet in Islam, but that must not be taken to represent the Muslim view; for whatever the Qur'ān may say about Him, it nowhere states, in so many words, that He, or any prophet for that matter, was 'sinless'.

#### ISĀ DECLARED TO BE PURE FROM SIN

Nevertheless, while by inference from the Qur'ān itself other prophets have sinned yet there is not a hint there, or

---

<sup>1</sup> Maulana Muhammad Ali, *in loc. cit.*, note 1624. cp. however, very similar wording at **75: 16-19** which suggests another and different interpretation, as has indeed been endorsed by this same expositor; see p. 39.

anywhere else in Islamic literature, of sin in Jesus. On the contrary, definite support for the common belief of the masses that He was without sin is to be found in a well-known tradition, attested by both Bukhārī and Muslim, which runs as follows:

"The Prophet said, 'There is no son of Adam born, except Mary and her Son, but Satan touches him when he is born and he cries out from the touch of Satan.'" This tradition is quoted by Baidhāwī in his comment on the verse, "I have named her Mary, and I take refuge with thee for her and for her offspring, from Satan the stoned", **3**: 31.

A variant form of the tradition is as follows:—

"The apostle of God said, 'Every child of Adam is at its birth stuck in the side by the devil's fingers, except Jesus, son of Mary. The devil went to stick his fingers into his side, but stuck them in the membranes enveloping the foetus'."<sup>1</sup>

And the Qur'ān itself makes Gabriel say to Mary that she is to have "a holy son", *ghulāman zakiyyan*, **19**: 19; which Baidhāwī interprets to mean *pure from sin*, and active in goodness.

Yet now, in that spirit of malice to which reference was made in the last chapter, the Ahmadis are maintaining that Jesus was far from blameless in character. The lead in this matter was given by the founder of the sect, who in face of the angry protests of the orthodox, defended himself by declaring that he was not attacking the 'Isā of the Qur'ān, but the Jesus of the gospels—an excuse that deceived nobody. He sought to establish his contention on the Gospel narratives themselves. How he wrested the meaning of passages in his determination to degrade Jesus, will be realized by a perusal of a list of his charges.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *Mishkātu'l-Masābih*, Book I, chap. 3, pt. 1, and Book XXIV, chap. 1, pt. 1, (trans. Matthews).

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C, p. 220.

But Maulana Md. Ali, formerly the Mirza's disciple, bases his repudiation of the sinlessness of Christ on other grounds. He maintains, and quite rightly, that mere "sinlessness" is no proof of greatness. Rather, greatness depends upon the amount of good done to one's fellowmen. Judged by this standard, he asserts that Muhammad is easily the greatest benefactor of humanity; and, in reference to the call to the prophetic office, says: "He did not stand in need of being baptized by somebody as Jesus did".<sup>1</sup>

One finds it difficult to understand how these people still maintain that they reverence the name of Christ, when they go out of their way to make the Gospel narrative yield the meaning that Jesus was guilty of various moral offences.<sup>2</sup> After all, the only ground on which anyone, be he Christian or Muslim, can base the claim that Jesus was without sin is the account that we have of Him in the gospels, for the reason that they are the only source for our knowledge of Him.

The author of the book just quoted singles out for criticism another Christian doctrine which has its bearing on the subject before us. "The fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam is that the former teaches that every human child is born sinful, while the latter teaches that every human child is born sinless.....According to the former.....sin is inherent in human nature and man therefore can only be saved by the redemption of the Son of God. This view is abhorrent.....That man is born sinful, or that sin is inherent in human nature, is to take the lowest possible

---

<sup>1</sup> *Muhammad and Christ*, pp. 52, 117.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. What value is to be attached to this assertion: "No Musalman can for a moment think of reviling Jesus. The moment he does so, nay, the moment he ceases to revere him as a chosen messenger of God, he ceases to be a Muslim", *The Light*, 16 Septem., 1933.

view of human nature".<sup>1</sup> This dogma of Original Sin, and belief in it, he says, "forms the foundation of the Christian religion".<sup>2</sup>

#### AHMADIS IMPUTE SIN TO JESUS

As the Ahmadis make much capital out of the doctrine of Original Sin and seek, through their interpretation of it, to involve Jesus Christ in the general sinfulness of the race, we are obliged to examine rather more closely what exactly we do mean when we ascribe to Him sinlessness. It has frequently been remarked that it is unfortunate that so much stress has been laid by Christian writers on this word in regard to Christ, because, at best, it is negative; and it is impossible to prove a negative. Besides, the term suggests the entirely erroneous notion that the highest achievement in the realm of ethics is "to do no harm".<sup>3</sup> On the contrary, what we believe concerning the character of Christ is something positive. What we extol in Him is "the full and positive response of His whole being to God, whom He knew as Father"; we have in mind "His active, unstinted, triumphant love and loyalty toward God and man, as shown in His life and supremely in His death".<sup>4</sup>

It is not improbable that this phrase owed its origin to the concern of theologians to maintain that Christ, in effecting a substitutionary atonement for sinners, was free from the very liability to sin; in other words, that He was superna-

---

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> It would seem that Muslim writers fail to distinguish between original *sin* and original *guilt*—the latter is not held by Christians.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Streeter, *Reality*, pp. 189-193; also Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, pp. 51-53.

<sup>4</sup> Micklem, in *Mysterium Christi*, p. 155. cp. Robertson Nicol, *The Church's One Foundation*, pp. 106 ff.

turally sinless.<sup>1</sup> Such exponents thought to find the assurance of that immunity in the fact that Jesus was born of a pure virgin. But there is surely a very real confusion here between two different things, viz.: a tendency or liability to sin, and actual sin. One cannot inherit an act, nor can one be held guilty for what one has not done. That men are born into this world with a tendency to sin, or more precisely, with a nature readily susceptible to evil temptation, is quite a different matter.

There seems, then, no *a priori* necessity, nor yet any reason in the Gospel records for claiming that Jesus was supernaturally immune from the approach of evil; i.e. from temptation, as such. Certainly birth from one parent does not give that immunity. For without irreverence we may say that, if God had so chosen, He could have become incarnate in the son of two parents, through the normal processes of generation. The absence of a husband would not have rendered Mary "sinless".

#### WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE OF THE GOSPELS?

It is far more satisfactory, however, to approach this question of the moral character of Jesus Christ with the mind freed from theological dogma and presupposition.

When we turn to the synoptic gospels—for certain reasons the case is different in the Fourth Gospel—we find no doctrine or dogma about His character. This of course is because Matthew, Mark and Luke are concerned with history, not theology. These writers tell their story so vividly that we feel it is drawn from life; it rings true. Their Jesus is not weak nor sentimental, but a man—resolute, bold, determined, keen in debate, terrible in wrath, denouncing hypocrites, and yet there is in Him no sin.

---

<sup>1</sup> There was the influence also of the Jewish idea that the lamb for sacrifice must be "without blemish".

Nevertheless, there are certain incidents in these narratives which, while not attributing sinfulness, seem at first sight to exclude sinlessness; and because these have been cited again and again by Ahmadi writers as proof of their contention that Jesus sinned, we are obliged to examine them briefly here.

There are three incidents, in particular, that are apt to cause difficulty:

1. The Baptism of Jesus.<sup>1</sup> The question inevitably suggests itself to the mind—how could the Saviour of the World submit to a rite which, for all others, amounted to a confession of sin?

We need to bear in mind, however, that baptism, even for others, was always more than just that. For all it was an act of self-consecration marking the beginning of a new epoch; as Paul says:

"We who were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death.....that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life."<sup>2</sup>

It was this for Jesus, and yet for Him it meant much more.

(1) Among the Jews the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit was the expected sign of the dawn of the Messianic Age, cp. Joel, 2: 28-29; and it was such an out-pouring that Jesus experienced, as all the narratives declare.<sup>3</sup>

(2) For Him the incident signified His consecration to the office of Messiah; this was part of the "righteousness" He felt Himself under an obligation to fulfil.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Mk. 1: 4-5, 9; Mt. 3: 13-17.

<sup>2</sup> Roms. 6: 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Mk. 1: 10; Mt. 3: 16; Lk. 3: 22; Jo. 1: 32.

<sup>4</sup> Mt. 3: 15. cp. A. G. Hogg, *Christ's Message of the Kingdom*, p. 153; W. R. Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

(3) By this act Jesus identified Himself with the human race. cp. "Thus it becometh *us* to fulfil all righteousness"; and "it behoved Him in all things to become like unto His brethren".<sup>1</sup> That is to say, He was baptized as "Son of Man". He stood down with the crowds, identifying Himself with sinful men, yet remaining Himself "without sin". Shortly afterwards He was sorely tempted to stand aloof from men, to hold Himself above them as "Son of God". So that He fulfilled *this* purpose of the Incarnation—He identified Himself by the act of baptism with the race of men.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless there was in this act, as He performed it, not the remotest suggestion that He felt He needed purification, nor yet any confession of sin.

2. The Temptations of Jesus. The main conclusion to be drawn from the Synoptic writers' accounts of the temptations is that Jesus was really tempted.<sup>3</sup> That is the view, too, of the writer of the Epistle to Hebrews.<sup>4</sup>

What then are we to infer from this clear statement? Certainly not that He was, thereby, sinful. For to be tempted is not to incur sin; rather, as James says,—that man is to be praised who endures temptation and overcomes it.<sup>5</sup>

Surely the truth is that Jesus could not have been really tempted unless He was really able, if He chose, to yield. That He never did so choose and never did yield are, likewise, facts equally well-attested in the gospels. Jesus being man was tempted, but being the Man He was He did not sin.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mt. 3: 15 and Heb. 2: 17.

<sup>2</sup> See Hoskyns and Davey, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> Mk. 1: 12-13; Mt. 4: 1-11; Lk. 4: 1-13.

<sup>4</sup> 2: 18; 4: 15. The concern of the author of the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, seems to be to present a supernaturally sinless Christ, for no mention is made of this incident.

<sup>5</sup> James, 1: 2 and 12.

We see that He was spared no pang, no obstacle. He had to resist temptation by exercising His strength. Nowhere is this fact more strikingly set forth than in the account of His ordeal in Gethsemane. He was exceedingly sensitive to the approach of evil, more so than any other, but His reaction was always a turning away from it. And when it is recorded of Him that "He was tempted at all points as we are", what is meant is that He was tempted at all points of His sinless character as we are tempted at all points of our sinful character. Yet if ever it can be said of anyone, it should be said of Jesus, that there were certain things He simply could not have done. It has been truly observed that His will "always showed its strength chiefly in certain splendid incapacities".<sup>1</sup>

Any other view of His sinlessness would rob His character of all moral complexion. Certainly He "would not have become a creative moral force in history if at the age of thirty He had never yet—in things physical as well as spiritual—heard the tempter's voice".<sup>2</sup> As it is, we see that He surmounted all His temptations—that is something that immensely helps us who also wrestle, and makes true what is recorded of Him: "for in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted".<sup>3</sup>

3. Yet another difficulty is presented in the remark of Jesus "Why callest thou me good; none is good save one, even God".<sup>4</sup> It is sometimes suggested that we have here

---

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Temple, C.V., p. 147. cp. H. R. Mackintosh, P.C., p. 413, and Weatherhead, H.L.O., pp. 35-7.

<sup>2</sup> Streeter, *Reality*, p. 192. The same writer says, "It may plausibly be urged that any exhibition of the will to evil would (in this particular case) be an inconsistency so startling as to be psychologically incredible; but can a whole theology be built on the assumption of its impossibility?", p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. 2: 18.

<sup>4</sup> Mk. 10: 17.

an avowal of failure, a plain denial of sinlessness. But surely to put such an interpretation on the words "would make nonsense of the Marcan Gospel. Jesus, according to Mark, is the Messiah in Whom the Righteousness of God is concretely present in the midst of Israel."<sup>1</sup>

The passage really has no bearing whatever on the question of the sinlessness of Jesus, but indicates that He is anxious to correct this young ruler's idea as to what constitutes "goodness". For, even though we may agree that the man was sincere, it is obvious that he had not given due thought to the import of the words he used.

Moreover, Jesus' rejoinder is not merely a declining of the youth's too-glib tribute—it is that—but a challenge to him to contemplate the Absolute Goodness, an attribute of God Himself, and then measure himself, and the righteousness he professes, by that supreme standard. Let him think what Goodness means to God, and then think out what it must mean to call Jesus "good". Goodness, in its fullest sense, is not human at all, but an attribute of God alone.

We thus arrive at a thought-provoking conclusion—viz. that only after giving due consideration to the essential meaning of Goodness and its bearing on the fact of Christ, is a man in a position to give to Him the praise that is His due. And even then, praise alone is not enough. Christ asks for, and expects, allegiance also. It was in this that the ruler signally failed. Like many Muslims, he found it easy to *praise* Christ, but when faced with the obligation to follow Him he turned away, unwilling to make the sacrifice.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Hoskyns and Davey, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-2 and 202. Throughout the gospels Jesus presents Himself to us as an infallible guide, teacher and pattern. There is the challenge always present, if not often expressed—"Which of you convicteth me of sin?", Jo. 8: 46.

<sup>2</sup> It is recorded of Bishop Lefroy of Lahore that he used to stress the word "Why" in the Master's question, "Why?.....what is your reason?.....is it to follow Me?"

## HE KNEW NO SIN

In conclusion it can be stated without fear of contradiction that there is a total absence of a consciousness of moral guilt on the part of Jesus in the synoptic records. Jesus never prayed for forgiveness, yet He asked others to. He expressed no need for reconciliation with His Father. He had no seasons of self-abasement, born of a sense of transgression. At each stage "His will was undamaged by the previous admission of sin" —"there was no enemy of self-will within, and therefore no danger of defeat".<sup>1</sup> This is something that greatly impresses all but the prejudiced reader.

And in Jesus this arresting feature is an essential part of Him; it is not the effect of pose. He who so severely condemned hypocrisy in others, combined with His own claim to sinlessness "the possession of a sincerity transparent and undisputed".<sup>2</sup> All others, the world's greatest heroes, are conscious of shortcomings. Even the saint has the sense of unworthiness, only much more acutely. But in the case of Jesus the serenity of His vision of God was unclouded. His fellowship with the Father was maintained unbroken in the face of well-nigh overwhelming temptation. The perfect harmony was never marred, if we except those few hours of agony on the cross.<sup>3</sup>

There are those who seek to cast doubt upon the conclusion thus drawn from the brief records in our possession, by suggesting that we do not really know what transpired in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Archbishop Temple, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> cp. C. H. Robinson, *Studies in the Character of Christ*, where the author adds: "All history, with the exception of the Gospel story, justifies us in regarding a claim to sinlessness as inseparably connected with hypocrisy", pp. 14-15.

<sup>3</sup> "From outset to end, no desire, motion, conception or resolve existed in the soul of Jesus, which was not the affirmation and execution of the will of God dwelling in Him and informing His entire life."

hidden years before the ministry.<sup>1</sup> The sufficient answer is that we find no "scars" on Jesus, detect no regrets and hear no cry of remorse. From this, backed by the whole narrative, we have the right to conclude that those years corresponded in character to the brief years of His public ministry. All of it was a close walk with the Father.

In a word, the gospels record of Him no sin, because there was no sin to record.

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

Garvie, A. E., *Studies in the Inner Life of Jesus*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1907.

Robinson, C. H., *Studies in the Character of Christ*, Longmans, 1907.

Bushnell, H., *The Character of Christ*.

Streeter, B. H., *Reality*, Macmillan, 1928.

*Sinlessness of Prophets*, The Mohammedan Tract Society, Lahore.

Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad and Christ*.

---

<sup>1</sup> Thus the Mirza of Qadian: "It is a noteworthy fact noted by all critical biographers of Christ that the writers of the gospels have carefully refrained from making even a passing reference to his earlier years. But the writers of the gospels have intentionally omitted to give any account of his first thirty years. They have chosen to start with that moment in his life when he emerged out of the sacred waters of Jordan a purer and perhaps a better man", *Unity versus Trinity*, p. 65. This is definitely not true, e.g. we are told that "the child grew and became strong and full of wisdom, and the grace of God rested upon Him"; and in that glimpse of Him as a boy of twelve it is recorded that "Jesus increased both in wisdom and in stature, and in favour with God and man", Lk. 2: 40 and 52.

[Blank Page]

CHAPTER  
X  
THE RESURRECTION

## MUSLIM OBJECTIONS

"The killing of Jesus and his resurrection is not proved even by the gospels."

"When Mary and the disciples did not recognize Jesus, how can it be admitted that he was Jesus"? (p. 206).

"Jesus has never said in any Gospel that when he will rise again he would change his countenance."

"If Jesus Christ had given information as to his crucifixion and resurrection to the disciples, they would have believed the fact at once" (pp. 207-8).

"If, instead of making all this clamour and noise to establish the Divinity of Jesus, the Christian missionaries had only taken the trouble to prove him a living man, they could have given satisfaction to many enquirers, and we would have never hesitated to accept him as such" (Qadiani).

## CHAPTER X

### THE RESURRECTION

The Resurrection of Christ is not, strictly speaking, an issue with Muslims. The orthodox, as we have seen, believe that He did not die; so that for them there can be no question of His having risen again. As for the Ahmadis, they follow the lead of the founder of their sect, who in order to establish his own claims made it his business to assert that Jesus is dead. But so far as the Crucifixion is concerned we have noted that he adopted the baseless theory that Jesus merely swooned on the cross and was revived, only to die later. In this way he denied also the historicity of the Resurrection.

This double refutation is hailed by the chief of his disciples as one of his greatest achievements:

"He has broken the cross.....because he has shown from the gospels that the death of Christ did not take place on the cross, as has been wrongly supposed by Christians for nineteen centuries, but having escaped with wounds he died a natural death afterwards, having lived to the age of 120 years, as a report expressly says... ..It was 'through the blood of the cross' (Col. 1: 20) that salvation was purchased; 'and if Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain' (I Cor. 15: 14). Christ never died on the cross and he never rose from the dead; the preaching of the Christian missionary is therefore vain, and vain is also his faith. The Christian religion laid its foundation on the death of Christ on the cross and his subsequent rising; both these statements have been proved to be utterly wrong on the strength of the historical testimony afforded by the gospels themselves, and with the foundation the whole superstructure falls to the ground."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Ali, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-9.

What are we to think of a writer who is content thus to thrust aside so lightly a fundamental belief, nineteen hundred years old, on the strength of a "report", concerning which he gives no particulars? One suspects, however, that he has in mind the story of Nicolas Notovitch, a Russian traveller to Ladakh in 1887. This interesting person published a book in which he declared that he had found an ancient manuscript in a Buddhist temple in Leh which stated that Jesus, in his youth, travelled to India. He succeeded in deceiving even Renan; but it was proved to the satisfaction of Max Müller that the report was an impudent lie.<sup>1</sup>

And why look to Paul for support? No one acquainted with what the Apostle says at the place cited will be deceived by the partial quotation. Having put the rhetorical question, Paul proceeds: "But now Christ hath been raised from the dead, the first fruits of them that sleep". Indeed, in the opening verses of that same chapter, speaking of actual events, i.e. of "the historical testimony", he uses the phrase, "He appeared", no less than four times.<sup>2</sup>

#### WRESTING THE MEANING OF THE GOSPELS

We can see for ourselves how these new enemies of the Cross of Christ are so blinded by prejudice that they do not hesitate to twist the clear statements about His death and

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Unknown Life of Christ*. Dr. Ahmad Shah shortly afterwards spent a long time in Tibet on government service and covered the ground over which Notovitch said he had travelled. He has left it on record that the man was "a Russian spy who was being dogged by the Simla detective police"..... "Mustapha, a Mahomedan gentleman.....one of the Leh officials", when asked about Notovitch's alleged find, exclaimed "*Lā haula walā quwwat*", an Arabic exclamation of indignation, and declared that though he had lived there 32 years he had never heard of it. cp. *Four Years in Tibet*, pp. 14–18.

<sup>2</sup> I Cor. 15: 1–20.

resurrection to suit their own desperate hypothesis. In his long note (645) on 4: 156, viz. the denial that the Jews crucified Jesus, Muhammad Ali advances a number of "proofs" in support of his contention that Jesus neither died on the cross nor rose from the dead. We reproduce the following:

*When the tomb was seen on the third day the stone was found to have been removed from its mouth, which would not have been the case if there had been a supernatural rising.*

This assumption is not warranted by the facts:—

- (a) In the first place there is the fact that the stone *was* rolled away after Joseph closed the tomb, and after the seal had been affixed. "This is the clear assertion of the earliest and of the every record we have."<sup>1</sup>
- (b) A second fact, equally well-attested in the narratives, is that the tomb was empty. "The documents are adamant upon this fundamental feature of the Eastern dawn."<sup>2</sup> This was something which the High Priests admitted, though they lied as to its cause: "They gave large money unto the soldiers, saying 'Say ye, his disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him and rid you of care'; so they took the money and did as they were taught."<sup>3</sup>
- (c) The third and most amazing fact of all is that Jesus definitely "appeared" beyond the grave, and His rising from the dead was attested by many witnesses. The real proof of this was something quite independent both of the stone rolled away and of the empty tomb. "The empty tomb comes before us only as a fact, not as an argument."<sup>4</sup> And we may say the same of the moved stone. When the Apostles witness to the Resurrection they do not make use of the women's evidence of the moved stone, nor refer to the fact of the empty tomb. What they

---

<sup>1</sup> Mk. 16: 4; Mt. 28: 2; Lk. 24: 2; Jo. 20: 1.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?*, pp. 231, 261, 300.

<sup>3</sup> Mt. 28: 11–15; cp. Mk. 16: 6; Lk. 24: 1–6; Jo. 20: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 144.

stressed was the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead by the direct hand of God.<sup>1</sup>

*Mary, when she saw him, took him for the gardener which shows that Jesus had disguised himself as a gardener.*

There was no "disguise"—the very suggestion is another way of imputing deceit to Jesus—Mary simply did not recognize Him. She was weeping, and altogether lacked the spirit of expectancy. Besides, Jesus was changed in appearance; He only slowly revealed His identity by the familiar inflection of His voice.<sup>2</sup> Recall how He disclosed His identity to the two disciples at Emmaus through the familiar way in which He broke bread.<sup>3</sup>

*Such disguise would not have been needed if Jesus had "risen from the dead".*

Again, allowance must be made for His changed appearance; "raised a spiritual body"; and having "the glory of the celestial".<sup>4</sup>

*It was in the same body of flesh that the disciples saw Jesus and the wounds were still there, deep enough for a man to thrust his hand in.*

Difficult though this subject is we are definitely told that it was not the same body: Jesus had "another form"; His disciples thought He was "a spirit"; He came through shut doors.<sup>5</sup>

*He still felt hunger and ate as his disciples did.*

Hunger! rather it was a concession to their human frailty, in order to dispel their terror and doubt.<sup>6</sup>

*He undertook a journey to Galilee with two of his disciples walking side by side with him, which shows that he was flying for refuge, for if his object had been to rise to heaven he would not have undertaken a journey to Galilee.<sup>7</sup>*

Flying for refuge, and to Galilee! Why, He was back in Jerusalem that very night!<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts, **1**: 22; **2**: 32; **3**: 15; **4**: 2; **10**: 40.

<sup>2</sup> Jo. **20**: 11–18.

<sup>3</sup> Lk. **24**:30–35.

<sup>4</sup> I Cor. **15**: 35–38.

<sup>5</sup> cp. Mk. **16**: 12; Lk. **24**: 37; Jo. **20**: 19.

<sup>6</sup> Lk. **24**: 37–43.

<sup>7</sup> The swoon-theory seems to have been forgotten!

<sup>8</sup> Lk. **24**: 33–36; that is all he makes of this moving interview which George Eliot declared to be "the most beautiful story in the world".

*In all post-crucifixion appearances Jesus is found concealing and hiding himself as if he feared being discovered.*

On the contrary, to whom would He, to whom should He, show Himself—to foes or to friends? Consider the wisdom and reasonableness of the Risen Lord's action in the light of the following statements in Scriptures:

"He saved others; himself he cannot save. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross, and we will believe on him", Mt. **27**: 42—but would they have?

"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rise from the dead", Lk. **16**: 31.

"Judas (not Iscariot) saith unto Him, 'Lord, what is come to pass that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?' Jesus answered and said unto him, 'If a man love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my words', Jo. **14**: 22–24.

"Him God raised up the third day, and gave Him to be made manifest, not to all the people, but unto those witnesses that were chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead", Acts, **10**: 40–42.

#### THE EVIDENCE FOR THE RESURRECTION

Thus far we have sought to rebut the assertion that because He had not really died, Jesus did not really "rise from the dead". But now by way of refuting the contention of the Ahmadis that "the clear testimony" of the gospels is against the Resurrection, we shall consider the actual evidence furnished by the records.

Here are the outstanding facts:

I. We have, first, the clear and precise predictions of Jesus Himself that He would be put to death and rise again.

"He taught His disciples and said unto them, 'The Son of Man is to be delivered up into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he shall rise again! But they understood not the saying, and were afraid to ask Him', Mk. **9**: 31–2; Mt. **17**: 22–23; Lk. **9**: 43–45.

And there is that amazing incident of Peter's protest at Cæsarea Philippi against the Master's use of such language about His death, and Christ's stern rebuke, "Get thee behind me, Satan!, for your thoughts are not God's thoughts, but men's", Mk. **8**: 27-33.

We have also the disciples' recognition, at last, of the tragic fact that death actually awaited their Master. It is the scene where Jesus leads the way to Jerusalem and they themselves follow in trepidation; "And they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was going before them: and they were amazed: and they that followed were afraid", Mk. **10**: 32; Mt. **20**: 17-19; Lk. **18**: 31-33.

Once again, there is that mysterious phrase used by Jesus, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". What called it forth? He had cleansed the temple of the unholy traffic of the Jews. His eyes blazed in His 'zeal for God's house', while those of the Jews smouldered with murderous hate; and as He gazed into their eyes and saw His impending death, He said, *Destroy this temple*—and the evangelist adds, "He spake of the temple of His body", Jo. **2**: 13-22.

And yet an Ahmadi writer can say (in seeking to show that Jesus did not die on the cross) "Jesus never taught his disciples that he would rise from the dead"—actually quoting in support, Lk. **24**: 11, "their words seemed idle tales", and Jo. **20**: 9 "as yet they knew not (i.e. understood not) the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead".<sup>1</sup>

#### THE DRAMATIC CHANGE IN THE DISCIPLES

2. We pass on to consider the remarkable change that took place in the outlook of the disciples. What caused this?

The final scenes of our Lord's life were a series of shattering blows to these men. Their Master had been betrayed by one, denied by another, deserted by all. His Messianic claim had been scouted by the Sanhedrin. He had experienced "desertion" by God. They dwelt on the horror of it—God

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Review of Religions* (Qadian), Jan. 1933.

had permitted Him to die!, and the shame of it—had left Him to die on a gibbet! Who were they to let memories of their Master's words and works stand against that sentence of God? There was nothing left for them now but to go back to their fishing.<sup>1</sup>

And, in very truth, had the career of the Master ended in that fashion, with the disciples in that mood, His cause would most certainly have perished. But again, what are the facts?

It is written plainly for all to see that despair did not finally win the day. The disciples did not in the end so interpret the cross. "The phenomenon which here confronts us is one of the biggest dislodgments of events in the world's history, and it can only really be accounted for by an initial impact of colossal drive and power.....An habitual doubter like Thomas, a rather weak fisherman like Peter, a gentle dreamer like John, a practical tax-gatherer like Matthew, a few seafaring men like Andrew and Nathaniel, the inevitable women.....does this heterogeneous body of simple folk, reeling under the shock of the crucifixion, the utter degradation and death of their leader, look like the driving force we require?.....Yet the clear evidence of history is that it did."<sup>2</sup>

We find the disciples proceeding to proclaim Jesus and His resurrection boldly in Jerusalem itself, the stronghold of His detractors:

"With great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus," Acts, 4: 33.

As the above-quoted writer says, "They brought it to Jerusalem and carried it with inconceivable audacity into the

---

<sup>1</sup> Jo. 21: 3. For an exposition of this passage, see *The Nature of Religious Truth*, A. D. Lindsay, pp. 82 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Morison, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-2.

most keenly intellectual centre of Judæa, against the ablest dialecticians of the day and in the face of every impediment which a brilliant and highly organized camarilla could devise. And they won!"<sup>1</sup>

### WHAT CAUSED THIS CHANGE?

Now so dramatic a change as this in the once despondent disciples requires a cause, and an adequate cause. No mere pious wish, nor a dream, far less a lie, will account for it. What was it? We have it supplied in the disciples' oft-repeated conviction that their Master had "risen from the dead", that He was *alive*: and, again, it may be said that apart from such unshakable conviction Christianity itself would have had, and could have had, no future.

3. Another fact is that this arresting news that Jesus had risen from the dead belonged, from the first, to the nucleus of the apostolic message.<sup>2</sup> We have the point stressed in the selection of another to take the place of Judas Iscariot among the twelve. They required "one who must become a witness with us of His resurrection", Acts, **1**: 21-22.

As instances of the proclamation of this fact in the earliest recorded preaching, we have Peter standing up with the eleven and saying, while explaining the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost:

"Whom ye by the hand of lawless men did crucify and slay, Him hath God raised up, having loosed the pangs of death", Acts, **2**: 23-4.

Likewise at the Gate Beautiful after the healing of the man born lame, Peter protests:

"Ye killed the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses", Acts, **3**: 14-15; see also **4**: 10 and 33; **5**: 30.

---

<sup>1</sup> Morison, *op. cit.*, pp. 179 and 265.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Hermann Sasse, *Mysterium Christi*, p. 94.

4. We turn, next, to a consideration of the dramatic change in Paul, once the bitter opponent of the Christians. None saw more clearly than this brilliant young Pharisee whither this new movement must lead if left unchecked, and so he resolved to use all his God-given powers to stamp it out, by persecuting the humble followers of the despised Nazarene. He himself was fully aware that this belief in the Resurrection of Jesus occupied the first place in their faith.

Notwithstanding all this; notwithstanding his first horror, akin to that of the disciples themselves, at a crucified claimant to the Messianic office, something amazing happened to him; for he, the proud Pharisee and pitiless persecutor of the new sect, himself became a convinced follower, an enthusiastic evangelist of this same Jesus. "Why should a man of this tough breed and of this admittedly sane and virile calibre be uprooted in an instant from his cherished beliefs and swept like chaff before the wind into the dogmatic camp of his most hated enemies?.....Why was one of the greatest intellects of the ages brought over and fixed in an instant of time from one pole of dogmatic belief to another?"<sup>1</sup>

#### PAUL LEAVES US IN NO DOUBT

Again, for so dramatic, so unexpected, so apparently impossible a change, we require an adequate cause. What was it? Paul leaves us in no kind of doubt as to that. It was the same cause—it was the appearance to him of the Risen Lord, "He appeared to me also", I Cor. **15: 8**.

It is not too much to say that this fact revolutionized Paul's outlook. Henceforth he was filled with an over-powering conviction that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead:

---

<sup>1</sup> Morison, *op. cit.*, pp. 222 f.; cp. Archbishop Temple, C.V., p. 109, where he speaks of Paul as "a man of supreme intellectual penetration and grasp".

cp. "That ye may know.....the exceeding greatness of His (God's) power to usward who believe, according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to sit at His right hand in the heavenly places", Ephes. 1: 19-20.

5. Nor does this exhaust our evidence. Paul tells us that he actually met others who had seen the Risen Christ. In I Cor. 15: 3-9 he gives a list of the Lord's appearances. This passage is actually the earliest literary evidence that we have of the event. It was written about 25 years after Christ's death, but the testimony it records belongs to a considerably earlier date. In Gal. 1: 18-19 the Apostle mentions how he went up to Jerusalem three years after his conversion, to visit Peter with whom he spent fifteen days—Peter, the bold proclaimer of the Resurrection.

We have it also on the testimony of Paul that immediately after the death of Jesus, Peter, James, and others—once a group numbering "above five hundred"—were convinced that they had seen the risen Christ. Even so Paul's list is not exhaustive; he makes no mention of appearances to the women. The reason for this omission seems to be that he desired to stress the testimony of those who might be called the "official witnesses", i.e. the disciples who had always been in the company of Jesus.

Sometimes the objection is made that these appearances were merely visions. But we have no evidence whatever to show that the disciples were expecting Jesus to appear. On the contrary, Luke explicitly says that when He had talked to them about His forthcoming death and resurrection they failed to understand Him.<sup>1</sup> Further, it is characteristic of visions of the kind here implied that the object of one's thoughts and desires appears in familiar form; the person

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke, 18: 31-34.

so seen is at once recognized. But the records tell us again and again that the risen Christ was not immediately recognized. He was in some way changed, and only revealed His identity by some characteristic speech or act.

If, on the other hand, we accept the fact of the Resurrection and the empty grave, "it makes far better history of the whole story than any form of the vision theory. It makes sense and unity of all the events; it makes the disciples intelligible as human beings.....above all, it makes a unity of the figure of Jesus Christ, and sense of the New Testament."<sup>1</sup>

### THE EMPTY TOMB

6. Then we have the clear evidence of the empty tomb. There are those who seek to explain this away; for instance, it has been suggested that the words "He is not here" (Mt. 28: 6) mean that the body was in another tomb, not the one to which the women came. But the very precise language in Mark's account, viz. "Mary Magdelene and Mary the Mother of Joses, noted where he was laid",<sup>2</sup> does not permit of such a notion. Besides which, the complete statement in Matthew's narrative is, "He is not here, because He is risen, even as He said".

Moreover, as Dr. Cairns pertinently asks in respect of this wild theory, if in some form the body did not leave the tomb, what became of it?

"We are told that no doubt somehow it was lost. Is it then so easy for a human body to get lost at any time? How it could get lost in the tempest of love and hate of the Jerusalem of that day, it passes the wit of man to determine. Was there no Antigone among all these women to stand by and remember the place of the body of the Lord? Is it likely that Mary was less loyal to her Son than the Greek maiden to her brother?<sup>3</sup> Was

---

<sup>1</sup> Cairns, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Mk. 15: 47.

<sup>3</sup> cp. Sophocles' drama, *Oedipus Coloneus*.

there no Sadducee or Pharisee with sufficient foresight and vigilance to destroy the early faith at its birth by producing the body? Is that like what we know of Caiaphas?"<sup>1</sup>

The very insinuation of the Jews that the disciples stole Him away seems rather to establish the historical reality of the Resurrection, for the disappearance of the body cannot otherwise be accounted for; while the offering of the bribe would be meaningless if we are to assume that the *soldiers* did not know the actual place where the body was laid.

A moment's reflection should suffice to show that the disciples could not have faced the authorities with the confidence we know they exhibited, unless they had been quite sure that the grave was really empty; in other words, that the body had not been just "lost". Besides, we know that at first even they were reluctant to credit this miracle, "These words (of the women) appeared in their sight as idle talk; and they disbelieved them", Luke, **24: II**.

7. Such considerations compel us to take Paul's words at 1 Cor. **15: 35ff.**, literally, and at their natural value. The "rising" of which he there speaks is assuredly relative to the grave and the burial, and if Paul did not have in his mind a bodily resurrection he had no right at all to speak of any resurrection, not even a "spiritual" one.<sup>2</sup>

How could Paul, who speaks as he does on the relation between sin and death, on the body and the spirit, and on the final transformation of the body, have possibly believed in any theory of our Lord's Resurrection which could dispense with the empty tomb? We are not here concerned as to whether his ideas were right or wrong, but with a fact; a fact, made clear from the whole context of his thought as well as from his phraseology, viz. that at the centre of his faith lay the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cairns, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> cp. Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, p. 113.

full Easter message and that in this he was at one with the whole New Testament community. This full faith is the very root of all the optimism we see in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup>

### TRIUMPHANT JOY

How characteristic of those writings is the exclamation,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!" I Pet. 1: 3.

In that outburst of praise there is not only profound joy at the realization that the power of sin has been broken, but also profound relief from the paralysing effects of human grief and human tragedy. Good has triumphed! God has vindicated His Son! And this is the glorious GOOD NEWS that has changed the face of the world. Apart from this proof, the Muslim, nay, mankind itself, has no assurance that men will rise again—Jesus Christ is "the first fruits of them that are asleep".<sup>2</sup>

8. Finally, and yet once again, we need to rouse ourselves to realize that we are dealing with no common incident, but with the most crucial event in history.

The words, the claims, the promises, and the hopes held out by Jesus in His lifetime, required some confirmation and vindication, and God Himself furnished it—that is our confident belief—in raising Christ from the dead.<sup>3</sup> This was the "sign" given by God to the disciples in their desperate need. "That Sunday dawned on an empty tomb. Anything else would have been an anticlimax to the life of Jesus upon earth: nothing else could account for what was to

---

<sup>1</sup> cp. Cairns, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-2.

<sup>2</sup> Cor. 15: 20.

<sup>3</sup> cp. Hoskyns and Davey, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

follow."<sup>1</sup> Small wonder that the Resurrection became the standing theme with the Apostles of the "exceeding greatness" of the power of God.<sup>2</sup>

But in the very nature of the case the historical evidence of that sign—the empty tomb and the appearances to the disciples, which was given to them and which satisfied them—cannot be given to us, and cannot, in just the same way, satisfy us. Nevertheless, God has given to us and to the world another sign for the truth of Christ and Christianity; and that is, the vindication in history of the claims Jesus made.

These are claims that can be, and have been tested; and both He and His claims have stood the test—*Vicisti Galilæe*. "Thou hast triumphed, O Galilæan"!

How are we to account for His triumphs in the lives of men and women all down the ages, and for His gracious influence and power in our own lives? How, save through the conviction that He ever lives—that He who once "was dead", is "ALIVE FOR EVERMORE".<sup>3</sup>

#### BOOKS FOR REFERENCE

- Morison, F., *Who moved the Stone?*, Faber, 1930.  
 Denney, J., *Jesus and the Gospel*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1909.  
 Zwemer, S. M., *The Glory of the Cross*, Marshall Bros.  
 Notovitch, N., *The Unknown Life of Christ*, Hutchinson, 1895.  
 Ahmad Shah, *Four years in Tibet*, Lazarus, Benares, 1906.

---

<sup>1</sup> Moffat, Jas., *Everyman's Life of Jesus*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> Ephes. 1: 20.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. 1: 19.

APPENDIX A (from p. 138)

Other replies of the *'ulama* as to who will be saved:

1. The Musalman is *nājī* and liable to punishment for his sins. The Brahmin is *nārī*, no matter how virtuous a life he may lead, which will all go for naught.

2. Whoever does good will get his reward and whoever does evil will suffer its consequences, whether a Muslim or a non-Muslim. Those whose good deeds outweigh their evil deeds will go to heaven, those whose evil deeds outweigh their good, to hell. But this rests with God to judge.

3. The Muslim is decidedly a *nājī*, provided he dies a Muslim, the Brahmin must have hell as his eternal abode if he dies a *kāfir*.

4. The Muslim will have salvation, the *kāfir*, no matter what a blessing his life may be to his fellow-men, will have no credit for it and must pack [off] to hell.

5. A Muslim however wicked he may be, is assured of salvation. A *kāfir* may get the reward of his virtuous life in this worldly life, but in the hereafter he shall have no share.

6. The Muslim will get to heaven. The *kāfir* may spend a whole life in doing good, may worship God the whole night, may spend lacs of rupees in charity but these will carry no value unless he shall profess faith in Islam. He will live in God's wrath for ever.

7. Faith is necessary to salvation. There is no salvation for a polytheist. Faith is the key to salvation and the *kāfir* does not possess that key. As a man's salvation means atonement with God, it is inconceivable that this object may be obtained without faith in God. As a matter of fact, deeds which are not done out of this motive cannot be called virtue, however virtuous they may look. Such deeds may be due to the desire for popularity or some other motive and may lead to the attainment of that desire—but not to God, the real objective of man, his salvation.

8. Both are *nārī*, the wicked Muslim as well as the virtuous Brahmin, for salvation depends on faith plus a virtuous life.

9. It has been a moot point which of the two carries more value, faith shorn of life or life shorn of faith. The consensus of opinion puts the first above the other. Lack of good life makes one liable to a certain measure of punishment, but lack of faith incurs eternal torture.

10. A Muslim, however sinful, is not *nārī*. Mere profession of Islam wards off hell fire. A *kāfir*, no matter even if the whole of his life is spent in good deeds, is doomed to hell fire.

## APPENDIX B (from p. 145)

We need not be over-concerned about those who contend that for God to "suffer" would be dishonourable to Him, for, as Professor H. R. Mackintosh has insisted, "it is worth saying that love in God must include that element which in experience we denote as emotion or feeling.....There is within Him that which finds us desirable for our own sake, which thirsts to impart itself and receive back the outflow of our love.....For it (His interest in man) to miss its aim through persistent human rebellion or distrust, results in His experiencing what we can only call pain and a sense of loss.....True, we use such words.....only because we have no better. But they are at least a truer and worthier account of the Divine Reality than the frigid and vacuous language not seldom held on this subject. The Father has at times been depicted as inexpressibly superior to all feeling.....But an inescapable choice has to be made here, and men will mark which side we take. What has been called the impassibility of God is in some of its most characteristic forms, nothing better than a vestigial relic of paganism." But this does not mean that we hold that suffering is the predominant note in the life of God. H. R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Apprehension of God*, pp. 192-3. cp. J. Baillie, *The Place of Jesus Christ in Modern Christianity*, p. 182; Temple, in "*Foundations*", p. 221; W. R. Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience*, pp. 248-9.

## APPENDIX C (from p. 190)

Some of the base charges that were brought by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian against the moral character of Jesus Christ:

He "was addicted to drinking", and "opened the way to excess and wholesale drunkenness" (through the use of wine at the Last Supper).

He "insulted his mother" (in addressing her as "woman"), and used "vulgar abuse to the learned priests of the Jews".

He "had free and intimate connections with women of dubious character".

"Some of the ancestors of Jesus were harlots."

He "transgressed many precepts of the Law".

He "intentionally caused wrongful loss to an innocent person by destroying his property" (the Gadarene swine).

Jesus "practised deceit", and "was enraged with an inanimate object" (a fig-tree).

"Jesus Christ was evil-minded and overbearing. He was the enemy of the righteous. We cannot call him even a gentleman, much less a prophet."

"It should be remembered that Jesus was a liar."

"He was profoundly disturbed through fear of death."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from *Sinlessness of Prophets, Unity versus Trinity, Zamāma-i-Anjam-i-Atham, Kashtī-i-Nūh*, some of which were cited in the Urdu paper, *Zamindar*, of 24th November, 1934.

## APPENDIX D

### *The Ahmadis*

The founder of the Ahmadi movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was born in 1839 at Qadian, a small town in the north of the Panjab. He had received a good education in Muslim learning and languages. About 1880 he concluded that he was called of God to a special mission, and in 1889 openly announced that he was the recipient of divine revelation and that he was authorized to initiate disciples of his own. From this time he began to expound a series of new doctrines.

He, too, found much to stimulate his thought and furnish him with material for his doctrines, in Muslim predictions concerning the Imam-Mahdi, with which he joined Muslim expectations about the Messiah. The day came when, claiming that the scriptures of Zoroastrians, Hindus and Buddhists alike prophesied the coming of a great world Teacher, he gave out that the hopes of the nations were to be fulfilled in himself. He was, further, the *mujaddid* sent by God for this century to restore the faith of Islam. He thus professed to be both the promised Messiah (in spirit, though not in person) and the Mahdi.....

Likewise, on the ground that God, at intervals, sends "renewers" of religion, he claimed that in his capacity of Mahdi no other than Muhammad had made his "second advent". He was, in fact, "an image of the Holy Prophet". But here, too, a difficulty had to be overcome. In the view of the orthodox the Mahdi is to be a man of war whose path will be red with the blood of "unbelievers". The Mirza, on the contrary, professed himself to be a man of peace; accordingly the *jihad* he proclaimed, the only kind possible "under existing circumstances", was to be a spiritual warfare, involving at once loyalty to the British Government and abstention from the political activities of the All-India Muslim League.....The Mirza stirred up much opposition. He never ceased to upbraid the professional *mullas*, whom he charged with keeping the common people in the darkness and bondage of superstition. Nor could he tolerate the rationalists, such as Sayyid Amir Ali and S. Khuda Bakhsh, who, by tracing some of the elements of the Qur'ān and Islam to pre-Islamic Arab cults, Judaism and Christianity, had weakened the claim

and authority of the Qur'ān. But in regard to social reforms he sided with the conservatives. He repudiated the abolition of *parda*, the veil, and defended the Islamic law of polygamy and divorce.

Nevertheless, the orthodox party whom he had come to "reform" branded him as heretic, blasphemer, enemy of the faith, and imposter. He was excommunicated, and he and his followers were forbidden the use of the ordinary mosques. Subsequently, several Qadian missionaries suffered the penalty of death for heresy in Afghanistan, three as recently as 1924, on which occasion orthodox leaders in India sent telegrams to the Amir approving the measures he had taken in the interests of the faith.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad died in 1908 and later on a schism took place in the ranks of his followers, as a result of which a new party came into being which shortly afterwards made Lahore its headquarters. For the sake of clearness it is as well to speak of the adherents to these two sections as (1) Qadianis, disciples of the original founder (also called Mirzā'is) and (2) Ahmadis, members of the Lahore party. Such differentiation is pointed out by the Lahore group. In answering the inquiry of a recent correspondent about the position of Khwaja Kamal-ud-din, the following statement was made in the columns of *The Light*, (August 8, 1931). "A Qadiani is one who looks upon Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, as a prophet, and regards all those who do not accept him (as) outside the pale of Islam.....He (the Khwaja) belongs to the Ahmadiyya movement of Lahore, according to which the Holy Prophet Muhammad was the last Prophet and no prophet can appear after him; which considers everyone who recites the *kalima*, whatever school of thought he may belong to, a fellow-brother in Islam".....

Both sections of the Ahmadis carry on propaganda work, and have a very active press, disseminating their views widely in English and Urdu journals.

(From *The People of the Mosque*, pp. 218-223.)

## APPENDIX E

The following questions, among others, were submitted in writing by a Muslim undergraduate to the author, at the close of a series of semi-private lectures. Copies of the written answers are appended.

Q. 1. Those who try to bring accusations against Christ deny the Koran and hence cannot be true Muslims.

A. In so far as you mean those like the Qadianis and Ahmadis, who charge Jesus with all manner of evil, I agree. My difficulty, however, is that the Qur'ān itself denies some of the facts of history recorded in the gospels.

Q. 2. Are the metaphysical conceptions of the Trinity easier to understand than the simple "There is no God but Allah"? You must remember that the Koran was first sent to the Arabs who were polytheistic, and in view of this "La Ilaha Il-Allah Muhammad ur-Rasul Allah" is very simple.

A. No, quite obviously any conception of the Trinity is more difficult to understand than the statement that God is One, and that is why the doctrine is so often misunderstood and misrepresented. But you would not say that "simple arithmetic" gives you a means of knowing more, say, than "higher mathematics" does—although the former is simple and the latter complicated. So in the matter of ultimate truth about God—the simpler the statement the less adequate it must be. When thinking of Him we look for something profound, difficult to grasp, and not to be arrived at by human guesswork. Nevertheless, it is not *necessary* to understand the metaphysics of this doctrine. After all, the doctrine of the Unity of God is not a matter of "revelation"—man has deduced it—some of the noblest minds in Arabia

believed in the Unity of God before the preaching of Islam; think, too, of the Jews centuries before the coming of Muhammad.

Christians too believe in the Unity of God, but in a Trinitarian form. They do so because of something that God has done; it is that He has revealed Himself—His character and His love, in and through Jesus Christ; and that now, through His Holy Spirit, He operates in the spirits of men, correcting, controlling, constraining and comforting them.

Q. 3. If Christ, thousands of years ago, died for the sins of the world all Christian sins are automatically forgiven?

A. Not "thousands of years ago"—say, nearly two thousand years ago. The answer to your question is—Certainly not! But Christ did willingly go to the death of the Cross in the faith and hope that *thereby* He might win us from sin and all its wretchedness, to a life of righteousness, well-pleasing to God.

Q. 4. Did the generations before Christ that were born before Him have to suffer a handicap in the forgiveness of sins as compared to those following?

A. If you mean—were penitent sinners denied forgiveness by the God of Mercy before the days of Christ?—the answer is—No, certainly not. But if you mean—was there something lacking in the measure of their sense of sin and in their penitence for it? I should say, Yes.

Q. 5. If we believe in Muhammad more (i.e. than Christ) it is only a natural weakness because he gave us faith and taught a wild race to worship a Supreme Being and not wooden idols.

A. I cannot think that in a matter of vital religion it is enough to follow "a natural weakness". In my own case, I have heard the voice of God Almighty speaking to me through the Life and Death of Jesus Christ until my sinful heart has melted and I have responded to that forgiving Love which

suffered, and yet conquered death. I now love Him, and God through Him, because He first loved me and gave Himself for me.

Published by the Y.M.C.A. Publishing House, Calcutta, and Printed  
by P. Knight, Baptist Mission Press, 41A, Lower Circular Road,  
Calcutta.