

THE BIBLE AND ISLAM

Sharing God's Word with a Muslim

A Basic Guide by Bassam Michael Madany

This book is offered as a guide for Christians witnessing to Muslims. It relates the Gospel genuinely, relevantly, and intelligently to the Muslim heart and mind. For over thirty-six years, I proclaimed the Word of God to the Arabic-speaking world. My approach follows the interpretation and exposition of the Gospel as we find it in the **Epistle of Paul to the Romans**. My emphasis is on the sinfulness of man and the sovereign grace of God. I take into consideration the fact that up to recent times, Muslims have not had the opportunity to hear the saving message of the Bible.

“Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. Copyright 1973 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.”

At the right is an image of the cover of the second Russian edition that was published in Moscow, Russia, in December 2001.



Table of Contents

Preface

Introduction

Part I – The Gospel

Chapter 1 – The Gospel according to Paul	1
Chapter 2 – Introducing Jesus	15
Chapter 3 – The Gospel in the Old Testament	23
Chapter 4 – Conclusion	29

Part II – The Christian Mission to Islam

Chapter 5 – Islam Viewed From a Biblical Perspective	31
Chapter 6 – Proclaiming the Gospel to Muslims	35
Chapter 7 – Islam and the Quest For Modernity	41
Chapter 8 – Missions to Muslims in the Twenty-First Century	49
Glossary of Arabic-Islamic Words	57

P r e f a c e

Almost everyone is aware of the revival of Islam. And there are various reasons for this sudden interest in a religion that has been in existence for almost 1400 years. Some are political, some economic and some religious. My interest, however, lies in the area of the Christian mission to Islam.

Since the rise of Islam in the 7th century A.D., it has spread mostly at the expense of Christian lands. The Christians in those conquered areas were weak and divided. The Arab conquerors called Christians and Jews "*Dhimmis*," an Arabic word that means protected. This protection, however, did not mean that they were free in the expression of their faith. There were severe restrictions placed on the *dhimmis*, such as paying the *jizya* or poll tax. Over the years, many among them Islamized. And by the time of the Ottoman conquest of the Middle East in the 16th century, Middle Eastern Christians became a minority.

Christian missions to Muslims began in earnest early in the 19th century. Great men and women were raised up by God to lay the foundations for missions to Muslims. Then followed the translation of the Bible into Arabic, Persian, and Turkish. Evangelical churches were born, and missionaries consolidated their work by establishing hospitals, printing presses, orphanages and schools that were desperately needed at the time.

It was my privilege to be a radio missionary of The Christian Reformed Church in North America, broadcasting the Gospel to the Arab world from June 1958 until June 1994. After more than 36 years of radio, literature, and correspondence missions, my testimony is "**But God's Word is not chained.**" (II Timothy 2:9b) Through a daily ministry of the Word, on an international scale, I was able to develop a Biblical way of teaching the Christian faith to Muslims, using the Bible itself as textbook. It is a way that, through the working of the Holy Spirit, has proven to be effective.

The style of this book is affected by its origin. It was based on my lectures given to students who did not have an adequate knowledge of Islam. The style was governed by the uniqueness of Islam and its misunderstanding of the Christian faith.

You will also notice that I subscribe to a specific tradition: **the Reformed heritage**. This does not mean that my understanding of the Bible is prejudiced by a dogmatic approach to its teachings, but rather that my study of Holy Scripture has increased my attachment to the Reformed tradition. I find myself better equipped to bring the Gospel to Muslims because of the major themes of the Reformed faith. It also means that I am totally committed to the unique role of the Bible in missions. It is not Western culture that I spread over the air, but the liberating Word of God. Muslims have seldom heard the Word of God in their mother tongue. Most of them have never seen a Bible.

It is equally my conviction that a formal adherence to the Bible as the Word of God, does not equip a person to be a missionary to Muslims. We need to grasp the purpose of the Word. In this book you will find a special emphasis on the redemptive character of the gospel. Biblical revelation finds its focus in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Islam makes it doubly necessary to emphasize and re-emphasize the fact that the Messiah did not come merely to teach and to heal, but to redeem his people from their sins.

It is also my conviction that our greatest difference with Islam is not merely in the doctrines of God and Christ, but it is also in the area of the doctrine of man. Muslims are taught that man is not really sinful in the Biblical sense of the word, and thus needs no redemption. It is extremely

important therefore; that we keep on emphasizing this Biblical teaching that the Messiah came from God specifically to deal with the awful imperialism of sin.

When we have succeeded, by the grace of God, to show a Muslim that he needs a Savior and that God has sent Jesus the Messiah to be this Savior; then the traditional difficulties with such doctrines as the Trinity and the Sonship of Jesus Christ, tend to disappear.

It is with gratitude to the Lord that I present this revised fourth edition of **THE BIBLE AND ISLAM**.

I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to my wife Shirley whose encouragement led to the initial production of this book. Both her placing of the material on the word-processor and her editorial help were invaluable in the preparation of this revised version.

As Christians who still cling to the mandate given by our Lord to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth and to the end of time, we must be concerned about the one billion Muslims whose urgent need is to hear the redeeming message of the Gospel. *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:12)

Rev. Bassam Michael Madany

Middle East Resources

www.levant.info

September 2003

INTRODUCTION

One of the doctrines that Muslims have inherited from their tradition is that the Christians have falsified the Holy Scriptures. Supposedly this alteration occurred before the rise of Islam. In fact, Muslims are not aware of any writings in the Old Testament other than the *Torah of Moses* and the *Zaboor (Psalms) of David*. They are surprised to discover four *Gospels* in the New Testament, the *Acts of the Apostles*, as well as several Letters, and a book called the *Vision or Apocalypse of John*. They are surprised to discover that the Bible is a collection of 66 books. Therefore, it is very important for the Christian missionary to explain, in a loving and patient way, that the Word of God consists of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament.

It is better to approach the divisions of the Old Testament in a different way than we do in our English Bibles. I prefer the Hebrew division: **Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms**. Moses refers to the *Pentateuch*, which the Muslims know as the *Tawrat*. The Prophets include *Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*. The third part of the Old Testament is known as the **Writings**. Here we find the following books: *Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, I and II Chronicles*. Since the Book of Psalms was placed at the head of the third division of the Old Testament, quite often this section is known as **The Psalms**.

When we come to the **New Testament**, it is of great importance that we insist that we have one Gospel, i.e., one *Injeel*, and that its primary meaning is **good news**. It is definitely not a book that Jesus received from heaven as Muslims are taught in their tradition. The Word of God, as far as its contents are concerned, is both **law and gospel**. The Arabic word *shari'a* (law) is an important one to learn. God's commands and promises are found in all of Scripture. The good news of Jesus is not to be confined to **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**.

It is unfortunate that we often add to the Muslim's misunderstanding of the Christian faith by talking about the Gospels as being **of Matthew, or of Mark, or of Luke or of John**. For example, in the Arabic translation the title is rendered "*Injeel Matta*." This gives the impression that the subject matter of each gospel is its author, rather than Jesus Christ. Rather, we should be faithful to the original Greek word "kata," which means, "*according to*" We must not give the impression that we have four gospels. There is only one gospel, one *Injeel*, and it is the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There are some genuine offenses that we cannot avoid, such as the doctrines of the Trinity, the deity of Jesus Christ, as well as the historicity of the crucifixion. But we should not, inadvertently add more offenses or show lack of sensitivity, when we present the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ to a Muslim. Thus, we must emphasize, time and again, that we have only one gospel and that it is found throughout the entire Bible. For example, the book of Romans may rightly be called *The Gospel according to Paul*. It is the most thorough and systematic New Testament book that expounds the true nature of the gospel. There is good reason for starting our study of **The Bible and Islam**, with this book, which was originally a letter that the apostle sent to the church in the very heart of the Roman Empire.

PART I — THE GOSPEL

Chapter One

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

The Preaching of the Gospel

“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.”
Romans 1:1

As soon as you begin to read the Scriptures among Muslims you will be aware of many questions that will automatically be raised. Some of them will deal with misunderstandings of certain points of Christian doctrine. You must be patient and loving and not disappointed if the first and second encounters seem fruitless. You will find that you have to wait on the Lord to reveal himself to them through the Scriptures. Your only concern will be your faithfulness to Him and to his Word.

The name of Paul will elicit two reactions. Either they will not have heard of him at all, or they will tell you that he is the greatest villain that Christianity has ever had. They may say Paul invented doctrines that Jesus never preached. Muslim scholars have always been delighted to read the works of the higher critics. If something heretical appears in a London or New York newspaper, you may be sure that it will be picked up, translated and reprinted in full in the daily newspapers of the Middle East. Unfortunately there have been too many such statements by Western theologians who deny one or another precious article of the Christian faith. Thus, as we approach Muslims with the Christian message, we base it totally on the revealed Book, doing our utmost to explain that we are, in the tradition of Paul, messengers bearing the Word of God.

We have many words to explain, starting with the name of our Lord. The word Christ has come to us from the Greek New Testament. It is the equivalent of the Hebrew word Messiah. In translating the New Testament into most Islamic languages the Greek word Christos is rendered *el-Masih*, i.e., the Messiah.

Jesus, or in Arabic *Yesu’a*, is another word which does not ring a bell. Right away we have to explain the meaning of the word rather than take anything for granted. The name *Yesu’a* is the same as Joshua, and Joshua means Savior. In the Arabic Bible our Lord is called *Yesu’a el-Masih*, Jesus the Messiah. In the *Qur’an*, Muhammad refers to our Lord as *’Issa*. There is a continuing debate over the use of this name. I am convinced that we should not use it. It is a loaded word, and I cannot empty it of its connotations. In other words, when you say *’Issa el-Masih*, you are evoking the *Qur’anic* concept of the Messiah. You have no way of ridding it of its associations. Furthermore, when we analyze *’Issa* in Arabic, we find that it has no meaning at all. However, the name *el-Masih* has an Arabic root and means the *Anointed One*. I prefer to call our Lord: *Jesus the Messiah*. Remember, you must always supply the meaning of the word Jesus (Savior) in whatever Islamic language you use.

Why do I make such a point of this? Because you must show Muslims that the person you are proclaiming is not a mere prophet. That is their idea of the Messiah. You should explain that *Jesus the Messiah, Yesu’a el-Masih*, is *el-Mukhalles*, the Arabic for savior. And by using it, you indicate to Muslims that **Christianity is a redemptive religion**. This is the most distinctive feature of our faith. When Jesus was born, this is how the angels announced His birth: *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord.”* (Luke 2:11)

Quite often, we find that the New Testament interprets for us the meaning of words that are of Hebrew origin. For example, when the angel appeared to Joseph he explained the meaning of the name to be given to the child. Referring to the Virgin Mary, the angel said: *“She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their*

sins.” Matthew 1:21. Matthew went on commenting on the birth of the Messiah with this quotation from the Old Testament: “*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’ which means, ‘God with us.’*” Matthew 1:22

It is always a good idea when you use a Biblical name to find out its meaning and interpret it to a Muslim audience.

Paul declares that he has been set aside by Christ Jesus to be an apostle. In Arabic the word for apostle is *rasool*. Muhammad is called a *rasool*. The Islamic credo or *shahada* is: “*I bear witness that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the apostle of Allah.*” In Arabic it reads: “*Ashhadu anna la Ilaha illa Allah, w’anna Muhammad rasool Allah.*”

So now we are setting Paul up as a very special person. He is an apostle, chosen and called by God.

The word used for God in Arabic is *Allah* (with the accent on the second syllable). Some Western Christians, who are unfamiliar with the history of Eastern Christians, think that it is not proper to use this word for the name of God. I disagree. First of all, there is no other word for god in the Arabic language except *Allah*. And besides that, it is a word that has been used long before the rise of Islam. *Allah* is a Semitic word equivalent to the Hebrew word *Elohim*. So it does not belong simply to Muslims. During the nineteenth century, both the American and the Lebanese scholars who translated the Bible into Arabic, decided to use the word *Allah* for God, and that was a wise decision.

In the Arabic version of the letter to the Romans the word Injeel is used for good news and this is what our message is all about. The gospel is the good news of what God decided to do concerning the redemption of man, and how it became an accomplished fact through the incarnation of the Son of God, His suffering, His vicarious death and His glorious resurrection.

Right away you must deal with the Muslim’s misunderstanding of the gospel. They think that it was a book descended from heaven on the Messiah. He simply received and was commissioned to preach it to the children of

Israel. That was, according to the Qu’ran, the mission of the Messiah. There is no word at all about redemption!

When Paul calls the Injeel the good news of God he is stating that it has a divine origin. The good news is not just attributed to Jesus the Messiah, but to God the Father. As Paul said: “*the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son.*” Romans 1:2. You have to keep in mind that the gospel is the gospel of God. Do not be mesmerized by the Muslim misunderstanding of the gospel. The description of our Bible is “*the Gospel of God*” and “*the Gospel of His Son,*” and these expressions do not contradict each other. Of course, there would be no gospel if the Son was not willing to be born of the Virgin Mary, to suffer under Pontius Pilate, to be crucified, die, and be buried and to be raised again. The gospel is about God’s Son.

When we say God’s Son, we immediately have done something terrible so far as the Muslims are concerned. They say that this is blasphemy. It is called *shirk*, which in Arabic means the worst concept of sin a person can commit regarding the Godhead, i.e., associating partners with God.

The Muslim considers God a lonely being in a Unitarian way. They say—how can God have a son? There is a verse in the Qur’an that states, *He does not beget, and neither is He begotten.* In fact, they have a very crude idea of the Christian Trinity as consisting of God, Mary and Jesus.

The Qur’an states that, Mary conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, and she gave birth to the Messiah. But they insist that the Messiah was a mere man. Furthermore, one may not deduce from the Qur’anic references to the Holy Spirit that this is recognition of his deity. God, according to Islam, is one in the Unitarian sense of the word. More is mentioned about this doctrine in Part II of this book.

Paul refers to Jesus Christ as *our Lord*. Muslims do not like this word to refer to Jesus the Messiah. They reserve the word *Lord (rab)* to *Allah* alone. So how can Christians call Jesus *Rab*? As far as they are concerned, Jesus was a mere *nabi*, a prophet, and a *rasool*, i.e., an apostle of *Allah*.

Who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the

Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.
Romans 1:4

Here Muslims raise vehement objections, for according to the Qur’an, and to Muslim tradition, He was never crucified. There is a verse in the Qu’ran which says that “*they have not crucified Him but it was likened unto Him.*” In some of their traditions, they claim that it was Judas Iscariot who was crucified on the cross. Their argument is that God, who sent such a great *rasool* as Jesus the Son of Mary, would never allow him to die such a shameful death on the cross.

At this point, we must remember that not all Muslims are against the idea of suffering as having some redemptive value. For example, the *Shi’ites* in Iraq, Iran, and southern Lebanon, have a high regard for suffering. They are followers of *Ali*, the son-in-law of *Muhammad*, who became the fourth Caliph in 656. Unfortunately for him, all the Muslim parties in Medina did not accept him. As a result of the dissension in the Muslim community, he was murdered in 661. His followers to this day remember his assassination, as well as the murder of his son Hasan, years later. (See Chapter 7)

With respect to Romans 1, you might find it useful to talk about the history of the time. Roman roads are still visible in certain parts of the Middle East. It would be very helpful to talk about the many people who had come from Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine and settled in Rome. Our main concern is to find topics, which will be helpful in reaching the Muslims with the gospel. Remember that they are historically conscious, even though their knowledge of biblical history is often marred by inaccurate accounts handed down in their tradition. Christian missionaries working among Muslims must become quite familiar with the details of the history of the Mediterranean world in the early years of the church. Quite often, we refer to the orthodox Christian faith as the historic Christian faith.

Paul’s Summary

Turning to verse 16 in the first chapter of Romans, we have the summary of the whole book.

“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the Power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.” Romans 1:16

It is a dynamic message. Your job is to explain the gospel to the Muslims and then pray that the Holy Spirit will open their hearts to receive that gospel. It is your responsibility to clear up the misconceptions that have been imprinted in the Muslim mind since the dawn of Islam. **You must explain what the gospel is and is not.**

There was a good reason for Paul to write: “*I am not ashamed of the gospel.*” He wanted to express his conviction in a negative form. When he said he was not ashamed of the good news he was implying that, in the Roman cultural context, many parts of the message of the Injeel were not acceptable. The entire worldview of the Greco-Roman civilization was antagonistic to the contents of the message as proclaimed by Paul. There existed a strong temptation to compromise, but the apostle resisted that temptation. In the language of the twenty-first century, we may say that Paul did not adapt his message according to the dictates of political correctness.

In the Islamic concept of the *Injeel*, it is a book that the Messiah received from God. But we must insist that the gospel is not primarily a book, neither are its contents nothing but law. *The Injeel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.* There was a point in time, i.e., during the First-Century A.D., when the only Bible in existence was the Old Testament. The common version was the Greek translation done in Alexandria, Egypt and known as the **Septuagint**. So when the Apostles and their assistants proclaimed the good news in the Mediterranean world, the New Testament, as we now know it, had not yet existed. Its various parts were circulating and preserved by the Church. Thus, early in the Second-Century, the canon of the New Testament was being established and its twenty-seven books preserved in various sections of the early Church.

I am using this historical information in order to emphasize that the gospel is a dynamic message from God. It is a message of salvation. The good news of God is found throughout the Bible. It is in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Romans or any other part of the Scriptures. This fact must be

stressed in all of our evangelistic labors among Muslims. If the gospel were a book of law, as they think it is, then it would be a legalistic document, incapable of communicating the way of salvation.

But the Biblical gospel is God's power that saves all who believe. Now Muslims will tell you, "We are believers." This is a very important concept in Islam. For them, a believer, "*mu'min*" (feminine: *mu'mina* and plural, *mu'minun*) is a person who has professed his faith in Allah and in his apostle Muhammad, as well as in all the previous messengers of Allah, from Adam through Jesus, and finally to Muhammad. However, what we mean by "believe" is trusting in the person and work of the Messiah, as revealed in the Bible. In other words, we must state that the Jesus a Muslim must believe in, is none other than the Biblical Christ; and certainly not *'Issa el Massih* of the *Qur'an*.

Reviewing again—the faith that Paul refers to in "*everyone who believes*" is in the *Christ of Al-Kitab*, i.e., the Book, the Arabic name of the Bible. Unfortunately, while Jews and Christians are called in the *Qur'an*, *Ahlul-Kitab*, i.e., the people of the Book, Muslims, in general, have seldom had the opportunity to see or read the Bible in their own languages. By the time they came across an Arabic translation of the Word of God, they faced a different version of the "story" of God's revelation, a version that differed radically from the one found in their sacred Book.

Recently, a very important manuscript was discovered at the Monastery of Saint Catherine in Mount Sinai, Egypt. It contains a translation of the **Book of Acts** and the **Epistles** from Syriac into Arabic. It took place in 867 A.D. in Damascus, Syria. I have studied the Arabic text that was published by **The Institute for Middle Eastern New Testament Studies**, in Louvain, Belgium, in cooperation with **The Bible Society in the Levant**. I came to the conclusion that within two centuries after the conquest of the Middle East by the Arab-Islamic armies, at least a portion of the Bible was translated into Arabic. However, for all practical purposes, the Arabic Bible was not made available to the Arabic-speaking people until 1860! The same goes for the other major languages of Islam such as Urdu,

Turkish, and Persian. In that sense, mission work among Muslims is of rather recent origin!

Looking at the phrase "*first for the Jew, then for the Gentile*," we may say that it was natural that the Bible came first to the Jews, because they were the people of God in the Old Testament times. The Jews referred to all non-Jews as *goyim*, (singular, *goy*.)

The Righteousness of God

Here we come to the fundamental doctrinal difference between Christianity and Islam (and Judaism). The gospel reveals how God makes people right with himself. The accent in the true gospel is not that God has revealed a higher law, nor a superior law, which we fulfill and thereby become well pleasing in His sight. Writing toward the end of his First Letter to the Corinthian Church, Paul gave us a clear description of the gospel. This is how he put it:

"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ... Whether, then, it was I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed" I Corinthians 15: 1-5, 11

The Biblical gospel was a promise during the Old Testament times, but it became a reality when Jesus Christ came to our world, died for our sins, and was raised on the third day. As one theologian stated, the gospel is not just that Christ died, but that Christ died for our sins. In other words, it refers to the historical fact of the death of Christ, his resurrection, and God's interpretation of these facts. People become righteous in the sight of God when they believe this gospel, and certainly not other pseudo-gospels.

The accent in the Scriptures is on God's initiative. It is "*a righteousness that is by faith*

from first to last, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith.” Romans 1:17b

According to Islamic teaching, Moses received a book from God called the *Tawrat*. This book taught the children of Israel how to please God by doing good deeds. In Islam, such terms as save or salvation are not part of their religious vocabulary. The Muslim’s main concern is to please Allah by accomplishing all the requirements of the Shari’a Law.

The best point to stress at the beginning of our approach to Muslims is exactly in the area where we have our greatest difference. And this is precisely the doctrine of man. Biblical anthropology is diametrically opposed to Islamic anthropology. According to Islam, man does not need a Savior, because man is simply a weak creature. What he needs is to know the will of Allah so that by doing it, he may please God. To put it in Christian terms, Muslims believe that the revelation of God’s will is adequate to save man. To them, man suffers from ignorance. It is not the righteousness of God that he needs, but simply to know the will of God. Through this enlightenment, man is enabled to fulfill all the requirements of the divine will. **This is the major difference between Islam and Biblical Christianity.**

In Islam man sins, but he is not sinful. He commits many sins and transgressions, but he is not sinful in the sense of having inherited a powerful inclination or propensity to sin. To the Muslim (as well as the Jew) man’s nature is inherently good. Man is basically decent. He simply misses the mark, because he does not know the will of Allah. Supply him with that knowledge, and he will be able to keep the Law and please his Creator!

Muslims have been immunized against the acceptance of the Biblical doctrine of salvation throughout a 1400-year religious culture that teaches the inherent goodness of man. It is not easy for them to acknowledge the wickedness or the sinfulness of man. Even though many examples from Islamic history point to the evil nature of man, they continue to deny the necessity for Divine redemption. Neither Muslims nor Jews are willing to accept the basic teaching of Biblical Christianity, that man is totally fallen. Every aspect of his personality has been polluted by sin: the mind, the will and the

emotions. In Reformed theology this is called Total Depravity. And this is the burden of the second part of the first chapter of Romans.

This section (1: 18-32) deals with the fallenness of man, the phenomenon of heathenism and heathen morality, and the degeneracy of man in the sophisticated and cultured societies of Rome and Greece. This section shows that moral perversions and religious idolatry illustrate the Pauline teaching about the fruits of sin.

Idolatry

Within the first chapter of the book of Romans, Paul gives a description of the rise of idolatry. Muslims abhor idolatry. What is the Biblical explanation of this sin? It is a primal sin that our first parents committed. It was not just simply ignorance. It was not that God had failed to give them adequate light at the dawn of creation. It was by an act of will that Adam and Eve sinned against God.

Unfortunately the Islamic concept of the fall is a caricature of the Biblical doctrine of the fall of man. They believe Adam disobeyed God and fell physically from the Garden to a lower level of existence on earth. And then he more or less apologized to God, and was forgiven.

The fall of the angels as told in the Qur’an is the most fantastic, unbelievable story. The angels fell after the creation of man. God called one of their leaders and said, “*bow down to Adam*” but the angel said, “*Oh, Lord, how can I do that? You have taught me only to bow down to you.*” And God became angry with him and called him the devil.

This puzzling contradiction was dealt with in a book entitled **Naqd Al-Fikr Ad-Dini** (*A Critique of Religious Thought*) written by Dr. Sadeq Al-‘Adham, a Muslim Marxist. He wrote it while he was a professor at the American University of Beirut. He points out that this is the most unbelievable and contradictory story in the Qur’an. How could God ask an angel to worship man when, according to the other teachings of the sacred book of Islam, only God should be worshipped?

Idolatry, which is so abhorrent to Muslims, is not the result of man’s ignorance. It is the fruit of the fall of man. Sin, in the Biblical sense of the word, begets idolatry. This specific sin is, in the

final analysis, the worship of self. Those idols that populated Mecca in the days of Muhammad were not simply there because of the whim of the tribal leaders of Quraish. They were there and they were worshipped as the concrete forms of men’s vain thoughts and imaginations. Putting it simply, **Idolatry exists because of sin. Sin is a very serious and hideous thing!**

The moral perversions that are mentioned in Romans 1 are quite prevalent among Muslims. But they are not fully aware of the seriousness of these sins. And even though Islam is a legalistic religion, Muslims do not seem to have a clear knowledge of the demands of the Law of God. *The Ten Commandments* of the *Tawrat* are nowhere to be found in the *Qur’an*.

Paul’s emphasis in Romans 1 was the fact that all mankind is guilty of sin and rebellion against God. We would do well to emphasize to the Muslims that our *Injeel*, our good news must be seen in the light of the bad news of man’s condition since the fall. Paul indeed described powerfully the bad news in the second part of Romans 1.

The Place of the Law in Our Lives

Bearing in mind that the Muslim regards the Law as savior, it becomes necessary that we have a clear understanding of the Pauline teaching of the role of the law in the life of the Christian. Here is something that we have in common with the Muslim: a high respect for the law of God. Of course, the Muslim, who has a very optimistic doctrine of man and a shallow understanding of sin, does not allow the law to act as a teacher that would bring him to Christ. This is how Paul described one the functions of the Shari’a (law) in his letter to the Galatians. (3:24)

By reading the *Qur’an*, we learn about the Muslims’ great emphasis on the oneness of God. We also believe that God is one. This is a Scriptural teaching and was one of the main themes of the prophets. We must make it clear to the Muslims that while we believe in a Trinitarian God, it does not follow that we have renounced our faith in the oneness of God. Throughout the Arab world, for example, whenever Christians invoke the name of God, they affirm in the same breath both his unity and trinity saying: *“In the name of the Father, and*

the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God, Amen.” We shall deal with this subject further in Part II.

Nowhere in the *Qur’an* do we find any reference to the importance of using the name of the Lord in the right way. As noted earlier, there is nothing comparable to the **Ten Commandments** in Islam. *“You shalt not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”* Exodus 20:7. These words do not form part of the memory of a young man or young woman growing up in the Muslim world. When working or living among them, one notices the frequency of transgressions against this specific command of God. It seems as if the word *Allah*, among Muslims, has lost its holiness, as it is so frequently used in vain.

Paul goes to great length to point out the sinfulness of mankind. As we have noted, in Romans 2, head knowledge of the existence of an absolute standard of right and wrong does not mean that the possessor of that knowledge becomes immune to the judgment of God.

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

Romans 2:1

The whole argument here is to show that the one who condemns others does that on the basis of the law. But he forgets to apply this law to himself. Throughout the Letter to the Romans, Paul engages in a polemic with Rabbinical Judaism. In this sense, they are similar to the Muslims who also believe that they can please God through the observance of the law (as based on the *Qur’an* and the *Hadith*).

In Chapter 2 verse 12, the word *law* is repeated more than once. Here it refers specifically to the *Law of Moses*. But later on in this chapter, Paul uses the word *law* as referring to the principle of right and wrong that is written on the heart of man, as created in the image and likeness of God.

All who sin apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who sin under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but it is those

who obey the law who will be declared righteous. Romans 2: 12, 13

Now a Muslim may respond and say to you: “See, the Bible does teach that those who obey the law will be declared righteous.” Well, this is true. But we must explain to the Muslim the sheer inability of any human being to fulfill the demands of the law. There is no such person in the world that can keep the *shari’a* perfectly.

(Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.) Romans 2:14, 15

Now Paul proceeds to deal with the question: **Is there any benefit then in possessing the law of God?**

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew, if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; Romans 2:17,18

While Paul is directing this teaching to the Jews, yet it applies to Muslims as well. When a Muslim is honest with himself, he must realize that quite often, he is breaking this law. So the following words apply to Muslims as well.

Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth—you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written:

‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you’ Romans 2:17-24

Here we have the Pauline emphasis on the total inability of man, even when living within the sphere of the revealed law, to gain God’s favor by keeping his commandments.

Circumcision has value if you observe the law, but if you break the law, you have become as though you had not been circumcised. Romans 2:25

Paul goes on to discuss the subject of the sign and seal of the covenant in the Old Testament era. He then comes up with this summary:

No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God. Romans 2:29

How clear this is! It is the work of God—of the Holy Spirit. Muslims, who have inherited a legalistic system, are condemned by these words of the apostle, but in a loving way. One must be careful not to assume a harsh attitude as these words apply to us all. None of us is above the law of God.

The Sinfulness of Man

Romans 3: 1-20 explains the fact that we cannot please God by our own efforts. Paul quotes from various parts of the Old Testament that explain the doctrine of the sinfulness of man. These passages refer to both Jews and Gentiles.

There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away; they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Romans 3:10-18

Paul was quoting from the **Septuagint**, the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made in Alexandria, Egypt between 280 and 130 B.C. These quotations were designed to point to the

Biblical teaching that man was unable to please God by his own efforts. This teaching is crucial in our work with Muslims, since their doctrinal tradition maintains that man is capable of accomplishing the demands of the divine *shari'a*.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Romans 3:19, 20

Nothing could be more definite than that. The law of God functions as the X-ray that reveals the true nature of our chronic and deadly illness.

Having heard the apostle explain to us the function of the Law, he is now ready to expound the true meaning of the Good News of Jesus the Messiah, or as we may put it in Arabic, the *Injeel Yesu'a el-Masih*. And here we must never tire of repeating that this Injeel is not that book that the Messiah, according to the Qur'an, received from God. The person and work of Jesus Christ form the subject of the Gospel.

The Good News

This is the beginning of the section in the Letter to the Romans that deals with the Gospel. It goes on to expound the Good News and its application in the hearts of the believers to the end of chapter 8.

But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Romans 3:21

The *Injeel* of the *Qur'an* is not the Gospel of the Bible. Furthermore, we must stress the fact that the *Injeel* is not a book of law, but rather the Good News of the grace of God that is bestowed on us when we believe in the Messiah. The coming of this Messiah and his work of redemption were predicted in the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament. In the New Testament, they are quite often known as the *Law and the Prophets*

Being put right with God or the righteousness from God was promised during the Old

Testament times. But now, at the dawn of the New Testament age it is revealed in the person and work of the Messiah. The word 'reveal' is not an easy term to translate into Islamic languages. The Arabic word '*a'alana*' that is commonly used in the Arabic translation of the Bible refers nowadays to commercial advertising. I prefer to substitute the Arabic *kashafa*, 'i.e., unveiled, whenever I want to say reveal.

Paul says it is '*apart from law*' (no definite article here). It means that God's way of putting us right with him, of giving us His righteousness, of making us acceptable in His sight, is not based on law. It is not through a legalistic scheme that we are made righteous before God. He makes us righteous on the basis of the work that was accomplished on our behalf by the Lord Jesus Christ. **This is the good news, the Injeel.**

However, one must not think that this gospel was something novel. It was already mentioned in the *Law and the Prophets*, i.e., in the Old Testament. In other words, the Gospel was present in the Old Testament as promise. In this New Testament age, it was fulfilled when the Messiah died on the cross and rose again from the dead. This is further explained in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 15.

Romans 3:22 becomes more explicit. '*This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus the Messiah to all who believe.*' I am substituting the word Messiah for Christ. In Muslim lands, it is much better to refer to our Lord as Jesus the Messiah, or *Yesu'a al-Masih*.

God puts people right through their faith in the Savior, the Messiah. Remember that the name Jesus (*Yesu'a*) does not ring a bell in Arabic. You must supply its meaning, i.e., Savior, (*Mukhalles*). This is not to imply that we may not use Jesus in our vocabulary when working among Muslims. But whenever possible give a synonym or meaning that would convey to Muslims the fact that Jesus was much more than a prophet. He was and is the only Savior.

God does this for all who believe in the Messiah, regardless of their ethnic or religious background. What a wonderful statement! Paul is saying that those who bring the message of the *Injeel* as well as those to whom it is addressed, are in the same predicament. All mankind is

fallen and in need of salvation. This must be emphasized lest Muslims misunderstand us as if we were preaching at them or looking down on them. *'There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.'* Romans 3:23, 24.

This is a revolutionary idea to the Muslim: that salvation is a gift from God and based on the death of Christ. Paul adds the adverb *freely* to emphasize that the gift of salvation is not earned; it is a gift of God's grace. This is a tremendous concept. Furthermore, when we talk about the work of our Lord we cannot describe it simply by the use of one word. For example, when I refer to our Lord, I use several words to properly explain his unique role in our salvation. *He is our Liberator, our Emancipator, our Redeemer and our Savior.* Each word has a slightly different shade of meaning. So, I hope and pray that one of these names would grab the Muslim and convey to him or to her the wonderful person and work of Jesus the Messiah.

Muslims believe that God is almighty and powerful enough to forgive anyone's sins. What does the Bible say about the basis of our forgiveness?

God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Romans 3: 25, 26

A Muslim may have the same reaction as many Jews had to this teaching of Paul. You are corrupting God's Word if you are implying that the law is of no value.

Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the

uncircumcised through that same faith. Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.

Romans 3:27-31

Paul always anticipates such questions that would naturally arise in his hearers' minds. Shortly we will deal with that phrase *'we uphold the law.'* We have already shown that we have a high regard for the law and that we see it playing a major function in bringing us to Christ the Savior.

The Example of Abraham

The example of Abraham as set forth, in Chapter 4 of Romans is very helpful when we deal with Muslims. They, as well as the Jews, regard Abraham as their father. He is called the father of all believers. The Arabs claim they are the descendants of Abraham through Ishmael. So, when Muslim pilgrims go to Mecca they commemorate the intended sacrifice of *Ishmael* in that holy place. Thus, they contradict the Biblical record relating the command that God gave to Abraham to *'sacrifice him [Isaac] there as a burnt offering.'* Genesis 22:2b The *'there'* of the Biblical account, is Mount Moriah in Palestine. Jews, Christians, and Muslims honor Abraham and regard him as a great man of God. The Arabs call him *Ibrahim Al-Khalil*, i.e., Abraham, the Friend (of God). In Arabic Hebron, on account of its association with Abraham, is known as *Al-Khalil*.

In Romans 4, Paul refers to Abraham as one would appeal to the Supreme Court. What does the life of Abraham, according to the record of the Old Testament, teach us?

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about — but not before God. What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.'

Romans 4:1-3

What was so great about Abraham? It was that God accepted him as righteous because he believed the promises of God, even though he, himself, was extremely old, and his wife Sarah had not born him any children.

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from the works: 'Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him'

Romans 4:4-8

Paul is not at this point, propounding a new interpretation of the life of Abraham, nor is he setting forth a principle that was foreign to the Old Testament scriptures. He points to the Book of Psalms that was well known and was highly regarded among the Jews. At this point, we may add that Muslims have no clear idea of the Book of Psalms, as it is not quoted in the Qur'an but is simply known by the name of *Zaboor*. Paul taught that our father Abraham was made righteous on account of his faith. Circumcision, so highly regarded by Jews and Muslims, was ordained later on in sacred history. In other words, Abraham was put right with God or was justified, long before he received circumcision as the sign and seal of the righteousness that comes through faith.

This declaration of Paul is a happy thing for us to dwell on because it means that Abraham, the father of all believers, is an example to those who are of Jewish and Gentile background. He is the father of those who believe in the God of Holy Scripture, regardless of their ethnic or racial background.

So, when we study the life of Abraham, we realize that he did not lead a perfect life. He made many mistakes, and yet, the Lord accepted him, and counted him as righteous, because of his faith.

The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Romans 4:23-25

Peace with God

Romans 4:25 tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ 'was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.' It is very important to notice how Paul equally emphasizes the death and the resurrection of our Lord. So, when faced with the Islamic denial of the crucifixion of our Lord, we may tend to dwell so much on his death, that we may forget to emphasize the fact that Christ was raised for our justification. Let us therefore keep in mind how Paul mentioned the two events in the same verse.

Paul, as a master teacher, wants to bring the interested inquirer to an understanding of the cardinal truths of the faith. The law enables us to recognize the terrible nature of our sinfulness. This knowledge, through the preaching of the Good News, leads us to God who sent his only begotten Son to die for us on the cross on Good Friday. But this is not the end of the story. God raised Jesus Christ from the dead on the First Day of the week. By believing in Jesus Christ, we become righteous and enjoy the fruits of salvation as described by Paul in Romans 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:1

The fruit of our justification by faith in Jesus Christ is peace with God. This is the most wonderful news a human being may hear. Peace with God, a peace that is not accomplished through our own efforts, but is the direct result of being put right with God. The Arabic word for peace is *salaam*, and in Hebrew is *shalom*. *Islam* means total and complete surrender to *Allah*. But ask a Muslim: do you really have peace with *Allah*? The answer is never simply positive. No Muslim is sure of his exact standing with *Allah*.

The gospel talks about peace with God, a subject of vital interest to Muslims. We, Christians, have found our peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. We want our Muslim neighbors to have the same experience.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we

rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.
Romans 5:1, 2

So we can tell Muslims that we, Christians, are very interested in peace with God. Before our conversion to Jesus Christ, we were in a state of war, within ourselves, with our neighbors, and with God. But now, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God. All of our life now is lived by God’s grace. As we do not live in a vacuum but in a world filled with sin, Paul mentions some of the problems that surround us. Yes, we have peace with God, but not peace with the world, in the sense of an organized opposition to God.

Not only so but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
Romans 5:3-5

Paul mentions here the Holy Spirit. This is very important. Christ is with us, even though he is at the right hand of God the Father. He is present with us by the Holy Spirit. Since Muslims reject the doctrine of the Trinity, they have no concept of the Holy Spirit as a Person. Yet they yearn for something vital, they look for a faith that is beyond and above a legalistic code of conduct. We must remember that a Muslim cannot be looked upon as being thoroughly consistent with the basic tenets of his faith. He remains a creature of God. He is made in *“the image and after the likeness of God.”* Genesis 1:27

This section of Romans is quite relevant to the longings of any human being who is seeking peace with God and with himself. It is at this point that we must explain that the Christian experience of salvation is not something that we have generated. It is the result of the Holy Spirit working in our hearts.

Adam our Representative

Now we come to Adam’s fall into sin. We must keep the Genesis account in the background of our minds, remembering that the *Qur’an* does not provide a clear picture of what took place in the Garden of Eden. In fact both the sacred text of Islam as well as its tradition denies vehemently the Biblical doctrine of the Fall of

Adam. Here in Romans 5, we have the story of the Fall expounded in a theological way. While there are similarities between Adam and Christ, Paul’s goal is to make a contrast between them. He expounds the doctrine of Christ as our representative or the substitutionary work of Christ. This is based on the fact that Adam was a representative of the entire human race. Such language is completely foreign to Muslims.

In the second part of Chapter 5, beginning with verse 12, we have the contrasts and similarities between Adam and Christ. Muslims believe in the historicity of Adam. We do not need to spend any time convincing them that Adam was real. But we must emphasize that the fall of Adam was spiritual and moral. It was a rebellion against God. It was caused by pride. It affected all the descendants of Adam.

Hearing such an exposition of Adam’s sin, Muslims may exclaim with horror. It is not fair that God, according to your Scriptures, would deal with us in this way, and impute to us the sin of Adam. At this point, the Christian evangelist would respond as Paul did in Romans 9, 10 and 11. *“Who are we to argue with God?”* This doctrine of the imputation of Adam’s sin to the entire human race is not something Christian theologians have dreamt up. This is what God clearly teaches us in his Word.

We may sympathetically say to a Muslims: ‘Look, I am not dwelling on Adam’s sin and the Fall of the human race, as if they are the whole story. Adam is not the good news. The story of Adam is a prelude to the good news. If you reject the fact that Adam was your representative, you are depriving yourself of a greater Adam, the second Adam, the heavenly Adam, who is the Messiah. If Adam did not and could not represent you, then how could Christ represent you? Christ, by dying on the cross, represented all those who would believe in Him throughout history. Do not deprive yourself of hope by bringing objections to the doctrine of Adam as our representative. Any believer may say: there on the cross, Christ died as my representative. Now he is my mediator before God. I am saved by the blood of Christ.’

Muslims will raise many objections to the doctrine of Christ as our representative before God. Since they do not accept the doctrine of original sin, they do not welcome the teachings

of Paul. However, we may not compromise at all. This passage in Romans is so important for the working out of a truly Biblical theology of redemption. It happens to be one of the clearest passages of Scripture that equally deals with our relationship to Adam and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.
Romans 5:18

This passage is rendered in this way in Today's English Version:

So then, as the one sin condemned all mankind, in the same way the one righteous act sets all mankind free and gives them life.

This happens to be one of those passages of Scripture that has been understood by some theologians as teaching universal salvation. But we may not interpret any specific passage of the Bible without taking into account the entire teachings of the Scriptures on the subject. By nature, we are all represented by Adam who is our progenitor. Like it or not, Adam is our father. However, the only way you can be in Christ is by faith. Once there is faith in Christ, then a person may claim that Christ has set him free and given him life eternal.

I do not believe that on the basis of the teachings of Paul, the teachings of our Lord, or the teachings of the entire Scriptures, one may deduce that the death of Christ meant the liberation of all mankind, numerically speaking. Redeemed mankind is the new humanity whose head is the Messiah.

For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.
Romans 3:19

We are not related to our Lord in the same way we are related to Adam. To claim Christ as our representative, we must be united to him by faith. We become children of God by faith.

Reviewing the Law

Paul as an excellent teacher reviews what our attitude should be towards the law and elaborates further.

The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Romans 5:20, 21

Paul struggles with these concepts of sin and righteousness and anticipates his hearers' questions. In Chapter 7:7, he senses that the Jew (like the Muslim) would be feeling that he has made the law of no value.

What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, 'Do not covet.'
Romans 7:7

The very fact that Paul goes in for so much repetition helps us not to grow weary of repeating often these basic tenets of our faith. It has taken us much time to absorb these truths, and to learn that the law was our teacher that brings us to Christ where we find our only salvation. On the other hand, Jews and Muslims believe that the law is their savior. This is a basic tenet of their theology. Thus, we have to repeat that the law is the means by which we know our sinfulness. The law is not our savior, but points us to Christ the Savior.

In verse 12, we have another summary that shows the true function of the law. *So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Simply, the law is unable to save.*

Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.
Romans 7:13

What Paul is saying is that even though we have the remembrance of the law of God in our hearts, our fallen nature does not allow us to fully

understand the sinfulness of sin. But as we come to know and understand God’s revealed law, we see the terrible, devastating nature of sin. Thus, a major function of the law is to show us our sinfulness.

Paul is fully aware of the conflict that goes on in the life of the redeemed. He counsels them to live with the help of Christ. Through Christ we have victory: *Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!* Romans 7:25

At this point, it is important to know about some confusion that arises about the sinful nature of man. The word ‘*flesh*’ that translates the Greek word ‘*sarks*’ may give the Muslim the idea that the Bible teaches that the body is inherently evil, or that sin resides in the physical nature of man. This is not the teaching of Scripture. Man is a unit. God created man with both body and soul, and when man fell into sin, his entire being fell.

Assurance

Chapter 8 is a wonderful summary of the teachings of the first part of Romans. There is nothing like it in the *Qur’an*. Muslims believe that one can never know the outcome of one’s pilgrimage upon earth, whether it is to be heaven or hell. How wonderful then, that one can confess: *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* Romans 8:1.

While Paul uses the word ‘*law*’ in his explanation of the doctrine of assurance, it does not mean that he is reverting to legalism. Here, we should recognize the limitations inherent in any human language, especially when we seek to describe spiritual truths. So we recognize that the word ‘*law*’ has several meanings. ‘*Law*’ does not always mean **Law of Moses**, or a specific commandment, or a way of salvation as taught in Judaism and Islam. The word sometimes is a synonym of principle. This is how we should understand it when Paul says: “the law of the Spirit.”

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in

the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. Romans 8:1-3

As mentioned above, Paul speaks here about law as a **functioning principle in the life of the believer**. But when he says, *what the law was powerless to do*, he is referring to the **Law of Moses**. Paul does not mean that our Lord’s human nature was sinful. He said in the likeness of sinful man, meaning that the Son of God assumed our human nature. It is important to remember that Muslims believe in the sinlessness of Christ.

When speaking about the assurance of salvation we should not hesitate to share with Muslims the very personal nature of our religion. This element is totally lacking in Islam. Our faith is personal in more than one sense. Obviously, when we believe, our entire personality is involved in the act of believing. It is not a matter of pure sentiment. But our faith is personal in another sense. The object of our faith is a Person. The God we trust for our salvation is a personal being. It is difficult to express these truths in Islamic languages. For example, in Arabic, the word for person has the connotation of *guy*, or *chap*. When talking about God, a Muslim cannot say that God is personal, or that God is a person. In Islam, God is transcendent, He is the wholly Other. He is different from anyone and from anything in the whole realm of existence. We have to remember this important fact when we speak in intimate words about God’s care for his children and the assurance we have that our salvation is forever secure.

The Bible finds its focus in a person, and he is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our *Immanuel*, i.e., God with us. This precious truth is missing in Islam. Muslims don’t even say that they know God, or that they have fellowship with God. If they talk like that, they would actually be *sufis*, i.e., the mystics of Islam. In Christianity we know God, as a person, as our heavenly Father. In Islam, there is always a preposition separating the Muslim from God. No Muslim can say: I know God. He would rather say: “I know about God.” There is nothing equivalent to these wonderful statements of Holy Scripture: *That I may know Him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering.* Philippians 3:10 (KJV)

Everything in Chapter 8 is intensely personal.

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ... We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies... And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called

according to his purpose... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels or demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What an assurance!

Chapter Two

INTRODUCING JESUS

It is our strong conviction that our Lord is the divine Son of God. But we notice that the apostle Matthew reveals this fact in a gradual way. In other words, this Gospel does not begin with the solemn words that were given to the church near the end of the first century. “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” John 1:1 Rather, it begins with the statement that this is the list of the ancestors of Jesus, the Messiah, and a descendant of David.

David, as a descendant of Abraham, is well known among the Muslims. As we go over the list, Muslims will be intrigued by the names of the patriarchs. They would be shocked to know that some of them were not saints according to their idea of sainthood.

The most important part of the first chapter is the wonderful message that accompanied the birth of the Messiah. He was heralded as the Savior of his people. The angel said: “*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.*” Matthew 1:21

This would be a good time to explain the conditions of the people under Roman rule. Arabs and Muslims in general, are very eager to learn more about the history of Israel. Much of the Old Testament sacred history is needed to fill in the gaps left by the Qur’an.

History is very important to the peoples of the Middle East. A missionary must become familiar with the history of the Old and New Testament times, including the 400-year period between the two eras. Some of this history is found in the Apocrypha. We may start with David and tell of the great kingdom he ruled, and mention also his son, Solomon the Wise, or as the Arabs call him, *Suleyman al-Hakim*. It was during his reign that the great temple of Jerusalem was built. After Solomon’s days, the kingdom was divided into two parts. The northern kingdom was known as the *Kingdom of Israel*, the southern kingdom that

was much smaller was known as the *Kingdom of Judah*, with Jerusalem as its capital. Muslims call it, *al-Quds*, i.e., the Holy City, and consider it as the third of their holy places, with Mecca ranking as the first, followed by Medina, in Arabia.

The southern kingdom did not maintain its faithfulness to the Lord. The Babylonians came and carried the people of Judah into captivity. After seventy years, the Jews were allowed to return to their homeland. About forty five thousand returned under the leadership of *Ezra and Nehemiah*.

After the fall of the Persian Empire, the Greeks came to the Middle East around 300 B.C. under Alexander the Great. After his death, his empire was divided into four kingdoms. The *Ptolemains* ruled Egypt, and the *Seleucids* ruled Syria. The Jews, who were living in Palestine at that time, felt the impact of the rivalry between those two kingdoms. At one time, they revolted against the Seleucids, and achieved a great victory over them. The Jews celebrate this event every December, in the feast of *Hanukkah*. The leaders of the Jewish revolt are known as the *Maccabees*.

Around 50 B.C., however, the whole Middle East came under Roman rule. During the New Testament times, Palestine was part of the Syrian province of the Roman Empire. The seat of that province was Antioch. It was a huge empire with a tightly organized system. The Savior was announced as saving his people, not from Roman imperialism, but from the bondage of sin.

As we remarked in our study of the Gospel as it was expounded in Paul’s **Letter to the Romans**, the Muslim concept of sin is totally different from the Biblical one. As far as a Muslim is concerned, sins are simply mistakes, transgressions that flow out of the weakness of man. He can atone for them by believing in the message of Muhammad and by practicing good deeds, as required by the *shari’a*, law. Not so,

according to the New Testament. Jesus is the Savior of his people from their sins. You need all the grace that God has given you and all your knowledge of the language you are using to be able to explain to Muslims what you mean by sinfulness or sin. This is why the telling of Bible stories is such an important and helpful method. Biblical truths cannot be simply taught in an abstract way. You have to tell stories.

Now we come to that wonderful name Immanuel that is mentioned in the first chapter of Matthew:

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, "God with us." Matthew 1:22, 23

When translated literally Immanuel may be rendered: **with us God**. It is interesting to note that in the Greek New Testament, this happens to be the emphasis. Immanuel refers to the incarnation of the Son of God. In Christ, God has taken our side, and declared his solidarity with us! Certainly this revealed truth is beyond our imagination. Now the deep spiritual hunger of human beings; whether they are Jews or Muslims, Marxist or heathen, can only be satisfied by **Immanuel, the God who is with us**. In Christ, God has become our Redeemer.

You will have to sense when the time is right for you to talk about the full meaning of the incarnation. Muslims are very eager to know the details of the life of our Lord. They are very touched by the stirring, gripping, and tragic events that are related in Matthew 3. You will be telling about the coming of the wise men – perhaps from Persia, or Mesopotamia. The flight into Egypt will intrigue them. The killing of the children by Herod is another illustration of the terrible wickedness of man.

John the Baptist is known in the Qu’ran under the name of Yahya; however, his mission is not properly described. Nowhere do we even hear a faint echo of the authentic preaching of the Baptist. So, we may not take for granted that Muslims realize that the son of Zechariah called people to look for the Messiah, and introduced him as the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. Matthew 3:11, 12

Jesus' Baptism and the Trinity

When we come to the baptism of Jesus, we have a revelation of the three Persons of the Trinity. This is a stumbling block to Muslims. We must not hide this doctrine. We do need to have a clear understanding of what happened.

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. Matthew 3:13-15

Here we have a manifestation of the meaning of the second name of Jesus as revealed in the opening words of Matthew. Immanuel—God with us. God in Christ is so identified with us that, sinless as he was, yet he went through baptism. This was a sign of his total identification with his people.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." Matthew 3: 16, 17

Here we have a clear revelation of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The Son was being baptized as the incarnate Son of God. He was visible. The Holy Spirit was revealed, "The Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him," and "a voice from heaven," the voice of God, the Father was heard saying: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

You must remember that you are dealing with a people who have been immunized for centuries against the doctrine of the Trinity. It is only after a Muslim has accepted the fact of his sinfulness

and received the Lord Jesus Christ as his only Savior that the doctrine of the Trinity ceases to be a problem. In the course of my work I have found this to be true. When a Muslim receives Christ as his Savior, through the grace of God and the working of the Holy Spirit, he realizes that Jesus is not merely a prophet but the incarnate Son of God. It is for us human beings, and for our salvation that he came down from heaven to accomplish his work of redemption.

We do not win Muslims to the Lord by first convincing them of the authenticity of Holy Scripture, or the scriptural basis for the doctrine of the Trinity, or the deity of Christ and His crucifixion on the cross on Good Friday. We begin where every human being is. We are all creatures made in the image of God. We have all sinned. “All we like sheep have gone astray.” We begin where Paul began in his **Letter to the Romans** by explaining the true nature of the misery of man. Then we proceed with the exposition of the good news of God. In other words we begin with the Biblical doctrine of the plight of man and the grace of God that saves man from his captivity to sin. Once a Muslim receives these basic teachings, we lead him to receive the doctrines of the Sonship of Christ and the Trinity.

Our teaching of the Gospel should cause the Muslim to be overwhelmed by the uniqueness of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ and his personality. The Messiah can never be understood as a mere prophet, but as a Person who was both divine and human. This is the burden of the Gospel, to reveal Jesus as the Son of God who came down to earth to bring about our redemption.

Miracles

We need not spend much of time talking about the miracles of Christ. Muslims credit our Lord with more miracles than we do. According to the Qur’an, Jesus performed miracles when he was a mere baby.

So when we are about to study the public ministry of our Lord we must have some understanding of the Muslim concept of the miracles that Jesus performed. The miracles of the Messiah in the Qu’ran are of a mythological nature. They describe Jesus as speaking to his mother on the day he was born. They claim that

our Lord made birds out of mud and such birds became alive and began to fly!

The New Testament teaching about the miracles that Jesus Christ performed is very important to our evangelism of Muslims. The first purpose for the miracles was to prove that he was sent from God and that he had a specific divine mission. The second purpose pointed to the nature of his mission: namely that he came to seek and save the lost. In other words, the mission of Christ was redemptive. The miracles that the Qur’an relates do not fulfill these two requirements.

This is why, when we read with the Muslim the account of the temptations of Jesus, we point out that our Lord refused to perform a miracle for the sake of the miracle itself. When you relate the account of the long fast of forty days and the temptations that followed, you note that the Messiah refused to change the stones into bread or to jump from the highest point of the temple. Jesus Christ would not perform a miracle simply to manifest his power or to force people to believe in him.

At this point we should remember that the Qur’an claims that the devil fell because he refused to worship Adam. And to make the account more bizarre, it attributes the command to worship Adam to Allah himself! Even though Islam teaches emphatically the oneness of God and the absolute duty to worship him alone, yet it has to live with this strange account of the fall of *Ibliss* (the Arabic name for the devil!)

Our concern is to tell about the genuine miracles that our Lord performed and by doing so hope that Muslims will cease to believe in those false miracles that are attributed to our Lord in the Qur’an and the Hadith.

Now we come to the part about our Lord’s preaching and healing ministry.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the

region across the Jordan followed him.
Matthew 4: 23-25

The good news of the kingdom refers to the Kingdom of God. In Islam, the concept of the kingdom is very different. While Muslims have a doctrine of the last things, they do not think of it as coming in its fullness at the end of time. Allah's kingdom appears within *Daru'l Islam*, i.e., the Household of Islam. From its early times, Islam divided the world into two realms: *Daru'l Islam*, and *Daru'l Harb*, i.e., the Household of War. Allah's kingdom and rule spread through the conquest of the world by Islam. This is their mandate. Both the sacred text of Islam and the history of Islamic conquests bear testimony to this fact.

The contrast is very great between the public ministry of our Lord and the days of Muhammad in Mecca and in Medina. Because of the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God and its final triumph at the return of Christ, Muslims charge Christians as being totally impractical and unconcerned for the affairs of the here and now. They cannot see how Christianity can be relevant to the challenges of life on earth. But the Christian response, rooted in Holy Scripture, is that in Christ the kingdom of God has appeared and is spreading throughout the world. But this kingdom does not grow through political programs. It begins in the very hearts of men and women who have surrendered to the Lord. In as much as possible, Christians reveal the power of the kingdom at work in their lives. They seek to practice the principles of the kingdom in all the spheres of life, recognizing that the fullness of the kingdom of God will be manifested at the End.

The Sermon on the Mount

You will have to have a very clear grasp of what our Lord was teaching here. Over the years I have found that these teachings are very attractive to the Muslim, but if we are not careful in our exposition of Matthew 5-7, Muslims tend to read the Sermon on the Mount in a superficial way, and imagine that our Lord taught salvation by works.

Muslims may acclaim a good deal of what we say because in some abstract or philosophical way, we appear to have much in common. Both Christianity and Islam are theistic religions. They

both manifest a high regard for the law of God. Christians and Muslims regard this law as a manifestation of his will for our lives. We both believe in the sovereignty of God and that he is highly exalted over all his creatures. We are not pantheists such as the Buddhists, nor polytheists such as the Hindus.

But when Muslims hear the Sermon on the Mount I am aware that they are not hearing it exactly as it is meant to be understood. They tend to hear it through the prism of their own worldview. So long as their mind is basically a Muslim mind, it will be motivated by certain radically anti-Christian motifs.

So while rejoicing when hearing the lofty words of the Sermon on the Mount, Muslims reject everything that is specifically Christian, such as the saviorhood of our Lord, the Trinitarian nature of God, etc. They reject the doctrine of the weakness of man and his inability to please the Lord or to fulfill the requirements of the Law. All these things are automatically rejected by the Muslim mind.

Therefore in studying the Sermon on the Mount with a Muslim, you must look out for the following three errors and try to correct them.

First, you must correct the mistaken notion that man can please God by his own efforts. Make it clear that we have no power to apply this lofty teaching in our own strength, even after we become slaves of the Messiah. We need his power, through the Holy Spirit, to even approximate the goals of the Sermon on the Mount. In fact anyone who reads the Sermon on the Mount carefully will find that it shows the total inability of man to live according to the law of God. This is a very good place to emphasize what has already been taught in Romans — the radical sinfulness of man.

You must also correct the view that if we follow our Lord's example we can bring about the Millennium through our own efforts! In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord was not giving us a higher or superior law that we would practice to bring about a perfect world order. It is very important to remember that we must first receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our personal savior. Then, we must listen to him and take his words seriously. It is not legitimate to divorce the teachings of Jesus Christ from his person, or the

specific work he came to accomplish. No exposition of the Sermon on the Mount is correct if it contradicts the doctrines of justification by faith and salvation by grace alone.

At this point, some Muslims may say, “*You adhere to the religion that was evolved by Paul, but the real Jesus is the Qur’anic Jesus.*” Unfortunately there have been some nominal Christian scholars who made Paul an opponent of Jesus. But the sole purpose of Paul was to proclaim Jesus Christ, and him crucified. Paul’s teachings do not contradict the Sermon on the Mount.

Having dealt with the three errors in the understanding of the Sermon on the Mount, we should now mention three basic truths that must be emphasized as we read and teach Matthew 5-7.

The Sermon on the Mount contains a polemic against the Pharisaic interpretation of the law of God, similar to Paul’s quarrel with the rabbinical theology of his day. To God, the real issue is the inward attitude of your heart; your outward actions follow as a result. Compare our Lord’s emphasis on the inward attitude in Matthew 5: 22, 28 and 15: 16-20 with Paul’s teaching in Romans 2: 28, 29.

Secondly, make it clear that the Gospel according to Matthew shows our Lord not only as Savior, but also as King. This Gospel is referred to as the Gospel of the Kingdom. It follows from this that we obey Jesus Christ because we are already His subjects. The Lord expects our righteousness to exceed that of the Pharisees, not in order that we may be saved, but because we are saved.

So make it clear, thirdly, that the Sermon on the Mount is the charter and guideline for the life of those who have already been saved by faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot achieve that through our own efforts. But in the sermon of Peter on the first Pentecost we are taught that the law of God becomes written on our hearts. Thus, the saved person lives the Christian life by obeying God’s law spontaneously. In our exposition of the Sermon on the Mount we must be careful not to represent it as a long list of external regulations, but as a guideline for a life of gratitude to Almighty God. Living in the light of the Sermon on the Mount is impossible unless you have

received Jesus Christ as the Savior and King of your life.

Passion Week and the Lord’s Supper

Some points must be emphasized when we get to the accounts dealing with Passion Week.

First, there is the preparation for the Passover meal. This will give you an opportunity to explain to an interested Muslim the whole background of the Passover. You will have to go back to the Old Testament, to what happened to the children of Israel in Egypt and how the Passover was kept yearly. It was part of the calendar of the Jewish nation.

Then there are the moving events in the Upper Room. Our Lord definitely predicted that he was not simply going to be betrayed and killed, but that it was going to be one of the twelve disciples who would betray him.

Here again, our Lord mentions that this event has been predicted in Holy Scripture. It could not have been invented by the Christians of later years. The cross is seen throughout all Scripture. Our Lord was not teaching fatalism or some kind of determinism about history when he said: The Son of Man will die as the Scriptures say, for he added, but how terrible for that man who will betray the Son of man! Our Lord, while teaching God’s sovereignty and God’s ordering of history equally taught the accountability and responsibility of Judas.

Certainly Christ taught that God had a plan of redemption that included the cross but he warned the person who was going to betray him. This teaches us that we must believe equally in divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We must never minimize either one of these doctrines or be too proud to admit that our finite minds cannot fully harmonize the two. In fact, if you find a religion which is totally understandable by the human mind you should be very suspicious. How could the human mind contain all the truths of God?

The Lord’s Supper will give you the opportunity to explain that while the new covenant emphasizes the Word, yet it is not devoid of some rites or ceremonies that are tremendously meaningful and God-ordained.

We explain that our Lord gave us this sacrament. He gave us a sacrament that portrayed the very

heart of his mission. We may also call it (for the sake of explaining it to the Muslims in whatever language you may be using) a sign, or a symbol, a physical portrayal of his mission.

The fact that Jesus took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them and told them to "*drink from it, all of you. This is my blood*" may shock a Muslim. You must explain that it symbolizes Christ's blood. No one should be so devoid of imagination as to think that our Lord was actually giving people his blood to drink. It does mean that by drinking the fruit of the vine, we see a symbol of our Lord's blood that is necessary for our life. He shed his blood on the cross. In the first Lord's Supper we see a prophecy of his coming death on the cross. It was not being prophesied in word only, but also in deed.

An important question may come to our mind. All Muslims know that Muhammad died within ten years after he moved to Medina from Mecca. At the same time, they say that Christ did not die. Doesn't this make Christ a greater prophet than Muhammad? It should. Here you are pointing to an inconsistency that may help us, not at the beginning of a conversation with a Muslim, but much later on. We hope that this realization may play a big role when a Muslim is converted and offers this testimony: "I believe in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior." Should Muslims have been consistent, they would realize that the one who, according to their account, was spared death, and lifted up to heaven, was greater than their prophet. After all, Muhammad died and was buried in Medina in June, 632 A.D. Muslims honor him to this very day when they visit his grave during the yearly pilgrimage or, *Haj*.

The Qur'an alone is believed to be the Word of God; however, the popular faith of Islam makes their traditions and folklore equally important. I shall never forget hearing a blind beggar in Meknes, Morocco, singing a eulogy of Muhammad at five in the morning at a bus depot. His words made Muhammad almost divine. It was the prophet for whom the whole world was created; he was in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world, etc. At the time, while waiting for the bus to start on its long journey to Tangiers, I thought of John I, and Colossians I, where the Lord Jesus Christ's deity is affirmed. That blind beggar elevated

Muhammad far beyond what the Qur'an ever said of him. But in fact, many Muslims have even made Muhammad the very center of the universe!

The Crucifixion

The Qur'an does not deny Passion Week. Supposedly, as Jesus was on his way to the cross, God tricked everyone by putting someone else in his place and by taking Jesus to heaven. In the final analysis, Muslims have a theological argument against the cross and not an historical one. They reason like this: First, God is almighty. Secondly, he sent Jesus into the world as a great revealer of His law and will. And since God would never allow his prophet to be crucified, therefore, Jesus was not crucified.

As Muhammad was persecuted there is nothing unusual about a prophet like Jesus being persecuted. Muhammad had to flee for his life. There is such a thing as the suffering of Muhammad and of the Muslim community that had recognized his mission as the Messenger of Allah. Some sought refuge in Ethiopia. And then, in 622, he and the rest of his followers migrated to Medina. That marked the beginning of the Islamic (lunar) calendar. So the idea of suffering is part and parcel of the early Muslim Umma. But the idea of complete defeat or failure of a divine messenger is unthinkable. The Jews have this problem also. How could they accept somebody who was crucified? So we have the Qur'anic account of Good Friday, where God rescues our Lord from death at the eleventh hour.

As you proceed to read in the presence of a Muslim enquirer the Biblical account of the passion of the Messiah, you may encounter a difficulty with this verse: "*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.*" Matthew 26:39 He may ask if the Messiah was supposed to die, he should have gone to the cross without any protest. Why is he struggling with the prospect of the cross? Why is he recoiling from death and yet, surrendering at the same time to the divine will? How are we to explain these words of our Lord?

First, you must say that Christ had both a divine and human natures. We should not minimize the human nature of Christ. Death, even to a Christian, is an enemy. Thankfully we conquer

this enemy through the help of Christ. But death is still an enemy. You cannot call an enemy a friend. Because Christ came in order to redeem his people, he continued to pray, *“not as I will, but as you will.”* This prayer was repeated three times. It shows that our Lord knew that there was no other way than the cross. Christ’s going to the cross was not because of anything he had done, but because he had accepted the mission that the Father gave him, so he died on the cross as our representative and redeemer.

The arrest of Jesus is told in the greatest detail. We see how treacherously Judas behaved. We note that Jesus appeared before the Jewish council that went through the motions of judging Jesus Christ according to the Law. However, the whole procedure showed a disregard for the true spirit of that Law.

Peter represents the human attempt to deny the necessity of the cross. For a while, he repudiated the Lord Jesus Christ. He thought at that late hour that the Messiah would not and should not end his life on a cross. He reasoned that way even though he had been very close to the Lord and had been with him for three long years. Reading this account should make us patient in our evangelism of Muslims. They come from a religious background that has always denied both the historicity and necessity of the cross. Their Holy Book tells them that this central event in the life of the Messiah did not take place, and that someone else was crucified. Allah rescued the Messiah and thwarted the evil plans of the Jews. In the final analysis, it is only the Holy Spirit who will convince a Muslim of the fact that *“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”* I Corinthians 15:3b, 4

We notice in Matthew 27 that our Lord was condemned to die by an ecclesiastical authority. His enemies claimed that he had blasphemed. But the Roman authority would not put anyone to death on account of a religious misdemeanor. Notice how the charge against our Lord changed. Jesus Christ was plotting against Rome. That indeed was a serious charge. However, it was not

proven. After several attempts to please the Jewish leaders and save Jesus from the cross, Pilate acceded to their request. He let them lead Jesus to Golgotha. *“Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.”* Matthew 27:26

Pilate represented the Roman authorities, which were famous for their high regard for law. Pilate knew that Christ was innocent. This fact is very important for our redemption. The civil authority acknowledged that there was nothing in him that deserved death. But for the sake of expediency, Pilate condemned him to death on the cross. We know that behind Pilate’s act, was the will of God. However, this does not exonerate Pilate. He delivered Christ to be crucified and freed Barabbas, an insurrectionist.

As we have noted before, the Qur’anic account is totally different. As some Muslims claim, some other person was crucified. In other words, when it comes to the heart of the Christian message, Muhammad put in his veto. And this has marked his followers for the last fourteen hundred years. Muslims still veto the cross, even though the rest of mankind, regardless of their religious commitment acknowledges the historicity of that event!

This is why Samuel Zwemer, the great missionary to the Muslim world for more than fifty years, used to call mission work among Muslims, **“the glory of the impossible.”** Certainly, it is impossible humanly speaking, but not with God. After all, when we speak about the cross and defend its historicity, we are not merely engaged in the cause of a historical truth. We are witnessing to the fact that our liberation from the bondage of sin and evil took place because Jesus Christ went to the cross and died there on our behalf. But this is not the whole story. Christ died on Good Friday outside the walls of Jerusalem, but he rose again on Sunday morning. He was victorious over all the powers of sin and evil. All those who put their trust in him experience salvation. And this is the heart of the Christian message, the authentic Injeel of Jesus the Messiah!

Chapter Three

THE GOSPEL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

As we consider the Old Testament, it is important to remember the Muslim concept of God's revelation. Muslims believe that God sent many prophets to the world, and that most of the books that were revealed to them had been lost before the advent of Muhammad. What remained of the revealed books of Allah are the **Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, and the Injeel of Jesus**. However, according to them, both Jews and Christians have corrupted their holy books. Muslims are rather puzzled to notice that Christians recognize four different gospels known as the **Injeel of Matthew, the Injeel of Mark, the Injeel of Luke, and the Injeel of John**. Quite often, they ask, but where is the Injeel of Jesus?

The Muslim concept of revelation has no room for **gospel as good news from God** given to man who is utterly lost. To them, the content of the "Injeel of Jesus," is simply a series of laws. God reveals his law or his will so that man, by coming to know this law, may practice it, and win the favor of Allah, and earn his salvation.

Even if we succeed to convince Muslims that our Bible is authentic, and that it has not been corrupted, they would answer that anyhow, they possess God's final and complete revelation: the *Qur'an*! They would point to their doctrine of the abrogation of previous revelations. This is found even in the *Qur'an* itself. For example, at one stage the Muslim's sacred book limited the number of legal wives to four, but later on, the Prophet himself 'was allowed' twelve wives! In other words, a later revelation 'descended' from heaven and abrogated, i.e., annulled, an earlier revelation that placed the limit at four legal wives.

We have to keep this in mind when we share the contents of our Scriptures with Muslims. We need to become sensitized to the thought processes of a Muslim audience. It demands a different approach in the sense that, as we open the Bible among Muslims, we must explain what we mean, and what we do not mean, when we

use certain words or expressions. Etymology is not a sufficient guide to the meaning of a word; we must remember the context, the history, and the baggage that has accompanied religious terms.

The question now arises in our minds: since we have such a totally different concept of God's revelation, what do we have in common with Muslims? Are we totally different?

First of all, we have our humanity in common. We have been created in the image of God and after his likeness. You may call this our common creatureliness. You do not speak to Muslims simply as Muslims, but as creatures and fellow-human beings made in the image of God. This fundamental reality must never be forgotten in our evangelistic efforts among Muslims.

Then, in a formal way, we have a certain amount of sacred history in common: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, Jacob, David and Solomon. There is sacred history that we both accept, even though one must add here that the contents of our history (as based on the Bible) are very different from the contents of the Muslim's sacred history (as based on the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*.)

I must reemphasize that the great difference between Christianity and Islam is in the concept of God's revelation. For us Christians, the Bible has been given to make us wise unto salvation. In other words, **God's revelation is redemptive**. To put it in a traditional language, **whereas the Christian conceives of the Word of God as consisting of both law and gospel, the Muslim's concept is that the Word of God is purely and simply law**.

This is why we have to learn to take nothing for granted. We must remember that the religious vocabularies we use are often used in Islam in a different way and with different meanings. As we have noted, when we say *Injeel*, Muslims think immediately of a heavenly book that descended on Jesus; while we think of *Injeel* as a

message that pervades all of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. It is the proclamation of the good news of what God has done on our behalf as human beings in the person of his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

So as we begin to talk about the contents of the Old Testament, we must remember that the term Old Testament does not ring any bell in the Muslim mind. So following the order of the Hebrew Text, we speak of the **Tawrat of Moses, the Prophets, and the Writings.**

We begin by telling the story of the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, and emphasize the Genesis account over against their superficial knowledge of this tragic event. But as soon as we have related that tragic story based on Genesis 3, be sure to emphasize verse 15 that has the first proclamation of the Injeel.

We must point the Muslims to history of Abraham as related in Genesis, emphasizing the fact that God, in his gracious dealings with mankind, took the initiative and gave the promise of salvation. It is tragic that both Muslims and Jews have understood the call of Abraham in a purely ethnic way. This great patriarch becomes an end in himself. His dignity is then transferred to the Arabs, his descendants through Ishmael, and later on to Muhammad, the restorer of the pure religion of Abraham.

The best place to go, after we have introduced Muslims to the main parts of Genesis, is to take them on a spiritual journey in one of the books of the prophets. Isaiah is extremely suitable as he was given the greatest number of Messianic prophecies. So we go to his book and study what we may call, the *Injeel according to Isaiah.*

First of all, let us remember that his name is not just a Hebrew word. It is much more: it means **'Jehovah is our Savior.'** The Old Testament is rich in such meaningful names. *Abram*, 'exalted father,' becomes *Abraham*, 'the father of many nations.' That was a prophetic name. Sarah, who was totally disbelieving of the possibility of God's promise, laughed. The Lord reminded her that nothing was impossible with God, so he gave her a son whose name was *Isaac*, which means 'laughter.' As for *Jacob*, the Lord changed his name to *Israel*, 'prince with God.'

Always in the context of Islam, any interpretation of Biblical materials takes place

against a background of misunderstanding and prejudice. This does not mean that we can engage in a kind of 'I am right, you are wrong' conversation. No, we must patiently and relevantly explain the Scriptures so that the light of the Gospel may dispel the darkness of Islam.

The Gospel According to Isaiah

Before we begin to relate the message of this great prophet, it is helpful to read up on the history of the kingdom of Israel. We must realize that Muslims know a little bit about David and even more about Solomon. Beyond that, they are hardly informed about the ancient history of Israel. We need to tell about the divisions of the kingdom after the death of Solomon. The northern part of Israel continued to be known by that name, while the southern kingdom was known as the Kingdom of Judah, with Jerusalem as its capital. This is how the prophecy begins.

The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: "I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand. Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on him. Why should you be beaten anymore? Why do you persist in rebellion? Your whole head is injured, you heart afflicted. From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there is no soundness—only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. Isaiah 1: 1-6

How do we proclaim the gospel from this passage, with the Muslim in mind?

We begin by saying that this great man, whose name meant *God is our Savior*, lived in the times after Solomon. He was scolding the people of Judah because they had failed to learn their lesson when they saw the people of the northern kingdom carried into captivity to Mesopotamia,

the Iraq of today. It is important to show how Isaiah proclaimed the good news only after he had told the bad news. This is relevant in our work with the Muslims. They must see that when they measure their lives in the light of God’s law, they must acknowledge how they have failed miserably.

Let us read the rest of the chapter and listen to the indictment of the people of Israel:

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! "The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?" says the Lord. "I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. Isaiah 1: 10-14

This is very relevant to a people like the Muslims who are fond of ritual and superficial religion. Without talking about their month of fasting *Ramadan*, and the ritual of the Muslim calendar, we can point out that the Jews were very religious. They were still keeping the outward forms of their religion, but God, who knew their hearts, did not accept that at all. In fact, He was not interested in the sacrifices because their hearts had departed from Him.

When a Muslim encounters the gospel in Isaiah chapter one, he will realize that sin is not a superficial matter. The very fact that God had commissioned his prophet to show the people of Israel how sinful they were, will make its impression upon Muslims, whose concept of sin and sinfulness is superficial. After the proclamation of the bad condition of man, comes the Good News of God.

"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall

be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." Isaiah 1: 18-20

God has said to them, *"I will wash you clean as snow"* Not, you can wash yourself, but I will wash you. This was said with the cross in mind. Living in the New Testament age, we see this clearly. But the people of the Old Testament times heard the gospel in the form of a divine promise. God offered it to them as an unmerited gift. It was by grace alone. There is always a warning with the proclamation of the gospel: If you defy me you are doomed to die. I, the Lord, have spoken.

It is important to stress to Muslims that the forgiveness of God is totally unmerited. The only thing that is required of them is the turning away from sin, or repentance. It must be a turning away, leaving the evil way.

There is, in the prophecies of Isaiah, a constant description of the sinfulness of Israel on the one hand, and the wonderful peace that comes from God, on the other. One of the most poetical passages of Isaiah is Chapter 2:1-5.

"This is what Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem: In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths. The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will judge between nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Come, O house of Jacob, let us walk in the light of the Lord."

What a wonderful prophecy of everlasting peace! At the very time when they were told about the sinfulness of Jerusalem, they were informed about that future when a period of peace would

come to earth as a result of the acknowledgment of the kingship of the Messiah. It is a wonderful description of the results of the good news once it pervades the world.

One of the best parts of Isaiah to use with Muslims is Chapter 6. In this chapter we have God's call of his prophet. It stands in drastic contrast to the call of Muhammad. We need to explain about the three parts of the temple: **the Outer Court, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies**. The prophet must have been at worship when he saw the Lord. The seraphim, which he saw, were angels. We must remember that Muslims believe in all kinds of beings that populate the world: angels, devils, jinns and other varieties of superhuman beings. So we must convey to them that these heavenly creatures brought a message about the holiness of God.

This is a doctrine that is totally missing in Islam. Granted, there are ninety-nine names of Allah in Islam. They refer to his attributes such as the merciful, the compassionate, the omniscient, etc., but they do not have any real concept of the holiness of God. They are not aware of his abhorrence of sin. And this is one of the fundamental attributes of God. He is holy, the thrice holy God. The glory of God fills the world.

Here we have an opportunity to tell about the sinfulness of man. Note that even though the angels were not capable of sinning, yet they covered their faces with two wings—a symbolic act of their awareness of the holiness of God.

How awesome then that we can come to God! And what a wonderful revelation that God has given of himself in Isaiah 6! Hopefully this should force an awareness of the true nature of sin to a Muslim. Note the confession of the prophet. He was one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament times. At the very moment of his encounter with the majesty and the holiness of God, he made a confession of sin. "*Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips....*" He is not simply confessing a few sins that he may have committed. He is not talking about a superficial doctrine of sin that the Muslims have, which defines sin as weakness. Isaiah was confessing his sinfulness, that is, his propensity to transgress the law of God by omission or by commission. This is a man who is

talking in full awareness of the presence of a holy God. The prophet identified himself with his people, and said, "*I live among a people of unclean lips.*"

Isaiah was not sinful in the same degree that the Israelites were, because he was touched by the grace of God. He was receiving the call to the office of a prophet, yet he considered himself just as sinful as the people to whom he was sent. But thanks to the grace of God, he could say "*And my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.*" Just as in Chapter 1, when the indictment of the children of Israel was followed by the call of the gospel; here we notice first the confession of sin followed by forgiveness. "*One of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand,*"—the coal symbolizing that God was the One who grants the forgiveness; it came from the altar, and that symbolized the future work of Christ on the cross. So the prophet received the assurance of the forgiveness of his sins.

And now the call comes: "*Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?*" And I said, "*Here am I. Send me!*" What a beautiful way of describing the plan of salvation to the Muslim!

After Isaiah received his call, he was told to go and proclaim the doom of his nation. This does not mean that no one was going to be saved. But the southern kingdom of Judah was going to cease to be an independent state. Eventually, when the people of God returned from the captivity in Babylon, the temple would be rebuilt and the sacrificial system would be restored.

The most important topic in the book of Isaiah is the fact that the prophet was given to see the age beyond the return from Babylon. Isaiah proclaimed the good news of the Messiah and his ministry in the Holy Land. The most thrilling part of the study of Isaiah begins with chapter 52. There we have a glimpse of the great work of redemption that was to be accomplished by the suffering **Servant of the Lord: Jesus the Messiah!**

We must remember how antagonistic Muslims are to the cross of Calvary; and how convinced they are, through their *Qur'an* and their tradition, that there was no such thing as the crucifixion of Christ. But here we have in our hands a message from God, given centuries before the coming of the Messiah, which predicts the sufferings,

rejection, the vicarious death, and the resurrection of the Savior. We must emphasize that long before the first century A.D.; the Lord had spoken clearly through Isaiah, informing his people that their hope was centered in the

coming of the Messiah. It was through his death and resurrection that forgiveness would come to all those who believe the *Injeel*, the good news of God.

Chapter Four

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of our study, our aim was to present the Gospel to the Muslim using God's book as our guide. The Muslim's misunderstanding of the contents of the Word of God, made it necessary that we emphasized the fact that the *Injeel* is a message of redemption that is found throughout the Scriptures, i.e., in both the Old and New Testaments. I conclude with these observations.

1. No Christian who goes to the Muslims with the aim of converting them to the Christian faith may entertain any doubts about the reliability or infallibility of the Bible. We have noticed more than once that Muslims charge us with having corrupted the Bible. They claim that what we have today is not the authentic Scriptures. The conviction that the Bible is the Word of God with final authority in all areas of life comes from the Holy Spirit. It is a faith commitment. **The Belgic Confession of Faith**, that dates from the early days of the Reformation, puts it this way, *“We receive all these books, and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith; believing without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but more specifically because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they carry the evidence in themselves.”* (Article 5)

2. No Christian may go to the Muslims unprepared or half-prepared in his knowledge of the Scriptures. This implies the necessity of an adequate acquaintance with the Bible, its background and most importantly, its rightful interpretation.

3. By rightful interpretation I mean specifically the use of the Bible in order to preach Jesus the Messiah. In other words, I am referring to the

necessity of a Christ-centered Bible exposition. We must be on our guard, especially when dealing with the Old Testament books, lest we approach them as if they can be understood without taking the person and work of Christ into consideration. Christ is our Savior, Redeemer, Liberator and Emancipator from the awful power of sin and evil. This is our testimony. We must never be ashamed of this good news. But we must be equally aware that, according to the Biblical testimony, **the proclaimed Word of God** – the preaching of Christ as Savior and Lord, this word of faith – **is God's instrument of salvation**. In the Reformation heritage, this is known as God's means of grace. What I am getting at is that God himself has chosen this means to save people. We may refer to such passages as Romans 10, and I Corinthians 1 and 2, and Hebrews 1, 2 and 3, in order to see **the crucial importance of the proclaimed Word of God**.

4. In our work of missions among Muslims, as in any other work, we are never on our own. The Holy Spirit blesses the faithful testimony based on His word and uses it to bring about the radical change in the heart of the Muslim. We must have faith in the Holy Spirit as the primary agent in missions. This gives us courage and patience, as well as a proper understanding of our own role in missions.

5. Finally, we must realize that God has been, is and shall always be, more concerned about Muslims and others than any one of us can ever be. Christian missions belong to God, not to us. It is our privilege to be involved in them. Our great concern should therefore be our faithfulness to the message, the *Injeel* of Jesus the Messiah, and our willingness to lovingly and patiently present it to the Muslims of today.

PART II — THE CHRISTIAN MISSION TO ISLAM

Chapter Five
**INTRODUCTION: ISLAM VIEWED FROM A
 BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE**

How can we develop a biblical perspective on Islam? We cannot simply embark on mission work, no matter what tool happens to be at our disposal, unless we have a biblical view of Islam. So we must not be deterred from continuing our search within the Bible for the answer, no matter what difficulties attend our way.

The New Testament testifies that wrong doctrines and heresies will abound during this age. Certain passages of the Bible must be fresh in our minds; such as the teachings of our Lord about the Last Things, Paul's message to the elders of the Ephesian church (Acts 20), his prophecies in II Thessalonians, and in I and II Timothy, Peter's prophecy (II Peter 2,) and John's warnings in his epistles, concerning the anti-Christ. All these biblical data alerted the church and prepared her to be on guard against false doctrines that would spread at an alarming rate during the present age.

Now, when we come to consider Islam, it is not easy to place it into a specific category. It may not be classified as a Christian heresy; since heretical groups cling, outwardly at least, to some biblical truths as final and authoritative. Furthermore, most heresies that arose within Christendom claimed to be Christian. But Islam claims to possess the **final and definitive record of divine revelation**, and a book that abrogates all previous revelations. Furthermore, this new religion adopted the name of Islam, i.e., total submission to Allah's will.

There is something mysterious about the birth of Islam. We cannot help but ask: Why this religion? How can we explain the emergence of Islam?

It is not possible to find an absolutely convincing reason for the rise of Islam, but we mention certain undeniable factors that contributed to the

birth of this theistic world religion. Whatever led to the emergence of Islam is still an important factor to reckon with today. The mistakes of the early church should not be repeated today. Church history in general and the history of the church in the East in particular, are extremely important for the proper understanding of our subject. We cannot formulate sound principles of missions to Muslims unless we are well versed in church history.

Here are some of the factors that contributed to the rise of Islam:

1. *The failure of the early Church to acquaint the Arabs with the true contents of the Scriptures.*
2. *The failure of the early Church to maintain the purity of the faith and to grasp the redemptive character of the Bible.*
3. *The unique conditions that surrounded the emergence of Muhammad and the early spread of Islam in the world.*

1. The failure of the early Church to acquaint the Arabs with the true contents of the Scriptures.

By the end of the 6th century, it seems that the church in the East (i.e., in the Eastern parts of the Roman Empire) had spent its force and lost its missionary zeal and vision. The Arabs who lived within the shadow of the church in Syria and Palestine were not, generally speaking, touched with the authentic gospel. It is true that some Arab tribes in southern Syria had adopted Christianity, but they had very little influence over the main parts of Arabia to the south. The church in Yemen, which had close ties with the church in Ethiopia, did not manage to spread the good news among the Arabian tribes in the north. The early church failed to give the Arabs the Bible in their tongue!

J. W. Sweetman put it this way in *The Bible in Islam*, (British & Foreign Bible Society. London: 1953)

Six hundred years had passed since Christ walked the earth and yet no one had put His words into the tongue of the Arab. Preachers there had been, men who hesitated at no privation and no peril, like Jacob Baradaeus, Jacob of the Horsecloth, who went into the remotest places so clad to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. But there was no precious Word in a known tongue and probably but a few who could have written it or read it. The Arabic language as a written language had yet to come into being. Its first letters were to be derived from Syriac and the first great book was the Qur'an which Muhammad brought; when it might have been so easily, as it has been in the case of so many languages for the first time reduced to writing, the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments. The characteristic name by which both Jews and Christians were known among the Arabs was the "people of the Book", which meant the people of the Bible. Yet that by which they were famous was kept as a hidden treasure, hoarded and not cast abroad like seed to bring forth fruit.

Pp. 9, 10

Now the early church was not inactive in the matter of Bible translation. In fact, the entire Bible was available in several languages both among the Eastern and other Christians. *The Itala, the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Egyptian and the Armenian* versions are some of the translations of the Bible that took place before the rise of Islam. But somehow no one bothered to take the Word of God to the Arabs. Let us go back to the sober analysis of Dr. Sweetman:

Here is the tragedy of the Church at the time of the rise of Islam. All truth demanded that, when Muhammad's spirit was stirred with the needs of his people and when he was groping after Him who could save and unify, he should have had in his hands the true Jewish and Christian Scriptures. Instead it was left for him to learn by hearsay from the lips of uninstructed or imperfectly instructed

Christians what those Scriptures contained. P. 10

These words are of utmost importance for us who are engaged in mission work among Muslims. Where the early Church failed, we dare not fail but seek to bring the Word of God in its entirety to the Muslims of today. However, our task has become very difficult and complicated. For according to Sweetman:

That Muhammad had some knowledge of what was contained in the Bible is evident to anyone who reads the Qur'an. He must have thought that what he had heard from the Jews and Christians was indeed that which was contained in the Bible. But had he any sufficient guarantee of that, when Christians at least seem to have neglected the Bible and to have contented themselves often with romantic tales of our Lord? P. 11

After giving some shocking examples of how even leaders within the church gave evidence of inaccurate knowledge of the Scriptures, Dr. Sweetman continues:

What is important, and to our mind a tragedy, is that the translation of the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments had to wait till more than a century at least after the experience of Muhammad on Mount Hira. The first was perhaps a translation from the Latin made in Spain by John of Seville in the early 8th century ...The earliest translation of the New Testament I have ever read and handled is one made in the 11th century by a Christian of Baghdad, a piece of work marked by devotion and ability. But oh! the pity of this long delay. P. 12

Since the Arabian Prophet did not have access to the original writings of the Old and New Testaments, he could not bring to his people the gospel of the Book, nor proclaim to them the Messiah of the Book. Thus, according to Sweetman, *"the apocryphal Christ emerged in the consciousness of Muhammad and not the Christ of the canonical Scriptures"* (P. 15) The consequences of this tragedy still live with us today, and we cannot ignore their existence. Let me again turn to the masterly work of Dr. Sweetman:

Now, after a lapse of time in which the Christian Scriptures have remained still unknown to them, Muslims came from a newly-fixed point of view to the Old and New Testament, placed in their hands by tardy Christians. It is at first a source of gratification to them, for the Qur'an commends the earlier Scripture. But when they come to examine the newly discovered book they find it does not agree at all with that to which they have gradually become accustomed. "This Gospel tells how Jesus really died and so it cannot be the INJIL which Muhammad commended. That was a revelation which God gave to Jesus, a book which marked his prophethood; but this consists of several books by disciples called Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John," and so they conclude that these writings are not the original Gospel but that the Jews and the Christians have corrupted the primitive revelation.

Pp. 17, 18

The lack of missionary zeal among the Christians who lived near Arabia and the neglect to give the Bible to the Arabs in their mother tongue form an important factor that helps us to understand the rise of Islam. Let us consider another important factor.

2. The failure of the early Church to maintain the purity of the faith and to grasp the redemptive core of the Bible.

When reference is made to the early church, it should not be taken as defining the church from the days of the Apostles until the rise of Islam in the 7th century A.D. The term refers here specifically to the Christian church in the two centuries which preceded the rise of Islam. We should be very careful in our criticism of the early Church. We owe much to the heroes of the faith who lived and died in the days before the birth of Muhammad. We Christians of the 21st century do not measure up to their tremendous sacrifices and achievements in many areas of faith and life. The major doctrines of Christianity were studied and formulated in those early days by large world gatherings of the leaders of the church. However, after the conversion of Constantine, the rolls of the churches were filled with people who were not true converts. Many church leaders neglected the study of the

Scriptures, and a false piety began to take the place of a Bible-based and Christ-centered religion. Furthermore, while trying to maintain the orthodox doctrines of Christ and the Holy Trinity, the church relied heavily on the arm of the State. Heretics were terribly persecuted, and often those considered heretics by the Orthodox belonged to what we would call today the national churches. Orthodoxy was championed by the Greek speaking Church which was backed officially by the power of the Byzantine emperor.

As a result of this sad situation, not only were the neighboring peoples such as the Arabs neglected by the church in Syria and Palestine, but the inner life of the Christians in those areas became weakened. The Bible became a closed book and various tales and legends of the lives and achievements of the saints took the place of Bible stories and doctrines. It should not surprise us at all, therefore, that the founder of Islam could not and did not arrive at a true knowledge of the Christian faith. The Christians themselves had obscured their faith. They were not living out of the Bible. They were not aware of the distinctive feature of their faith: **that it was a redemptive religion.** Often, they gave the impression that Christianity consisted mainly of some metaphysical knowledge, and that it had to be lived on some high and lofty level of law through the efforts of man.

Having quoted from Dr. Sweetman's writings earlier, we shall turn to him again, quoting some very pertinent remarks from another book of his composition, *Islam and Christian Theology* (Lutterworth Press).

One of the results of an excessive emphasis on gnosis in the Alexandrian School particularly, but this is true to some extent of all Eastern schools, is a deficient soteriology (doctrine of salvation). Too often we find the substitution of monastic discipline and virginity and an ascetic intellectualism usurping the place of the redemptive self-giving of God. The incarnation is in the main held out as a sort of promise of the deification of man. Cosmological considerations are of more importance than the atoning grace which brings back the individual sinner in reconciliation to God. The East had too little of Augustine

and too much metaphysical speculation. It puzzled itself about the mode of Incarnation to the neglect of the doctrines of grace. For the faith of trust there was substituted a faith of assent, and now when the Muslim comes face to face with the Christian, he has little to ask of the God who is Saviour and everything to ask about the problems of the Trinity, the mode of the Incarnation, the difficulties of the union of divine and human.

One may ask what does all that have to do with our work of missions today? Why should we lay so much emphasis on what did or did not take place about 1400 years ago? We cannot ignore the mistakes of the past because they did contribute, to a great extent, to the rise and development of Islam. Theologically, Islam has not changed. It is still an anti-Trinitarian and anti-redemptive religion. We must set forth the redemptive truths of the Bible in the tradition of the Apostles. We must preach the Messiah-Savior as the only hope of man. We now turn to the third point.

3. The unique conditions that surrounded the emergence of Muhammad and the early spread of Islam in the world.

As the 7th century A.D. dawned, Arabia was ripe for a radical change. Its paganism was worn out. The inter-tribal wars that plagued the Arabian Peninsula were sapping the energies of its inhabitants. Both Byzantium and Persia were seeking to enlarge their spheres of influence in the northern and north-eastern frontiers of Arabia. From Africa, the Ethiopians sought to interfere in the internal affairs of eastern Arabia. In the year of Muhammad's birth, a large Ethiopian army with hundreds of elephants was defeated by the Arabs; and according to the Qur'an, that happened because of a direct intervention of God.

As a young man, Muhammad traveled to the north and met many people who belonged to the

Jewish colonies in Arabia. He learned a good deal of Old Testament history from the Jews of Medina. It is very likely that he encountered some Christians in the southern parts of Palestine. Most likely, they belonged to some heretical groups that had sought refuge in the desert to escape the persecution and the tyranny of the Byzantines.

Being a very sensitive person and quite given to contemplation, Muhammad reflected on the deep issues of life. He was attracted by the teachings of the Arab monotheists known as the *Hanifs*. They were neither Jews nor Christians, but openly declared the vanity of all idols and the existence of *Allah*, the one Supreme Being. From all these influences that had become part and parcel of his life experiences, Muhammad forged a Unitarian and monotheistic faith that dominates around one billion people today.

After his death, the armies of his successors, the caliphs, conquered all the lands between western India and southern France. For almost the entire century before Muhammad, the Persian and Eastern Roman Empires had exhausted themselves and their treasuries, in unending warfare, and were ripe to give way to the advancing armies of Islam. The native populations of the Middle East had become thoroughly tired of the oppression of their imperial overlords, and thus welcomed the Arabs as liberators.

But these new conquerors were not ordinary conquerors. They came to stay for good. They were ardent in their commitment to their new and militant faith: *Islam*. Their creed was forceful and simple: *THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH, AND MUHAMMAD IS THE APOSTLE OF ALLAH.*

Never has the world known such an anti-Christian faith. Never has the Church of Jesus Christ encountered a greater challenge to everything which is dear to her beliefs and her way of life!

Chapter Six

PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL TO THE MUSLIMS

How shall we proclaim the Gospel to the Muslims of today? Part of the answer must be an acquaintance with Islamics. But this is an exceptionally complex theological-philosophical discipline. One could spend a lifetime in its study. And no Christian should embark on this task simply for the study of Islamics in isolation from the larger context of the Christian missions to Muslims.

The important thing for the Christian is that the study of Islamics will enable him to proclaim the gospel relevantly to the Muslims of today. Therefore, the Christian rejects a purely theoretical study of Islam. He knows that the time is short and that we cannot live in the hope that some future generation will do the job. We must work while it is still today and do our utmost to bring the whole gospel to the Muslims of the world in our generation. This is especially so as we witness the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and its impact all over the globe.

These preliminary thoughts are necessary in order to emphasize:

First, that no one can be effective in mission work among Muslims without an adequate knowledge of Islamics.

Second, that the study of Islamics may become dangerous if one forgets the main task: the relevant proclamation of the gospel to the Muslims of today. We must avoid the two extremes that have manifested themselves during the twentieth century. On the one hand, many went to Muslim lands with the hope of evangelizing Muslims without any proper knowledge of Islam. On the other hand, many who had manifested a great interest in Muslims became so fascinated with Islamics that they forgot the main goal of Christian missions. Both a basic knowledge of Islamics and a great zeal for reaching Muslims with the Christian message are a prerequisite for a proper work of missions among Muslims.

This is a very ambitious goal. I would begin by setting some limitations. Muslims today number around one billion. While they have many things in common, yet they live in various countries in Africa and Asia and belong to various cultures. Since I have first-hand knowledge of the Arab segment of the Muslim world, my remarks deal specifically with the situation in the Arab world. This part of the Muslim world is preoccupied with the emergence of the State of Israel. This fact imposes certain limitations on the work of missions throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Thus what may or may not be done there does not necessarily apply to the Muslim countries in Southeast Asia or in sub-Saharan Africa.

Having emphasized the special conditions that exist in the Arab world, I must hasten to add that the Muslim mind tends to be the same everywhere. Furthermore, thanks to the modern means of mass communications such as radio, satellite TV, and the Internet, our world today is bringing all nations together and placing them face to face with a very dominant and aggressive culture. I am referring to the Western secular worldview. It threatens Islam as well as Christianity.

As Islam is a post-Christian religion and since the Qur’an refers to several Biblical personalities of the Old and New Testament times, one cannot ignore theology or doctrine. As soon as we begin our mission work among Muslims, we are involved in apologetics and polemics. We believe that the Bible is the word of God; they believe the Qur’an to be the eternal and uncreated Word of God. We believe in one God who is triune; their doctrine of God is Unitarian. The Qur’anic Messiah is not the Biblical Messiah. According to the Muslim holy book, Christ was not crucified. Man’s sin consists mainly in his ignorance of the divine will. This is the teaching of the Qur’an about sin. It is very important to remember that Muslim doctrine refers to individual sins rather than to sin in the

singular. In other words, sin in the sense of sinfulness (i.e. that propensity to disobey the will or law of God) is unknown in Islamic theology. There is no original or inherited sin in Islam. This faith does not recognize a general or radical corruption of the human nature.

One could go on enumerating the differences between Christianity and Islam in the areas of doctrine. These differences are very important. We should have an adequate knowledge of the basic points of disagreement between the two faiths. The question that faces the missionary is: what is my approach going to be? How am I going to relate the Gospel to a people who have been formed by a thoroughly anti-Christian theology?

There are several possibilities that are available to us. Since we are not pioneering the Christian mission to Islam, we can simply go back to the past, and especially to the last two hundred years, and seek to re-use and up-date the approaches and the methods of the pioneers.

For example, we may begin with an attempt to prove the authenticity, veracity, and reliability of the Christian Scriptures. We believe, of course, that history is on our side and that a Muslim will have a very hard time proving that we no longer possess the authentic Bible. Nevertheless, this approach has serious shortcomings, for while the Christian holds to the above-mentioned qualities of the Bible, he cannot “prove” them to a Muslim. The latter has been conditioned to think differently about the subject. No amount of historical evidence will convince him. Furthermore, if he has received a Western education, he has most likely become aware of the devastating types of Biblical criticism that have emerged among liberal Western Christians. The educated Muslim does not hesitate to make full use of higher criticism in his own critique of the Bible.

Today there are very few opportunities for a Christian missionary to engage in polemics with a Muslim. We are no longer living in the old colonial era. Indonesia has replaced the Dutch East Indies. Pakistan and Bangladesh were carved out of India before the British left the vast sub-continent. The Arab world has shaken off foreign rule.

How are we to proclaim the gospel to the Muslim of today? If we cannot successfully engage in apologetics and in polemics with respect to the Bible, should we shift the ground to the doctrine of God? Or, should we rather concentrate on the doctrine of the person and work of Jesus Christ? Here again, we go back to the Bible and we read it according to the authentic Christian tradition: the tradition of the early ecumenical creeds and the Reformation confessions of faith and catechisms. We proclaim a Trinitarian God and we preach a Divine-human Messiah. The Muslims’ retort is immediate. They tell us that we have committed the worst sin: the sin of “*shirk*.” We have become polytheists. Unless we adopt Islam, we are on the way to hell.

By asking these questions, I am not trying to say that we have to reduce the gospel to some bare minimum of bland theism in order to make it acceptable to the Muslims today. The gospel is not negotiable. **There is only one gospel: the gospel of God, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of the Bible.** *“Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned”* Galatians 1:8 (NIV)

The whole Gospel must be proclaimed to the Muslims otherwise we have not brought it to them. We cannot keep anything back. Everything that is part and parcel of the Christian faith must be brought to the followers of Islam.

The reason behind these questions is that we must come to understand not so much the content of the preaching of the Christian message to Muslims, (for we have already concluded that the whole Gospel must be presented) but **the method of proclamation**. By method, I do not mean the actual technique, be it conventional missionary ways or in radio and literature missions. My questions do not relate to techniques but to the approach that must underlie any technique or method.

The right answer resides in the word “today.” I have been emphasizing “today” throughout this chapter because Muslims no longer live in an isolated or insulated world. Slowly but steadily, they are coming under the impact of Western secularism. As this anti-theistic worldview works within the Muslim world, individuals find themselves challenged to the very root of their

existence. How do they react to the propagandists of neo-paganism?

This is not a theoretical question. For instance, there was a big debate in Lebanon about an Arabic book written by a Muslim from Damascus, Syria. It was printed in Beirut under the title: *A Critique of Religious Thought*. It appeared in 1969 and was the first open critique of Islam written in Arabic. Though I refer to the author as a Muslim; this simply means that he comes from a Muslim background. However, due to his studies at Western institutions of higher education both in the Middle East and in the United States, he became thoroughly secularized. The appearance of a book in Arabic that criticized Islam from a Marxist point of view was an indication of the degree of secularization that has been reached in the Arab section of the Muslim world.

The believing Muslim is very offended by any work that challenges the basis of his faith. He responds by re-stating the case for Islam along traditional lines. However, he fails to realize that the process of Westernization, through the educational systems that had been left by the colonial powers, has exposed a certain section of the population to the anti-Islamic teachings. Then, about a quarter of a century later, Salman Rushdie, a secularized Muslim from Bombay, India, wrote *“The Satanic Verses.”* His implied criticisms of the family of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, earned him a *fatwa* from Ayatollah Khomeini that shocked people all over the world. That legal decision of the father of the Islamic Republic of Iran authorized any Muslim to kill a renegade author who dared to write such a negative book about a subject considered as very sacred in Islam.

So, when we come to consider our present-day opportunities to bring the Gospel to Muslims, we must be fully aware of what is going on in their lands. How should we address them with a message that is utterly important for them in this life, and for the hereafter?

In presenting the claims of the Christian faith to the Muslims of our world, we should sympathetically and irenically point to one of the most glaring short-shortcomings of Islam: **the doctrine of man**. In Islam, the doctrine of man lacks the realism of the Christian doctrine of man. Generally speaking, missionaries do not

adequately recognize this important point, especially if they adhere to traditions that have rejected the radical nature of man's fall into sin. While the Bible clearly teaches us the awful consequences of man's fall into sin, it is only within the Augustinian and Calvinistic traditions, that this Biblical teaching has been fully recognized and proclaimed.

Islam has an optimistic view of man. This faulty anthropology precludes the necessity of redemption and fortifies the Muslim against the acceptance of the Biblical teaching of redemption through the work of the Messiah on the cross of Golgotha. At this point, I would like to quote the following regarding the Islamic doctrine of man and its failure to come to grips with the real needs of mankind.

In 1957, a group of Muslim and Roman Catholic scholars met in a monastery at Toumliline, a small Berber town near Meknes, in Morocco. One of the main speakers was Dr. Uthman Yahya, a scholar from *Al-Azhar University* (Seminary) in Cairo, Egypt. The title of his paper was: *“Man and His Perfection in Muslim Theology”* These are some excerpts from an English translation published by the quarterly journal, THE MUSLIM WORLD.

The Qur'an confronts us with man in two distinct states: the first in his original constitution, the prototype created in the image of God, the second man in his actual condition. In the primordial state man was created in entire harmony. He was perfectly constituted. The Qur'an gives us this description: "We created man in the most noble form" As contrasted with his ideal prototype man in his actual state is feeble (Surah 4:28), despairing (11:9), unjust (14:34), quarrelsome (16:4), tyrannical (96:6), lost (105:2), etc. It is true that Muslim theology does not speak of original sin and of its transmission from generation to generation. But we see clearly in the light of these quotations that there are two distinct states of man: that of his original nature and that of his actual fall ... The possibility of man's deliverance and the way to follow have been indicated by the Qur'an in its address to sinners, fathers of the human race: "Go forth all of you from

hence and if there comes to you guidance from Me then he who follows my guidance shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they know distress” (2:38) By this solemn affirmation God Himself takes action (entre en acte) for the salvation of man in the path of right. Islamic tradition then has the means to lead man to final perfection, the effect of which is liberation from the fear and from the sadness that prevent man from attaining that eternal blessedness which is life in God and for God.

In commenting on the paper of Dr. Yahya, the editor of The Muslim World wrote:

Dr. Yahya’s exposition of Muslim theology and its concepts of man and his salvation raise several deep questions. The Christian must always be perplexed about its ready confidence that ‘to know is to do,’ that man’s salvation happens under purely revelatory auspices and that through the law given in the Divine communication is the path that man will follow once he knows and sees it. The whole mystery of human recalcitrance and ‘hardness of heart’ seems to be overlooked.

THE MUSLIM WORLD,
Volume 49, No. 1, January 1959

In other words, the Muslim view of man and the Muslim understanding of the nature of the fall do not leave any room for a Divine Savior. Such a Savior is not needed, since man needs only to know in order to do the will of Allah.

Islam has never recognized realistically the consequences of man’s rebellion against God. While admitting the fall of Adam as an historical event, Islam lacks that Biblical realism that makes us acknowledge the seriousness of man’s sinfulness as well as the necessity of redemption from without. Islam readily admits the sins and shortcomings of man, but does not admit the sinfulness, i.e., the indwelling nature of sin. This lesson was engraved in my memory in the words of a Tunisian listener who once wrote to me: *“I can well understand you when you talk about sins in the plural, but I cannot comprehend you when you speak about sin in the singular.”*

Today Islam is tremendously vulnerable in its doctrine of man. For the present mood in world

literature, philosophy, and the arts, does not lend itself to that shallow optimism of the Islamic doctrine of man. The modern secular prophet tells us that man is dead. He sees no hope for mankind. How can he entertain any optimistic views of man after all that happened in our world during the past century? And if the Muslim’s answer is that these terrible things took place within Christendom, can he really maintain that human nature is any different in Africa and Asia? Such questions are not meant to embarrass any Muslim, nor are they intended to show that the West is less sinful than the East. The point is that modern history does not support any optimistic view of man or of his so-called native goodness. So much has taken place during the last fourteen hundred years within the Household of Islam that points to the fact that man is desperately wicked, and that man’s depravity is general or total. Nevertheless, throughout all of these years, Islam has not yet learned the lesson that *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that does good, no not one!”*

Since the Islamic doctrine of man is the most vulnerable one, what are its implications for the Christian mission to Islam today?

Whether the Christian is explaining the Scriptures to a Muslim audience, or preaching on a certain passage of Scripture, or proclaiming the Word in a topical message, or simply reflecting on the problems and issues of contemporary life, he must bear in mind the Biblical doctrine of the radical nature of sin. By doing this, he is not imposing a non-Biblical scheme on the Christian proclamation. He is simply witnessing to a basic and foundational theme of God’s special revelation. Furthermore, he is preparing the ground for the acceptance of the Biblical doctrine of redemption by the vicarious death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What we must always remember is this: the Muslim not only rejects the historicity of Good Friday’s main event—the crucifixion of Christ—but his theology denies the necessity of redemption. According to Islam’s teachings, man does not need to be redeemed by a Divine act. In Islam, perfection or salvation is achieved by doing what one learns from God’s revelation! So, it is only after a Muslim has acknowledged the necessity of Divine redemption due to the radical

nature of sin, that he is ready to consider the claims of Jesus Christ, the Savior.

But here we must be very careful in our statement of the case. We must follow Biblical history and Biblical logic, and not some abstract logic. We cannot appeal to a so-called neutral arbiter in order to make our message acceptable to Muslims. The Christian missionary must begin with Biblical history. The finished work of Christ on the cross is *a fait accompli*. God planned it from all eternity. He executed it in the fullness of time. Thus, our argument is not based on human logic, but on a Divine action that took place in real history. It is preserved for us and explained in Holy Scripture. We should never give the Muslim the idea that our doctrine of salvation has been concocted as a result of our own independent theologizing.

Certainly God's way of salvation by the blood of Christ shed on our behalf on Calvary's cross is exactly what we needed. There was no other way of salvation. Man's case was hopeless. There was no other way of escape except God's way. And when we speak in such terms, we are not taking our stand on some neutral ground, and then arriving at these truths on the basis of a so-called autonomous human logic. We must impress the Muslim that when we speak of salvation and redemption, we are testifying of what God has planned from eternity and what he has accomplished in the fullness of time. The Christian faith is objectively true, whether people believe it or not.

Furthermore, when the Christian missionary speaks of the Gospel, he speaks as one who has already tasted the salvation of the Lord. We, who are called to go to Muslims with the message of

the gospel, have already experienced the Lord's redemption. We go to Muslims as those who are commissioned to proclaim the Word of God. We go as witnesses to the truth that has liberated us from the power and bondage of sin and evil.

These lines are not the fruit of an abstract reflection on Christian missions to Islam. Rather, they are the result of a pioneering ministry of radio and literature missions in the Arabic-speaking world. It was my privilege to be involved in this work from mid-1958 to mid-1994. I processed around 150,000 letters from Arabs in every part of their vast world, more than half of which were from Muslims. Based on these long years of work, and having kept in touch with a field that stretches from the Gulf to the Atlantic, I testify that the gospel of Jesus Christ is tremendously needed. Now, as we live in the early years of the Third Millennium, (corresponding to the Second Millennium of the Islamic calendar) we must realize that, notwithstanding the rise of radical Islam, the challenge of missions to Muslims remains with us as members of the obedient church. We must preach the Good News of Jesus Christ to the followers of Muhammad, remembering the words of Paul in I Corinthians 1:21

For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. (NIV)

Epeiden gar en te sofia tou Theou ouk egno o kosmos dia tes sofias ton Theon, eudokesen o Theos dia tes morias tou kerugmatos sosai tous pisteuontas (Greek)

Chapter Seven

ISLAM AND THE QUEST FOR MODERNITY

Today’s Muslims face a tremendous challenge to their faith and worldview. Their most noticeable response is known as Islamic fundamentalism. In 1979, the triumph of the Khomeini revolution gave this radical movement a powerful base. This coup galvanized the Shi’ite masses in Iran. One year later, it enabled them to withstand the Iraqi invasion, and to turn it into a *jihad* that lasted for eight long years. Before too long, the Iranian revolution was exported to Lebanon. It is no wonder that in 1987, a special stamp was issued in Iran to commemorate the martyrs of *Hizbullah* (Party of Allah) in Lebanon!

The majority of the Muslims of the world belong to the orthodox or *Sunni* branch of Islam; and within this part of Islam, radical fundamentalism (known nowadays as *Islamism*) has manifested itself everywhere from Indonesia to Africa. Just think of the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the horrific attack on the United States on September 11, 2001. Is it still appropriate to speak about Islam and modernity? When we take the long view, the answer is yes. While *Islamism* has captured the minds of many young Muslims, eventually, it leads to a dead-end. Thus, Muslims must face the challenge of modernity. Already, in the early days of 2003, the young people in Iran are manifesting their rejection of the utopian ideology of the Ayatollahs of the Islamic Republic.

We may summarize the thinking of the Islamists in this way: At the dawn of Islam (7th Century A.D.), God gave the Arabs His final and complete revelation. He launched them on a mission to spread the faith over the entire world. Their rapid success in building a huge empire from the walls of China to Spain was a sign of Allah’s approval and blessing. During the First Muslim Millennium, history was on their side. While they went through some violent internal upheavals, their belief in their divine mission was not shaken.

After the fall of Baghdad in the 13th century, and the demise of the Abbasid caliphate, the Ottoman Turks became the new defenders of the faith. They spread their empire into Eastern and Southern Europe. Constantinople fell into their hands in 1453. Islam was still on the march. There was now a Muslim caliph ruling from Istanbul, (Constantinople).

At the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire was dismembered by the European powers. Most of the Middle East came under British and French rule. During the 1920s and 1930s, most of the Muslim world was under the control of European powers with the exception of a major portion of Arabia, Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan.

This situation created a great problem for Muslims. How could they reconcile the finality and rightness of their faith with their contemporaneous history? It seemed as if Allah had forsaken them! Something must have gone wrong; they had forgotten Him and His Law. The cry went out, back to the fundamentals of Islam.

The period that followed World War II, saw the end of European imperialism. Muslim nations became independent. The last major Muslim land to throw off the shackles of colonialism was Algeria. Its eight-year struggle of liberation from France cost it 1,500,000 martyrs! But during those long years of colonialism, many Arabs came into contact with Europe. As a result, Arab nationalism was born. Its primary aim was to throw off the yoke of imperialism. It sought to borrow several features of Western civilization and blend them with the basic tenets of Islam.

The failure of nationalism to solve the economic problems of the masses, the population explosion, rapid urbanization, and the birth of the State of Israel, have contributed to the revival and spread of Islamic Fundamentalism. But we must not jump to the conclusion that the entire Muslim world is dominated by fundamentalism.

A sampling of contemporaneous Arabic literature indicates that some Muslims today are seeking to find solutions to their problems from a non-fundamentalist perspective.

One author who has been very helpful in pinpointing the basic problem that faces the Muslims today is the late Dr. Zaki Naguib Mahmoud, an Egyptian scholar who taught for many years in Kuwait. He holds a Ph.D. degree from a British university. He came to appreciate his Islamic heritage after his encounter with Western culture. He is representative of several lay Muslims who are working for the renewal of Islam through its modernization.

In one of his earlier books, *Tajdid al-Fikr al-'Arabi* (The Renewal of the Arab Mind), Dr. Mahmoud outlined the emergence of a contemporaneous Arab-Muslim culture in which the inherited culture of the past would co-exist in harmony with modernity. According to him, this goal would be attained if the modern Arab was willing to preserve from his cultural heritage the “general outlook” of his ancestors, provided it was purged of all those problems which were of no relevance to the Muslims of today.

Having set forth his thesis in the above-mentioned book, Dr. Mahmoud pursued his quest for renewal in another book, which was published in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1973. *Al Ma'qool wa'l Lama'qool fi Tirathina al-Fikri* (The Rational and the Irrational in Our Cultural Heritage).

The thesis of the book is that the Arab’s general outlook was fundamentally rational. The irrational outlook did impact individuals but what marked the life of the Arabs in general was a specific *hikma* or wisdom.

The author’s method is to take us on a “cultural journey” where we may visit the Arabs of the past taking note of both their rational and their irrational outlooks. He does not attempt to look at their problems through their own eyes. Rather, he keeps his own outlook, which is the product of our modern times. After listening carefully to the fundamental discussions that took place in the past, he would reflect on what he had learned in order to decide what must be accepted and what must be rejected from the cultural heritage of the past.

As an Arab-Muslim scholar, his research begins with the 7th Century and ends in the 13th Century A.D. As noted earlier, Arab Muslims consider the fall of Baghdad in 1258 as the beginning of their Dark Ages. They are unwilling to consider that the banner of Islam went to the newly converted Turks who enlarged the Muslim world and spread the faith into new regions never occupied by the Arabs.

During the 7th Century A.D. – 1st A.H. – the Arabs’ preoccupations were with the political and social realms. *Ali*, the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was the best representative of the Arabs. *Ali*’s book, *Nahj al-Balagha* (The Way of Eloquence), showed that the genius of the Arabs resided in their tongue. While the modern Arab may still appreciate the form of this cultural heritage and especially his beautiful language, he must not become a prisoner of the form or contents of this heritage.

Muhammad died in 632 A.D. without leaving any specific instructions about his succession. Thus the first major problem that confronted the Arab-Muslim community was who was to be the legitimate successor or *khalifa* of the Prophet? For about a quarter of a century, the Islamic Umma chose its caliphs by the consensus of the leading members of the community in Medina. But this system broke down when there was no unanimity in the choice of *Ali*, the fourth caliph. *Mu'awiya*, the governor of Damascus, claimed that *Ali* was implicated in the murder of *'Uthman*, the third caliph. He wanted the caliphate for himself. War broke out between *Ali* and his opponent. There was call for arbitration. Not all parties agreed on the results of the arbitration. The Islamic Umma split into three parties: the followers of *Mu'awiya* (known as *Sunni* Muslims,) the followers of *Ali* (known as *Shi'ites*, i.e., Partisans of *Ali*,) and the *Khawarej* or Dissenters. Both *Ali* and *Mu'awiya* claimed the caliphate on grounds of kinship to Muhammad, the *Khawarej* put forth the thesis that it was not heredity, but ability and capability that mattered in the choice of the caliph.

One may see a rational approach in the position taken by the *Khawarej*, yet their conduct in the history of the Muslim community shows their inconsistency. Irrationalism triumphed in their camp. One of their men murdered *Ali*. They became notorious for their cruelty to those

Muslims who did not adhere to their extremist positions. Dr. Mahmoud maintains that the basic political theory of the *Khawarej* is forgotten or neglected in the history of the Arabs, the right to revolt against the *imam*, (the leader,) when he betrays the trust granted to him by the Muslim *umma*. The *Khawarej* sinned against this great political principle when they surrounded it with religious fanaticism.

The first lessons we learn from the research and reflection of Dr. Mahmoud is this one: during the first period of the Islamic history, *the rational approach had its champions, at least theoretically, but its champions were inconsistent, and their behavior was utterly wrong.*

During the second period, 8th Century A.D. - 2nd A.H., certain theological problems came to the fore. For example, there was a debate about the ‘*great sins.*’ Can a Muslim, who committed one of the great sins, still be considered a true Muslim? Furthermore, discussions relating to predestination and human responsibility, and the attributes of God, occupied the attention of the Islamic community. These subjects dealt with deep theological matters. It is in his comments on this period that Dr. Mahmoud manifests his lack of interest in theological topics. He does not think that the Arabs of today are able to identify with those discussions. He makes one exception however: the subject of man’s freedom and responsibility.

At this point, one cannot help but notice that Dr. Mahmoud, who is a leader in the cause of the modernization of the Arab-Muslim mind, exhibits a bias for the horizontal aspect of the faith. He considers subjects that are purely theological, or those that deal with the supernatural, of no relevance today!

The “liberals” of that period were known as the *Mu’tazilites*. They taught man’s full responsibility for his actions. Their thesis was: a man is able to create his own deeds; otherwise, there would be no foundation for justice. The theological discussions were live and dealt with concrete problems that surfaced as a consequence of the wars of succession. The opponents of the *Mu’tazilites* were known as the *Jabirites*. Their thesis was: a man is *mujbar*, i.e., he is forced to do what he does. He has no capability to create his own deeds.

The third period, 9th and 10th Centuries A.D. - 3rd and 4th A.H., ushers us into the *Abbasid* era with Baghdad as the new center of the Arabic/Islamic culture. In commenting on this chapter in the history of the Arab nation, Dr. Mahmoud writes: The accession of the Abbasids “*teaches us a lesson that our ancestors were not perfect.*” These words were undoubtedly prompted by the blood bath that took place when the *Abbasids* wrested the caliphate from the *Umayyads* in 750 A.D.

But as things began to settle down, Baghdad became the center of learning and the cultural life of the Arab-Muslim community reached its zenith. There was a great deal of freedom for the airing of various theological and philosophical views. Both Muslim and Christian scholars participated in this movement. The impact of Greek culture was great, but according to Dr. Mahmoud, only a small group of intellectual elite felt it; the masses in Baghdad, and throughout the vast empire, were not influenced by Hellenism.

In contrast with those times, today, the influence of the outside world on the Arabs is total. All aspects of life – culture, economics, military, commerce, government – have come under the impact of non-Islamic worldviews. A new situation is at hand that has never happened in the previous thirteen centuries of Islam!

Going back to the *Mu’tazilites*, Dr. Mahmoud appreciates their rational approach: they believed in free will and responsibility and in playing an active role in the life of the Muslim community. One of their theses was: God cannot do evil.

Time and again, as one accompanies our author on his intellectual journey in the early centuries of Islam, one takes note of the vigor of the intellectual activities of the times and the relatively free atmosphere within which they were pursued. There were, for example, the rationalists known as *Ikhwan al-Safa*. Their thesis may be summarized as follows: There is no conflict between Islamic *Shari’a* and Greek philosophy. Religion is for the sick, while philosophy is for the well. They championed the belief that man is perfectible by wisdom. They were tolerant to those who did not hold their views. They taught that all religions were helpful! They wrote 51 or 52 epistles. In one that had the title *Discovery of the Truth*, their account

of the fall of Adam is closer to the Biblical one than to the traditional Islamic view of the fall.

Dr. Mahmoud is perplexed by those who claim that nothing is left for us to discover or accomplish, since the *salafs* (ancestors) have discovered everything. This view was not shared by some of the Arabs' intellectual giants of the past. For example, the famous Syrian poet Abu'l 'Ala'a taught: "It is possible for any person to become his own imam (leader), if he did his research and reflection well."

This is a very important observation: rigidity within the Arab-Islamic culture occurred later on. During the first five hundred years, it was otherwise. There was freedom of thought, expression and discussion.

When we arrive in our cultural journey at the fourth period, 11th Century A.D. - 5th A.H., we are still preoccupied with *Mu'tazilite* teachings. They were involved in the *Mihnat al-Qur'an*, i.e., the Ordeal of the Qur'an. They had enjoyed the favor of three successive caliphs: *al-Ma'moon*, *al-Mu'tasem* and *al-Watheq*. This theological controversy is of great importance in the understanding of the problems that confront every monotheistic faith.

These are the five principles of the *Mu'tazilites*:

1. **Tawheed.** This refers to unity as understood in a Unitarian sense. Allah is both *wahed* (one), and *ahad* (solitary). They differed from the Sunnis (orthodox) in declaring that God's eternality was in His essence, but not in his attributes. God knows by or through His self, but the attribute of knowledge, for example, does not stand by itself. Had these attributes of Allah shared His essence in its eternality, they would have also shared in its deity. Then, according to *Mu'tazilite* thinking, there would be a plurality within the Godhead. This is why they insisted on strict unity, or to use a Christian way of speaking, they advocated a strictly Unitarian unity of Allah. They advocated a *wahdaniyya mutlaqa*, (absolute unity.) This led them to declare that there was no similarity between God and anything in existence, or to put it in more familiar language, they did not recognize any

communicable attributes of God. Any Qura'nic passage that conflicted with this principle was paraphrased and its meaning altered to fit into their principle of *tawheed*. The *Mu'tazilites* advocated the hermeneutics of *ta'weel*, i.e., the bending of the meaning of a Qur'anic passage to fit their basic beliefs. Both *Sunnis* and the *Shi'ites* affirmed, in their exegesis of the Qur'an, the literal meaning of the text.

Having proceeded on this theological principle of absolute Unitarianism, the *Mu'tazilites* precipitated the crisis known as the *Mihnat al-Qur'an*, mentioned above. According to their teachings, the *Qur'an* was not *qadeem* (eternal); it came into existence when Gabriel brought it to Muhammad. Both *Sunnis* and *Shi'ites* responded by affirming the eternality of the *Qur'an*; the prototype had always existed in heaven. When the *Mu'tazilites* enjoyed the upper hand in the affairs of the state, they did not refrain from persecuting their opponents. There were imprisonments, torture and even some executions. But later on, after the caliphate of *al-Watheq*, it was the turn of the *Sunnis* to become the persecutors and the *Mu'tazilites* to undergo persecution.

2. **'Adl.** This means justice or righteousness. The *Mu'tazilites* taught that man chooses his own deeds. He is not forced to do things against his will. This was a reaction to the excessive predestinarianism of the ultra-orthodox that made Allah the author of evil.
3. **Al-Wa'd w'al-Wa'eed.** In dealing with man, Allah makes His promises and issues His prohibitions. This means that He will surely recompense those who do good, and will surely punish those who do evil.
4. **Al-Manzilat Beyn al-Manzilatayn.** This refers to a category between the two opposites, or to the 'gray' areas of life. The ultras taught that there were only two opposite views in theological and ethical matters. The *Mu'tazilites* advocated the existence of a third

position and thus set forth the principle of non-essentials or neutral areas of life. In Arabic, this is expressed in the words used as the title of this paragraph.

- 5. Activism** and the necessity of participation in the social life of the community. This principle gave a basis for the use of force to stop evil and the legitimizing of jihad, i.e., holy war.

After the theological controversies that were precipitated by the *Mu'tazilites*, the Muslim community adopted the position of the famous *Abu'l Hasan al-Ash'ari*, (873 - 917 A.D.) He taught the existence and importance of the spheres of reason and faith. He set forth what may be called the Creed of the orthodox Muslim in one of his writings.

Ahlu'l Hadith wal-Sunna, i.e., the people of the Traditions and the Orthodox Way, believe in Allah, His angels, His books and apostles and what proceeded from Allah and what the trustworthy have transmitted from the Apostle of Allah. They affirm that Allah is one God, ahad (solitary,) eternal; there is no other God beside him; He has not taken to Himself a wife nor a son; that Muhammad is His apostle; there is a real heaven and a real hell. The Hour (i.e. final day) is coming; there is no doubt about it. There will be a resurrection from the graves.

Al-Ash'ari criticized the *Mu'tazilites* for not accepting the literal meaning of the *Qur'an*, and for refusing its anthropomorphisms. His position was that God created the evil works of men. Fatalism is part and parcel of his theological system.

Finally, we arrive at the **fifth** and last period in our survey of the Islamic cultural heritage. It is dominated by the great figure of *Al-Ghazzali* (died in 1111 A.D.) This great thinker praised the scientific methodology; on the other hand, he represented a powerful reactionary force in the history of Islamic thought. While Dr. Mahmoud appreciates the contributions of *Al-Ghazzali* to the culture of the Arabs, yet on balance, he regrets that his influence on the Arab-Muslim mind and culture was to freeze them in a mold that led to stagnation. In his book, *Ihya' 'Uloom al-Deen* (The Revival of Religious Knowledge),

Al-Ghazzali defined every utterance a Muslim makes and every step he must take in order to guarantee the orthodoxy of his Islam. Everything is spelled out for the Muslim: *how to eat, sleep, travel, fellowship with one's wife and child, etc. No room is left for any spontaneity in the Muslim's life* "Al-Ghazzali closed the door of philosophy on the Muslims and it remained closed for eight hundred years!"

When we come to the period when the *Sufis* (mystics) were playing the leading role in the life of the Muslim community, we witness the ascendancy of irrationalism. The *Sufis* tended to be heretical, as they did not observe the basic teachings of Islamic theism. The way to understanding, according to their teachings, was by intuition. They advocated the unity of all existence, and some of them ended up pantheistic.

Dr. Mahmoud summarizes his research by stressing the importance of rejecting the irrational aspect of the heritage. Only the rational outlook must be retained. But often, in his rejection of irrationalism, one gets the strong impression that our author is rejecting supernaturalism! To work for the renewal of a theistic religion by emphasizing only the horizontal relevance of the faith, is to bring about a deistic faith that is something altogether different from Islamic theism.

Today, the vast Muslim world is not as monolithic as we may imagine. The tide of Fundamentalism is high, but this movement is not the only force at work among the Muslims. Our reflection on the attempt of a lay Muslim, Dr. Zaki Naguib Mahmoud to "modernize" the Arab-Muslim mind enables us to sympathetically understand the tremendous problems and challenges that face the Muslim community.

As Christians, we applaud every attempt that seeks to further the cause of tolerance among the peoples of the world. By tolerance I do not mean indifference to the fundamental beliefs we confess. But in dealing with the heritage of the past, and in seeking to renew the Arab-Muslim mind, one cannot adopt the principle of horizontalism and make it the touchstone of what must be accepted and what must be rejected from one's heritage. Those discussions relating to the attributes of Allah, predestination, the createdness or the eternality of the *Qur'an*,

cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the Muslims of today. When a faith requires its adherents to subscribe to the supreme and final authority of a sacred book, its followers are bound by that text. Therefore, the dismissal of the theological in the interest of the sociological aspects of the faith will not satisfy the heart of the believer. Man does not live by bread alone! Dr. Mahmoud's approach, if carried to its logical end, would change Islam into a deistic belief.

One observation that Dr. Mahmoud makes deserves our special attention, the one referring to the total impact of the outside world on the Arab world today. Thanks to the mass media and the ease of travel, we have all become neighbors. Ideas and ideologies spread everywhere. Isolationism is gone forever. Today the Muslim community lives under new circumstances that have no parallel in history! Islamic fundamentalism, known also as Islamism, has thrived in the nineties, and has manifested its destructive power early in the twenty-first century. However, it will not succeed. It is anchored to the myth of a "golden age" that cannot be retrieved. The challenges of modernity and globalization persist; they do not vanish by denial.

Another topic, which merits our careful attention, is the problem of the *Qur'an*, its createdness or eternity, from the Muslim point of view. The *Mu'tazilites*, as we have noted, were champions of absolute Unitarianism. They set forth the doctrine of the createdness of the *Qur'an* in order to safeguard the doctrine of the oneness of God. They could not accept two eternals: *Allah* and the *Qur'an*. Their opponents championed the doctrine of the eternity of their sacred book, and could not accept that it came into being at the time of its delivery to *Muhammad*.

As we reflect on this theological problem from a Christian perspective, we admit that mysteries are part and parcel of any theistic faith. We must not charge Muslims with dualism on account of their belief in the eternity of *Allah* and His word, the *Qur'an*. We recognize the unavoidability of difficulties within any system of monotheism. But we would appreciate a treatment of *quid pro quo*, from the Muslim side. While we believe in a Trinitarian God, we have not surrendered our faith in the oneness of God. Three centuries before the rise of Islam, at the

very first ecumenical council of the Christian church, our fathers affirmed this teaching by stating: "*We believe in one God, the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.*" (Nicene Creed, 325 A.D.)

Having done this brief survey of a vast subject I am left with a great concern: the lack, in Islamic thought, both fundamentalist and modernizing, of a realistic teaching about the condition of man. That there is a basic flaw in the character of man is undeniable. Both the Christian scriptures and world history testify to the sinfulness of man. But in orthodox Islam, man is regarded as fully capable to fulfill the requirements of God's law and thus attaining the bliss of heaven.

In Islam, there is no need for redemption from without. Modernizing Muslim thinkers have welcomed the optimistic views of man which have been advocated in the West since the Enlightenment. They fail to see the necessity of developing a realistic view of the human condition. On this point they do not differ from the basic belief of Muslim fundamentalists. In spite of all the events of history that indicate the existence of a radical "flaw" in human nature, Muslims, cling to the belief in the basic innocence or goodness of man. But as long as any worldview, be it religious or secular, advocates an optimistic view of man, it cannot realistically face the mounting problems of the future. No such views of the human condition help their adherents to properly cope with the challenges of modernity. As far as Muslims are concerned, their rejection of the Biblical description of the plight of man forms a powerful barrier for them to seriously consider the merits of the Christian Injeel. If man is basically good, then the *Injeel* is nothing more than another *shari'a*, or law that he can fulfill and thus earn the favor and peace of God!

The Christian, while joyfully accepting the revelation of the Divine law, does not hail it as his liberator. The law reveals the radical dimension of that sinfulness that has become part of the human nature ever since Adam and Eve transgressed God's commandment in the Garden of Eden. We are often accused by Muslims of being very pessimistic vis-à-vis the present condition of man. We are told that our doctrine

of original sin is demoralizing; that we look too much on the dark side of life.

Our response takes the form of a testimony: left to ourselves, we would have never devised what we now know as the Biblical doctrine of man. None of us like to consider ourselves as dead in trespasses and sins. If we have adopted this language, it is because we believe it to be the language of divine revelation. We applaud the law and we regard it as the pedagogue that leads

us to Jesus, the Messiah. He is the One who came from God to our world of misery, and fulfilled all the requirements of the law. More than that, he went to the cross and died there to atone for our sins. Those who trust in him as Savior and Lord, experience liberation from sin, and become free to serve God and their fellow human beings. They do not take credit for themselves, but give all the glory to the one only true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Chapter Eight

MISSIONS TO MUSLIMS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

1. Some Forces of Change in Christian Missions

As we begin the Third Millennium, it is necessary to have a new vision of world Missions based not only on the solid foundation of the Word of God, but coupled with a **realistic description of our times**. We are living in a new era of world history. In the early days of modern missions, between 1800 and 1950, the West was more or less Christian, and its culture reflected the impact of the Christian tradition. The mission fields in Asia and Africa formed an integral part of the vast colonial empires of Britain, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. Not so today. The West is secularized, and those European empires are a thing of the past. Furthermore, Christian missions overseas should never be abstracted from what is going on in the homelands. **Hence the critical importance of reaffirming the uniqueness and finality of the Christian faith in our missionary endeavors within the global scene and for the support groups in the West to be identifiably Christian.**

The post-world-war II era has ushered in a new Diaspora which has brought millions of people from the former colonies to settle in Western European countries. And due to the changes in the immigration laws in Canada and the United States, the North American population is now more diversified than ever before. Such a mega shift in the global situation requires a re-examination of mission strategies. Millions of Muslims from the Indian sub-continent, Southeast Asia, North Africa and the Middle East have settled in North America and Europe. They use the freedoms of the host countries not only to freely practice their faith, but also to proselytize among their neighbors.

In this chapter I will speak about the global challenge of Islam, with special emphasis on the

fact that **Islam is more than a Religion**. This reality is not easily recognized by the average North American, since his understanding of this subject is limited by an individualistic concept of religion, namely, a system of belief and a code of ethics that are limited to the life of the individual, his family, and his or her house of worship.

Unlike Europeans, North Americans have had very little experience with Islam and Muslims. During the modern era, several European nations colonized huge sections of the Muslim world, and thus, gained a direct knowledge of Islam. Before that, during the early and late Middle Ages, some European countries were conquered by Muslims who colonized them for centuries. Think, for example, of Spain. The Arab-Islamic conquest began in 710, and lasted until 1492! Most of Central and Eastern Europe came under Islamic rule for hundreds of years. Would you believe it, Salonika in Northern Greece, was still under Ottoman Turkish rule as late as 1912?

The first American encounter with Muslims occurred soon after independence. The pirates of Tripoli terrorized maritime trade in the Mediterranean, so the U.S. Navy had to deal with them. The real American experience in Muslim lands took place when missionaries of the Presbyterian Church, the Congregational Churches, and the Reformed Church in America, began their missionary activity in the Middle East, in the 19th century. Their work among Eastern Christians and Muslims forms a glorious chapter in the history of missions in the Modern times.

It was after World War II that the United States became significantly involved in the Muslim world. Oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia in the 1930s, and U.S. oil companies were the first to develop and market it. When the French and British pulled out of the area in the aftermath of World War II, it was the United States that sought to fill the vacuum. Israel was born in 1948, and

ever since that day, Americans have been drawn into the intricate diplomacy that seeks to keep Israel alive and to convince the Arab-Muslim states to co-exist with the Jewish State.

At the outset it is very important to remind ourselves that whether working with Muslims or among the followers of other world faiths, we are never on our own. We are the messengers of Him who presides over the spread of His Good News and the building up of His universal church. The Bible teaches a **theocentric** view of missions. Our primary concern should be the faithful proclamation of the Word of God in the language of the people and in harmony with the historic Christian faith as we find it summarized and expounded in the ecumenical Creeds and the Confessions and Catechisms of the Reformation. We should keep in mind a Pauline missionary principle: *“Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the preaching of Christ.”* (Romans 10:17 NIV) The establishment of Christian churches in new fields follows a vibrant and faithful preaching of the whole counsel of God.

Unfortunately, rather than basing their approaches on this solid heritage of the past, some missionary strategists during the last few decades of the twentieth-century have been very critical of the modern mission endeavor charging it with lack of concern for the cultures of non-Western people. They have vigorously adopted new theories and methods which supposedly would guarantee success in missions. For example, great stress has been placed on **contextualizing** the gospel in such a way that it becomes rather easy for a Muslim to convert to Christianity.

Certain advocates of contextualization have espoused radical theories which conflict with the teachings of the Bible. Their inspiration did not originate from within the Christian tradition but from their fascination with **cultural anthropology**. These approaches have alarmed those missiologists who are committed to the Biblical principles of missions.

It is not only theologians who manifest the impact of the spirit of the age on their thinking. On the popular level, many Christians are no longer willing or able to defend the uniqueness of Christianity. They do not want to offend their new neighbors who have come from Islamic,

Hindu or Buddhist parts of the world by affirming the uniqueness of the Christian faith. Should they be listening to radio ads on weekends, they are likely to hear more than once the government-sponsored ad: *“Our strength is in our diversity.”* Placing this statement within its larger context of political correctness, it means much more than ethnic diversity. It preaches a multiculturalism that erases religious differences supplanting them by a vapid spirituality.

I would like to advance three main reasons why pluralism is gaining grounds within the Western world.

A. Loss of faith in the supreme and final authority of the Word of God.

While many Christians are not willing to say explicitly that they no longer receive the Bible as the only Word of God, they exhibit their lack of faith in its authority when they are unwilling to stand for the great themes of Biblical revelation such as the Creation, the Fall, and the Redemption accomplished by the incarnate Son of God. When confronted with open denials of the uniqueness, finality, and superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ, many Christians remain silent. Unlike Paul, they are ashamed of the Gospel!

B. Loss of faith in the value of the Christian tradition.

Nowadays, the majority of Christians know hardly anything about the great Christian tradition that has come down to us via the Church Fathers, the teachings of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicea, Constantinople, and Chalcedon. Equally, they hardly manifest any true knowledge of the Reformation and its leaders such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Knox. They may not even be aware that the Reformers left us classical formulations of the Christian faith in their Confessions of Faith and Catechisms.

C. Ignorance of the resurgence of the major world religions in the non-Western world.

One of the most important phenomena on the global scene at the dawn of the New Millennium is the revival of the major world religions. In an article entitled, **“Pluralism and the Otherness of Word Religions,”** Prof. S. Mark Heim of Andover Newton Theological School, near Boston, MA, referred to this phenomenon and remarked that the representatives of world

religions, such as Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus, are not willing to relinquish their firm belief in the validity and uniqueness of their particular religious tradition. (FIRST THINGS, August/September 1992, pp. 29-35) At the same time, is it not strange that Westerners, who are now a demographic minority on the global scene, are rushing to get rid of their religious and cultural roots?

For those of us who love the Lord and believe in the supreme and final authority of His sacred Word, we must repudiate the harmful influence of all pluralistic theologies. We need to deepen our study of the Bible and the classical works of Christian leaders of the last 2000 years. Above all, we must double our efforts to defend and spread the Christian faith by every means throughout the entire world.

2. Understanding the Worldview of a Muslim Today

Setting aside theories which advocate a radical discontinuity with the work of the pioneer missionaries, we may now zero in on the Muslim world. Our approach should be marked by a macro or total vision of the real nature of Islam as a religion which encompasses all areas of life. It is basically a faith which acknowledges God as creator and sovereign over all, but denies the event of the fall as described and explained in the Bible, the historicity of the crucifixion as well as the necessity of redemption. In Islam, **“man’s salvation takes place under purely revelatory auspices.”** The attainment of eternal bliss in the paradise of Allah depends on the confession of the oneness of God and the apostleship of Muhammad coupled with a life of obedience to the demands of the Shari’a Law.

The majority of Muslims today live in the third world; most of them are historically conscious and quite aware of their great and glorious past. Their faith in the rightness of their religion is unshaken. God has entrusted them with His final message to mankind. They have taken it to distant lands and managed to found great empires. They consider their present predicament as transitory, an unfortunate phase which will eventually give way to a revival of their past glories. They do expect the triumph of Islam all over the globe. This belief forms an integral part of their eschatology.

With regard to the evangelization of Muslims, we must realize that they come from a position of utter certainty about the rightness of their faith. They consider themselves as the custodians of God’s final and complete revelation. Thus, they have hardly any reason to seriously consider the claims of a previous and inferior faith. Furthermore, an average Muslim is convinced that he has nothing to gain by converting to Christianity. If he lives within a Muslim country, his conversion will inevitably lead to death. If he has immigrated to a Western land, he sees no specific benefits that would accrue from his adoption of the Christian faith. Western societies present him with a very confusing scene. Their mores are a threat to his family. Back in his homeland, society and the state cooperated with him in the faithful practice of his religion. Over here in the West, no such help is available. The freedom he sought in this new world of economic opportunity surrounds him at the same time with a devastating type of secularism. He does not understand separation between religion and politics, or church and state. **His culture is deeply religious and his religion has produced an assertive and self-consciously Islamic culture.** Based on his experiences of living and working in the West, he identifies Christianity with Western culture. He regards it as decadent and hurtling towards disintegration. His personal faith and fervor are rekindled. In order to survive within a secular milieu, he must go on the offensive and engage in *da’wah*, i.e., in Islamic missions. He calls on Westerners to convert to Islam. This would involve both a religious and political change of mind on the part of his Western converts.

3. Muslim Pressures on Western Pluralist Societies

Thus, when we are considering Christian missions to Muslims in the twenty-first century, we must be fully aware that Muslims themselves are already engaged in a global effort to spread their faith. This is a new state of affairs which was not at work when William Carey launched the modern missionary enterprise back in 1792. In other words, while we entertain a hope for conducting missions among Muslims, we must keep in mind that they will be tremendously engaged in a counter offensive, endeavoring to convince Europeans and Americans that Islam can bring order to the chaotic moral and spiritual

conditions of Western societies. They use the Internet to advertise their faith throughout the English speaking world. In July 2003, while preparing this revised version of THE BIBLE AND ISLAM, I came across an ad placed in a Washington, D.C. newspaper, offering the services of "The Internet Islamic School."

I would like to enlarge on this point by referring to the work of two prominent Christian professors, one of them teaching in the United States and the other from Germany. They both address the subject of Muslims living in the West, their struggles to survive, and their attempts to engage in missions within the host countries.

Before I quote from their works, a word of explanation is necessary concerning the traditional Islamic view of the world. According to Islam, the world is divided into two camps: **Daru'l Islam** and **Daru'l Harb**, i.e., the household of Islam and the household of war. Within Islamic countries, the Shari'a Law is supreme and is enforced within society through the arm of the state. Until very recently, the vast majority of Muslims lived almost exclusively within **Daru'l Islam**. Now that many have migrated to the West, it is very difficult for them to fully practice the requirements of their faith in an environment where the state is neutral vis-à-vis religious matters. Radical Muslims, enjoying the freedoms of our Western pluralistic societies, are working hard to create conditions which would allow the followers of Islam to live as if they were still residing within an Islamic territory. However, such a goal can be realized only where the Shari'a Law is enforced by a theocratic state!

In the **International Bulletin of Missionary Research** of October 1993, the noted West African scholar, Lamin Sanneh wrote a thought provoking article entitled, "**Can a House Divided Stand? Reflections on Christian-Muslim Encounter in the West.**" Dr. Sanneh, a convert from Islam and a Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School, commented in his article on the inevitable confrontation between the "pluralistic tradition of the West" and the demands of Muslim immigrants for implementing practices which stem from their theocratic view of the state. Dr. Sanneh wrote:

"It would be wrong for Westerners to think that they can preserve religious toleration by conceding the extreme Muslim case for territoriality, because a house constructed on that foundation would have no room in it for the very pluralistic principle that has made the West hospitable to Muslims and others in the first place. The fact that these religious groups have grown and thrived in the West at a time when religious minorities established in Islamic societies have continued to suffer civil disabilities shows how uneven are the two traditions.

"We risk perpetuating such a split-level structure in our relationship, including the risk to the survival of our great public institutions, unless we take moral responsibility for the heritage of the West, including tolerance for religion. Such tolerance for religion cannot rest on the arguments of public utility but rather on the firm religious rock of the absolute moral law with which our Creator and Judge has fashioned us.

"In view of growing signs of Muslim pressure for religious territoriality, often expressed in terms of shari'ah and political power, and in view of the utter inadequacy of the sterile utilitarian ethic of the secular national state, Westerners must recover responsibility for the Gospel as public truth and must reconstitute by it the original foundations on which the modern West has built its ample view of the world."

Coming from a tradition which considers religion as involving all areas of life, and having witnessed the moral collapse of Western societies, it is quite understandable that Muslims are ready and eager to offer their faith as a remedy to the deplorable spiritual conditions within the host countries. Their boldness stems from their deep conviction that the West is rapidly entering the twilight of its civilization and that only Islam has the answer.

From across the Atlantic, a noted German theologian contributed an article in which he touched on the subject of Muslim minorities in the West and their zeal to engage in missionary activities. It appeared in the December 1994, issue of **FIRST THINGS** under the title:

Christianity and the West: Ambiguous Past, Uncertain Future. Wolfhart Pannenberg, who is Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Munich, wrote:

"If Western freedom in fact means no more than individual license, others do well to try to defend their communities and spiritual values against the encroachment of Western secularism. Beyond the defensive mode, Islamic missions in Western societies express a strong sense of missionary vocation aimed at liberating Western nations from the materialism and immorality associated with secularism. These Muslims view Christians as having failed in the task of the moral transformation and reconstruction of society. Such criticism is a serious challenge to traditional Christianity and to Western culture. A culture devoid of spiritual and moral values is not equipped to meet that challenge, and is bound for disintegration and decay."

This analysis of a leading European theologian requires our serious reflection. After all, we are not living in the days of William Carey or Samuel Zwemer. Their work was supported by a home front, which exhibited a Christian culture. Before World War II, the average Muslim in the Middle East, for example, thought of Americans as being thoroughly honest. He could trust them more than his fellow Muslims. Why? Because all the Americans he knew were either missionaries or educators who exhibited in their life the higher ethic of an authentic Christian faith! Quite often, the first United States diplomats in the area were children or grandchildren of the pioneer missionaries.

As mentioned earlier, even after living a long time outside **Daru'l Islam**, the household of Islam, Muslims still carry with them their own habits of thought. They do not comprehend the stark reality that Western culture has jettisoned its Christian heritage. Thus, they confuse Christianity with Western culture and regard it as exhibiting an inferior ethic. Therefore, it becomes both their responsibility and opportunity to engage in missions among Westerners. It is also a very telling matter that such activity is not rooted in an organized and official "sending" by a mission agency. The

Islamic view of missions is rooted in the concept of *da'wah*, i.e., calling people to Islamize. Quite often, it is a spontaneous activity in which he engages as a Muslim, as a person who has submitted to God's final revelation in the Qur'an. His solemn duty is to share his faith by all means, peaceful at times, or through holy war, *jihad*, at other times. However, one must not forget that Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States are subsidizing well-organized efforts within the West to spread Islam.

4. Islam is More Than a Religion

How can we better understand this idea of **jihad**, and how prevalent is it in the Muslim mind? And why does Islam pose such a challenge to the pluralistic norms of Western societies and to Christianity? We should look to the history of the expansion of Islam for some clues.

First of all, Islam claims to be the last message from God to mankind. The development of a religion that was born in Arabia, into a "way of life," is rooted in its specific history, a history that is inextricably wedded to its founder, Muhammad. Born in Mecca in 570 AD, he began preaching the absolute unity of God at the age of forty. Very few people believed in his message. In 622, he migrated with his few followers to Medina. There, he acted both as **Prophet and Statesman**. By 632, the year of his death, he had conquered Mecca, and gained the submission of the warring tribes of Arabia. His successors, the Caliphs, began the conquests of the territories of the Persian and Byzantine Empires. By 732, the new Arab-Islamic Empire stretched from Spain to India! Most of the Eastern Christians became subjects of Muslim rulers, had to pay a poll tax, and accept a restricted way of life, in order to remain in their own religion.

Therefore we can say that two factors explain how Islam developed into a complex of **religion, state, and culture in one entity**. One was the life and example of Muhammad, the founder of this religion, and the way he succeeded in making Islam the religion of all Arabia. The other factor was **geopolitical**: the two superpowers of the time, **Byzantium and Persia**, had exhausted themselves in their fierce rivalry. Thus, they were unable to withstand the onslaught of the Arab-Islamic armies that burst out of Arabia after the death of Muhammad in 632 AD.

The second Islamic expansion took place when the various Turkish tribes from Central Asia Islamized, after coming to the Middle East to serve as mercenaries of the Muslim caliphs in Baghdad. After the Mongolian invasion of the Middle East, and the fall of Baghdad in 1252, the Turks took over the cause of Islam and continued its conquests.

In 1453, they brought an end to the Byzantine Empire when they overran Constantinople, and changed its name to Istanbul. The Ottoman Turks colonized vast territories in Central and Eastern Europe. Twelve years after Martin Luther penned his 95 theses; the Turks laid their first siege of Vienna.

This brief survey of the rise and expansion of Islam demonstrates that it spread primarily through conquests. In fact, Islam regards wars of conquest, as an essential part of the faith, calling it **Jihad**. At this point, I must add that I do not want to minimize the fact that Islam is a religion, like other religions. It is a theistic religion, teaching that God is both the Creator and the Governor of the world. It has its religious rites and houses of worship. On the other hand, Islam has a specifically political component that is essential for the proper functioning and well being of the community of believers. Muslims must live under **Shari'a**, the Islamic law, and their rulers must enforce it. An Islamic state guarantees the development of a specifically Islamic worldview or culture. Since **Islam is religion politics, and culture, in one entity**, Muslims carry with them, consciously or unconsciously, the **ideal of establishing ultimately an Islamic regime where the rule of Allah takes a concrete shape, in the here and now**. When circumstances are favorable, Muslims are bold enough to advocate and proclaim their political philosophy in Western lands, as they have done recently in the United Kingdom.

Excessive attention by the Christian to the concern of **Jihad** may sound totally out of tune with the spirit of our times when a globalized and shrinking world requires all of us to live in harmony and forget the past. But what if some civilizations are not able to adjust their ideology to the modern situation? And what if, as we notice today, Islamic radicalism is impacting our world all the way from Indonesia, passing

through Pakistan, and into the Middle East, Europe, and America? Are we supposed to engage in self-censorship and suppress facts that are based on ancient dogmas and that are advocated by Islamists?

5. Our Christian Witness to Muslims: Fight Secularization

When we take the historical development of the Islamic worldview and their conviction and duty to share their faith by all means, the challenge for all Christian believers is very great and urgent indeed. We need to do more than arm ourselves with theological arguments that could prove that Islam is not God's last message to mankind. Surely we can analyze and prepare our evangelistic witness of God's Word by pointing out clearly that this Muslim faith disputes all the fundamentals of the Christian faith: the authenticity of the Bible, the Trinity, and the deity of Jesus Christ, his crucifixion, resurrection, and redemptive mission. Moreover, we can conclude that in planning for missions to Muslims in this new century, it becomes the responsibility of all Christians to fight tenaciously the steady advance of secularism into the various spheres of their life and communities.

The credibility of the Christians' missionary endeavors, at home within a pluralistic society, and overseas, **depends on their distancing themselves from the norms and the lifestyles of the secular societies that surround them**. Unless Christians lead lives which are concretely different from the lifestyles of the secularized citizenry, no Muslim will consider seriously what Christianity has to offer. We have so much to learn from the history of the first three hundred years of the Christian era when to be a Christian meant both a marked separation from the corrupt heathen environment and, at the same time, engaging it with the bold Christian word-and-life testimony: **Jesus is Lord**.

Going back to Professor Pannenberg's article:

"And so, while we can envision a great resurgence of Christianity and Western culture in the third millennium, such a future is by no means certain. Western societies may ignore their need to recover the strength of their religious roots. They may continue headlong on a secularist course, unaware of its certain and dismal

outcome. The end of Western culture, however, would not spell the end of Christianity. The Christian religion is not dependent upon the culture to which it gave birth. As it has in the past, the Church can survive and flourish in the context of other cultures.

"The further secularism advances the more urgent it is that Christian faith and Christian life be seen in sharp contrast to the secularist culture. It is quite possible that in the early part of the third millennium only the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, on the one hand, and evangelical Protestantism, on the other, will survive as ecclesial communities. What used to be called the Protestant mainline churches are in acute danger of disappearing. I expect they will disappear if they continue neither to resist the spirit of a progressively secularist culture nor to try to transform it.

"There is no alternative to the Church. The further the secularist dominance of the general culture advances, the more clearly the Church, in clear distinction from that culture, emerges as the reference point of Christian existence."

6. Missions to Muslims: What Can We Do?

While the opportunity to engage in missions to Muslims is, relatively speaking, easier in the Western world, we should not forget our duty to bring the gospel to them in their homelands. Of course, evangelizing Muslims within *Daru'l Islam* may be regarded as mission impossible. And yet what is impossible with man is possible with God.

It was my privilege to bring the message of Jesus Christ, crucified, risen and coming again, to the Arabic speaking world for thirty-six years. During those years I received and read thousands of letters written by Muslims and Eastern Christians. While the majority of the Muslim correspondents showed an interest in learning about the Biblical Messiah, some did actually confess him as Savior and Lord at a great risk to their lives. Due to the existence of the Law of Apostasy in Islam which prohibits Muslims from converting to Christianity, I did not have the privilege of baptizing converts or organizing

national churches. But I have no doubt that many converts have persisted in their Christian testimony.

What can we plan for this new century in the area of missions to Muslims? Radio missions are still very important in the proclamation of the Word of God and in reaching the ever-growing masses of Islam. The use of the Internet is becoming another effective tool for the presentation of the Good News to the followers of Islam. And where tentmakers can go with their specific skills which give them entry into otherwise closed areas, we should stand behind them and support them daily in our intercessory prayers.

However, we cannot ignore the political, economic, cultural and most of all, the religious factors which are at work in the Muslim world today. I am greatly concerned about the near future since the general situation in the Muslim homelands is deteriorating rapidly. Those of us who live within the Western hemisphere seem to have very little awareness of what is going on in the Arab world or in the larger Muslim world. As long as the oil supply is not interrupted, we hardly give any serious thought to that distant part of the globe. After all, have we not done enough for them? Did we not, early in the last decade, send half a million of our men and women to Arabia to liberate Kuwait from Saddam Hussein? And about ten years later, did we not do our best to liberate Iraq and attempt to make it the first truly democratic country in the Arab world? Have we not done our utmost for the last few years, to bring about lasting peace between Israel, the Palestinians, and its Arab neighbors?

But the rise and spread of militant Islam should cause us all to give serious attention to the Muslim world and its one billion people. Due to the failure of nationalistic ideologies to deliver on their promises to create just and prosperous societies, now radical Muslims have replaced them.

In her book, **God Has Ninety-Nine Names: Reporting from a Militant Middle East**, Judith Miller who was the Middle East correspondent for the New York Times for more than twenty years, wrote:

“John Page, the World Bank’s chief Middle East economist, believes that the global economy is developing so quickly that nations or regions that fail to make the necessary structural adjustments to compete for market share and capital are now likely to remain permanently poor. Today the Middle East attracts only 3 percent of global foreign investment; Asia gets 58 percent. The Middle East now buys almost 50 percent of all arms sold to the Third World.” P. 475

These disturbing facts clearly indicate the acute nature of the crisis which grips the Muslim nations today. Simply stated, Islam is not able to cope with the challenges of the modern world. While the radicals, now known as the Islamists, proudly and loudly proclaim Islam as the answer, there are no visible signs that such slogans have any real power to solve the desperate conditions of millions of urban and rural Muslims.

Judith Miller's book ends with these solemn predictions:

“There is no shortage of Arab commentaries on the cause of the Muslim malaise. But as Bernard Lewis, the historian, has observed: the writings fall into two groups. While some analysts ask, ‘What did we do wrong?’ others demand to know: ‘Who did this to us?’ While the first question leads to debate about how to set things right, the second leads only to ‘delusions and fantasies and conspiracy theories’ that intensify feelings of resentment, frustration, and victimization as well as ‘an endless, useless succession of bigots and tyrants and to a role in world history aptly symbolized by the suicide bomber.’ Much of the self-critical analysis written by Arabs in Arab countries, alas, falls into the second category.

“How sad it would be if after so much suffering the Arabs embraced yet another ideology [reference here is to Islamic radicalism] that seems only likely to compound the obstacles to regaining the prosperity, dynamism, tolerance, and

imagination that once characterized their civilization” Pp. 475,476

God Has Ninety-Nine Names (Simon & Schuster, New York, NY 10020, 1996)

Taking into account these insights and listening obediently to the teachings of the Word of God, we conclude that at this juncture in world history, global missions in general and missions to Muslims in particular, should be the concern of every church member. **The old distinction between domestic and foreign missions is outdated.** As noted at the beginning of my lecture, millions of Muslims and adherents of other world religions are now living in the West. Furthermore, a great number of Christians from America, Europe and the Pacific Rim are working in many parts of the Muslim world. They have ample opportunities for missionary activities not necessarily structured as in the past, but equally faithful to the mandate left for us by our victorious Lord.

Thus, as members of the Body of Christ, we must consider ourselves on active duty in the service of our Lord. None of us should have the luxury of sitting back and simply supporting missions in a purely financial way. While busy with missions within our own communities and country, we should ardently support those whom we have sent to distant lands, through our prayers and generous gifts as well as by a consistently Christian lifestyle. We must not leave it to the Muslims among us to be busily engaged in “calling.” We have a great message to share with mankind. And if we, Western Christians, shirk our missionary responsibility, Christians from Africa, Asia and Latin America will accomplish what God had ordained from all eternity. The apostle John saw that glorious end and described it in these wonderful words: *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, And crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”* (Revelation 7:9, 10 NKJ)

Glossary of Arabic-Islamic Words

A'alana: Arabic for revealed, used also for advertise in modern Arabic. *Kashafa* is a good synonym to use.

Ahad: One, used in Arabic for God in the sense of alone or solitary, thus precluding the Trinity.

'Aleem: Arabic for all knowing.

Allah: Arabic for God. It derives from *Ilah*: God, but has the distinct notion that Allah is the true God, etymologically formed by the use of '*Al*,' the Arabic definite article and '*Ilah*' and then combined into '*Allah*'

Beyn: Between.

Caliph: Anglicized form of *Khalifa*, i.e., successor. Used to denote the successors of Muhammad beginning with *Abu Bakr*, the first caliph, A.D. 632-634; the second caliph was '*Omar* (634-644), the third Caliph was '*Uthman* (544-656), and the fourth caliph was '*Ali*, the cousin and son-in-law of *Muhammad*. Muslims regard the age of the first caliphs as the golden age of Islam. The conquests (*Futuhat*) of the world began during this era.

Caliphate: The system of succession in Islam that combined both religion and state under the rule of one *caliph*. After the assassination of '*Ali* in 661, the caliphate became dynastic. The first dynasty of the *Umayyads* began in 661, and was centered in Damascus, Syria. It ended with a blood bath in 750. It was followed by the '*Abbasid* dynasty (750-1250) and was centered in Baghdad, the last one was the *Ottoman*

dynasty that was abolished by Ataturk, the founder of the Turkish Republic in 1924.

Dar: House, household, realm.

Goy: Hebrew for gentile, its plural is *goyim*.

Harb: War.

Hizbullah: Party of *Allah*, a radical Shi'ite terrorist group in south Lebanon, funded by the Islamic government in Iran.

Ibliss: The devil.

Ilah: God or a god.

Imam: Leader at the worship service in the mosque. In *Shi'ite* Islam, it refers to the Leader who is a descendant of '*Ali*, the fourth caliph. After a certain number of Imams (7 or 12), the last one disappeared without dying and will return at the end of time to bring justice to the world through the spread of *Shi'ite* Islam.

Iman: Faith, especially in its subjective meaning, the faculty of believing the revelations of *Allah*.

Injeel: Gospel. In the Islamic tradition, it is understood as a Book that the Messiah received from heaven, and which contained a message to Israel similar to the Law of Moses.

Islam: The name of the religion that was initiated by *Muhammad* early in the 7th century and which means surrender to *Allah*.

'Issa: The *Qur'anic* name used for Jesus. As all Arabic names have a meaning since they derive from specific verbs, *'Issa* does not conform to this general rule. It is devoid of meaning, but has been associated with the person of the Messiah who is often called in the *Qur'an*, Son of Mary.

Jinn(s): According to the *Qur'an*, there are three categories of rational creatures: Angels (and demons), *jinn(s)* and humans. *Jinns* may be good or evil, and occupy a middle position between angels and humans.

Kashafa: Unveiled, i.e., revealed. Perhaps it is a better word than *A'alana* (used in most Arabic translations of the Bible for revelation).

Khalil: Friend, used especially to refer to Ibrahim, i.e., Abraham, the friend of *Allah*. It is also the Arabic name of Hebron in Palestine.

Khawarej: Dissenters in the early history of Islam. They were the radicals who murdered 'Ali; they differed with both the Shi'ites and the Sunnis, declaring both groups as apostates.

Kitab: Book. It refers also to the Bible. Christians and Jews are called *Ahlu'l Kitab*, i.e., the People of the Book.

Manzilat: Level or degree, dual form of the word is *Manzilatayn*, a theological expression that dealt with the state of being neither a good Muslim, nor an unbeliever.

Massih: Messiah often used in Arabic with the definite article 'al' to make the title: *al-Massih*.

Mujbar: Forced, i.e., has no freedom of choice.

Mukhalles: Savior.

Muslim: The follower of Islam.

Mu'tazilite: A religious party in Islam that tended to be rationalistic. It took part in the controversy about the *Qur'an* and taught that the sacred book of Islam was created in time.

Mutlaqa: Absolute.

Qur'an: The Holy Book of Islam. Muslims believe that it "descended" from heaven upon *Muhammad* between 610 and 632. Its chapters are known as *Surahs*; they were either revealed in Mecca (610-622) or Medina (622-632). Theologically, the *Qur'an* is a book of law containing no gospel in the Biblical sense of good news.

Quds: Holy; as a proper noun it refers to Jerusalem, and is often preceded by *al-Quds*.

Rab: Lord.

Rasool: Apostle.

Salaam: Peace, used also as an Islamic greeting, *Assalaam 'Alaykom*.

Shalom: Hebrew for peace.

Shari'a: Law, specifically the divinely revealed laws of the *Qur'an*.

Shirk: According to Islam, this is the worst sin, i.e., associating other beings with God.

Shi'ite: Partisan or follower of 'Ali, the fourth caliph.

Sunna: The prescribed way of orthodox Islam, equivalent to tradition.

Sunni: One who follows the *Sunna*, therefore orthodox, or a *non-Shi'ite* Muslim.

Tawheed: The doctrine of affirming and defending the unity of God in the Islamic sense of Unitarianism.

Ta'weel: Unlawful exegesis or exposition of a passage of inspired scripture.

Tawrat: The revelation received by Moses, the Law of Moses often used to designate all the books of the Old Testament.

Torah: Hebrew for the Five Books of Moses, the first division of the Old Testament.

Umma: Nation or community often used for the entire household of Islam.

Wahed: One.

Wahdaniyya: Oneness.

Wa'd: Promise.

Wa'eed: Warning.

Yesua: Used in the Arabic Bible for Jesus. Not used in the *Qur'an* where the name 'Issa is used with the title: *al-Masih*.

Zaboor: The Quranic name for the Psalms of David.

