

Basics of Faith

A Biblical Perspective

Vs.

A Quranic Perspective

By

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Introduction

Do you think this life with all its tragedies and injustice is the whole story? Some are born to enjoy their intelligence and wealth and others to suffer their dumbness and poverty. Some fall victims of others who may as well escape punishment. Some relax with their good luck, and others toil with their bad luck?

Hopefully there is no normal human being that thinks or believes that this life is the whole story. Because a person with such a perception is greatly tempted to commit suicide or to add more miseries to other's lot. Perhaps the truly religious people, no matter what would be their religion, are the last group who would think so. Therefore, the assumption is that the most pious persons among them are the ones who care and worry most about bringing success to their lives and other people's live, in this world and the Hereafter.

This booklet is actually motivated by the efforts of the many sincere and devoted people among Christians as well as Muslims, especially those who take great pain in trying to convince people to accept what each, sincerely, believes is the right means to attain felicity in this temporary life or at least in the eternal life in the Hereafter.³

This is just a humble contribution to the massive efforts of the sincere and concerned men and women. Its purpose is to assist open-minded person to make the right choice for his success in this life and especially in the Hereafter. However, this work could be offensive to a person who deeply believes that religion has nothing to do with common sense, basic logic, rationality or pure natural disposition.

The concern of this booklet is focused on the basic beliefs of today's Christianity and Islam. The discussion is based on the assumption that the basics of a true religion

should be reasonably understandable by any normal human being that uses his or her brain and common sense.

It is true that there are some mystical components in every religion to be accepted simply by faith once a person commits himself or herself to that particular religion. It is also true that a person could be made to accept a specific religion by instilling in him or her its belief and values since childhood. Even in adulthood, this could be done by allurements, intimidation or both. Nevertheless, this person usually regains his or her independence and natural disposition once he or she becomes mentally free.

The essentiality of subjecting the religious fundamentals to common sense or pure natural disposition is demonstrated in the following analogy.

Assume a person told you that he has visited a palace that is located somewhere hanging between the earth and the heaven without any support from above, beneath or either side. Then he went on to describe to you some mysterious stories about his adventures, in that palace, alongside with some other stories which sounded reasonable. Would you believe his mysterious stories before you believe him about the existence of such a mythical palace? It seems hard to believe him about the existence of such a place to begin with, and nobody would blame you for having such an attitude. The situation may differ if the description of the palace sounded somehow reasonable.

Therefore, any religion which requires from a non-believer to accept its basics merely by having blind faith is a religion which is confined to its followers. Not only that but its credibility will suffer when it is exposed to basic rationalism or natural disposition.

On the contrary, a religion whose basics go in harmony with human natural disposition will maintain its credibility, even though the so-called followers may display its

impracticability. Because only the true commitment to its teachings can demonstrate its practicability.

For the basics of the true religion should not contradict natural disposition or the simple means of reasoning. Otherwise, the religion will give an indication that some people are born to be deprived of guidance and there is no equal chance to gain success even in the hereafter, the eternal life.

Since God is the supreme source of both Christianity and Islam, the concept of “God” will be discussed first. This will be followed by a discussion of the Holy Books, Jesus, Accountability, Prophets, Muhammad, and Conclusions.

However, the booklet is not designed to include all historical, philosophical and intellectual arguments. On the contrary, this brief work is only an attempt to raise some intriguing questions. This is to provoke the reader’s curiosity and to embark upon the search for the right path to eternal success before it is too late.

The author owes his gratitude to many able and sincere brothers and sisters in humanity who contributed directly or indirectly to this modest work. Especially, he would like to thank Dr. Riaz Zobairi Br. Rashiid and Brother T. Quraishi for reviewing the English version of this booklet.

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Concept of God

Most Christians believe in the Trinity. Catholics especially consider it an unquestionable element of the concept of God. The three dimensions are the Father, Son (Jesus) and the Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit. ⁽¹⁾.

The Bible says that Jesus said after his resurrection: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and the Son and of the Holy Spirit." ⁽²⁾.

Among the attributes of God is that He regrets and repents when something goes wrong, such as the decision to make Saul a king of Israel ⁽³⁾ He regretted that he had created man on earth ⁽⁴⁾. He felt sorry for sending the flood on the earth "I will never again kill every living creature, as I have just done." ⁽⁵⁾

God also forgets "and now I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, enslaved by the Egyptians and I have called my covenant to mind,"⁽⁶⁾. And he needs things to remind him ⁽⁷⁾.

⁽¹⁾ John 1:1-14; John 3:17; Matt 26:63-64.

⁽²⁾ Matt 28:19.

⁽³⁾ Sam, 1, 15:10, 35.

⁽⁴⁾ Gen. 6:6.

⁽⁵⁾ Gen. 8:21.

⁽⁶⁾ Ex, 6:5.

⁽⁷⁾ Gen. 9:13-16.

God becomes tired, "...He rested on the seventh day from all work he had done in creation and made it Holy. " ⁽¹⁾.

Prophet Jacob was so strong that God could not throw him and forced God to bless him, ⁽²⁾.

In Islam, believing in one God is the cornerstone of the faith. The Qur'an reads {God does not forgive that partners should be set with Him; but He forgives anything else to whom He pleases,} ⁽³⁾. Also it reads:{Say He is God, the one and only God, the eternal absolute. He begets not nor is He begotten, And there is none like Him.} ⁽⁴⁾.

The Qur'an also assures that the knowledge of everything is with God and God never errs nor forgets. ⁽⁵⁾. The power of God and His perfect knowledge is well expressed in this verse:

God. There is no God but He, the living the self-subsisting, eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there can intercede in His presence except as He permits? He knows what (appears to His creatures as) before or after or behind them. While they encompass nothing of His knowledge save what He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth and He is never weary of preserving them. He is the Sublime, the Supreme. ⁽⁶⁾.

In reviewing the two concepts of God, we can barely find any problem in comprehending the Islamic concept. However the Christian concept imposes a countless number of questions.

Is the Trinity some kind of incarnation but limited to only three forms? Is God a family which is composed of

⁽¹⁾ Gen. 2:2-3.

⁽²⁾ Gen. 32-24-30.

⁽³⁾ Qur'an 4:48,116.

⁽⁴⁾ Qur'an. 112:1-4.

⁽⁵⁾ Qur'an 20:52.

⁽⁶⁾ Qur'an 2:255.

three individuals, each dependent on the other? If creatures can go astray and be disobedient, then what about "the Son," especially if he is a half man descending from a sinner, Adam, according to the Trinity concept?

In this respect, the Qur'an says: {If there were in the heavens and the earth other gods besides God, there would have been disorder} ⁽¹⁾. And it assures that {no Son did God beget nor is there any god along with Him: (if there were any gods), then each god would have taken away what he had created and some would have lorded it over others.} ⁽²⁾.

What should be the best criterion that distinguishes the Creator from His creatures except that God is self sufficient and completely independent, but the creatures are dependent on Him and on each other.

Regardless of the credibility and accuracy or inaccuracy of every word in the Bible, does the denomination "son" always mean a begotten son? What about "you are the sons of the Lord, your God" ⁽³⁾?

Does the word Father always mean the blood father? What about Jesus saying... "My father and your father"? ⁽⁴⁾ What about the religious title "father"?

If these two words do not always indicate a blood relationship between human beings, why should it necessarily mean a blood relationship when it is between the Creator and a creature?

In fact, even in the Bible the verses which stress the oneness of God are found frequently, ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Qur'an 21:22.

⁽²⁾ Qur'an 23:91.

⁽³⁾ Deut. 14:1, Ex. 4:22.

⁽⁴⁾ John 20:17.

⁽⁵⁾ Ex. 20:3-5; Deut. 6:4; 2Chr. 6:14; Matt. 23:9; Mark 12:29, 32.

Holy Books

Depending on the various editions, the number of the Books ranges from 39-54, with a slight difference in the order of these books. Every book is divided into chapters and the chapters into verses.

The Bible is comprised of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament includes the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, and the teachings of other prophets. It comprises almost three quarters of the Bible with some variation, depending on the edition referred to.

The New Testament consists of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Acts of the Apostles, the Revelation and the letters of John; altogether there are 27 books.

The letters include those of St. Paul's; who received his teachings through private revelation from Jesus after his crucifixion. ⁽¹⁾. His letters comprise about one third of the New Testament.

The Old Testament is assumed to have started existing in writing earlier than the eighth century BC, but it was not until 397 AD that the Torah, was put together in Jerusalem. The earliest extant manuscripts of the Old Testament were not Hebrew, the original Moses teaching language, but Old Aramaic, Greek and Latin, ⁽²⁾. All these are regarded as discrete languages. The Qumran, Dead Sea scrolls, which are the oldest originals, date from 170 BC-70 AD and were written in archaic Hebrew.

Concerning the New Testament, "Apart from some papyrus fragments of the third century AD, there is no text of the New Testament earlier than the fourth century" ⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Gal. 1:11-12.

⁽²⁾ Partridge pp. 7-18.

⁽³⁾ Partridge p. 13.

The Gospel tradition was entirely oral until 70 AD. Most of the New Testament literature was only produced by 140 AD. Probably the first written document of the New Testament, were Paul's letters, ⁽¹⁾.

The teaching language was the old Aramaic, but the earliest complete manuscript was in Greek ⁽²⁾. It is assumed that most of the New Testament books have been in writing by the end of the first century. ⁽³⁾. However some of the books were not included in the New Testament canon until the fifth century, ⁽⁴⁾.

The standard version of the Bible from the beginning of the fifth century was the Latin, Vulgate, which was prepared between 382-404 AD. The Old Testament was translated from Hebrew and the New Testament from Greek, ⁽⁵⁾.

In other words the original copy of the existing Bible is a translation from the languages of the teachings. The improvement on the different secondary translations has never ceased since first secondary translations were done.

To Muslims both the wording and the meaning of the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic from God to Muhammad through Archangel Gabriel, ⁽⁶⁾. That is why God challenged the eloquent Arabs to produce something similar to it. The Qur'an reads: {And if you are in doubt concerning what we have revealed to our servant (Muhammad) then produce a single chapter that matches it and call your witnesses besides God if you are truthful} ⁽⁷⁾. The Qur'an was revealed over a period of 23 years and was preserved orally and in written

form during the time of the Prophet. ⁽¹⁾. It is obligatory for every Muslim to memorize part of it. Memorizing it all or reciting it often in its original form with the exact punctuation's and intonations is strongly recommended, ⁽²⁾. It was compiled in a single volume within a year after the death of the Prophet ⁽³⁾. It is composed of 114 chapters and 6236 verses without the opening verses; i.e. "In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful" which opens each chapter except one. The Qur'anic grammar, vocabulary and style are still employed today and used by millions of Arabs. A translation of it should never be regarded as a substitute for its divine version.

It seems evident that the existing Bible is not the word of God but a translation of translation from a collection in some discrete languages assumed to have been revealed or inspired by God. It is also clear that part of the Bible is subject to disagreement between the different sects of Christianity. An example of this is whether the Apocrypha is canonical or not; should it be rejected completely as the puritans may say or not? ⁽⁴⁾. In English alone, over 50 translations had been made by 1611 AD ⁽⁵⁾. So it is not only, the problem of translation from a translation which makes distortion imminent ⁽⁶⁾ But it is also the problem of devotion to certain sects which may cause addition or elimination of critical passages such as "Thus, we have a threefold warrant in heaven, the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost, three who are yet one." ⁽⁷⁾. Also check in the different editions for," If you wholeheartedly believe it is

⁽¹⁾ Partridge p. 13.

⁽²⁾ Partridge, pp.14-15.

⁽³⁾ Bucaille pp. 71-93.

⁽⁴⁾ Partridge p. 15.

⁽⁵⁾ Bruce p. 1; Partridge pp. 16-17.

⁽⁶⁾ for example, Qur'an 96:1; 75:16-19; 12:1-3.

⁽⁷⁾ Qur'an 2:23.

⁽¹⁾ Abdal 'Ati pp. 192-194.

⁽²⁾ Khan Vol. 6 pp. 80-81, 185-9, 463, 477-85.

⁽³⁾ 'Azizallah pp. 1-6.

⁽⁴⁾ Bruce pp. 110-11, 123.

⁽⁵⁾ Partridge p. 5.

⁽⁶⁾ Deedat, Christ in Islam.

⁽⁷⁾ John 5:7 in T. Nelson 1970.

permitted. He replied; "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." ⁽¹⁾. These verses were included in many editions and erased from the more recent ones sometimes because they did not exist in the best Latin manuscripts. ⁽²⁾.

The contradictory passages in the Bible are many. The following are some of these:

In Gen. 16:15 and 17-19 the Bible confirms that Ishmael is the eldest son of Abraham, but in 22:2 the Bible says: "take your son Isaac, your only son.." How could Isaac be the only son when he was the second son and Ishmael was still alive?

In 1 Sam. 15:29 it says: "God who is the splendour of Israel does not deceive or change his mind; he is not a man that He should change his mind." But again God repents for making mistakes and changes his mind as if he does not know from the very beginning what would happen ⁽³⁾.

The story of the two ⁽⁴⁾ or one possessed man ⁽⁵⁾.

In Romans, the Bible says that because Adam sinned, all his offspring sinned ⁽⁶⁾. Yet, in another place it says: "It is the soul that sins and no other, that shall die; a son shall not share a father's guilt, nor a father his son's" ⁽⁷⁾.

Looking into the genealogies of Jesus as it was reported by Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38, the reader will find these contradictory statements:

1- The number of generations between Abraham and Joseph, the stepfather of Jesus differs between Matthew and Luke with a variation ranging from 38 to 56 or 54 depending on the edition.

2- In Matthew 1:16 Joseph is son of Jacob but in Luke 3:23, Joseph is son of Heli.

3- In Matthew 1:7 Joseph is a descendant of Solomon, son of David and in Luke 3:31, he is son of Nathan son of David.

4- Many other names are not comparable in the two reports.

So, even among the four writers of the gospel, who are assumed to be reporting what they have seen or heard as eyewitnesses, the difference are often times contradictory. This could only mean that either some of them were not eyewitnesses, they depended on unreliable sources, or corruption has crept into their writings. In any case, this fact questions the authenticity of these gospels.

One may wonder if Paul was a prophet whose message is universal; whereas, the message of Jesus was confined to the house of Israel ⁽¹⁾. This is specially because he preached new things and some of them are contradictory to or different from the teaching of Jesus and his practice. For example, innovating singing and making melody to the Lord ⁽²⁾, and making the Trinity and the Original sin as his central theme. He sanctified the cross which should be abhorred because it was the means of torturing Jesus, and substituted Sunday for Saturday, although the Old Testament is binding ⁽³⁾.

Paul actually disagreed with some of the disciples and accused them of hypocrisy ⁽⁴⁾. With all these contradictions, Paul commenting on the source of his teachings, says that he "did not take it over from any man but received it through

⁽¹⁾ Acts 8:37.

⁽²⁾ Bruce p.208, see also Partridge, pp. 1-6, 159-79.

⁽³⁾ 1 Sam. 15:10, 2 Sam.24: 16; Amos 7:3; Jonah 3:10.

⁽⁴⁾ Matt. 8:28-29.

⁽⁵⁾ Mark 5:1-10; Luke 8:26-31.

⁽⁶⁾ Rom. 3:24-25; 5:2-21.

⁽⁷⁾ Ezek. 18:20; also Deut. 24:16.

⁽¹⁾ Matt. 10:5-6; 15:24; 19:27-28.

⁽²⁾ Eph.5: 17-9.

⁽³⁾ Matt. 5:17-19 and see Tahtawii pp. 259-77.

⁽⁴⁾ Gal. 2:5-14.

revelation of Jesus Christ” ⁽¹⁾ few years after Jesus’ crucifixion ⁽²⁾.

Doesn’t this claim sound like the claim of a person who did not see his deceased relative but claims that he received direct instructions from him to cancel part of the written will and to divide the inheritance his way?

In fact all three major mysteries of today’s Christianity center around Paul. Recognizing that Paul’s letters were the first part of the New Testament to be put into writings, the three mysteries should appear, clearly to be dependent on each other in terms of their evidence in the Bible.

To any average person, the authenticity of such a book to which additions or deletions and modification of meaning and wording can be done so frequently to improve a translation ⁽³⁾, based on a translated origin, should be of doubtful nature.

If this were the case of man made constitution what should we think of it? Then what about a source which is supposed to be a divine constitution?

⁽¹⁾ Gal. 1:11-12.

⁽²⁾ Act. 9:1-42.

⁽³⁾ Deedat, Christ in Islam.

Prophet Jesus

According to the Bible, Jesus was born in Bethlehem in a miraculous way. His mother was a virgin, “...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” ⁽¹⁾.

The purpose of his life was that “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son that everyone who has faith in him may not die but have eternal life ... through Him the world might be saved.” ⁽²⁾.

Jesus is half –divine and half-man. His divinity is based on being mentioned as the Son of God in the Bible, and the ‘word’ of God which was already there from the beginning ⁽³⁾ “and through Him all things come to be” ⁽⁴⁾ and “so the word became flesh; he came to dwell with us ...” ⁽⁵⁾. It is also based on the belief that (Mary)” found that she was with a child by the Holy Ghost” ⁽⁶⁾.

The Bible describes his crucifixion as one of the most tragic and merciless events. ⁽⁷⁾.

There is a tendency among the Christians to believe that the son of God voluntarily sacrificed his human life on our behalf. However, the Bible reports that Jesus cried aloud “My God, my God, why have you forsaken or shamed me?” ⁽⁸⁾.

On the other hand, the Qur’an reports the story of Jesus as follows:

{Behold, the angels said “O Mary God gives you glad tidings of a word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in

⁽¹⁾ Matt. 1:20.

⁽²⁾ John 3:16-17; also Rom. 3:24-5; 5:8-10.

⁽³⁾ John 1:1.

⁽⁴⁾ John 1:3.

⁽⁵⁾ John 1:14.

⁽⁶⁾ Matt. 1:18.

⁽⁷⁾ Matt. 27:1-66; Mark 15:1-41.

⁽⁸⁾ Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46.

this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to God.

“He shall speak to the people in infancy and in maturity and he shall be (of the company) of the righteous.

She said: “O my Lord how shall I have a son when no man has torched me?

He said: “Even so, God creates what He wills when He has decreed a plan, He only says to it: “be” and it is”. {And God will teach him the book and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel, and appoint him an apostle to the children of Israel (with this message):

“I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay as it were, the figure of a bird and breath into it, and it becomes a bird by Gods leave and I heal, those who were born blind and I disclose to you what you eat and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a sign for you if you did believe” (I have come to you) to attest the Torah which was before me and to make lawful to your part of what was forbidden to you; I have come to you with a sign from your Lord. So be conscious of God and obey me.

It is God who is my Lord and your Lord; then worship Him. This is the way that is straight.} (1).

The Qur’an is apparently in agreement with the Bible about the miraculous birth, that is, without a father. But so was eve created-without a mother, (2). And Adam was created without a father or a mother (3). And {the similitude of Jesus to God is as that of Adam, He created him from dust, then said to him “be” and he was}(4). God pronounces a word and anything He wills will be there.

Reviewing the Bible and the Qur’an concerning the denomination of Word, Spirit or Holy Spirit, Son and the fact of being created without one or both of the parents we find:

(1) Qur’an 3:45-551.

(2) Qur’an 4:1; al-Bukhari Vol.4 p. 346.

(3) Qur’an 15:28-29.

(4) Qur’an 3:39.

Elijah was created by a “word” from God before Jesus (1). His birth was also miraculous because his father, then, was very old and his mother was barren.

The Holly Spirit was behind the birth of Elijah, and Jesus (2). Speaking about how the clay became alive into Adam, God says: {Behold your Lord said to the angels: “I am about to create man from clay from mud moulded into shape. When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down in obeisance to him}. (3). The same expression was used in the case of Jesus. (4).

The denomination “son” in the Bible was shared by Adam (5) and, the believers (6).

Being created without one of the “parents” is shared by Eve (7). If their creation is equally miraculous, then Adam’s creation is more miraculous. So, who deserves more to be claimed son of God and divine? The reported protest of Jesus to God for letting him be crucified not only questions the common belief that Jesus willingly wanted to sacrifice himself for the others’ sin, but also demonstrate his weakness as a human being and disobedience to his Father.

This picture becomes an erroneous accusation against a great prophet when we compare it with the submission and obedience of Isaac (8) or Ishmael (9) who did not utter a word of protest or discomfort.

(1) Qur’an 3:39-40 and 3:45.

(2) Luke 1:41, 67; Matt. 1:18; see also Num. 11:25 and Luke 2:25 for all people; Is. 11:1 for a tree.

(3) Qur’an 15:28-29.

(4) Qur’an 21:91; 66:12.

(5) Luke 3:38.

(6) John 1:12; Matt. 5:45.

(7) Gen. 2:221-25.

(8) Gen. 22:10-11.

(9) Qur’an 37:102.

In fact, the way the Bible traces the genealogy of Jesus shows that it insists on the natural system of human multiplication. It traced his stepfather's genealogy instead of his mother's. ⁽¹⁾. He was mentioned as son of David ⁽²⁾ and son of man ⁽³⁾.

Therefore, the Qur'an confirms: {Christ, the son of Mary was no more than an apostle and many apostles have passed before him. His mother was a woman of truth; they both had to eat food (to survive.)} ⁽⁴⁾.

What about mankind before Jesus appeared? Do they remain sinners? Adam's sin brought perdition to all his descendents without discrimination. Why should the justice of God be confined to those who believe that Jesus is the son of God?

⁽¹⁾ Matt. 1:1-16; Luke 3:23-38.

⁽²⁾ Matt. 9:27; John 7: 42.

⁽³⁾ Matt. 10:23; Mark 2:10.

⁽⁴⁾ Qur'an 5:75.

ACCOUNTABILITY: THE ORIGINAL SIN

One of the essential principles of Christianity is that of "Original Sin," which goes in harmony with the concept of the trinity. This principle is traced back to Adam's disobedience to God's command when he ate the apple ⁽¹⁾. This disobedience by the father of humanity is called the Original Sin, by which all his offspring became sinners, and assigned to perdition.

Explaining this, Paul said: "Through one man (Adam), sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus, death spread to all men because they had all sinned." ⁽²⁾. However because God is just and loves the world so much, redemption was arranged ⁽³⁾. And in Paul's words (Jesus Christ as the son of God) "emptied himself and took a slave's form and came to be in the likeness of man. More than that, when he found himself in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient as far as death, yes death on a torture stake" ⁽⁴⁾.

Related to accountability is also the question of predestination, which has been the subject of many controversies. One argument holds that God is absolutely sovereign. He has mercy upon whomever He wills, and hardens the heart of whomever He wills and no one can demand an account from Him ⁽⁵⁾. This verse shows man's lack of freedom. But, "The Greek Fathers", Rondet said,

⁽¹⁾ Gen. 3:1-7.

⁽²⁾ Rom.5: 12.

⁽³⁾ John 3:16.

⁽⁴⁾ Phil 2:6-9, Rom. 3:23-26; 8:3.

⁽⁵⁾ Rom. 9:14-24.

“interpreted these and other relevant texts mainly with a view to preserving human freedom” ⁽¹⁾.

To Rahner, the Original Sin is different from personal sin ⁽²⁾, which requires confession ⁽³⁾. For Jesus, after death, gave the authority of forgiving Christians’ sin to the disciples by saying: “receive the Holy Spirit! If you forgive any man’s sins, they stand forgiven, if you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain” ⁽⁴⁾.

The Qur’an has a different stand on Adam’s story in the Garden. It reads:

{O Adam! dwell you and your wife in the Garden and eat of the bountiful things therein as you wish but do not approach this tree or you become among the wrongdoers.” Then Satan made them slip from the (Garden), and get out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. The Qur’an makes it clear that Adam repented and God granted him forgiveness. ⁽⁵⁾.

Contrary to the concept that says life on earth is punishment, the Qur’an assures that life on earth is a gift. It is the appointment of man as a vicegerent of God on earth ⁽⁶⁾ a decree which was announced by God even before the actual creation of Adam took place.

In Islam man is born in a natural state of purity recognizing that submission is only to one God ⁽⁷⁾. God has provided man with the thinking faculty to distinguish between good and evil ⁽⁸⁾, granted him a limited free will to

enjoy freedom of choice ⁽¹⁾, and made guidance available to him through His apostles ⁽²⁾.

Those who follow the divine guidance will have success conferred on them; those who misuse their thinking faculty or free will and neglect the guidance, deserve punishment.

This does not mean that God has no perpetual control over His creatures. For God says: {This is an admonition: whomsoever will, let him take a (straight) path to his Lord. But you will not except with God’s permission} ⁽³⁾. This, along with the fact that we shall be held accountable for our deeds, may create confusion in the minds of many people. But the following analogy will remove the confusion. Assume you have a young child who can comprehend instruction (has thinking faculty). You put before him a dish of food and a toy which has germs, and explained to him that the food is good for his health but the toy is harmful for his health (guidance) Then you gave him freedom to make his own choice (limited free will).

The whole situation is still under your control because you can interfere at any moment to force him to act against his will. However he could decide to choose the toy and become sick. Who should be blamed? you or him? Not only that, the toy could be difficult to reach, but he insists on taking it and you make it easy for him to reach. The child is to be blamed still, because this is the price of the freedom of choice which we all chant about, fight and live for. The result of the free will in this analogy is beyond our certain knowledge.

However God’s knowledge, unlike ours, is not limited by time, space or limited senses. To God’s knowledge, there

⁽¹⁾ Rahner, p. 1277.

⁽²⁾ Rahner p. 1155.

⁽³⁾ Mark 1:4-5, 1 John 1:9-10.

⁽⁴⁾ John 20:21-23.

⁽⁵⁾ Qur’an 2:35-37.

⁽⁶⁾ Qur’an 2:30.

⁽⁷⁾ Qur’an 30: 30-1.

⁽⁸⁾ Qur’an 90:8-10.

⁽¹⁾ Qur’an 76:3; 13:27; 16:93.

⁽²⁾ Qur’an 35:24.

⁽³⁾ Qur’an 76:29-30.

is no such thing as past or future, nothing is hidden ⁽¹⁾. Everything is present, and in this knowledge, the “fate” (Alqadar) is vested, ⁽²⁾. In other words, what is written since the beginning of time is not "decision" or predestination but pre-recording of God’s knowledge. Though we call that ‘fate’ which is not escapable, we don’t know what was written. Therefore, we are required to do our best to make the best choices to secure the eternal happiness or at least to relieve ourselves from responsibility. Then, although a bad choice is made, we will not be held responsible.

The Qur’an also makes it clear that things do not occur haphazardly. Everything occurs according to some perfect “natural laws” ⁽³⁾. And the possibility of one law having negative effect on another is part of these natural laws. We will be responsible only for what we willingly choose among the available causes that have their imminent results. God is who created both the causes and the results. The results of these causes could be good or bad. If we did our best to make the right choice and the choice turned to be bad we will not be held responsible for the bad choice and will be rewarded for receiving the bad results.

Furthermore, the supplication helps in preventing the results (qadaa) of the chosen law by the intervention of another law. (For details on fate or predestination see Ismaeel)

Concerning the original sin God assures:

“Say, shall I seek for (my cherisher other than God, when He is the Cherisher of all things. Every soul will earn what it has accomplished and none will bear the others’ burden. It is to God your destiny and He will tell the truth about what you have disputed” ⁽⁴⁾

⁽¹⁾ Qur’an 2:284; 6:59.

⁽²⁾ Qur’an 57:22.

⁽³⁾ Qur’an 25:2; 65:3.

⁽⁴⁾ Qur’an 6:164.

In fact, this principle is also emphasized in the Bible, ⁽¹⁾.

God is aware of everything and does not need a mediator between Him and anyone of His creatures. He is closer than (one’s) jugular vein, ⁽²⁾. Forgiveness should only be asked from Him and can only be granted by Him, ⁽³⁾.

The concept of the Original Sin indeed invites many questions. Can human justice allow punishing the offspring because of the father’s crime? ...Then what about the divine law?

Assuming that this is acceptable can’t God forgive them without under going Himself, or putting part of Himself or His Son through this painful and cruel process?

Don’t you think that the whole concept of the Original Sin and Jesus’ sacrifice sounds like a person pretending that his family is thirsty and the water is actually within his reach. But he runs miles and miles in a circle to go back to the same point where the water is? What should we call this man? ..; then what about conferring this attribute on God, the all-Wise?

⁽¹⁾ Ezek. 18:20.

⁽²⁾ Qur’an 50:16.??

⁽³⁾ Qur’an 3:135.

THE PROPHETS

The denomination of “prophet” in the Bible is used for two types of people: those who prophesy out of their own hearts and deserve to be called “the wicked folly of the prophets.” ⁽¹⁾, and those who were sent with divine guidance to their people.

Opposite to the profile drawn for Jesus in the New Testament, the reader can find strange profiles in the Old Testament for the messengers of God.

The bible, for example, reads: Prophet “Noah, a man of the soil, began the planting of a vineyard. He drank some of the wine, became drunk and lay naked inside his tent.” Since his son Ham the father of Canaan saw him in this situation and told his brothers, Noah gets mad and curses Canaan: “Cursed be Canaan, slave of slaves shall be to his brothers”. ⁽²⁾.

Prophet Abraham was depicted as to lie to his men and his son without a justified reason. ⁽³⁾

Prophet Lot is depicted as being made drunk by his two daughters so that they could commit adultery with him to preserve his seed. The Bible reads: “So, that night, they gave him wine to drink and the elder daughter came and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down and when she got up.” This plot was carried out again, the next night, by the younger daughter, ⁽⁴⁾.

Prophet Jacob, with his mother’s advice, tricked his father, Isaac, and stole the blessing promised to his brother Esau, by their father ⁽⁵⁾.

Jacob was also depicted as being so wicked as to play trick on his uncle to increase his own wealth. ⁽¹⁾. He lied about God to his wives to make them hate their own father, which they did. Not only that but one of them “stole her father’s household goods and Jacob deceived Laban (his uncle), keeping his departure secret,” ⁽²⁾.

Amazingly, in the Bible, God seemed to approve this wickedness, “then the Lord said to Jacob, go back to the land of your father and to your kindred. I will be with you” ⁽³⁾ and commanded Laban not to say anything to Jacob when he caught with him ⁽⁴⁾

Judah consciously committed adultery with his daughter-in-law, thinking her a prostitute, to bear two children ⁽⁵⁾. One of them, Perez became the ancestor of Prophets: David, Solomon, and Joseph, Jesus’ stepfather, ⁽⁶⁾.

There were only eight generations between Perez, and prophet David, although the Old Testament reads: “No descendant of an irregular union, even down to the tenth generation, shall become a member of the assembly of the Lord,” ⁽⁷⁾.

Prophet David was depicted as not only to commit adultery with a married woman but as plotting for the death of her innocent husband who was his faithful soldier, ⁽⁸⁾. Prophet David fasted only in the hope that his child may live, but not as a sign of repentance for what he did ⁽⁹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Ezek 13: 3.

⁽²⁾ Gen. 9:20-25.

⁽³⁾ Gen. 22:5-8.

⁽⁴⁾ Gen. 19: 30-38.

⁽⁵⁾ Gen. 27:1-29.

⁽¹⁾ Gen.30: 31-43.

⁽²⁾ Gen. 31: 4-20.

⁽³⁾ Gen. 31: 3.

⁽⁴⁾ Gen. 31: 24.

⁽⁵⁾ Gen. 38:13-30.

⁽⁶⁾ Matt. 1:1-16.

⁽⁷⁾ Duet. 23:2.

⁽⁸⁾ 2 Sam11:2-17.

⁽⁹⁾ 2 Sam. 12:16-23.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, takes a different stand from the prophet's positions, and characteristics. Its stand emerges from the fact that the prophets are the messengers God sent to convey the divine guidance to mankind. Therefore, they are the best examples among their people and the best among mankind in general and protected from committing cardinal sins. ⁽¹⁾.

The Qur'an, for example, reads:

"That was the reasoning about Us, which We gave to Abraham, (to use) against his people; We raise whom We will degrees after degrees, for the Lord is full of wisdom and knowledge. We gave him Isaac and Jacob: all (three) We guided and before him We guided Noah and among his progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron, thus We do reward the good. And Zachariah, John, Jesus and Elias, each (of them) were among the righteous, And Ishmael, Jonah and Lot each one of them We did prefer (above) the nations. ⁽²⁾.

Portraying prophet Noah, the Qur'an assures that He was of strong faith, ready to challenge all the disbelievers, ⁽³⁾. As a father he felt sorry for his disbelieving son who was drowned, but then repented when he was reminded that his son was not righteous, ⁽⁴⁾. Noah was described as "a devote most grateful" ⁽⁵⁾, and as "God's believing servant" ⁽⁶⁾.

Prophet Abraham was portrayed as a man of truth, and as a prophet ⁽⁷⁾. He was most tenderhearted, forbearing,

devoutly obedient to God, and always fulfilled his engagements ⁽¹⁾.

Prophet Lot was among the prophets who were favored above the nations, the pious, the grateful who was given wisdom and knowledge, ⁽²⁾.

About Prophet Jacob, his father Isaac, and Grandfather Abraham, the Qur'an reads:

"And commemorate our servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, possessors of power and vision. Verily, We did choose them for a special (purpose) proclaiming the message of the hereafter. They were in our sight, truly of the company of the elect and the good. ⁽³⁾.

Prophet David was depicted as a man of strength who turned always to God, the hills hymn the praises (of their Lord) with him, at nightfall and sunrise. He was granted wisdom and sound judgement ⁽⁴⁾. In general the Qur'an does not accuse any prophet of committing major moral violations beyond the thoughts that go on in the mind, such as in case of the prophet Joseph ⁽⁵⁾.

To recognize how erroneous the accusation of the Old Testament against the great prophets of God are, just put yourself in the shoes of these prophets. Indeed, just imagine that you are a preacher and the community caught you in situations similar to the situations of the prophets Lot and David, and this scandal was published everywhere. What would be your feelings? What would be the attitudes of those to whom you preach? Can't God choose bitter messengers than these described by the Old Testament?

⁽¹⁾ Al-Albanii et. Al. 555-8; Badawi on prophethood.

⁽²⁾ Qur'an 6:83-86.

⁽³⁾ Qur'an 10: 71.

⁽⁴⁾ 11:45-47.

⁽⁵⁾ Qur'an 17:3.

⁽⁶⁾ Qur'an 37:80-81.

⁽⁷⁾ Qur'an 19:41.

⁽¹⁾ Qur'an 9:114; 16:120; 53:37.

⁽²⁾ Qur'an 6:86; 66:10; 54:35; 221:74.

⁽³⁾ Qur'an 38:45-47; also see 19:49-50.

⁽⁴⁾ Qur'an 38:17-20.

⁽⁵⁾ Qur'an 12:24.

PROPHET MUHAMMAD

There are a few verses in the Bible, which can be considered as indications to the coming of Prophet Muhammad. Among the verses in the Old Testament are:

The Bible reads: "I have heard your prayer for Ishmael. I have blessed him and will make him fruitful. I will multiply his descendants; he shall be father of twelve princes, and I will raise a great nation from him" ⁽¹⁾. The verse as it has been quoted above does not mean much. But some Muslim scholars, in the fourteenth century B.C ⁽²⁾, depending on an earlier translation and adding to it verse 16:11-12 provided evidence that one of the descendants of Prophet Ishmael will surpass everybody else among the descendants of Prophet Abraham, i.e. Prophet Muhammad. Not only that, but the name Muhammad was mentioned as the cause of the blessings conferred on Prophet Ishmael.

The Bible reads: "The Lord came from Sinai and shone forth from Seir. He showed Himself from Mount Paran." ⁽³⁾. The Bible also confirms that Ishmael was raised in Paran ⁽⁴⁾.

Depending on these two verses, Muslim scholars confirm that the message of Prophet Moses started from Sinai, and the message of prophet Jesus had shone from Seir. So, the message revealed to Muhammad began from Mount Hira (Paran) in Mecca, ⁽⁵⁾.

The Bible prophesying the coming of a new thing that especially makes the tribe of Kedar happy, reads "... let the

wildness and its towns rejoice, and the villages of the tribe of Kedar..." ⁽¹⁾.

In Isaiah 54:1-17 the Bible also describes a barren woman who never bore a child and who had been deserted but no longer. Again the Bible describes God's anger and His declaration to substitute a people who did not ask and seek Him for a people who provoked Him ⁽²⁾. Muslim scholars interpret the barren woman as Mecca, which for the first time gives birth to a prophet who comes from a people who had never had a messenger from among themselves before.

The Bible reads: "...I will raise up for them a prophet like you, one of their own race, and I will put my words into his mouth." ⁽³⁾. Muslim scholars interpret these verses as clear references to Prophet Muhammad who was illiterate and to the Arabs who were illiterate too. This was especially interpreted so because of the description given in the Psalm 45, especially "you surpass all mankind in beauty, your lips as moulded in grace, so you are blessed by God forever. With your sword ready at your side." ⁽⁴⁾. Muslim scholars believe that these attributes well fit the message of Islam which is the last version of the divine message and the early soldiers of Islam.

In the existing New Testament there are some verses which could be interpreted as direct or indirect references to Prophet Muhammad. The strongest indication is where the Bible reads: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another to be your Advocate, who will be with you forever, the Spirit of Truth." ⁽⁵⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Gen. 17:20.

⁽²⁾ Ibn Qayyim 529-80.

⁽³⁾ Deut. 33:2.

⁽⁴⁾ Gen. 21:20.

⁽⁵⁾ Ibn Taymiah pp. 304-5.

⁽¹⁾ Is. 42:9-17.

⁽²⁾ Isa. 65:1-4.

⁽³⁾ Deut. 32:21.

⁽⁴⁾ Ps. 45:2-17.

⁽⁵⁾ John 14:16 also 15:26; 16:7-15.

In fact, Muslim scholars referring to the original Greek translation and focusing on the word, which was translated into “Advocate” or comforter, confirm that the original Greek word gives a meaning, which is regarded as a derivation of the word “praised.” This word “praised, “ in Arabic, means Muhammad or Ahmad, more praised.

Muslim scholars, in their interpretation of the Hebrew or Greek origins of the Bible, usually embark from their firm belief in the Qur’an. For the Qur’an reads:

{And remember, Jesus, the Son of Mary, said: “O children of Israel, I am the Apostle of God (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and glad tidings of a messenger to come after me whose name shall be Ahmad.} (1).

Telling the story of the prophets Abraham and Ishmael while building the House of God in Mecca, the Qur’an reports that Prophet Abraham prayed: {Our Lord, send among them an apostle of their own, who shall rehearse your signs to them and instruct them in scripture and wisdom, and sanctify them}(2).

The Qur’an confirms that Muhammad is not more than a messenger, preceded by other messengers, (3) and that he believes in all the messengers sent before him (4).

The theme of all messengers of God is to confirm that there is nothing worthy to be worshipped except God, alone (5).

God assures, in the Qur’an: {We have not sent you but as a universal (messenger) to mankind, giving then glad

tidings, and warning them (against sin), ..} (1). And Muhammad is the seal of God’s prophets, (2).

Biblical scholars, certainly, reject the claim of the Muslim scholars. But in the absence of authenticity of the original translation of the teaching of Moses and Jesus added to the difficulties of translation, even unintentional alteration can find its way easily in the various editions of the Bible.

This is not to rule out the intentional modification, which is another possibility. For the Jews deny the divinity of Prophet Jesus’ message and both the Jews and Christians deny the divinity of Prophet Muhammad’s message.

No doubt, the whole situation makes the distinction of the truth from falsehood extremely difficult. Therefore, any judgement would mostly depend on what one believes is the truth.

Never the less, the partial agreement between some of the verses in the Bible and the Qur’an, concerning this matter, deserves our attention and worthy of a careful consideration

(1) Qur’an 61:6.

(2) Qur’an 2:129.

(3) Qur’an 3:144.

(4) Qur’an 2:285.

(5) Qur’an 21:25.

(1) Qur’an 34:28.

(2) Qur’an 33:40.

CONCLUSIONS

Perhaps the relationship between Judaism, Christianity and Islam is unique compared to the relationship among other religions or philosophies. It seems to be unique in many aspects.

First, they maintain a hierarchical order, based not only on the chronological sequence, but also on the comprehensiveness of their message, though in a reversed direction. For the last is the most comprehensive; the second contains the first.

Second, they are linked to each other by adhering, basically, to similar fundamentals; they believe in one ultimate supreme power, the day of resurrection, accountability, and life hereafter.

Third, the followers of the later religion attest to the earlier religions, whereas, the followers of the earlier religions deny the later religions. Indeed, the similitude of these religions and their relationship to each other is that of three different sizes of a suite. They are all designed for mankind and share major features, but they are for different ages. The growth usually stops when it reaches its final stage but maintains its flexibility i.e. the skeleton stops but the other components of the body may stretch or shrink. Therefore, choosing the wrong since surely means a problem.

However, the problem of choosing a wrong religion is more serious and critical than that. It is a matter of eternal success or eternal failure. The seriousness of this matter could be perceived clearly by using the following analogy.

Assume that you are looking for the only available doctor to save your life from an imminent death. The doctor lives in an apartment building, which has three gates. One gate has an elevator that leads only to one-third of the

apartments, the old section. The second leads only to tow-third of the apartments- the old and a newer section. The last gate leads to all apartments- the previous sections and the latest section. All apartments carry signs indicating the occupier's names, and that is the only way to know who lives where. You meet three people; each is living in a different section of the three sections. Each is claiming that the doctor lives in his section. You are given only one chance, that is, to choose either of the three gates. What would be your choice? Will you choose the gate that has an access to one-third of the apartments, tow-thirds of the apartments or all the apartments? In other words will you choose Judaism, Christianity or Islam to avoid missing the eternal felicity?

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