

The Koran and the Bible Compared
Allah – God of Love?
The Fall of Man and the Redemption of Mankind
The Meaning of Sin in the Koran and the Bible
Repentance and Forgiveness in Islam
Abraham in the Koran
Jesus Christ in the Koran
The Crucifixion of Jesus
The Koran on the Trinity
Apostasy in Islam
and others



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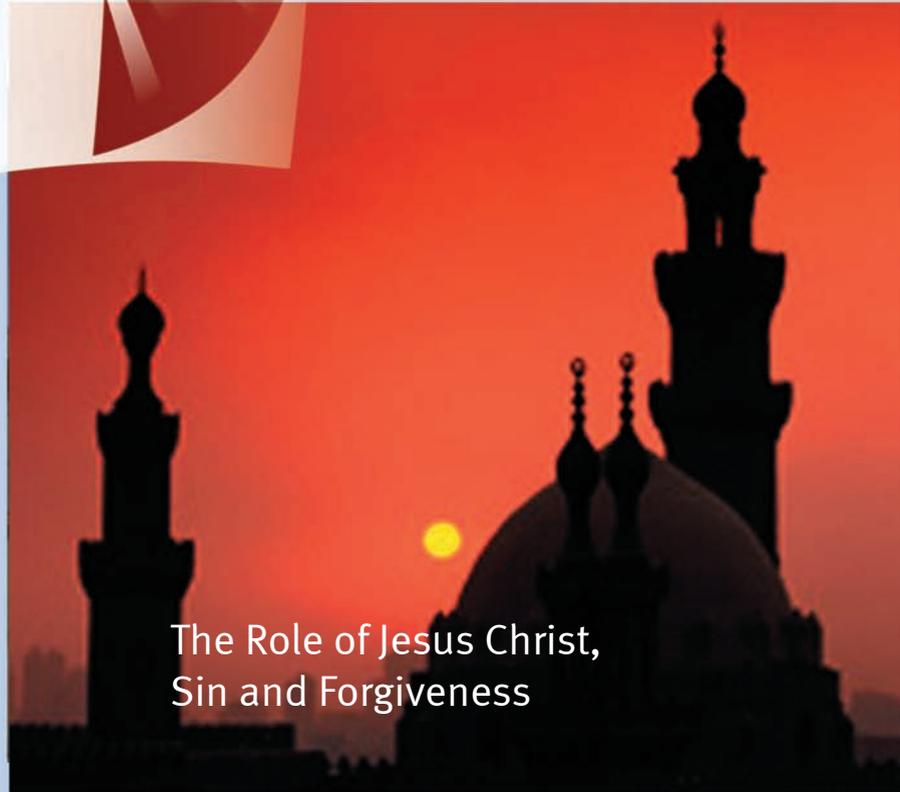
The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings



Christine Schirmmacher

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VKW The WEA Global Issues Series 2



The Role of Jesus Christ,
Sin and Forgiveness

VKW



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Christine Schirrmacher

The Islamic View of Major Christian Teachings:



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**The Islamic View
of Major Christian Teachings:**

**The Role of Jesus Christ,
Sin, Faith, and Forgiveness –**

Essays

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1 What Is Islam?

The term *Islam* means submission, surrender, or dedication to God. A Muslim is someone who submits to God and obeys the obligatory Islamic laws and commands. Muslims claim that the term *Islâm* has the same roots as *salâm* in Arabic (the letters s-l-m), and *salam* means peace, wellbeing, or salvation. As to the Muslims' opinion, the Koran has been sent down as an exact copy of the original heavenly revelation. Muslims believe that the angel Gabriel transferred the contents of the Koran to Muhammad. Therefore, the whole text of the Koran has supreme authority. In the Muslims' opinion, Muhammad is the last prophet in history, as well as the most important one, the follower of Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David who was already announced by Jesus Christ. In the Muslims' eyes, Muhammad (his name means 'the praised one') was God's messenger, but he was only a human being. Long after Muhammad's death in 632 A.D., Muslim theologians developed the doctrine of all prophets of history having been without sin (including Muhammad), although the Koran in more than one instance refers to sins all prophets have committed (with the exception of Jesus). Also, Muhammad asked God for forgiveness (Muhammad in surah 110:3 and 48:2; Adam in 7:23; Noah in 11:47; Abraham in 14:41; Moses in 28:16; David in 38:24). This dogma of all prophets being sinless is commonly accepted in today's Muslim theology.

The Life of Muhammad

Concerning Muhammad's life, only very few historically reliable facts have been transferred to us. He was born around 570 A.D. at Mecca, a city of the Arabian Peninsula. He belonged to the tribe of the Quraish and to the lineage of the Banu Hashim. Muhammad became an orphan at the early age of six and was raised by his grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib. Abd al-Muttalib died only a few years later, and Muhammad came to live with his uncle Abu Talib.

In the sixth century A. D., the Bedouin tribes of Arabia worshipped a number of gods, deities, and demons. Stones, trees, and fountains were considered to be the homes of gods and deities. Sacrifices and offerings were made on a regular basis. Animals were slaughtered at those holy places, and when the animals' blood was flowing over the stones, people believed they received forgiveness. At least some of the Arabian tribes worshipped a supreme God, a creator, whose name is believed to have been 'the god' or 'the goddess' (in Arabic: *al-ilâh* or *al-lâh* = 'the god,' 'the deity').

At about the age of 25, Muhammad became husband of Hadîja bint Huwaylid, a 40-year-old trader's widow. One can rightly say that Hadîja was Muhammad's first convert who accepted the new faith of Islam. She did not agree with other people's opinions, which had concluded that Muhammad was obsessed by evil spirits or demons. In the beginning, it is said that this was Muhammad's own perception of what had happened. Hadîja encouraged her husband in the belief that the feelings and strong impressions he experienced while meditating in the cave of Hîra were divine messages. Muhammad should preach and proclaim what God had told him to preach and exhort his fellow countrymen to obey and repent. Muhammad's message is said to be a warning that the Last Judgment is near at hand. Later on – as the Koran and Muslim tradition tell us – Muhammad himself came to the conclusion that he had received a message from God through the angel Gabriel and had been chosen by God to be his prophet. Muhammad from then on was to warn his people and present God's revelation to the Arab nation: *qara'a* in Arabic means 'to read' or 'to recite,' so *Koran* is the message being presented or recited. Muhammad in his early messages concentrated on two main issues:

- There is only one almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.
- One should repent and submit to God in order to avoid the threatening judgment.

Muslims believe that until his death in 632 A. D. Muhammad received many more revelations from God. It was only many years after his death that all texts believed to be his 'revelations' were summarized and perceived to be the Koran text with 114 surahs (chapters). These 114 surahs were put in order according to their length. For this reason, we find the longest surahs at the beginning of the Koran and the shortest at its end.

For Muslims, the Koran is God's own word, sent down with verbal inspiration, authoritative for all eternity. In the same way, Muslim tradition

(hadīth) – stories of what Muhammad and his closest followers had said and decided to do in certain situations – is considered to have the same authority from God as does the text of the Koran itself. The whole body of tradition which Muslims consider to be true traditions is put together in six extensive hadith collections. Muslim traditions in combination with practices of folk Islam frequently exercise more influence on a Muslim's daily life than does the Koran itself.

2 What Do Muslims Believe? Some Basic Facts about Islam

The word *Islam* means ‘commitment’ or ‘surrender’ to God and his will, revealed, according to Muslim thought, in the Koran. A Muslim has ‘surrendered’ to God, is to show him gratitude, and is to carry out the commands contained in the Koran, as well as in Muslim tradition.

Muslims believe that the Koran was sent down to mankind from God and was relayed to the prophet Muhammad via the angel Gabriel. The Koran is a faithful rendering of the original heavenly revelation (The “mother of all scripture”) and has, as such, divine authority. Muhammad counts as the last and most significant prophet in history (“The seal of the prophets,” surah 33: 40); his predecessors were Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joseph, Job, Saul, David, Solomon, Zechariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the coming of Muhammad.

All of these prophets, according to Islam, were proclaimers of Islam and always preached one and the same message. However, after their message had been delivered, the people quickly turned away from Islam, falsified the revelations contained in the divinely inspired scriptures, threw the warnings and rebukes of the prophets to the wind, and turned again to idolatry.

God then sent another prophet, who preached anew the ‘pure’ message of Islam and called the people back to submission to the one almighty God. According to Islam, Christians have also falsified the original message which they had received in that they adore Jesus as God or the son of God and Mary as the ‘Mother of God’ – this demonstrates the understanding of the Koran toward the Christian belief in the Trinity.

Muhammad, the Proclaimer of Islam

Muhammad (the name means ‘the acclaimed one’) is seen as a prophet and messenger of God, but only a mortal man who possesses no supernatu-

ral abilities. Only after Muhammad's death did Muslim theologians develop the teaching that Muhammad and all other prophets should be considered as morally perfect ('sinless') even though the Koran itself describes how various prophets (including Muhammad himself) pleaded with God for forgiveness for their mistakes and failures (7:23; 11:47; 14:41; 28:16; 38:24; 110:3; 48:2; 9:43; 94:2). The one exception is Jesus Christ, of whom no sin or mistake is reported in the Koran. This dogma of the "sinless prophets" probably came into being during the tenth century and is today generally accepted by Islamic theology.

Unfortunately, very few really historically reliable records concerning the life of Muhammad are available. He was born in about 570 A.D. in Mecca, on the Arabian peninsula, and belonged to the family of Banu Hashim, from the tribe of Quraish. Muhammad was orphaned very early in his life, and grew up with his grandfather, Abd al Muttalib, and then following his grandfather's death a few years later, with his uncle Abu Talib. The Bedouin tribes of Arabia in the sixth century A.D. believed in a wide variety of gods, spirits, and demons. Stones, trees, and water springs were held to be the residences of gods, who must be appeased through sacrifice (e.g., animals). Spirits and demons could be influenced by seers and could themselves influence human affairs for good or bad. At least one of the Arabian tribes believed, additionally, in a supreme God, a creator – God, whom they honoured as 'The God (Arabian: *al-ilah*, or *Allah* = The God, or The Divinity.)

When Muhammad was about 25 years old, he married Hadija bint Huwaylid, the widow of a merchant, who was considerably older than he. Hadijah is seen as Muhammad's first follower, and it was she who encouraged him to perceive the very powerful feelings and impressions that are said to have come to him as he meditated in a cave when he was about 40 years old not as a sign of demon possession, which is what Muhammad himself is said to have thought, but as messages from God, containing rebukes and commands to repent, as well as warnings concerning a pending day of judgment. Later, according to the Koran and Islamic tradition, Muhammad received the assurance that it was the angel Gabriel who had spoken to him, and commanded him as a warner and prophet for his people to 'instruct' or 'recite' (Arabian: *qara'a*, thus *Qur'an* – Koran) the revelations of God.

Muhammad's earliest messages are concentrated around the proclamation of the one almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth, people and

animals, and the stern command to submit to this God so as not to be suddenly and unexpectedly overcome by judgment.

When Muhammad first turned to his fellow countrymen in his hometown of Mecca, in about 610 A.D., he attracted only a few followers and experienced mockery, rejection of his mission, open enmity, and persecution. The situation became so threatening that in autumn of 622 A.D., he and his small group of followers fled to a neighbouring town called Yathrib (later renamed Medina). This event is described as *hijra* (the ‘migration’) and marks the year ‘0’ at the beginning of the Muslim calendar.

In Medina, a community including not only members of various Arabian tribes but also Christians, as well as three large Jewish tribes, it became possible for Muhammad to assert himself more and more as a military as well as religious leader of his rapidly increasing band of followers, against a backdrop of evolving political power struggles. He led his followers into various battles (most of which he won), especially against the three Jewish tribes of Medina. Toward the end of his life, Muhammad had not only attained status as the ruler of Medina and the most important power in the whole region, but he managed also, shortly before his death, to return to his hometown of Mecca and conduct a pilgrimage to Ka’ba, which was already honored in pre-Islamic times. This also increased his recognition as a religious and political leader.

Muhammad continued to receive revelations concerning various subjects (e.g., questions of law, revelations concerning God and his dealings, the roles of men and women, crime and punishment, regulations concerning property inheritance). These revelations, however, were not put together to form the complete Koran text until some decades after Muhammad’s death. Probably an ‘editorial team’ comprised of various of his successors (caliphs) ordered the writings into 114 surahs, not sorted according to themes but determined by the length of each chapter in order of decreasing length.

The Significance of the Koran and Islamic Traditions

The Koran is, from a Muslim point of view, the inspired and verbally passed down word of God, binding for all people everywhere. Not just the Koran, however, but also Islamic traditions (Arabic: *hadith*) possess divine authority, that is, the accounts collected after Muhammad’s death, discovered by Muslim scholars, and sorted into six large collections (the hadith collections). These traditions contain individual instructions concerning

religious obligations (observing the five pillars of Islam: confession of faith, prayer, fasting, alms giving, and pilgrimage), as well as instructions concerning such things as religious festivals, clothing, food, general behavior, punishment and legal matters (inheritance and marriage laws, property laws, and religious trusts), and the position of women.

The teaching demonstrates, through short accounts and examples, how Muhammad and his closest adherents thought and behaved in certain situations and questions, and what decisions they made.

The traditions and teachings which have been recognized by Muslim authorities as genuine (that is, originating from Muhammad or from his closest followers) concerning matters of law are, in all points of detail, just as compulsory as is the Koran itself. They have, indeed, together with religious practices of Islamic people groups (at least a certain store of knowledge, passed on by word of mouth), an even greater influence on daily life than does the Koran, which, being written in Arabic and containing much specialized terminology, is only really studied and understood by a minority of individuals.

The Five Pillars of Islam

Muslims believe in Allah, the one God, eternal, almighty, and merciful, the creator of heaven and earth, and, as God's concluding act, in the sending of the prophet Muhammad. God is not only the creator but also the judge of each individual. In the final judgment, when all people will be 'returned' (30:12), each person will be answerable to his creator and sustainer. In this judgment, each person will be judged according to his 'faith and good deeds,' which are mentioned by the Koran repeatedly as the basis on which anyone can hope to enter Paradise (e.g., 2:25; 11:23; 13:29; 18:107; 22:56; 32:19; 34:37; 85:11) 'Good deeds' means, first and foremost, observing the Five Pillars of Islam – a binding obligation for every man and woman from the age of puberty onward:

1. Reciting the confession of faith (*shahada*): "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger."
2. Ritual prayers (*salat*) five times a day in the direction of Mecca, while observing ritual washing, the set prayer text, the prescribed clothing, and prostrations (onto the knees and lying flat on the ground).

3. Charitable giving (*zakat*) – approximately two percent of income, to be given to the poor and needy.
4. Thirty days of fasting (*saum*) in the month of Ramadan, as daily abstinence from food, drink, perfume, gossip, cigarettes, and sexual intercourse, as long as there is enough daylight to distinguish a black from a white thread (surah 2:187). The month of fasting is concluded with the two-day festival of *Id al-fitr*, the breaking of the fast.
5. Conducting a pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) at least once in a lifetime, during the set month for pilgrimage. The detailed rituals for the pilgrimage are to be concluded with ceremonial animal sacrifices (*Id al-adha*), the slaughter of the animal, as well as the distribution of the meat. This part is to be carried out by the pilgrims, as well as by those at home.

There remains, however, a degree of uncertainty whether an individual person has really pleased God and is able to enter Paradise at the end of his life even if he has faithfully observed the five pillars of Islam. Islam emphasizes actions carried out on an equal basis with belief, and as Muslim theology sees any predetermined decrees by God concerning salvation as a limit on his omnipotence, there remains an element of doubt concerning salvation on the day of judgment. Islam teaches that no one can know, when his good deeds are laid on the scales, whether they will outweigh the bad deeds. The statements concerning the mercy of God in the Koran are viewed as general language used to describe God rather than containing any clear promise for an individual sinner.

Alongside his qualities of mercy and grace is to be seen his unlimited power, which renders any predetermined decree in his judgments as impossible. God is completely free to act toward any individual as he sees fit. It therefore follows that his decrees concerning individuals cannot be determined in advance as this would constitute a limitation on God's sovereignty and cause him to be limited to certain courses of action.

The only certain way to enter Paradise is to die the death of a martyr in *jihad* – fighting for God, for the one who dies fighting for his faith is promised immediate entrance to Paradise (see 2:154; 47:4-6).

3 The Koran and the Bible Compared

The Koran, as well as the Bible, recounts the story of Adam and his wife transgressing in Paradise, of Moses and Israel's marching through the Red Sea; the Koran and the Bible tell us of Jesus, Mary, and John the Baptist. But not everything sounding similar has the same content and meaning. Let us look at some of the most remarkable similarities and differences between the Bible and the Koran, between the Muslim and the Christian creed.

GOD	
<p>Christians as well as Muslims believe in one God, the creator of heaven and earth and the creator of each single individual. God has put down his will in writing in his holy book. On the Day of Judgment, he will call everybody to account at the end of the times.</p>	
Koran	Bible
<p>1. Allah is the creator of the universe and of each single individual, but he is transcendental, i.e., he is separated from creation. There is no connection between creator and creature (sura 55:1-78; 6:100-101).</p>	<p>1. God created man in His image and made him His counterpart. He revealed His character in His creation. Jesus is the bridge between God and man (John 1:14-15).</p>
<p>2. Allah has no children. Jesus may not be worshipped as God. To believe in the Trinity is polytheism. To worship more than one God is the most evil sin in Islam, which cannot be forgiven, since there is only one God (Allah means 'the God' or 'the goddess') (5:72-73+75; 4:171-172).</p>	<p>2. God's only Son is Jesus Christ. Jesus came to earth as a human being and is Himself God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are a single, Triune God (John 1:1-2).</p>
<p>3. Allah is not the father of Jesus Christ. He is the omnipotent and merciful God. The Koran accuses Christians of worshipping three gods: God, Jesus, and Mary. This was probably Muhammad's perception of the Trinity as it was described to him by the Christians of his lifetime (9:30-31).</p>	<p>3. God is the Father of Jesus Christ and the Father of His children (Romans 8:15-17). The Trinity consists of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Mary was a mere human being and does not belong to the Trinity (Matthew 28:19).</p>

JESUS	
<p>The Koran and the Bible tell us about Jesus whom God has sent to Israel. The Koran, as well as the Bible, calls him 'Christ.' He was born of the virgin Mary, called the Israelites to faith, has ascended to heaven, and will come again to earth at the end of the ages.</p>	
Koran	Bible
<p>1. Jesus was created by Allah through his word ('Be!') and was moved by God's might into Mary. He is but a human being (3:59; 5:75; 5:116-117).</p>	<p>1. Jesus was created by the Holy Spirit within Mary. He was a real human being and true God at the same time and in one Person (Luke 1:35).</p>
<p>2. Jesus was one of the most outstanding prophets of history, but Muhammad is the last prophet, the 'seal of the prophets' (33:40; 61:6). Muhammad's coming is already announced in the Old Testament by Moses and Isaiah. In the New Testament Jesus himself announces Muhammad (2:67 ff; 7:157).</p>	<p>2. Jesus entered the world as the Saviour and Redeemer who was foretold in the Old Testament. As the Son of God, He is the highest Prophet, who announced the coming of the Holy Spirit as Counselor (John 14:16). Muhammad is not announced in the Bible and does not fulfill the biblical requirements for a prophet of God (Acts 10:43).</p>
<p>3. Jesus has not been crucified and is not resurrected. The crucifixion would have been a humiliating defeat for Jesus. Even if he would have died on the cross, he could not have brought redemption to mankind. The Koran does not state clearly what has happened at the end of Jesus' life. Probably Allah carried him away to heaven in the face of his enemies. After that, another one was crucified in Jesus' place (4:157-158).</p>	<p>3. Jesus died on the cross as it was His Father's will. He was put into His grave and arose from the death on the third day. By this, He gained victory over sin and death, and He, the representative of mankind, brought about redemption (1 Peter 1:18-19).</p>

SIN, FAITH, AND FORGIVENESS

Both the Koran and the Bible emphasize that it is God's will to believe in him and to live according to his commandments. If man transgresses against those commandments and commits sin, he can be granted forgiveness through God's mercy. The Koran and the Bible promise eternal life to those who believe.

Koran	Bible
<p>1. Adam sinned in Paradise by eating the forbidden fruit, but man was not cut off from communion with Allah through this transgression. There is no fall and no original sin in Islam (2:35-39).</p>	<p>1. Adam transgressed God's commandment in Paradise by eating the forbidden fruit. With this, he brought sin, death and separation from God into the world for all human beings. Reconciliation with God is only possible through Jesus' death (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Romans 3:20).</p>
<p>2. Man is always capable of deciding to do right or to do wrong. He can please Allah by obeying his commandments and by doing good deeds. If he transgresses against Allah's commandments and commits sin, this does not affect or touch Allah. In the first place, man sins against himself (7:19-25; 7:23).</p>	<p>2. Man's nature is evil after the fall. He is unable to do anything in order to atone for his sins. If he tries to keep God's law, it will lead him even deeper into sin. His single sins are always directed against God (Romans 3:10-12, 20; Psalm 51:6).</p>
<p>3. Faith means to believe in Allah's existence, to be thankful toward him and to obey his commandments (2:177).</p>	<p>3. Faith means to realize one's own sinfulness and damnation, to accept redemption for oneself through Jesus Christ, and to live according to God's commandments by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:1-18).</p>
<p>4. The penitent sinner <i>hopes</i> to obtain Allah's forgiveness. The Koran again and again praises Al-</p>	<p>4. The penitent sinner <i>knows for sure</i> that God will grant forgiveness to him, since God has defi-</p>

lah's mercy and grace, but in every single case the sinner *does not know for sure* if he will obtain forgiveness. He *does not know for sure* in his present life whether he may enter Paradise after his death. Allah is too omnipotent for man to definitely predict his attitude and dealing with man (7:156; 3:31).

nitely promised in His Word to do so (1 John 1:9). Whoever appeals to Jesus' death and accepts His forgiveness has *assurance* of eternal life (John 1:12; 1 John 3:1).

GOD'S WORD and the HOLY SPIRIT

Muslims and Christians believe that God's genuine eternal word is laid down in his holy book. God's word tells us how God has made his history with people in the past. God's word today gives men direction for their lives and their faith. God's Spirit contributes to God's revelation for mankind.

Koran	Bible
<p>1. The Koran is the pure unaltered Word of Allah and a genuine copy of the original heavenly revelation. In contrast to the Koran, the Old and New Testament have been corrupted in time. The Koran corrects the Old and New Testament in all places where they differ from the Koran (2:2; 2:97-98; 43:2-4; 2:83).</p>	<p>1. The Bible is God's reliable Word. The Holy Spirit supervised its recording. The Bible can be corrected by nothing and remains God's valid Word in eternity (Revelation 22:18).</p>
<p>2. The Koran was directly revealed to Muhammad through mediation of the angel Gabriel. Muhammad's own personality played no role in this, and therefore the Koran's genuineness is guaranteed (26:192-194).</p>	<p>2. Various personalities have been inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that the Bible is a mirror of their characters. The personality of the biblical authors becomes visible in the individual biblical books (2 Timothy 3:16).</p>
<p>3. The Spirit of God participated at the revelation of the scriptures, which were sent down to single men in history (the Torah to Moses, the Psalms to David, the Gospel to Jesus, and the Koran to Muhammad) (16:102). Single persons (e.g., Jesus) were strengthened by the Spirit (2:87; 5:110), but the Spirit also strengthens believers (58:22).</p>	<p>3. The Person of the Holy Spirit is God Himself and belongs to the Trinity. He convicts people of sin and guilt. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came over all flesh. The Spirit causes spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit to grow in believers (Genesis 1:26; John 14:16; Galatians 5:22).</p>

Conclusion

At first glance, Islam and Christianity seem to have several points in common when it comes to God, the Creator, the Last Judgment, eternal life, and eternal death. Characters from the Old Testament, such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jonah, also appear in the Koran. Even Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are mentioned in the holy book of the Muslims. Jesus Christ is called ‘word of God,’ ‘spirit of God,’ and ‘Messiah’ in the Koran. But to emphasize only these similarities would reflect only a superficial understanding of both religions. Especially when it comes to Jesus Christ, the main, important differences between the Koran and the Bible become obvious.

As to the biblical testimony, Jesus Christ was not only a prophet, but God’s only Son, whereas the Koran clearly denies the sonship of Jesus. While the Old and New Testaments state that Jesus’ suffering and His death on the cross were necessary to redeem those who are sold under original sin, the Koran rejects the crucifixion of Jesus and also original sin and the necessity of redemption for mankind. Crucifixion, redemption, the sonship of God, and the Trinity are cornerstones of biblical dogmatics, but they are aberrations of Christendom and even blasphemy for the Koran.

Whereas in the biblical testimony only those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and who accept His representative offering at the cross will inherit eternal life, the Koran clearly states that only those who believe Muhammad to have been the last prophet of God and the Koran to be the very truth will inherit eternal life. For Muslims, Christians with their belief in the holy Trinity (which includes Father, Son, and Mary, as the Koran teaches) commit the most evil sin, the sin of polytheism.

4 Allah – God of Love?

The Image of God in the Koran

The Koran does not contain any passages which comprise any kind of systematic description of the characteristics of God. In Arabic he is called Allah, which means simply 'The God.' God does not introduce himself in the Koran, as he does in the Old Testament, with the words "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14, NASB), but he remains hidden – a mystery. He is completely separated from his creation and cannot be compared at all with any of his created beings, for "Nothing is like him" (surah 42,11). Because God is a mystery, it is impossible for anyone to try to paint a mental picture of him or of what he is like, and the very attempt would be forbidden. A Muslim believer only knows the names of God, the attributes described in the Koran, and his dealings with mankind. The center of the Koran's message is that God is one, that nothing is comparable to him, and that he himself cannot be compared to anything else. This dogma is called the tauhid: (The unity/oneness of God) "He is God, the only, the eternal! He does not conceive, and was not himself conceived! There is no-one like him!" (112:1-4)

This God is characterized by three areas: creation, sustenance, and judgment. The Koran reports that, at the beginning, God created the world and mankind. At the end of time, each individual will be judged and will receive his just reward from the almighty, but merciful God. He is omniscient, so nothing will remain hidden from God, not even a "leaf falling to the ground" (6:59). God is the one God, truly existing, transcendent, almighty, all-present, unchangeable, never passing away, eternal and uncreated, all-knowing, and unlimited in his might: "He does not conceive, and has not been conceived. He cannot be measured, veils cannot cover him. They try to apprehend him, but cannot grasp him – he cannot be measured by man, no created being compares to him in any respect."¹ In Islam today,

¹ al-Ash'ari. *Maqalat al-islamiyyin*. Cairo 1950, I, S. 216-217, quoted from Johan Bouman. *Gott und Mensch im Koran*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1977/1978, p. 3.

the idea has emerged that Allah has 99 names by which the believer can worship him.

God the Judge

Right at the beginning of the Islamic faith, Muhammad proclaimed God as judge in a coming day of judgment in which all people, without exception, would be brought to account, for their actions and belief. “The hour (of judgment) will certainly come. There is no room for doubt” (40:59). At the end of time, at the God-appointed hour, the living and the dead will be ‘brought back’ to God: “And prepare for a day on which God will bring you back. Then, each one will receive the just reward for what he has done! They (mankind) will not be judged unjustly” (2:281) – for God will judge absolutely justly. The actions of each individual, recorded in a book, will be weighed on a pair of scales. Muslims who have truly believed will come into Paradise, whereas unbelievers will be thrown into hell forever.

God the Almighty

The omnipotence (all-powerfulness) of God is one of the most important characteristics of God in the Koran. The Koran often emphasizes how impotent various other gods are by comparison. According to surah 22:73-74, all other gods, with combined strength, cannot even create a fly, whereas the almighty one is the creator of heaven and earth and of each individual. Mankind is to acknowledge the all-powerfulness of God, to recognize himself as created by him, and to serve him, to submit to, and to believe in him, as the rightful thanks and praise due to him for his constant mercy.

Although there can be no comparison and no contact between the transcendent God and his created mortal man, God has allowed mankind to receive knowledge concerning himself, although not knowledge concerning his person, or essence, for it would be unthinkable that God would emerge from his transcendence, become visible for the human eye, or come into the world to reveal himself in a human way. Rather, God sent his word via the angel Gabriel, who then showed it to individual prophets. The prophets then gave God’s messages to mankind. Thus were the revelations of God sent down.

Despite the revelations of God, and his dealings with mankind throughout history, there remains an unbridgeable gulf between God and mankind.

This does not mean, however, that God is very distant from mankind, as God is “closer to us than our very arteries” (50:16) This expression, however, is rather intended to emphasize God’s omnipresence. Also, the expression “He is a friend of the believer” (3:68) emphasizes God’s mercy with mankind, but it does not in any way intend to convey the meaning that God has anything in common with any of his created beings. Similarly, any attempt to use the description of ‘Father’ for God would be completely incompatible with the message of the Koran, which emphasizes the uniqueness of God and his incomparability with any created being; it also describes God as Father of Jesus Christ, or Father of any of his subjects. Islam interprets Christian ideas such as ‘sons of God’ or the ‘Fatherhood’ of God in a purely physical sense and firmly rejects any such expressions, as well as the idea of the Trinity, which the Koran sees as worshipping other gods besides Allah, as in the polytheistic religions of Muhammad’s fellow Arabian countrymen.

Apart from the Koran, God speaks also to mankind through ‘signs’ which can be recognized in the created world, as well as in the past through the prophets, and through the reports of how God dealt with them and their people. With these signs, God’s ‘call,’ so to speak, goes out to mankind, which can be responded to with either faith or disbelief. The words of the prophet Noah in the Koran, “Serve God, fear him, and obey me” (71:3), are a classic challenge to his fellow countrymen.

The omnipotence of God, mentioned in the Koran in countless passages, encompasses all areas and regions. God created the world, the animals, mankind, spirits, and the angels, as well as the good and the bad. “No evil happens, either on the earth, or with you, that was not contained in a book before we carry it out. This is easy for God” (57:22) for “Only that will happen to us, which God has ordained.”

God appoints the time of death for each person: “But God will grant none a prolongation, when his time has come” (63:11). It is, after all, God who causes people to believe or disbelieve: “When God desires to guide someone in the right way, he opens his heart for Islam. If, however, he wants to lead someone into confusion, he makes his heart narrow and confined, as though he would have to rise up to heaven. This is how God punishes those who do not believe” (6:125). The language is even clearer in surah 7:179: “Many of the spirits and people were created for hell.” The answer to the question of why all people do not become Muslims is answered by the Koran, that this is not his will: “And even if the Lord desired it, would all the people on the earth together really believe? Do you want

to force people to believe? No-one may believe, unless God permits it” (10:99-100).

At the same time, the Koran emphasizes that each individual will be called to account for his belief, or lack of it, on judgment day. Each person will receive the just reward for his conduct on the earth, be it good or bad. “God does not demand any more from anyone than he is able to perform. Everyone will receive that which is due to him, and his sins will catch up with him” (2:286). These apparently irreconcilable positions – the responsibility of mankind and God’s predestined decrees for each person to either belief or disbelief – stand next to one another in the Koran. A person cannot hold God responsible for his disbelief or sin, and when a faithful Muslim is permitted to enter Paradise, this is because of God’s mercy.

These Koran verses concerning predestination can be seen as reflecting Muhammad’s predicament with his countrymen. With his call to return to God, the only almighty God, he was turning away from the absolutely fatalistic religions of his contemporaries in pre-Islamic Arabia. At the same time, he also had to somehow explain the continued obstinacy and resistance to his message shown by the people in Mecca and Medina, who, for the first 12 years of his preaching, hardly paid any attention to him at all. Thus, in the Koran, we see the connection between God’s absolute power and the predetermined nature of his ordinances, as well as the responsibilities laid on mankind.

As God is all-powerful and no one can really understand and know his nature, an individual Muslim cannot know for certain whether God’s mercy and grace are extended to him or whether he will be rejected by God at the end of his days and be sentenced to hell: “But not so the Lord of mankind, who has created me, who leads and guides me, who gives me to eat and drink, who heals me when I am sick, who lets me die, and makes me alive again, *and from whom I hope will forgive me on the day of judgment*” (26:77-82). God is described as the Gracious One, and merciful, even as generous and forgiving, but each Muslim will only receive any assurance concerning forgiveness for his sins after his death. To predict God’s decisions in his judgments would be to put a limit on his power. God’s dealings can never be predicted; otherwise he would have to fit into human expectations and imagination. Nothing and no one can influence God, and he is accountable to no one. Also, the God of the Koran is a cunning God. Again and again, it is written that he thinks up the best tricks. Surah 13:13 says: “God is full of tricks” (literally, “God is strong/powerful

in tricks/deception”) and “The unbelievers think up cunning tricks, but God does it best of all” (8:30).

God the Creator

Apart from the frequent and general observation that God created heaven and earth and mankind, the Koran does not contain any detailed report of the creation as in the Old Testament, except in surah 41:9-13, which describes the creation as having been completed in six days. First God created heaven and earth in two days, out of a forming mass; then he set mountains, rivers, and plants on the earth. Out of water he then made the various animals and created man to rule over them. We do not read anywhere in the Koran, however, that God made man “in his image,” as emphasized in the Old Testament (Genesis 1:21). This would be irreconcilable with the greatness and uniqueness of God, who cannot in any way be compared with mankind. Also, surah 40:57 describes the creation of heaven and earth as a ‘greater wonder’ than the creation of man. In contrast, the creation account in the Old Testament describes the making of man as the crowning of creation.

The Koran reports – in harmony with the biblical account of creation – that the whole of mankind is descended from one pair of human beings (6:98). Adam was formed from a lump of clay. God spoke, “Be!” (Arabic: “*Kun!*”), and Adam was created (3:59). The creative word of God causes things to happen: “When he has decided something, he only has to say ‘Be!’ and it happens.”

After the completion of creation, God ascended an angel-borne throne in the seventh heaven, from whence he rules the eternal realms. In the lower heavens are the moon, sun, and stars. In the lowest level of the heavens, a watcher stands guard to prevent the evil spirits from eavesdropping on the angels’ council (37:1-9). God has created the sequence of day and night: the sun and the moon give light in the day and at night, and, through their regular courses, they give mankind the means of measuring time (10:5). God supports the heavens, which have no pillars, so that they do not fall onto the earth (22:65). The Koran emphasizes that God was not tired after the creation and did not rest, as did the God of the Bible: “We created the heavens and the earth, and everything inbetween in six days, but no tiredness came over us” (50:38). God does not suffer tiredness and does not require sleep. God does not require Muslims to hold a Sabbath, and so, up until the modern day, there is no official weekly day of rest in the Muslim

world, although Friday has a special status. In certain countries, Sunday has been introduced as a day of rest as a result of earlier European colonization.

God has set mankind on the earth as ‘followers’ or ‘representatives’ (Arabic: *khalifa*) and has entrusted him with worldly goods for the short span of his life, giving him authority over them, allowing him to flourish, but requiring an account from him at the end of his life for the way in which he has stewarded these things and for whether he has recognized God as the giver of all things. It can be clearly read in the Koran that it is God’s will that there should be rich as well as poor in the world. Both rich and poor are to recognize God as the creator and giver, and God tests each individual, through the circumstances of his life (see, for example, 6:245) to see how he conducts himself. God’s provision is a sign for mankind through which he can recognize God as the creator. “It is he, who allows rain to fall out of the clouds ... In this is a sign for those who can receive instruction ... Maybe you would learn gratitude” (16:10-14).

God the Merciful

God exists in the imagination of many people as a cruel dictator in Islam, acting on whim. Not so, say Muslims, as the Koran emphasizes God’s mercy and grace many hundreds of times. Every surah (except surah 9) is introduced with the words “In the name of God, the compassionate, the merciful,” or, as it can also be translated, “In the name of the compassionate and merciful God.” Surah 7:156 goes even as far as to say: “But my mercies know no limit.” For the believer, God reveals himself as a merciful giver, who understands and forgives and who hears prayers and protects, whereas the unbeliever cannot expect any mercy in God’s judgment.

The Koran states that Allah has revealed himself to mankind through his goodness. Muhammad also is reminded of God’s goodness and reminds the people to remember his kindness and to be thankful to God for it. This gratitude to God, and the knowledge that everything comes from him, is the mark of a true Muslim, whereas the unbeliever is always ungrateful, as he does not recognize God and has not submitted to him. The Koran says that God loves those who practice righteousness and only guides the steps of him who does his will. God does not accommodate his enemies, and those who mock him have nothing to expect apart from wrath and judgment. He does not love the unrighteous nor the unbeliever nor the sinner and those who practice evil.

The relationship of mankind in relation to God is that of servant or slave. Each person is to completely submit himself to God, and his will (Arabic: *aslama* – to submit oneself, to commit, to give oneself up to God, to devote oneself to God’s will, to become a Muslim). The nature of this kind of relationship to God is expressed through the prostrations, to be carried out during the ritual prayers five times a day. Surah 35:16 reminds mankind that he is “poor, and dependent on God,” whereas God does not have to rely on anyone. Whoever calls on God does not, as the Bible testifies, call on him as his child, but as a servant, the only way in which it is possible to approach him: “No-one, whether in heaven, or on the earth, is able to approach the merciful one, except he come as a servant” (19:93).

The submission of a person under God’s might and the recognition of his rulership lead him to fear God and believe in him. When someone bows down to the gracious and merciful God of the Koran, it shows that he has his ear open for his revelations and is following the good way, the way of Islam.

Allah, a Loving God?

God in the Koran is not only described as merciful and charitable. A few Koran verses speak about the love of God: “Say: If you love God, then follow me, and so God will love you, and forgive your sin! God is merciful, and ready to forgive” (3:31). Muslim theologians differ, however, in the various ways in which the love of God is to be understood:

“The orthodox school defines the love of mankind to God as his willingness to obey and serve him, as love for his ordinances, his reverence, and his rewards. For, they argue, love as reciprocal affection, as between friends, or even lovers, implies the equality of lover and beloved. The transcendence of God forbids, however, to imagine a relationship between man and God in these terms. The idea that any kind of love, or intimate friendship, can come about is foolish and intolerable presumption on the part of mankind, and a blasphemous degrading of God.”²

The rejection of any suggestion that reciprocal love could come about between God and man comes from the concepts of the omnipotence of

² *Der Koran Arabisch-Deutsch. Übersetzung und wissenschaftlicher Kommentar von Adel Theodor Khoury.* 10 Bde. Vol. 2: Sure 2,75-2,212. Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn: Gütersloh, 1991, pp. 207-208.

God, his transcendence and utter otherness, rendering any idea of comparisons to human relationships and feelings as unthinkable.

The Islamic mystics have differing views about the love of God. Here, the believer strives to come close to God, to become one with him, even as far as God actually dwelling in his person. As the believer loses himself in God, his transcendence is overcome, and the unbridgeable gulf between creator and created is crossed. This can only happen through a mystical losing of oneself in God, and this approach is often harshly attacked by orthodox Muslims. The mystics attempt, however, to love God, but, at the end of the day, do not really know if God loves them.

Differences from biblical statements concerning God as God of love: It is certainly true that there are many similarities between the descriptions of God in the Koran and the picture of God that we find in the Bible – more so, even, than in any sacred writings from any other religious group. God as creator, judge, Lord of the universe, who has given mankind a sacred book; the concept of sin and forgiveness; the sin of the first humans in Paradise; Satan’s attempts to lead mankind astray into sin; the judging of mankind, some being permitted to enter Paradise, and some being sentenced to hell; the mention of Adam, Job, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mary, and various other personalities from the Bible could prompt the question as to whether the similarities between the Koran and the Bible are not, perhaps, greater than are the differences. Here are a few examples which should shed some more light on this question:

In comparison to the Bible, it is noticeable that although the Koran refers constantly to God’s grace and mercy, and even from God’s love, this love does not describe the essence of God’s character and is not set up as the center of the Koran’s message. The core of the Koran’s message testifies of God’s uniqueness and oneness (Arabic: *tauhid*), as well as his power and strength.

Although the Koran uses the word ‘love,’ there are basic differences between the meaning and extent of the expression as used in the Bible. Various books in the Bible emphasize that God not only gives love or deals in a loving way, but that He **is** love (1 John 4: 8, 16) and is a ‘God of love’ (2 Corinthians 13:11). Thus, the biblical portrayal of God’s love and its extent differ very strongly from that of the Koran. The love of God for his created beings is not merely a theoretical concept but is the motive and driving force behind His dealings with mankind in the past; and it reached its climax in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ, for “God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should

not perish, but have eternal life” (NASB). Jesus, God and man, and Son of God was an embodiment of love, the same love that God has, and is “the love of God ... manifested in us” (1 John 4:9 NASB). Because God is love, all love proceeds from God: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7 NASB). All human relationships and relationships toward God should be marked by love.

The greatest sacrifice and selfless deed does not count as anything in God’s eyes if the motivation is not love, love for God and love for one’s neighbor. The familiar passage which describes love, in Corinthians 13:1-3, states this impressively: “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing” (NASB).

Because God, the source of all love, has given His love to mankind, so mankind is enabled in his turn to love God and his neighbor. The first of the Ten Commandments contains this obligation to love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ... you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Deuteronomy 6: 5, 3; Leviticus 19:18, quoted by Jesus in Matthew 22:37-38 NASB).

Love then, according to the Bible, should be the distinguishing quality to be found in marriage and family life, within the church community, and extending into relationships with all people, even enemies. Although the Koran does state that reconciliation between warring parties is a precious thing, it does not give any hint that here, particularly, love should rule, and that we should forgive our enemies for their wicked deeds, as Paul does in his letter to the Romans: “Let love be without hypocrisy...give preference to one another in honor...contributing to the needs of the saints, practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and curse not. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men... .But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him drink, for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:13, 14, 17, 20, 21 NASB).

The frequently repeated connection between love and sacrifice (repeated especially often in the New Testament) is also not to be found in the Ko-

ran. We are confronted with these thoughts in the New Testament especially in the context of Jesus' death (John 3:16) and also on a more general level: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NASB). That self-sacrificial attitudes and actions should characterize community life, as well as the unity of family and marriage, as a proof of the love which is there is a uniquely biblical concept, also not to be found in the Koran.

The Old, and especially the New Testament, emphasize very often that the driving force behind God's dealings with mankind is His love, which causes him to save, to remind of his commandments through the prophets, and then finally to send His Son, who was crucified, as the climax of God's love toward mankind. God, in Jesus, delivers Himself up into the hands of His enemies; He gives Himself up to achieve salvation for mankind. God's actions spring up purely out of His own love – not based upon anything man could ever do to earn His love because man is incapable of doing anything of himself that would or could merit God's love. Because God has sent His Son for mankind, people can respond to this love and carry out those actions which God, in His love, has commanded.

This all-encompassing love, the care of others, ministering to and caring for those nearest to us, even love for enemies, going even as far as dying for them is only to be found in the Bible, even when the Koran, in many passages, often uses expressions such as 'love' and 'mercy.'

5 The Fall of Man and the Redemption of Mankind – What Does the Koran Teach?

Introduction

Maybe the question about the Koran's teachings on original sin, the fall of man, and the redemption of mankind does not seem to be of major importance at first glance. Even some Christians may have the impression that they are not really affected in their daily life by what the Bible teaches about Adam and Eve being in Paradise. A young lady once told me openly that she considered it very 'unjust' of God that she has to suffer *only* because Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree ... It wasn't her fault – and perhaps she would not have done the same! But as we read in Romans 5, if we don't accept that we are 'sold' under original sin by Adam's transgression as our 'representative,' there is no way to find salvation in Jesus, who died for us in our place so that we do not have to lay down our own lives for ourselves. It is the same principle: through Jesus being our representative we can receive grace, righteousness, justification, and eternal life, "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 5:19). So if we want to understand what the Koran teaches about eternal salvation, we need to start with the Islamic concept of original sin – if there is any.

In short, if we discuss original sin and salvation, we could make two short statements: Although the Koran contains the story of man's temptation and moral failure in Paradise, there is no story of a 'fall' of the man as the Bible depicts it. As a consequence, mankind does not really need redemption from sin. If we want to go into further details, we have to investigate the text of the Koran, listen to some Muslim commentators, and find out how the Koranic teachings have been interpreted by them.

The Islamic Idea of Redemption

The Bible again and again stresses the connection between original sin and the question of redemption (Romans 5:8-10, 12-18). If there is no original sin, no redemption is necessary. Only the curse on mankind and their corrupted relationship with God make redemption so urgently needed, so that the wide gap between our holy God and sinful man (Genesis 3:15, 24) can be bridged.

As mentioned above, the Koran does not contain the dogma of original sin in the very sense of the word. If we keep in mind that Muhammad came into contact with Christians in his environment and included lots of material from the Bible (especially stories of Old Testament prophets) in the Koran, it is no wonder that much of the contents of the Koran corresponds with Old and New Testament teachings at first glance. On the other hand, orientalist today believe that Christians of Muhammad's time in the seventh century A.D. lacked a complete Arabic translation of the Bible. Their belief seems to have been partly or even largely founded on other sources such as apocryphal writings and oral traditions. The Christians with whom Muhammad had come into contact had acquired some heretical teachings (they seemed to venerate Mary as the 'Mother of God' and the third person of Trinity).

It is interesting to note that the Koran does not contain fundamental statements about Christianity such as the Sermon on the Mount, the Revelation, the letters of Paul, Peter, or Timothy, or the dogma of original sin. Even the crucifixion of Jesus is addressed in only two Koran verses (surah 4:157-158). One can assume that Muhammad either did not hear much about the dogma of original sin from those Christians or did not understand its importance for Christian theology and biblical teaching – or, as some say, he omitted such teachings intentionally when compiling the Koran text because it did not fit into his theological framework.

Adam and His Wife in Paradise

It is true that the Koran speaks about Adam's being in Paradise. He plays an important role in the Koran and is even one of the greatest prophets mentioned. Together with Noah, the family of Abraham (Ibrahim) and 'Imran, he belongs to those who have been 'chosen' by Allah "above all people of the whole world" (surah 3:33). Adam is the ancestor of mankind (4:1). God formed him out of dust and clay (15:26) and gave him "spirit ...

hearing ... seeing and hearts to understand” (32:9). If the Koran says that God gave ‘spirit’ to Adam, this, according to Muslim Koran commentators, does not mean that he breathed his spirit into man as the Old Testament teaches (Genesis 2:7; surah 2:7) but is only an illustration of the fact that Allah gave life to man.³

The Koran never teaches that man has been created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27), only a little lower than himself (Psalm 8:5-7) – which does not mean that man is Godlike – since Allah is unique, unimaginable and highly exalted above his creation. He can never be compared with mankind, his creatures, and servants. He is hidden from mankind and can never be compared to them under any aspect.

In contrast to the Old Testament (Genesis 2:19: “... God brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: And whatsoever Adam called every living creature that was the name thereof”), Allah does not ask Adam to give names to the animals that were created by Allah. On the contrary, the Koran teaches that Allah taught Adam the names of the animals. Afterward, Allah asked the angels which names had been given to the animals. They did not know but answered: “Praise be unto thee, we have no knowledge, but what you teach us, for you are knowing and wise” (surah 2:32). Adam is then asked to tell the angels the names of the animals, and this bears evidence for the preeminence of Adam before them (that leaves us with the impression that the focus of interest lies on the question of who is in a position of power to command and who has to obey). Then Allah commands the angels to bow down before Adam. All angels obey except Iblis (another word for ‘Satan, in the Koran), who refuses because of his pride (surah 2:34).

The Forbidden Tree and Adam’s Transgression

The Koran does not mention the name of Adam’s wife. Koran commentators have given her the name Hawa, adding that she was created out of Adam’s rib when he had fallen asleep, whereas some Muslim apologists insist that only the Bible contains this ‘humiliating’ passage of Adam’s wife being created out of a rib of Adam, but not the Koran – and that means that man and woman are created equally in Islam (maybe they are *created* equally, but there is no way to state that men and women have the

³ This is summarized by Hermann Stieglecker out of different Koran commentaries: *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam*. Paderborn, 1962/1983. p. 191.

same rights in Islam, which is easy to prove as we investigate further into some Koranic statements about the superiority of man).

In the Koran, Adam and his wife were allowed to live in Paradise without any restrictions imposed on them. The only exception was that, similar to the Old Testament, they were not to eat from a certain tree. The Koran does not explicitly state which tree this was, but from surah 20:120, it becomes indirectly clear that the fruits from this tree will grant immortality and the likeness of the angels. In another surah (2:35), Allah even forbids Adam and his wife to approach this tree; otherwise, they will become ‘transgressors.’ Up to this point, the differences between the Koran and the Old Testament do not seem to be so crucial.

But now the Koran explains that temptation approaches Adam and his wife in the shape of Satan: Satan leads man ‘to transgress’ and forfeit Paradise (surah 2:36). Surah 20:120 tells us that Satan tempted Adam to transgress. Allah had already warned Adam that Satan might possibly expel Adam from Paradise (20:117-119). Nevertheless, Adam and his wife ate from the forbidden tree. They realized their nakedness and made themselves clothes out of leaves (2:121). Being unable to stay longer in Paradise, Allah turns them out of it (7:22) and banishes them down to earth.

It is quite interesting to note that in contradiction to the Old Testament, Adam and his wife ask Allah for forgiveness for having eaten the fruit. At the same time, they emphasize that their sin affects *only themselves* (7:23): “They said: ‘We have sinned against our own souls’” (7:23). Not Allah, but they themselves are the ones who are affected by the violation of Allah’s commandment. The Koran teaches in many other instances that man always commits sin against himself and that that sin cannot affect Allah (see e.g., surah 2:54; 2:57; 3:117; 3:135; 4:64; 4:97; 4:110; 7:160). (Grave sins such as apostasy hurt the law of Allah, but never himself.)

In our Paradise story, Allah forgives Adam and his wife their transgression (2:37). According to the Koran, Adam’s sin in Paradise has no further effects on mankind and does not hamper or destroy man’s relationship to Allah.

This transgression is so to say only a ‘faux pas,’ a lapse that stands in contradiction to the Old Testament teaching. In the Koran, the trespass does not destroy a former close relationship between Allah and mankind, because there was never a ‘relationship’ as such which goes beyond the fact that Allah is the creator of all beings. Although the Koran teaches that Adam and his wife could not remain in Paradise because of their sin, the

event does not seem to be significant or to have such traumatic results for the history of mankind as it does in the Old Testament. The quality of relationship between the man and his wife is not influenced by the Koranic Paradise story either. The only result for Adam and his wife seems to be their banishment down to earth and the prophecy of enmity between man and Satan in the coming future (2:36). In spite of this transgression, Adam was ‘chosen’ by Allah, and “he accepted him and turned unto him again and directed him” (20:122).

Thus the Koranic view is much more optimistic than is the biblical one concerning man’s ability to live righteously. Mankind after Adam is not generally ‘caught’ in the sin and does not need to be redeemed in order to perform good works. Man is able to live a godly life if he resists the attacks of Satan. Consequently, the most wicked sin is, according to the Koran, not to doubt Allah’s trustworthiness and reliability (as Genesis 3:1 puts it: “Yea, has God really said ...?”). Also faith does not primarily mean to trust God, but first of all to submit to him. In the Koran, man’s gravest sin is his will to determine his own destiny and to neglect God as creator and judge. It is man’s pride that makes him unable to submit to Allah.

Conclusion from the Koranic Paradise Story

a. The relationship between man and Allah is not generally hampered. Sin does not separate man from God, since there was no other, closer relationship with him before. God is the master of man; he is his creator, but not his father, and man is not created in God’s image. Sin principally never affects God but only man, who commits it. God forgives all sins, smaller and greater ones, since his mercy “extends over all things” (7:156), if the sinner repents, turns away from his sin, and has no intention to commit it again. Muslim theology has discussed the question whether Allah forgives sin even if man does not repent. The majority of Muslim theologians do not hold repentance really to be a condition for forgiveness (some say that the Muslim transgressor who does not ask God for forgiveness before his death will remain in hell for a limited amount of time, but eventually he will go to Paradise) except when it comes to unbelief (Arabic: *kufr*). Also *shirk* (associating a partner with God – the sin of the Christians believing in the Trinity) or apostasy is a form of unbelief. Unbelief must be repented, and a conversion to Islam must take place. Allah hears his servants’ pleas for forgiveness; since there is no original sin, there is nothing that hinders man from leading a better life after having asked for forgiveness.

b. Relationships between people are not affected, since Adam's sin could not poison interhuman relationships. There is virtually no hint in the Koran that Adam's relationship with his wife was hampered or even changed through what had happened in Paradise. There is no hint in the Koran regarding what the Bible characterizes as the husband being master over his wife after the Fall as a consequence of sin, not that God had designed it like this in the beginning (Genesis 3:16). As the Bible shows us, God has designed man and women to be a unity, two very different types of persons, yet a couple, living in harmony, complementing each other. But after the Fall, true harmony and unity can only be obtained by the help of God. After the Fall, we read of envy, striving for power, oppression, mistrust, and violence between husband and wife. The Koran completely lacks this dimension.

c. After his banishment from Paradise, man is still able to live righteously if he resists the whispering of Satan. Temptation approaches man from outside of himself, not from his inner heart. Sin is not rebellion against God, but only 'transgression' or a 'trespass' (2:36). With this view, life on earth is like a time of probation and test,⁴ which Allah imposes upon man. Consequently, the Koran does not know of man's inner conflict between his will to perform the good and his inability to do it, as Paul describes it in Romans 7. As man desperately realizes that he is not able to perform the good by his own power, he reaches out to God and cries for help.

In the Koran, the inner heart of man is not evil, as the Bible tells us, but man's temptation comes from the outside, from Satan, the fallen angel, who was expelled from heaven and now tries to seduce man to perform evil. Man always has the free choice between good and evil, although many people do not choose good. But this is only Allah's testing. Whoever commits sin has lent his ear to the whispering of Satan, but if he really wants to keep the commandments of God, he is able to fulfill the five pillars of Islam as well as further religious duties.

The Old and New Testaments also expect man to do good works, but at the same time, both make unmistakably clear that it is impossible for man to do these good works without the power of God and the help of the Holy Spirit. Moreover, all the good deeds one could perform would never suffice to save a single soul. A single transgression of God's law can never be

⁴ Thus defined by Tilman Nagel. *Der Koran. Einführung-Texte-Erläuterungen*. München 1983. p. 239.

eradicated through good deeds but still is reality until it is taken away by the 'representative' Jesus Christ, whom the sinner asks for forgiveness.

d. *Interestingly enough, according to Muslim theology, there are persons who are sinless.* All prophets mentioned in the Koran have never committed any sin, according to Muslim theology, but not according to the Koran! The Koran itself reports several times where many of the prophets asked Allah for forgiveness for their sins (Adam in 7:23; Noah in 11:47; Abraham in 14:41; Moses in 28:16; David in 38:24; Muhammad [!] in 110:3; 48:2). The only exception is the prophet Jesus, who also, according to the Koran, committed no sin, but, nevertheless, was only a human being. The orientalist Louis Gardet considers the tenth century to be the time when the dogma of sinlessness was first reported.⁵ It seems to have originated with the Shi'ite branch of Islam.

e. *Without original sin, no redemption is necessary.*

E. E. Elder comparing Islam and Christianity summarizes: "Islam has no doctrine of sin, but only of sins, the great problem being the classification of disobedient acts into the categories of great and small and determining their respective punishments ... To Christian thinkers sin is a state of rebellion against the righteousness and holiness of God."⁶ All the different Old Testament laws and rules of purification before entering the temple, the slaughtering of animals and the shedding of blood when the animals were sacrificed, are a foreshadowing of the very sacrifice to come which is without sin, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

In Islam, if it comes to the question of salvation, it is necessary that every human being submit himself to Allah and accept Islam, since there will be no mercy on non-Muslims at the Day of Judgment. According to tradition, only Muhammad (or, as other theologians presume, God himself or his angels) can intercede for Muslim believers as intercessor; but this particular question cannot be answered for certain since the Koran itself gives only some hints at the possibility of intercession. In Muslim tradition, we have many prayers of intercession to Muhammad. Thus conversion to Islam does not mean redemption but obedience toward and submission under Allah and the laws of Islam.

⁵ Louis Gardet. *Islam*. Köln 1968. p. 68.

⁶ E. E. Elder. "The Development of the Moslem Doctrine of Sins and their Forgiveness." in: *The Moslem World* 29 (1939): 178-188, here p. 188.

f. The idea of juridical representation is unknown to Islam. Each one is responsible only for himself and acts only for his own person. The Old and New Testaments teach us that Adam sinned as representative for all human beings (Romans 5:12), and with this sin, he destroyed the relationship of every single human being to God. In the same manner, Christ by sacrificing Himself has obtained redemption for us, his followers, so that no one else has to die for his sins (Romans 5:6-21).

In the eyes of Muslim theologians, this idea of representative redemption is illogical and absurd, as many apologists put it, since there is no necessity of it from a Muslim point of view. Muslim theologians have argued that this representative redemption had no effects, since otherwise redemption would have set an end to all sorts of sin, of theft, of murder or of adultery.⁷ But it is evident that mankind has not changed since Jesus' death and continues to commit sins.

Muslim theology does not realize that redemption does not make somebody automatically free from sin for the rest of his or her life, that also the saved one has his or her freedom to perform evil, that Satan rules the world until the Last Day and that Jesus' redemption does not work magically in all people, whether they want it or not.

f. Since Islam does not hold Jesus to be the Son of God, redemption can never be accepted by Muslim theology. The Old and New Testaments teach clearly that only God Himself could be the redeemer of mankind. An animal being offered as sacrifice could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4: "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins;" see also Hebrews 9:12-14); it was sacrificed only as an outer sign of the sinner's inner repentance and as a foreshadowing of the coming perfect sacrifice. Also, no other human being could save any other soul: The death of Isaac would not have helped mankind; it would have been only as an act of obedience by Abraham. Even when Moses asked God if he could be eradicated from the Book of Life so that Israel could be saved in his place, God did not allow this to happen (Exodus 32:32; see a similar wish of Paul in Romans 9:3). Psalm 49:7-8 summarizes: "None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: For the redemption of their soul is precious." One condition for Jesus' ability to redeem His people was His holiness and sinlessness as the Son of God. But because the sonship of Jesus is rejected by the Koran and Islamic theology there remains no redeemer for mankind being completely free of sin.

⁷ Stieglecker. *Glaubenslehren*. p. 317.

6 The Meaning of Sin in the Koran and the Bible

The Koran: When the Bible speaks of sin, it means the breaking of the covenant between God and man or, in other words, man's disloyalty toward God. The Koran, however, emphasizes that one sins not against God, but against himself: "They said [Adam and his wife, that is]: 'Our Lord, we have wronged our own souls'" (surah 7:23). Surah 2:57 describes Israel's sin of ingratitude with the following words: "And we gave you the shade of clouds and sent down to you manna and quails, saying: 'Eat of the good things We have provided for you:' (But they rebelled); to us they did no harm, but they harmed their own selves."

The Bible: In the Bible, all sin is against God. The Scriptures compare the Old Testament relationship between God and Israel with marriage, and Israel's rebellion against Him with adultery. The Lord is angry over human sin, but at the same time He is grieved.⁸ "But they rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit (Isaiah 63:10; compare Ephesians 4:30). In his well-known prayer of repentance (Psalm 51), David recognizes, "Against You, You only have I sinned" (vs. 6; compare 1 Kings 8:50).

The Koran: In the whole Koran text, there is no mention of original sin. Rather, the book teaches that every human being can choose between good and evil in every action. According to Islam, God permits Satan to tempt men to disobedience, so that evil does not come out of man's inner being – which is what Scripture teaches – but from external temptation, from the whispering of the Devil. If one resists and does not wish to do evil, then he is able to achieve good.

As we see here, the Koran has a thoroughly positive view of man in terms of his moral capabilities. He is not unable to do the good, as the Bible describes the unredeemed, but he suffers from weaknesses which originate in his unbelief. Tilmann Nagel concludes: "The Koran's view of human nature, which seems to be marked by weaknesses of character, is still

⁸ Compare Jesus' simultaneous grief and anger in Mark 3:5 and John 11:33.

completely optimistic and positive, for these weaknesses are considered to be the fruits of unbelief.”⁹

The Bible: The main idea of Romans 7:19, “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice,” is not to be found in Islam, for man is believed to be able to achieve the good. Just as in the Bible, the Koran describes sin as transgression against God’s law and disobedience of His commands, but not as rebellion of the inner man against God Himself and His Law. Jesus, describing the origin of evil, says: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man” (Mark 7:21-23).

The Koran: Man is basically able to not sin. If he listens to evil and does wrong, God is merciful and willing to forgive offenses as long as the individual is sorry and wishes to improve. If he performs his prayers regularly, observes the month of fasting, gives alms, and perhaps carries out the pilgrimage to Mecca, he may hope that Allah will graciously permit him to enter Paradise when he dies.

On the other hand, man has the possibility of choosing to do evil. The Koran speaks clearly of those who do not listen to God’s warnings, but it never leaves the impression that all men would ever be prepared to obey the teachings of his messenger. This becomes clear in the so-called ‘Legends of Punishment,’ which describe the destruction of whole nations who ignored God’s warnings, even though they should have believed the Prophet. In the same way, Muhammad addresses his warnings of the coming judgment to his contemporaries and must still experience their rejection of his message.

The Bible: Man is essentially incapable of not sinning, for he is “sold under sin” (Romans 7:14-15). He is under its curse and continues to commit evil until he accepts God’s forgiveness. Only by accepting the fact that he is a sinner, that he cannot improve himself, and that Jesus died on the cross because of his sin can he be reconciled with God and receive new life through repentance and prayer. Only then does the Holy Spirit dwell in him and enable him to resist sin through the power of God. Should he then sin – which will occur repeatedly in the life of the Christian – but ask for forgiveness for his transgression, he will receive forgiveness and new fel-

⁹ Tilmann Nagel. *Koran*. p. 253.

lowship with his Creator (1 John 1:9). Whoever becomes a child of God in this way has the confidence that he will inherit eternal life.

"Greater" and "Lesser" Sins

The Koran distinguishes between greater and lesser sins, that is, more or less serious offenses. There is, however, no clear indication which are which. Surah 4:31, for example, speaks of grave sin but does not explain which offenses are meant. "If ye avoid the great (things) which ye are forbidden, we will remit you from your evil deeds, and make you enter at a noble gate (Paradise)." Muslim theologians disagree on the subject, but the following distinction is used frequently:

1. *Unbelief (in Arabic: kufr)*: Unbelief is the greatest sin of all. It can be expressed

a. in the denial of the existence and the activity of God.

b. in the repudiation of Islam.

c. in the worship of gods other than Allah. For this reason, Jews and Christians are considered to be guilty of polytheism: Jews, because they are believed to worship Esra as the son of God (surah 9:30); Christians, because they have declared Jesus to be divine (surah 5:72).

Whoever commits these sins and fails to repent before death cannot, according to probably all Muslim theologians, enter Paradise. Such a person will be cast by God into the fires of Hell for all eternity.

2. *Greater (or graver) sins*: This includes offenses such as the rebellion and disobedience of children against their parents, murder, perjury, doubting God's forgiveness, incessant sin, calculation of God's grace, false testimony, magic, slander about indecency, drinking alcohol, misuse of orphans' possessions, usury, adultery, homosexuality, theft, and desertion from the army.¹⁰

All grave sins, including murder and adultery, can be forgiven to a pious Muslim, for he can expect the mediation of the Prophet Muhammad at the Last Judgment.

3. *Lesser (or lighter) sins*: The Koran mentions not only "greater sins and indecencies" (surah 42:37), but also lighter offenses (surah 53:32).

¹⁰ Hermann Stieglecker. *Glaubenslehren*. pp. 625-626.

Little sins, popular Islam assumes, can be expiated by good deeds such as giving alms, additional fasting, or prayers. God would never refuse Paradise to a Muslim who had committed only lesser offenses.

As a result of this differentiation between greater and lesser sins, the question arises whether a Muslim who commits grave sins can still be considered a believer or if he has proven himself to be a renegade damned to the punishments of Hell.

Here again, the opinions of Muslim theologians vary on this point. Some assume that a Muslim can lose his salvation by committing grave sin. The Harijites, for example, teach that one who commits serious transgressions must be an unbeliever (Arabic: *kâfir*). The Wa'idites, a splinter group of the Harijites, also doubt whether such a sinner can still be counted as a believer. The Zaidites, a sub-group of the Shi'ites and the Ibâdites (another sub-group of the Harijites) assume that such a great sinner will remain in the fire eternally.

The Mu'tazilites, however, teach that Muslims who commit grave sins constitute a third class between the believers and the unbelievers, the class of the wicked (Arabic: *al-fâsiqûn*), those who confess Islam but have become bound in serious sin. If these cease to transgress, they then become believers again. Should a wicked man die before repenting, he will be considered by God to be an unbeliever.¹¹

The opinions above do not, however, represent the views of the majority of Muslim theologians. Most assume that each Muslim will enter Paradise, even if he has committed serious sins but could not repent of them before death. God will perhaps condemn him to a period of time in Hell, but then, because of Muhammad's mediation, will receive him into Paradise for eternity. (This comes close to the Catholic dogma of Purgatory.) Should the unbeliever ask for forgiveness before his death, then God is sure to forgive him and receive him into Paradise without prior punishment.

¹¹ E. E. Elder. "Development". pp. 178-183. See also Stieglecker. *Glaubenslehren*. p. 634.

7 Repentance and Forgiveness in Islam

In a time when nearly everyone asserts that Islam, as well as Christianity and Judaism, belongs to the three ‘Abrahamic religions,’ it is more important than ever before to recall what the Koran and Muslim theologians really say about who God is, about forgiveness, and about salvation. Although there are a few similarities between the Bible and the Koran which can be easily explained with history, there are even more (and much more important) differences between both books and beliefs.

God is Gracious and Merciful

One of the basic statements of the Koran is, “Allah is merciful” (surah 4:16), an idea reiterated in the introduction to all 114 surahs (except surah 9): “In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.” Man may always hope for God’s mercy. If, having sinned, man repents and turns from his iniquity, God will forgive all his transgressions, large or small, for the divine mercy “encompasses all things” (surah 7:156). Surah 3:135-136 promises all believing Muslims forgiveness and entrance into Paradise if they ask God for pardon.

“And those who when they commit an indecency or do injustice to their souls remember Allah and ask forgiveness for their faults – and who forgives the faults but Allah, and (who) do not knowingly persist in what they have done. (As for) these – their reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide in them and excellent is the reward of the laborers” (surah 3:135-136; similarly, surah 4:110).

Repentance Means Turning away

Interestingly, the word used in the Koran for ‘repentance’ or ‘penance’ (Arabic: *tauba*) actually means ‘to turn about face.’ Repentance is, therefore, not merely a formal rejection of sin but includes the entreaty to God for forgiveness and the renunciation of the transgression. As a result, God

turns back to the sinner graciously and leads him in the right way. Surah 57:28-29 concludes,

“O you who believe! Be mindful of your duty to Allah and believe in His Apostle: He will give you two portions of His mercy, and will appoint for you a light with which you will walk, and forgive you. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful; So that the People of the Scripture may know that they control naught of the grace of Allah, and that grace is in Allah’s hand to give to whom He pleases. And Allah is the Lord of mighty grace” (see also surah 9:104-106).

Divine Judgment

Should the believing Muslim die without having repented of certain sins, God will, according to most Muslim theologians, still forgive him and, perhaps after a period in Hell, let him enter Paradise. Unbelief (Arabic: *kufr*), however, cannot be forgiven without contrition; the unbeliever will suffer the eternal pains of Hell.

“And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them, he says, Surely now I repent; nor (for) those who die while they are unbelievers. These are they for whom we have prepared chastisement” (surah 4:18).

This category of unbelievers includes all who have rejected Allah, as well as the idolaters, those who worship several gods, thus conceding the honor due only to Allah to other beings. This includes the Buddhists, the Hindus, and believers in all related religions which worship more than one god. Jews and Christians are, in Muslim eyes, also polytheists, for the Jews, according to the Koran, consider Esra to be the Son of God (surah 9:30), while the Christians believe in three gods: God Himself, Jesus, and Mary, a third deity, who, according to Islam, became the wife of God in order to become the mother of Jesus, an unthinkable blasphemy for Muslims.

Having all offended against the most important precept of Islam, that there is only one God, these ‘worshippers of many gods’ cannot, by definition, be believers. They can only hope to attain forgiveness by repenting of their polytheism and accepting Islam. Only those who have repented of unbelief and have become Muslims can hope for God’s grace in the Last Judgment.

The Final Rejection of God

According to the Koran, in sinning, man turns away from God and yields to Satan's influence, but by repenting, the sinner returns to Allah, who then turns back to him. The unbeliever also turns his back on God, but his rejection is final, for he does not return. Thus the Koran continually warns man to turn to God's mercy before it is too late, and Allah suddenly and unexpectedly subjects him to the punishment of the Last Judgment, where no unbeliever can hope for divine mercy. Surah 39:53-55 says:

“Say: O my slaves who have been prodigal to their own hurt! Do not despair of the mercy of Allah, surely Allah forgives all sins, surely He is the Forgiving, the Merciful. And return to your Lord time after time, and submit to Him, before there comes to you the punishment, when you cannot be helped. And follow the best that has been revealed to you from your Lord, before there comes to you the punishment all of a sudden while you do not even perceive.”

The Koran warns not only against the final rejection of God but also against deliberate sin which reckons with contrition before death:

“Repentance with Allah is only for those who do evil in ignorance, then turn (to Allah) soon, so these it is to whom Allah turns (mercifully), and Allah is ever Knowing, Wise. And repentance is not for those who go on doing evil deeds, until when death comes to one of them, he says: Surely now I repent; nor (for) those who die while they are unbelievers. These are they for whom we have prepared a painful chastisement” (surah 4:17-18).

From these Koran statements on forgiveness of sin, Muslim theologians have derived three requirements for divine forgiveness:

1. *The sinner must repent because he regrets his sin*, not because he reckons with forgiveness or fears God and his judgement.

2. *The sinner must be determined never to commit this sin again*. Asking for forgiveness while at the same time being determined to commit the same sin again is not what a believer is expected to do.

3. *The sinner must in future avoid all occasions* which might lead him to repeat this transgression.

Forgiveness, once completed, still has repercussions. If the offense has been against man, the sinner must requite the damage. The Koran lists various rules, for example, who must pay retribution for manslaughter.

In popular Islam, this thought has led to the notion that certain good deeds (such as supplementary fasting or particularly large alms) may be

used as penance. Dying in battle as a martyr for the Muslim faith, for example, compensates for all one's sins, according to this view. The martyr enters Paradise immediately, without being questioned about his faith at the Last Judgment, as is the case for other Muslims. The pilgrimage to Mecca is considered to be effective by cancelling all major sins and by making the pilgrim pleasing to God. Prayers performed at the Ka'ba – the largest Islamic shrine, located in the major mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia – are believed to be more potent than those carried out elsewhere. Apparently, 'good deeds' might constitute the essential part of a Muslim's life instead of the actual Islamic faith and obedience to the Koranic law. Whether this applies to all individual Muslims we cannot judge, but it is certainly true of many.

Forgiveness Stems from Allah's Omnipotence

An interesting difference between the Bible and the Koran lies in the reason for God's forgiveness. In the Bible, God forgives out of love for mankind. Love moved Him to send His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to die for man's sin so that we could receive forgiveness. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). He calls to sinners out of love so that they can enter by His forgiveness into fellowship with Him.

In the Koran, Allah's forgiveness arises not from love but from his omnipotence. He forgives whom he will, but not as proof of his love. The Koran mentions Allah's goodness and his mercy toward mankind, but the center of his being is his power and his eminence. So powerful is he that no comparison can possibly be made between Allah and man, his creation. Because man may not conceive of God in any way that would limit the divine might, he can neither predict Allah's behavior nor foresee his activity. Not even the believing Muslim can be absolutely sure of his salvation at the Last Judgment, even though he hopes for it, for an absolute security would mean that man can control God's treatment of his creatures. The Bible, in contrast, emphasizes the believer's *absolute assurance* that he is a child of God and will inherit eternal life. "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know you have eternal life" (1 John 5:12-13).

8 The Meaning of Faith in Islam

Westerners often assume that the Muslim faith rests only on the obedience of strict rules and regulations but has no place for 'a living faith of the heart.' How do the Koran and the Islamic teachers define 'faith in God?' Does the Muslim have assurance of his salvation?

In the Koran, the term 'faith' means 'to consider something to be sure and reliable' without doubting. Faith can only be given by God, and this means, above all, that a human being acknowledges Allah's greatness and superiority and his own position as God's servant, who owes him gratitude for his mercy toward man.

"He has created the heavens and the earth with truth ... He has created man from a sperm-drop ... And cattle He has created for you (men): from them ye derive warmth, and numerous benefits, and of their (meat) ye eat. And ye have a sense of pride and beauty in them as ye drive them home in the evening and as ye lead them forth to pasture in the morning. And they carry your heavy loads to lands that ye could not (otherwise) reach except with souls distressed: for your Lord is indeed Most Kind, Most Merciful and (He has created) horses, mules, and donkeys, for you to ride and as an ornament; and He has created (other) things of which ye have no knowledge" (surah 16:3, 4, 5-8; compare with the whole section, surah 16:1-21).

In general, the Koran divides humanity into two groups, the Muslims (the believers, in Arabic: *al-mu'minûn*) and the non-Muslims (the unbelievers, in Arabic: *al-kâfirûn*). The unbeliever is ungrateful toward God and his goodness, and, above all, toward his gift of revelation, the Koran. The believer, however, gives the thanks he owes Allah by honoring Him as source of all goodness and by recognizing his revelation as law. It is the faith of the individual that decides his fate at the Day of Judgment, whether he will enter Paradise or Hell. That belief is essential to salvation is accepted by all schools of Muslim theology.¹² Opinions differ, though, on the constitution of faith. Possibilities include:

¹² L. Gardet. "Imân". in: Encyclopaedia of Islam. Vol. III. E. J. Brill: Leiden 1986. pp. 1070-1074.

1. The inner conviction of the truth of the revelation of God without any public confession being necessary.
2. The declaration of the Islamic confession of faith, combined with the inner conviction of the heart.
3. The fulfillment of the prescribed Muslim duties.
4. The Muslim conviction of faith combined with the fulfillment of the Muslim duties and good works.¹³
5. The declaration of the Muslim confession of faith, inner conviction, and good works.¹⁴

Faith in Need

The Koran clearly condemns those who call upon God only when in need and forget him afterward. Surah 39:8 says, for example:

“When some trouble toucheth man he crieth unto his Lord, turning to Him in repentance: but when He bestoweth a favour upon him as from Himself, (man) doth forget what he cried and prayed for before, and he doth set up rivals unto Allah, thus misleading others from Allah’s Path. Say, ‘Enjoy thy disbelief for a little while: verily thou art (one) of the Companions of the Fire!’”

God thus demands faith out of gratitude toward man’s creator and not out of calculation in a momentary situation of need. A true Muslim, in the actual sense of the word, is one who continually trusts in divine assistance and support and does not wait until an emergency to arise before seeking him. For example, the Koran condemns the Arabic Bedouins of Muhammad’s lifetime, who confessed Islam publicly, but who did not believe it in their hearts. “The desert Arabs say, ‘We believe.’ Say, ‘Ye have no faith; but ye (only) say, ‘We have submitted our wills to Allah,’ for not yet has faith entered your hearts” (surah 49:14).

In the same way, the Koran condemns the feigned belief of the hypocrites (Arabic: *munâfiqûn*), who profess to be Muslims in order to enjoy its privileges. Buhârî, a collector of Islamic tradition, wrote that ‘religious teaching’ consists of three elements: the contents of faith, the practice of

¹³ Gardet. “Imân.” pp. 1070-1071.

¹⁴ Stieglecker. *Glaubenslehren*. pp. 570-571.

Islam, and the internalization of this practice, so that the individual always acts as if he were in the presence of God.¹⁵

Faith and Acts

The majority of Muslim theologians teach that the Islamic faith is more than either a mental agreement with certain facts or a mechanical obedience of certain rules; it is rather a person's dedication to God's will and the recognition of his sovereignty. This has consequences for his behavior in the family, in society, and in the state. Without question, the Islamic faith cannot be described as a mere external membership of a religious group or as the theoretical agreement with particular dogmas.

According to the Koran, particular deeds and behaviors are essential aspects of faith and are demanded of every Muslim. The five pillars of Islam come to mind first, of course: The confession of faith, prayer five times daily in Arabic toward Mecca, alms giving to the poor, 30 days of fasting in the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. But beyond these requirements, the Koran describes other practical expressions of faith in Allah. Surah 2:177 concludes:

“But it is righteousness ... to believe in Allah and the Last day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer and give Zakat”.¹⁶

Surah 23:1-11 promises Paradise to the believer who prays humbly, who has no sexual relations with women other than his own wife and slaves, who uses wealth entrusted to him honestly, and who does his duty and prays.

The Islamic Confession of Faith

Besides the individual rules of behavior, the Koran does not formulate any particular dogmas which a Muslim must believe in order to be considered a believer. Since there were no official councils held or doctrinal decisions made in Islam as in the early centuries of New Testament Chri-

¹⁵ Gardet. *Islam*. p. 30.

¹⁶ The tax for the poor.

stianity, no official confession of faith binding on all Muslims was ever formulated. In contrast to the detailed Apostolic and Nicene Creeds of Christianity, the first Pillar of Islam contains only two points, the belief in the existence of God and the belief in Muhammad's prophetic office: "I confess that there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet." For this reason, there are usually only three statements of faith required of every Muslim:

1. The belief that there is only one God.
2. The belief that Muhammad is his Prophet.
3. The belief that every human being must appear before God at the Last Judgment.

Sometimes two further statements of faith are added:

4. The belief in angels.
5. The belief in the Holy Books of revelation.

Above and beyond these statements, Muslim theologians have collected basic dogmas, such as the sinlessness of the prophets or the absolute sovereignty of God, which are generally accepted in Muslim theology but have never been formulated into a statement of faith binding on all believers. The well-known reformist theologian of the nineteenth century, Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ (1865-1935), who lived in Cairo, defined Islamic faith as

"the act of worship, the care to avoid bad and blameworthy deeds, to respect right and justice in social relationships, and to purify the soul and prepare it for the future life; in a word (it consists of) all the laws whose aim is to bring man near to God."¹⁷

Conclusion: The definition of faith from the Koran and from Muslim theologians before the background of what the Bible says about faith demonstrates similarities as well as differences. The Bible also presents faith as more than a mere acceptance of various regulations, a theoretical agreement with dogmas, or a membership in a religious group. On the other hand, biblical faith could be called 'a firm, unshakeable trust in God' rather than merely a humble recognition of God's sovereignty, as it is in Islam. The firm belief, which does not doubt but becomes sure before it sees, is

¹⁷ Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ. *al-hilâfa au al-imâma al-'uzma*. Cairo 1922., p. 192, quoted from: Encyclopaedia of Islam. Vol. II. E. J. Brill: Leiden 1986. pp. 293-296, here p. 294.

considered exemplary in the Bible (compare Hebrews 11). Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

At the same time, the Bible makes it clear that faith can never be a mere acknowledgement of dogmatic precepts. (“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe and tremble.” James 2:19) Rather, biblical faith is a conviction which expresses itself in a person’s actions. (“But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?” James 2:20 Or “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.” James 2:17) The Bible also calls this ‘bearing fruit:’ “He who abides in Me and I in him, bears much fruit” (John 15:5). Whoever truly believes repents before God, for a merely theoretical conviction of sin is not a real conviction. A true believer in Christ acts according to God’s standards, for he otherwise proves that he is not really convinced of the truth of God’s Word: “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6).

9 Christian and Muslim Prayer: A Comparison

Introduction

Muslim prayer differs fundamentally from Christian prayer in style, content, form, and intention. Prayer is of central significance in Islam. Its significance can hardly be overemphasized. When a Muslim mentions 'prayer,' he generally means the mandatory ritual prayer, which he repeats five times daily. Ritual prayer is called *salat* in Arabic and must be performed daily at specific times by every adult Muslim, men and women, in Arabic, while facing Mecca. A Muslim who has forgotten or just omitted one of the five prayers must pray at a later point in time.

Fixed Times to Pray

The Muezzin (Arabic: *mu'addin*) calls the believers to prayer from the Minaret of the mosque; nowadays, this is usually accomplished by a recording. When the call to prayer has sounded ("Allah is the greatest ... there is no God but Allah ... Muhammad is the messenger of Allah"), only ritual prayers are permitted, not freely formulated prayers, as Muslim tradition states. Ritual prayer must be performed at the defined hours. In many mosques we find five clocks (watches), so the Muslim believer knows when the prayer must be performed. As time changes a little from day to day, morning prayer must be performed before sunrise (in the summer, that can be before 4:00 a.m.); the midday prayer, just before the sun reaches its zenith; the afternoon prayer, after the sun has reached its zenith but before sunset; the evening prayer, after sunset; and the night prayer, when it has become dark. At other (specified) times, prayer is forbidden, for example, during sunrise or when the sun has reached its zenith. The prayers of non-Muslims are invalid on principle.

How did Mandatory Prayer Develop?

The requirement to pray five times a day was not a part of the original seventh-century teachings of Islam. Surah 11:14, dated at times of the *hijra*, the exile of the first Muslim congregation from Mecca to Medina in 622 A.D., first mentions that Muhammad was commanded to pray three times a day. It seems as if between 620 and 624 A.D. the duty to perform ritual prayer was fixed for all Muslims (7:204-206, etc.). Surah 24:58 also mentions three daily prayers – in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. About 100 years later, in the eighth century, tradition indicates that Muslims were required to pray five times a day. In the first years after the proclamation of Islam, Muhammad called his adherents to pray while facing Jerusalem (which was most probably meant to make the Jewish community accept Muhammad as their prophet, too), whereas after 624 A.D., Muhammad changed the direction of praying toward Mecca.

The Koran does not describe how Muslims should pray and at what times. Only tradition gives some hints and explanations, while the four Sunni schools and the main Shi'a school of law differ from each other in some details. Folk Islam tells us that Muhammad was lifted up to heaven on the back of the *buraq* (a white animal similar to a horse with two wings), and God commanded Muhammad to teach the Muslim believers to pray 50 times per day. But when Moses urged Muhammad to plead God for reducing the number of prayers to five, God consented and Muhammad returned to earth.

The ritual prayer which is only prayed by Muslims is not just a prayer. Content, form, style, and manner are prescribed in detail. The very idea of ritual prayer is not that a Muslim prays at all, but that he fulfills exactly all the detailed requirements to make his prayer 'valid.'

Positions for the Prayer and Proper Clothing

There are several prescribed positions for prayer. First, the Muslim must look toward the Ka'ba in Mecca, Islam's central sanctuary. Then he speaks the first verse of the last surah of the Koran: "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind" (114:1). The 'declaration of purpose' (Arabic: *niyya*) which follows is necessary to make the prayer valid and determines how often the Muslim will bow down during the following prayer (Arabic: *rak'a*). Then the Muslim says, "God is great (or, greater)!" and enters a state of dedication until prayer is over. After that, he may speak a prayer of praise such

as, “Blessed are you, oh God, blessed are you! Great is your name ... there is no other God!” Then he recites the first surah, the *Fatiha*, additional Koran verses, and again bows down to praise God. Then he says, “May God be glorified!” or “May my Lord, the Exalted One, be glorified. Glory to him!” He stands up and says, “May God hear those who praise him!” Then he kneels and says, “God is great!” He falls down to the earth so that his toes, knees, palms of his hands, and his forehead touch the ground and says, “Praise be to you, my Lord, the most High,” which is repeated at least three times. Then he returns to his knees and repeats, “God is great!” When falling onto his face, he begs, “My Lord, forgive me, have mercy on me, give me what is due to me and lead me in the straight path.” This completes the first obeisance.

At the morning prayer, the Muslim prays two to four of such obeisances; at midday prayer and in the afternoon, four to eight; in the evening, three to five; and during the night, at least four or at most twelve. The Muslim also offers salutations toward God and Muhammad while praying. The *Shahada*, the Muslim creed, “There is no God but God and Muhammad is his messenger,” is uttered several times, as well as the blessings over Muhammad’s family and Muhammad himself. Those blessings can be understood as a plea to God to save Muhammad, since nobody knows for sure if Muhammad has already entered Paradise. At the end of prayer, a Muslim says, “Peace be upon you and the grace of God,” and looks to his right and left. While praying in the mosque, the Muslim addresses his neighbour; if he prays at home, he addresses the two angels that Folk Islam believes stand at each person’s right and left side, watching over every good and bad deed of the believer.

The very nature of ritual prayer is to submit to Allah and his omnipotence, to demonstrate one’s absolute surrender and devotion, a visible expression of man’s proper attitude toward God, which is the mark of a true believer, for the term ‘Muslim’ means ‘one who submits (to God),’ as ‘Islam’ means submission and devotion toward God, not ‘peace,’ as many Muslims claim (Muslims hold that there would be perfect peace on earth if mankind would completely convert to Islam.). The Islamic prayer ritual is thus primarily an act of obedience, the visible acknowledgement of God’s omnipotence – but for many Muslims, it is also an expression of true piety and praise to God (50:39-40). Many Muslims take their prayers very seriously.

Prayer also ties the individual to the greater Islamic congregation (Arabic: *umma*), to God, and even to the prophet Muhammad, for in each required prayer, blessing is called down on him.

While praying, the believer must be properly clothed and must observe all the necessary details, which include the order of the ceremony and the proper gestures of bowing and kneeling. Any deviation from the rituals, e.g., eating, speaking, or walking, invalidates the prayer (makes it *batil*), and it no longer counts as one of the five daily required prayers. Not only the words of prayer and the clothing are prescribed, but also the direction and the specific times for praying. To obtain the purity of a ritual by absolute before prayer is as important as the ‘declaration of purpose’ (which defines how many obeisances the Muslim will perform). If the Muslim has made any mistake during prayer, the whole process must be repeated from the beginning until the end. Pious Muslims often add an extra prayer just in case they have made some mistake.

Ritual Purity and Abolution

Before the prayer, the Muslim must complete either the ‘lesser’ or the ‘greater’ washing with water. If no water is available, he uses sand, since only those who have purified themselves may approach God (surah 4:43). Men can become unclean by touching any body liquids or by touching or consuming alcohol or pork meat; women, by menstruation or giving birth. Women must perform all omitted prayers later when they are ‘clean’ again. Pious Muslims often worry that they may have become ritually unclean, for that weighs more heavily than ‘small’ sins, as the state of uncleanness makes worship invalid (futile); ‘small sins’ don’t. The Koran says, “Truly, Allah loveth those who have a care for cleanliness” (surah 2:222; 9:108). According to tradition, the purification ritual serves to strengthen faith, to awaken repentance, and to purify believers of the sin. In addition, men must be covered from their navel to their knees. Women must be covered completely; only their hands and face can remain uncovered (although there are some differences between the schools of law).

Voluntary and Freely Formulated Prayers

Besides the required ritual prayers five times per day, extra ritual prayers may also be offered, e.g., when attending Friday worship in the mosque or

on special holidays, such as the one at the end of Ramadan. Although the believer is free to formulate his prayers in his own way, prayer books (which are Sufi prayer books, for the most part) contain the form of prayers. Islam also recommends prayers of praise and supplication during times of illness or for forgiveness of sins. This sort of prayer (Arabic: *du'â*) has only secondary value in contrast to the required ritual prayers.

Additionally, the Koran tells about people who approached God with their requests and were heard (3:38; 19:2-4). God commands his people to seek his aid so that he can fulfil their requests: "Pray unto me, and I will hear your prayer" (40:60), or "And when my servants question thee (i.e., Muhammad), then surely I am nigh. I answer the call of the suppliant when he crieth to me" (2:186). Muslims *hope* for God's assistance when they are in need, but they are not accustomed to bring their daily needs to God. Free prayers are generally offered as requests at the graves of the saints, or formulas are uttered, e.g., "Lord, be merciful on me ...". Free prayers can also be offered, e.g., when entering a house, before eating, when visiting the sick or travelling, if someone has died, or in the month of fasting. Prayer formulas sound like "In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate" (the *Basmala*); "God is great;" "May God be glorified;" "Praise to God;" or "O God, bestow your blessing upon Muhammad and his family."

Prayer Cancels (out) Sins

The deliberate failure to pray is one of the most terrible sins a Muslim can commit; his negligence makes him similar to an unbeliever who will be thrown into hell unless he repents before he dies, as tradition tells us. Islamic tradition says, "The first thing to be investigated on the day of judgment will be prayer." Men must participate weekly in the Friday prayers at the mosque. One tradition declares the faith of a man who fails to participate to be useless, for neither the fasting nor pilgrimages of such a person have any value in God's eyes. Praying at home has the same value as praying in a mosque, although in Folk Islam, praying in the mosque is considered to be more meritorious. Popular Islam believes that prayer cancels smaller sins and that prayer in the great mosque in Mecca expiates even major offenses.

Neither sickness nor disability excuses the failure to pray; one must always make up for any missed prayers; the dying must carry out the prayers in their thoughts. Children must learn to pray starting at the age of seven,

and some theologians recommend forcing them (even with blows) to pray once they have reached the age of about ten.

Because spoken prayer is a meritorious work which will be laid on the scales at the judgment (similar to fasting or performing the pilgrimage), it contributes to the individual's salvation and his entrance into Paradise, but at the same time, the required prayers are also a burden, particularly when, for example, one must catch up on all the missed prayers during a long time. Since no one can pray five times every day of his life, the Muslim is continually haunted by the fear that he will die without having fulfilled his obligation. Prayer is thus not a joyful expression of one's relationship to God, for it is not a confident conversation with the loving Father.

Prayer in the Bible

In the Bible, prayer is always voluntary, never an obligation, although this does not contradict the fact that God has told His children to pray. But still it is always a personal conversation with God and a great privilege: sinful man is not worthy of approaching God, but because Jesus pleads for the suppliant and purifies him from "all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9), man may approach God on his "throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). The Holy Spirit inspires the person's desires to turn to God in a prayer with his needs, whereas in Islam it is commanded that the suppliant fall down before God and fulfil what is required with the prescribed formulas.

According to the Bible, anyone can pray at any time, bringing anything before God. The Bible tells us in many instances that Christians should pray continuously and not at specific times (even if the Bible often mentions prayer in the morning, at midday, and in the evening). Because God is a Father to His children, He hears their prayers and does what is best for them although that does not mean that He automatically gives them everything for which they ask. Prayer is an expression of a vivid relationship between Creator and creation. Prayer can be offered when the believer wants to worship God or to thank Him; to praise Him; to intercede; to express his doubts, fears, or helplessness; to find relief; to express his complaints; or to ask for forgiveness. The prayers of churches and congregations stand under special promises (Matthew 18:18-20). God's children may approach Him with the intimate address of 'Dear Papa' ('Abba, dear Father;' Romans 8:15). Is that not a picture of intimacy, confidence, concern, and love? In Islam, God is not a father, only the creator, who could never be pulled down on the same level with his creation.

The Bible prescribes neither the form nor the amount of prayer required of the believer. Psalms and other texts, such as the prayers of Jesus, suggest possibilities, but these are not obligatory. Jesus himself refutes the idea that prayer ought to be offered in any certain direction or in a certain place (John 4:21), for He is the way to God (John 4:16). Scripture does not prescribe prayer times, a minimum number of prayers, posture, particular dress, washings, form, or language necessary to make the address pleasing or acceptable to God. Only the individual's attitude is necessary, not his words. His prayer should be earnest: he must believe (Matthew 21:22; James 1:6), be humble before God (James 4:6; Luke 18:13), and forgive others, just as God has forgiven him (us) (Matthew. 6:14-15). An unbeliever may also pray, for the Holy Spirit can speak to him as well and lead him to God through the experience of the answered prayer.

The water of ritual purification does not purify us in God's eyes: blood must be shed if we are to become pure (Hebrews 9:22), and only the blood of the very sacrifice, Jesus, suffices (Hebrews 10:14). Our prayers do not save us at the last judgment, for salvation is given only by grace through faith (Romans 5:1-2; Galatians 3:11-14).

10 Abraham in the Koran

In reading the Koran, one soon notices that it frequently mentions biblical characters such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Mary, or Jesus, but the accounts of their lives deviate strongly from the biblical version. Since, in the seventh century A.D., Muhammad must have had contact with Christian and Jewish groups and been familiar with biblical and extra-biblical stories, this inclusion of scriptural material in the Koran is hardly surprising. (Muslims, of course, see this differently and assume that the Koran relates the direct, unadulterated divine revelation.)

Muhammad used particularly the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets as a backdrop for his own life and his supposed calling as the last and most important prophet of history. The Koranic narrations are all strikingly similar in form and content; God sends a messenger to warn his people of impending judgment because of their unbelief and their idolatry, should they fail to believe the prophet. Because most of the hearers refuse to repent, God verifies the truth of the prophecy by sending the punishment, sparing only those who heed the warning.

The tale of Abraham follows a similar pattern.

Abraham as Role Model

Abraham, or Ibrâhîm, as he is called in the Koran, is one of Islam's most important prophets and is mentioned in 25 of the 114 surahs. The Koran calls him a "truthful man, a prophet" (surah 19:41), "an upright" (surah 4:125), "obedient to Allah," whom God chose and "guided on the right path" (surah 16:120-121). He was "forbearing, tender-hearted, often returning to Allah" (surah 11:75). Just as in the Bible,¹⁸ the Koran designates him a 'friend' of God: "Allah took Ibrahim as a friend" (surah 4:125).

The Koran also indicates Abraham's importance for the following generations, but whereas the Bible describes him as the 'Father of all believers'

¹⁸ 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8 (cited in James 2:23).

(Genesis 15:2, Romans 9:7-8) who walk in his steps (Romans 4:12), that is, the progenitor of all Christians, his function in the Koran is that of an exemplary believer: “Surely I will make you to an Imam of men” (surah 2:124). Surah 16:120-121 emphasizes his model behavior: “an exemplar, obedient to Allah...grateful for His favors” (surah 16:120-121).

Abraham as Prophet and Founder of the Ka’ba

The Koran has little to tell about Abraham’s life and concentrates on his conflict with his people’s polytheism. According to Muslim theology, he was already a Muslim in the sense that he preached monotheism to his antagonistic polytheistic neighbors – Islam considers itself to have existed as the original religion from the beginning of human history and to have been repeatedly taught by God’s messengers. At the same time, the Koran designates Abraham as neither Jew nor Christian (surah 3:67), but as a ‘Seeker of God’ (Arabic: *hanîf*; surah 6:79; 16:120). Even before Muhammad’s time, this term was used in ancient Arabic to designate a pious man. Although the Koran never defines the term more closely, its usage indicates that Muhammad used it to mean someone who no longer worshipped several gods but had already reached a stage of understanding closer to Islam.

The Koran, however, describes Abraham as having gone even further by indirectly confessing his Islamic faith. In surah 2:123, he uses the formulation, “I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds” (Arabic: *aslamtu li rabbi l-’alamain*). The expression ‘I submit myself’ (*aslamtu*), is used by the Queen of Sheba in surah 3:17 and in surah 27:44 to declare her conversion to Islam. In the eyes of Muslim interpreters, this confirms Abraham’s conversion to Islam.

Abraham is also important to Islam, because, according to the Koran, he and his son Ishmael were the founders of the central Islamic shrine, the Ka’ba, a place of prayer to the true God (surah 2:124-127), who has shown him that not the stars, but Allah, God over heaven and earth, governs human fate (surah 6:75). We can assume that Muhammad mentions the astrology of Abraham’s community in response to the ancient Arabic belief in the power of the stars over human destiny.

In the Koran, Abraham rejects his previous worship of the sun, the moon, and the stars (surah 6:76-69) and converts to the true God, but in order to confirm his belief and to remove all his doubts, he requests a mi-

racle; he wishes to see the dead restored to life. By reviving four birds which the prophet had slaughtered, God answers his prayer, proving that “Allah is Mighty, Wise” (surah 2:260). The killing of the birds is also important for the sacrifice of Abraham’s son, for the prophet has now experienced God’s ability to raise the dead. The Bible, however, relates Abraham’s unconditional faith in God (Hebrews 11:17-19), which does not hesitate to lay his son on the altar without any previous ‘proof’ of God’s trustworthiness (Genesis 22).

Abraham’s Calling

Abraham’s people, like Muhammad’s contemporaries, were polytheistic. After his conversion to Allah, the prophet receives the charge to purify the Ka’ba of its idols (surah (22:26-29). Abraham challenges his father, Azar,¹⁹ and his neighbors to renounce their polytheism, since Allah alone is omnipotent God. In surah 29:17, he tells them, “You only worship idols besides Allah and you create a lie; surely they whom you serve besides Allah do not control for you any sustenance, therefore seek the sustenance from Allah and serve Him and be grateful to Him; to Him you shall be brought back.” This turning point in Abraham’s life – the renunciation of polytheism traditional to his people and the appeal to his environment to believe in the one true God – reflects only too clearly Muhammad’s own history.

Abraham begs his father to cease serving Satan, but Azar refuses and threatens to have his son stoned. The prophet then prays to Allah to forgive his father (surah 19:44, 46-47; 26:86). This dramatic separation from the faith of his own family and their opposition also reflect Muhammad’s own situation. Proclaiming clearly his own new faith, Abraham explicitly renounces his father and his idolatry (surah 19:42-48).

Abraham Destroys the Idols in the Ka’ba

Abraham’s people then begin to justify their idolatry by appealing to the religion and tradition of their fathers, an excuse which the prophet rejects; there is only one God of heaven and earth. “Certainly you have been, (both) you and your fathers, in manifest error” (surah 21:54). When his audience still refuses to believe him, he destroys all their idols except the

¹⁹ See surah 6:74; in the Bible he is named Terah.

largest. When the enraged neighbors ask who has done the deed, he ironically suggests that not he, but the remaining image, was guilty (surah 21:63). Once more, he preaches monotheism, but the enraged neighbors decide to burn him to death. Allah then saves him, together with Lot, who had believed him (surah 29:26). The Koranic account neither gives any details of the deliverance nor mentions their flight to another country.

Abraham's Sons

Surahs 11:69 and 52:24 describe the promise of descendants to Abraham. He serves his guests a calf; they do not eat, but they promise him the birth of a “boy possessing knowledge.” His wife, shocked because she is too old, laughs (surah 11:71), and even Abraham doubts the promise because of his age (surah 15:54). After a while, first Isaac²⁰, then Jacob,²¹ are born (surah 19:49), and both are called as prophets. Unlike the Jacob of the Bible, the Koranic Ya'qub is not Abraham's grandson, but his son (see Genesis 25:19, 28).

God makes a covenant with Abraham and designates him leader of mankind. Islamic tradition adds that Allah made him the forefather of a great nation, the Arabs, descendants of Ishmael.

Abraham's Sacrifice – Isaac or Ishmael?

The Koran also includes a sacrifice account but with very different details: one of Abraham's sons dreams that his father is to kill him. Abraham assures the boy that the command must be obeyed. The question is, which son is meant, Isaac or Ishmael? Although no name is mentioned in the text of the Koran (surah 37:99-107), most Muslims believe that the son sacrificed was Ishmael. Older Koran commentaries, however, come to different conclusions. The most common argument asserts that this incident must have occurred before Isaac's birth, for the Old Testament speaks of Abraham's “only son” (Genesis 22:12). The scriptural account, however, specifies “your only son, Isaac” (Genesis 22:2).

On hearing of the dream, Abraham asks his son to make the right decision (surah 37:101-102). Interestingly, the account does not expressly de-

²⁰ Ishaq in the Koran.

²¹ Ya'qub in the Koran.

clare the command to have come from God, but only that Abraham interprets the dream in this way. Tradition relates that Abraham meditates for a day in order to determine whether the dream is from Allah or from Satan. In the evening, he receives the same revelation and understands this to be a confirmation that God has sent the message. Wishing to obey, Abraham is willing to sacrifice his son.

Tradition adds that the devil waylays Abraham and tries to dissuade father and son from their plan.

“He spoke to Ishmael, ‘Where are you going? You are much too young to die!’ To Abraham he said, ‘That cannot be right. How can Allah give such an inhuman command, and that to his friend?’ Not doubting Allah’s good plan, Abraham throws stones to drive the devil away.”²²

As Abraham then commences the sacrifice, Allah prevents him, assuring him that his intention to obey is just as good as obedience, and gives him a sacrificial animal as substitute for the son. God’s act is a test for Abraham (surah 37:103-107). In remembrance, each pilgrim ends his pilgrimage to the Day of Sacrifice in Mecca by sacrificing an animal whose meat is then distributed among the poor and among needy relatives. The Day of Sacrifice above, together with the Breaking of the Fast at the end of Ramadan, is one of the most important holidays in the Islamic calendar.

The Koranic account of Abraham’s life demonstrates major differences with the biblical version. The Koran’s Abraham plays a role only as example for mankind and as a prophetic type as Muhammad’s predecessor in the battle against idolatry. In the Bible, he is not only a patriarch significant in salvation history, but a role model for believers of following generations, who places his faith completely in God (see Hebrews 11).

²² *Geschichte der Propheten aus dem Koran*. Islamisches Echo in Europa 5. Hamburg: Islamisches Zentrum. 1982. pp. 40-41.

11 Jesus Christ in the Koran and in Muslim Theology

The Koran mentions only a few New Testament people by name: Jesus, John the Baptist, Zacharias, and Mary. The disciples are only mentioned as a group of people, but reading the Koran one never learns how many disciples Jesus had nor their names nor what their calling was.

Jesus (Arabic: *Îsâ*) the Prophet is described as an extraordinary person, but from an Islamic point of view. Muhammad confirms some aspects of New Testament Christology, rejects others, and ignores some altogether, delineating in 15 surahs and 93 verses a selective picture of Jesus. Modern research assumes that Muhammad was probably familiar with biblical material (in a mostly somewhat distorted and vague form) and with non-biblical sources such as tradition, Christian literature, and apocryphal Gospels, such as the Arabic gospel of Jesus' childhood. This non-biblical material seems to have been Muhammad's major source.

On the one hand, Jesus' role in the Koran is certainly extraordinary: He is the only prophet called "the Word of God" or "Spirit of God" (surah 4,171) and the only prophet who heals the sick, revives the dead, or creates life out of dead matter. On the other hand, the Koran insists that, in spite of his exceptional titles and gifts, he is only a human being and a prophet. "Jesus Christ, the Son of Mary, is only an apostle of Allah" (surah 4:171).

Jesus is one of the few Prophets in the Koran who brought scripture, the Gospel (Arabic: *al-injîl*), to mankind. The Injîl is not the complete New Testament or one of the Gospels but indicates that the apostle preached the message of the one Creator-God and the Judgment, i.e., Islam. The Koran pursues none of the New Testament doctrines and cites nothing from Paul's epistles or from the Book of Acts. The Crucifixion is mentioned in only one quite vague verse, but its significance for redemption and atonement is completely ignored.

Jesus' Birth

The Koran usually calls Jesus 'the Son of Mary,' a title possibly derived from Syrian and Arabic apocryphal texts²³ or from the liturgical language of the Coptic church in Ethiopia.²⁴ Mary, by the way, is often called 'the sister of Aaron' (e.g., surah 19:28) – Muhammad must have confused her with the Miriam of the Old Testament. The Koran narrates that a 'spirit,' assumed by Islamic tradition to have been the angel Gabriel, appears to Mary to promise her a son. The child, says the messenger, will be "a sign to men" (surah 19:21). Although, according to Islamic tradition, Jesus was sent only to his own people, Israel, the Koran emphasizes that he is also a sign for all humanity and for the whole world (surah 19:21).

At the angel's proclamation, Mary is frightened by the thought of having a child, since she is a virgin and 'no whore' (19:21). In contrast to the biblical account, the Koran does not mention Joseph at all. Like Adam, the Koranic Jesus is called to life by the power of God alone, which does not imply that he is any more than a human being. Unlike the New Testament's explanation of the Virgin Birth, this extraordinary act of creation is merely a divine sign, not an indication of any special function. While the New Testament interprets Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit as an indication of His role as the Son of God, the Koran and later Islamic theology both expressly reject Jesus' divine nature. A further difference is that the Bible says that Jesus was born of God, while the Koran insists that he was created.

Mary delivers her son under a palm tree.²⁵ Jesus immediately speaks with her and comforts her in her pain and her fear of her people's rejection. Shortly after, he addresses his contemporaries:

"Surely I am a servant of Allah; He has given me the Book and has made me a prophet; and He has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and poor-rate so long as I live" (surah 19:30-31).

²³ Edward Geoffrey Parrinder. *Jesus in the Koran*. Oxford University Press: New York 1977. pp. 27-29.

²⁴ G. C. Anawati. "Isa." in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. IV. E. J. Brill: Leiden 1990. pp. 81-86.

²⁵ Heikki Räisänen. *Das koranische Jesusbild. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie des Korans*. Finnische Gesellschaft für Ökumenik: Helsinki 1971. p. 20. Räisänen points out the similarity between this account and a tradition recorded in Pseudo-Matthew of the 8th or 9th century.

Jesus' Miracles

Interestingly, the Koran reports not only that Jesus did miracles, in contrast to Muhammad, but also that he did miracles no other prophet had achieved: he raised the dead and even created life out of inanimate matter, an act which the Koran otherwise ascribes only to Allah. Jesus acted, however, only as a creature on Allah's instructions, for he required 'God's permission' to do so (surah 3:49). Like other Koranic prophets, he could perform his miracles only in the power of God, not of himself.

Surah 3:49 announces that Jesus will form birds of clay and give them life with his breath, heal the blind and the leprous, resurrect the dead, and know things a mortal cannot usually know; but in contrast to the New Testament,²⁶ the Koran gives only one further account of Jesus' miracles. In this story, when the disciples expressly request an authentication of his authority, he has a table spread with food descended from heaven. When the disciples wish to eat the food in order to convince themselves of the veracity of his message, God hears their request but announces a hard punishment on any who refuse to believe after such a sign has been given (surah 5:112-115). This incident may have been drawn from the New Testament account of the feeding of the 5.000, from the Lord's Prayer's request for daily bread, or from the account of the Lord's Supper.

Except for the miracles, the Koran has little to say about Jesus' life. It says nothing about the preparation of the disciples for the beginning of Christian missions or about the content of Jesus' instruction. Heikki Räisänen summarizes the Koranic account of Jesus' teaching as follows:

1. Fear God and obey me.
2. God is my Lord and your Lord.
3. Serve Him.
4. That is a straight path.²⁷

The Koranic Jesus thus reveals no new doctrine but repeats the message of earlier prophets, the commandment to believe on the one Almighty Creator-God, as surah 5:46 expresses it:

“And We sent after them in their footsteps Isa, son of Mariam, verifying what was before him of the Taurat (i. e. the Torah), and We gave him the In-

²⁶ Jairus' daughter: Luke 8:49-56; the youth of Nain: Luke 7:11-17; Lazarus: John 11:1-45.

²⁷ Räisänen. *Jesusbild*. p. 47.

jeel (i.e., the Gospel) in which was...a guidance and admonition for those who guard (against evil)” (surah 5:46).

Jesus – Word of God

The Koran calls Jesus ‘the Word of God,’ a ‘spirit of Him,’ created by his word (4:171; 3:45).

“When the angels said: O Mariam, surely Allah gives you good news with a Word from Him (of one) whose name is the Messiah, Isa son of Mariam, worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near (to Allah)” (3:45).

Muslim commentators have made various attempts to explain the title ‘Word of God.’ Jesus was created by a word of God and is the ‘word’ laid into Mary.²⁸ He is the fulfillment of the creative word spoken by God at the moment of his conception, the word predicted by previous prophets, and the Good News which brings Allah’s message and directs mankind onto the right path,²⁹ but not the ‘logos’ (Greek: *word*) of the New Testament, the pre-existent Word of God, who participated in creation and was with the Father until He was sent into the world at a predetermined point of time (John 1:1). Thus the Koranic Jesus is only *a* word of God and not *the* Word of God. Only in surah 4:171 does the Koran call Jesus ‘*the* word’ (literally, ‘His word’), but here the context makes clear that Jesus is only God’s emissary, a prophet and a mortal human being.

Jesus - Spirit of God

The Koran describes Jesus seven times as the ‘Spirit of God,’ breathed into Mary (66:12) and empowered by God’s spirit: “... and We gave Isa, the son of Mariam, clear arguments and strengthened him with the holy spirit³⁰” (2:87, compare 2:253). However, not only Jesus received this sort of aid from the divine spirit. The Koran, which emphasizes that God strengthens all believers with his spirit (58:22) and that the spirit plays an active role in the revelation of the Koran, does not identify Jesus with the New Testament Trinity when it calls him the spirit of God.

²⁸ Parrinder. *Jesus*. p. 47.

²⁹ Anawati “‘Isâ’”. p. 83.

³⁰ or “spirit of holiness.”

Jesus - Messiah

Jesus is called the Messiah eleven times in the Koran (e.g., 3:45), but this designation does not indicate the New Testament role of Jesus as Redeemer or as Anointed One but is merely used as another name, as Christ. Muhammad had apparently never heard of Jesus' role as the Redeemer or Anointed One of His people, for the Koran never discusses the significance of the title but substitutes the title 'Christ' for 'Jesus' in several places without ever explaining its meaning. Since Muhammad was unfamiliar with the biblical significance of the term 'Messiah,' he could not identify Jesus with the salvation-bringing messenger prophesied in the Old Testament. The Koranic Jesus is called 'Messiah' but does not have the Messiah office defined in the New Testament.

Jesus - Servant of God

The Koran also calls Jesus the 'Servant:' "The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of Allah ..." (4:172). Again, we see the same treatment as with the other titles: Jesus is assigned the title 'Messiah,' but by calling him a servant of God, the Koran identifies him with the other messengers.

The Crucifixion, Death, and Return of Jesus

Because of the complicated ambiguous grammatical formulation, it is difficult to conclude from the single verse of the Koran which mentions the crucifixion (4:157, the 'crucifixion verse') whether Jesus was indeed crucified and died or not. The majority of Muslim interpreters and theologians believe that the Koran teaches that Jesus did not die but was rescued from the defeat and shame of the cross when Allah elevated him alive into heaven. Naturally, if they deny Jesus' crucifixion and death, they have no reason to believe in his resurrection, a doctrine which contradicts the Muslim view of his role and work. No other prophet died on a cross, and no other prophet was resurrected. Referring to liberal European theology, Muslims completely deny the resurrection, which they generally consider an invention by Jesus' disciples.

Whether or not Jesus will return to earth at the end of time is not clearly stated in the Koran, but Islamic tradition contains many detailed accounts

of Jesus' role at the end of the world: he will return to Damascus – the minaret on the left in the main Mosque of Damascus (the mosque of the Umayyads) is called 'Jesus minaret' because it is believed that Jesus will come down from heaven on this specific minaret. Jesus will then destroy the Antichrist with the sword, break all crosses, kill all pigs, destroy all synagogues and churches, and execute all Christians unwilling to accept Islam.

Then Jesus will perform Muslim prayer at the mosque in Jerusalem, whose local prayer leader (Imam) will offer his position to him. Jesus, however, will refuse and will join the congregation, thus explicitly declaring that he believes in the preeminence of the Islamic clergy and that he believes and practices Islam. After He has killed the Antichrist, most of the 'People of the Book' will believe in him and in Islam, and those refusing will be killed by Jesus, so that there will be only one congregation of faith, Islam. Justice and peace will reign on earth, including the animal kingdom (according to the Shi'ites). After 40 years, Jesus will die and be buried in Medina beside Muhammad and between the first two Caliphs after Muhammad, Abû Bakr and 'Umar.³¹ None of these details are to be found in the Koran, but these traditions concerning Jesus' activity at the end of time are commonly accepted in the whole of the Islamic world.

Conclusion: The Koran never criticizes Jesus or his behavior. He is one of the few who is close to Allah and commands respect in this world and in the beyond (3:45). Like all other messengers, he is an upright example for human piety.

On the other hand, the history and teaching of the Koranic Jesus, however extraordinary his titles, attributes, and actions may be, are in no way unique. His position as messenger of God has nothing to do with divine nature or sonship. He is, rather, a cog in the wheel of Allah's plan for the world, who fulfils his duty to preach the One Almighty God and the coming judgment. He confirms the Torah (5:46), just as Muhammad later confirmed his book, the Gospel, and purifies it of subsequent adulterations.

At the same time, Jesus was the apostle who proclaimed Muhammad's coming (61:6), which had already been prophesied in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament, as Islamic theology has 'discovered' in the last 150 years (7:157).

³¹ According to the traditions of Buhârî and Baidâwî; see Anawati. "Isâ". p. 124.

The Koranic Jesus is thus quite a different person from the Jesus Christ of the Bible. In spite of many superficial similarities, such as the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, his miracles, and his message from God, the Koran denies the essence of New Testament Christology: Jesus is neither the Son of God, the Crucified One, the Resurrected One, nor the Redeemer, which further dismantles the object of his mission: the salvation of His church and the preparation of the disciples for the evangelization of the world.

In spite of all the titles, in spite of all the miracles, the Koran limits Jesus' role to that of a prophet, a role which, by definition, leaves no room for the Christian perception of Him as Prophet, Son of God, and Savior, once and for all. Neither the Koran nor later Islamic theology can comprehend the Christian view, and thus they consider anything over and above his prophetic office to be false.

Jesus in the Doctrine of the Koran and Islamic Theology	
1.	Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary (19:16-33).
2.	He is 'Word' of God and 'Spirit of Him' (4:171).
3.	He is the Messiah (3:45).
4.	He brings mankind a revelation, the Gospel (<i>injil</i> ; 5:110).
5.	He confirms the Torah (3:50).
6.	He is a prophet of God, but only a human being. He preaches faith in the One God (5:175).
7.	He does miracles with God's permission. He heals the sick, raises the dead, and gives life to inanimate matter (5:110).
8.	He is only a human being. He does not want either himself or his mother to be deified (5:116-117).
9.	He is an example for mankind (43:57) and a revelation for mankind (19:21).
10.	He is a witness, who will testify at the Final Judgment against those who have refused to believe in him (4:159).
11.	He was created when God said, "Be!" (3:47; 19:21)
12.	He allowed some things forbidden by the Law of Moses (3:50).
13.	He taught monotheism (3:51).

14. He differed with the Jews who wanted to kill him (3:54-55).
15. He was commanded by God to offer Muslim prayers and to give alms (19:31-32).
16. He received God's blessing (19:31).
17. He is 'One brought close to God' (Arabic: <i>muqarrab</i>), 'one whom divine mercy has brought close to God.' ³²
18. He was without sin, as were all other prophets (according to Islamic theology).

Islamic Errors about Jesus

1. He did not die on the cross (3:54-55) but was lifted into heaven by God (4:157-158).
2. He did not rise again.
3. He is not the Redeemer.
4. He is called Messiah, but is not the Anointed One announced in the Old Testament.
5. He is neither God (5:17) nor a being similar to God nor God's Son (4:171). He confirms this himself (5:72).
6. He is not Lord (Arabic: <i>rabb</i> ; 9:71).
7. He is not the Second Person of the Trinity (5:73).

³² Stieglecker. *Glaubenslehren*. p. 256.

12 The Koran's View of Jesus – Son of God or Prophet?

True, both Muslims and Christians interested in dialogue emphasize Jesus' unique role in the Koran, His remarkable titles ('Messiah,' 'Word,' and 'Spirit of God') and his extraordinary deeds (healing the sick, raising the dead, giving life to inanimate matter). On the other hand, we must not ignore the Koran's explicit denial of the biblical doctrine that Jesus was the Son of God:

“Those are unbelievers, who say, ‘God is Christ, the Son of Mary’. Christ said, ‘Oh Children of Israel! Serve God, my Lord and your Lord! Allah refuses Paradise to anyone who associates others with Him. The fires of Hell will swallow him. And there is no helper for the blasphemous there’ (surah 5:72).

In spite of all external similarities between the Koran and the Bible, the Koran denies the essence of biblical doctrine: the doctrine of original sin, the incarnation of Jesus, and the salvation of the sinner by His death on the cross, as well as the Trinity, and the divine nature of Jesus. Muslims consider these doctrines intolerable and false.

Even those who advocate dialogue must admit that these points remain the classical controversies between the two religions. Christians and Muslims may both emphasize their mutual faith in the One Almighty Creator-God, in the Last Judgment, and in the resurrection of the dead, but a Muslim – as long as he embraces Islam – will never accept Jesus' divinity or His redemptive role. No Christian who believes the Bible can deny Jesus' divine Sonship and the doctrines derived from it.

Whereas the Bible teaches that salvation is only available to those who believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, as the Redeemer crucified and resurrected for the forgiveness of sin, Islam believes Paradise is only open to those who accept Muhammad as the Prophet of God and the Koran as God's revelation. Since the Koran explicitly denies Jesus' divine Sonship, an insurmountable gap lies between the dogmatic statements of the two faiths: only one can be true.

Why Does Islam Deny Jesus' Divine Sonship?

I want to mention the most important reasons.

1. The Sonship of Jesus contradicts Muslim ethics.

The Koran must deny that Jesus was God's Son, since Muhammad understood the relationship to be a physical one, as if God had taken a wife and begotten a child.

“But they have attributed sons and daughters to God. May He be praised! He is above what they report. The Creator of Heaven and Earth, how shall He have a child, since He has no consort and has created all things?” (6:110-101)

For Muhammad, there was no doubt that God can have no son, for he says in surah 43:81, “Let us assume that the Merciful One indeed had a child. I would be the first to worship it” (43:81). Surah 19 expresses even greater disgust at such a blasphemous idea:

“They say, ‘The Merciful One has added a child to Himself.’ You have thus done a reprehensible deed. The heavens crack at the thought, the earth is rent asunder and the mountains fall on themselves, for they attribute a child to the Merciful One. It is not worthy of Him to take a child” (19:88-92).

To Muhammad's mind, the assertion that God has ‘taken a child to Himself’ proves the ignorance of those who believe such a thing. It is a ‘lie’ (18:4-5). It is not “worthy of God to take a child for Himself” (19:34) or, as surah 112, frequently cited by Muslims, states:

“Say: ‘He, God is One!

God is the Eternal!

He does not beget, nor was He begotten!

There is nothing equal to Him!”³³

Later Muslim theologians have maintained and emphasized their denial of Jesus' divine sonship more strongly than does the Koran. They insist that God gives life only by his creative will, not by procreation.

³³ Translated by Olaf Schumann. *Der Christus der Muslime*. Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn: Gütersloh 1975. p. 30.

2. Since Jesus is not the Son, God is not the Father.

Since the Koran considers Jesus Christ only one prophet among many in Allah's plan, then God, the Creator, cannot be his Father. Since God, according to Islam, has no son, he cannot be described as Father and appears to the believer only as Creator and as Judge, never as Father.

God's revelation of himself as Father is, however, one of the most central statements of the Bible (2 Thessalonians 1:1; 1 Peter 1:17). His paternal love determines His dealings with mankind. The Bible emphasizes that He shows His love to His children by letting them call him Father. "See what love hath the Father bestowed on us, that we should be called God's children – which we are!" (1 John 3:1). God Himself compares His love with the love of a mother for her children (Isaiah 49:15), and His divine paternal love is the perfect example for every father on earth (Ephesians 3:15).

In Islam, however, any affinity between the eternal, almighty God and a mortal is inconceivable. It contradicts the very nature of Allah, for there can be no comparison with God or closeness on any level, certainly not on the level of family relationship.

While the Bible insists that man has no way to approach God but by His Son Jesus ("No one comes to the Father but by Me," John 14:6), Islam has no such bridge between creation and Creator.

3. Jesus' Sonship contradicts God's Oneness.

In addition, the Christian dogma of Jesus' divine Sonship violates the Muslim concept of Allah's unique nature and his oneness (Arabic: *tauḥîd*), the most important tenet of Islamic theology. According to the Koran and to Muslim theologians, to set another deity beside Allah is polytheism (Arabic: *shirk*), the worst form of idolatry, even worse than atheism. Whoever sets another god beside Allah will be thrown into hell for eternity and cannot enter Paradise.

As Muhammad particularly objected to the ancient polytheism of his people, it seems only logical that he rejected a supposed Christian form. If his opposition to ancient Arabic tribal polytheism included the pagan goddesses, then he could certainly never accept a 'Son of God,' who not only claims status equal to the Creator but also is supposed to have divine nature

and power. Such an individual challenges God's position as the one and only Lord of the world.

4. God does not reveal Himself as a mortal.

The Bible teaches that God spoke "at various times and in various ways ... to the fathers by the prophets" and has "in these last days spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1-2).³⁴ The incarnate Word of God lived among men; God revealed Himself in and through the Man Jesus Christ.

Muslims believe that revelation occurs not through a person but by a writing, a copy of the original revelation in heaven. The idea that Jesus *is* divine revelation, the Word of God in human flesh, disagrees with the Muslim concept of divine revelation. Even Muhammad only gave his people, the Arabs, a revelation in their own language in order to correct their idolatry and to lead them back to the worship of the one true God.

5. God remains a mystery separated from creation.

The Koran illustrates God's activity with many accounts, but Allah remains hidden from man and separated from him. He is invisible, a mystery (2:2). His nature can be comprehended only by his names, which designate attributes, and is still incomprehensible, incomparable, and unpredictable.

Thus the Muslim, however convinced he may be that he has the right religion, remains unsure how God will judge him at the Last Judgment. To be sure of one's salvation would mean to bind God to a predictable verdict, thus abridging his absolute sovereignty. Allah's thought and activity are for the believer not to understand but to worship and to confess.

6. Muslim theologians argue against Jesus' divine Sonship.

Drawing from Western historical criticism, Islamic theology has added new arguments against Jesus' divine nature. It was this literature which 'proved' to them that biblical revelation might not have been reliably handed down.

³⁴ New King James translation.

These theologians also frequently quote the Bible itself to support their arguments. They claim, for example, that the Gospels always emphasize Jesus' human limitation – His hunger, His weariness, His dependency in the Garden of Gethsemane – unthinkable for God's Son. Since He did not know the time of the Last Judgement (Matthew 24:26), He was not omniscient, as God is. He points out Himself that the Father is greater than He is (John 14:28), thus 'denying' that He is God. Islamic theologians support the idea that His office was only prophetic with such Scriptures as "A prophet has no honor in his own country" (John 4:44) or "Know that God has made Jesus, whom you killed, Lord and Messiah" (Acts 2:36).

Muslim apologists also cite Psalm 2:7: "You are my Son, today I have begotten You," to prove that Jesus was human, and John 14:31: "As the Father commands me, so I do," to demonstrate that He was only a servant sent by God. Jesus also refers to His position as servant elsewhere: "When you have lifted the Son of Man, you will know that I am He and that I do nothing of Myself, but everything as My Father has taught Me" (John 8:28). The teaching of this prophet came from God but required only a human being to deliver it: "My teaching is not Mine, but that of He who sent me" (John 7:16).

Nor does the creation react to Jesus as if God were walking on earth as a man; there are no supernatural signs. Besides, Jesus' temptation represents a real battle with Satan. This means, so Muslim theologians believe, that the supposed Son of God is not superior to Satan, for he struggles like a mortal. Nor are his miracles – healing, raising from the dead – extraordinary, but mere 'prophet's miracles,' which Jesus does in the power of God and only with God's explicit permission.

John 11:41 relates, for example, that Jesus prays, "Father, I ask You, as I have always asked of You, and as You have always heard Me, hear Me now; I ask you because of these, who stand here, that they may know that You have sent Me." Jesus cannot be God, according to Islam, if he must ask the Creator to hear his prayers and to assist him in doing his miracles and if he is completely dependent on God, as John 5:19 seems to confirm: "Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself."

Of course, the Bible also contains counter-arguments against these twisted interpretations, which are based on statements that have been taken out of context and perverted. Anyone who intends to discuss these Scriptures with Muslim friends must be sufficiently prepared to demonstrate that such statements can be refuted by the context of the Bible text itself. Ultimately, however, the personal decision as to the accuracy of the Koran or

the Bible does not depend on the individual verse but on the individual's predisposition. For Muslim theologians, who categorically deny Jesus' divine Sonship, these texts confirm Jesus' humanity and his prophetic office, but for Christians, these same words, taken in the total context of Scripture, provide no arguments against the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ.

13 The Crucifixion of Jesus in View of Muslim Theology³⁵

It is commonly known that the question as to whether Jesus was crucified and what significance the crucifixion has belongs to the major points of discussion between Islam and Christianity. Whereas for Christianity a rejection of the crucifixion and salvation touches the center of the Christian faith, in the Koran, the event plays only a minor role. Muslim theology nevertheless has made extensive comments on the crucifixion.

The Crucifixion in the Koran

The Koran deals with the crucifixion of Jesus only in a single verse. Because of its ambiguity, this verse is the starting point of all discussion about the crucifixion. Surah 4:157-158 reads:

“... and they (the Jews) have said, ‘Verily we have slain Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of God.’ But they slew him not, neither crucified him, but it seemed to them as if (or: he seemed to them to be crucified).³⁶ They did not kill him with certainty.³⁷ No, God took him up³⁸ unto himself.”³⁹

It is interesting to note that the Koran does not even mention or hint at the *meaning* of the crucifixion of Jesus as the salvation of his people. It is very likely that Muhammad, who came into contact with monophysites, Christian heretics, and sects of his time, had never heard a true, biblical

³⁵ Reprinted from “The Crucifixion of Jesus in View of Moslem Theology”. Reflection: An International Reformed Review of Missiology 5 (1994/1995): 3/4 (March/May): 23-29 = Chalcedon Report No. 337 (Aug. 1993): 24-28.

³⁶ In Arabic: “shubbiha lahum”.

³⁷ In Arabic: “mâ qatalûhu yaqînan”.

³⁸ In Arabic: “bal rafa’ahû Allâh ilaihi”.

³⁹ My own translation.

representation and explanation of the meaning of the crucifixion, which is therefore not to be found in the Koran.⁴⁰

From the Arabic terms used in this verse (*shubbiha lahum*: “it seemed to them as if;” *mâ qatalûhu yaqînân*: “they did not kill him with certainty”), it is obvious that it is quite difficult to prefer a certain translation, since translation means, at the same time, interpretation. From the wording alone, one can either think that the Koran defends the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ or that it rejects both because of the Arabic expression *shubbiha lahum* (which means ‘it’ or ‘he’ seemed to them as if or “he was made similar for them”). Several different interpretations have been given by Muslim Koran commentators:

1. Nobody was crucified: Then surah 4:157-158 means it remains uncertain what happened at the time of the crucifixion. The Jews aimed at crucifying Jesus, but “it seemed to them only as if” the crucifixion of Jesus had taken place. The Jews thought that they had crucified Jesus, but because of the darkness and the earthquake, which the Bible also reports, he escaped his execution and was in time raised to heaven by God. Only a minority of Muslim theologians advocate the opinion that nobody was crucified.

2. Jesus was crucified, but it was because of God’s decree: With the expression *shubbiha lahum* (“it seemed to them as if”), it could also be emphasized that Jesus was crucified but not because the Jews intended to do so, but because of God’s own decree. The emphasis then lies on the first word “,*hey* slew him not” (but *God* caused his death and the Romans did the job). This opinion is today more an outsider’s position in Muslim theology.

3. Another person was crucified instead of Jesus: A further interpretation of the expression *shubbiha lahum* (“it seemed to them as if”) could be: It seemed to them as if Jesus was crucified. Then the verse would mean that Jesus himself was not crucified himself, but someone else was; Jesus was either unintentionally mistaken for another person (this is today the opinion of the well-known Muhammad Taufiq Sidqî and of the great Shi’îte theologian Muhammad Husain Tabâtabâ’î) or God intentionally transformed another person into the image of Jesus so that he looked simi-

⁴⁰ For a more detailed description of the Christian Church in Arabia at Muhammad’s time see Günter Riße. “*Gott ist Christus, der Sohn der Maria*”. *Eine Studie zum Christusbild im Koran*. Borengässer: Bonn 1989.

lar to Jesus and was crucified in his place.⁴¹ Jesus was risen to heaven alive, but everybody thought that Jesus was crucified himself (this opinion is, for example, defended in the classical Koran commentary of at-Tabarî). This interpretation of surah 4:157-158 is the most frequent one today in the Muslim world. But there are also many different opinions when it comes to the question, who was crucified in Jesus' place.

Was Jesus Himself Crucified or another Person?

If Jesus was not crucified himself, then the question arises, who was taken in his place? Muslim theologians have given many different answers to this question, since the Koran does not give any hint. Some classical Koran commentators, Zamahsharî or Baidâwî, hold the opinion that one of Jesus' disciples, for example, Peter, offered himself as 'substitute' for his master, because Jesus had promised him Paradise as a reward. Others think that Judas was chosen in order to pay for his betrayal. Various other ideas exist among Muslim theologians concerning this substitute: it could have been an unknown person, a Jew or someone who was there accidentally; Simon from Cyrene, who carried the cross; Josua; the Jew Titanus; one of Jesus' guardians; someone who was created by God in this very moment; Satan himself; Jesus Barabbas; a Jewish rabbi; one of the Roman soldiers; or a criminal who was involved in the matter by God.

Although there are famous commentators like Zamahsharî who reject the 'substitution theory,' in modern times Muslim exegetes tend to prefer it. The substitution theory means that not Jesus himself was crucified, but somebody else in Jesus' place. Still everybody thought the victim to be Jesus, because God made this person to look similar to him. Therefore the eyewitnesses had no doubt that Jesus himself was crucified. Most of the commentators today hold the opinion that one of Jesus' disciples (some give him a name; others do not) was the victim, while Jesus was still alive and taken to heaven, with his soul or with his soul and body.

The so-called *Gospel of Barnabas*, a forgery from the late Middle Ages, claims to be the only true gospel of Jesus Christ but contains many Muslim doctrines which attack the Bible. This gospel has become very famous in the Muslim world, especially since its translation into Arabic in the begin-

⁴¹ Louis Massignon has argued that this theory has a Shi'ite origin: Louis Massignon, "Le Christ dans les Évangiles selon Ghazali." In: *Revue des Études Islamique* 6/1932. p. 523-536; p. 535.

ning of the twentieth century. It argues that, having been made so similar to Jesus that the Messiah's own family and disciples considered him to be Jesus, Judas was led to the Mount of Calvary and was crucified against his will in Jesus' place.⁴²

Consequently, Muslim Koran commentators only agree, concerning surah 4:157-158, that Jesus could bring no salvation to mankind even if he would have been crucified. But most modern Muslim Koran commentators totally neglect the possibility of Jesus' being crucified.

What Happened to Jesus?

The difficult Arabic expression about Jesus' crucifixion is followed by the Arabic term *mâ qatalûhu yaqînan* ("they did not kill him with certainty"). Again we find several ways of understanding this affirmation among Muslim theologians:

1. Jesus was crucified but did not die: The contents of the expression could be that the Jews did not really kill Jesus, who was crucified. Jesus did not die on the cross and was taken down alive. Muslim theologians argue that the word 'crucify' in surah 4:157-158 does not mean automatically 'to die on the cross.' Then there are different possibilities about what happened to Jesus.

2. Jesus was not crucified, and, therefore, he was not killed: Then the first sentence of the verse, "they slew him not nor crucified him," means, in light of the second part, "they did not kill him *with certainty*," that they were certain of not having killed him.

3. It was not clear whether Jesus was killed: "They did not kill him with certainty" means, in this case, that nobody could be sure whether Jesus was killed or not. Then the question remains whether Jesus was crucified or taken up to heaven alive.

⁴² A detailed study of the history and effectiveness of the gospel is part of my doctoral thesis: Christine Schirrmacher. *Mit den Waffen des Gegners. Christlich-Moslemische Kontroversen im 19. Jahrhundert, dargestellt am Beispiel der Auseinandersetzung um Karl Gottlieb Pfanders 'mîzân al-haqq' und Rahmatullâh ibn Khalîl al-'Uthmânî al-Kairânawîs 'izhâr al-haqq' und der Diskussion über das Barnabasevangelium.* Klaus Schwarz Verlag: Berlin 1992. p. 241ff.

Why Should God Allow Jesus to Be Crucified?

As we have seen, it is not clear from the Koran text itself what it really wants to say concerning the crucifixion. The only thing which is quite obvious is that the Koran does not explicitly teach or explain the crucifixion and its consequences for mankind. Most of the Muslim theologians understood surah 4:157-158 as a clear rejection of the crucifixion. But why do they fight the crucifixion so vigorously? Islamic dogmatics teach:

1. Crucifixion means defeat: If Jesus had really died on the cross, it would have meant the failure of his whole mission.⁴³ His disciples had forsaken him, Judas had betrayed him, Peter had disowned him, and Jesus was dying without the visible success of thousands being converted or of the establishment of an empire like the Islamic one, which came into being in the seventh century at the end of Muhammad's lifetime. Muhammad's political and religious success is considered as real proof of his prophethood by Muslim theologians.

2. Crucifixion means disgrace: Such a disgrace as it would be to be nailed on the cross like a criminal would have been a death unworthy of an honored prophet. God would be unjust if Jesus had suffered like a wicked transgressor, and God would not have been on Jesus' side, since he did not rescue him in such a desperate plight. Western orientalist think that the Koran perhaps aimed at vindicating Jesus with the verse in surah 4⁴⁴, since the end of the verse reads as if Jesus was taken away from his persecutors: "God took him up to himself." Hermann Stieglecker summarizes:

"The idea of the Christians, that God could have humiliated himself to such a degree, that his enemies, the vulgarest mob, could mock, deride and ill-treat him like an idiot or a fool and that he eventually suffered the most shameful and painful death like a criminal between two real criminals, that is an outrageous disgrace ..."⁴⁵

3. Also, the Bible does not really support the crucifixion: Muslim theologians have taken some of their arguments against the crucifixion out of the Bible itself and point to the fact that the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy 21:23, teaches that the one who is hung on a tree is under God's

⁴³ This is, for example, emphasized by the Muslim author Ahmad Shafaat. *The Gospel According to Islam*. New York 1979. p. 90.

⁴⁴ So, for example, the opinion of James Robson, "Muhammadan Teaching about Jesus." In: *The Moslem World* 29 (1939) pp. 37-54.

⁴⁵ Stieglecker. *Glaubenslehren*. p. 315.

curse. Consequently, Jesus could not have died on the cross, since he was an honored prophet and not a cursed criminal. Also, the Gospels are used by Muslim theologians to show that Jesus' words on the cross, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" prove that Jesus was crucified against his will (and not, like Christians say, voluntarily). Additionally, Jesus cried in pain and was therefore weaker than were the two criminals who did not cry. How could he have been the Son of God?

Another argument for the Muslim opinion that Jesus was rescued before he could be crucified is taken from Hebrews 5:7, a verse Christians believe to be dealing with resurrection: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions, with loud cries and tears to the One who could have saved Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverent submission" (i.e., God did not deliver him from crucifixion). In addition, the narratives of the Gospels are so different and contradict each other so much that nobody can guarantee the truth of the reports. One of the spiritual leaders of the Egyptian Muslim brotherhood (*al-iḥwân al-muslimûn*), Sayyid Qutb, argues that none of the narratives of the Gospels are recorded by eyewitnesses, and therefore they are not reliable. So liberal European theology has contributed much to the Muslims' perception of the untrustworthiness of the Bible.

4. The crucifixion and representative salvation are intellectual nonsense: Again and again, Muslim apologists point out that the death of a mortal man (since for Muslim theology Jesus is not God but only a human being) cannot bring salvation to another human being. The fact that Jesus did not deserve his death, but suffered innocently, adds to this intellectual nonsense. The idea that Jesus carried and took away all sins of mankind makes the concept of the crucifixion of a prophet of God even more untrustworthy. It is not compatible with human intelligence⁴⁶. (This is, of course, beyond logic: Muslim theologians have argued that Christian doctrines are not compatible with human intellect. But since in their eyes only the doctrines of Islam are reasonable themselves, any deviant teaching must be unreasonable and absurd).

5. The idea of crucifixion has its origin in heathen religions: Famous Muslim apologists such as the well-known jurist Muhammad Muhammad Abû Zahra (1898-1974), who was teaching world religions at the tradi-

⁴⁶ This is argued by the reform theologian Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ in his Koran commentary composed out of material of Muhammad 'Abduh and himself: *tafsîr al-Qur'ân al-hakîm*. Cairo 1911. Vol. 6. pp. 26-27.

tional Egyptian center of learning, the al-Azhar university in Cairo, or the historian Ahmad Shalabî, who has done his doctorate of history in Cambridge, have ‘pointed out’ that Christian dogmas such as the Trinity, the Sonship of Jesus, or the Christian idea of salvation were not originally part of Christianity but were introduced by the apostle Paul, the one who – in their opinion – corrupted Christianity after the death of Jesus. Such ideas, they argue, originated from the Roman-heathen environment of early Christianity and were taken into it like certain elements from Neo-Platonism and Judaism⁴⁷.

Ahmad Shalabî and perhaps the most influential reform theologian of the beginning of the twentieth century, Muhammad Rashîd Ridâ (1865-1935), hold that the idea of salvation through bloodshed originated in the heathen religions of Tibet, Nepal,⁴⁸ or India.⁴⁹ Muhammad Asad, who was converted from Judaism to Islam sometime after 1920, thinks the doctrine of forgiveness through the death of Jesus on the cross may have come from the Mithras cult. In any case, it was introduced into Christianity after Jesus’ death.⁵⁰

Higher Criticism Supports Muslim Apologetics

It has by now become evident that Muslim apologists make use of the Bible in order to seek arguments against the crucifixion. Even more arguments are taken out of the theological literature of higher criticism of Europe, mostly from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There is, for example, the theory that Paul falsified the original Christian teaching. In Europe (and especially in Germany), many professors of theology at the universities have collected much material in order to prove that the Bible of the Old and New Testaments is totally unreliable and especially historically untrustworthy.

Muslim apologists have translated many of these theological books and have used the arguments of (mostly) German professors and so have simply repeated the opinions of ‘specialists,’ i.e., Christian theologians. From

⁴⁷ Such arguments are to be found at Muhammad Muhammad Abû Zahra. *muhâdarât fî-nasrânîya*. Cairo 1966/3. p. 11.

⁴⁸ Ahmad Shalabî. *muqâranat al-adyân*. Vol. II. al-masîhîya. Cairo 1965/2. p. 123.

⁴⁹ Rashîd Ridâ. *tafsîr*. p. 26.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Asad (Ed.). *The Message of the Koran*. Gibraltar 1980. p. 134.

the middle of the nineteenth century onward, Muslim theologians have collected whole encyclopedias of ‘contradictions, errors, and mistakes’ of the Old and New Testaments, and these works have been reprinted until today and used for attacks against Christian missionaries.

Christian missionaries, who arrived in the Muslim world at the beginning of the nineteenth century, had for the most part not heard of these differentiated arguments, but after the middle of the nineteenth century, Muslims made use of the arguments of Strauss, Michaelis, Eichhorn, and other theologians of that time against the conservative missionaries.

When dealing with Jesus’ crucifixion, Muslim theologians also go back to higher criticism of European theologians, who have pointed out that the biblical narratives of the crucifixion themselves report that a chaos and a great confusion emerged because of the darkness and the earthquake, so that nobody knew what happened to Jesus. The narratives of the different Gospels are considered to contradict each other and are therefore untrustworthy. One Muslim opinion, that Jesus survived his crucifixion, also garners its support from so-called rationalism, the last epoch of enlightenment theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe.

Christian Rationalistic Theologians Deny the Crucifixion

One can see that the older Koran commentators are relatively cautious in deciding what happened to Jesus. Most theologians restrict themselves to emphasizing one part of the crucifixion verse, “They slew him not, neither crucified him,” but they do not explain specifically what happened to Jesus. In modern Koran commentaries this attitude has changed; the commentators explain more precisely what is meant by surah 4:157-158. Most of them prefer the ‘substitution theory,’ that another person died in Jesus’ place. Especially after the Arabic translation of the Gospel of Barnabas 1908, most Muslims accept from this so-called Gospel that Judas was crucified in Jesus’ place.

Also, the theory that Jesus was crucified but survived crucifixion perhaps did not emerge in Islam itself but was possibly imported from Europe, since rationalistic theologians speak of a deathlike rigidity into which Jesus fell after crucifixion. He was revived afterward because of the thunderstorm and the earthquake; then the myth of his resurrection from the dead was invented.

A few examples from rationalistic theology include Karl Heinrich Georg Venturini (1768-1849), a forerunner of rationalism, who hints in his influential novel about the life of Jesus *Natürliche Geschichte des großen Propheten von Nazareth*⁵¹ (*Natural History of the Great Prophet of Nazareth*) at the possibility of a suspended animation. Karl Friedrich Bahrdt (1741-1792) formulates later in his work *Ausführungen des Plans und Zwecks (sic) Jesu (Performance of the Plan and Purpose of Jesus)*⁵²:

“... this is my opinion about the last part of the history of Jesus. Jesus had been put to death: he had suffered all tortures of an evildoer, all pains of death, but he also survived them – he came from death to life – and he came out of the grave ... on the third day after his execution – as somebody wholly restored and has shown himself to his disciples as somebody being revived ...⁵³

These remarks of K. F. Bahrdt were expanded by Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761-1851) in his work *Das Leben Jesu als Grundlage einer reinen Geschichte des Urchristentums (The Life of Jesus as the Basis of a Pure History of Early Christianity)*.⁵⁴ Paulus does not speak of a swoon, but he calls the state of Jesus ‘dwindling of consciousness,’ ‘rigidity,’ and ‘being dazed.’ In this state Jesus was taken down from the cross. Paulus held that there was nothing unnatural concerning Jesus’ life and death, and he was convinced that Jesus did not move when taken down from the cross, but he was not dead.

Many well-known German theologians, e.g., Daniel Ernst Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) took over this idea that Jesus being crucified does not necessarily mean that he had died on the cross. It is possible that Muslim theologians also took up this theory from the works of German theologians and included it in their theology.

⁵¹ Karl Heinrich Georg Venturini. *Natürliche Geschichte des Großen Propheten von Nazareth*. 4 Parts. Bethlehem 1806/2.

⁵² Karl Friedrich Bahrdt. *Ausführungen des Plans und Zwecks (sic) Jesu*. Berlin 1784-1793.

⁵³ Bahrdt. *Ausführungen*. Vol. 10/1786 p. 187.

⁵⁴ Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus. *Das Leben Jesu als Grundlage einer reinen Geschichte des Urchristentums*. Heidelberg 1828. pp. 242-244+256-257.

Did Jesus Survive Crucifixion?

The theory, held by German rationalistic theologians, that Jesus survived his crucifixion was especially defended by the so-called Islamic Ahmadiya movement, which is today considered heresy, since the founder of the movement at the beginning of the twentieth century claimed to be a further prophet, while Muslim theology holds that Muhammad was the last prophet in human history (“the seal of the prophets”).

In numerous books and articles, the Ahmadiya movement proclaims the theory that Jesus was nailed to the cross but only fainted, was taken from the cross while still alive, and was revived in the cool grave with the help of special ointments. Then he wandered through Afghanistan to Kashmir in search of the ‘ten lost tribes of Israel.’ He was married in Kashmir, died a natural death at the age of 120 years, and was buried in Srinagar, Kashmir. At this place, people visit the grave of a certain Yuz Asaf as Jesus’ grave until today.⁵⁵ Today the theory that Jesus survived crucifixion again experiences a renaissance on the German book market.

Conclusion: In surah 4:157-158, the Koran treats the crucifixion of Jesus in two verses only. From the wording itself, it is not clear whether the verses generally deny the crucifixion of Jesus or want to emphasize another aspect of it. Muslim theology categorically denies the crucifixion but denies even more the Christian idea of salvation through crucifixion. Numerous arguments against the crucifixion and salvation are taken from the theological works of higher criticism of European theologians.

Muslim theologians offer different answers to the question of what happened to Jesus after the crucifixion. The theory of a substitute, perhaps Judas, who might have died in Jesus’ place, is today a very well-accepted theory. The Ahmadiya movement holds, like German rationalistic theologians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that Jesus was crucified but survived crucifixion, migrated to India, and eventually died a natural death.

⁵⁵ This theory is, for example, defended in the book by Mîrzâ Ghulâm Ahmad. *Jesus in India. Being an Account of Jesus’ Escape from the Cross and of His Journey to India*. Oxford 1978.

14 The Koran on the Trinity

The Koran and Muslim theology reject the idea of Jesus' divine Sonship as false and abhorrent, as we have seen. The Koran's position on the Trinity is closely related to the question of Jesus' divine Sonship.

A. Belief in the Trinity is Considered to be Idolatry.

In the same way that the Koran denies the divine Sonship of Jesus, it also objects to the Trinity – without understanding the biblical doctrine. Muhammad probably had only a confused understanding of the Christian faith; there were Christian monks and hermits in his surroundings, but as far as we know, there was no New Testament church. He seems to have had contact with several Christian heresies but not with doctrinally balanced groups.

Additionally, no complete Arabic Bible was available during Muhammad's lifetime. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that Muhammad misunderstood the biblical concept of the Trinity, a monotheistic faith in God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit as a unity of three Persons.

The Koran condemns the doctrine of the Trinity, which it believed to be a group of three deities: God the Father; Jesus Christ as a physical son of God; and Mary as the mother of Jesus. It never mentions the Church's doctrine of the Holy Spirit as a Person of the Trinity. For these reasons, we can assume that Muhammad was completely unfamiliar with the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.

In preaching Islam, Muhammad was primarily concerned with the polytheism of his Arab contemporaries. Since he believed that the Christians had retained two extra deities beside the Creator, he insisted that Jesus rejected the faith on himself as son of God and on Mary his mother: "When God said: 'Jesus, son of Mary! Did you then say to the people, 'Take to yourselves me and my mother as gods besides Allah?' He said: 'Praise to You! I am not entitled to speak, where I have no right'" (5:116). In this

way, the Koran denies that there could be human beings who might be honored as gods beside Allah. This is, however, not what the Bible teaches. Christians consider this idea idolatry and reject it just as vehemently as do the Muslims.

In his 1734 English translation of the Koran, George Sale mentions the Mariamites, who are supposed to have worshipped a Trinity consisting of God, Christ, and Mary.⁵⁶ The adoration of Mary as a martyr, which began in the early church, her identification with pagan goddesses (such as the Diana of Ephesus), and the resulting elevation of her person to semi-deification as ‘Mother of God’ and as ‘God-bearer’ must have played a role in the Koran’s rejection of the Trinity.⁵⁷

In objecting to the idea that Allah had begotten a child by having a sexual relationship with a woman, the Koran thus denounces the Trinity but misunderstands it to be a form of polytheism which is equally foreign to biblical teaching. Muhammad also saw in the Trinity a denial of God’s uniqueness, a doctrine which could allow no other gods beside Allah, the almighty and omniscient Creator. He considered Allah’s unique position so indisputable that he could conceive of no commensurate being beside him; Allah is too sublime to have a child.

B. Belief in the Trinity is Considered to be Unbelief.

Since at the center of Islamic theology is the belief that there is only one God (Arabic: *tauḥîd*) to whom nothing comes close on any level – certainly not on the level of family relationship – the Trinity is emphatically rejected in the Koran. To refute the Christian concept of Trinity, the Koran states,

“Those are unbelievers, who speak: ‘God is one of three.’ And if they do not cease with what they say, those who are unbelievers will receive painful punishment ... Christ, the son of Mary, is only a messenger. There were other messengers before him” (5:73+75).

⁵⁶ A. J. Wensinck and Penelope Johnstone. “Maryam” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. VI. E. J. Brill: Leiden 1991. pp. 628-632.

⁵⁷ Parrinder. *Jesus*. p. 135. Parrinder describes several heretical Christian forms of the worship of Mary.

The Koran insists that Jesus Christ was only a prophet equivalent to the many other prophets before him and that the Christians who persist in their belief in his divine Sonship will spend eternity in hell.

Surah 4:171-172 addresses the Christians in a similar fashion:

“You People of the Book! Do not go too far in your religion and speak only truth about God! Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, is only God’s messenger and His Word, which He brought to Mary, and the spirit of Him. Believe in God and His messengers. And do not say ‘three!’ Stop! That is better for you. God is One God. He is praised and too sublime to have a child. Heaven and Earth belong to Him. And He suffices as Protector. Christ will not refuse to be a servant of God, nor will the angels close (i.e., to God)” (4:171-172).

C. Belief in the Trinity is Considered to be a Misunderstanding.

In addition, the Islamic theologians claim that the Bible never explicitly formulates the Trinity as dogma: Jesus never refers to the Trinity, and no prophet of the Old Testament deals with the issue.

Muslim apologists (defenders of the faith) refer to the history of the early church in order to confirm their arguments. They suggest that the doctrine of the Trinity was ‘invented’ by the earliest church councils, who twisted Scripture in order to ‘prove’ the idea. Christian arguments cited from the New Testament are considered unreliable by Muslims, for they believe its text to have been corrupted and falsified.

Here we must note that Christian theology has done little to refute Muslim apologetics. There is little sound literature to explain to Muslims the difference between the Trinity of Scripture and pagan polytheism or to refute their arguments against the Trinity or the divine Sonship of Jesus. Appropriate literature provided by Christians convinced of the divine inspiration of the Bible is desperately needed for this purpose.

D. Jesus is Considered not to be a Mediator.

The idea that Jesus is a Mediator between God and man is closely related to the doctrine of the Trinity. The Koran completely ignores this argumentation, but in the Bible, Jesus’ role as Mediator is intimately linked to His divine Sonship: Only as Son of God can He intercede for man before

God. Muhammad, however, was probably unfamiliar with this aspect of New Testament theology.

Islam, on the other hand, knows no official mediator between God and man. There is no office comparable with the Christian pastor, and all are equal before God and will be tried justly, the Koran emphasizes. Popular Islam, however, believes Muhammad, the Muslim congregation's advocate, to be a kind of mediator between Allah and mankind in the Last Judgment. Many assume that sinners who must spend some time in hell for particularly serious crimes will be liberated by the advocacy of either the Prophet or of God himself and will then be permitted to enter Paradise.

E. Jesus is Considered not to be the Brother of the Believers.

Although on the one hand, the Bible presents Jesus as the Son of God, who left the glory of the Father to live on earth for a short period of time, the New Testament testifies that He was not ashamed to call believers His friends (John 15:14-15) and His brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

The Koran, however, sees an unbridgeable gap between man and God. No human being can ever be a true brother of God. Surah 6:127 calls Allah the friend of the faithful, but the context of the statement makes clear that God is in no way similar to man but only that he sustains believers. In surah 7:155, Moses calls God his friend and asks him for mercy and forgiveness, but according to Muslim theology, because Moses had a particular position among God's messengers, the term 'friend' cannot be applied to other prophets, much less to mankind in general. Nor does the term mean that the Creator had lowered himself to human level, as Jesus did at His incarnation.

The eternal, almighty, transcendent God of the Koran may have mercy on man and allow him signs of grace, which man must receive with gratitude, but this relationship cannot reduce the chasm between Creator and creation. The idea that a creature could have divine attributes or participate in any aspect of divine nature is inconceivable to Koranic anthropology. The Islamic perception of God abhors the idea that God could step out of his transcendence to take on himself human form as Jesus did in the Bible. As a result, Islam cannot accept the thought that God became, in Christ, a creature like man or submitted to the conditions of human life. That Jesus

depended on the provision for human needs such as food, drink, and sleep proves to Muslim theologians that he was not divine.

Conclusion: The Koran denies the doctrine of the Trinity, which Muhammad misunderstood to consist of the Father, Mary, and their physically begotten son. Since Muhammad preached a strictly monotheistic doctrine, he rejected the idea that any other person could be revered as God beside Allah. Because of the purely monotheistic doctrine of the Koran, for Muslims to accept the Trinity would mean:

1. debasing the Oneness of God and setting other beings beside him, i.e., committing idolatry, the greatest of all sins, which God will not forgive. This definition of idolatry makes it very difficult for Muslims to consider Christianity to be the truth.

2. reducing the eternal, almighty, transcendent God to the level of the creation. This is inconceivable: God can have no human attributes.

3. accepting pagan ideas. Since for Muslims the Bible “does not teach either the Trinity or the divine Sonship of Jesus,” the Trinity and Sonship are, for them, ideas that were introduced into Christianity later from pagan religions by the early church after the death of Jesus – possibly by the Apostle Paul: therefore, belief in the Trinity automatically means a relapse into paganism.

4. teaching a doctrine repugnant to human reason, for the belief in the Trinity and the divine Sonship of Jesus cannot, according to Muslim theologians, be reconciled with human reason.

All of the above make it very difficult for Muslims to consider becoming a Christian.

15 Life after Death: Eternal Assurance in Islam

Muslims seldom discuss the assurance of the believer's salvation after his death. Neither Islamic theological literature nor Koran commentaries offer thorough explanations. The reason for this silence is the fact that neither the Koran nor tradition teach that anyone can be sure of his eternal salvation.

But doesn't the Koran promise Paradise to believers (Muslims)? Don't martyrs enter Paradise immediately after their death if they have sacrificed their lives for their faith?

On the one hand, the Koran seems to promise Paradise to all who believe in God, the Creator and Judge, and on Muhammad, his messenger and prophet, and who obey God's commandments. Many texts indicate that those who "believe and do right" (2:25), the "God-fearing" (or "the righteous" 52:17) will enter the "Gardens of Delight" (56:26), i.e., Paradise. For this reason, Muslims *hope* for Paradise. But what can one really know for sure?

Paradise in Koran and Tradition

The Koran describes Paradise in glowing terms, speaking of enjoyment of fruit (55:68) and meat, springs, milk and honey, wine, golden jewelry, and garments of brocade and silk (35:33; 18:31). God promises believers 'great-eyed Houris' as wives (44:54; 56:22).

But Paradise contains more than just material blessings: the believers will be liberated from empty words, from lies, and from sin (78:35). They will hear only of peace and well-being (19:62), for Paradise is the "abode of peace" (6:127). No one in Paradise is ever sad (35:34); there is no hardship or weariness (35:35). The believers praise God (10:10) eternally (44:56) and ridicule the damned in hell, who despised the believers on earth (83:29-35; 37:50-61).

The blessedness of Paradise also includes the presence and the “pleasure of God,” which the Koran values more than all material pleasures (3:15; 9:72). Surah 75:22 can be interpreted to mean that believers perhaps even see God himself, but Muslim theologians differ in their opinions on this subject.

Two Requirements for Salvation

Paradise awaits those who “believe and do right” (2:25), while hell awaits unbelievers and the wicked. In this statement, we find two requirements for salvation: faith and righteousness, i.e., the good deeds which, according to Islam, will be weighed on a scale at the Last Judgment. Only when one’s good deeds outweigh the bad, will the individual enter Paradise. Thus ‘good deeds’ are of as much importance as faith.

Little hope remains for the person who does few good deeds and fails for any reason to keep the “Five Pillars of Islam.” The poor, who cannot afford the pilgrimage to Mecca; women, who have no money of their own to give; or the uneducated, who cannot learn Arabic, have little hope of grace. Only those who died in Jihad, the endeavor to spread Islam, can be assured of immediate entry into Paradise.

The Bible urges believers to do good works for others, whether believers or unbelievers or even enemies, because good deeds are fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 6:10); such righteousness, however, is not a requirement for salvation but rather the result of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit. A Christian who has never had the chance to do good (e.g., the criminal who died next to Christ) is still saved by faith. A Christian who could do only a few good works is just as “saved by grace” as a model believer who has done many good deeds (Romans 5:1-2; Galatians 3:1-14). Trusting God is possible for all, the elderly, the blind, the disabled, the poor, women, men, children, the educated, and the uneducated.

The great significance of good works in Islam of necessity leads to a complete lack of eternal assurance. Who can claim to have done enough to cancel out his sins? Even the believer must live in fear that he has failed to do enough good deeds, for all do bad deeds. Every human being fails to do all the good he could do. With such insecurity, who can die with any sort of assurance of divine forgiveness?

God's Unlimited Omnipotence

At this point, we must mention a second point of Islamic theology, God's omnipotence and his unlimited authority of decision and activity. This unlimited power makes it impossible for man to predict God's final decisions in the Last Judgment.

Since Muslims assume that God is omnipotent and that no one has ever comprehended his nature, no one can be sure whether God's mercy, goodness, and grace will apply to any individual or whether God will still be angry at the end of time. Only after death will a person finally know, not before, since God's behavior is never predictable, for he would otherwise descend to a human level and fit within human ideas. Additionally, the Koran describes Allah as a trickster and schemer who devises the best intrigues: "God is full of guile" (13:13). "The unbelievers may 'hatch plots.' but Allah also hatches plots. And Allah is the best of plotters" (8:30).

God's behavior is beyond human comprehension, and no one has ever grasped the essential nature of this devious divinity. No one can harm him through evil deeds, and no one can equal the goodness of his work, for the god of Islam is absolutely transcendent and separated from creation. "Oh you men! It is you who are poor and dependent on God, but God depends on no one and is worthy of praise" (35:15).

The Bible, however, repeatedly assures us that all may obtain assurance of forgiveness of sin and salvation through Jesus Christ. The absolute reliability of God's promises to those He has saved is the essential element of biblical soteriology, not any sort of trick or plot which would leave man unsure. God even allows man, a mere part of the creation, to test His reliability (Malachi 3:10-11) and to claim what He has promised, for "all His work is done in truth" (Psalm 33:4).

Conclusion: The question of forgiveness of sin and salvation offers possibilities for evangelistic discussion with Muslims. When the Bible describes Christians as children of a loving heavenly Father who desires their best, it says much about absolute trust, security, and assurance in our relationship to God (Romans 8:15).

"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:18-19).

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Because God knows our failures, but reconciles us with Himself, we are free of the pressure of having to win His satisfaction through our own good works. Even though we fail, He accepts us whenever we ask for forgiveness. That is a joyful message for Muslims as well.

16 Apostasy in Islam – Death Penalty in This Life, Hell Fire in the Hereafter

When Christians are persecuted for their faith in Muslim countries or when Muslim converts to Christianity are threatened with the death penalty, the Western press accuses the Islamic state of human rights violations. At the same time, most Islamic states have ratified declarations such as the United Nations 1948 General Declaration of Human Rights.⁵⁸ How can they justify this contradiction?

In the last decades, various Islamic organizations have themselves formulated declarations of human rights. They have one basic difference from those of Western statements, however. Because they give priority to the Koran and to the Sharî'a (Islamic law), human rights can only be guaranteed in these countries under the conditions imposed by these two authorities and their regulations. Article 24 of the 1990 Cairo Declaration of Human Rights, for example, states that "All rights and freedoms mentioned in this statement are subject to the Islamic Sharî'a," and Article 25 adds, "The Islamic Sharî'a is the only source for the interpretation or explanation of each individual article of this statement." This emphasizes the "historic role of the Islamic Umma,⁵⁹ which was created by God as the best nation, which has brought humanity a universal and well-balanced civilisation, in which harmony between life here on earth and the hereafter exists, and in which knowledge accompanies faith"⁶⁰.

⁵⁸ Saudi Arabia is an exception, as it did not ratify the Declaration.

⁵⁹ "Umma" (Arabic) is the community, the congregation. It indicates the universal fellowship of all Muslims.

⁶⁰ The Cairo Declaration of Human Rights was published, for example, in: *Gewissen und Freiheit*. Nr. 36 (1991). pp. 93-98. See also: Osman El Hajie. "Die islamischen Länder und die internationalen Menschenrechtsdokumente". *Gewissen und Freiheit*, 36 (1991) pp. 74-79, and the critical analysis by Martin Forstner. "Das Menschenrecht der Religionsfreiheit und des Religionwechsels als Problem der islamischen Staaten". *Kanon, Kirche und Staat im christlichen Osten*. Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für das Recht der Ostkirchen. Wien 1991. pp. 105-186. See also the

What does the priority of the Koran and the Sharî'a mean for human rights discussions? These two authorities insure that in Islamic states, human rights only exist within the limitation set by the religious values of Islamic revelation and are guaranteed only within the framework determined by the Koran and Islamic law. The secularized Westerner, molded by the Enlightenment and accustomed to separation of Church and state, has difficulties understanding that a country could determine its standards for political and social life and for private and public affairs by the standards of religion.

Human Rights or Duties?

For this reason, Islamic apologists (defenders of the faith) are generally convinced that while God has rights in regard to man, man has only duties toward God. Man must, for example, submit to God's will and fulfill the Five Pillars of Islam, whereas God has no duties toward man.

Civil Rights for Muslims and Non-Muslims

Islamic culture has never known any sort of separation of religion and state or of politics and religion, while, in the Old Testament, a certain division of authority between the king and the high priest did exist. In Islam, Muhammad had unified both aspects in his own person, being simultaneously religious and political leader of the first Islamic community. His immediate successors, the Caliphs, also carried out both offices.

In Islamic states, Islam is the state religion, to which all citizens are assumed to belong, and which is considered to be the "principle on which the state is built. The state is bearer of a religious idea and is therefore itself a religious institution ... It is responsible for the worship of God, for religious training, and for the spreading of the faith."⁶¹ For this reason, the law must distinguish between the civil rights of Muslims, who can fully enjoy legal protection because they prove their loyalty to the state by their adhe-

publication of the "General Islamic Human Rights Declaration" of the Islamic Council for Europe in Paris September 19, 1981 in Cibedo (Documentation) Nr. 15/16. Frankfurt 1982.

⁶¹ O. Spiess and E. Pritsch. *Klassisches Islamisches Recht. 1. Wesen des Islamischen Rechts*. Handbuch der Orientalistik. Section 1. Vol. 3. Orientalisches Recht. E. J. Brill: Leiden 1964. p. 220.

rence to its religion, and the rights of non-Muslims, who, as traitors, forfeit their right to state protection because of their ‘unbelief.’ In these countries, Muslims always have more rights than do non-Muslims. A non-Muslim can usually not inherit from a Muslim, for example.

Change of Religion is High Treason

To be a Muslim means to be a citizen imbued with all legal rights, whereas to become an unbeliever is to commit high treason, for Islam is an “essential element of the basic order of the State.”⁶²

When a Muslim repudiates his faith, he rebels against that order and endangers the security and the “stability of the society to which he belongs.”⁶³ Martin Forstner concludes:

“Only he who believes in God and the divinely revealed Koran, and who obeys the Sharî’a, is able to become a competent citizen, whereas the ungodly are enemies of society. The repeated duty to confess the faith – by fulfilling the five daily prayers, by fasting during Ramadan ... is the medium by which the citizen’s morale is conveyed, so that the Islamic State links full civil rights to the confession of the true faith”⁶⁴.

When Islamic law is interpreted in its strictest sense, this ‘watchman’ function of the state over its citizens’ religion makes it impossible for human rights to be given priority over Islamic law when a Muslim gives up his faith, in spite of human rights declarations. When a Muslim commits high treason, according to the Muslim point of view, religious law must be obeyed, and that requires the punishment of the renegade. On the other hand, a non-Muslim can only enjoy those rights given him by the Koran and the Sharî’a.

Freedom of Religion for Non-Muslims

Although the constitutions of many Islamic countries provide for freedom in exercising religious beliefs, non-Muslims almost always have great difficulties practicing their faith. Muslims who have become Christians

⁶² Forstner. „Menschenrecht.“ p. 116.

⁶³ O. Spies and E. Pritsch. *Recht*. pp. 220-343 (here p. 220).

⁶⁴ Forstner. „Menschenrecht.“ pp. 116 & 138.

may even lose their lives. Still, Islamic countries claim to be tolerant and to guarantee freedom of religion.

In spite of the fact that freedom of religion is part of the law in most Islamic countries, their constitutions declare Islam to be the state religion. A few other faiths, such as Judaism and Christianity, are allowed a certain right to exist, so that their members are not required to convert to Islam, even if they live in a predominantly Islamic area, but they are never equal to Muslims before the law. They remain 'second-class citizens' with limited legal rights and are subject to the Islamic state, which defines the limits of their religious freedoms very strictly (including the building or repairing of churches, for example).

In most cases the Jewish or Christian faith must be exercised quietly, for "a Muslim citizen cannot be expected to endure and continually resist the missionary activity of other religions."⁶⁵ Non-Muslim faiths, which are only tolerated and supervised, may exist only under the conditions imposed by the law, otherwise not at all.

Non-Muslims are forbidden to insult or disparage Islam, the Koran, or the prophet Muhammad, which automatically occurs in Christian evangelization, according to Muslim opinion. Moroccan law, for example, requires a prison sentence of six months to three years, as well as a fine of 200 to 500 dirham, for proselytizing a Muslim to another religion.⁶⁶ Repudiation of Islam is still considered to be a crime worthy of death, whereas the Muslim has the right to proselytize others.

Conclusion: Islamic human rights declarations of all kinds continually insist on the authority of the Islamic faith and Sharî'a law and can therefore only guarantee civil rights which respect Islam and its principles. This automatically restricts the rights of non-Muslims so that under Islamic law, only the Muslim are allowed to enjoy all rights, for only he is considered to be a loyal citizen.

Non-Muslims have limited rights, but they are allowed to exist. The Muslim who repudiates his faith loses all his rights, for he is considered a traitor to his country and to the state and may be subject to the death sentence either under the legal system or by his neighbors. This is also empha-

⁶⁵ Forstner. „Menschenrecht.“ p. 114.

⁶⁶ Forstner. „Menschenrecht.“ p. 114.

sized in the “Draft for an Islamic Declaration of Human Rights,” which was composed by the Islamic Conference in Jidda in 1979.⁶⁷

This statement forbids a Muslim to ever change his faith. Not to condemn a renegade to death would be an offense against the Sharī’a. Therefore, when Sharī’a is considered to be binding in a certain context, a humane treatment of a convert can not be expected, not even when human rights declaration claim so.

When Muslims Convert to Christianity – Apostasy and the Death Penalty in Islam

Does a Muslim have the right to desert Islam and turn to Christianity? Is faith a private matter or do the state and its organs have the responsibility to monitor and control it? Christianity and Islam view this question quite differently.

In our ‘enlightened’ Western world with its separation of church and state, the personal belief of the individual is one of the most private areas of life – so much so that many are unwilling to even share the details of their faith. Many contemporaries consider their personal faith, which they have formulated according to their own convictions independent of the church, to be the ‘true faith,’ a religion more valid than that of those who ‘are always running to church.’

The Islamic view is quite different: faith and religion are basically public affairs subject to the control of the state, although the measure of control varies from country to country. Wherever Islam is the state religion and the very pillar of state order, the good citizen is expected to adhere to Islam; apostasy is treason.

The Koran on Apostasy: Wrath and Punishment

The mere unbelief of a man who denies God and refuses to submit to him is, according to Islam, a serious sin. Whoever knows the Islamic faith but rejects it is guilty of an even more serious offense.

The Koran discusses apostasy in several places. Surah 16:106 mentions God’s wrath and the ‘grievous chastisement’ which a defector may expect.

⁶⁷ Forstner. „Menschenrecht.“ p. 109.

Surah 2:217 warns against leading believers into apostasy, for this offense is “graver than slaughter.” The good works of the apostate count for nothing, for his apostasy will not be forgiven, so that he will be thrown into hell. Surah 3;86-91 describes his reward: the curse of God, of men and of angels is on him (3:87; 9:67-68); there is no redemption, mediation, or aid for the accursed. God can in no way forgive apostates (4:137), for they are unbelievers who have made themselves particularly punishable. It is interesting, however, that beyond eternal damnation, the Koran defines no concrete worldly penalty and no judicial procedure for the punishment of the apostate.

Apostasy “in the Full Possession of One’s Mental Faculties”

‘Apostasy from Islam’ (Arabic: *irtidâd*) means proven, deliberate defection from Islam by a person either born Muslim or later converted to it. He must be in the full possession of his mental faculties and act of his own free will, not under coercion, before he can be condemned. Apostasy means the denial of the one true God, Allah, and of his Prophet, Muhammad.

Islamic theologians, however, do not agree on a practical definition of apostasy. The Koran teaches the fact of apostasy, but fails to define it more clearly. Is the failure to perform the Five Pillars of Islam (confession, prayer five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, giving alms, and pilgrimage to Mecca) apostasy?

If one has no legitimate reason for failing to pray five times a day and shows no intention of improving, the Malikis, Shâfi’ites, and Hanbalis (three Sunni legal schools) consider him apostate, as the deliberate failure to pray is considered one of the gravest of sins. Abû Hanîfa (father of the Hanafi school) believes such a person to still be a believer, but he suggests imprisonment for his betterment until he is prepared to pray.⁶⁸

Should the individual unintentionally fail to fulfill the requirements of Islam, he is not apostate. His omission is still sin, to be penalized to the

⁶⁸ J. Schacht. “Katl.” in: Encyclopaedia of Islam. Vol. IV. E. J. Brill: Leiden 1990. p. 771.

judge's discretion.⁶⁹ The sentence of apostasy depends on the sinner's deliberate refusal to obey.

Apostasy is Treason

Apostasy thus occurs not only when the confession of Islam is theoretically denied but also when the practice of the faith is willfully neglected. To depreciate Muhammad, to abuse a Koran (by burning or dirtying it, for example), or to revile one of the 99 most beautiful divine names is also apostasy.⁷⁰ The practice of magic or the worship of images is also considered apostasy, for these are acts of idolatry. The belief in the transmigration of souls can also constitute apostasy, for this belief denies the Islamic teaching of the dead once being resurrected from their graves on the day of judgement. Even entering a church or showing interest in the Christian faith can be considered an act of defection.⁷¹ To suggest that Muhammad had any physical defects, to question the perfection of his knowledge, his morality, or his virtue, or to defame the angels⁷² also constitutes apostasy.

Since apostasy in Islam is not merely a private or ecclesiastical affair (by withdrawal of church membership, for example) as it is in Western society, the state must act. Apostasy is treason toward Muslim society (the *umma*) and the undermining of the Muslim state, for Islam is the buttress of society and of the state itself. Apostasy erodes and shakes the foundations of the order of society – because it is treason, the state must prosecute it.

Islam Requires the Death Penalty for Apostasy

The Koran has little to say about judicial penalties for apostasy, but on the basis of Koranic warnings against it and the background of Islamic tradition, Islamic theology has formulated directions for the treatment and

⁶⁹ Adel E. Baradie. *Gottes-Recht und Menschenrecht. Grundlagenprobleme der islamischen Stafsrechtslehre* Nomos: Baden-Baden 1983. p. 124.

⁷⁰ 'Abd al-Rahmân al-Djazîri. *kitâbu l-fiqh 'alâ l-madhâbihi l-'arba'a*. Cairo 1934/1987/8 (German: *Die Strafen für den Abfall vom Islam nach den vier Schulen des islamischen Rechts*. Aus dem Arabischen übersetzt von Ishak Ersen. Licht des Lebens: Villach 1991. pp. 11-12.

⁷¹ al-Djazîri. *kitâb*. p. 12.

⁷² al-Djazîri. *kitâb*. p. 12.

punishment of apostates. Only a minority of theologians believes the Koran's warnings to appeal only to private conscience, for which the state has no responsibility.⁷³ The Ahmadiya Movement, which is persecuted as a sect in Pakistan, opposes the death penalty for apostasy.

Surah 4:88-89 warns against hypocrites led astray by God. Such people have no hope of repentance and represent a danger for the Muslim fellowship, for "They desire that you should disbelieve as they have disbelieved, so that you might be (all) alike" (4:89). The text continues, "but if they turn back then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take not from among them a friend or helper."

Imprisonment as an Opportunity to Repent

The verse above, generally interpreted to be a concrete commandment on the treatment of the apostate, requires the death penalty for the offense. The renowned Egyptian theologian Muhammad Muhammad Abû Zahra (1898-1974) speaks of three cases in which a Muslim may be punished by the death penalty: apostasy, bawdiness following a properly legal marriage, and any murder except family vendettas.⁷⁴

The commandment to execute the apostate is, however, derived not so much from the Koran as from Islamic tradition, for the traditions from Muhammad's lifetime are much more explicit: "Kill anyone who changes his religion,"⁷⁵ and "He who separates himself from you (or repudiates the faith) must die."⁷⁶

Tradition relates that Muhammad himself illegally mutilated and killed apostates who were said to have killed some of his followers. J. Schacht discusses the Islamic attempt to justify Muhammad's action,⁷⁷ for which the Koran offers no clear revelation which would have commanded such a

⁷³ Heribert Busse; Martin Honecker. *Gottes- und Weltverständnis im Islam und Christentum*. EZW Texte. Informationen Nr. 123 IX/1993 EZW: Stuttgart 1993. p. 18.

⁷⁴ Muhammad Abû Zahra. *al-jarîma wa-l-'uqûba fî l-fiqh al-islâmî*. Cairo, Part 1 ca. 1955, Part 2 ca. 1965, here Part 1. p. 172. See also Ibrâhîm Ahmad al-Waqfî. *tilka hudûd allâh*. Qatar 1397/1977. p. 269.

⁷⁵ According to the tradition of Buḥârî. *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari*. Arabic-Engl. Vol. 9. Kitab Bhavan: New Delhi 1997. p. 45.

⁷⁶ Schacht. "Katl." p. 771.

⁷⁷ Schacht. "Katl." p. 771.

course of action. Other traditions exist as well in which Muhammad, at the end of his life, following the capture of his family's city Mecca, executed two apostates who had killed a Muslim, as well as another who is reported to have done nothing illegal.⁷⁸

Judging by the sources, the death penalty seems to have been carried out on apostates after the prophet's death,⁷⁹ and modern Sunni and Shi'ite law generally agree that apostasy, blasphemy, and ridicule of the Prophet or of the angels are to be punished by death. The accusation of apostasy must, however, be clearly proven, for example, by the fact of blasphemy, ridicule of the Prophet, denial of the necessity of practicing the Five Pillars of Islam, or if the accused has participated in actions such as idolatry, magic, the abuse of the Koran, or desertion to Islamic enemies.

Persecution by the Family

Apostasy is basically an offense to be prosecuted by the state once charges have been brought. Sometimes relatives prefer to wash away the 'shame' of apostasy itself with an alternative 'solution' such as casting the offender out of the family, driving him out of the country, or even killing him.

When a case of apostasy is brought before a judge, it must usually be confirmed by two male witnesses.⁸⁰ In order to determine the defendant's guilt, the judge may require him to repeat the Confession of Faith ("There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His prophet"). Refusal to pronounce the confession can be considered proof of apostasy.

The apostate must be in full possession of his mental faculties if he is to be condemned, and he cannot have given up Islam under coercion or intoxication. Children and the mentally retarded can therefore not be convicted of apostasy at all, and women only under particular circumstances, although the various judicial schools disagree on their liability.

The three Sunni schools, the Shâfi'is, the Malikis, and the Hanbalis do not distinguish between men and women in this matter. The Malikis demand postponement of penalization if the woman is pregnant or nursing. The Hanafis allow the death penalty for male Muslims, but in analogy to

⁷⁸ Schacht. "Katl." p. 771.

⁷⁹ Khoury. *Koran*. Vol. 2. p. 95.

⁸⁰ Khoury. *Koran*. Vol. 2. pp. 95-96.

surah 24:2 and 4:15, they and the Shi'ites insist on a procedure by which an apostate woman is to be imprisoned and beaten every three days, or even daily, until she recants⁸¹ – at least in theory. The father of the Hanafi school, Abû Hanîfa, also suggested slavery as punishment for women⁸² – so much for theory.

In practice, the courts seldom deal with cases of apostasy. When Muslims convert to Christianity, they seem to be punished unofficially by their families or even by onlookers instead of fearing the conviction of a judge. Immediate private revenge does at least seem to frequently follow a Muslim's declaration of his apostasy. Besides, judicial proceedings on apostasy provoke unwelcome attention in the Western press.

Although the apostate has a right to proper judicial proceedings, in practice, no Muslim who kills him even without giving him the opportunity to submit to a trial or to recant will be accused of murder. The killer cannot even be officially charged with the offense even though he has in theory acted wrongly. At the most, he might theoretically be accused of acting too quickly, since he failed to wait for the judicial system to act. In the eyes of Muslim society, however, he has committed no murder, for the execution of an apostate is not an offense.⁸³

The judge may decide to penalize the killer but only with a mild punishment or even with an admonition.⁸⁴ Thus, the renegade finds himself a sort of outlaw without any sort of legal protection.⁸⁵ The same applies when the apostate is brought to court but is not condemned to death. His murderer only carries out valid law, as the Islamic legal dogmatist Abdul Qader 'Oudah Shaheed emphasizes, for the execution of an apostate, according to the Sharî'a, is not a right but the duty of every Muslim⁸⁶.

⁸¹ Khoury. *Koran*. Vol. 2. p. 96.

⁸² Schacht. "Katl." p. 771.

⁸³ According to Shaheed, only the Malikis consider the rash private killing of an apostate a serious offense punishable by fine. Abdul Qader 'Oudah Shaheed. *Criminal Law of Islam*. 3 Vols. International Islamic Publishers: New Delhi 1991. Vol. 2. p. 258.

⁸⁴ Erwin Gräf. "Die Todesstrafen des islamischen Rechts" in: *Bustan* (Vienna) 4 (1962): 8-22 and 1 (1965): 9-22.

⁸⁵ Shaheed's Muslim legal dogmatics confirms this. Shaheed. *Law*. Vol. 2. p. 257.

⁸⁶ Shaheed. *Law*. Vol. 2. pp. 258-259.

In spite of such hard regulations, not every apostate suffers execution, either because he is able to flee or because his environment threatens but does not carry out the penalty. There can, however, be other consequences.

Loss of Family, Home, and Property

Whether or not the apostate is executed, other measures are usually taken, such as the confiscation of his property. The different schools of law hold varying opinions on the extent of the confiscation; some recommend that all property be taken, while others permit only the property acquired since the defection to be confiscated.⁸⁷ The Hanafis permit the offender to recover his property by returning to Islam, while the other three schools consign it to the state after his death.⁸⁸

Before his trial, an apostate will probably lose his job, and his family will possibly try to bring him back to the fold by the services of a Muslim clergyman. If that fails, they may send him to a psychiatric clinic or out of the country or even expel him from the family.

An apostate's marriage is automatically dissolved, for marriage with an apostate is illegal, so that a male convert suddenly finds himself living in adultery with his own wife, who could also be stoned to death if she refuses to leave him. In addition, no Muslim woman may be married to a non-Muslim. Should the apostate return to the faith, he must repeat the marriage ceremony to be legally married again. He may also expect various further consequences in matters of inheritance or property rights;⁸⁹ an apostate is usually dispossessed. Should he move into a non-Islamic country, his homeland will consider him dead, so that his heirs inherit his property.⁹⁰

Apostasy is Blasphemy

Muslim theologians disagree on the desirability of having a clergyman exhort the defector to recant before condemning him to death. Most re-

⁸⁷ Shaheed. *Law*. Vol. 2. 59.

⁸⁸ Djazîrî. *kitâb*. pp. 17-18.

⁸⁹ Khoury. *Koran*. Vol 2. pp. 97-98.

⁹⁰ Gräf. „Todesstrafen.“ p. 21.

commend admonition and suggest allowing the offender a certain period of time (three days, for example) to repent, but an avenger unwilling to wait need fear no judicial penalty.

The Malikis forbid the authorities to beat the prisoner during this period of reflection, but they do not permit his burial in a Muslim cemetery once a judge has ordered the execution.⁹¹ Should he repent, he is to be treated as a Muslim once again. If the offender has already turned from Islam several times, his return is more difficult. The Malakis and Hanbalis then demand execution in spite of any apparent repentance,⁹² while the Shâfi'is regard each renewed return to Islam true repentance.

Theologians also disagree on the difference to be made between the apostasy of a convert to Islam and that of a person born and raised as a Muslim. They also hold different views on the expediency of the death penalty for a penitent apostate. According to Shi'ite theology, repentance is not sufficient to revoke the death penalty.⁹³ This may be the reason that the death penalty pronounced on Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini in his Fatwa (legal report) of February 14, 1989, was not revoked when Rushdie publicly renounced his blasphemous novel *The Satanic Verses* and officially apologized for it. No Muslim born in Bombay and raised in England may disparage or insult Islam, the Koran, the angels, or the Prophet Muhammad as long as he lives for fear of confirming the offense of apostasy.

Crucifixion or Decapitation

Islamic authorities demand that the defector from the faith – assuming that his guilt has been proven – be beheaded with the sword but not tortured in any way. Other methods of execution are permissible. Crucifixion is one possibility. A tradition traced to Aisha, Muhammad's favorite wife, requires the apostate to be executed, crucified, or burned.⁹⁴ Calif 'Umar II is also said to have had apostates bound to a pole and pierced with a

⁹¹ al-Djazîrî. *kitâb*. pp. 17-18.

⁹² al-Djazîrî. *kitâb*. p. 52.

⁹³ Abdoljavad Falaturi. "Abfall von Islam." Lexikon der islamischen Welt. Ed. by Klaus Kreiser and Rotraud Wielandt. W. Kohlhammer: Stuttgart 1992. 17-18.

⁹⁴ See Otto Spies. "Über die Kreuzigung im Islam." Religion und Religionen. Festschrift für Gustav Mensching zu seinem 65. Geburtstag, dargebracht von Freuden und Kollegen. Ludwig Röhrscheid: Bonn 1967. p. 145.

lance.⁹⁵ Otto Spies cites further examples.⁹⁶ Perhaps the best-known example is the condemnation of the mystic al-Hallâj, who was crucified as a heretic in Bagdad in 922 for his unorthodox doctrines.

Crucifixion is not carried out only on apostates. Islamic law also recommends it for violent street robbery involving murder or manslaughter (Arabic: *qat' at-tariq*) outside of the city boundaries. Rebels, ringleaders of mobs, and heretics are to be crucified as well.⁹⁷ Some theologians recommend crucifixion as the method of execution, while others prefer it as a deterrent following execution.

According to Islamic theology, the heretic (Arabic: *zindiq*), an unbeliever pretending to be a Muslim, is the equivalent of an apostate. The Malakis and the Hanbalis require his execution without any opportunity for repentance and independent of any repentance, for they identify him with the hypocrite (Arabic: *munafiq*) so strongly condemned in the Koran and thus demand an even heavier punishment for him than for the apostate.

If he repents before his execution, a heretic may be buried in a Muslim cemetery, for he has died as a believer executed for his offense, not as an unbeliever⁹⁸. The Hanafis and the Shafi'is do not demand his execution whenever he repents.⁹⁹

The divine miracle: Islam threatens the apostate with severe penalties, whether he has become a Christian or has rejected religion altogether. Exile, disinheritance, divorce, intimidation, loss of family and job, threats, beating, torture, prison, and even death are very real expectations for any Muslim who becomes a Christian, even though not all may take place. Only seldom does the miracle occur that the family of the convert accepts his decision or becomes Christian as well; otherwise, the new believer lives in constant danger of detection and persecution.

He can meet with other Christians only in great secrecy and may not be able to find the love and acceptance he so greatly needs in his church, which may well fear Muslim spies. In spite of persecution and difficulties, the number of converts from Islam grows so steadily that it seems that more Muslims are becoming Christians than ever before. God is building

⁹⁵ Spies. "Kreuzigung." p. 145.

⁹⁶ Spies. "Kreuzigung." p. 145 ff.

⁹⁷ See Spies. "Kreuzigung." p. 150 for examples.

⁹⁸ al-Djazîrî. *kitâb*. p. 25.

⁹⁹ al-Djazîrî. *kitâb*. p. 27.

His church on the one spot where, according to human considerations, it cannot exist at all. It is the chief duty of any Christian living in Western countries to publicly remind fellow Christians of the persecuted church, to pray for converts, and to support them wherever possible.

17 Appendix:

The Influence of European Higher Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century¹⁰⁰

*The aim of this paper is to trace the development of a new Muslim view of Christianity in the nineteenth century, which still has an enormous impact on today's Muslim apologetic works. The composition of anti-Christian books has changed in character because of the achievement of a different view of Christian dogmas and Christianity itself in the nineteenth century.*¹⁰¹

The development of Muslim-Christian polemics dates back to an event in the middle of the nineteenth century. On the April 10 and 11 in 1854, we find ourselves in the schoolroom of the British missionary agency Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Agra, India, among several hundred Muslims and Europeans, mostly Christian missionaries but also a few government officials of the British colonial power. They had all gathered in order to listen to a public debate initiated by the Muslim community of Agra. The

¹⁰⁰ Originally published as “The 19th century *izhâr al-haqq*’ polemic as turning-point of Muslim apologetics” in: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions and Cultures throughout History. 15.-21.12.1991. Departement d’ Histoire et des Science des Religions. Universität Lausanne: Lausanne, 1992 = “The Influence of Higher Bible Criticism on Muslim Apologetics in the Nineteenth Century”. S. 270-279 in: Jacques Waardenburg. *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions*. Oxford University Press: New York/Oxford, 1999. A shortened version was published as “Muslim Apologetics and the Agra Debates of 1854: A Nineteenth Century Turning Point”. *The Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 13 (1994) 1/2 (Jan-Jun): 74-84 (Hyderabad, India).

¹⁰¹ The following text is based on material of my dissertation *Mit den Waffen des Gegners. Christlich-Muslimische Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, dargestellt am Beispiel der Auseinandersetzung um Karl Gottlieb Pfanders ‘mîzân al-haqq’ und Rahmatullâh ibn Halîl al-‘Utmânî al-Kairânawîs ‘izhâr al-haqq’ und der Diskussion über das Barnabasevangelium*. Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1992.

debate was carried out between the German missionary Karl Gottlieb Pfander (1803-1865), coming out of the pietistic movement in Württemberg, Swabia, and an Indian Muslim Šîî theologian, Rahmatullâh Ibn Halîl al-‘Utmânî al-Kairânawî (1818-1891).¹⁰² Despite the fact that this debate took place nearly 150 years ago, both of the opponents are still well remembered in the Muslim world today pertaining to matters of dialogue. The subject of discussion at this public debate, which lasted for two days, was mainly *tahrîf* (deviation of the Christian Scriptures).

The challenger of the debate in 1854 was the Muslim theologian al-Kairânawî, who intended to publicly demonstrate the inferiority of Christianity and make it clear once and for all that Muslims should not be shaken in their faith because of the proclamation of the Christian creed by Protestant missionaries in India in the past decades.

India had been opened to Protestant Christian missionary activities by a decree of the British Parliament in 1813, and the first Anglican Bishop was secretly consecrated on May 8, 1814, in Lambeth Palace, Calcutta.¹⁰³ In 1832/1833 non-British missionary agencies were allowed to follow and began to establish their net of Christian mission all over India, more or less officially supported by the British. It is interesting enough that the Šîî al-Kairânawî represented himself in 1854 as the defender of the Muslim religion and obviously was accepted as such by the whole Muslim community.

Although it was planned to extend the discussion to subjects of *tatlîl* (Trinity), the Qur’ân being the Word of God, and the sending of the prophet Muhammad, the debate did not proceed further than the deviation of the Christian Scriptures. The discussion centered on this point of controversy: al-Kairânawî insisted that the Christian Scriptures had been abrogated and tried to prove this with examples taken out of the Bible itself, while the Christian missionaries persistently affirmed the integrity of the Old and New Testaments. After two days, the opponents separated and “both sides claimed the victory.”¹⁰⁴ Also, a few conversions to Christianity

¹⁰² For a more detailed description of the debate, see e.g., Ann Avril Powell. *Contact and Controversy between Islam and Christianity in Northern India 1833-1857: The Relations between Muslims and Protestant Misisonaries in the North-Western Provinces and Oudh* (unpubl. Ph.D. thesis). London 1983, p. 273 f.

¹⁰³ H. H. Dodwell (ed.). *The Cambridge History of India*. Vol. 6: The Indian Empire 1858-1918. New Delhi 1932, p. 124.

¹⁰⁴ Eugene Stock. “The C.M.S. Missions to Mohammedans”. *The Muslim World* 2 (1912), p. 128; W. H. T. Gairdner. *The Reproach of Islam*. London 1909, p. 248.

took place following the debate. Besides the well-known Safdar ʿAlī,¹⁰⁵ who was baptized in 1864, perhaps the most famous Muslim convert to Christianity in India had been ʿImād ud-Dîn (ca. 1830-1900), who was baptized in 1866 and ordained as an Anglican priest in 1872.¹⁰⁶ He had been involved in mosque preaching against Christian missionary work before, and afterward he wrote several apologetic works against Islam such as the famous book *hidâyat al-muslimîn* or *tahqîq al-imân*.

But why is this 1854 debate of such significance? Have there not been many more debates before and up to the present which have concentrated again and again on the main points of encounter between Islam and Christianity such as *tahrîf*?

The 1854 Agra debate is a historical milestone. Experts of the religious situation of India in the nineteenth century have asserted: "... there was in these days no debate on the scale of the high drama of the Rahmatullâh-Pfander debates of the 1850s."¹⁰⁷ I will attempt to analyze the significance of this Muslim-Christian debate in India and its effects on future Muslim apologetic works.

Significance of Place and Time

Concerning the nineteenth century onward, Jacques Waardenburg has written:

"We see another period of confrontation, now mostly political, between Muslim states and the expanding West, heir to Christian tradition. In this time

¹⁰⁵ The story of Safdar ʿAlī's conversion to Christianity appeared in *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 2 NS/July 1866, p. 215-221. Parts of his own report of his conversion are published in D. Rajaiah Paul. *Lights in the World. Life Sketches of Maulvi Safdar Ali and the Rev. Janni Alli (sic)*. Lucknow 1969, pp. 20-23+28-30.

¹⁰⁶ The German magazine of the Basle Mission Society EMM (*Evangelisches Missions-Magazin*) published the story of his conversion under the title "A Moham-medan Brought to Christ, Being the Autobiography of a Native Clergyman in India" (No. 14 (1871), pp. 397-412), being probably a summary of his own tract dealing with his conversion in Urdu, which was republished in 1957 in Lahore and in 1978 in Vanyambadi.

¹⁰⁷ Narayani Gupta. *Delhi, between two Empires 1803-1931*. Society, Government and Urban Growth. Delhi 1981, p. 79.

we witness a growing polemic of Islam, at first linked with the national movements, against religions like Christianity, Hinduism and Judaism ...^{108c}

This is perfectly true for India. In the nineteenth century Agra, the former symbol of the Mughal power, developed into one of the centers of Muslim learning and culture in India. The British government transformed it into its administration center of the North-West-Provinces. In addition, the British government allowed foreign mission agencies to enter the country. Especially in Agra, most missionaries were British, and they opened a huge orphanage after a disastrous famine in 1837. Several children were baptized as Christians, so that the growing influence of the Christian mission was universally recognized. In Agra itself several polemical Christian books against the Muslim creed had been published.¹⁰⁹ All of these facts made the Muslim population extremely aware of the presence of Westerners and missionaries as an instrument of British colonialism.

So we find ourselves in the heat of Christian-Muslim tensions in Agra in the middle of the nineteenth century: the Muslim 'ulamâ' felt threatened by the presence of European Christian missionaries and during the 1840s and 1850s underwent a severe crisis because of the decline of values of their own religion and culture. Different parties gathered in the middle of the nineteenth century in Agra, and various lines intersected at this historical turning point: 1) the representatives of India's colonial power, being Great Britain, the protector of the European missionaries; 2) the German pietist and Protestant missionary Pfander himself, his co-workers, and perhaps a few of his converts; and 3) representatives of the Anglican church, who were neither against the debate nor wholeheartedly supported it. Thomas Valpy French (1825-1891) should be named; he later became the first Anglican bishop of Lahore. He himself was not overly convinced of the benefit or the necessity of open encounter and proselytizing, but having been challenged by the Muslim theologians, he was determined to defend the integrity of the Bible;¹¹⁰ 4) Catholic missionaries, who obviously disliked the work of their Protestant colleagues and materially supported Muslims,

¹⁰⁸ Jacques Waardenburg, "World Religions as seen in the Light of Islam", in Welch, Alford T.; Cachia, Pierre (ed.). *Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge*. Edinburgh 1979, p. 248.

¹⁰⁹ See Ann Avril Powell. "Maulânâ Rahmat Allâh Kairânawî and Muslim-Christian Controversy in India in the Mid-19th Century." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 20 (1976), pp. 42-63.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Neill. *A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858*. Cambridge 1985, p. 344.

who helped them refute the Protestant missionaries; and 5) the Muslim audience, including Šîîs and Sunnis, while the Šîî theologian al-Kairânawî prepared himself to defend the Muslim creed against Christian mission with the help of Dr. Muhammad Wazîr Khân, who had worked since 1851 in a British medical hospital. He had received parts of his medical training in Great Britain, where he collected material in order to prove Christianity to be false.

Significance of Individuals Involved

Karl Gottlieb Pfander (1803-1865)

The German missionary Karl Gottlieb Pfander, who was involved in the controversy, was, even a few decades after his death, still considered as “the greatest of all missionaries to Mohammedans”¹¹¹ or “one of the most interesting figures among the Missionaries to Muhammedans of the 19th century.”¹¹²

In the West, Pfander remained, nevertheless, quite unknown until the very present, but especially his controversial book *mîzân al-haqq* is still a current topic of debate in the Muslim world today. This apologetic work, written in 1829, originally in German¹¹³ in refutation of Islam, intends to convince its readers of the supreme values of Christianity, mostly by defending the integrity of the Old and New Testaments and refuting the Muslim charge of *tahrîf*. After its first publication in 1831 in Armenian, it was quickly translated into at least half a dozen Muslim languages, including, e.g., Urdu (1840), Persian (1835), Turkish (1862), and Arabic (1865)¹¹⁴ and has had an enormous influence. This book *mîzân al-haqq* still

¹¹¹ Church Missionary Society (ed.). *One Hundred Years. Being the Short History of the Church Missionary Society*. London 1898, p. 78.

¹¹² Transl. from: Julius Richter. *Mission und Evangelisation im Orient*. Gütersloh 1908/1930, p. 71.

¹¹³ The original handwritten text is still to be found in the archives of the Basle Mission Society headquarter (Basler Mission), Switzerland.

¹¹⁴ In Turkey, where Pfander was missionary from 1858-1865, “the circulation of the *Mîzân* seems to have brought matters to a crisis...” (Pfander’s letter of 16th Sept 1862 to the CMS, Doc. No. 63a; archives of Heslop Room/University of Birmingham). The Ottoman government resolved to expel all missionary agencies in consequence of the baptism of several converts to Christianity by Pfander and his co-workers in the year 1864.

is both quoted by and refuted by Muslim apologists today. It has remained a subject of controversy in the Muslim world. Twelve years after Pfander's death, a participant of the Agra-debate of 1854 wrote:

“He has passed away, but the stir and movement he excited has not passed ...”¹¹⁵

mîzân al-haqq, the “standard work of encounter between Christianity and Islam,¹¹⁶” was used by generations of Christian missionaries as an apologetic tool to refute Islam, and for this reason it was reprinted many times up until the present. Despite the fact that we also hear severe critiques concerning the work, especially in the twentieth century,¹¹⁷ we can date the last Arabic and English reprints back to the year 1986,¹¹⁸ and these reprints are still used today for missionary activities among Muslims.

The author of the book, Karl Gottlieb Pfander, having being stationed as missionary of the British mission agency CMS in India from 1837 to 1857, was requested on April 10, 1854, by Muslim theologians of Agra to publicly defend the Christian dogma of the integrity of the Bible. In fact, it was he himself who had opened the discussion by public preaching on the bazars (market places), by writing and distributing books for several years. It should also be noted that Pfander tried to prove the high value which the Qur'ân attributes to the Bible with the help of Qur'ânic statements. He also quoted Muslim commentators in order to hint at the difference of their judgment about Christianity:

“... the Christians were trying to show that in the Qur'ân itself Muhammad shows respect for Christianity and veneration for its beliefs and teachings.”^{119c}

¹¹⁵ Herbert Birks. *The Life and Correspondence of Thomas Valpy French, First Bishop of Lahore*. London 1895, vol. 1, p. 70.

¹¹⁶ Transl. from Horst R. Flachsmeier. *Geschichte der evangelischen Weltmission*. Giessen 1963, p. 446.

¹¹⁷ See e.g., Lyle L. Vander Werff. *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record, Anglican and Reform Approaches in India and the Near East 1800-1938*. Pasadena 1977, p. 42; Emmanuel Kellerhals. *Der Islam. Seine Geschichte, seine Lehre, sein Wesen*. Basel 1956², p. 334 f.

¹¹⁸ The Publishers of the 1986 English edition wrote in their introduction to the book: “Perhaps the way of discussion seems questionable to some theologians in our century, but until today the book touches the central points in sincere dialogue between Muslims and Christians.” “The Publishers,” Introduction, in C. G. Pfander, D. D., *The Mîzân-ul-Haqq, Balance of Truth*. Villach 1986.

¹¹⁹ Harry Gaylord Dorman. *Toward Understanding Islam*. Edinburgh 1948, p. 31.

Rahmatullâh Ibn Halîl al-ʿUtmânî al-Kairânawî (1818-1891)

Nevertheless, Pfander's opponent is much more interesting regarding the theme of Muslim-Christian historical encounter.

The Šîʿî theologian Rahmatullâh Ibn Halîl al-ʿUtmânî was engaged in the battle against the presence of Christian missionaries in India from the beginning of the 1850s, and in 1855, he had already written three polemical works against Christianity in order to defend Islam, probably with the help of the Bengali physician Muhammad Wazîr Khân. al-Kairânawî and Wazîr Khân belong to the most outstanding figures of Indian Muslim defense against Christian mission in the nineteenth century. They came into contact at the beginning of the 1850s in connection with their apologetic work. In 1854 both of them took part in the public Agra debate, al-Kairânawî being the challenger and the leader of the discussion, Muhammad Wazîr Khân acting as interpreter between the Urdu and English-speaking participants.

The Influence of al-Kairânawî on Nineteenth-Century Muslim Views of Christianity

al-Kairânawî's influence is not restricted to this single event in Agra. This was only a prelude to his future impact, which is due to his written works. When it comes to Muslim apologetics, al-Kairânawî certainly comes to mind. The reason for this is his famous book *izhâr al-haqq*, which he wrote as a response to Pfander's *mîzân al-haqq*. Written in Arabic in 1867 by request of the Ottoman sultan Abdülaziz I (1861-1876),¹²⁰ the book has seen several translations into Turkish (1876/1877), French (1880), English (ca. 1900), and Urdu (1968), i.e., it has been translated into almost the same languages as has Pfander's *mîzân al-haqq*. Like *mîzân al-haqq*, *izhâr al-haqq* has been reprinted up until the present. In 1964 a new edition came out, supervised by the Department for Islamic Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco, and a foreword was added by the adab-professor ʿUmar ad-Dasûqî. The last Arabic editions date from the year 1978; one of the two was authorized by the late šaiḥ ʿAbd al-Halîm Mahmûd of al-

¹²⁰ Ahmad Hijâzî as-Saqqâ (ed.). *Rahmat Allâh al-Hindî, izhâr al-haqq*. al-Qâhira 1978, p. 29-30. al-Kairânawî had to go into exile because the British government suspected him of participating in the anti-British revolt of 1857. al-Kairânawî fled to Mecca, and when the Ottoman sultan made his hajj to Mecca at the beginning of the 1860s, he was informed about the events in India of 1854. al-Kairânawî had to stay in Mecca until his death in 1891.

Azhar. In 1989 a short version in English came into being, published by Ta-Ha Publishers in London.

Only a few polemical Muslim works have become as famous as al-Kairânawîs *izhâr al-haqq*. It has been stated:

“The first great classic of modern Muslim polemic has never been superseded”¹²¹.

Ignaz Goldziher reported that during his visit in 1877 to Damascus, everybody was talking of *izhâr al-haqq*.¹²² Undoubtedly, the book played a key role for Muslim polemics in the past, but it is still currently on the ‘top ten’ of Muslim apologetic works. Concerning the significance of *izhâr al-haqq*, Georges C. Anawati wrote in 1969:

“C’est le grand ouvrage de base qui a servi et continue à servir d’arsenal pour les apologistes musulmans de la fin du 19e siècle jusqu’à nos jours.”¹²³

and again in 1981:

“... et aujourd’hui encore, il reste le livre par excellence où les musulmans traditionalistes et peu ouverts au christianisme, puisent leurs arguments.”¹²⁴

Concerning *izhâr al-haqq* it was stated in 1968:

“The editor of the Urdu version has expressed the strong opinion that nothing written in the intervening hundred years on the theme of Islam and Christianity has replaced the books which were generated in the mind of Maulânâ

¹²¹ Dorman. *Islam*. p. 44.

¹²² Goldziher wrote: “Während meines Aufenthaltes in der umajjadischen Chalifenstadt übte eine enorme Zugkraft auf das Lesepublikum aus das arabisch geschriebene polemische Werk *izhâr al-haqq* von dem indischen Muhammedaner Âeih Rahmat Allâh gegen die *mîzân al-haqq* betitelte Missions- und Controversschrift eines englischen Predigers des Evangeliums, welcher mit den Geschützen christlicher Theologie die Bollwerke des Islam erschüttern wollte.” Goldziher, Ignaz. “Ueber muhammedanische Polemik gegen Ahl al-kitâb”, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 32 (1878), pp. 343-344.

¹²³ G. C. Anawati. « Polémique, Apologie et Dialogue Islamo-Chrétiens, Positions Classiques Médiévales et Positions Contemporaines. » in : *Euntes Docete* 22 (1969), p. 420.

¹²⁴ G. C. Anawati. « Les grands courants de la pensée religieuse musulmane dans l’Égypte contemporaine » in : Anawati, G. C.; Borrmans, Maurice. *Tendances et courants dans l’Islam arabe contemporain*. vol. 1: Égypte et Afrique du Nord, *Entwicklung und Frieden, Wissenschaftliche Reihe*. Vol. 26, München 1982, p. 58

Rahmat Allâh Kairânawî by the situation of extreme tension which faced the ‘ulamâ’ of northern India in the first half of the 19th century.¹²⁵»

The popularity of *izhâr al-haqq* is also because only a very cautious Šî‘î coloring can be found in the book. As far as it can be seen in the different editions from 1867 onward, the reason for this is not any revision but is rather the original tone of al-Kairânawî himself, who only once hinted at his own Šî‘î background when dealing with *hadîth*. Therefore, it could become the standard work of Muslim apologetics, as well as in ‘orthodox’ circles such as al-Azhar.

In order to realize the influence of *izhâr al-haqq*, it can be noted that the Sunni nineteenth-century ‘reform-wing’ theologian Rašîd Ridâ made extensive use of al-Kairânawîs *izhâr al-haqq* when dealing with Christianity. Coming to the question of Muhammad’s mission, he quoted the famous ‘Abduh/Ridâ Qur’ân commentary *tafsîr al-qur’ân al-hakîm*, about 60 pages from *izhâr al-haqq*.¹²⁶ Another Muslim polemicist who made use of *izhâr al-haqq* should be mentioned, Muhammad Muhammad Abû Zahra.¹²⁷ In his ‘lectures on Christianity’ (*muhâdarât fî n-nasrânîya*), he made use of al-Kairânawîs commentaries on the Christian creed.¹²⁸

Reasons for the Influence of *izhâr al-haqq*

The very reason for the immense influence of al-Kairânawîs *izhâr al-haqq* can be found in his developing a new method to prove Islam to be the only true religion: it is quite obvious that al-Kairânawî does not restrict the defense of Islam to a mere devaluation of the Christian creed or to praise of Islam. al-Kairânawî took advantage of the new orientation of European theology which had taken place especially during the nineteenth century. From a formerly conservative standpoint in regard to the integrity of the Christian Scriptures, European theology had undergone a rapid change to a more and more critical standpoint regarding the reliability of historical and

¹²⁵ Powell. « Maulânâ Rahmat Allâh Kairânawî. » p. 63.

¹²⁶ Muhammad Rašîd Ridâ (ed.). *tafsîr al-qur’ân al-hakîm*. vol. 9, al-Qâhira 1347/1928¹, pp. 231-293.

¹²⁷ This is mentioned by the editor of one of the newest editions of *izhâr al-haqq*: Ahmad Hijâzî as-Saqqâ (ed.). *Rahmat Allâh al-Hindî. izhâr al-haqq*. al-Qâhira 1978, p. 33.

¹²⁸ Quotations of al-Kairânawî by Abû Zahra in his *muhâdarât fî-n-nasrânîya*. al-Qâhira 1966³, p. 32.

textual questions, especially since the nineteenth century. Critical and liberal standpoints found their way into universities and churches. In this evolution, Germany was the forerunner for the whole Christian Occident. Numerous theological liberal works appeared and found their way into the Muslim world rather quickly.

al-Kairânawî was – ostensibly – the very first apologist in the Muslim world who referred to these books and Bible commentaries in order to fight Christianity with its own weapons. For the first time, he used different works of famous European theologians who were influenced by liberalism and historical criticism of European theology of the nineteenth century. During the Agra debate, al-Kairânawî quoted these representatives of liberalism in order to show the conservative missionaries that Christian theology had already produced evidence that the Bible is unreliable.

European Theology and Philosophy Influence Muslim Apologetics

This is not the only example where the Muslim world borrowed fruits of European theology or philosophy which affirmed Islam. Before the nineteenth century, there had been a movement in European theology called rationalism. Representatives of German rationalism, e.g., Karl Friedrich Bahrtdt (1741-1792) or the famous Heinrich Eberhard Gottlob Paulus (1761-1851), maintained that Jesus Christ had been crucified, but they neglected that he had really died on the cross, a standpoint which is again an ‘outside’ position today. Bahrtdt wrote at the end of the nineteenth century:

“This is my opinion on this last part of the history of Jesus. Jesus has been put to death: he underwent all the sufferings of an evil-doer, he endured the suffering of death, but he overcame death – he came from death to life – he came out of the mausoleum ... on the third day after having been put to death ... and he has shown himself to his disciples as somebody being revived from the dead”¹²⁹.

It is possible, even if not probable, that the Ahmadîya-standpoint of Jesus having died a natural death in India after he survived his crucifixion did not originate in Islam itself but was fostered by developments in Europe

¹²⁹ Translated from: Bahrtdt, Karl Friedrich. *Ausführungen des Plans und Zwecks (sic) Jesu*. Berlin 1784-1793, vol. 10, p. 187.

such as rationalism. Muslim apologists claimed: “European theologians and scientists have proven that Jesus Christ survived the crucifixion.”

Some Christian university theologians even went so far as the climax of theological liberalism, which is, historically speaking, connected with enlightenment, that they neglected Jesus as a historical figure or at least his deity or his being part of the Trinity. Muslim apologists have used these theories as proofs for their old affirmation that according to surah 4:157-158, Jesus never died on the cross, even if he was perhaps crucified, which is doubtful.

The Gospel of Barnabas Confirms Muslim Apologists

Doubts of European theologians and philosophers concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ or concerning the reliability of the four canonical Gospels also played a key role when the Gospel of Barnabas was defended in numerous books and pamphlets by Muslim apologists as the only true Gospel of Jesus Christ, mostly in the twentieth century. Muslims had mostly taken over positive statements about the value of the Gospel of Barnabas by European critics of conservative theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, while at the same time Christian missionaries tried to prove that it is impossible to date this Gospel back to the first centuries A.D. The Gospel of Barnabas proves that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross; Judas was transformed into the likeness of Jesus and was crucified, while everybody thought he was Jesus himself; so the Qur’ân is again affirmed in its refutation of the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Qur’ân is confirmed by ‘objective,’ ‘scientific’ results: Muslim apologists name European theologians or philosophers, such as the well-known English deist John Toland (1670-1722), who positively mentioned the announcement of Muhammad in the Gospel of Barnabas. Muslim apologists concentrate on European authors who, on the one hand, trace the Gospel of Barnabas back to the first centuries and herewith accept its value and who, at the same time, doubt and critique the integrity of the Bible and the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ E.g., John Toland. *Christianity Not Mysterious*. London 1696 had a rationalistic understanding of the wonders narrated in the Bible. In his work *Nazarenes* he attributes at the same time a great probability to the Gospel of Barnabas going back to the very first centuries A.D.: John Toland. *Nazarenes or Jewish, Gentile and Mahometan Christianity*. London 1718. He defended the Gospel of Barnabas

It is possible that al-Kairânawî himself ‘brought’ the Gospel of Barnabas to the Muslim world by mentioning it for the first time in 1854 in his Urdu work *i[‘]jâz-i ‘Îsâwî*¹³¹ and afterward in *izhâr al-haqq*, from 1867 onward, as an old Christian Gospel which foretells the coming of the prophet Muhammad. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Gospel of Barnabas had not even been published as a whole. Only a few fragments were known to the Western world when al-Kairânawî used it as a weapon against the Christian rejection of Muhammad, who had been foretold from the beginning of revelation. It is quite probable that Muhammad Rašîd Ridâ, who defended the Gospel as the only surviving reliable Gospel from the time of Jesus and who published the first Arabic edition of the Gospel of Barnabas in 1908 under the title *al-injîl as-sahîh*, was led to this Gospel through the work of al-Kairânawî. Several translations have appeared since 1908 to promote this ‘only true Gospel of Jesus Christ’ (Urdu 1916; English 1916; Persian 1927; Indonesian 1969; Dutch 1990).

Changes of Muslim Apologetics are because of Developments in European Theology

In the nineteenth century, a new wave of criticism emerged in Europe and quickly found its way into the Muslim world. In European universities, all miracles reported in the Old and New Testaments were called into question; historical events were doubted; the formulation of Christology, the Trinity, and the deity of Jesus Christ, His crucifixion and resurrection were discussed from their very foundation. All these doubts and critical remarks of European theology found their way into the Muslim world and were enthusiastically taken as proofs of the traditional Muslim view of a corrupted Christian Bible. This way of arguing against the reliability of the Old and New Testaments has marked the form of controversy, especially since al-Kairânawî.

against the common charge from the Christian side as being a willful forgery of a renegade of the Middle Ages: “How great ... is the ignorance of those, who make this an original invention of the Mahometans”. J. Toland. *Nazarenus*. p. 17 or: “After this mature examination I could safely say that this Gospel might in the main be the ancient Gospel of Barnabas ...”. J. Toland. *Tetradymus*. London 1720, p. 148.

¹³¹ Rahmatullâh Ibn Halîl al-‘Utmânî al-Kairânawî, *i[‘]jâz-i ‘Îsâwî*. Agra 1853/Delhi 1876.

During the Agra debate, this method of controversy was used for the first time. al-Kairânawî confronted the theologically conservative missionary Pfander and his friends in 1854 with the newest results of European critical research. Pfander, who had already left Europe in 1825 as a missionary, had not witnessed the important developments which had taken place in European theology in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the pupils of the conservative Basel Mission Society (Basler Missionsgesellschaft), where Pfander was educated from 1821 to 1825, had allowed their pupils to visit the theological seminary at Basel but had restricted its influence on the candidates.¹³² David Friedrich Strauss' world-famous book *Das Leben Jesu (The Life of Jesus)* was not published until 1835, when Pfander had already been ten years abroad. As the Agra debate took place in 1854, Pfander had already suspected that his Muslim opponents were busily studying European theological works, but he either underestimated the far-reaching effects of these studies or he did not have enough knowledge himself of these new developments. Pfander wrote concerning his Muslim opponents:

“... several of their friends in Delhi have been for the last two or three years hard at work in studying the Bible, reading the controversial books we have published, and searching out our commentaries and critical writers ..., only to obtain material for refuting it.”¹³³

During the Agra debate, al-Kairânawî and Muhammad Wazîr Khân presented the newest critical remarks on textual variations and on contradictions between different biblical texts of the latest theories in Europe. al-Kairânawî seemingly inherited most of his material from Muhammad Wazîr Khân, who received part of his medical training in Great Britain, where he came into contact with European theologically critical works. In addition, al-Kairânawî received the latest European works from Catholic

¹³² Teachers of the Basel Mission Seminary thought about the lectures at Basel university, given from one of the most famous theologians of the nineteenth century and representative of biblical criticism, Wilhelm Martin Lebrecht de Wette (1780-1849): “Doch trug man Bedenken, sie bei De-Wette hospitieren zu lassen und sie so in die historische Kritik einzuführen. Überhaupt fürchtete man, die Zöglinge möchten aus diesen Vorlesungen nicht denjenigen Gewinn davontragen, der dem Zeitaufwand entspräche”. Paul Eppler. *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815-1899*. Basel 1900, p. 16-17.

¹³³ Undated letter, perhaps to Thomas Valpy French, participant of the Agra debate 1854: Birks, *Life*, vol. 1, p. 71.

missionaries in India, who strongly disliked the work of their Protestant colleagues.¹³⁴

In several polemical works against Christianity in Agra and later on, for the first time Muslim theologian al-Kairânawî presented the latest scientific research from Europe. Pfander was helpless against this new sort of attack, since his books responded to the traditional Muslim charges against Christianity and not to the European results of higher or lower criticism presented from the Muslim side.

Europe did not have the slightest idea about the effects of its theological evolution on the Near East. Protestant missions were comparatively new to Muslim countries, dating only from the nineteenth century,¹³⁵ in which a new branch of Christian mission had been extended to Muslim countries apart from single attempts in former centuries as, for example, undertaken by Henry Martyn or Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg. It can be added here that after the debate, Pfander sought European authors in Basel who were refuting these theories but only in order to demonstrate to the Muslim polemicists that the standpoint of these theologians was only one part of the prism of European theology.¹³⁶

Apart from the Agra debate, we are able to witness that al-Kairânawî developed this method of proving the corruption of the Bible with European voices. In *izhâr al-haqq*, al-Kairânawî draws all the evidence he can procure from European sources: he quotes Luther's critical attitude concerning the Pope and King Henry VIII of England and European critical remarks on the apostle Paul's devastating influence on early Christianity; he refers to doubts among theologians as to whether the epistles of Jacob or Judas belong to the original biblical canon; he criticizes the forming of dogmas at the first Christian councils such as Nicea about 300 years after the death of

¹³⁴ Eugene Stock. *The History of the Church Missionary Society. Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work*. 3 vols; London 1899-1916; vol. 2, p. 171.

¹³⁵ The nineteenth century is called the 'Missionsjahrhundert' (century of mission) in Europe because of the founding of numerous Protestant missionary agencies and seminaries for the education and sending of missionaries to foreign countries.

¹³⁶ He asked for the books in a letter to his former school in Basel "... um den Mohammedanern, die sich mit denselben gar sehr brüsten, zu zeigen, daß diese Neologen und Pantheisten weit über den Koran hinausgehen und also gefährliche und schlechte Hilfsgegnossen seien, teils um nachzuweisen, daß Strauß und Konsorten längst ihre Widerlegung gefunden haben..." Christoph Friedrich Eppler. *D. Karl Gottlieb Pfander, Ein Zeuge der Wahrheit unter den Bekennern des Islam*. Basel 1888, p. 152.

Jesus Christ. Furthermore, he refers to doubts about the authorship of the books of Moses, Joshua, Judges, etc. When he comes to the genealogies of Christ, he detects ‘errors and contradictions;’ ‘absurdities’ in the narrative of Elijah being fed by ravens; and he quotes commentaries on the Bible from Eichhorn, Horne, and Henry and Scott. I could continue with hundreds of contradictions al-Kairânawî ‘detects’ between single biblical texts.¹³⁷ In six thick volumes, *izhâr al-haqq* served as a summary of all possible charges against Christianity and was therefore used after al-Kairânawî’s death as a sort of encyclopaedia, since al-Kairânawî extended the material of former polemicists such as ‘Ali Tabarî, Ibn Hazm and Ibn Taymiyya to a great extent.

European Theology Changes Muslim Views of Christianity

Here it is obvious that al-Kairânawî has changed the former Muslim view of *tahrîf* and the Muslim view of Christianity as a whole: *tahrîf* should, according to al-Kairânawî, no longer be understood as mere single alterations in the texts of the Old and New Testaments which had crept into the texts during the process of copying them throughout the centuries. Apologists in former times only criticized certain biblical dogmas such as the Trinity or the deity of Jesus Christ, as the Qur’ân itself does. al-Kairânawî expanded the Qur’ânic criticism of the corruption of the Bible to a much larger extent. Leading Muslim apologists now follow the example of *izhâr al-haqq* and take over the ‘results’ of the textual studies of European theologians. al-Kairânawî came to the conclusion that the biblical texts are totally distorted, corrupted, and unreliable in *all* their historical, dogmatic, and narrative passages. For al-Kairânawî this is no matter of dispute, since the Christian ‘ulamâ’ of Europe themselves admit the complete distortion of all biblical texts. So al-Kairânawî and his followers feel confirmed in the traditional Muslim view that the Bible is corrupted just as the Qur’ân states. Muslim apologists have known this for centuries already, but now European theologians have confirmed it themselves through scientific studies in history, geology, and archaeology.

¹³⁷ It is true what H. G. Dorman states for the real apologetic literature until the present time: “Through most of this material there moves a strain of suspicion and resentment. In only a few of the books is there an open friendliness in the approach. For the most part the polemicists are fighting hard to win a declared battle and to overthrow the enemy. There is surprisingly little difference from the classical polemical methods of the earlier centuries.” Dorman. *Islam*. p. 113.

The effect of this use of European theology can be summarized: in today's Muslim apologetic works against Christianity, we find numerous results of the severe studies in textual exegesis and different sciences undertaken in the West. With this transformation of the dogma of *tahrîf* in Christianity and the acknowledgment of European theology serving as a proof for the Muslim statements, the whole Muslim view of Christianity has changed. In former times, only certain dogmas of Christianity had to be refuted, but Christianity as a whole contained the same message as Islam. Now Christianity seems to have been proven to be corrupted as a whole: if Christian scientists and theologians in the West determine that it is untenable to believe in this collection of fanciful stories and legends originating in heathenism or Greek Platonic philosophy, it is no longer tenable to praise this revelation. Muslim apologists only take seriously what the religious authorities of Christianity have discovered about their own creed. In contrast to this great error, Islam is the religion of understanding and intelligence. The Islamic dogmas are clear, understandable, and reasonable.

Furthermore, we witness that Muslim polemical works following the al-Kairânawî-Pfander battle always pursue this fundamental attitude: Christian theologians themselves admit that the Old and New Testaments are not inspired by God as we have them today, but both parts of the Bible are full of errors, misconceptions, contradictions, and absurdities, if not willful distortions. Thus Muslim theologians are confirmed in their interpretation of the Christian Scriptures.

We can witness this form of controversy today when it comes to Muslim apologetic works: Muhammad Rašîd Ridâ used the results of European theological studies in his *tafsîr*. For him the apostle Paul is especially guilty for having introduced heathenism into Christianity. It was not until the Council of Nicea in the year 325 A.D. that the dogmas of the Trinity and redemption through the crucifixion of Jesus were established. With this development, *tauhîd* was replaced by *širk*.¹³⁸ We witness the same tendency in Abû Zahra's *muhâdarât fî-n-nasrânîya*: Jesus Christ himself preached monotheism, but this dogma was distorted by the influence of syncretism, new Platonic and Greek philosophy, and Roman heathenism.¹³⁹ Ahmad Shalaby considers Christianity a mixture of heathenism and the

¹³⁸ Muhammad Rašîd Ridâ. *al-manâr* 10 (1325-1326), p. 386.

¹³⁹ Muhammad Muhammad Abû Zahra. *muhâdarât*. p.11.

convictions of the apostle Paul,¹⁴⁰ and Jesus' miracles narrated in the four Gospels as unreliable¹⁴¹.

Elwood M. Wherry remarks, according to his personal view, of course, concerning the beginning of the twentieth century:

“The Muslims were obliged to abandon their own works and endeavour to save the day by a counter assault, in which they scrupled not to use the stock arguments of European infidelity in their effort to overthrow the authority of the Christian Scriptures. This characteristic has marked the Muslim method of controversy ever since.¹⁴²”

Summary

1. In the nineteenth century a Muslim-Christian debate took place far away from the traditional centers of Muslim learning. In Agra in 1854, probably for the first time, Muslim theologians used European critical works as proofs against Christian missionaries.

2. The nineteenth century marks a turning point when it comes to Muslim apologetics: the Muslims developed a completely new method to prove Christianity to be the ‘false religion’ with the help of European sources being mainly Christian theological works (e.g., Bible commentaries).

3. After the publication of *izhâr al-haqq*, this method of controversy became common among Muslim apologists such as Muhammad Rašîd Ridâ and Muhammad Muhammad Abû Zahra to prove the traditional charge of *tahrîf*.

4. *tahrîf* is the center of Christian-Muslim apologetics of the nineteenth century (Christology or redemption is the center of apologetics in the twentieth century).

5. This leads to a new Muslim view of Christianity during the nineteenth century. The dogmas of Christianity are no longer distorted in fragments but rather as a whole.

¹⁴⁰ Ahmad Shalaby. *muqâranat al-adyân*. Vol. 2: *al-masîhîya*. Cairo 1965², p. 64.

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* p. 62.

¹⁴² Elwood M. Wherry. *The Mohammedan Controversy*. London 1905, p. 2.

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About the Author

Biography

Christine Schirmacher, born in 1962 (MA in Islamic Studies, 1988; PhD in Islamic Studies, 1991, University of Bonn, with a thesis dealing with the Muslim-Christian controversy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) has studied Arabic, Persian, and Turkish and is presently Professor of Islamic Studies at the Department Religious Studies and Missiology of the Evangelisch-Theologische Faculteit (Protestant University) in Leuven/Belgium and lecturer of Islam at Freie Theologische Akademie (Free Theological Academy) in Giessen. She is director of the Institut für Islamfragen (Institute of Islamic Studies) of the German Evangelical Alliance, as well as an official speaker and advisor on Islam for the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA). She lectures on Islam and security issues, serves in continuing education programs related to politics, and is a consultant to different advisory bodies of the German government.

Dr. Schirmacher is a member of the Internationale Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte (International Society for Human Rights) (IGFM/ISHR), Frankfurt; a member of the Deutsch-Jordanische Gesellschaft (German-Jordanian Society), Berlin; and a curatorium member of the Evangelische Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen (Protestant Center for World View Questions), an academic documentation and advisory center of the Protestant Church of Germany (Berlin). She is engaged in current dialogue initiatives, formulating papers responding to the letter of the “138 Muslim theologians” to Christian leaders in October 2007, and will partake in the coming conference “Loving God and Neighbor in Word and Deed: Implications for Muslims and Christians” of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, in July 2008.

Dr. Schirmacher has visited many countries of the Muslim world of the Near and Middle East, has been the speaker at national as well as international conferences dealing with Islam, and is the author of numerous arti-

cles. She has also written ten books, including the two-volume standard introduction *Der Islam* (1994/2003) (Islam), *Frauen und die Scharia* (2004/2006) (Women under the Sharia), and *Islam und Christlicher Glaube – ein Vergleich* (2006) (Islam and Christianity Compared).

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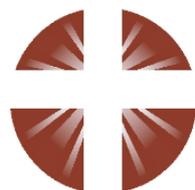
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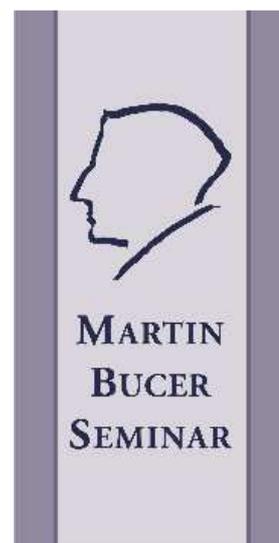
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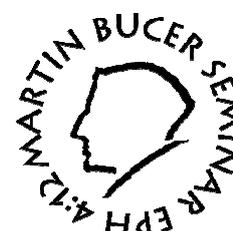
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