

AL-MĪZĀN

An Exegesis of the Qur'ān

BY:

**al-'Allāmah as-Sayyid Muḥammad
Ḥusayn aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā'ī**

VOLUME 6

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***In the Name of Allāh,
The All-compassionate, The All-merciful***

*Praise belongs to Allāh, the Lord of all being;
the All-compassionate, the All-merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgement;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we pray
for succour;
Guide us in the straight path;
the path of those whom Thou hast blessed,
not of those against whom Thou art wrathful,
nor of those who are astray.*

* * * * *

*O' Allāh! send your blessings to the head of
your messengers and the last of
your prophets,
Muhammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send your blessings to all your
prophets and envoys.*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الحمد لله رب العالمين الرحمن الرحيم
مالك يوم الدين إياك نعبد وإياك نستعين
أهدنا الصراط المستقيم صراط الذين
أنعمت عليهم غير المغضوب عليهم
ولا الضالين

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى
سَيِّدِ رُسُلِكَ وَخَاتَمِ أَنْبِيَائِكَ
مُحَمَّدٍ وَآلِهِ الطَّيِّبِينَ الطَّاهِرِينَ
وَصَلِّ عَلَى جَمِيعِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالرُّسُلِ

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TRANSLITERATION

Symbol	Transliteration
ء	'
ب	b
ت	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	ḍ
ط	ṭ
ظ	ẓ
ع	' <i>or</i> '
غ	gh
ف	F
ق	q

Symbol	Transliteration
ك	K
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
ي	y
ة	ah, at (construct state)
ال	article al- and 'l (even before the antepalatals)
Long Vowels	
آ	ā
و	ū
ي	ī
Short Vowels	
َ	a
ُ	u
ِ	i

تصدير

- ١- العلامة الشهير والمفكر والفيلسوف الإسلامي المعاصر، السيد محمد حسين الطباطبائي (١٣٢١/١٩٠٤ - ١٤٠٢/١٩٨١) رحمه الله سبق وأن عرفناه بعض التعريف في تصديرا للجزء الأول من الترجمة الإنجليزية للميزان، الذي سينشر، بحول الله وقوته، في القريب العاجل.
- ٢- اشتهر العلامة الطباطبائي رحمه الله بالعديد من آثاره وأهمها تفسيره الكبير (الميزان في تفسير القرآن) الذي يصح أن يعدّ الدعامة الأساسية للتقدير العلمي الذي ناله العلامة الطباطبائي في العالم الإسلامي.
- ٣- شعرنا بالضرورة الملحة إلى نشر تفسير للقرآن الكريم بالإنجليزية، وبعد مداولات واستشارات، وقع اختيارنا على (الميزان) لأننا وجدناه يجمع إلى حدّ ما، بين النقاط التي لا بدّ منها في تفسير متكامل للقرآن الكريم وبين ما تتطلبه الدّهنية المعاصرة للقارئ المسلم فاقترحنا على الأستاذ العلامة السيد سعيد أخترضوي القيام بهذه المهمة، لما نعهده فيه من القدرة العلميّة على فهم النصّ العربيّ، وكفاءته الأديبة في التعبير والترجمة، وقد اعتمدنا عليه في ذلك، ليكون هو الزعيم بالترجمة الإنجليزية والمسئول عنها، كما كان العلامة الطباطبائي رحمه الله هو الزعيم ببحوث الكتاب والمرجع المسئول عنها.

٤- قدّمنا نشر ترجمة الجزء الثاني من (الميزان) لأنه كان قد تهيأ للنشر، والجزء الأول لم يتهيأ بعد- لأسباب لا نريد أن نشرح أمرها هنا- فلم نر من الصّالح إرجاء نشره. وقد وضعنا قائمتين (الأولى) بأسماء المؤلفين الوارد ذكرهم في مجموع أجزاء (الميزان) و(الثانية) بأسماء الكتب التي هي بحاجة الى التعريف، وقد ألحقنا هاتين القائمتين بالجزء الأول من الترجمة الانجليزية. ولكنّا وضعنا جدولين آخرين يجدهما القارئ ملحقين بكل جزء من أجزاء الترجمة.

* * *

ومن الله سبحانه نسال، واليه نبتهل أن يجعل عملنا خالصا لوجهه الكريم، وأن يوفقنا لإتمام ما بدأنا ويسدّدنا في خطوتنا هذه وخطواتنا المقبلة، إنّه نعم المولى ونعم النصير.

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(لجنة التأليف والترجمة والنشر)
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١٤٠٢/٤/٦

١٩٨٢/٢/١

FOREWORD

1. al-‘Allāmah as-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā’ī (1321/1904 — 1402/1981) — may Allāh have mercy upon him — was a famous scholar, thinker and the most celebrated contemporary Islamic philosopher. We have introduced him briefly in the first volume of the English translation of *al-Mīzān*.

2. al-‘Allāmah aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā’ī is well-known for a number of his works of which the most important is his great exegesis *al-Mīzān fī tafsīri ‘l-Qur’ān* which is rightly counted as the fundamental pillar of scholarly work which the ‘Allāmah has achieved in the Islamic world.

3. We felt the necessity of publishing an exegesis of the Holy Qur’ān in English. After a thorough consultation, we came to choose *al-Mīzān* because we found that it contained in itself, to a considerable extent, the points which should necessarily be expounded in a perfect exegesis of the Holy Qur’ān and the points which appeal to the mind of the contemporary Muslim reader. Therefore, we proposed to al-Ustādh al-‘Allāmah as-Sayyid Sa‘īd Akhtar ar-Raḍawī to undertake this task because we were familiar with his intellectual ability to understand the Arabic text of *al-Mīzān* and his literary capability in expression and translation. So we relied on him for this work and consider him responsible for the English translation as al-‘Allāmah aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā’ī was responsible for the Arabic text of *al-Mīzān* and its discussions.

4. We have now undertaken the publication of the fifth volume of the English translation of *al-Mīzān*. This volume corresponds with the

FOREWORD

first half of the third volume of the Arabic text. With the help of Allāh, the Exalted, we hope to provide the complete translation and publication of this voluminous work.

In the first volume, the reader will find two more appendixes included apart from the two which are to appear in all volumes of the English translation of *al-Mizān*: One for the authors and the other for the books cited throughout this work.

* * * * *

We implore upon Allāh to effect our work purely for His pleasure, and to help us to complete this work which we have started. May Allāh guide us in this step which we have taken and in the future steps, for He is the best Master and the best Heiper.

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al-Mīzān

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وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ
وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ — ٤٢ . يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي
وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ — ٤٣ . ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهِ إِلَيْكَ
وَمَا كُنْتَ لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يُلْقُونَ أَقْلَامَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ يَكْفُلُ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا كُنْتَ
لَدَيْهِمْ إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ — ٤٤ . إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا
وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ — ٤٥ . وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا
وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ — ٤٦ . قَالَتْ رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي
بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ اللَّهُ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَى أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ
كُنْ فَيَكُونُ — ٤٧ . وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ — ٤٨ .
وَرَسُولًا إِلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ أَنِّي
أَخْلَقْتُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ
اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأَنْبِئُكُمْ
بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمَا تَدَّخِرُونَ فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لَكُمْ
إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ — ٤٩ . وَمُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلِأَحْلِ
لَكُمْ بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ فَاتَّقُوا

اللَّهُ وَأَطِيعُونَ - ٥٠ إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبُّكُمْ فَأَعْبُدُوهُ هَذَا صِرَاطٌ
 مُسْتَقِيمٌ - ٥١ فَلَمَّا أَحَسَّ عِيسَى مِنْهُمْ الْكُفْرَ قَالَ مَنْ أَنْصَارِي إِلَى
 اللَّهِ قَالَ الْحَوَارِيُّونَ نَحْنُ أَنْصَارُ اللَّهِ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَأَشْهَدُ بِأَنَّا مُسْلِمُونَ - ٥٢ .
 رَبَّنَا آمَنَّا بِمَا أَنْزَلْتَ وَاتَّبَعْنَا الرَّسُولَ فَاكْتُبْنَا مَعَ الشَّاهِدِينَ - ٥٣ .
 وَمَكْرُؤًا وَاكْرَأَ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ خَيْرُ الْمَاكِرِينَ - ٥٤ . إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَا عِيسَى
 إِنِّي مُتَوَفِّيكَ وَرَافِعُكَ إِلَيَّ وَمُطَهِّرُكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلُ
 الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ
 فَأَحْكُمُ بَيْنَكُمْ فِيمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ - ٥٥ . فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
 فَأَعَذِبْنَاهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ - ٥٦ .
 وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَيُوَفِّيهِمْ أُجُورَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ
 الظَّالِمِينَ - ٥٧ . ذَلِكَ نَتْلُوهُ عَلَيْكَ مِنَ الْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ - ٥٨ .
 إِنَّ مَثَلَ عِيسَى عِنْدَ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ آدَمَ خَلَقَهُ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ قَالَ لَهُ كُنْ
 فَيَكُونُ - ٥٩ . الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُنْ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ - ٦٠ .

And when the angels said: "O Maryam! surely Allāh has chosen and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds (42). O Maryam! keep to obedience to your Lord and prostrate and bow down with those who bow" (43). This is of the tidings of the unseen which we reveal to you; and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Maryam in his charge, and you were not with them when they contented one with another (44). When the angels said: "O Maryam! surely Allāh gives you good news of a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah, 'Isā son of Maryam, worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near (to Allāh) (45). And he shall speak to the people when in the

cradle and when of mature age, and (he shall be) one of the good ones” (46). She said: “My Lord! how shall there be a son (born) to me and man has not touched me?” He said: “Even so; Allāh creates what He pleases; when He has decreed a matter, He only says to it: ‘Be,’ and it is (47). And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Injīl (48). And (make him) a messenger to the Children of Israel: ‘That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allāh’s permission, and I heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead ones to life with Allāh’s permission, and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses; most surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers (49). And a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you, and I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, therefore fear Allāh and obey me (50). Surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship Him; this is the straight path’ ” (51). But when ‘Īsā perceived unbelief on their part, he said: “Who are my helpers to Allāh?” The disciples said: “We are helpers of Allāh: We believe in Allāh and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones (52). Our Lord! we believe in what Thou halt revealed and we follow the messenger; so write us down with those who bear witness” (53). And they planned and Allāh (also) planned, and Allāh is the best of planners (54). And when Allāh said: “O ‘Īsā! I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve, and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed (55). Then as to those who disbelieve, I will chastise them with severe chastisement in this world and the hereafter, and they shall have no helpers” (56). And as to those who believe and do good deeds, He will pay them fully their rewards; and Allāh does not love the unjust (57). This we recite to you of the signs and the wise reminder (58). Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust,

then said to him: “Be,” and he was (59). The truth is from your Lord, so be not of the doubters (60).

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

QUR’ĀN: *And when the angels said: “O Maryam! surely Allāh has chosen you and purified you: The conjunctive, “And”, joins it to the verse 35: When the woman of ‘Imrān said ... Both verses therefore describe the selection of the descendants of ‘Imrān mentioned in the verse 34: Surely Allāh chose Adam...*

This verse proves that Maryam was one of “the spoken to”; the angels talked to her and she heard their speech. It is proved also by the words of Allāh in the Chapter of Maryam: *then We sent to her Our Spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man ... He said: “I am only a messenger of your Lord ... ” (19:17 — 21): We shall write, at the end of this Commentary, about “the spoken to”.*

We have earlier written explaining the Divine Words, So her Lord accepted her with a good acceptance and made her grow up a good growing (3:37), that these sentences answer the pleas of Maryam’s mother: “and I have named her Maryam, and I commend her and her offspring into Thy protection from the accursed Satan” (3:36); also it was mentioned that the angels’ words in the verse under discussion, “O Maryam! surely Allāh has chosen you ...”, show the status which Maryam had near Allāh. You may refer to that explanation for further details. Thus her choosing means that she was accepted a good acceptance for the worship of Allāh; and her purification implies that she held fast to the protection of Allāh. She was therefore a chosen one who was protected from sin. It has also been said that her purification means that she was a virgin who did not menstruate — thus she was not obliged to go out of the synagogue at any time. There is nothing wrong in this explanation although the meaning given by us is more in conformity with the context.

QUR’ĀN: *“and chosen you above the women of the worlds: We have*

already described (in the Commentary of the verse 3:33, *Surely Allāh chose Adam ... above all the worlds*) the connotation of choosing “above” the worlds; “above” shows that the chosen one was given excellence and precedence over other people in something exclusively given to him; and that it is more than mere selection which implies total surrender to the will of Allāh. The announcement that Maryam was chosen “above the women of the worlds” thus, means that she was given precedence over them.

Was she given precedence over them in all things? Or only in some matters? Look at the following verses:

When the angels said: ‘O Maryam! surely Allāh gives you good news of a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah...’ (3:45).

And she who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her of Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for the worlds (21:91).

And Maryam, the daughter of ‘Imrān, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed into it of Our Spirit, and she accepted the truth of the words of her Lord, and she was of the obedient ones (66:12).

These verses describe the only distinction which she was given to the exclusion of all women of the worlds — and that is her miraculously conceiving and giving birth to ‘Īsā (a.s.). It shows that it was this aspect of her life in which she was given precedence over all the women. The other qualities attributed to her in these verses (her purification, her acceptance of the words of Allāh and His Books, her obedience to God and her being spoken to) were not her exclusive virtues — they are found in others too.

It is said that she was chosen above the women of her time. But the verse is unconditional and general, and as such it cannot accept any limitation put to it.

QUR’ĀN: *‘O Maryam! keep to obedience to your Lord and prostrate, and bow down with those who bow’:* *‘al-Qunūt’* (الْقُنُوتُ) means keeping to obedience with submission and humility; *as-sajdah* (السَّجْدَةُ = translated here as prostration) is well-known ritual of worship; *ar-rukū’* (الرُّكُوعُ = to bow down; to be humble).

When someone calls another person, the called one looks towards the caller and listens to him. In this verse, Maryam is again called by name. It is as though the angels wanted to tell her: We have brought to you

good news and again some more; you should listen to both of the good tidings. The first concerns with the rank and status you have been given by Allāh. The second is what you are obliged to do alongside that Divine Favour; in other words, what you have got to offer to Allāh of the duties of servitude; it will show your gratitude for that rank and meet the demands of servitude. In this light, this verse, “O Maryam! keep to obedience ...”, seems to branch out from the preceding one, “O Maryam! surely Allāh has chosen you ...”; that is, because Allāh has chosen you, purified you and chosen you over the women of the worlds, you should keep to obedience to Him and prostrate and bow down with those who bow down. Each of the three orders given in this verse may possibly have emanated from one of the three excellences mentioned in the preceding one — although their respective relationship is not clear.

QUR’ĀN: *This is of the tidings of the unseen which we reveal to you: Allāh has counted it as a tiding of the unseen as He has done after relating the story of Yūsuf (a.s.): This is of the tidings of the unseen (which) we reveal to you, and you were not with them when they resolved upon their affair, and they were devising plans (12:102).* Of course, the scriptures of the People of the Book contain stories about them, but no credence can be attached to them, because they have not remained safe from alterations, deletions and interpolations. For example, a lot of details and particulars given by the Qur’ān concerning the story of Zakariyyā are nowhere to be found in the Bible.

It is probably for this reason that Allāh goes on to say: “and you were not with them when they cast their pens...”

Moreover, the Prophet and his people were unlettered; they had not known these stories, nor had they read them in books, as Allāh says after mentioning the story of Nūḥ: *These a, e of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you; you did not know them — (neither) you nor your people — before this (11:49).* But the first interpretation is more in keeping with the context of the verse.

QUR’ĀN: *and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Maryam in his charge: “al-Qalam” (القلم = pen; plural: al-aqlām = القلām), also means arrow shaft or arrow which was used for casting lot; in this meaning it is synonymous to as-*

sahm (السَّهْمُ). Therefore, “when they cast their pens”, means, when they cast their arrows to decide by lot which of them should have Maryam in his custody. This sentence shows that the contention mentioned in the next phrase, “and you were not with them when they contended one with another”, refers to this same conflict which they had had about the guardianship of Maryam, and that they did not stop arguing with each other until they agreed to decide the matter by lot. They cast the lot and it came out in favour of Zakariyyā, and he took her charge, as Allāh says: *and gave her into the charge of Zakariyyā* (3:37).

According to some people, this contention and decision by lot probably occurred when Maryam was grown up and Zakariyyā had become too weak to look after her. Why did this idea occur to them? Probably it was because this contention and its settlement through lot has been mentioned after the story of Maryam’s birth and her being chosen by Allāh, and also because the guardianship of Zakariyyā has already been mentioned before. Thus, according to them, this verse refers to another guardianship.

But it is not unusual, while describing an event, to repeat, or to allude to, some of its previously mentioned aspects in order to prove a claim. A similar style has been used in the story of Yūsuf, where Allāh says at the end: *This is of the tidings of the unseen (which) We reveal to you, and you were not with them when they resolved upon their affair, and they were devising plans* (12:102). This points to their conspiracy which is mentioned at the beginning of the story: *When they said: “Certainly Yūsuf and his brother are dearer to our father than we, ... Slay Yūsuf or cast him (forth) into some land ...” A speaker from among them said: “Do not slay Yūsuf, and cast him down into the bottom of the pit if you must do (it), (so that) some of the travellers may pick him up”* (12:8 — 10).

QUR’ĀN: *When the angels said: “O Maryam! surely Allāh gives you good news of a Word: Evidently it refers to the same event which is mentioned in the Chapter of Maryam in these words: then We sent to her Our Spirit and there appeared to her a well-made man. She said: “Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent God, if you are pious.” He said: “I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I should give you a pure boy”* (19:17 — 19). The good tiding ascribed to the angels in the verse under discussion is thus attributed here to the Spirit.

It is said that the word “angels” refers to Gabriel. He has been described with a plural, “angels”, to show his great honour and high rank. People say: He went on a journey riding horses and sailing in ships — while actually he rode one horse and sailed in one ship only. Also, we say: People told him so, while in fact it was only one person who gave him the news. A similar style is seen in the story of Zakariyyā, mentioned earlier: *Then the angels called to him... He said: ‘Even thus; does Allāh what He pleases’* (3:39 — 40).

Others have said that there were other angels with Gabriel and they jointly gave her the good news.

However, if you ponder on the verses which describe the angels, you will see that the angels are of various ranks; some have precedence over others, some are nearer to Allāh than others. Those who are behind are mere followers of the orders of those who are in the forefront. The actions and words of the follower are counted as the actions and the words of the leader himself. It is not different from the activities of our own powers and limbs which are counted as our own activities without there being any duality of doers. We say: My own eyes saw it, my own ears heard it; and the same idea is conveyed when we say: I saw it and heard it. We say: My hand did it; my fingers wrote it; and also we say: I did it, I wrote it. Likewise the deeds and words of the angels of higher ranks are counted as the deeds and words of those of lower rank who follow the former’s orders, and vice versa. And similarly the actions and words of all the angels — the leaders and the followers — are attributed to Allāh Himself. Look at the action of giving death: In one place, Allāh attributes it to Himself: *Allāh takes completely the souls at the time of their death* (39:42); another verse ascribes it to the angel of death: *Say: ‘The angel of death who is given charge of you shall take you completely’* (32:11); and yet another one attributes it to a group of the angels: *until when death comes to one of you, Our messengers take him completely* (6:61).

A similar interchange is seen in the following verses: *Surely We have revealed to you* (4:163); *The Faithful Spirit has descended with it upon your heart* (26:193 — 194); *Say: ‘Whoever is the enemy of Jibrīl — for surely he revealed it to your heart ...’* (2:97); *Nay! surely it is an admonishment. So let him who pleases mind it. In honoured books, exalted, purified, in the hands of scribes, noble, virtuous* (80:11 — 16).

Now it is clear that the announcement of good news by Gabriel was precisely the announcement by the group of the angels under his authority. And Gabriel is one of the chiefs of the angels, one of those who are nearer to Allāh, as the Divine Words show: *Most surely it is the word of an honoured messenger, the possessor of strength, having an honourable place with the Lord of the Throne, one (to be) obeyed, and faithful in trust* (81:19 — 21). We shall explain it further, Allāh willing, under the ch. 35.

You may have a glimpse of the above mentioned reality in the verse: *He said: "Even so; Allāh creates what He pleases ..."* (3:47). Apparently the speaker of these words is Allāh, while in ch. 19 the same thing has been attributed to the Spirit: *He (i.e., the Spirit) said: "I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I should give you a pure boy."* *She said: "How shall I have a boy and no mortal has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?"* *He said: "Even so, your Lord says: 'It is easy to Me ...'"* (19:19 — 21).

That the angels and the Spirit talked with Maryam, shows that she was one of "the spoken to". Not only this; the earlier quoted words of ch. 19 show that in addition to hearing their speech, she even saw an angel: *then we sent to her Our Spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man.* We shall further explain it, Allāh willing, under the Traditions.

QUR'ĀN: *"a Word from Him whose name is the Messiah, 'Isā son of Maryam: We have fully explained the significance of the "speech of Allāh", under the verse: Those apostle, we have made some of them to excel the others* (2:253).

al-Kalimah (الكَلِمَةُ = word) is a collective noun, one unit of which is called *al-kalim* (الكَلِم), as is the case with *at-tamrah* and *at-tamr* (التَّمْرَةُ = date). *al-Kalimah* is used for one meaningful word as well as for a sentence (e.g., Zayd is standing); also, it is used with equal validity for a phrase or incomplete sentence (e.g., If Zayd is standing ...). This explanation is according to language. As far as the terminology of the Qur'ān is concerned, as for example where it attributes a word to Allāh, it means: 'that which shows the will of Allāh'; it may be an order, e.g., the word of creation when He says to a thing, 'Be'; or it may be a word of revelation and inspiration, etc.

What is the meaning of “a Word from Allāh” when it is applied to ‘Īsā (a.s.)? Some people say: This title was given to ‘Īsā (a.s.) because the prophets who preceded him (or especially the prophets of Israel) had foretold his advent, giving the good news that he would be the saviour of Israel. We say in similar situations: This is my word which I had said. And it is in the same meaning that this word has been used by Allāh in connection with the advent of Mūsā (a.s.): *and the good word of your Lord was fulfilled in the Children of Israel because they bore up (sufferings) patiently (7:137).*

COMMENT: Although the books of the Bible may support this interpretation, the Qur’ān does not subscribe to it. According to the Qur’ān, ‘Īsā son of Maryam was a prophet who had brought *the good news of a Messenger who will come after me, his name being Ahmad (61:6)*; he was not the one whose good news was given by the others. Moreover, the phrase, “whose name is the Messiah”, does not fit this interpretation; because according to this interpretation, “a Word from Him” refers to the advent of ‘Īsā, and not to ‘Īsā himself; while the phrase “whose name is the Messiah”, says that the Messiah is the name of the word — and not the name of him in whom the word of Allāh was fulfilled.

Another interpretation: The “Word” refers to ‘Īsā (a.s.) because he explained the Torah giving it the meaning intended by Allāh, pointing out the interpolations and alterations made by the Jews, and clarifying the religious matters in which they had differed. Allāh quotes him as saying to the Children of Israel: *... so that I may take clear to you part of what you differ in (43:63).*

COMMENT: This interpretation justifies application of the “Word” to ‘Īsā (a.s.); but there is no association or proof in the Qur’ān to support it.

Third interpretation: The “Word” refers to the good news itself; Maryam was told that she would conceive ‘Īsā and deliver him. Accordingly, “Allāh gives you good news of a Word from Him,” means that Allāh gives you good news that you will give birth to ‘Īsā without the agency of man.

COMMENT: Obviously, the phrase, “whose name is the Messiah, ‘Īsā

son of Maryam’’, does not fit this interpretation.

Fourth interpretation: It refers to ‘Īsā (a.s.) because he was the word of creation, i.e., the Divine Command, ‘Be’. No doubt every man, nay, every thing, comes into being by the creative word, ‘Be’; but every man is conceived and born according to the well-known normal system: the usual course is for the male sperm to fertilize the female ovum — and it requires many main and supporting causes to materialize. That is why conception is attributed to man as its efficient cause — as every effect is attributed to its immediate cause. But conception of ‘Īsā did not follow this course; many usual and gradual causes were simply missing. His existence was just by the creative word, ‘Be’, and no usual causes intervened. And in this way, he became the “Word” itself, as we see in the verse: ... *and His Word which He communicated to Maryam* (4:171). It gets support from the verse 3:59, coming at the end: *Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him, ‘Be’’, and he was.*

COMMENT: This is the best of the interpretations.

al-Masīḥ (الْمَسِيحُ = anointed; wiped clean), ‘Īsā (a.s.) was given this name because he was anointed with success and blessing. Or because he was wiped clean of sins, was purified. Or because he was anointed with holy olive-oil, with which the prophets were anointed. Or because Gabriel wiped him with his wings at his birth, so that it should be a protection from Satan. Or because he used to touch and wipe the heads of the orphans. Or because he used to wipe the eyes of the blind and they gained eye-sight. Or because whenever he touched and wiped any suffering person, he became whole. These are the reasons given by the exegetes for this name.

The fact is that this name was included in the good news given by Gabriel to Maryam, as Allāh quotes him as saying: *O Maryam! surely Allāh gives you good news of a Word from Him whose name is al-Masīḥ, ‘Īsā son of Maryam.* This word is the Arabicised form of the Meshiha, which is found in the Old and the New Testaments.¹

The Bible shows that when a king was enthroned among the Children

¹ The original Hebrew *māshiah* became *mashīḥā* in Aramic; in Greek this became messiah, the form now in common use. (*tr.*)

of Israel, the priests anointed him with the holy oil, so that he might be blessed in his rule. The king was therefore called messiah. It may be inferred from it that the messiah means either the king or the blessed one.

It appears from their books that ‘Īsā (a. s.) was called the Messiah because the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament contained the prophecy of his kingdom; it was believed that there would appear in the Children of Israel a king who would deliver them from bondage. The Gospel according to Luke describes the angel’s good news to Maryam in these words:

And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail thou that are highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women, And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke, 1:28 — 33)

And that was the excuse offered by the Jews for not accepting ‘Īsā’s claim of prophethood. They said that the good news contained the prophecy of his kingdom and it did not materialize at any time during his life. And it was precisely to overcome this objection that the Christians interpreted the promised kingdom as the spiritual, and not the temporal one. Some Muslim exegetes too have taken the same line.

The author says: It is not unlikely that the name *al-Masīh* used in the good news may have meant “the blessed”. When they anointed a king with the holy oil, it was done to bring blessings on him. This connotation may be supported by the verses: *He said: “Surely I am a servant of Allāh, He has given me the Book and made me a prophet: and He has made me blessed wherever I may be ...”* (19:30 — 31).

‘Īsā was originally Yashū‘ which they interpret as deliverer, saviour. Some Muslims’ traditions say that it means “he lives”. It seems more appropriate in view of the perfect similarity between ‘Īsā and Yaḥyā whose name too means “he lives”.¹

¹ See the translator’s note in vol. 5, p. 263, under the explanation of the verse 3:39. (*tr.*)

The name ‘Īsā is qualified with the phrase, son of Maryam, although the good news was being given to Maryam herself. It was done to emphasize the fact that he would be born without the agency of a father, and therefore would be known with this name; and that Maryam would jointly share this sign with him. Allāh says: *and made her and her son a sign for the worlds* (21:91).

QUR’ĀN: ‘*worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near* (to Allah): *al-Wijāhah* (الْوَجَاهَةُ = translated here as worthiness of regard) means esteem, prestige, eminence and acceptability. ‘Īsā’s eminence and acceptability in this world is not a secret; and the Qur’ān confers this position to him in the hereafter too. Undoubtedly ‘Īsā (a. s.) was one of “those who are made near”. He is near to Allāh, included in the rank of the friends of Allāh and the near angels in the verse: *The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of Allāh, nor do the angels who are near to Him* (4:172). Allāh has explained the importance of being made near to Him, in the ch. 56. He says: *When the great event comes to pass, ... and you shall be three sorts ... And the foremost are the foremost; these are they who are drawn near* (to Allāh) (56:1 — 11). These verses point to the reality of the nearness to Allāh: Man presses forward leaving others behind in the way that leads one back to Allāh, then he comes nearer to Allāh. Proceeding on this way is prescribed for every man, nay, everything. Allāh says: *O man! surely thou art striving to thy Lord, a hard striving, so that thou art to meet Him* (84:6). Also, He says: *now surely to Allāh do all affairs eventually come* (42:53).

There is another aspect to this reality. Nearness to Allāh is an attribute of some angels. It means that this nearness is not necessarily a thing to be acquired by one’s endeavours; whatever it is a gift from Allāh. It may therefore be said that it is a rank it is a gift from Allāh. It may therefore be said that it is a rank and status which the angels get by Divine bestowal and the men by their striving.

The expression, “worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter” is a circumstantial phrase; and so are other words in conjunctive with it, i.e., “and of those who are made near”; “and he shall speak”; “and one of the good ones”; “and He will teach him ...”; “and a messenger ...”

QUR'ĀN: *'And he shall speak to the people when in the cradle and when of mature age ...'*: *al-Mahd* (الْمَهْدُ = cradle; bed or cot for infant, especially one on rockers). *al-Kahl* (الْكَهْلُ = one of mature age) is derived from *al-kuhūlah* (الْكُهُولَةُ = to be of mature age); it is the middle age between youth and old age, it is the time when the body is at the height of its perfection and strength. That is why it is said that middle age is when white hair mixes with black. Others say that mature age means the age of forty-three.

In any case, it was a prophecy that he would live until he reached middle age; it was another good news for Maryam.

The Gospels say that he did not live on the earth more than thirty-three years. And yet the Qur'ān clearly talks about his middle age. It is a point to be pondered upon. It is because of this that some people have said that his middle age speech would occur after his coming down from the heaven — because he was not on the earth till his middle age. Some others have claimed that according to “historical research” ‘Īsā (a.s.) lived for about sixty-four years, contrary to what the Gospels say. But the expression, “when in the cradle and when of mature age,” shows that he would not reach old age — his life on this earth would end in his middle age. In other words, the verse gives us both sides of his age — the infancy and the middle age.

Usually a child is put in cradle in the beginning of its life when it is in diapers, before it starts crawling or walking — generally in its second year or even before; and it is the age when it starts talking. Therefore, for a child to speak in cradle is not an extraordinary achievement. But the verse obviously has another importance: It means that he would speak to the people, when in the cradle, a complete and thought provoking speech which men of understanding would listen to, as they listen to the talk of a middle-aged man. In other words, he would talk to them in his cradle in the same manner as he would do in his mature age. Surely such a talk from an infant is extraordinary sign, a miracle.

Apart from that, the story as given in the ch. 19, clearly shows that he had spoken to the people in the very first hour of his life, when Maryam brought him to them soon after his birth. And undoubtedly when a child talks on the day he is born, it must be a miracle. Allāh says: *And she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). They said: “O Maryam! surely you have done a strange thing. O sister of Hārūn! your*

father was not a bad man, nor was your mother an unchaste woman.” But she pointed to him. They said: “How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle?” He said: “Surely I am a servant of Allāh; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet: And he has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and zakāt so long as I live: And dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me insolent, unblessed: And peace on me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life” (19:27 — 33).

QUR’ĀN: *She said: “My Lord! how shall there be a son (born) to me and man has not touched me?”*: She addressed her talk to the Lord, although it was the Spirit in the form of a well-made man who was talking to her. It was based on the earlier explained reality that the talk of the angels and Spirit is in fact the talk of Allāh. She knew that it was God who was talking to her although the talk occurred through the agency of the Spirit or the angels. That is why she expressed her perplexity to her Lord.

Also, it is possible to look at this sentence as a cry for help. In that case, it will be a sentence in parenthesis, somewhat similar to the expression: *he says: “Send me back, my Lord, send me back” (23:99).*

QUR’ĀN: *He said: “Even so; Allāh creates what He pleases when He has decreed a matter, He only says to it, ‘Be’, and it is: We have described earlier the syntactic position of the word, “Even so”.* We have shown that, putting this reply by the side of the verse 19:21 (*He said: “Even so; your Lord says: ‘It is easy to Me: and that we may make him a sign to men and a mercy from Us; and it is a matter which has been decreed’ ”*), it may be inferred that the word, “Even so”, is a complete sentence, implying: Even so is the matter. That is, what you have been told is a matter which has been decreed; nothing can avert it.

As for her astonishment, it could only be in place if the matter was beyond the power of Allāh, or very difficult for Him to do. So far as His power is concerned, it is unlimited, He does whatever He pleases. And as for difficulty it is imaginable only where the matter depends on preliminaries and causes — the more numerous and more formidable the causes and preliminaries, the more difficult that matter. But Allāh does not create, what He creates, with the help of the causes; “when He has

decreed a matter, He only says to it, ‘Be’, and it is”.

It is thus evident that the word, “Even so”, is a complete sentence meant to remove the perplexity of Maryam; the next sentence, “Allāh creates what He pleases,” aims at getting rid of the possible misunderstanding about Allāh’s power; and lastly the sentence, “when He has decreed a matter, He only says to it, ‘Be’, and it is,” removes the delusion of difficulty and hardship.

QUR’ĀN: “*And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Injil:* The definite articles, in “the Book” and “the Wisdom”, denote the genes of the Book and the Wisdom. The Book, as explained earlier refers to revelation which removes the people’s differences. The Wisdom is the useful knowledge related to the belief and action. Now the Torah and the Injil themselves were books containing Wisdom. Yet, the Spirit or the angels mentioned them separately after the Book and the Wisdom. Sometimes a particular person or thing is mentioned after description of its genes, because that thing is important enough to deserve separate mention. The definite article in “the Book” is not for comprehensiveness. In other words, it does not say that ‘Īsā (a.s.) was taught all the book, all the revelation. Allāh says: *And when ‘Īsā came with clear arguments, he said: ‘I have come to you indeed with Wisdom, and so that I may make clear to you part of what you differ in; so fear Allāh and obey me’’* (43:63) . Note the word, “part of”; we have written about it earlier.

When the Qur’ān mentions the Torah, it refers to the revelation which Allāh had sent down to Mūsā (a.s.) inscribed on the tablets when he was on the Mount Sinai, as Allāh describes in the ch. 7, i.e., “The Battlements”. As for the books presently in the hands of the Jews, they themselves admit a big vacuum and void, a large gap, in its chain of narrators between the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, and Cyrus, King of Persia. Nevertheless, the Qur’ān confirms that the Torah which was with the Jews in the days of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) was not altogether different from the original Torah — although it had been altered and interpolated to a great extent. The Qur’ānic verses clearly show these facts.

As for the Injil — and it means “good news” — the Qur’ān says that it was a single book that was revealed to ‘Īsā (a.s.), it was therefore a

revelation sent especially to him. Allāh says: *and He revealed the Torah and the Injīl aforesaid, a guidance for the people* (3:3 — 4). But the present Gospels attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were admittedly written and composed long after ‘Īsā (a.s.).

The Qur’ān also shows that the Law was only in the Torah; the Injīl did not bring any new *sharī‘ah*, except that it abrogated some rules of the Torah. Allāh says in the verses under discussion: “And a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you.” Again He says: *and We gave him the Injīl in which was guidance and light, and verifying what was before it of Torah, and a guidance and an admonition for those who guard* (against evil). *And the people of the Injīl should have judged by what Allāh revealed in it ...* (5:46 — 47). It may be inferred from this verse that there were some affirmative rules too in the Injīl.

The Qur’ān also shows that the Injīl, like the Torah, contained the good news of the advent of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.), Allāh says: *Those who follow the Messenger Prophet, the ummī, whom they find written down with them in the Torah and the Injīl* (7:157).

QUR’ĀN : “*And (make him) a messenger to the Children of Israel: Evidently ‘Īsā (a.s.) was sent particularly to the Children of Israel; and the verses concerning Mūsā (a.s.) imply the same thing about him. But while writing on the subject of prophethood, under the verse: Mankind was but one people; so Allāh sent the prophets ...* (2:213); we have explained that ‘Īsā (a.s.), like Mūsā (a.s.), was one of the *ulu ’l-‘azm* prophets, who were sent to the whole world.¹

This problem may be solved if you look at the difference between a messenger and a prophet written there. It was mentioned that a prophet conveys to his people what is good for them in this world and the hereafter; and an apostle brings to them a special message which decides between the people with truth and finality — either providing them with eternal blissful life or bring to them destruction and perdition, as has been described in the words of Allāh: *And every nation had a messenger; so when their messenger came, the matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be dealt with unjustly* (10:47).

¹ See *al-Mīzān*, vol.3, p.212. (tr.)

In other words, a prophet is a man who is sent to explain the religion to the men, while a messenger is sent to convey a special message whose rejection brings destruction and perdition in its wake, and whose acceptance bestows eternity and bliss.¹ This idea gets strengthened if we ponder on the messages given by the messengers (like: Nūḥ, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Shu‘ayb and others, peace of Allāh be on them) to their nations, and which are quoted in the Qur’ān.

This being the case, being a messenger to a particular nation does not necessarily mean that he was sent as prophet to them only. Possibly a messenger sent to a particular nation could have been appointed as prophet to that nation together with other people — as was the case with Mūsā and ‘Īsā (a.s.).

We find in the Qur’ān evidence in support of the above views. For Example, Mūsā (a.s.) was sent to Pharaoh, as Allāh said to him: *Go to Pharaoh, surely he has exceeded all limits* (20:24); and the magicians of the Pharaoh’s nation believed in Mūsā (a.s.); evidently their belief was accepted by Allāh although they too were not from the Children of Israel, as Allāh says: *they said: ‘‘We believe in the Lord of Hārūn and Mūsā’’* (20:70). Likewise, the call to the Divine Religion was addressed to the whole nation of Pharaoh: *And certainly We tried before them the people of Pharaoh, and there came to them a noble messenger* (44:17).

A similar phenomenon is seen about ‘Īsā (a.s.). Before the appearance of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.), there had entered into the religion of ‘Īsā a multitude of non-Israelites, like the Romans, the Franks, the Austrians, the Prussians and the Anglo-Saxons in the West, and the tribe of Najrān in the East. And when the Qur’ān speaks about the Christians, it does not single out the Israelite Christians. When it says something for or against them, it covers all Christians — Israelites and non-Israelites alike.²

¹ *Ibid.*, p.205. (tr.)

² This argument seems inconclusive. ‘Īsā (a.s.) himself said: ‘‘I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’’ (Matthew, 15:23); and when he sent his Apostles to spread the Divine Message, he expressly forbade them to go to non-Israelites: ‘‘Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and unto the city of the Samaritans enter you not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’’ (Matthew, 10:5 — 6). But St. Paul, who had never seen ‘Īsā (a.s.) in his life, over-ruled the Apostles who had spent their time with ‘Īsā (a.s.) and were privy to his ideas and ideals. Thus, St. Paul took Christianity to non-Israelites; and this transplantation bore out such fruits which could never be palatable to ‘Īsā

QUR'ĀN: “*That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allāh’s permission, and I heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead ones to life with Allāh’s permission,:* ‘*al-Khalq*’ (الْخَلْقُ = to create; to assemble the parts of a thing). This verse ascribes creation to someone other than Allāh; the same idea is implied by the verse: *so blessed be Allāh, the best of the creators* (23:14).

al-Akmah (الْأَكْمَهُ = one who is born blind). ar-Rāghib says that it is sometimes used for one who has lost his eyesight, i.e., as synonymous to blind. It is said: His eyes *kamahat* (كَمَهَتْ = lost their sight until they became white).

al-Abras (الْبَرَصُ) means one having *al-barṣ* (الْبَرَصُ = leprosy, a well-known skin disease).

He said, “and bring the dead ones to life”, using the plural. It proves, or at least hints, that he brought to life many dead persons. And he said, “with Allāh’s permission”, to make it clear that these miraculous signs appearing on his hands were actually attributed to Allāh, not that ‘Īsā (a. s.) had any independent power to do so. He went on repeating this phrase to put utmost emphasis on this aspect.

There was a real danger of people believing him to be a god — because of these miracles. That is why he repeatedly added the proviso, “with Allāh’s permission”, after every miracle which could confuse and mislead the people, like creation of bird, and bringing the dead to life. And it was because of this very reason that he ended his talk saying: *Surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship Him; this is the straight path.*

The verse, “that I create for you ...”, apparently means that these miracles had actually happened on his hands; it was not just a talk, nor just a challenge. Had he wanted only to tell them that he had got that power — just to complete his argument against them — he would have added some proviso like, “if you ask for it”, or “if you so desire”.

Moreover, the talk that Allāh will have on the Day of Resurrection

(a.s.) himself.

Clearly, we cannot bring in evidence an action of St. Paul (or more precisely, the fruit of that action) which was diametrically opposed to a clear instruction of ‘Īsā (a.s.). (*tr.*)

with ‘Īsā clearly shows that these miracles had actually happened: *When Allāh will say: “O ‘Īsā son of Maryam! remember My favour on you and on your mother ... and when you created out of clay a thing like the form of a bird by My permission, then you breathed into it and it became a bird by My permission, and you healed the blind and the leper by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead ones by My permission ... ”* (5:110).

Some people have said: Utmost that can be proved from these verses is that Allāh had given him this power, and that he mentioned that power when he argued with the people. Thus, he completed his proof against them, because he would have shown those miracles, if they had asked for them. But it does not prove that all or some of these miracles did actually happen.

COMMENT: The explanation given by us and the Divine Speech on the Day of Resurrection make it abundantly clear that all these miracles did actually take place, and that it is absolutely wrong to cast any doubt on them.

QUR’ĀN: *“and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses ...: This is news of the unseen which is reserved for Allāh and his messengers who knew it by Divine Revelation. It is another miracle, an information of the unseen which was beyond any doubt or confusion — man, after all, cannot have any doubt about what he has eaten or has stored in his house.*

This miracle does not have the proviso, “by permission of Allāh”, although no miracle can take place without Allāh’s permission. Allāh Himself says: *and it was not meet for a messenger that he should bring a sign except with Allāh’s permission* (40:78). The reason of this omission lies in the verb “inform”. ‘Īsā (a.s.) was to give them those informations; it would be a speech emanating from ‘Īsā (a.s.). In other words, it was ‘Īsā’s action, and as such was not worthy of being attributed to Allāh, in contrast to the preceding two signs, i.e., creation and bringing the dead to life, which are really the actions of Allāh and cannot be attributed to anyone else except by His permission.

Moreover, these two signs were not like giving those informations. They had more potentiality of leading people astray, when compared to

his informing them of what they ate and what they kept in store. Simple minded people can very easily accept the Godhead of a creator of birds and resurrector of dead, rather than the divinity of one who gives them the news of the unseen. Common people do not think that the knowledge of the unseen is exclusively reserved for Allāh; they think that it is not so difficult an art and may be attained to by any magician through training and practice. That is why ‘Īsā (a.s.) found it necessary, when talking to them, to put the condition of Allāh’s permission, on the two signs, and not on this last one. The same is the case of healing; it was sufficient just to mention, as he did in the beginning, that it was “a sign from your Lord”; and especially when he was talking with the people who claimed to be believers. That is why he ended his talk with the words, *most surely there is a sign in this for you, if you are believers*, i.e., if you are truthful in your claim that you are a believer.

QUR’ĀN: “ *And a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you:* It is in conjunction with “and a messenger to the Children of Israel”. Of course, this phrase is in the first person (i.e., spoken by ‘Īsā, a.s.) while the former is in the third person (i.e., spoken by the Spirit); but it makes no difference because the former, i.e., “and a messenger ...”, has been immediately explained by ‘Īsā (a.s.) in the following words: “That I have come to you with a sign from your Lord ...”; and this has changed the mode from the third to the first person — and this makes the conjunction perfect.

He came as a verifier of the Torah; he verified the Torah which was revealed before him and which he was taught by Allāh, as the preceding verse says. In other words, he verified the original Torah which was given to Mūsā (a.s.). This phrase, therefore, does not show that he verified the Torah which was with the Jews in his time, nor does it imply that the Torah of his days was unaltered. The same applies to the verification of the Torah by our Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

QUR’ĀN: “ *and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you:* Allāh had forbidden them some of the good things, as He says: *Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful for them ...*

(4:160).

This talk shows that ‘Īsā (a.s.) had endorsed the laws of the Torah with exception of some tough rules prescribed for them in the Torah, which he abrogated. That is why it is said that the Injīl does not contain a new *sharī‘ah*.

The phrase, “and that I may allow you ...”, is in conjunction with, the phrase, “with a sign from your Lord”; the preposition, *li* (ل = that), describes the purpose; the sentence therefore means: I have come to you for the purpose of abrogating some of the hard rules imposed on you in the Torah.

QUR’ĀN: “ *‘and I have come to you with a sign from your Lord ...: Apparently, this is to make it clear that the following phrases, “therefore fear Allāh and obey me”, are based on his bringing a sign from Allāh, and not on his allowing some of the forbidden things. It is to remove this possible misunderstanding that the phrase, “and I have come to you with a sign from your Lord”, has been repeated.*

QUR’ĀN: “ *‘Surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship Him ...’* ”: ‘Īsā (a.s.) said it in order to cut off the excuse of those who were to believe in his divinity — either because he (a.s.) had detected such tendency in them or because he was informed through revelation of these future happenings. It was a sincere attempt to remove all chances of misunderstandings, as he had done when he added the proviso, “with Allāh’s permission”, while talking about creating a bird and bringing the dead ones to life. But it appears from his talk on the Day of Judgment as quoted by the Qur’ān in the verse 5:117 (*I did not say to them aught save what Thou didst enjoin me with: That worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord ...*), that he had said it in pursuance of the order of Allāh and His revelation.

QUR’ĀN: *But when ‘Īsā perceived unbelief on their part, he said: “Who are my helpers to Allāh?”*: The narration leaves unsaid his life story from his conception to the early days of his mission, because its important milestones had already been mentioned in the good news given to Maryam. That is why this verse picks up the thread of narration from the point when ‘Īsā (a.s.), after announcing his mission and showing the

aforesaid miracles, faced resistance from his people. It describes how he selected his disciples, how his people planned against him, and how Allāh defeated their conspiracy by purifying him, taking him away to Himself and making him to ascend to Him. And thus the story ends.

The narrative throws light on those aspects only which were immediately needed for clarifying the subject matter to the Christians of Najrān, whose delegation was then at Medina for discussion and argument. That is why many other points of the story, mentioned in the Chapters of: ‘The Women,’ ‘The Table,’ ‘The Prophets,’ ‘The Embellishment’ and ‘The Ranks,’ have been omitted in this one. The use of the word, perception or sense, in connection with unbelief — although disbelief is a matter pertaining to heart — implies that their disbelief was so transparent that it could be perceived by external senses. It could alternatively mean that when they, because of their disbelief, planned to harm and kill him, he sensed it and in this way perceived their disbelief. The verse therefore means: When ‘Īsā perceived, i.e., felt, sensed and noticed the unbelief of the Children of Israel — whose name was mentioned in the good news given to Maryam — he said: “Who are my helpers to Allāh?” He asked this question as he wanted to distinguish and set apart a selected group of his people who would be solely dedicated to truth; they would strengthen the power of religion and form the nucleus around which the structure of religion would be built — they would be the centre from which the Divine Religion would spread. We find this phenomenon in every physical, social and other powers: When a party begins its activities, it finds it necessary to take for itself a core of dedicated cadre, on which it gets its strength. Otherwise, it could not pursue its activity and would become useless. In Islamic history, the same phenomenon is seen in the pledges of allegiance of the mountain pass and the tree. The Messenger of Allāh’s aim in the two pledges was to concentrate the full strength of Islam, reinforcing its power, in order that the Divine Mission could spread and succeed.

Thus ‘Īsā (a.s.) became sure that his mission was not succeeding in the Children of Israel — in a major part of them — and that they were not ready to believe in him no matter what he did. He was afraid that if they succeeded in destroying his life, the mission would fail and the difficulties would increase. Therefore, he wanted to make arrangements as a safeguard against that eventuality. He sought help of a selected

group in proceeding towards Allāh. The disciples answered his call and thus were distinguished from among the whole nation by their belief. It paved the way to distinguish belief from disbelief, by making the faith victorious over faithlessness, spreading his mission and establishing proofs. Allāh says: *O you who believe! be helpers of Allāh, as 'Īsā son of Maryam said to (his) disciples: "Who are my helpers to Allāh?" The disciples said: "We are helpers of Allāh." So a party of the Children of Israel believed and another disbelieved; then we aided those who believed against their enemy, and they became uppermost (61:14).*

'Īsā (a.s.) qualified his question, "Who are my helpers", with the phrase, "to Allāh". He did so to awaken their longing and arouse their eagerness to proceed towards Allāh, to be near Him. And this was the real reason for asking this question. The same was the idea behind the question, *Who is it that will lend to Allāh, a goodly loan ... (2:245).* It is the preposition "to", in "my helpers to Allāh", which implies the meaning of going or proceeding, etc. A similar connotation is found in the declaration of Ibrāhīm (a.s.) as quoted in the Qur'ān: *Surely I go to my Lord: He will guide me (37:99).*

Some commentators have said that "to" in the above sentence means "with"; the question according to them means: Who are my helpers with Allāh? But there is no evidence to support this explanation. Moreover, it is against the manners of the Qur'ān to count Allāh in line with others. The Qur'ān cannot count others as the helpers when it counts Allāh as the Helper. Nor is it in conformity with the manners of 'Īsā (a.s.) which shines so brightly everywhere in his narrative in the Qur'ān. Furthermore, the reply of the disciples too does not support this interpretation. In case this meaning were correct, the disciples should have said: 'We are your helpers with Allāh.' (Think over it).

QUR'ĀN: *The disciples said: "We are helpers of Allāh: We believe in Allāh and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones: A man's 'al-ḥawāriyy' (الْحَوَارِيُّ) is the one exclusively attached to him. It is reportedly derived from al-ḥawr (الْحَوْرُ = intense whiteness; marked contrast between the white of the corona and the black of the iris). The Qur'ān has not used this word except for the close companions of 'Īsā (a.s.).*

The sentence: "We believe in Allāh", is a sort of explanation of their

former declaration, “We are helpers of Allāh”. This too supports the above exegesis that ‘Īsā’s phrase, “my helpers to Allāh”, implies proceeding on the way leading to Allāh, because true belief is the prescribed way.

Was it their first entry into the circle of faith? Obviously not. The wordings used in verse 61:14 (... *‘Īsā son of Maryam said to [his] disciples: “Who are my helpers to Allāh?” The disciples said: “We are helpers of Allāh.” So a party of the Children of Israel believed ...*), show that it was a belief after belief. And there is nothing strange in it, as we have already explained that the *īmān* and *islām* are of various ranks, one upon the other.

Going a step further, look at the verse: *And when I revealed to the disciples, saying, “Believe in Me and My messenger,” they said: “We believe and be our witness that we are the submitting ones”* (5:111). It clearly shows that this reply of theirs was based on a revelation from Allāh; in other words, they were prophets. Therefore, the belief referred to in their reply was a belief after belief.

Proceeding further, we find them saying: ... *and be our witness that we are submitting ones. Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger; so write us down with those who bear witness.* The *islām* or submission to which they have referred, is unconditional surrender and submission to all that Allāh demands from them and desires for them. This too implies that it was not the initial belief, but a belief after belief, because such submission is not found except in the sincere believers; it is not within the reach of those who merely bear witness to the Oneness of God and the prophethood of the Prophet. We have earlier explained in detail that every stage of *īmān* is preceded by a relevant stage of *islām*. Their words: “We believe in Allāh and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones,” also point to this very fact: They used the verb for belief (implying a new occurrence) and adjective for submission (implying a sort of permanence). The first stage of *islām* is submission and generally bearing witness to the basic of religion. This is followed by a heartfelt belief in the above testimony in principle. Then comes the second stage of *islām* and that is the sincere submission to the meaning of the said belief. When this stage comes, all possibilities are removed of anger or annoyance with what Allāh and His messenger has ordered. In other words, the believer puts in practice the

tenets of religion. It is followed by the second stage of *īmān*. This is the stage when deeds become sincere and the attributes of servitude are deeply ingrained in all actions and activities. This is followed by the third stage of *islām* which means surrender to the love of Allāh and to His will; such a Muslim does not love anything except because of Allāh and does not want anything except for Allāh; then nothing happens on his hands except that which Allāh loves and desires, and the man's own love and desire are completely forgotten. It is followed by the third stage of *īmān*, when this servile submission permeates all his actions and deeds.

Keep in view this short description of the stages of *islām* and *īmān*. Then ponder on the call of 'Īsā (a.s.) as he said: "therefore fear Allāh and obey me. Surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, therefore worship Him; this is the straight path". Note that he (a.s.) first told them to fear Allāh and obey himself. And he gave the reason of that order, in these words, "Surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord". That is, Allāh is your Lord, O people of my nation, and He is also the Lord of His messenger whom He has sent to you. Therefore, it is obligatory for you to fear Him by believing in Him, and to obey me by following me. In short, you are obliged to worship and serve Him with piety and His fear, obeying His messenger, i.e., with belief and following. This much is clearly understood from his words. That is why the fear of Allāh and obedience of the prophet have been changed to the phrase, "therefore worship Him"; He effected this change to make it clear that this order and this affair is attributed to Allāh, and that attribution becomes crystal clear in the worship. Then he said that this worship is a straight path — it is a way that leads the walker to Allāh.

After issuing that call, he perceived their disbelief, and he felt that there was no ground for hoping that their general public would accept true faith. Therefore, he said: "Who are my helpers to Allāh?" He was seeking helpers for proceeding on this straight path to which he had invited the people. That is the path of servitude — the piety and obedience. The disciples answered his call accepting the same thing he had asked for. They said: "We are helpers of Allāh." Then they proceeded to explain it in these words: "We believe in Allāh and be (our) witness that we are submitting ones." The submission here refers to their obedience and following. It was for this reason that when they humbly and beseechingly spoke to their Lord, telling Him what they had

promised ‘Īsā (a.s.), they changed the word, submission, to the following; and expanded the circle of belief to cover all that was revealed by Allāh. They said: *“Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger.”*

It means that they believed in all that Allāh had revealed, and in what He had taught ‘Īsā son of Maryam of the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Injīl, and they followed the messenger in this matter. You will appreciate that it is among the highest ranks of belief, not its lower ones.

The disciples did not say: We believe in Allāh and we are submitting ones. Instead they asked ‘Īsā (a.s.) to be their witness regarding their submission and following. They did so in order that they should have a proof when they spoke to their Lord and said: *“Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger.”* It was as though they said: Our Lord! This is our condition and Thy messenger is our witness for it.

QUR’ĀN: *“Our Lord! we believe in what Thou hast revealed and we follow the messenger; so write us down with those who bear witness”*: It is direct quotation of what the disciples said — without using an introductory phrase, like, ‘They said.’ This dramatic style of the Qur’ān (as we have mentioned somewhere) puts the audience in a position where they seem to hear the words directly from the speakers — not through a narrator. They asked their Lord to write them down with those who bear witness. And they based this prayer on their *islām* and *īmān* both. A messenger conveys his message when he explains what Allāh has revealed to him — both in words and in practice. He teaches the tenets of religion and himself acts upon them. Those who shall bear witness that the messenger conveyed the Divine Message to his people shall do so by learning the message from the messenger and following him in the *sharī‘ah*. In this way, it will be seen that the messenger himself practises what he tells others to do — he does not ignore it nor does he transgress it.

Apparently, this witnessing refers to their testimony that the messenger had truly conveyed the message, as Allāh says in the verse: *Most certainly then We will question those to whom (the messengers) were sent, and most certainly We will question the messengers (7:6)*. As

for the witnessing mentioned in the verse 5:83 (*And when they hear what has been revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears on account of the truth that they recognize; they say: ‘Our Lord! we believe, so write us down with the witnesses.’*), it refers to bearing witness for the truth of the messengership not for conveying the message. And Allāh knows better.

Another possible explanation: They had asked the messenger to be witness for their *islām*; thereafter they prayed to Allāh to write them down with those who bear witness. Probably they wanted Allāh to write them among those who shall bear witness for deeds, as appears from the prayer of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl (a.s.) quoted in the Qur’ān: *‘Our Lord! and make us both submissive to Thee and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting to Thee, and show us our ways of devotion ... (2:128).* Refer for details to what we have written under that verse.

QUR’ĀN: *And they planned and Allāh (also) planned, and Allāh is the best of planners:* The planners were the Children of Israel, as appears from the preceding verse, *‘But when ‘Īsā perceived unbelief on their part ...’* We have explained under the verse 2:26 (*... but He does not cause to err by it [any] except the transgressors*) what planning means when it is attributed to Allāh.

QUR’ĀN: *And when Allāh said: ‘O ‘Īsā! I am going to take you away completely: ‘at-Tawaffī’ (التَّوَفِّي) is to take something completely.* It is for this reason that it is also used for death, because at the time of death Allāh takes man’s soul away from his body. See, for example, the following verses:

... Our messengers take him completely (6:61), i.e., cause him to die. And they say: ‘What! when we have become lost in the earth, shall we then indeed be in a new creation?’ ... Say: ‘The angel of death who is given charge of you shall take you completely (i.e., cause you to die), then to your Lord you shall be brought back’ (32:10 — 11). Allāh takes completely the souls at the time of their death, and those that die not during their sleep, then He withholds those on whom He has passed the decree of death and sends the others back till an appointed term ... (39:42).

Pondering on the last two verses you will see that the Qur’ān has not

used *at-tawaffi* in the meaning of death, rather the word gives the idea of taking and preserving. In other words, when *at-tawaffi* is used for death, it is not because it means death; rather it is used to emphasize the connotation of taking and preserving, to show and establish that man's soul does not perish, is not destroyed by death — contrary to what ignorant people think; Allāh keeps and preserves it until comes the time to return it to its body for resurrection. At other places where this sense is not involved, Allāh uses the word *al-mawt* (المَوْتُ = death), and not *at-tawaffi*. For example:

And Muḥammad is no more than a messenger, the messengers have already passed away before him; if then he dies or is killed, will you turn back upon your heels? (3:144).

... it shall not be finished with them entirely so that they should die ... (35:36).

There are a lot of other verses of this type, not excepting some verses in 'Īsā's story itself: For example, there are, 'Īsā's words about himself: *And peace be on me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life (19:33);* and Allāh's words about him: *And there is not one of the people of the Book but most certainly shall believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection he ('Īsā) shall be a witness against them (4:159).*

It all shows that *at-tawaffi* does not necessarily mean death.

This interpretation is also supported by the words of Allāh refuting the claim of the Jews: *And their saying: "Surely we killed the Messiah, 'Īsā son of Maryam, the messenger of Allāh;" and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so (like 'Īsā); and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they have no knowledge respecting it, but only follow a conjecture; and they killed him not for sure. Rather, Allāh took him up to Himself; and Allāh is Mighty, Wise. And there is not one of the people of the Book but most certainly shall believe in him before his death and on the Day of Resurrection he ('Īsā) shall be a witness against them (4:157 — 159).* The Jews claimed that they had killed the Messiah, 'Īsā son of Maryam, and likewise the Christians think that the Jews had killed 'Īsā son of Maryam by crucifixion, and that after he was crucified Allāh raised him up from his grave to the heaven, as the Gospels say. But the Qur'ānic verses, as you see, unequivocally refute the story of killing and crucifixion both.

It is apparent from the Divine Words, *And there is not one of the people of the Book ...*, that ‘Īsā (a.s.) is alive near Allāh and that he will not die until all the people of the Book shall believe in him. Keeping all these factors in view, the word *at-tawaffī*, used in the verse under discussion, would only mean that Allāh was to take him away completely from among the Jews. Yet the verse does not say so clearly; it is only its apparent connotation. (We shall write in detail on this subject at the end of the fourth Chapter, ‘The Women’.)

QUR’ĀN: ‘*and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve: ‘ar-Raf’*’ (الرَّفْعُ = to raise, to cause to ascend) is opposite of *al-waḍ’* (الْوَضْعُ = to put down); *at-tahārah* (الطَّهَارَةُ = cleanliness, purity) is opposite of *al-qadhārah* (الْقَذَارَةُ = dirtiness, impurity). We have already explained the meaning of cleanliness. The phrase, “cause you to ascend”, is qualified by the word, “unto Me”; and it implies that the ascension was spiritual, rather than physical; because Allāh has no place like the physical spaces in which a body or things related to body arrive, stay or settle down, and from which they depart or to which they come nearer. Accordingly, this phrase will have the same connotation as the words at the end of this very verse have: *then to Me shall be your return*. This interpretation will be strengthened if *at-tawaffī* is taken to mean “to cause to die”; because in that case, “to cause to ascend to Me” would imply raising his rank and taking him nearer to Allāh. Its meaning will, then, be similar to the verse 3:169, wherein Allāh says about those who are martyred in His way: *they are alive near their Lord*; and the verse 19:57, where He says about Idrīs (a.s.): *And We raised him to a high station*.

Another interpretation: The ascension refers to his being raised alive with his body and soul together to the heaven; because the apparent meaning of the Qur’ānic verses suggest that the heaven — i.e. the physical one — is the place of nearness to Allāh, the venue from which the Divine favours and blessings are sent down, and where the honoured angels live. Probably, we shall discuss the meaning of *as-samā’* (السَّمَاءُ = sky, heaven) somewhere else, Allāh willing.

Purification from the unbelievers, as it is preceded by ascension to Allāh, implies spiritual, rather than physical purification. Accordingly, it means that Allāh would keep him away from the unbelievers, protect him

from mingling with them, and remove him from their society — the society that is polluted by their unbelief and rejection of truth.

QUR'ĀN: “*and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection:* In this verse Allāh gives a promise that He will surely make the followers of ‘Īsā (a.s.) prevail over his adversaries who disbelieved in his prophethood, and that this predominance will continue upto the Day of Resurrection. This verse distinguishes the superior group from the inferior one, saying that the superior ones are those who follow ‘Īsā (a.s.) and the opposite group is that of the unbelievers — without mentioning that they were from the Children of Israel, or that they were the Jews who professed to follow the *sharī‘ah* of Mūsā (a.s.) or pointing to them in any other way.

Of course, looking at the fact that his adversaries have been defined as unbelievers, it appears that “those who follow you” refers to the following in the way of truth, a following that is approved by Allāh and which He is pleased with. Accordingly, his followers would be those Christians who did not deviate from his straight path before Islam came to abrogate ‘Īsā’s religion; and after the advent of Islam it is the Muslims who are his followers — because only these two groups are his followers in the path of truth. If so, then the promised superiority would mean their superiority in their arguments and proofs, not their material domination or their rule over his adversaries. The meaning thus will be as follows: The proof of your followers, i.e., the above mentioned Christians and the Muslims, shall be victorious over the proof of those who disbelieve in you, i.e., the Jews, upto the Day of Resurrection.

The above was the explanation given and chosen by the exegetes. But I think that the verse does not support this interpretation either explicitly or implicitly. Evidently the whole sentence, “I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve, and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the Day of Resurrection,” is news of what was to happen in the future: His being taken away, his ascension to Allāh, his purification from disbelievers and the domination of his followers over unbelievers — all was to happen sometimes after Allāh had given him this news. Moreover, the words, “and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve,” contain a promise and a good tiding, and good tiding always

refer to some future event. And it is known that the proof of the ‘Īsā’s followers is nothing but the proof of ‘Īsā himself. These are the very proofs which were mentioned in the good news given to Maryam. And those proofs had certainly gained ascendancy over those of the unbelievers, both when ‘Īsā (a.s.) was present before his ascension, as well as after his ascension. It may rather be said that before his ascension those proofs were more decisive and more convincing in face of his adversaries’ claims than they were after his ascension. This being the case, what is the meaning of a promise that his followers’ proofs would overcome those of his adversaries — in future? Again, why should this dominance be limited “to the Day of Resurrection” only? If a proof is victorious and convincing it should remain so for all times, without any limitation of time or day. Moreover, victory of a true proof over false ones will be even more manifest on the Day of Resurrection, as the Qur’ān informs us in connection of that Day’s happenings.

A suggestion: Perhaps predominance of proof means that it would be more popular, more widely accepted — people would heed more to it, would accept it more readily; in this way their number would increase, and their power be more formidable.

COMMENT: Does it mean that his true followers would prevail over the disbelievers, would rule over them and overwhelm them with their power? But the fact is otherwise. It is no use saying that it may be a good news which would come true in distant future in the last days of the world, because the wordings of the verse do not allow such delay.

Or does it mean predominance in number? That is, his followers — the followers of truth after ‘Īsā (a.s.) — would be more numerous than the followers of falsehood? But reality belies it. The followers of falsity have always been in majority, and the people of truth always in minority, right from the time of ‘Īsā (a.s.) upto these days of ours — a long period of two millennia. Moreover, the wordings of the verse do not support this interpretation either. Look at the context; the verse gives ‘Īsā (a.s.) the good news that Allāh’s displeasure was to descend on the Jews, that they were to be overwhelmed by Divine Anger. In this background, the predominance of his followers conforms more with his followers’ hold and dominance over his adversaries — either through convincing proofs

or through rule and domination. But in no way does it point to the majority in number.

Let us have a fresh look at this verse: It distinguishes the two groups with two verbs: “those who follow you”, and “those who disbelieve”. The verb shows that an action has taken or will take place within the framework of a time — past, present or future. The implication would differ if these phrases were changed to adjectives: “followers” and “disbelievers”; because adjectives show a more or less permanent attribute which transcends time limits, the said attribute is found in its related thing or person at all times. Suppose there is a group of people who do something good or bad, and the rest of the nation is pleased with it, even the coming generations agree with what their ancestors did, then this much ideological identity and psychological identification are enough to ascribe that action or thing to the whole nation. For example, the Qur’ān admonishes the Jews and condemns them because of their ancestors’ actions like hurting and slaying the prophets, their arrogance in face of the commands of Allāh and His messengers, their alterations and interpolations in the Book of Allāh and many other things like that.

In view of the above-mentioned two principles, “those who disbelieve” may be interpreted as the whole Jewish nation; and “those who follow you” may mean all the Christians because their early fathers had believed in and followed ‘Īsā (a.s.) — and it was a correct belief and true following — although Allāh was not pleased with those among them who believed in the trinity before Islam, nor was He pleased with the whole nation when they continued to follow ‘Īsā (a.s.) even after the advent of Islam.

The sentence therefore means that Allāh was to make the Christians — whose ancestors had truly followed ‘Īsā (a.s.) — dominant over the Jews because they had disbelieved in ‘Īsā (a.s.) and had planned and conspired against him.

The aim is to show that Allāh’s wrath has descended on the Jews, and His severe chastisement has engulfed their nation. (We have explained above that the early Christians had truly followed ‘Īsā [a.s.]; and therefore the whole Christian nation may be included in the phrase, “those who follow you”.)

Going further, we find the phraseology changed. Instead of saying “those who follow you”, Allāh says: “And as to those who believe and

do good deeds ...” This too supports our interpretations that “those who follow you” covers all the Christians, irrespective of their present belief and behaviour. It does not mean only the Muslims and those Christians who had correct belief and had truly followed ‘Īsā (a.s.) — in short it is not confined to those who will be saved in the hereafter. Otherwise, Allāh would have continued the earlier mode of expression and said: And as to those who follow you, He will pay them fully their rewards.

Another interpretation: “those who follow you” covers all the Christians and all the Muslims; and the verse foretells that upto the Day of Resurrection the Jews would always remain under the domination of those who believe that it is obligatory to follow ‘Īsā (a.s.) — and the basis of the explanation is the same as above. And it is the best of the interpretations written for this verse.

QUR’ĀN: *‘then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed:* This talk is addressed jointly to ‘Īsā (a.s.) and those who followed him and those who disbelieved in him. It gives their ultimate result on the Day of Resurrection. And with this verse the story of ‘Īsā (a.s.) comes to its end — from the time Maryam got the good news to the end of his earthly life.

QUR’ĀN: *‘Then as to those who disbelieve, I will chastise them with severe chastisement in this world and the hereafter, ...’:* Apparently, it branches out from the phrase, “so I will decide between you”; it gives detail of that preceding general statement, describing the Divine Judgment on the Day of Resurrection — severe chastisement for the Jews who disbelieve, and full reward for the believers.

But the phrase “in this world” shows that the verse branches out from two preceding sentences: “and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve ...”; “Then to Me shall be your return ...” Thus, the verse says that as a result of that “making” and that “returning”, the disbelievers shall be severely punished in this world on the hands of those whom Allāh has made dominant above them, and in the hereafter with the Fire, *and they shall have no helpers.*

It is another proof to show that in the preceding verse, making dominant means domination through power and rule, not through proofs.

The sentence “and they shall have no helpers” proves that they will

not be able to avail of any intercession which could protect them from the chastisement. It is a firm decree which cannot change.

QUR'ĀN: *And as to those who believe and do good deeds, He will pay them fully their rewards ...:* It is an attractive promise of good reward for those who followed 'Īsā (a.s.). But, as mentioned above, the phrase “those who follow you” could be applied to the whole nation even when only a few of them actually followed him. Application of a name is one thing and actually having that attribute personally is something else. Good result and lovely reward is given only to him who actually has that attribute — not to him who is merely included in nomenclature. Allāh says: *Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabaeans, whoever believes in Allāh and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve (2:62).*

This then is the reward of those who believed and did good deeds from among those who followed 'Īsā (a.s.); Allāh will pay them fully their reward. The other group from those followers shall get no reward. Allāh has pointed to this fact at the end of the verse: *and Allāh does not love the unjust.*

It is now clear why this verse — a verse of mercy and paradise — has ended with the phrase “and Allāh does not love the unjust”. Otherwise, such verses usually end with Divine Names of mercy and forgiveness, or on praise of those for whom the verse is revealed. For example :

And Allāh has promised good to all; and Allāh is aware of what you do (57:10).

If you lend to Allāh a goodly loan, He will double it for you and forgive you; and Allāh is grateful, forbearing (64:17).

... and whoever believes in Allāh and does good, He will remove from him his evil and cause him to enter gardens beneath which rivers flow, to abide therein for ever; that is the great achievement (64:9).

Then as to those who believed and did good, their Lord will make them enter into His mercy; that is the manifest achievement (45:30).

We may go on quoting such examples from the Qur'ān. However, it is now clear that the phrase “and Allāh does not love the unjust” describes the other group from among those who claim to follow 'Īsā (a.s.) but are not true believers, nor do they do good deeds.

QUR'ĀN: *This we recite to you of the signs and the wise reminder.* It indicates the end of the story. The “wise reminder” is the Qur’ān; it reminds one of Allāh and is firm and wise in its verses and descriptions; falsehood cannot enter it, nor can non-serious talk pollute it.

QUR'ĀN: *Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: “Be,” and he was:* It is the summary of the necessary points described in detail in preceding verses. Such summing up after detailed description — especially in arguments and discussions — is a beauty of style. The verses were revealed for arguments with the delegation of the Christians of Najrān. It was proper to sum up the basic point of ‘Īsā’s creation — after giving the story in detail — to show that the particular circumstances of his birth do not prove anything except that he was a created man like Adam (peace be on them both). Therefore, it is not permissible to say about him more than that which is said about Adam (a.s.) — that is, he was a man whom Allāh created without the agency of a father.

The verse therefore means: The condition of ‘Īsā (a.s.) in the eyes of Allāh — as Allāh knows how He had created ‘Īsā — is only that the manner of his creation resembles that of Adam’s creation. How was Adam created? Allāh gathered various portions of earth and said to him, “Be”, and he became a human being without any father.

This verse actually contains two independent proofs, either is sufficient to refute the idea of ‘Īsā’s divinity.

First: ‘Īsā is a creature created by Allāh — as Allāh knows, and He is never confused in His knowledge. He created him a man, albeit without a father. And such a person is a servant of Allāh, not a god.

Second: ‘Īsā’s creation is not greater than that of Adam. If ‘Īsā’s unusual creation may in any way justify the belief in his godhead, then Adam’s creation will justify the same belief. But no Christian says that Adam was god. Therefore, they should not have such belief about ‘Īsā (a.s.). After all, both cases are the same.

The verse shows that ‘Īsā’s creation, like that of Adam, was physical and of this world, although it happened against the usual manner of conception, because usually a child is conceived through the agency of a father.

Apparently, *fa-yakūn* (فَيَكُونُ = lit: and he is) is used here to describe a past event — that is why we have translated it as “and he was”.

The phrase, “then said to him, ‘Be’, and he was”, shows instant, not gradual creation, but we know that both Adam and ‘Īsā had undergone a gradual process of creation. The fact is that there is no contradiction in these two aspects — because condition changes with the change of context. All things, whether they come into being gradually or instantly, are created by Allāh, brought into being by His command, i.e., by the word, “Be”, as He says: *His command, when He intends anything, is only that He says to it, ‘Be’, and it is* (36:82). Many of these things, come into existence gradually — when they are seen in the framework of their gradual causes. But when they are seen in relation to Allāh, then there is no graduality in their existence, no gap between the command, “Be”, and their “being”; Allāh says: *And Our command is but one, as the twinkling of an eye* (54:50). We shall explain it in detail in a more appropriate place, Allāh willing.

The main idea behind the statement, “then said to him, ‘Be’, and he was”, is as follows: Allāh is not dependent on causes when He creates a thing. Things which He intends to create have equal relation with Him. If they were related to Him through causes, their conditions could have differed one with another, some would have looked possible, others impossible; one would have been easy, the other difficult; one nearer, another far away — all depending on the conditions of the relevant causes. But Allāh does not need any cause to bring about an effect; whatever He intends, He says to it, “Be”, and it comes into being.

QUR’ĀN: *The truth is from your Lord, so be not of the doubters:* It emphasizes the meaning of the preceding verse which was itself emphasized by the use of the particle “surely”. It serves the same purpose as the verse, “This We recite to you of the signs and the wise reminder”, revealed at the end of the detailed story. It was to set the Prophet’s mind at rest that he was on truth, and to strengthen him in the argument.

The sentence, “The truth is from your Lord”, is one of the finest expressions of the Qur’ān. It uses the preposition, “from”, which shows beginning point. The truth starts from your Lord. If you were to change it to some other particle, e.g., “with”, saying, the truth is with your Lord, it

would give a hint of polytheism; and would actually show God as helpless, in need of that truth.

The true maxims and the propositions showing real and unalterable facts are self-evident and impossible to change; for example, four is an even number; one is half of two; and so on. Man finds out these self-evident truths from the really existing things; and existence — all of it — is from Allāh. Therefore, the truth — all of it — is from Him. That is why Allāh is not questioned concerning what He does and men are questioned. An action of a creature, if it is correct and right, accompanies the truth, but the action of Allāh is existence itself, and therefore, truth itself.

TRADITIONS

The Imām (a.s.) said¹ about the words of Allāh, *O Maryam! surely Allāh has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds*: “(Allāh) chose her twice: As for the first, He chose her, i.e., selected her; and as for the second, she conceived without a husband; in this way, He made her excel over the women of the worlds.” (*at-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

Abū Ja‘far (a.s.) said about this verse: “It means that He selected you for the progeny of the prophets, and purified you from unchastity, and chose you for the birth of ‘Īsā (a.s.) without a husband.” (*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān*)

The author says: The saying of the Imām, “He selected you for the progeny of the prophets”, means that He selected you to be a good offspring worthy of being related to the prophets. The phrase, “and purified you from unchastity”, means that He gave you protection from unchastity; this is the best explanation of the Qur’ānic words, because she had given birth to ‘Īsā (a.s.) without a husband. Thus, the tradition describes some concomitants of her selection and purification.

¹ This is the Commentary of ‘Alī ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī himself and not the saying of the Imām, (See al-Qummī, *at-Tafsīr*, an-Najaf al-Ashraf, ed., vol. 1, p. 102). (*ed.*)

The two traditions are not in conflict with each other, as may be seen manifestly. And we have explained that the verse implies this meaning.

It has been narrated by Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhī (and he said that it is correct), Ibnu 'l-Mundhir, Ibn Ḥabbān, and al-Ḥākīm from Anas, that he said: “Verily the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: “Sufficient are in excellence from among the women of the worlds, Maryam bint ‘Imrān, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.) and Āsiyah wife of Pharaoh!” (ad-Durru 'l-manthūr)

as-Suyūfī has said that Ibn Abī Shaybah has narrated it from al-Ḥasan without connecting the chain of narrators with the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

al-Ḥākīm has narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās (and has said that it is correct), that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘The most excellent of the women of the worlds are Khadījah, and Fāṭimah, and Maryam, and Āsiyah wife of Pharaoh.’ ” (ibid.)

Ibn Marduwayh narrates from al-Ḥasan that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘Verily, Allāh chose four (women) over the women of the worlds: Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, and Maryam bint ‘Imrān, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.)’ ” (ibid.)

Ibn Abī Shaybah and Ibn Jarīr have narrated from Fāṭimah (may Allāh be pleased with her!) that she said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said to me: “You are the chief of the women of the people of the Garden, (and) not Maryam, The Virgin.” (ibid.)

Ibn ‘Asākir has narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘The chief of the women of the people of the Garden are Maryam bint ‘Imrān, then Fāṭimah, then Khadījah, then Āsiyah wife of Pharaoh.’ ” (ibid.)

Ibn ‘Asākir has narrated through the chain of Muqātil from aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk from Ibn ‘Abbās from the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) that he said: “Four women are the chiefs of the worlds: Maryam bint ‘Imrān, and Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and Fāṭimah bint Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.); and the most excellent of them in the world is Fāṭimah.” (ibid.)

Ibn Abī Shaybah narrates from ‘Abdu ’r-Raḥmān ibn Abī Laylā that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘Fāṭimah is the chief of

the women of the worlds after Maryam bint ‘Īmrān, and Āsiyah wife of the Pharaoh, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid.’ ” (*ibid.*)

aṣ-Ṣadūq narrates through his chains from ‘Ikrimah from Ibn ‘Abbās that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) drew four lines, then said: ‘The best of the women of the Garden are Maryam bint ‘Īmrān, and Khadījah bint Khuwaylid, and Fāṭimāh bint Muḥammad, and Āsiyah bint Muzāḥim, wife of the Pharaoh.’ ” (*al-Khiṣāl*)

Also, he narrates through his chains from Abu ‘l-Ḥasan al-Awwal (a.s.) that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘Verily Allāh, the Mighty, the Great, has selected four from among the women: Maryam, and Āsiyah, and Khadījah, and Fāṭimah ...’ ” (*ibid.*)

The author says: There are numerous traditions of nearly the same meaning, narrated by both sects. The fact that these four are the chiefs of the women does not preclude the difference in excellence as amongst themselves, as may be seen in the sixth tradition quoted from *ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*, as well as other traditions. And a similar discourse was written under the verse: *Surely Allāh chose Adam and Nūh ...* (3:33).

A point to ponder: The verse talks about selection and choosing, while the above traditions describe their supremacy.

There is a difference between selection and supremacy; the latter being a degree of the former’s perfection.

al-Bāqir (a.s.) said explaining the words of Allāh: ... *when they cast their pens* (to decide) *which of them should have Maryam in his charge:* “They were drawing the lot about her, when she was orphaned of her father.” (al-‘Ayyāshī)

The Imām (a.s.) said about the verse: *And when the angels said. ‘O Maryam! surely Allāh has chosen you and purified you and chosen you above the women of the worlds’:* “(Allāh) chose her twice: As for the first, He chose her, i.e., selected her, and as for the second, she conceived without a husband; in this way He made her excel over the women of the worlds.

“... Then Allāh said to His Prophet: ‘This is of the tidings of the unseen which We reveal to you, (O Muḥammad!) and you were not with them when they cast their pens (to decide) which of them should have Maryam in his charge, and you were not with them when they contended

one with another.’ When she was born the family of ‘Īmrān contended one with another about her; everyone said: ‘We shall have her in our charge.’ So they went out and cast lot among themselves with the arrows, and the arrow of Zakariyyā came out (in the draw) ...’ (*at-Tafsīr*, al-Qummi)

The author says: The Commentary written above supports this and the preceding tradition. There are numerous traditions giving the details regarding the good news given to Maryam, birth of ‘Īsā (a.s.), his mission and his miracles. But the general outline of his story, given in these verses is enough for the purpose of exegesis. That is why we have not written them here except the important ones.

al-Bāqir (a.s.) said about the words of Allāh, *and I inform you of what you eat ...*: “ ‘Īsā (a.s.) used to say to the Children of Israel: ‘I am the messenger of Allāh to you, and I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird with Allāh’s permission, and I heal the blind and the leper; ’ (*al-Akmah* means blind). They said: ‘We do not think that what you do is anything but sorcery. Show us therefore a sign by which we may know that you are truthful.’ He said: ‘Do you think that you would know I was truthful if I informed you of what you eat and what you store in your houses, i.e., what you had eaten before you came out of your houses and what you had stored at night?’ They said: ‘Yes.’ So he used to tell them: ‘You ate this and this.’ Some of them confirmed his words and became believers, and other rejected it. And there was for them a sign in it, if they were believers.’” (*ibid.*)

The author says: The style of the verse when describing the latter two signs differs from that used for the former ones, as we had pointed out in the Commentary. And this difference supports the theme of this tradition.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said explaining the verse, *And a verifier of that which is before me of the Torah, and that I may allow you ...*: “There was (a distance of) four hundred years between Dāwūd and ‘Īsā; and it was the *sharī‘ah* of ‘Īsā that he was sent with monotheism and sincerity, and with

what (Allāh) had enjoined on Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm and Mūsā; and He revealed to him Injīl; and took from him the covenant that was taken from (all other) prophets; and He ordained for him in the Book establishing the prayer with religion, and enjoining good, and forbidding evil, and prohibiting unlawful, and allowing lawful; and revealed to him in Injīl the sermons and the parables, and the panel code which did not have retaliation; it contained neither (detailed) rules of panel code nor the shares of inheritance; and He revealed to him alleviation of what was (ordained) for Mūsā in the Torah. And this is (the meaning of) the words Allāh quoting what ‘Īsā said to the Children of Israel: *and that I may allow you part of that which has been forbidden to you.* And ‘Īsā ordered those who were with him, from among those who followed him of the believers, to believe in the *sharī‘ah* of the Torah and the Injīl.” (al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: This tradition is narrated in *Qiṣaṣu ‘l-anbiyā’*, in detail, from aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.), and there it says that there was a distance of four hundred and eighty years between Dāwūd and ‘Īsā (a.s.). But neither of these dates conforms with the history of the People of the Book.

ar-Riḍā’ (a.s.) was asked: “Why the disciples were called *al-ḥawāriyyūn*?” (الْحَوَارِيُّونَ = companions, disciples; the root word denotes “intense whiteness”). He said: “According to (other) people, they were named *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, because they were washer-men, they cleansed the dirt from clothes by washing; and it is a name derived from *al-ḥawr* (الْحَوْرُ = to bleach, to whiten). But according to us, they were given this name because they were pure in their own selves and cleansed others from filth of sins by sermon and reminder.” (*‘Uyūnu ‘l-akhbār*)

The same Imām said that they were twelve men, and the most excellent and most learned of them was Luke.¹ (*at-Tawḥīd*)

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said, *inter alia*, in a tradition: “Allāh sent ‘Īsā son of Maryam; and entrusted to him light, knowledge and wisdom; and (gave him) all knowledge of the previous prophets, and added Injīl to it. And He sent him to Baytu’l-Maqdis, to the Children of Israel, (he came)

¹ Apparently, this phrase is an interpolation by one of the narrators, because Luke was not among the twelve disciples. (*tr.*)

calling them to his Book and his wisdom, and to the belief in Allāh and His messenger. But most of them insisted on exceeding (the limits) and disbelieving. When they did not believe (in him), he prayed to his Lord, and adjured on Him (to punish them). So (Allāh) transformed (some) satans from among them, in order to show them a sign, so that they might take lesson from it.

“But it did not increase in them except (their) transgression and disbelief. Then (‘Īsā) came to Baytu’l-Maqdis, and continued calling them to, and awakening their interest in, that which is with Allāh, for thirty-three years, until the Jews got up in his pursuit. And they claimed that they tortured him and buried him in the earth alive. And some of them claimed that they killed and crucified him. But Allāh was not to give them power over him; but it only appeared to them so; and they were not able to torture and kill him or to kill and crucify him, because if they could do so it would have been a refutation of the words of Allāh; but Allāh caused him to ascend after taking him away completely.”
(*Kamālu ‘d-dīn*)

The author says: The words of the Imām: “Allāh transformed (some) satans from among them,” means that He transformed a group of evil persons from among them. “And continued calling them ... for thirty-three years”; perhaps it refers to his span of life, as it is well-known that he lived on this earth for thirty-three years. ‘Īsā (a.s.) talked to them from his cradle upto his mature age, and he was prophet from his early childhood, as the Qur’ān quotes him saying in the verses: *But she pointed to him. They said: ‘How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle?’ He said: ‘Surely I am a servant of Allāh; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet (19:29 — 30).*

“... it would have been a refutation of the words of Allāh; but Allāh caused him to ascend after taking him away completely”. It is a paraphrase of the Qur’ānic words: *Rather Allāh took him up to Himself (4:158); and, ‘I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me. ’* As this verse mentions taking him away before causing him to ascend, the tradition infers that the events happened in the same sequence.

al-Bāqir (a.s.) said: “ ‘Īsā (a.s.) made a promise to his companions,

the night when Allāh took him up to Himself. So they gathered near him in the evening, and they were twelve men; and he made them enter into a house. Then he came to them from a fountain that was in the corner of the house, shaking off water from his hair. Then he said: ‘Verily Allāh has revealed to me that He is going to take me up just now to Himself and purify me from the Jews. Now who among you (agrees) that my features be put on him, in order that he is killed and crucified (in my place) and he shall be with me in my rank?’ A young man among them said: ‘I, O Spirit of Allāh!’ He said: ‘So you are that.’ Then ‘Īsā said to them: ‘Why! surely there is one of you who will reject me twelve times before it is morning.’ One of them asked: ‘Am I that? O prophet of Allāh!’ ‘Īsā said to him: ‘Do you feel it in your heart? Then be you that.’ Thereafter ‘Īsā told them: ‘Why! surely you will divide after me in three groups: two groups, forging lie against Allāh, (shall be) in the Fire; and one group following Sham‘ūn ¹, being true to Allāh, (shall be) in the Garden.’ Then Allāh caused ‘Īsā to ascend to Him from the corner of the house while they were looking at him.’”

Then the Imām (a.s.) said: “The Jews came searching for ‘Īsā the same night. And they caught the man about whom ‘Īsā had said: ‘Surely there is one of you who will reject me twelve times before it is morning’; and they took the young man who had been given the features of ‘Īsā and he was killed and crucified. And he for whom ‘Īsā had said that he would reject him twelve times before it was morning, did (indeed) reject him.” (at-Tafsīr, al-Qummī)

The author says: The traditions of nearly the same meaning have been narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās, Qatādah and others. Some people have said that the man who was made to look like ‘Īsā was the same person who had guided the Jews so that they could arrest and kill him. There are some other views regarding those details. But the Qur’ān is silent on this subject; and we shall write on it in detail under the verse: ... *and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so ...* (4:157).

ar-Riḍā (a.s.) said: “There never was, in the eyes of the people, any

¹ Simon the Peter, in English. (tr.)

uncertainty concerning the affairs of any prophet or Proof of Allāh except the affair of ‘Īsā alone; because he was taken up from the earth alive, and he was given death between the heaven and the earth, then he was taken up to the heaven. And this is (the meaning of) the words of Allāh, the Mighty, the Great: *And when Allāh said: ‘O ‘Īsā! I am going to take you away completely and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you’*; and (also) Allāh says quoting the words of ‘Īsā (which he will say) on the Day of Resurrection: *‘and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst take me (away) completely, Thou wert the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things (5:117).’*” (*‘Uyūnu ‘l-akhbār*)

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said: “ ‘Īsā son of Maryam was taken up with a woollen outer garment, spun by Maryam, and woven by Maryam, and sewn by Maryam. But when he reached the heaven, he was addressed: ‘O ‘Īsā! Lay down your worldly embellishment.’ ” (al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: We shall explain the meaning of the above quoted two traditions, Allāh willing, at the end of the Chapter 4, “The Women.”

It is written in *ad-Durru‘l-manthūr* about the verse: *Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh ...*: ‘Abd ibn Ḥamīd and Ibn Jarīr have narrated from Qatādah that he said: “We have been told that as-Sayyid and al-‘Āqib, the two chiefs and bishops of the people of Najrān, met the Prophet of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and asked him about ‘Īsā, and said to him: ‘Every human being has a father. Then why is it that ‘Īsā (a.s.) had no father?’ Then Allāh revealed this verse about him: *Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam ...*”

The author says: The traditions of nearly the same meaning have been narrated from as-Suddī, ‘Ikrimah and others; al-Qummī also has narrated in his *at-Tafsīr*, that the verse was revealed on the same occasion.

SOME OTHER TRADITIONS ABOUT *AL-MUḤADDATH*

Zurārah said: “I asked Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.) about the messenger, the prophet and *al-muḥaddath* (المُحَدَّثُ = the one spoken to). He said: ‘The messenger is the one who sees the angel (who) brings the message of his Lord to him, and tells him: “(Allāh) orders you so-and-so.” And the messenger is a prophet with (the added rank of) messengership. And the prophet does not see the angel, something comes down to him — the news (comes) to his heart; and he becomes as though he be in a trance, and he sees (the vision) in his dream.’ I said: ‘Then how does he know that what he saw in his dream was truth?’ He said: ‘Allāh makes it clear to him, so that he knows that it is truth; and he does not see the angel. And *al-Muḥaddath* is the one who hears the voice and does not see (the speaker) in person.’ ” (*Baṣā’iru ‘d-darajāt*)

The Author says: It has been narrated from the same Imām in *al-Kāfi* also.

The original word of the Imām at the end of the tradition is *shāhidan* (شاهداً = translated here as “in person”); it literally means “at present”; also it may be a conditional phrase related to the subject; in other words, it may mean, “he does not see manifestly”.

Burayd enquired from al-Bāqir and aṣ-Ṣādiq (peace be on both of them), *inter alia*, in a tradition: “Then what is a messenger, a prophet and ‘the one spoken to?’” He (the Imām) said: “A messenger is one to whom the angel appears and speaks; and a prophet is one who sees in his dream; and possibly the messengership and the prophethood is combined in a single person. The *muḥaddath* is the one who hears the voice of the angel but does not see his person.” Burayd said: “I said: ‘May Allāh make things right for you! How can he know that what has he seen in his dream is the truth and that it is from the angel?’ He (the Imām) said: ‘He is directed in the right way until he knows it (with certainty). Allāh has surely set a seal on the (divine) books with your Book, and on the prophets with your prophet.’ ” (*ibid.*)

Muḥammad ibn Muslim said: “I mentioned *al-Muḥaddath* in the presence of Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.). He said: ‘Verily he hears the voice but does not see his person.’ I said: ‘May Allāh make things right for you!

How does he know that it is the speech of the angel?’ He said: ‘He is given tranquillity and dignity so that he knows that it is the angel (speaking).’ ” (*ibid.*)

Abū Baṣīr narrates from the same Imām that he said: “ ‘Alī was the *muḥaddath*, and Salmān was the *muḥaddath*.” Abū Baṣīr says: “I said: ‘Then what is the sign of the *muḥaddath*?’ He said: ‘The angel comes to him and scratches his heart (i.e., communicates to him) so-and-so.’ ” (*ibid.*)

Ḥumrān ibn A‘yan said: “Abū Ja‘far (a.s.) said to me that ‘Alī was the *muḥaddath*. (When I told this to) our Companions, (they) said: ‘You did nothing when you did not ask him who used to speak to him?’ Then it happened that I (again) met Abū Ja‘far; and I said to him: ‘Did not you inform me that ‘Alī was spoken to?’ He said: ‘Surely.’ I said: ‘Who used to speak to him?’ He said: ‘An angel.’ I said: ‘Then I may say that he was a prophet or a messenger?’ He said: ‘No. But you should say that his likeness was the likeness of the Companion of Sulaymān and the Companion of Mūsā; and his likeness was the likeness of Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn. Why! Have not you heard that ‘Alī was asked about Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn whether he was a prophet?’ He said: ‘No. But he was a servant who loved Allāh, so (Allāh) loved him; and he was sincere towards Allāh, so (Allāh) gave him good advice (i.e., guided him). So this also is like that.’ ” (*ibid.*)

The author says: There are numerous traditions narrated from the Imāms of the *Ahlu ‘l-bayt* about the meaning of ‘the one spoken to’ found in *Baṣā’iru ‘d-darajāt*, *al-Kāfi*, *Kanzu ‘l-fawā’id*, *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ* and other books. This topic is found in the Sunnī traditions too.

As for the distinction given by these traditions, between a prophet, a messenger and ‘the one spoken to’, we have described the difference between a messenger and a prophet. Also it has been explained that through revelation Allāh speaks to His servant, and it creates by itself firm and certain knowledge, and this knowledge does not require any other proof. Among all Divine messages, revelation has the same position as the self-evident truths have in human knowledge — man does not need any proof or logical deduction to know that it is truth.

As for the dream, you must have noted that the traditions explain it in another way; it is not the vision which one sees normally in sleep; rather

it denotes something like a trance, in which the external senses of the prophet are suspended, and then he observes what Allāh wants him to see — in the same way as we observe the things in our waking. Then Allāh strengthens his conviction by bestowing on him the certainty that what he has seen is from Allāh and not a Satanic manipulation.

As for being spoken to, it denotes hearing the voice of an angel. But he hears it by his heart, not by the ears, nor is it something like ideas or imaginations occurring in the mind, because idea or imagination is not called ‘hearing the voice’ — except as a far-fetched allegory. That is why the traditions describe it as hearing the voice and also as communicating to the heart; and yet name it as speech and talk. In short, the *muḥaddath* hears the voice of the angel and listen to it with his ‘hearing, power’ just as we hear and listen to normal talks and voices heard in this material world; but no other person can share in that talk or hear that voice, and therefore it is called a matter of heart.

As for his firm knowledge that what he heard was an angel’s talk and not a Satanic whispering, it happens by the help of Allāh, as is explained in the above-quoted tradition of Muḥammad ibn Muslim: “He is given tranquillity and dignity so that he knows that it is the angel (speaking).” The Satanic whispering — surely a falsehood — may come in either of the two ways: It may appear in a form which the believer knows to be false, and then he naturally will know that it cannot be the talk of an angel because angels do not disobey Allāh and do not go against His command. Or, it may appear wearing a mask of truth and fact — hoping to bring in its wake falsehood and lie. In such case, the Divine Light, which always leads the believer, exposes its reality. Allāh says: *Is he who was dead then We raised him to life and made for him a light by which he walks among the people ...* (6:122).

Apart from that, whispering and evil suggestions always create restlessness in soul and turmoil in heart, contrary to the remembrance of Allāh and His speech which create gravity, and tranquillity. Allāh says: *It is only the Satan that frightens his friends* (3:175); *now surely by Allāh’s remembrance are the hearts set at rest* (13:28); *Surely those who are pious, when a visitation from the Satan afflicts them they become mindful, then to ! they see* (7:201).

When therefore the heart of the *muḥaddath* is blessed with tranquillity and dignity at the time when he hears the message, it

conclusively proves that the message is from Allāh. Conversely, restlessness and anxiety would show that it was a Satanic whispering, which brings precipitation, anxiety, anguish, etc., in its wake.

The traditions say that the *muḥaddath* hears the voice of the angel and does not see him. It looks at the reality of being spoken to, and gives its academic definition. But it does not mean that the *muḥaddath* cannot see the angel. A man becomes *al-muḥaddath* (المُحَدَّثُ = the one spoken to), as soon as he hears an angel's voice, it is not necessary for him to see the angel. And if the *muḥaddath* sees the angel, it is not because he is spoken to; it is an added excellence. Many verses clearly show that some of those spoken to had seen the angels when they spoke to them.

For example:

Maryam: *then We sent to her Our Spirit, and there appeared to her a well-made man. She said: "Surely I fly for refuge from you to the Beneficent Allāh, if you are pious." He said: "I am only a messenger of your Lord: That I should give you a pure boy"* (19:17 — 19).

Wife of Ibrāhīm: *And certainly Our messengers came to Ibrāhīm with good news. They said: "Peace," "Peace," said he ... And his wife was standing (by), so she laughed; then We gave her the good news of Ishāq and after Ishāq of (a son's son) Ya'qūb. She said: "O woe to me! shall I bear a son (now) when I am an (extremely) old (woman) and this my husband an (extremely) old (man)? Most surely this is an amazing thing." They said: "Do you wonder at the decree of Allāh? The mercy of Allāh and His blessings be on you, O people of the house surely He is Praised, Glorious"* (11:69 — 73).

However, the above traditions may have got another explanation: The statement that the *muḥaddath* does not see the angel, may mean that he does not see the reality of the angels, although he might see them in the form which they assume when appearing before him. After all, the above-quoted verses only show that Maryam and the wife of Ibrāhīm had seen the angels in human form — the assumed form.

Someone has suggested a third interpretation: The statement means that the angel does not bring to him any revelation of the *Sharī'ah*; he does not appear before him with a legislative order; and this distinction is meant to protect the dignity of the messengers and the prophets.

But it is a far-fetched interpretation.

* * * * *

فَمَنْ حَاجَّكَ فِيهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ فَقُلْ تَعَالَوْا
 نَدْعُ أَبْنَاءَنَا وَأَبْنَاؤَكُمْ وَنِسَاءَنَا وَنِسَاءَكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ ثُمَّ نَبْتَهِلْ
 فَنَجْعَلْ لَعْنَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَى الْكَاذِبِينَ - ٦١ . إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَصَصُ الْحَقُّ
 وَمَا مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ - ٦٢ . فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا
 فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُفْسِدِينَ - ٦٣ .

But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: "Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves, then let us pray earnestly and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars" (61). Most surely this is the true story, and there is no god but Allāh; and most surely Allāh is the Mighty, the Wise (62). But if they turn back then surely Allāh knows the mischief makers (63).

COMMENTARY

QUR'ĀN: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge: "Fa" (ف = translated here as "But") shows that the offer of al-mubāhalah (الْمُبَاهَلَةُ = earnest imprecation) branches out from the Divine teaching explained above so clearly and convincingly about 'Īsā son of Maryam (a.s.), and ended so emphatically with the words, The truth is from your Lord, so be not of the doubters (60). "in this": The pronoun "this" refers either to 'Īsā or to the "truth" mentioned in the*

preceding verse.

The preceding verses were Divine Revelation in which there could be no doubt at all. Apart from that, they contained a clear logical proof, that is, the verse: *Surely the likeness of 'Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam ...* (59). Thus, the knowledge emanating from these verses is two-fold: one, because it is a Divine Speech: two, because of its rational proof. That is why this knowledge was not reserved for the Prophet only; others too could understand it. Even if someone did not believe it to be a Divine Revelation, he could not entertain any doubt about the truth of the subject discussed, because it contained rational argument which unbiased mind was bound to accept. Perhaps that is why Allāh said: “after what has come to you of knowledge”; and did not say, after what We have explained to them.

Another point: By reminding the Prophet of the Divine Knowledge, Allāh wanted to assure him that he would overwhelm his adversaries by Allāh’s permission and that Allāh would surely be on his side supporting him in that dispute.

QUR’ĀN: *then say: “Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves:* The first person plural pronoun in “let us call” has a different import from the plural pronouns in “our sons” “our women” and “our selves”. The former refers to the both parties of the argument, that is, the advocates of Islam and those of Christianity; while the latter refer to the side of Islam only. Accordingly, the meaning would be as follows: Let us both call the sons, the women and the ‘selves’; we should call our sons, our women and our ‘selves’, and you should call your sons, your women and your ‘selves’. The verse thus has shortened a long sentence in a meaningful and pleasant way.

al-Mubāhalah (المَبَاهَلَةُ) and *al-mulā‘anah* (المُلَاعَنَةُ) both have the same meaning: to curse each other. The actual parties of the argument were the Messenger of Allāh on one side, and the Christians men on the other. But in the challenge for the imprecation, the call was extended to the sons and women, as it would show more convincingly that the claimant is perfectly sure of the truth of his claim, that he is absolutely right. Allāh has put in man the love of his children and family, to such an extent that he puts himself in jeopardy to save them, plunges into perilous

situations to keep them safe. And precisely for this reason, sons have been mentioned before women, because man loves his sons more than his women.

An exegete has said: “The verse means, let us call your sons, your women and your selves; and let you call our sons, our women and our selves.” But the explanation given by us above shows how absurd this meaning is. This meaning does not leave any justification for including the sons and the women in the earnest imprecation.

The detailed description of the invitees is a further proof that the caller (i.e., the Prophet) has absolute confidence in the truth of his claim. The import of the call is as follows: Let my whole group and your whole group enter into earnest imprecation, so that both groups pray earnestly to Allāh and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars. In this way, the Divine curse and chastisement shall cover the sons, women and selves of the liars, and the enemies of truth shall be annihilated completely, they shall be rooted out without leaving any trace.

Consequently, the truth of this speech does not depend on numerousness of the sons, the women or the ‘selves’. The main brunt of the challenge is that one party — that which is on wrong — should perish together with all its near and dear ones — male and female, old and young. The exegetes unanimously say — and traditions and history support them — that when the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) came out for the imprecation, the only persons whom he brought with him were: ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (peace be on them all!). Therefore, the only participants, on the side of Islam, were two ‘selves’, two sons and one woman — and yet the Prophet did fully comply with the Divine Command.

Moreover, the meaning of a word in a verse is one thing, and it is quite another matter as for whom, or on how many people, could that word be applied in practice. We find numerous examples in the Qur’ān where an order, a promise or a threat has been mentioned using plural words, but the circumstances of its revelation show that it was revealed for one person only. For example: (As for) *those of you who put away their wives by likening their backs to the backs of their mothers, they are not their mothers* (58:2); And (as for) *those who put away their wives by likening their backs to the backs of their mothers then would recall what they said ...* (58:3); *Allāh has certainly heard the saying of those who*

said: “Surely Allāh is poor and we are rich” (3:181); And they ask you as to what they should spend. Say: “Whatever can be spared” (2:219). There are a lot of verses which were revealed with plural words, although the events for which they were revealed concerned one person only.

QUR’ĀN: “then let us pray earnestly and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars”: “*al-Ibtihāl*” (الْإِبْتِهَالُ) is derived from *al bahlah* (الْبَهْلَةُ) also pronounced *al-buhlah* (الْبُهْلَةُ = curse). This is its basic meaning; then it was commonly used for earnest prayer.

The words, “and bring about the curse of Allāh”, are a sort of explanation for the preceding verb, “then let us pray earnestly.” The verse said, “and bring about the curse of Allāh”; it did not say, and ask from Allāh to curse. It was an indication that that prayer would surely be granted because at that juncture it was the only way to distinguish the truth from the falsehood.

The word, “the liars”, does not refer to all the liars found anywhere in the world, nor does it mean the genes of the liars. It refers to a particular group — that party of the argument (between the Prophet and the Christians) which was wrong in its claim. The Prophet was saying that Allāh is One, there is no god besides Him, and that ‘Īsā was His servant and messenger; while the Christians said that ‘Īsā was God, and son of God, and that God had three persons.

This observation leads us to another reality. All those who came out for the proposed imprecation were equal partners in their respective claim. Had the claim and the resulting imprecation been between the Prophet only and the Christians, one party (i.e., the Prophet) would demand singular words, and the other, plural. In such cases, it is necessary to use an expression which would cover singular and plural both. For example, the sentence under discussion could have been written like this: and bring about the curse of Allāh on whosoever is lying. But it says: “... on the liars.” It proves that indeed there were liars (in plural) in one party of the argument, either on the side of the Prophet or on the Christians’ side. Consequently, all those who came out for the imprecation would be partners in the claim — because lie presupposes a claim. Therefore, those who were present on the side of the Prophet for the imprecation — i.e., ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn — were partners in the claim of the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and his

Mission. It is one of the most excellent virtues which were given exclusively to these family-members of the Prophet (peace be on them all!). Another exclusive excellence: Allāh gave them the names of ‘selves’, women and sons of the Prophet to the exclusion of all the men, women and children of the *ummah*.

Question: You have mentioned above that the Qur’ān uses, more often than not, plural words for singular; and even this verse says “our women” while it was only one lady, i.e., Fāṭimah (a.s.), who participated in the imprecation. Then why should the plural, “the liars”, be not explained in the same way?

Reply: There is a vast difference between the two. There is a situation which may happen again and again, and there is another which is not expected to repeat itself. In the former situation, it is perfectly all right to use a plural in place of a singular, so that the rule or comment would cover even those who would be doing the same thing in future. But in the latter situation it is not allowed to use plural in place of singular, because the event is not to repeat itself and no one else is expected to be included in that order or comment, etc. Look for example at the following verses:

And when you said to him to whom Allāh had shown favour and to whom you had shown favour: Keep your wife to yourself and fear Allāh ... (33:37).

The tongue of him whom they are inclined to blame (for it) is barbarous and this is clear Arabic tongue (16:103).

O Prophet! surely We have made lawful to you your wives whom you have given their dowries, ... and a believing woman if she gave herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet desired to marry her — specially for you, not for the (rest of) believers; ... (33:50).

And the order for calling to the imprecation could not be extended beyond that particular situation, that is, the imprecation between the Prophet and the Christians. Therefore, when Allāh uses a plural, there should be more than two in both parties which were called; otherwise, the use of the plural “the liars” would be out of place.

Question: All the Christians who had come in the delegation of the Najrān were a party to a claim — the claim that ‘Īsā was God, and the

son of God, and one of the three persons of God. There was no discord among them in this matter, nor was there any difference in this claim between their men and women. Likewise, the claim on the side of the Prophet — that Allāh is One, there is no god but He; and ‘Īsā son of Maryam was His servant and His messenger — was upheld by all the believers; it was not confined to any one of them — not even the Prophet. Therefore, it is out of place to say that those who were brought by the Prophet for the imprecation had any superiority or excellence over the rest of the believers. In fact, the Prophet had brought them just as examples of the sons, women and selves mentioned in the verse.

Moreover, claim and mission are two different things. Those who participated in the imprecation were party to the claim. How is it that you have made them partners in the Mission too?

Reply: Had the Prophet brought them just as samples, it was necessary for him to bring at least two other men, three women and three sons — to comply with the demand of the plurals. Yet, he did not do so. It proves that only those who came with him were worthy of being called his sons, his women and his selves — to the exclusion of all the others. Only on accepting this fact, we can say that he obeyed the Divine Order given in this verse. In other words, he could not find any one worthy of being included in these categories, except the one man, one woman and two sons whom he brought with him. There was no one else whom he could include in compliance with the plural words of the verse. In these circumstance, he fully complied with the order, although he could not bring three persons in any category.

Moreover, if you ponder on the events, you will see that the only aim of the Christians of Najrān in coming to Medina was to confront the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and to argue with him about ‘Īsā son of Maryam. It was the Messenger of Allāh who was claiming that ‘Īsā was a servant of Allāh and His messenger. It was he who called others to believe in this claim, saying that it was based on Divine Revelation — the revelation which, he said, was sent to him. As for the rest of the believers, the Christians had nothing to do with them; nor did they argue with them. That is why Allāh has used singular verbs and pronouns in the beginning of this verse, when referring to the Prophet: “But whoever disputes with you (literally:thee) in this after what has come to you (lit.:thee) of knowledge, then say (lit.:say thou)...” The same is the case

of the verse: *But if they dispute with you* (lit.:thee), *say* (lit.:say thou): *‘I have submitted myself (entirely) to Allāh and (so has) every one who follows me’* (3:20).

The above explanation shows that the Messenger of Allāh (blessings of Allāh be on him and his progeny!) had not brought those personalities as samples or examples of other believers — because the believers, *per se*, had no part in that disputation or imprecation; and there was no reason why they should be offered as targets for the curse and punishment which were to come to one of the two parties (the Christians and their adversary, i.e., the Prophet). The Prophet himself was a party of that argument and it was his obligation to offer himself as the target of the calamity which could come to him in case his claim was (God forbid!) wrong. Now, there was no reason why he should bring ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (a.s.) with him, if his claim were not dependent on them also, as it was on his own self. He had come with them for imprecation because they were the only sons, woman and self on whom his claim depended. Surely he had not brought them as samples or examples. It is now crystal clear that these personalities were his partners in his claim; the claim depended on them as it did on him.

Furthermore, the Christians had come to argue with the Prophet not just because he believed that ‘Īsā son of Maryam was the servant and messenger of Allāh. They had taken upon themselves to come upto Medina because, in addition to claiming those things about ‘Īsā, he had called and invited them to believe likewise. This call, this mission, was the main reason why they had come in delegation for argument. Consequently, when the Prophet came to the appointed place of imprecation, bringing with him the four personalities, it was because of that claim and that call together. Thus these personalities were his partners in his mission, as they had been his partners in his claim.

Question: We accept that the Prophet came with them because they were a part of him; and this attribute was not found in others, it was their exclusive excellence. But it appears — and normal practice confirms it — that when a man brings his near and dear ones, his women and children, in dangerous and frightening places, it shows that he is fully confident of his and their safety and comfort. His bringing them for imprecation proves only that he was absolutely sure of his truth — it does

not show anything else. It is quite irrelevant to say that his action proves that they were his partners in the mission.

Reply: It is true that the beginning of the verse does not show more than that which has been mentioned above. But the end of the verse, that is, “on the liars”, shows that there were surely liars (in plural) in one of the two sides of the argument and imprecation. Such expression could only be used if there were several people in each group, all making some claim — be it true or false. Therefore, those who were brought there by the Prophet were indeed his partners, both in the claim and in the mission, as was explained above. It is thus proved that those who were present there with the Prophet — all of them — were parties to the claim and the mission, together with the Prophet, and were his partners in it.

Question: It follows, from what you have said, that they were his partners in the prophethood.

Reply: Not at all. We have explained earlier where we have discussed “Prophethood”¹ that the Call and Propagation are not one and the same with the prophethood, although they are among its conditions and concomitants, and are parts of the divinely-bestowed responsibilities which a prophet takes upon himself. Likewise, we have made it clear in the discourse about the *Imāmah*² that they are not identical with *Imāmah* either, although they are in a way among its concomitants.

QUR’ĀN: *Most surely this is the true story, and there is no god but Allāh:* The demonstrative pronoun “this” refers to the earlier mentioned stories of ‘Īsā (a.s.). There is a fine literary transposition in the sentence. What it says is as follows: Most surely the stories We have told you concerning ‘Īsā are the truth — not that which is told by the Christians.

There is multiple emphasis in this sentence: *Innā* (إِنَّ = surely), and *la* (لَا = surely) followed by an additional pronoun *huwa* (هُوَ = this) are all combined together to put utmost emphasis on this statement. It was done to cheer the Prophet and to encourage him and strengthen his heart for the coming imprecation, by augmenting his certainty and insight, and fortifying his confidence in the revelation which Allāh had sent to him. It

¹ Vide vol. 3 (Engl. transl.), under the verse 2:213. (*Author’s note*)

² Vide vol. 2 (Engl. transl.), under the verse 2:124. (*Author’s note*)

is further strengthened by additional emphasis contained in the next sentence which describes an accompanying reality: “and there is no god but Allāh”. This fact once again shows that the preceding stories are truth.

QUR’ĀN: *and most surely Allāh is the Mighty, the Wise:* The conjunctive “and” joins it to the first sentence of the verse. The same modes of emphasis have again been used here. It aims at further comforting the Prophet and strengthening his heart. It says that Allāh is Mighty: He has power to help the side of the truth. And He is Wise: He cannot neglect or forget this aid, because ignorance or oblivion cannot reach Him. He is not like those false deities whom the enemies of the truth have taken for themselves besides Him.

This explanation shows why these two Divine Names were chosen for concluding this verse. The sentence contains an exclusiveness: Only Allāh is the Mighty and the Wise.

QUR’ĀN: *But if they turn back then surely Allāh knows the mischief makers:* What should be the actual aim of any argument or imprecation? The manifestation of the truth. If so, then it is unthinkable for a seeker of truth to turn back from it. If the Christians really wanted the truth to be manifested — and they knew that Allāh was the Guardian of truth and that He would never allow it to be, destroyed or invalidated — they would not turn back from the proposed imprecation. And if they did, it would show that their aim by all this argumentation and disputation was not the manifestation of truth; they only wanted apparent victory, preservation of the status they had and beliefs they followed, and continuation of the customs and traditions with which they were familiar. Their only goal was that which their desire, lust and greed had made to seem fair to them — and it was not the good life which conforms with truth and happiness; it was but a semblance of life. In other words, they did not want reform and improvement; they wanted to make mischief in the world by corrupting the good life. Their turning back would mean that they were mischief-makers.

The sentence uses a metaphorical device of putting the cause in place of the effect; it mentions their mischief-making instead of saying that they do not want the truth to be manifested.

The second part of the sentence refers to the Divine Attribute of

knowledge, andi it has been emphasized with addition of *inna* (surely), as it says: “then surely Allāh knows”. It was to show that mischief-making and thwarting the manifestation of truth was ingrained in their psyche, and Allāh knows that as a result of that deep rooted trait they will surely turn back from the imprecation. And so they did and by doing so proved the truth of the Divine Words.

TRADITIONS

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said: “When the Christians of Najrān came to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) as a delegation — and their leaders were al-Ahtam, al-‘Āqib, and as-Sayyid — and (the time of) their prayer came, they began to ring hand-bells and prayed. The Companions of the Messenger of Allāh said: ‘O Messenger of Allāh! This in your Mosque?’ He said: ‘Let them be!’ When they finished (their prayer) they came near the Messenger of Allāh and said: ‘To what do you call (us)?’ He said: ‘To bearing the witness that there is no god except Allāh, and that I am the Messenger of Allāh, and that ‘Īsā was a servant created (by Allāh), he used to eat, drink and relieve himself.’ They said: ‘Then who was his father?’ Thereupon came the revelation to the Messenger of Allāh saying: ‘Say to them, “What do you say about Adam? Was he a servant created (by Allāh) who used to eat, drink, relieve himself and cohabit?”’ The Prophet put this question to them and they replied: ‘Yes.’ He said: ‘Then who was his father?’ and they became speechless. Then Allāh sent down (the verse): *Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust ...*; and the verse: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge ... and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars.*

“Then the Messenger of Allāh said: ‘(If you do not agree with what I say) then enter into earnest imprecation with me; thus if I am truthful the curse will be sent down on you and if I am a liar it will be sent down on me.’ The said: ‘You have done justice.’

“So they made an appointment for the imprecation. When they returned to the place they were staying, their leaders as-Sayyid, al-‘Āqib and al-Ahtam, said: ‘If he comes for the imprecation against us with his nation (i.e., people unrelated to him), we shall enter into imprecation

against him, because then he is not a prophet. But if he enters into imprecation against us with only the people of his House, we shall not enter into imprecation against him, because he will not put the People of his House forward unless he is truthful.'

“When the morning came, they came to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) — and there were with him the Leader of the Faithful (‘Alī), Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn (a.s.). The Christians said: ‘Who are these?’ They were told: ‘This is his cousin, *al-waṣiy* (الْوَصِيُّ = executor of will) and son-in-law, and this is his daughter Fāṭimah, and these are his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.’ So they were frightened and said to the Messenger of Allāh: ‘We shall pay you whatever you are pleased with, but excuse us from the imprecation.’ Thereupon the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) made agreement with them on (the condition of) *al-jizyah* (الْجِزْيَةُ = tax); and they went away.” (*at-Tafsīr*, alQummī)

ar-Rayyān ibn aṣ-Ṣalt narrates a talk of ar-Riḍā (a.s.) with al-Ma’mūn and the scholars about the difference between the Prophet’s progeny and the rest of the *ummah* and the former’s superiority over the latter, in which he, *inter alia*, says: “The scholars said: ‘Has Allāh explained (this) selection in His Book?’ ar-Riḍā (a.s.) said: ‘He has explained the selection manifestly in twelve places — apart from the hidden (references).’ Then he described those places of the Qur’ān, during which he said: ‘As for the third (verse, it was) when Allāh distinguished His purified creatures and ordered His Prophet to earnestly pray with them for His curse on the liars, in the verse of imprecation. So Allāh, the Mighty, the Great, said: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: “Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves.”*’ The scholars said: ‘our selves means the Prophet himself.’ Abu ‘l-Ḥasan (ar-Riḍā) said: ‘You are mistaken. He only meant ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. And one of the proofs to show it is the saying of the Prophet (himself): “Banū Walī‘ah should give up (their mischief); otherwise, I will surely send to them a man like my own self” — referring to ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. And He meant al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn with “sons”, and meant Fāṭimah with “women”. So this is an exclusive virtue in which no one can precede them, and an excellence in which no man can reach them, and an honour in which no creature can overtake them, because He made ‘Alī’s person like his (Prophet’s) own self (person)...’ ”

(‘Uyūnu ’l-akhbār)

aṣ-Ṣadūq narrates through his chain from al-Imām Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (peace be on both of them!), that he had a talk with (Hārūn) ar-Rashīd, during which ar-Rashīd said to him: ‘How is it that you say, ‘We are the offspring of the Prophet’, while the Prophet did not leave any offspring? And progeny is through male, not through female; and you are the children of the daughter and her child is not (her father’s) progeny.’ The Imām said: ‘I said to him: ‘I ask you by the right of kinship and that of the grave (i.e., of the Prophet) and of him who is therein, that you should excuse me from (replying to) this question.’ He said: ‘You shall tell me of your proof for it, O son of ‘Alī, and you, O Mūsā! are their leader and their present Imām — thus I have been informed — and I am not going to excuse you from any question I put to you until you bring me a proof from the Book of Allāh; because you claim, O children of ‘Alī! that nothing of it (the Book) comes out from you — not even an *alīf* or a *wāw* — but you know its interpretation; and you advance the word of Allāh, the Mighty, the Great, as your proof; *We have not neglected anything in the Book* [6:38], and you are not in need of the opinion of scholars and their analogy.’

‘Then I said: ‘Do you permit me to reply?’ He said: ‘Let me have.’ I said (reciting the Qur’ānic verse): ‘I seek refuge of Allāh from the cursed Satan. In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful. ... and of his (Ibrāhīm’s) offspring, Dāwūd and Sulaymān and Ayyūb and Yūsuf and Mūsā and Hārūn; and thus do We reward those who do good; and Zakariyyā and Yaḥyā and ‘Īsā and Ilyās; every one was of the good ones (6:84 — 5). Who was the father of ‘Īsā? O Leader of the Faithful!’ He said: ‘He had no father.’ Then I said: ‘Yet He (Allāh) has joined him with the progenies of the Prophets through Maryam; and in the same way Allāh, the High, has joined us with the progenies of the Prophet through our mother, Fāṭimah.’ (Then I said): ‘Should I tell you more? O Leader of the Faithful!’ he said: ‘Let me have.’ I said: ‘(It is) the word of Allāh, the Mighty, the Great: *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of know-ledge, then say: “Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves, then let us pray earnestly and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars.”*’ And nobody has ever claimed that the Prophet — on the occasion of the imprecation with the Christians — made anyone enter

under the drape except ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. So (this) was the interpretation of His Word: “our sons” meant al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and “our women”, Fāṭimah; and “our selves”, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib.’ ” (*ibid.*)

al-Ma’mūn had asked ar-Riḍā (a.s.) several questions, one of which was as follows:

al-Ma’mūn said: “What is the proof for the caliphate of your grandfather, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib?”

(The Imām) said: “The verse of *our selves*.”

He (al-Ma’mūn) said: “If there were not *our women*.”

He (the Imām) said: “If there were not *our sons*.”

The author says: The Imām argued on the strength of the word, *our selves*. He meant that Allāh had made ‘Alī (a.s.) like the person of the Prophet. (And who could have more right to succeed the Prophet than his own person?). al-Ma’mūn said: “If there were not *our women*.” He wanted to say that the reference to “women” indicates that the word “our selves” means “our men”, and as such it would not show any excellence. The Imām replied: “If there were not *our sons*.” That is, if “our selves” referred to the men, then why should the sons be mentioned separately? They would have been included in “our men”.

Ḥarīz narrates from Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.) that he said: “The Leader of the Faithful (‘Alī, a.s.) was asked about his excellent virtues. He mentioned some of them. Then they said to him: ‘Tell us (some) more.’ So he said: ‘Verily two Bishops of the Christians of Najrān came to the Messenger of Allāh, and talked (with him) on the subject of ‘Īsā (a.s.). Thereupon Allāh revealed the verse: *Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam...* Then the Messenger of Allāh entered (the house), and held the hands of ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and Fāṭimah; then he came out, and raised his palms to the heaven and separated his fingers one from another; and called them (the Christians) to the imprecation.’ ” (Abū ‘Abdillāh, a.s.) then said: “And Abū Ja‘far (a.s.) has said: ‘And that is the way of imprecation; one intertwines his hand in one’s (adversary’s) hand raising them to the heaven.’ ” Thereupon when the two Bishops saw him, one of them said to his companion: “By God! If he is a prophet, we shall surely perish; and if he is not a prophet his

(own) people would save us (from the trouble of confronting him).” So they gave up (the imprecation) and went back.’ ” (al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: This or nearly the same meaning has been narrated in other traditions through the Shī‘ī chains. All of them unanimously say that those who were brought by the Prophet for the imprecation were ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn only.

ash-Shaykh aṭ-Ṭūsī has narrated it in his *al-Amālī*, through his chains from ‘Āmir ibn Sa‘d from his father; and also through his chains from ‘Abdu’r-Raḥmān ibn Kathīr from aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.); and also through his chains from Sālim ibn Abi ‘l Ja‘d, raising it to Abū Dharr; and also through his chains from Rabī‘ah ibn Nājid from ‘Alī (a.s.).

al-Mufīd has narrated it in his *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, through his chains from Muḥammad ibn az-Zibriqān from Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (a.s.); and also from Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir from his father from his grandfather.

al-‘Ayyāshī has narrated it in his *at-Tafsīr* from Muḥammad ibn Sa‘īd al-Urdunnī from Mūsā ibn Muḥammad ibn ar-Riḍā (a.s.) from his brother; and also from Abū Ja‘far al-Aḥwal from aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.); and also from al-Mundhir from ‘Alī (a.s.); and also through his chains from ‘Āmir ibn Sa‘d.

al-Furāt has narrated it in his *at-Tafsīr* several traditions to this effect, which separately reach to Abū Ja‘far (a.s.), Abū Rāfi‘, ash-Sha‘bī, ‘Alī (a.s.), and Shahr ibn Ḥawshab and several other traditions to the same effect have been narrated in *Rawḍatu ‘l-wā‘izīn*, *I‘lāmu ‘l-warā*, *al-Kharā‘ij* and other books.

It has been narrated in *at-Tafsīr* of ath-Tha‘labī¹ from Mujāhid and al-Kalbī: “When the Prophet called the Christians for the imprecation, they said: ‘Let us return and think over it.’ When they were alone, they asked al-‘Āqib — and he was a man of good judgment among them: ‘O ‘Abdu ‘l-Masīḥ! What is your opinion?’ He said: ‘By Allāh! You are well-aware, O ye Christians! that Muḥammad is a prophet, sent by Allāh, and that he has brought to you the decisive word about your Companion (‘Īsā, a.s.). By Allāh! whenever a nation has entered into imprecation with a prophet, their elders have perished and their youngsters have died.

¹ The author now gives references from the Sunnī books. (*tr.*)

And if you do it, we shall surely perish; but, if you turn down, for the love of your religion and (want) to remain on what you have at present, then make peace with the man and go back to your towns.’

“So they came to the Messenger of Allāh; and he had come out in the morning carrying al-Ḥusayn in his lap, holding the hand of al-Ḥasan, with Fāṭimah walking behind him and ‘Alī was behind her; and he was saying: ‘When I pray, you say “Amen”’. Then the Bishop of Najrān said: ‘O ye Christians! Surely I see the faces that if they ask Allāh to remove a mountain from its place, He would surely remove it. Therefore, do not do imprecation, otherwise you will perish, and there will not remain any Christian on the face of the earth, upto the Day of Resurrection.’

“Then they said: ‘O Abu ’l-Qāsim! We have decided that we should not enter into imprecation against you; and that we leave you on your religion and we remain on our religion.’ He said: ‘Well, if you refuse imprecation, then accept Islam — you will have (the rights) which (other) Muslims have, and on you shall be (the duties) which are on them.’ But they refused. So (the Prophet) said: ‘Then I shall fight you.’ They said: ‘We do not have strength to fight against the Arabs. But we shall make peace with you that you will not fight against us or frighten us; nor will you turn us away from our religion, on the condition that we shall pay to you every year two thousand robes — one thousand in Ṣafar and one thousand in Rajab — and thirty coats of mail, (of) common (quality), made of iron.’ So the Prophet made agreement with them on these conditions. And he said, ‘By Him in Whose hand is my soul ! Surely destruction had almost descended on the people of Najrān.’ And if they had entered into imprecation they would have been transformed into monkeys and pigs, and there would have erupted in the valley a conflagration of fire engulfing them all; and surely Allāh would have annihilated Najrān and its inhabitants — even the birds on tree tops; and the year would not have ended for all the Christians but they would have perished.”

The author says: The event, nearly in similar words, has also been narrated in *Kitābu ’l-Maghāzī* from Ibn Ishāq. Also al-Mālikī has narrated it in his *al-Fuṣūlu ’l-muhimmah* from many exegetes; and al-Ḥammūyī has narrated nearly similar tradition from Ibn Jurayḥ.

The agreement contains the phrase, “one thousand in Şafar;” it means al-Muḥarram of Islamic calendar, which was the first month of the year in Arabia. In pre-Islamic days it was called “Şafar” — the first two months were called *Şafar al-Awwal* and *Şafar ath-Thānī*. Arabs in the days of ignorance used to postpone *Şafar al-Awwal*. Then Islam confirmed the sacredness of the *Şafar al-Awwal*; so it was called, “the sacred (المُحَرَّمُ = al-Muḥarram), month of Allāh;” then it became known as al-Muḥarram.

‘Āmir son of Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqās narrates from his father that he said: “Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān ordered Sa‘d telling him, ‘What prevents you from abusing Abū Turāb (‘Alī, a.s.)?’ He said, ‘As for this matter, as long as I remember three things which the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) has said (about ‘Alī) I will never abuse him; if even one of them were for me, it would have been dearer to me than red livestock.’ I heard the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) saying, when he left him (‘Alī) as his Deputy (when going) for one of his battles. ‘Alī said to him, ‘O Messenger of Allāh! Are you leaving me behind with women and children?’ Thereupon, the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said to him: ‘Are you not pleased that you should have the same position with me that Hārūn had with Mūsā — except that there is no prophet after me?’ And I heard him saying on the day of Khaybar: ‘Most surely tomorrow I will give the standard (of army) to a man who loves Allāh and His Messenger, and whom Allāh and His Messenger do love.’ (Sa‘d) said: ‘So we held our heads high (hoping to catch the eye of the Prophet). But he said: ‘Call ‘Alī to me.’ So he was brought (before him), sore-eyed; and (the Prophet) put (his) saliva in his eyes (and he was cured); and gave the standard to him. And Allāh conquered (Khaybar) on his hand. And when this verse was revealed: ... *then say: “Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves, then let us pray earnestly ... ”*, the Messenger of Allāh called ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and said: ‘O Allāh! These are the People of my House.’ ” (*aṣ-Şaḥīḥ*, Muslim)

The author says: This tradition has been narrated by at-Tirmidhī in his *aṣ-Şaḥīḥ*, Abu ‘l-Mu‘ayyad al-Muwaffaq ibn Aḥmad in his *Kitāb Faḍā’il ‘Alī*, Abū Nu‘aym in his *Ḥilyatu ‘l-awliyā’* (from the same

narrator as above), and al-Ḥammūyī in his *Farā'idu 's-simṭayn*.

Abū Nu‘aym narrates through his chains from ‘Āmir ibn Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ from his father that he said: “When this verse was revealed, the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) called ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn and said: ‘O Allāh! These are the People of my House.’” (*Ḥilyatu 'l-awliyā'*)

Also he narrates in the same book through his chains from ash-Sha‘bī from Jābir that he said: “al-‘āqib and aṭ-Ṭayyib came to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.), and he invited them to Islam. They said: ‘We are (already) Muslims, O Muḥammad! He said: ‘You tell a lie. If you wish, I would tell you what prevents you from (accepting) Islam.’ They said: ‘Then let us have.’ He said: ‘The love of the cross, drinking liquor, and eating the flesh of pig.’ Jābir further said: “Then the Prophet invited them to imprecation, and they promised him to come to him in the morning. When the morning came, the Messenger of Allāh held the hands of ‘Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn and Fāṭimah. Then he sent (someone) to them. But they refused to accept his call (for imprecation) ; instead they acknowledged to him (his sovereignty). Then the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘By Him Who has sent me with truth! Had they done (the imprecation) the valley would have rained fire on them.’ ” Jābir said: “About them was revealed the verse: ... *let us call our sons and your sons* ... Jābir further said “*our selves* refers to the Messenger of Allāh and ‘Alī; and *our sons* to al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and *our women* to Fāṭimah.”

The author says: This tradition has been narrated by Ibn al-Maghāzilī in his *al-Manāqib* through his chains from the same ash-Sha‘bī from Jābir; by al-Ḥammūyī in his *Farā'idu 's-simṭayn*, through his chains from the same narrator; by al-Mālīki in his *al-Fuṣūlu 'l-muhimmah* from the same; by Abū Dāwūd aṭ-Ṭāyālīsī from the same; and by as-Suyūfī in his *ad-Durru 'l-manthūr* from al-Ḥākīm (who has said that this tradition is correct), and from Ibn Marduwayh as well as Abū Nu‘aym (in his *Dalā'ilu 'l-khayrāt*) — all from Jābir.

Abū Nu‘aym has narrated in his *Dalā'ilu 'l-khayrāt* through the chain of al-Kalbī from Abū Ṣāliḥ from Ibn ‘Abbās that he said: “Verily a

delegation of the Christians of Najrān came to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.), and there were fourteen persons of their nobles. Among them were as-Sayyid (and he was the leader) and al-‘Āqib, the second in rank and a man of good judgment among them.” (Then he has described the event as given above.) (*ad-Durru 'l-manthūr*)

al-Bayhaqī has narrated in his *Dalā'ilu 'n-Nubuwwah* through the chain of Salmah ibn ‘Abd Yashū‘ from his father from his grandfather that he said : “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) wrote to the people of Najrān, before the (chapter of) Tā Sīn Sulaymān¹ was revealed: ‘In the name of Allāh, the God of Ibrāhīm and Ishāq and Ya‘qūb. From Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allāh to the Bishop of Najrān and the people of Najrān. If you accept Islam, then I extol before you Allāh, the God of Ibrāhīm and Ishāq and Ya‘qūb. Now after (the praise of Allāh), I call you to the worship of Allāh leaving aside the worship of the servants (of Allāh), and I invite you to (come under) the guardianship of Allāh instead of the guardianship of the servants. But if you refuse (it), then (you should pay) the head-tax; and if you refuse (even this), then I declare war against you. And peace (be on you).’

When the Bishop read the letter, he was shocked and extremely terrified. So he sent (someone) to call a man of Najrān Shuraḥbīl ibn Wadā‘ah by name; and gave him the letter of the Prophet and he read it. Then the Bishop said to him: ‘What is your opinion?’ Shuraḥbīl said: ‘You surely know the promise which Allāh made to Ibrāhīm about the prophethood in the progeny of Ismā‘īl. Therefore, how can one be sure that it is not this very man? I would not give any opinion regarding the prophethood. If it were an opinion about a worldly matter, I would have advised you about it and made efforts on your behalf.’ Then the Bishop called the people of Najrān one after another, but all said as Shuraḥbīl had said. Thereupon, they decided to send Shuraḥbīl ibn Wadā‘ah, ‘Abdullāh ibn Shuraḥbīl and Jabbār ibn Fayḍ, so that they might bring them the (correct) news of the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.)

“So the delegation proceeded until they came to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.). And he asked them (questions) and they asked him, and this questioning between him and them continued, until they said to him:

¹ i.e., the 27th Chapter, the Ant. The author has proved, while writing the traditions under the next verse, that this particular tradition is false. (*tr.*)

‘What do you say about ‘Īsā son of Maryam?’ The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘Today, I do not have anything about him; therefore you stay (here), in order that I may tell you tomorrow morning what is to be said about ‘Īsā.’ Then Allāh sent down this verse: *Surely the likeness of ‘Īsā is with Allāh as the likeness of Adam; He created him from dust ... and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars.*

“But they refused to agree to that (truth). Thus, when the next morning came after the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) had given them that information, he proceeded for the imprecation to a place thick with trees that belonged to him, carrying al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and Fāṭimah was walking behind him; and he had many wives those days (but did not take any of them with him). And Shuraḥbīl said to his two companions: ‘Surely, I see a (serious) matter coming (to us). If this man is a prophet sent (by Allāh) and we ventured to imprecate against him, there would not remain on the face of the earth any hair or claw of us (i.e., any cattle or bird belonging to us), but it will perish.’ They said to him: ‘What is your view?’ He said: ‘My opinion is that we should leave the judgment to him, because I see (in him) a man who will never exceed the proper limits in his decision.’ They said: ‘You may do as you like in this matter.’ Thereupon, Shuraḥbīl met the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and said: ‘I have thought (of one thing) better than the imprecation against you.’ He said: ‘And what is it?’ He said: ‘(We give you the authority) to decide (between us) this day upto the night and from the night to the (next) morning. Whatever you will decide will be binding on us.’

“So the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) returned without doing imprecation, and made agreement with them on the head-tax.” (*ad-Durru 'l-manthūr*)

Ibn Jarīr has narrated from ‘Ilbā’ ibn Aḥmar al-Yashkurī that he said: “When the verse was revealed: ... *then say: ‘Let us call our sons and your sons ...’*, the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) sent (someone) to (call) ‘Alī, Fāṭimah and their sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn; and invited the Jews to enter into imprecation against them. Then a young Jew said: ‘Woe unto you! Are you not familiar with (the story) of your brothers who were yesterday transformed into monkeys and pigs? Do not enter into (this) imprecation.’ So they desisted (from it).” (*ibid.*)

The author says: This tradition supports the view that the pronoun

“this” in the opening sentence, *disputes with you in this*, refers to “truth” in the preceding verse, *The truth is from your Lord*. In this way, the order of imprecation would cover other matters too, besides the controversy about ‘Īsā son of Maryam. In that case, it would be another story ¹ after the events which took place with the delegation of Najrān as narrated in numerous traditions which supports each other, and a large portion of which has been quoted above.

Ibn Ṭāwūs has written in *Sa‘du ’s-su‘ud*: “I saw in the book *Mā nazala minā ’l-Qur’āni fi ’n-Nabiyyi wa Ahli baytih* (by Muḥammad ibn al-‘Abbās ibn Marwān) that he has narrated the tradition of the imprecation through fifty-one chains from the Companions and others; and some of them are: al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī (peace be on them both), ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān, Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqās, Bakr ibn Sammāl, Ṭalḥah, az-Zubayr, ‘Abdu ’r-Raḥmān ibn ‘Awf, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās, Abū Rāfi‘ (slave of the Prophet), Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh, al-Barā’ ibn ‘Āzib and Anas ibn Mālik.”

Likewise (Ibn Shahrāshūb) has narrated this tradition in *al-Manāqib*, from a number of narrators and exegetes. as-Suyūfī has done the same in *ad-Durru ’l-manthūr*.

A very strange thing has been written by an exegete who said:

“The traditions unanimously say that the Prophet selected ‘Alī, Fāṭimah and their two sons for the imprecation; and they apply the word *our women* to Fāṭimah, and *our selves* to ‘Alī only. The source of these traditions are the Shī‘ahs, and their motive in this respect is well-known. They have tried as much as they could to propagate such traditions until it has spread among a vast number of the Sunnīs too.

“But those who forged these traditions did not succeed in properly fitting their interpretation on the verse. When an Arab says, ‘our women’ he never means his daughter — especially when he has wives too. Such thing is not known in their language. Even more far-fetched is the claim that ‘our selves’ means ‘Alī. Moreover, the delegation of Najrān — concerning whom the verse is said to be revealed — had not come to Medina with their women and children.

“The only thing which the verse shows is that the Prophet was

¹ This tradition is not supported by other traditions or history. (*tr.*)

ordered to call the People of the Book (who were disputing with him about ‘Īsā) to gather all — men, women and children — together; and he was to gather the believers — men, women and children — together, in order that they might earnestly pray to Allāh to curse the party which was in the wrong regarding its claim about ‘Īsā (a.s.).

“Such thing would prove that the Prophet had strong conviction of the truth of his claim and had utmost confidence in it. And likewise, the desistence of those who were challenged to imprecation — the Christians or other People of the Book — would show that they had no confidence in their own claim and were disputing not for the purpose of ascertaining the truth; their belief was shaky and they had no clear proofs. How can a believer in Allāh agree to gather such a group — consisting of the truthful ones and the liars — in one place to fix their attention to Allāh asking for His curse, to pray to remove the liars from His mercy? Can anyone be more daring than such a person? Can anything be more mocking to the Divine Power and Majesty than this?

“The Prophet and the believers had full confidence in the truth of what they believed about ‘Īsā (a.s.). It may be understood from the words of Allāh, *after what has come to you of knowledge*; because knowledge in matters of belief means certainty only.

“The words of Allāh, *let us call our sons and your sons ...*, may be interpreted in either of the two ways:

“First: Each group should call the other; you should call our sons and we should call your sons and likewise about the other two categories of women and selves.

“Second: Each group should call his family. We, the Muslims, should call our sons, women and ourselves, and you should do likewise with your family.

“There is no difficulty in either case in calling the ‘selves’. The difficulty arises when this phrase is restricted to one person, as the Shī‘ahs and their followers do.”

COMMENT: This is such a non-sense that no knowledgeable person would ever like to write it in academic books; and perhaps someone might venture to say that we have wrongly attributed it to such a renowned man! Yet, we have quoted it in full to show how low a man can sink in misapprehension and jaundiced views because of his bias and

prejudice. He goes on demolishing what he had earlier built, and reconfirms what he had rejected before, without caring or even knowing what he was doing. Also, we wanted evil to be known to all, so that they could protect themselves from it.

We may comment on this talk in two ways:

1. To show that the verse proves utmost excellence and superiority of ‘Alī (a.s.). But it is a subject more appropriate for the books of theology, and is not so much related to our subject, that is, explanation of the meanings of the Qur’ānic verses.

2. To review what the above exegete has written about the meaning of the verse of imprecation and concerning the traditions showing what had happened between the Prophet and the Christians of Najrān. This comes within the purview of exegesis, and we shall deal with it here.

You have already seen what the verse means. And the numerous traditions (which support each other), quoted by us, perfectly fit the meaning of the verse. If you ponder on what we have written earlier, you will see where and how his innovated “proof” has gone wrong, and at what points his blinkered vision has made him stumble. Here are some details:

He says: “The source of these traditions are the Shī‘ahs, and their motive in this respect is well-known. They have tried as much as they could to propagate such traditions until it has spread among a vast number of the Sunnīs too.” This he says after admitting that the traditions are unanimous! Would that I knew which traditions he speaks about. Does he mean the abovementioned traditions which support and strengthen each other, which the scholars of traditions have unanimously accepted and narrated? They are not one, two or three; they are countless in number. The traditionalists have quoted them with one voice; the compilers of traditions have written them in their books, including Muslim and at-Tirmidhī in their collections of ‘correct’ traditions; and the historians have confirmed them by describing the events in a similar way. The exegetes of the Qur’ān have unanimously quoted and copied them, without expressing any doubt or levelling any objection against them — and there are among them stalwarts of traditions and history, like at-Ṭabarī, Abu ’l-Fidā’, Ibn Kathīr and as-Suyūfī etc.

And who were those Shī‘ahs who were the source of this story? Does

he mean those companions who narrated it in the first place? Like Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqās, Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās and others? Or the disciples of the companions who took this tradition from them and conveyed it to others? Like Abū Ṣāliḥ, al-Kalbī, as-Suddī, ash-Sha‘bī and others? Does he want to say that those companions and their disciples became Shī‘ahs — just because they narrated a tradition which he does not like? It is these companions and disciples — together with other like them — who are the final links in the chains of the narrators of the Prophet’s traditions. Discard them, and you will be left neither with any tradition nor any biography of the Prophet. How can a Muslim — nay, even a non-Muslim researcher — aspire to know the details of the Prophet’s message, if he rejects the traditions? How can he know the teachings and laws brought by the Messenger of Allāh? The Qur’ān clearly upholds the authority of the sayings and actions of the Prophet; and declares that the religion is based on his life. Reject the authority of the traditions and you have lost the Qur’ān as well; there will remain no trace of the Divine Book, nor will there be any fruit of this revelation.

Or perhaps he thinks that the Shī‘ahs have interpolated and surreptitiously inserted these traditions in the books of traditions and history? But then the problem, instead of going away, would rather increase and be more overwhelming: the tradition will lose its authority and the *sharī‘ah* will be nullified.

He says: “They apply the word *our women* to Fāṭimah and *our selves* to ‘Alī.” Probably he wants to say that according to the Shī‘ahs, the words *our women* and *our selves* literally mean only Fāṭimah and ‘Alī respectively. Perhaps he got the idea from an earlier quoted tradition in which Jābir said: “*Our selves* refers to the Messenger of Allāh and ‘Alī; ... and *our women* to Fāṭimah.” But obviously he has not understood its meaning. The traditions do not say so. They only mean that because the Prophet when acting on the verse, did not bring (any other person for imprecation) except ‘Alī and Fāṭimah, it made it clear that she was the only one worthy of being included in the category *our women*, as he was the only one qualified for the category *our selves*; and likewise al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn were the only two for the category *our sons*. The words: sons, women and selves taken together meant the family. Therefore, these four were the family of the Messenger of Allāh and his closest relatives, as we have seen in some traditions that he (s.a.w.a.) said after

coming with them at the appointed place: “O Allāh! These are the people of my house.” The sentence implies: I did not find anyone whom I could call, except these four.

That this is the correct explanation may be seen in the wording of some traditions which say: “*our selves* refers to the Messenger of Allāh and ‘Alī.” It clearly shows that the tradition aims at describing who had come under which category — not at explaining the literal meaning of the words.

He says: “But those who forged these traditions did not succeed in properly fitting their interpretation on the verse. When an Arab says *our women* he never means his daughter — especially when he has got wives too. Such thing is not known in their language. Even more far-fetched is the claim that *our selves* means ‘Alī.’”

First he has given an imaginary meaning to the traditions, then he uses it as an excuse to discard all those narrations — in spite of their numerousness, in spite of their great number. Then he discredits its narrators and all those who have accepted them by accusing them of the crime of Shi‘ism! Had he been a true seeker of knowledge, he should have studied the books of exegesis, and remembered the vast multitude of the masters of eloquence and authorities of rhetorics, since they have quoted and written these traditions in their books of exegesis and other subjects without any hesitation, without any objection.

Look at the author of *Tafsīru ‘l-Kashshāf*. He is a recognized authority on Arabic language, grammar and literature. He has often pronounced judgment on various recitations of the Qur’ān, showing why a certain recitation was not in keeping with the norms of language or usage. And see what he has to say about this verse: “And this verse contains a proof — unsurpassed in strength — of the excellence of the people of the mantle, peace be on them. And there is in it a clear proof of the truth of the prophethood of the Prophet, because nobody — either a supporter or an antagonist — has ever narrated that they (the Christians) answered that call (for imprecation).”

How come that those giants of rhetorics and champions of literature could not realize that these traditions — in spite of their vast multitude and their repeated narrations in the books of traditions — accuse the Qur’ān of using incorrect expression by employing a plural (women) for one woman only?

Not, by my life! This exegete is in fact confused; he does not know the difference between the literal meaning of a word and its application. Obviously, his thinking goes like this: “Allāh said to His Prophet, *But whoever disputes with you in this after what has come to you of knowledge, then say: ‘Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves ...’* Now if we admit that the disputers at that time were the delegates of Najrān numbering according to some traditions, fourteen men; and that there were no women or children with them; and if after that we admit that when the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) went for the imprecation, he had with him only: ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, then the phrase, *whoever disputes with you*, would literally mean the delegation of Najrān; *our women* would mean one woman; *our selves* would mean one ‘self’; and *your sons* and *your women* would become words without meaning because there were neither women nor sons in that delegation!”

I wonder why he forgot to add that it would also mean use of *our sons* (a plural, meaning at least three sons) for only two sons, because it is more repugnant than the use of plural for singular. Since post-classical period, people have been using plural in place of singular — although such use is not found in the classical Arabic, except when done as a mark of respect. But the use of plural for dual is an unheard of thing — it has no justification at all.

However, it was this trend of thought which led him to discard all these traditions, saying that they were forged. But he has completely misunderstood the talk.

The fact is that an eloquent talk conforms with the situation which it is related to, and throws light on what in a given context is important to explain. Sometimes the talk is between two strangers, neither knowing the other’s life condition. Then they use normal expressions which are applied in general talk. Suppose two groups are facing each other; one of them wants the other to know that their conflict is deep-rooted, and that the whole tribe — men and women, elders and youngsters — shall continue the fight till the last. In such a situation, he will say: We shall fight you with our men, women and children. Now this sentence is based on the assumption that normally and naturally a tribe does have women and children. The statement aims at making it clear to the enemy that the speaker’s tribe is one in its determination to fight against their adversary.

On the other hand, if he were to say, ‘We shall fight against you with our men, a woman and two sons’, it would be a superfluous detail, uncalled for in this context — unless there be some good reason for it in a particular situation.

But when the talk is between friends who know each other’s family, then it may be couched in general terms. For example, one may say while inviting the other to his home: We are at your service — we ourselves as well as our women and children. Or, he may wish to be more specific and say: All of us will be at your service — the men, the daughter and the two children.

In short, normal way of expression is one thing and its application on real facts is another matter. Sometimes they may coincide, at other times they may be different. If a man speaks in normal and general terms and then it appears that the real situation is different, he is not accused of telling a lie.

This verse is based on the same principal. Accordingly the words, ... *then say: “Come let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our selves and your selves ... ”*, means as follows: Tell them that you are coming with your closest relatives who are your partners in your claim and knowledge, and invite them to come with their closest relatives. Thus, the verse proceeds in the normal way assuming that the Messenger of Allāh had in his family men, women and sons, and the Christian delegates had likewise men, women and sons in their families; it was a challenge couched in general and usual terms. But when the time came to act on that challenge, it was found that the Prophet did not have any men, women and sons except one man, one woman and two sons, while his adversaries had no woman or son with them — there were only men in their group. But this difference in implementation did not falsify the challenge. That is why when the Prophet came out with one man, one woman and two sons, the Christians did not accuse him of lying or of not fulfilling the conditions; nor did they cover their refusal by saying that the Prophet had told them to bring their women and sons which they did not have with them at that time and therefore they were unable to enter into imprecation. Also, it was because of this that those who heard this story never imagined that it was a forgery.

The above explanation also shows the absurdity of his assertion

where he says: “Moreover, the delegation of Najrān — concerning whom the verse is said to be revealed — had not come to Medina with their women and children.”

He says: “The only thing which the verse shows is that the Prophet was ordered to call the People of the Book (who were disputing with him about ‘Īsā) to gather all — men, women and children — together; and he was to gather the believers — men, women and children — together; in order that they might earnestly pray to Allāh to curse the party which was in the wrong in its claim about ‘Īsā ... How can a believer in Allāh agree to gather such a group — consisting of the truthful ones and the liars — in one place to fix their attention to Allāh asking for His curse, to pray to remove the liars from His mercy? Can anyone be more daring than such a person? Can anything be more mocking to the Divine Power and Majesty than this?”

In short, the verse invites both parties to gather together with their “selves”, their women and their sons in one place and then to earnestly pray for Allāh’s curse on the liars. Now let us find out what is the meaning of this gathering which he talks about.

Was it a call to gather together all the believers and all the Christians? But the believers at that time ¹ included all, or almost all, Arabs of the tribes of Rabī‘ah and Muḍar residing from Yemen and Hijāz to Iraq and beyond. And the Christians included those in Najrān (then forming a part of Yemen), Syria and the regions around the Mediterranean sea; the Romans and the Franks, as well as the people of the Britain, Austria and other places.

Such a vast multitude of people, scattered from the East to the West, must have exceeded millions upon millions, counting men, women and children all together. There can be no doubt whatsoever in the mind of a sane person that it was almost impossible for all of them to gather in one place. Normal ways and means reject such a proposition altogether. If the Qur’ān had offered this proposal then it had asked for an impossible. It would mean that the Prophet was offering a conditional proof for the authenticity of his claim — and the condition, on which it depended, was

¹ It was the 9th year after Hijrah according to some historians, and the 10th according to others. But both timings are open to question, as we shall describe when writing the “Traditions” related to the next verses. (*Author’s Note*)

an impossible one! It would have given an excuse — a valid excuse — to the Christians not to accept his call of imprecation; in fact it would have been more damaging to his claim, rather than weakening their case.

Or, does he mean that it was a call to gather from both groups only those who were present thereby — the believers of Medina and nearby places, and the Christians of Najrān and the places in its vicinity? This alternative — although less absurd than the preceding one — was no less impossible. Who was capable that day of gathering all the residents of Medina and Najrān and their neighbouring places, not leaving a single woman and child out, in one place for the intended imprecation? Such proposal would have been an admission that the truth was impossible to prove, because the proof depended on an impossible condition.

Or, was it a call covering only those who were actively engaged in the disputation and arguments? That is, the Prophet and the believers around him, and the delegation of the Christians of Najrān. But then his own objection would boomerang: “Moreover, the delegation of Najrān — concerning whom the verse is said to be revealed — had not come to Medina with their women and children.” So the problem would not go away.

Further he says: “The Prophet and the believers had full confidence in the truth of what they believed about ‘Īsā (a.s.). It may be understood from the words of Allāh, *after what has come to you of knowledge*; because knowledge in matters of belief means certainty only.”

It is true that the knowledge, as used in this verse, means certainty. But would that I knew where does it say that the believers were sure of the truth of their belief concerning ‘Īsā? The verse does not speak about anyone except the Prophet in singular pronouns: *But whoever disputes with you* (lit. thee) *in this after what has come to you* (lit. thee) *of knowledge, then say* (lit. say thou). And there was no reason why the verse should have addressed anyone except the Prophet alone; the Christians’ delegation had only one aim before their eyes — to dispute and argue with the Prophet. It was not their intention to meet the believers; they had not argued at all with the believers, nor had the believers spoken to them.

If the verse shows at all that anyone other than the Prophet had attained knowledge and certainty, it does so about those whom the Prophet had brought with himself for imprecation, as we have inferred

from the words, *and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars.*

On the other hand, the Qur’ān shows that not all the believers had attained knowledge and certainty. For example:

And most of them do not believe in Allāh without associating others (with Him) (12:106). Here Allāh announces their polytheism. How can polytheism co-exist with certainty?

And when the hypocrites and those in whose heart was a disease began to say: “Allāh and His Messenger did not promise us (victory) but only to deceive” (33:12).

And those who believe say: “Why has not a chapter been revealed?” But when a decisive chapter is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein you see those in whose hearts is a disease look to you with the look of one fainting because of death. Woe to them then! ... Those it is whom Allāh has cursed so He has made them deaf and blinded their eyes (47:20 — 23).

The fact is that certainty was attained by only a few of the followers of the Prophet who had got clear sight. Allāh says:

But if they dispute with you, say: “I have submitted myself (entirely) to Allāh and (so has) every one who follows me” (3:20).

Say: “This is my way, I invite (you) unto Allāh; with clear sight (which) land he who follows me (possess) (12:108).

He says: “The words of Allāh, *let us call our sons and your sons ...*, may be interpreted in either of the two ways: First: Each group should call the others; you should call our sons and we should call your sons; and likewise about the other two categories of women and selves.”

You have already seen in the Commentary that this interpretation (which he gives as his first choice) is totally absurd and not in conformity with the wordings of the verse. So far as the call for imprecation was concerned, it would have sufficed to say: Come, let us earnestly pray and bring about the curse of Allāh on the liars. Why then were the remaining phrases added: *Let us call our sons and your sons and our women and your women and our ‘selves’ and your ‘selves’?* These phrases were meant to bind each party to bring for the imprecation its dearest and precious-most things, that is, the sons, the women and the selves. This challenge could be meaningful only if each party was to bring its own sons, women and selves. It would lose its meaning completely if it was interpreted as he says: You should call our sons, women and selves and

we should call your sons, women and selves.

Moreover, common sense rejects this interpretation. Why should the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) give the Christians power and authority over their sons and women? Because only after getting that power and authority could each party call the other's sons and women and bring them at the place of imprecation. Surely the aim could be achieved in a better way if each party called its own sons and women.

Further, as we have shown above, this interpretation makes it necessary to add in the verse the idea of giving someone the power and authority over others. But how and on what ground can we do so? The truth is that this interpretation is absolutely wrong. Only the other interpretation is correct — that each party was to call its own family members.

He says: “There is no difficulty in either case in calling the ‘selves’. The difficulty arises when this phrase is restricted to one person, as the Shī‘ahs and their followers do.”

The difficulty, to which he refers, arises from the following objection: How can a man call himself? But this objection has nothing to do with either interpretation. It has been levelled against the explanation that *our selves* means the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) himself. Reportedly during one religious discussion, one group said that *our selves* referred to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.), not to ‘Alī. The opposite party said that it would imply that he called himself, which is manifestly wrong. (See the second tradition, quoted from ‘*Uyūnu ’l-akhbār.*’)

It will be seen from the above that his claim that “the difficulty arises from the Shī‘ahs’ interpretation”, is absolutely wrong. The Shī‘ahs say that the word, *our selves*, means the men from the family of the Prophet; and when the order was implemented, it was applied to the Messenger of Allāh and ‘Alī (blessings and peace be on them!). And there could be no difficulty in their calling one another.

Accordingly, no objection can be directed at the Shī‘ahs, even according to the interpretation which he ascribes to them, that *our selves* means ‘All. What difficulty could there be if the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) was to call ‘Alī (a.s.)?

His disciple ¹ has written in *al-Manār*, after mentioning some traditions: “Ibn ‘Asākir has narrated from Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad from his father in explanation of the verse, *then say: ‘Come let us call our sons and your sons ...’* ‘Then (the Prophet) brought Abū Bakr and his son, ‘Umar and his son, and ‘Uthmān and his son.’ ” Then he comments: “Apparently the verse speaks about a group of the believers.” Thereafter he has copied the abovequoted writing of his teacher, and then has opined as follows: “As you see the verse orders women to participate with men in national struggles and religious wars. It is based on the principle of equality between men and women even in public affairs — except where an exception has been made. (Then he goes on elaborating the same points.)

COMMENT: As for the tradition which he has quoted, it is an isolated and peculiar one and goes against all the other traditions on this subject; and needless to say that the other traditions are so numerous and so well known. That is why the exegetes have not mentioned it. Moreover, it contains statements which do not tally with the facts: It supposes that all the people mentioned therein had sons, but surely not all of them had sons at that time.

He says: “Apparently the verse speaks about a group of the believers.” Probably, he wants to infer from the tradition (quoted by him) that the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) had brought there all the believers and their children; thus the words that the Prophet, “brought Abū Bakr and his son ...” would indirectly imply that he brought all the believers. In this way he wants to support the interpretation of his teacher, discussed above. But you see how isolated, shunned and discarded this tradition is; and how defective is its text. Apart from that it does not give the meaning he infers from it.

Now look at the principle adduced by him that women should participate in the public affairs just as men do. If his reasoning is accepted then it would also prove that small children too should participate in those affairs with their elders. This one point alone is enough to show the falsity of his observation.

¹ i.e., Rashīd Riḍā, author of *Tafsīr al-Manār*. (tr.)

We have talked at length on the subject of the women's participation, under the verses of divorce in the second volume ¹; and we shall be writing some more in a relevant place there is no need to make such inferences as he has done from this verse.

* * * * *

¹ Vide vol. 4 (Engl. transl.), pp. 61 — 83. (*tr.*)

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ أَلَّا نَعْبُدَ
 إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نُشْرِكَ بِهِ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَتَّخِذَ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضًا أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ
 اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَا مُسْلِمُونَ — ٦٤ . يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ
 لِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَا أُنزِلَتِ التَّوْرَةُ وَالْإِنْجِيلُ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ
 أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ — ٦٥ . مَا أَنْتُمْ هُوَ إِلَّا حَاجِجْتُمْ فِيمَا لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلِمَ تُحَاجُّونَ
 فِيمَا لَيْسَ لَكُمْ بِهِ عِلْمٌ وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ — ٦٦ . مَا كَانَ لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ
 يَهُودِيًّا وَلَا نَصْرَانِيًّا وَلَكِنْ كَانَ حَنِيفًا مُسْلِمًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ —
 ٦٧ . إِنَّ أَوْلَى النَّاسِ بِإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ وَهَذَا النَّبِيُّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
 وَاللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ — ٦٨ . وَدَّتْ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يُضِلُّوكُمْ
 وَمَا يُضِلُّونَ إِلَّا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَمَا يَشْعُرُونَ — ٦٩ . يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ
 تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ — ٧٠ . يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ
 تَلْبِسُونَ الْحَقَّ بِالْبَاطِلِ وَتَكْتُمُونَ الْحَقَّ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ — ٧١ . وَقَالَتْ
 طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُنزِلَ عَلَيَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَجَهِ
 النَّهَارِ وَكَفَرُوا آخِرَهُ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ — ٧٢ . وَلَا تُؤْمِنُوا إِلَّا لِمَنْ
 تَبِعَ دِينَكُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ الْهُدَى هُدَى اللَّهِ أَنْ يُؤْتَى أَحَدٌ مِثْلَ مَا أُوتِيتُمْ
 أَوْ يُحَاجُّوكُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ قُلْ إِنَّ الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ

وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ — ٧٣ . يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ
 الْعَظِيمِ — ٧٤ . وَمِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِقِنطَارٍ يُودِّهِ إِلَيْكَ
 وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ إِنْ تَأْمَنَهُ بِدِينَارٍ لَا يُودِّهِ إِلَيْكَ إِلَّا مَا دُمَّتْ عَلَيْهِ قَلْبًا
 ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ عَلَيْنَا فِي الْأُمِّيِّينَ سَبِيلٌ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ
 الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ — ٧٥ . بَلَىٰ مَنْ أَوْفَىٰ بِعَهْدِهِ وَاتَّقَىٰ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ
 يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ — ٧٦ . إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَشْتَرُونَ بِعَهْدِ اللَّهِ وَأَيْمَانِهِمْ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا
 أُولَٰئِكَ لَا خَلَاقَ لَهُمْ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ
 يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا يُزَكِّيهِمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ — ٧٧ . وَإِنَّ مِنْهُمْ لَفَرِيقًا
 يَلُودُونَ أَلْسِنَتَهُمُ بِالْكِتَابِ لِتَحْسَبُوهُ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ
 وَيَقُولُونَ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَمَا هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَيَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ
 الْكَذِبَ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ — ٧٨ .

Say: "O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you, that we shall not worship any but Allāh and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh"; but if they turn back, then say: "Bear witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones)" (64). O People of the Book! why do you dispute about Ibrāhīm, when the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed till after him? Do you not then understand? (65). Behold! you are they who disputed about that of which you had knowledge; why then do you dispute about that of which you have no knowledge? And Allāh knows while you do not know (66). Ibrāhīm was not a Jew nor a Christian but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists (67). Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe; and Allāh is the Guardian of the believers (68). A party of the People of the Book desire that they should lead you astray, and they lead not astray but themselves,

and they do not perceive (69). O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in the communications of Allāh while you witness (them)? (70). O People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with the falsehood and hide the truth while you know? (71). And a party of the People of the Book say. "Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe (in) the first part of the day, and disbelieve (at) the end of it, perhaps they go back on their religion (72). And do not believe but in him who follows your religion." Say: "Surely the guidance is the guidance of Allāh — that one may be given (by Him) the like of what you were given; or they would contend with you by an argument before your Lord." Say: "Surely grace is in the hand of Allāh, He gives it to whom He pleases; and Allāh is Ample-giving, Knowing (73). He specially chooses for His mercy whom He pleases; and Allāh is the Lord of mighty grace" (74). And among the People of the Book there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a heap of wealth, he shall pay it back to you; and among them there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a dīnār he shall not pay it back to you except that you remain standing over him; this is because they say: "There is not upon us in, the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach) ;" and they tell a lie against Allāh while they know (75). Yea, whoever fulfils his promise and guards (against evil) — then surely Allāh loves those who guard (against evil) (76). (As for) those who take a small price for the covenant of Allāh and their (own) oaths — surely they shall have no portion in the hereafter, and Allāh will not speak to them, nor will He look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, nor will He purify them, and they shall have a painful chastisement (77). Most surely there is a party amongst those who distort the Book with their tongues that you may consider it to be (a part) of the Book, while it is not (a part) of the Book, and they say, "It is from Allāh," while it is not from Allāh; and they tell a lie against Allāh whilst they know (78).

COMMENTARY

Now begins the second phase of the exposition of the People of the Book, particularly the Christians, and some related matters.

The preceding verses described the condition of the People of the Book generally, beginning with the verse 3:19 (*Surely the religion with Allāh is Islam ...*), taking a turn at the verse 3:23 (*Have you not considered those who are given a portion of the Book?*). Then it focused its attention on the Christians beginning with the verse 3:33 (*Surely Allāh chose Adam and Nūḥ ...*), guiding the believers earlier, in the verse 3:28, not to take the unbelievers for friends rather than the believers (*Let not the believers take the unbelievers for friends rather than the believers ...*). This was the first phase.

Now, the same subjects are explained in other words in a different style. First, it comments on the People of the Book in general. Apart from the verses under discussion, it throws light on various other relevant matters in other places; for example: *Say: ‘O People of the Book! why do you disbelieve in the signs of Allāh? ...’* (3:98); *Say: ‘O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allāh? ...’* (3:99). Secondly, it exposes the condition of the Christians and their belief concerning ‘Isā (a.s.): *It is not meet for a man that Allāh should give him the Book, and the wisdom and prophethood, then he should say to men: ‘Be my servants ...’* (3:79). Then the talk turns to the matters related to the believers calling them to submission and unity and warning them of befriending the unbelievers and being intimate with them in preference to the believers. All these things are explained in numerous verses in various places.

QUR’ĀN: *Say: ‘O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you:* This call is addressed to all the People of the Book in general. The invitation to “come to a word” really means to unite on the meaning of the word by acting upon it. The call to the word is based on the idiom found in Arabic and other languages, as for example, they say: The nation is united on this word. It implies the meanings of belief, acknowledgment, recognition and propagation. The verse therefore means: Come let us adhere to this word, co-operating with one another in its propagation and acting on its demands.

as-Sawā' (السَّوَاءُ) is a *maṣḍar*, although it is commonly used as an adjective to denote a thing both sides of which are equal. “common between us and you” means that you and we both are equally bound to acknowledge it and to act on it. Obviously, the use of this adjective for “word” is metaphorical. What is actually equal is its acknowledgment and the resulting action. Again action is related to the import of the word, not the word itself. Moreover, the call for unity about the word in itself has metaphorical connotation. In this way, this sentence has many fine points of rhetorics: Calling to unite on a meaning, then using the “word” for the meaning and then ascribing the adjective “common” to the “word”.

Also, it has been said that the “common word” refers to that which the Qur’ān, the Torah and the Injīl commonly invite to with one voice — and that is the belief of monotheism. If this suggestion is correct then the next words, “that we shall not worship any but Allāh ...”, would serve as the correct explanation of the word common between the Muslims and the People of the Book; it would invite the latter to leave aside their own interpretation of the Oneness of God — the interpretation used to fit this pristine “word” on their own desire; for example, their belief that God was incarnated, took a son, was one but had three persons; their worship of their rabbis, priests and bishops. The meaning in that case would be as follows: Come to a word common between us and you, and that is the belief in One God; and if we unite on it then we would have to discard and reject all that is associated with Allāh, and would not take others for lords besides Him.

But the ending of the verse, “but if they turn back, then say: ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones)’ ”, supports the first meaning given by us. In short, the verse calls to this word that “we shall not worship any but Allāh ...”, as it is the demand of Islam, the total submission, which is the religion with Allāh. Although submission is also a concomitant of the belief in the Oneness of God, the verse calls the People of the Book not to the theoretical, but practical, monotheism; that is, to discard worshipping anyone but Allāh. (Think over it).

QUR’ĀN: “*that we shall not worship any but Allāh and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh*”: It is the explanation of “the common

word”, and it is what submission to Allāh demands. The words, “we shall not worship any but Allāh”, reject the worship of any other than Allāh; it is not their aim to prove or affirm the worship of Allāh. We have already mentioned in the explanation of the “creed” — There is no god except Allāh — that the phrase, “except Allāh”, is not an exception but *al-badal* (البَدَلُ = appositional substantive standing for another substantive) of “god”; consequently, the sentence aims at rejecting partners for Allāh, not at affirming the existence of Allāh¹. According to the Qur’ān, existence of Allāh and His being the Truth needs no proof, it is a self-evident reality.

This sentence calls them not to associate anyone to Allāh in worship. But it does not nullify the other types of polytheism emanating from the belief that Allāh had a son or the idea of trinity and things like that. That is why the call continues: “and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh.” The fact is that merely saying that a worship is meant for Allāh does not make it the worship of Allāh, unless it is done with pure and sincere faith, unless the heart is purged of all beliefs and superstitions springing from polytheism. Otherwise, the worship would be for a god who had a partner. And a worship devoted to one of the alleged partners in godhead — even if it is done for him exclusively — would still be a product of polytheism. Why? because such a worship, by its very definition is a share devoted to one of the two or more partners; as such it acknowledges the right of the other partner or partners, and is therefore the worship of those partners too.

On the other hand, the Prophet calls them, by order of Allāh, to the pure monotheism, “that we shall not worship any but Allāh and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh.” It is this call which combines in itself all the aims and objectives of prophethood; it is this which the prophets taught their men, and which they propagated in the human society.

We have described (while explaining the verse 2:213, *Mankind was but one people*) that prophethood is a God-inspired awakening, a true advancement, the purpose of which is to spread the word of religion. The

¹ Vide *al-Mīzān* (Engl. transl.), vol. 2, 2:163. (*tr.*)

religion, in its reality, is equilibrium in the society's march of life; and a well-balanced society creates well-balanced individual in life. In this way, each and everyone is accorded his due position which the nature has meant him to have. Thus, the society gets the freedom and the felicity of natural perfectness based on justice and equity; and likewise the individual gets complete freedom to enjoy the life in all its aspects, as he thinks fit and as he likes — except when it is likely to harm the society's life. And all these freedoms and enjoyments are conditional to servitude and submission to Allāh, subservient to the unseen authority and power.

We may summarize the prophets' message in these words: They want human species — individually and collectively — to march forward according to the dictate of their nature which adheres to the belief of monotheism. That belief in its turn demands that man should base all his individual and social actions and activities on submission to Allāh, and that he should spread justice and equity. In other words, all should be given equal rights in life, and all should have equal freedom of good intention and good deed.

This goal cannot be achieved until and unless the roots of conflict and unlawful transgression are completely destroyed; so that no strong person exploits or enslaves a weak man, no one dominates another, and no powerless person serves the interests of someone powerful. There is no god but Allāh; there is no Lord except Allāh; and there is no rule for anyone except Allāh.

This is what this verse says: “that we shall not worship any but Allāh and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh. There are many verses of the same connotation. For example, Allāh quotes Yūsuf (a.s.) as saying: *O my two mates of the prison! are sundry lords better or Allāh, the One, the Supreme? You do not worship besides Him but names which you have named, you and your fathers; Allāh has not sent down any authority for them; judgment is only Allāh's; He has commanded that you shall not worship aught but Him; this is the right religion* (12:39 — 40). Also, Allāh says: *They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allāh, and (also) the Messiah son of Maryam, and they were not enjoined but that they should worship one God only, there is no god but He* (9:31).

And the same is the importance of many admonitions addressed to

their peoples by the prophets like: Nūḥ, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Ibrāhīm, Shu‘ayb, Mūsā and ‘Īsā (peace be on them all). For example:

Nūḥ: *My Lord! surely they have disobeyed me and followed him whose wealth and children have added to him nothing but loss (71:21).*

Hūd: *Do you build on every height a monument? Vain is it that you do. And you make strong fortresses that perhaps you may abide. And when you lay hands (on men) you lay hands (like) tyrants (26:128 — 130).*

Ṣāliḥ: *And do not obey the bidding of the extravagant ones (26:151).*

Ibrāhīm: *When he said to his father and his people: “What are these images to whose worship you cleave?” They said: “We found our fathers worshipping them.” He said: “Certainly you have been, (both) you and your fathers, in manifest error” (21:52 — 54).*

And Allāh said to Mūsā and Hārūn: *Go both to Pharaoh, surely he has become inordinate: ... So go you both to him and say: “Surely we are two messengers of your Lord; therefore send the Children of Israel with us and do not torment them ...” (20:43 — 47).*

And lastly ‘Īsā said to his people: *“... and so that I may make clear to you part of what you differ in; so fear Allāh and obey me” (43:63).*

The natural religion is that which negates transgression and mischief, and eradicates injustice and unlawful dominations — the unjust dominations which destroy the foundation of happiness and uproot the basis of truth and reality. It was this fact which the Prophet alluded to when he said in the last pilgrimage (and al-Mas‘ūdī has mentioned it in his *Murūju ‘dh-dhahab*, in the events of the year 10 of Hijrah): “Indeed the time has come full circle to its (original) form (as it was) the day when Allāh created the heavens and the earth.” Perhaps he (s.a.w.a.) meant that the men have come back to the rule of nature because the Islamic character had become firmly rooted among them.

The sentence, “that we shall not worship any but Allāh ...”, not only covers all the aims and objectives of prophethood, but also explains the reason of this commandment.

“that we shall not worship any but Allāh”: Godhead is that which everything worships, is bewildered about and loved — in every way. God is the origin and fountainhead of every perfection in all the things; in spite of their magnitude in number, they are related to one another and all

are one in that each component looks to God for its needs; He is the source of every perfection desired by these things. This reality leads us to the Oneness of God. As the created things are interrelated, the Creator can be no more than one. He is the Owner in Whose Hand is the management of everything. Therefore, it is obligatory to worship Allāh, because He is the One and Only God, there is no partner or colleague to Him. And it is obligatory not to ascribe any partner to Him in worship. In other words, this universe with all that it contains cannot submit except to One Creator. These creatures are joined in a uniform system, they are united in their existence: naturally there cannot be more than one Lord for them, because there is not more than one Creator for them.

“and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh”’: Human beings, in spite of their great number, are parts of one reality, that is, human species and humanity. All those merits and abilities which the hand of creation has put in them in equal measure demand that they must have equal rights in life, and must be accorded equal treatment in all those matters. On the other hand, there are differences in the conditions of the individuals and in their ability to procure and acquire some advantages and prerogatives of life; they are the gifts of general humanity which are bestowed to some particular individuals or groups here and there; such prerogatives also should be allowed to the mankind — but only in the way it demands. For example, sexual intercourse, pregnancy and medical treatment, all are the affairs of the humanity in general; yet sexual intercourse is the prerogative of an adult human being, male or female, while pregnancy is exclusively reserved for the female; and medical treatment is accorded only to a sick person.

In short, the members of the human society are components of a single reality — the components being similar to each other. No one has a right to impose his will on another, until and unless he takes on himself a similar burden on behalf of the other. And this is what co-operation in acquisition of life’s advantages means. But if the society or individual surrenders to an individual, if the whole or a part of the humanity submits to another part; raising him from the level of equality to that of superiority, giving him domination and arbitrary powers, making him an autocratic despot — he rules as he likes, is obeyed in whatever he says, and is taken as a lord whose will has to be complied with — then it negates the nature and destroys the foundation of humanity.

Moreover, Lordship exclusively belongs to Allāh, there is no lord but He. Thus, if a man puts himself under the authority of another man like himself, allowing that master to do with his follower whatever he wants, then it means that the said master has been taken as a lord besides Allāh. It is such a proposition which can never be accepted by him who has surrendered himself to Allāh.

It is now clear that the words of Allāh, “and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh”, throw light on two realities: One, the human beings are parts of a single reality, the parts being similar to each other. Two, Lordship is the exclusive prerogative of Godhead.

QUR’ĀN: *but if they turn back, then say: “Bear witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones)”*: It is a call to them to witness that the Prophet and his followers are on a religion which Allāh is pleased with, and it is Islam. Allāh says: *Surely the religion with Allāh is Islam (3:19)*. This declaration will cut their argument and dispute, because no proof prevails against the truth and the people of the truth.

This sentence points to the fact that monotheism in worship is a concomitant to Islam.

QUR’ĀN: *O People of the Book! why do you dispute about Ibrāhīm, when the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed till after him? Do you not then understand?:* Apparently it is governed by the imparative verb, “say”, placed in the preceding verse; and so are the verses 70 — 71, coming after four verses. Thus, it will be an order to the Prophet to say these things to the People of the Book. On the other hand, the verse coming after two verses (*Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe ...*), gives an association which shows that the verse under discussion too may be a direct talk of Allāh, and not of the Prophet (by Allāh’s Command).

The People of the Book disputed among themselves about Ibrāhīm (a.s.). Probably it was, in the beginning, an argument by which each group wanted to show its veracity. The Jews might be saying: Ibrāhīm, whom Allah has praised so much, was from us; a claim which the Christians might have countered by saying: Ibrāhīm was on truth, and the truth has been manifested by the advent of ‘Īsā. Then the arguments might have degenerated into bigotry and obstinacy. Then the Jews

claimed that Ibrāhīm was a Jew; and the Christians, that he was a Christian. However, it is a known fact that Judaism and Christianity came on the scene after the revelation of the Torah and the Injīl respectively; and these Books were revealed long after Ibrāhīm (a.s.). How could it be possible for him to be a Jew (a follower of the religion brought by Mūsā, a.s.)? Or a Christian (a follower of the *sharī'ah* of 'Īsā, a.s.)? All that can be said about Ibrāhīm (a.s.) is this: He was on truth, sincerely adhering to right, away from wrong, submitting himself to Allāh. These verses, therefore, have a connotation similar to the verse: *Or do you say that Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl and Ishāq and Ya'qūb and the tribes were Jews or Christians? Are you better knowing or Allāh? And who is more unjust than he who conceals a testimony that he has from Allāh?* (2:140).

QUR'ĀN: *Behold! you are they who disputed about that of which you had knowledge; why then do you dispute about that of which you have no knowledge? And Allāh knows while you do not know:* The verse affirms that they possessed a knowledge in respect of the disputation which they indulged in; and negates another knowledge and ascribes it to Allāh. The exegetes have variously explained the knowledge which they had, and that which they did not. According to them it may mean as follows: 'You had disputed about Ibrāhīm and you had some knowledge about him, for example, that he existed at a certain time and was a prophet. Why then do you dispute about a matter of which you have no knowledge at all — claiming that he was a Jew or a Christian? The fact is that Allāh knows while you do not know.' Alternatively, the knowledge that has been affirmed may refer to the little knowledge they had about 'Īsā. The verse thus says: 'You have disputed about 'Īsā while you had some knowledge about him and his affairs. Why do you then dispute about a subject of which you have no knowledge, claiming that Ibrāhīm was a Jew or a Christian?'

The above two explanations, given by the exegetes, do not conform with the apparent context of the verse. The first is wrong because the People of the Book had never contended with each other about the existence or prophethood of Ibrāhīm (a.s.). The second, because neither party was on right concerning their disputation about 'Īsā (a.s.). Both were mistaken in their respective beliefs, making erroneous claims about him. How then can their disputation about 'Īsā be called a disputation of

which they had knowledge? In any case, the verse says that they disputed about something of which they had knowledge and also about that of which they had no knowledge. The question arises as to what was the disputation about which they had had knowledge? Moreover, it apparently shows that both disputes were among the People of the Book themselves. It does not refer to any argument between them and the Muslims; otherwise, the Muslims would obviously have been in wrong in that matter of which the People of the Book had knowledge.

The appropriate explanation would be as follows — and Allāh knows better:

It is well known that there was a never ending dispute between the Jews and the Christians which covered all the subjects in which they differed. The main point of contention was the ‘Īsā’s prophethood and the claims made by the Christians concerning his status — that he was God and son of God, and the belief of trinity. The Christians disputed with the Jews about his being a prophet sent by God — and the Christians had its knowledge. The Jews disputed with the Christians and refuted his godhead, his sonship and the trinity — and they talked with knowledge about it. These were the disputations about which they had got knowledge. As for the disputation about that of which they had no knowledge, it was their contention that Ibrāhīm was a Jew or a Christian.

When the Qur’ān says that they had no knowledge of this matter, it does not mean that they were unaware of the fact that the Torah and the Injīl were revealed after Ibrāhīm — as it was an obvious thing. Nor that they were oblivious of the fact that a preceding man cannot be a follower of one coming after him, because the admonition at the end of the preceding verse (*Do you not then understand?*) does not leave room for this suggestion; it shows that it is such an obvious thing that a mere hint is enough to focus attention on it. They knew that Ibrāhīm preceded the Torah and the Injīl, but they were oblivious of its logical corollary that he therefore could not be a Jew or a Christian, that he would be on the Divine Religion, that is, submission to Allāh.

The Jews also said: There cannot be more than one true religion and that is the Judaism. Thus, Ibrahim would inevitably be a Jew. The same argument was used by the Christians to Christianize Ibrāhīm. The error they committed in this argument sprang from ignorance, not obliviousness. The fact is that the religion of Allāh is one — and that is

Islam, the submission to Allāh. It is one, progressing towards perfection, with passage of time and in keeping with mankind's progress — as humanity advances to perfection. The Judaism and the Christianity are two branches of the perfection of Islam — the root religion. The prophets (peace be on them all !) were the builders of that building, each of them had a hand in it, laying down the foundation and raising such a lofty edifice. No doubt, Ibrāhīm (a.s.) was the founder of Islam — i.e., submission to Allāh — and it was the basic and true religion; then the true religion appeared with the name of Judaism and then Christianity; these were two of the branches of its perfection, two of the stages of its completion. What the Jews and the Christians did not know was that these propositions do not make Ibrāhīm a Jew or a Christian. He would remain, as before, an upright Muslim; his name would be always linked with that of Islam, the religion which he himself had founded. That Islam is the root of Judaism and Christianity; but it is neither Judaism nor Christianity. The root is not attributed to its branches; it is the branch that should be related to the root.

To say that Ibrāhīm (a.s.) was a Muslim and not a Jew or a Christian does not imply a claim that he was the follower of the Prophet of Islam, acting according to the Qur'ānic *sharī'ah*. Nobody should rush to say that as Ibrāhīm (a.s.) had preceded the revelation of the Torah and the Injīl and therefore could not be counted as a Jew or a Christian, so had he preceded the revelation of the Qur'ān and the advent of Islam, therefore, in a completely identical manner, he should not be called a Muslim.

As a matter of fact, the use of 'Islam' for the Qur'ānic *sharī'ah* is a terminology which came up after the revelation of the Qur'ān, when the fame of the religion brought by Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.), had spread far and wide. The Islam which is attributed to Ibrāhīm means submission to Allāh, humbling oneself before His Lordship. The two uses are different, and consequently there is no room for any objection whatsoever.

The People of the Book were unaware of the true meaning of the basic religion; they did not know that it was a reality which had various levels, and which had evolved, passing through stages, to the summit of its perfection. It was this ignorance of theirs to which Allāh refers when He says: "And Allāh knows while you do not know. Ibrāhīm was not a Jew nor a Christian ...". This meaning is also supported by the next verse: "Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed

him and this Prophet and those who believe;” as well as the verses 84 — 85 coming later: *Say: “We believe in Allāh and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl and Ishāq and Ya‘qūb and the tribes, and what was given to Mūsā and ‘Īsā and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit.” And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers.* (We shall explain it in its place.)

QUR’ĀN: *Ibrāhīm was not a Jew nor a Christian, but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists:* This verse has been explained above. Some exegetes have explained it as follows: The Jews and the Christians claimed that Ibrāhīm (a.s.) was one of them, on their religion. Likewise, the idol-worshipping Arabs claimed that they were the followers of *ad-dīn al-ḥanīf* (الدِّينُ الْحَنِيفُ = the upright religion) the religion of Ibrāhīm (a.s.); even the People of the Book came to call them *al-ḥunafā’* (الْحُنَفَاءُ) and thus *al-ḥanīfiyyah* (الْحَنِيفِيَّةُ = uprightness; religion of Ibrāhīm) was misconstrued to mean idol-worship. When Allāh praised Ibrāhīm (a.s.) by saying that “he was (حَنِيفًا = ḥanīfan) upright”, it was necessary to explain the word, so that people should not take it in the sense of idol-worship. That is why Allāh added the words, “a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists;” he followed the religion which Allāh is pleased with, and that is Islam, submission to Allāh, and he was not a polytheist like the Arabs of the days of Ignorance.

QUR’ĀN: *Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who believe; and Allāh is the Guardian of the believers:* This verse gives the reason behind the foregoing talk, and explains the reality of the subject matter. The meaning is as follows (and Allāh knows better).

If we look at relationship between this great Prophet, Ibrāhīm, and those who came after him, obviously he cannot be counted as a follower of later generations; rather, we have to decide who is nearest of all to him. Only he can be nearest of all to a prophet — coming with *a sharī‘ah* and a Book — who follows the truth like him and accepts the religion which he brought. According to this criterion, the nearest to Ibrāhīm

(a.s.) is this Prophet (s.a.w.a.) and those who believe. They are on the Islam for which Allāh had chosen Ibrāhīm. Likewise, those who were his followers were nearest to him — not those who disbelieve in the communications of Allāh and confound the truth with falsehood.

The words, “those who followed him,” are an allusion against the People of the Book, indirectly telling the Jews and the Christians that they were not the nearest to Ibrāhīm because they did not follow him in submitting to Allāh.

The phrase, “and this Prophet and those who believe,” distinguishing the Prophet and his followers from the followers of Ibrāhīm (a.s.); this was done to show the exalted position of the Prophet; he was too great to be called someone’s follower. The same consideration is reflected in other verses; for example, *These are they whom Allāh guided, therefore follow their guidance* (6:90). Note that Allāh did not say, ‘therefore follow them’.

The sentence, “and Allāh is the Guardian of the believers”, complete this reasoning and explanation. Ibrāhīm was a *waliyy* (الولي = friend) of Allāh, and his *al-wilāyah* (الولاية = friendship, guardianship) was a part of Allāh’s guardianship; and Allāh is the Guardian of the believers, not of the others who disbelieve in His Signs and confuse the right with wrong, the truth with falsehood.

QUR’ĀN: *A party of the People of the Book desire that they should lead you astray, and they lead not astray but themselves, and they do not perceive: “aṭ-Ṭā’ifah”* (الطائفة = party; lit.: rover, walker about). The people, and especially Arabs, used to live — in the beginning — a nomadic life; their tribes and clans used to wander around with their cattles looking for water and pasture, from season to season; they travelled in groups as a safety measure against attack and assassination. They were then called “a wandering party”; gradually the noun, ‘party’ was dropped, and the adjective *aṭ-ṭā’ifah* (wanderer, rover, walker about) took its place.

How is it that the People of the Book lead not astray but themselves? The first and foremost human virtue is inclination towards truth and its acceptance. A desire to divert the people away from the truth, to turn them towards falsity (being a psychological trait) is a depravity of soul — and how evil this depravity is! It is a sin, a crime, a transgression

against truth; and what is there after the truth but lie and error? Thus, when they desire to lead the believers astray (when those believers are on truth), they in fact lead themselves astray although they do not perceive it.

And even if they got hold of a believer and led him astray by planting some doubts in his heart, they would be leading themselves astray before him. Man does not do anything — good or bad — but for himself. Allāh says: *Whoever does good, it is for his own self, and whoever does evil, it is against it* (45:46). As for those who go astray because of someone's misguidance, it is not so much a result of that deceiver's influence, as the misdeed and wrong choice of the straying person himself — by permission of Allāh. The Qur'ān says: *Whoever disbelieves, he shall be responsible for his disbelief, and whoever does good, they prepare (good) for their own souls* (30:44); *And whatever affliction befalls you, it is on account of what your hands have wrought, and (yet) He pardons most (of your faults). And you cannot escape in the earth, and you shall not have a guardian or a helper besides Allāh* (42:30 — 31). Some details about the effects and characteristics of human actions have been given in the second volume (Arabic text), under the verse: ... *these it is whose deeds are forfeited in this world and the hereafter* (2:217).¹

This explanation is among those Qur'ānic realities which spring from *at-tawhīd* (التَّوْحِيدُ = monotheism) of action, and that active belief in its turn is based on the realities of Lordship and Kingdom. Only in this way, we can explain the exclusiveness found in the words of Allāh: “and they lead not astray but themselves, and they do not perceive.” As for the explanation given by others, they do not help in understanding this exclusiveness; that is why we have not mentioned them here at all.

QUR'ĀN: *O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in the communications of Allāh while you witness (them)?*: It has already been explained that disbelieving in communications of Allāh is not the same as disbelieving in Allāh Himself. Disbelief in Allāh entails open rejection of montheism, as the idol-worshippers and atheists do; while disbelief in communications means rejection of the Divine Knowledge after it is clarified and explained. The People of the Book do believe that the

¹ See *al-Mīzān* (Engl. transl.), vol. 3, pp. 245 — 274. (tr.)

universe has One God. What they disbelieve in are described in the books revealed to them and to others, like the prophethood of Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.) , the fact that ‘Īsā was the servant and the messenger of Allāh, that Ibrāhīm was neither a Jew nor a Christian, that the hand of Allāh is open, that Allāh is Self-sufficient and other such things. The People of the Book, in Qur’ānic language, are disbelievers in communications of Allāh, not in Allāh Himself. Of course, there is the verse which goes against it: *Fight those who do not believe in Allāh, nor in the latter day, nor do they prohibit what Allāh and His Messenger have prohibited, nor follow the religion of truth, from among those who were given the Book, until they pay the jizyah (tributary tax) with their hands while they are in a state of subjection (9:29)*. It clearly says that those People of the Book did not believe in Allāh, i.e., they disbelieved in Allāh. But it goes on mentioning their non-prohibition of prohibited things and their deviation from the religion of truth; and it shows that when the verse attributes disbelief to them it really uses a concomitant to allude to the related characteristic. In other words, when they disbelieve in communications of Allāh, it follows that they do not believe even in Allāh and the latter day although they may not realize it. But it does not speak about open and direct disbelief in Allāh.

“while you witness (them)”: ‘*ash-Shahādah*’ (الشَّهَادَةُ = presence; knowledge through external senses; witness). It shows that their disbelief in communications refers to their rejection of the Prophet; they did not accept that the Prophet was the promised Prophet whose advent was foretold in the Torah and Injīl although they clearly saw that the signs and descriptions mentioned therein perfectly fitted on the Prophet.

Somebody has said that the word, “communications”, is general and comprehensive; it covers all the communications and there is no reason why it should be restricted to the signs of the Prophet; the word therefore refers to their rejection of all the true signs and communications.

COMMENT: The explanation given by us clearly shows the invalidity of this interpretation.

QUR’ĀN: *O People of the Book! Why do you confound the truth with the falsehood and hide the truth while you know?: ‘al-Labs’* (اللَّبْسُ = to create doubt; to confuse; to confound). Why do you manifest the truth in

the form of falsehood? The words, “while you know”, show or at least allude, that the confusion and the hiding refers to their confounding and hiding the religious knowledge and realities; and not to the verses of scriptures; that is, it does not speak about the verses which they had altered, hidden or misinterpreted.

These two verses, beginning with, “O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve ...” and ending with, “while you know?”, complete the talk which began with the words, “A party of the People of the Book desire ...” The whole community has been admonished for the wrongdoings of some of its members, because they were all united in race, tribe and character, and all accepted what some of them were doing. Such usage is commonly found in the Qur’ān.

QUR’ĀN: *And a party of the People of the Book say: “Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe (in) the first part of the day, and disbelieve (at) the end of it, perhaps they go back (on their religion) : “Wajha ’n-nahār” (وَجْهَ النَّهَارِ = lit. face of the day) means the first part of the day, because it has been used in contrast with “the end of it”; also the face of a thing is what it appears to others with, and as far as the day is concerned, it is its early part. The context of this saying shows that something was revealed to the Prophet in the early hours of the day which conformed with tenets of the People of the Book, and another revelation came at the end of the day which was against their belief. And this prompted them to say these words.*

Therefore, the clause, “that which has been revealed to those who believe”, refers to a particular Qur’ānic revelation which agreed with the belief and practice of the People of the Book. The words, “the first part of the day”, are an adverbial phrase of time, and it is related not to “Avow belief”, but to “has been revealed” because it is nearer. The words, “and disbelieve (at) the end of it,” mean: disbelieve in that which has been revealed (to those who believe) at the end of the day; it is an allegorical expression putting the adverbial phrase of time in place of the thing which happened at that time; a similar device has been used in the verse where it says: *Nay, (it was) planning of night and day (34:33).*

Accordingly, it supports what has been narrated from the Imāms of the *Ahlu ’l-bayt* (a.s.), relating the circumstances in which this verse was revealed. This idea was propagated by the Jews at the time when the

qiblah was changed. The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) had prayed the morning prayer towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis which was the *qiblah* of the Jews. Then the *qiblah* was changed towards the Ka'bah in the noon prayer. Then a group of the Jews said: Believe in that which was revealed to those who believe in the early hours of the day, that is, praying towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis, and disbelieve in that which has been revealed at the end of it, that is, facing towards the Ka'bah. This explanation is further supported by their assertion which has been quoted in the next verse: “And do not believe but in him who follows your religion;” that is, do not trust anyone who does not follow your religion and does not believe in it, lest you disclose to him some of your secrets and the good tidings which were revealed to you about the promised Prophet — one of the signs foretold of the Prophet was that he would change the *qiblah* towards the Ka'bah.

Another interpretation: Some exegetes have said that the phrase, “the first part of the day” is related to the verb “Avow belief”; and, “the end of it,” is an adverbial phrase, (in which “in” is deleted and understood) and it is related to the verb “disbelieve”. Accordingly, the meaning would be as follows: Some of them should pretend to believe in the Qur'ān and attach themselves with the Muslims; then they should renounce Islam at the end of the day saying that they had believed in the morning because they were deceived by apparent signs of truth of Islam but they had to renounce it by the end of the day because they had seen many things which proved its falsity; and because the good tidings of the prophethood and signs of veracity which they were told by the previous prophets did not fit on this Prophet. This was a devious plan to deceive the believers, so that the believers would be overwhelmed by doubts about their religion, and weakened in their conviction; in this way their power would break down and their mission fail.

This meaning in itself is not far-fetched, and especially from the Jews who had left no stone unturned to defeat Islam, to extinguish its light by any possible means. But the wording of the verse does not fit this interpretation. We shall write some related things under the traditions, Allāh willing.

Someone has explained it as follows: Avow belief in their praying towards the Ka'bah in the first part of the day and disbelieve in it at the end of the day; perhaps they would go back on their religion.

A fourth explanation: Pretend to believe in the first part of the day by agreeing that the signs of the promised prophet were present in the Prophet; and disbelieve at the end of it saying that those attributes did not fit on him; this would put doubts in the believers' minds and perhaps they would renounce their religion. There is no proof for these two interpretations; and whatever the meaning, there is no ambiguity in the verse.

QUR'ĀN: *And do not believe but in him who follows your religion:* The context shows that this too is the saying of the People of the Book, completing their talk which started with the words, "Avow belief in that which has been revealed to those who believe." And likewise the words, "that one may be given (by Him) the like of what you were given; or they would contend with you by an argument before your Lord," are continuation of their speech. And therefore the sentence, "Say: 'Surely the guidance is the guidance of Allāh,' " is a parenthetical sentence in reply of their talk beginning with, "Avow belief," and ending with, "who follows your religion." The change of style supports this view. Similarly the words, "Say: 'Surely grace is in the the hand of Allāh ...,' " are in reply of their talk, "that one may be given (by Him) the like of what you were given." In this way, all the segments of this talk are inter-woven and the meanings of the two preceding verses inter-related with one another. Also, the two verses stand face to face with the verses describing the Jews' obstinacy, disputation and deception.

The meaning therefore is as follows, and Allāh knows better:

A party of the People of the Book, that is, the Jews, said one to another: Attest the truth of the Prophet and the believers regarding their prayer towards Baytu 'l-Maqdis in the first part of the day and do not accept their truth when they prayed towards Ka'bah in the afternoon. Do not trust others when you talk with them, lest they inform the believers that the changing of *qiblah* to the Ka'bah was foretold as a sign of the truth of the Promised Prophet. For, if you accepted the affair of the Ka'bah and disclosed what you knew about it (that it was a sign of the Prophet's truth), then you would have to face two dangers: (1) The believers would get a *qiblah* of their own, like that of yours; it would destroy your supremacy and neutralize your precedence in the matter of *qiblah*; (2) the believers would contend with you before your Lord

establishing a proof against you that although you knew about the new *qiblah* and were witnesses of its truth, you did not accept the Islam.

Allāh replied to their talk — that they should believe what was revealed in the early part of the day and disbelieve what happened at the end of it, and their admonition to one another to hide the matter of *qiblah* so that the believers would not know the truth — that the guidance which the believers needed was the true guidance and it was the guidance of Allāh, and not yours. The believers do not need your guidance; you may follow the believers' guidance if you like and reject it if you so desire; you may proclaim the truth if you wish, and hide it if you want.

Then Allāh replies to their fear that one might be given by Allāh the like of what they were given.

He says that the grace is in the hand of Allāh, He gives it to whom He pleases. It is not in the Jews' hands so that they could reserve it for their own selves, blocking the way to the others. Allāh has made no comment on their conspiracy to hide the truth so that the believers would be unable to argue with them before their Lord; it was such a conspicuously fallacious presumption that needed no reply. The same disdainful silence is maintained in another verse exposing the same fallacy: *And when they meet those who believe they say: 'We believe,' and when they are alone one with another, they say: 'Do you talk to them of what Allāh has disclosed to you that they may argue with you by this before your Lord? Do you not then understand?'* What! Do they not know that Allāh knows what they conceal and what they proclaim? (2:76 — 77). The exclamatory "What!" in the sentence, "What! Do they not know", shows that it is not a reply to the Jews; it is just an indication that their talk goes against correct understanding, for they know that their hiding or proclaiming makes no difference in Allāh's knowledge.

It will be seen from the above explanation that the words, "And do not believe", mean 'do not trust anyone', 'do not expect anyone to keep your secret'. It has the same connotation as the verse: *and believes the believers* (9:61). The words, "him who follows your religion," mean 'the Jews'. Their aim was to prevent the disclosure of what they knew regarding the truth of the change of *qiblah* to the Ka'bah. Their knowledge of this truth was also referred to in the verses: *turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque ... and those who have been given the Book most surely know that it is the truth from their Lord; ... Those whom*

we have given the Book recognize him as they recognize their sons; and a party of them most surely conceal the truth while they know (it) (2:144 — 146).

The exegetes have written various explanations for these verses. One of them says that the whole verse, “And do not believe ... Ample-giving, Knowing”, is a direct speech of Allāh, not a quotation of the Jews’ talk; and the second person plural pronouns — “And do not believe”, “What you were given”, “they would contend with you”, “before your Lord” — are all addressed to the believers; while the second person singular pronoun in “Say” refers to the Prophet. Some others agree with this explanation with one difference: They say that the second person plural pronouns in the above mentioned words are addressed to the Jews, and the speech admonishes and rebukes them. Still others have said that the words, “And do not believe but in him who follows your religion”, are the quotation of the Jews’ talk; while the words, “Say: ‘Surely the guidance is the guidance of Allāh — that one may be given (by Him) ...’ ”, are spoken by Allāh in reply to what the Jews had said. Likewise, there is a difference about the meaning of “grace” whether it means religion, worldly blessings, dominance or something else.

These interpretations, in spite of their bewildering number, are far removed from the connotation given by the context, as we have already shown. That is why we have not spent much time on them.

QUR’ĀN: *Say: ‘Surely grace is in the hand of Allāh, He gives it to whom He pleases; and Allāh is Ample-giving, Knowing’: ‘al-Faḍl’ (الْفَضْلُ = surplus; that which is in excess). This word is used in commendatory sense, while al-fuḍūl (الْفُضُولُ) is used as a derogatory term. ar-Rāghib says: Every voluntary gratis benefaction is called al-faḍl; as Allāh says: and ask Allāh of His grace (4:32); this is Allāh’s grace (5:54); and Allāh is the Lord of mighty grace (2:105); Say: ‘In the grace of Allāh’ (10:58); and were it not for the grace of Allāh (4:83).*

Accordingly the sentence, “Say: ‘Surely grace is in the hand of Allāh’ ”, is a sort of abbreviated syllogism from which the first premise has been omitted. The full deductive syllogism shall be as follows: Say: This revelation and Divine bestowal (which you are trying to reserve for yourself by pretending to believe and disbelieve and admonishing each other to hide the truth) is not a thing which we mortals can impose on

Allāh, it is really a grace. Grace is in the hand of Allāh (to Whom belong the Kingdom and the Command). Therefore, He has the power to give it to whom He pleases. And Allāh is Ample-giving, Knowing.

This verse does not leave any room for the Jews to reserve the Divine Grace for themselves (despite their mistaken belief reflected in their words and deeds). Why should some people enjoy the grace of Allāh to the deprivation of others (as the Jews wanted to do with religion and *qiblah*)? One may imagine only three ways for it.

1. Either the grace of Allāh would fall under the influence of someone else, who then would manipulate the Divine Will, diverting it to one side, preventing it from going in another direction. But the fact is otherwise. Because “Surely grace is in the hand of Allāh, He gives it to whom He pleases.”

2. Or, the bounty is in short supply, is insufficient to reach all the aspirants. In that case it would need some outside factor to choose a few and reject the others. But the fact is otherwise. Because Allāh is Ample-giving; All-powerful, Whose grace knows no limit.

3. Or, it could be that the grace — even if it was unlimited and in the hand of Allāh — could not reach a certain group because that group was hidden from Allāh, was unknown to Him. Thus the privileged group plans devious ways to hide the other groups and keep them concealed from Allāh, in order to deprive them of the Divine Grace. But the fact is otherwise. Because Allāh is All-knowing; ignorance cannot reach Him; nothing can be hidden from Him.

QUR’ĀN: *He specially chooses for His mercy whom He pleases; and Allāh is the Lord of mighty grace: As the grace is in the hand of Allāh, He gives it to whom He pleases; and as He is Ample-giving, Knowing, it is in His power to choose some of the servants for some of His favours. It is for Him to manage His property as He likes. The fact, that His grace and His bestowal of bounties are unrestricted, or that nobody can put any restraint on Him, does not make it necessary for Him to bestow His grace on each and every person indiscriminately. Otherwise, it would again be a restraint on His absolute power. It is His prerogative to specially choose for His grace whomever He pleases.*

The verse ends on the sentence, “and Allāh is the Lord of mighty grace”. In a way it explains the reason of all that has been mentioned

above. The grace is mighty. Consequently it must be in His hand to give it to whom He pleases. Also, Allāh should be Ample-giving in His grace, knowing the condition of His servants, well aware of which type of grace would be more suitable to a given person. And therefore it should be His prerogative to specially choose for His grace whomever He pleases.

In the sentence, “He specially chooses for His mercy whom He pleases,” the word, “grace” has been replaced by “mercy”. It shows that the grace, being a free gift, a discretionary bounty, is a branch of mercy. Allāh says: *And My mercy encompasses all things (7:156); and were it not for Allāh’s grace upon you and His mercy, not one of you would have ever been pure (24:21); Say: ‘If you control the treasures of the mercy of Lord, then you would withhold (them) from fear of spending’ (17:100).*

QUR’ĀN: *And among the People of the Book there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a heap of wealth, he shall pay it back to you; and among them are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a dīnār he shall not pay it back to you except that you remain standing over him, this is because they say: “There is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach)”*: The verse points to the glaring differences seen in the characters of various People of the Book, for example, in keeping the trust and fulfilling the agreements. Their dishonesty and breach of trust is in itself a national disgrace; this characteristic has permeated their society as a well accepted feature. Unfortunately, it is based on their ideology which is reflected in the statement: “There is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach).” They called themselves the People of the Book, and called others gentiles, unlearned people. The above quoted statement means that no gentile (non-Israelite) can have any way against an Israelite. Even more disturbing was their claim that that behaviour was approved by religion. It is to this aspect that the next sentence refers: “and they tell a lie against Allāh while they know ...”

They believed — as they do even today that they were the chosen people; Divine Grace was their exclusive property; others had no share in Allāh’s favour; Allāh had given them Prophethood, the Book and the Kingdom; therefore they had precedence and excellence over all races, and had a right to subjugate the others. This misconception gave rise to

various misunderstandings. For example, they came to believe that the sociological and financial rights and obligations (like prohibition of interest, of devouring others' property and usurping people's rights) were applicable within their own circle only. A Jew should not devour another Jew's property unjustly; an Israelite should not usurp the rights of his own people. In short, only the People of the Book had got a way to reproach against the People of the Book. As for the gentiles, the non-Israelites, they had no way of reproach against the People of the Book. The Jews thought they could deal with non-Israelites anyway they liked; they could do with others whatever they wanted. In their eyes the gentiles were no better than animals and they dealt with them as they did with animals.

Of course, the conception was not found in the books that are said to be revealed, like the Torah, etc. They had taken this idea from their rabbis and blindly followed them. Moreover, the religion of Mūsā was meant for the Children of Israel only; others were neither invited nor allowed to enter it. Thus it became a racial religion. This gave rise to a belief that this excellence and Divine Grace was something based on race for which the Children of Israel were exclusively chosen. Being born of Israel parents was the essence of dignity, the root of excellence, the basis of supremacy. The one who was related to Israel had absolute precedence over all others. When such arrogant spirit governs the structure of a nation, it incites them to create mischief on the earth, and to annihilate the essence of humanity found in a society.

Of course, sometimes it becomes necessary in a human society to deprive some individuals or groups of some common rights. But what should be the criterion for such deprivation? A healthy society believes that whoever tries to negate others' rights or to damage or destroy the society itself, should be deprived of his own rights. From Islamic point of view the only criterion of rights is acceptance of Islam or coming under the protection of Islamic State. One who is neither a Muslim nor a *dhimmi* (الذمي = one under the protection of Islamic State), has no right in the life. This criterion conforms with the dictate of nature; and you have seen that the human society also recognizes such test in a general way.

Now, we come back to the verse under discussion, "among the People of the Book." Apparently, it should have been 'among them'.

Why was the noun used in place of the pronoun? It was done to remove a possible misunderstanding: the preceding two verses had spoken about: “A party of the People of the Book”; if these verses had said, ‘among them’, it could give an impression that it was speaking about a group of the previously mentioned, “A party of the People of the Book”. You will see that after removing this possible cause of misunderstanding, the next verse uses pronoun when it says: “Most surely there is a party amongst those who distort the Book with their tongues.”

Also, mentioning of the attribute — i.e., their being the People of the Book — points to a sort of reason. That is, such words and deeds — their saying that there is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way to reproach, and their swallowing the people’s wealth in this way — would not have looked so strange if they had been uttered by unlearned people, who did not know anything about prophethood and revelation. But these were the People of the Book; they had the Book which contained the God’s Commandments; and they knew very well that the Book did not give them any such latitude, nor did it allow them to take other people’s wealth and property just because they were gentiles, non-Israelites. Such statements and deeds were more strange and more disgraceful because they were uttered and done by the People of the Book. Therefore, they deserved more severe condemnation and rebuke.

“*al-Qinṭār*” (الْقِنْطَارُ = 100 raṭl; figuratively used for huge amounts); “*ad-dīnār*” (الدِّينَارُ = a coin). Apart from their rhetorical beauties ¹, their parallel setting in the context of trustworthiness shows that these words have been used for great and small amounts respectively. The verse means that there are some among them who faithfully keep the amount entrusted to them, no matter how great and valuable it may be; while there are others among them who would embezzle it even if it is a trivial and worthless thing.

The second person singular pronoun in the phrase, “if you entrust one (of them) with a heap of wealth, he shall pay it back to you”, does not refer to any particular person; it is a sort of indefinite pronoun showing general applicability of the statement. In other words, the sentence means: If someone — anyone — gives him something in trust he shall pay it back to him, no matter how great the amount may be.

¹ Like rhyme and similarity of paradigm. (*tr.*)

“*illā mā dumta ‘alayhi qā’iman*” (إِلَّا مَا دُمْتَ عَلَيْهِ قَائِمًا): It is said that “*mā*” (مَا) has changed the verb into *al-maṣḍar* (الْمَصْدَرُ = infinitive verb); and the sentence means, “except that you remain standing over him”. The word, “standing”, points to urgency and insistence; when the claimant remains standing on his feet without sitting, it shows his impatience and inability to wait. Someone has said that “*mā*” is an adverb of time; but it makes no sense.

“this is because they say: ‘There is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach)’ ”: Apparently, the context shows that the pronoun, “this”, refers to the whole description written before, that is, the fact that some of them keep their trust even if it is a huge amount, and others do not pay it back even if it is a small thing; this difference has arisen from their belief that there is on them no way to reproach in the matter of the unlearned people. This idea has created among them a great disparity in ethical and spiritual standard although they know that Allāh has not ordained any such thing in His Book, nor is He pleased with such practices of theirs.

Alternatively, it may be referring to the second group only, which is mentioned by the sentence: “and among them there are some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a dīnār he shall not pay it back to you.” In this case, the first (i.e., trustworthy) group may have been mentioned here just to give the complete picture, to fulfil the demand of justice. Consequently, the plural pronouns in, “they say”, and, “they know”, may refer to, “the People of the Book”, or to, “some such that if you entrust one (of them) with a dīnār”. In the latter case, the first person pronoun in, “upon us”, may refer to all, “the People of the Book”, or to a certain group of them. The translation will differ in each case, but all the possibilities are correct and credible. (Think it over.)

QUR’ĀN: *and they tell a lie against Allāh while they know:* It refutes their claim that there was not upon them any way to reproach in the matter of the unlearned people. Also, it proves that they used to justify their behaviour on religious grounds, claiming that it was a Divine Revelation, as we have mentioned earlier.

QUR’ĀN: *Yea, whoever fulfils his promise and guards (against evil) — then surely Allāh loves those who guard (against evil):* It answers their

argument and affirms what they wanted to negate with their statement that there was no way to reproach upon them regarding the non-Israelites. Fulfilment of promise means acting on it and guarding against its breach. ‘‘*at-Tawfiyah*’’ (التَّوْفِيَةُ = to give completely); ‘‘*al-istifā*’’ (الِاسْتِيفَاءُ = to take completely).

The promise refers to the covenant which Allāh had taken from His servants that they would believe in Him and worship Him. This meaning is supported by the next verse which says: ‘‘(as for) those who take a small price for the covenant of Allāh and their (own) oaths.’’ Or, it may mean all promises in general, including the covenant of Allāh.

The sentence, ‘‘then surely Allāh loves those who guard (against evil),’’ is a syllogism from which a premise has been omitted for brevity. Its completed form would be as follows: then surely Allāh loves him, because he guards against evil, and Allāh loves those who guard against evil. The idea is that Allāh bestows honour and dignity on His pious servants by loving them, and not by giving them licence to deceive, exploit and oppress His other servants.

The verse indicates that the divinely bestowed dignity is not so easily obtainable; it is not a common — place thing which could be attained by just verbal expression of belonging, or which may be used for racial or national supremacy by crafty and wily persons. The important condition for attainment of Divine Dignity is piety and fulfilment of the covenant made with Allāh. When these conditions are fulfilled the said dignity is achieved. That dignity means Allāh’s love, friendship and guardianship, which are not given except to His pious servants. It results in Divine help and happy life, which in its turn brings them prosperity and betters their condition in this world, and raises their rank in the hereafter.

This is the meaning of dignity which Allāh bestows. It does not give rise to imposition of a certain race or nation on the shoulders of His servants, good and bad alike, giving the supposed ‘‘master race’’ freedom to do whatever they want and to say whatever they like. Thus, one day they would claim, ‘‘there is not upon us in the matter of the unlearned people any way (to reproach)’’; saying next day that they were the friends of Allāh to the exclusion of the other people ¹; and yet

¹ Say: ‘‘O you who are Jews, if you think that you are the friends of Allāh to the exclusion of other people ...’’ (Qur’ān, 62:6). (Author’s note)

another day, that they were the sons of Allāh and His beloved ones ¹. Thus, it leads them to create mischief in the earth and to destroy the tilth and the stock.

QUR'ĀN: (As for) *those who take a small price for covenant of Allāh and their (own) oaths*: It explains the reason of the preceding statement. The Divine Dignity is exclusively reserved for those who fulfil the covenant of Allāh and guard against evil — are pious; because the others — those who take a small price for the covenant of Allāh and their own oaths — have no honour, no dignity at all.

The fact is that whoever breaks the covenant of Allāh and forsakes piety — not guarding himself against evil — does so just for the enjoyment of the vanities of this world, giving preference to immediate desires over everlasting happiness. He exchanges the covenant of Allāh and the piety with a few worldly trinkets. That is why it has been likened to a trade deal: Covenant of Allāh is the item sold; and insignificant worldly provision, its small price. ‘*al-Ishṭirā*’ (الِشْتِرَاءُ = to sell); “they take a small price for the covenant of Allāh and their (own) oaths”, that is, they exchange the covenant and oaths for provisions of this world.

QUR'ĀN: *Surely they shall have no portion in the hereafter, and Allāh will not speak to them ... they shall have a painful chastisement*: ‘*al-Khalāq*’ (الْخَلْقُ = portion, share); ‘*at-tazkiyah*’ (التَّزْكِيَّةُ = to make grow, good growing; to purify). The descriptions of this group stand face to face with the attributes of the first group (*Yea, whoever fulfils his promise and guards [against evil] ...*); and the consequences of their behaviour are all negative. Keeping it in view, we find that:

First: The verse points to them with the demonstrative pronoun, *ulā'ika* (أُولَئِكَ = those, they), which is used for a distant object. It shows that they are far removed from nearness to Allāh. Conversely, the pious ones who fulfil their covenant are brought nearer to Allāh because He loves them.

Second: When Allāh loves someone, he is given a portion in the hereafter; Allāh will speak to him and look upon him on the Day of

¹ *And the Jews and the Christians say: “We are the sons of Allāh and His beloved ones”* (Qur’ān, 5:18). (Author’s note)

Resurrection, will purify him and forgive him, that is, will remove chastisement from him. Allāh has mentioned three traits for those who break the covenant of Allāh and their own oaths.

First: They shall have no portion in the hereafter. “*al-Ākhirah*” (الْآخِرَةُ = the hereafter); it stands for *ad-dāru ’l-ākhirah* (الدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ = the abode in the hereafter; the everlasting abode); it is used for life after death. In the same way, *ad-dunyā* (الدُّنْيَا = the world) stands for *ad-dāru ’d-dunyā* (الدَّارُ الدُّنْيَا = worldly abode), which is used for the life before death.

They shall have no portion in the hereafter, because they themselves had preferred this world’s share. It shows that “a small price” refers to this world. Of course, we have explained it above as the worldly provision; it was done because Allāh has used adjective “small” for it and the same adjective has been used for the worldly provision in the verse: Say. “*The provision of this world is small*” (4:77). In other word, the provision of the world is the world (itself).

Second: Allāh will not speak to them, nor will he look upon them on the Day of Resurrection. It stands *vis-a-vis* the love which Allāh has for His pious servants; in love, the lover wants to enjoy nearness with the beloved, by looking at him and talking to him when they are together. As Allāh does not love this group, He will not speak to them nor look upon them on the Day of Resurrection, the day when they will be brought in His presence. The verse first mentions not speaking and then not looking upon; the description is in descending order; speaking shows more intimacy than looking upon; it is as though the verse wants to say: Allāh shall not confer upon them any honour, neither great nor small.

Third: Allāh will not purify them and they shall have a painful chastisement: The statements are unrestricted and unconditional. It implies that they shall remain unpurified and in chastisement both in this world and in the hereafter.

QUR’ĀN: Most surely there is a party amongst them who distort the Book with their tongues that you may consider it to be (a part) of the Book; “*al-Layy*” (الَلْيُ = to spin, to entwine); when used with the head or tongue as its object, it means inclining, bending or tilting it. Allāh says: they turn back their heads (63:5); distorting (the word) with their tongues (4:46). Apparently, it means that they recite the lies which they have

invented against Allāh in the same tone and style which they use for the Book, in order to confuse the people, making them believe that it was a part of the Book while it is not so.

The word “Book” has been repeated thrice in this sentence, in order to remove all possible ambiguity. The first “Book” refers to that which they wrote with their own hands and attributed to Allāh; the second refers to the “Book” which was revealed by Allāh; the third refers to the same Divine Revelation but the word was repeated to remove ambiguity and to indicate that the “Book”, being the Book of Allāh, was too high and sublime to contain such forgeries — it is because the word “Book” has a connotation that points to sublimity.

The same was the cause of repeating the Divine Name, Allāh, in the sentence, “and they say, it is from Allāh, while it is not from Allāh”. It means it is not from Allāh Who is the true God and Who does not say except truth, as He Himself says: *and the truth do I speak* (38:84).

The verse ends with the words, “and they tell a lie against Allāh whilst they know”: It is refutation after refutation of their ascribing their forgeries to Divine Revelation. They were confusing the people by their distorted recitation; Allāh refuted it and said, “while it is not (a part) of the Book”. Then they used to say, “it is from Allāh”; Allāh refuted them first by saying, “while it is not from Allāh”; and then by declaring that “they tell a lie against Allāh”. This repeated denial points to two new factors: (1) Telling lies is their ingrained habit and persistent trait. (2) It is not because of any confusion or ignorance that they have told such lies; they know that it is a lie and yet they say it.

TRADITIONS

as-Suyūfī writes in *ad-Durru 'l-manthūr* under the verse: *Say: “O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you ...”*: “Ibn Jarīr has narrated through his chains from *as-Suddī* that he said: “Then the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) called them — that is, the delegation of the Christians of Najrān — and said: “O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you ...” ’ ’ ’ ’

The author says: The same book quotes another tradition of the same meaning through Ibn Jarīr from Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far ibn az-

Zubayr. The tradition apparently means that this verse was revealed about the Christians of Najrān. We have written a tradition in the beginning of the chapter ¹, that its early part (upto eighty odd verses), was revealed about the Christians of Najrān; and this verse is included in that number.

Some traditions say that the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) invited the Jews of Medina to a common word, until they accepted to pay *jizyah*. However, it is not in conflict with its revelation about the delegation of Najrān.

al-Bukhārī narrates through his chains from Ibn ‘Abbās from Abū Sufyān a long *ḥadīth* in which he, *inter alia*, mentions the letter sent by the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) to Heraclius, the Roman emperor. Abū Sufyān says: “Then he (i.e., Heraclius) asked for the letter of the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and read it; and it was written therein: ‘In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allāh to Heraclius, the emperor of Rome. Peace be on him who follows guidance. After this, I invite you to Islam. Accept Islam, and you will be saved (in the hereafter). Accept Islam and Allāh will give you double reward. But if you turn back, then the sin of your people also will be on your shoulders. ‘O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you, that we shall not worship any but Allāh and (that) we shall not associate anything with Him, and (that) some of us shall not take others for lords besides Allāh’; but if they turn back, then say: ‘Bear witness that we are Muslims (Submitting ones) ...’ ” (*aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Bukhārī)

The author says: It has also been narrated by Muslim in his *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*; and by as-Suyūfī in *ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr* from an-Nasā’ī, ‘Abdu’r-Razzāq and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, all from Ibn ‘Abbās.

And it has been said that also the letter sent by the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) to Muqawqis, the Chief of the Copts, contained these very words of Allāh, “O People of the Book! come to a word, common between us and you ...” There is a Cufic writing reputedly the original letter of the Prophet, its text conforming with his letter to Heraclius; and

¹ See *al-Mīzān* (Engl. transi.), vol. 5, p. 21. (tr.)

its photos are easily available throughout the Muslims world ¹.

However, the historians say that the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) wrote the letters which he sent through various envoys to many kings and rulers (like: Heraclius, Kisrā and an-Najāshī) in the sixth year of hijrah. It proves that this verse was revealed in the sixth year or even earlier. On the other hand, the historians (like: aṭ-Ṭabarī, Ibnu 'l-Athīr and al-Maqrīzī) have written that the delegation of the Christians of Najrān had come to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) in the tenth year of hijrah, while others (like: Abu 'l-Fidā' in *al-Bidāyah wa 'n-nihāyah* and al-Ḥalabī in *as-Sīrah al-Ḥalabiyyah*) say that it was in the ninth year. If so, then the verse would have been revealed in the ninth of tenth year of hijrah. Sometimes, it is said that it was revealed in the early years of hijrah as the traditions written hereafter will show. Others say that it was revealed twice, as al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar has reported.

Nevertheless, the verses of the chapter are connected with each other in a single context, as we had pointed out in the beginning of the chapter; and it supports the view that the verse was revealed long before the ninth year. Consequently, the delegation must have come in the sixth year of hijrah or even earlier.

It is difficult to believe that the Prophet would write letters to rulers of Rome, Egypt and Fārs and ignore the people of Najrān who were nearer.

There is a point to note in the above quoted tradition. The letter begins with the formula, '*In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful*'. Keeping it in view, we may know the worth of the tradition copied earlier (in the story of Najrān's delegation), from al-Bayhaqī's *Dalā'ilu 'n-nubuwwah*. He narrates: 'The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) wrote to the people of Najrān, before the (chapter of) 'Ṭāsīn Sulaymān' (i.e., the Ant) was revealed: 'In the name of Allāh, the God of Ibrāhīm and Ishāq and Ya'qūb. From Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allāh to the Bishop of Najrān and the people of Najrān. If you accept Islam, then I

¹ The first such letter discovered was that sent to Muqawqis. Its photo was published in the *al-Hilāl* of November, 1904. It is now in Istanbul (Turkey). A third letter sent to the co-rulers of Oman, 'Abd and Jayfar, sons of Julandā, was discovered not very long ago. (*tr.*)

extol before you Allāh, the God of Ibrāhīm and Ishāq and Ya‘qūb. After that I call you to the worship of Allāh leaving aside the worship of the servants (of Allāh), and I invite you to (come under) the guardianship of Allāh instead of the guardianship of the servants. But if you refuse (it), then (you should pay) the head-tax; and if you refuse (even this), then I declare war against you. And peace (be on you).’ ”

Now, the chapter of the Ant is a Meccan one; and its textual evidence almost clearly proves that it was revealed before hijrah; how can that period be juxtaposed with the event of Najrān? Apart from that, the purported letter contains some other things which cannot be explained, like the demand of *jizyah* and ultimatum of war and other such things. And Allāh knows better.

aṭ-Ṭabarānī narrates from Ibn ‘Abbās: “Verily the letter of the Messenger of Allāh to the unbelievers was: *‘come to a word common between us and you ...’* ” (*ad-Durru ’l-manthūr*)

It is written in the same book about the words of Allāh, *O People of the Book! why do you dispute about Ibrāhīm ...*: “Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Jarīr and al-Bayhaqī (in his *Dalā’ilu ’n-nubuwwah*) have narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās that he said: “The Christians of Najrān and rabbis of the Jews came to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and disputed with one another near him. The rabbis said: “Ibrāhīm was but a Jew”; and the Christians said: “Ibrāhīm was but a Christian”. Thereupon, Allāh revealed about them: *O People of the Book! why do you dispute about Ibrāhīm, when the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed till after him?... and Allāh is the Guardian of the believers.* Then Abū Rāfi‘ al-Quraṣī (a Jew from Banū Qurayzah) said: “Do you demand from us, O Muḥammad! that we should worship you as the Christians worship ‘Īsā son of Maryam?” And one of the Najrānites said: “Is it what you wish, O Muḥammad?” And the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: “I seek protection of Allāh that I should worship other than Allāh or enjoin worship of other than Him. Not for this He has sent me or enjoined me.” Then Allāh revealed concerning their talk: *It is not meet for a man that Allāh should give him the Book and Judgment and Prophethood, then he should say to men: ‘Be my servants rather than Allāh’s’; but rather (he would say): ‘Be worshippers of the Lord because of your teaching the Book and your reading (it yourselves).’ Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords; What! would He enjoin you*

with unbelief after you are Muslims? (3:79 — 80). Thereafter Allāh mentioned the covenant He had made with them and their forefathers that they should believe in the Prophet when he came to them, and to their acceptance of this fact; so He said: And when Allāh made a covenant through the prophets: “Certainly what I have given you of the Book and Wisdom — then an Apostle comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him.” He said: “Do you affirm and accept My compact in this (matter)?” They said: “We do affirm.” He said: “Then bear witness, and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you” (3:81). (ad-Durru ’l-manthūr)

The author says: According to the text and context of the verses (*It is not meet for a man that Allāh should give him the Book and Judgment and Prophethood ...*) are applicable on ‘Īsā son of Maryam (a.s.) more meaningfully and in an easier way than on the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.), as we shall explain when writing on these verses. Perhaps what the tradition says concerning the revelation of these verses about the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) is just an inference of Ibn ‘Abbās. Moreover, when the Qur’ān deals with such talks, it invariably always brings it in the form of question and answer or as a quotation with its refutation.

al-Kalbī has narrated the story of the hijrah to Abyssinia through Abū Ṣāliḥ from Ibn ‘Abbās; and it has also been narrated by Muḥammad ibn Ishāq from Ibn Shahāb through his chains, that he said: “When Ja‘far ibn Abī Ṭālib with a group of the Companions of the Prophet migrated to Abyssinia and settled there; and the Prophet migrated to Medina and there happened in Badr what happened, the Quraysh assembled in *Dāru’n-Nadwah* (the Town Hall) and said to each other: ‘You may avenge those who have been killed at Badr with those Companions of Muḥammad who are with an-Najāshī (Negus). Collect some money and send it as a present to an-Najāshī; perhaps he would hand over your tribesmen to you; and there should go two of your wise men as your envoys to him.’

“They sent ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ and ‘Umārah ibn Abī Mu‘ayt ¹ with

¹ The right name of this person is ‘Umārah ibn ‘Uqbah ibn Abī Mu‘ayt. But the real person who accompanied ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ to Abyssinia, in the first

presents (of) skins, etc. They sailed the sea and arrived at Abyssinia. When they came to an-Najāshī, they prostrated before him and greeted him; and said: ‘Our people are sincere and thankful to you, and they love your courtiers. They have sent us to you to warn you against these people who have come to you for, they follow an imposter who has stood up, claiming to be a Messenger of Allāh; and none of us has followed him except a few simpletons. And we made life difficult for them and compelled them to take shelter in a narrow mountain valley of our land, with nobody visiting them, until hunger and thirst (nearly) destroyed them. When the situation became too tough for him, he sent his cousin to you, in order to create mischief here — in your religion, kingdom and subjects. Therefore, beware of them and hand them over to us; it will save you the trouble of dealing with them.’ Also, they said: ‘And it is a sign (of their mischief) that when they come here they will not prostrate before you, nor will they greet you in the way the people greet you; (it is because of their) disliking your religion and customs.’

‘‘Then an-Najāshī called them (i.e., the Muslims). When they came, Ja‘far called at the door: ‘The party of Allāh ask permission to come before you.’ an-Najāshī said: ‘Tell this caller to repeat his words.’ Ja‘far did, and an-Najāshī said: ‘Yes; let them enter with safety of Allāh and His protection.’ ‘Amr looked at his colleague and said: ‘Do you not hear how they jabbered about the party of Allāh and how the King responded to them?’ And they were displeased with it.

‘‘Then (the Muslims) entered and did not prostrate before him. ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ said: ‘Do you not see that they deem themselves too great to prostrate before you?’ an-Najāshī said to them: ‘What prevents you from prostrating before me and greeting me in the way all those do who come to me from furthest regions?’ They replied: ‘We do *sajdah* (prostration) to Allāh Who created you and gave (this) kingdom to you. Of course, we were using the customary greeting when we were idolaters; then Allāh raised among us a truthful Prophet, and he taught us the greeting which Allāh is pleased with, and that is, ‘‘Peace’’, the greeting of the people of the Garden.’ an-Najāshī knew that it was true and that it was in the Torah

journey, was ‘Umārah ibn al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī, the brother of Khālīd ibn al-Walīd; and in the next journey ‘Amr was accompanied by ‘Abdullāh ibn Abī Rabī‘ah ibn al-Mughīrah al-Makhzūmī. (*ed.*)

and Injīl. Then he said: ‘Who among you had called, “The party of Allāh asks permission to come before you?”’ Ja‘far said: ‘I’ Then he (Ja‘far) said: ‘You are a king from the People of the Book, and it is not proper to talk much before you, nor to do any injustice. I would like to answer on behalf of my Companions; therefore, order these two people that one of them should speak and the other should just listen; and you should listen to our talk.’ Amr said to Ja‘far: ‘Speak.’ Ja‘far said to an-Najāshī: ‘Ask these two people whether we are slaves or free people. If we are slaves (and) have fled from our masters, then you should return us to them.’ an-Najāshī said: ‘Are they slaves or free people?’ He (Amr) said: ‘Nay; (they are) free and noble people.’ an-Najāshī said: ‘They are saved from slavery.’ Ja‘far said: ‘Ask them if we have shed any blood unjustly, so that they want its requital from us?’ Amr said: ‘No; not a single drop.’ Ja‘far said: ‘Ask them, if we have taken other people’s property without right, so that we have to repay it?’ an-Najāshī said: ‘Even if it is a heap of money I shall repay it.’ Amr said: ‘No; not even a small amount.’ an-Najāshī said: ‘Then what do you want from them?’ (Amr) said: ‘We and they were together on one religion, the religion of our forefathers; and they have left it and followed another religion. Therefore, our people have sent us so that you may hand them over to us.’ an-Najāshī said: ‘What was the religion you followed and what is that which they have now accepted?’ Ja‘far said: ‘As for the religion we followed before, it was the religion of the Satan; we disbelieved in Allāh and worshipped the stone. And as for the religion to which we have turned, it is the religion of Allāh, the Islam; it has been brought to us from Allāh by a Messenger, coming with a Book like the Book of the son of Maryam and conforming to it.’ an-Najāshī said: ‘O Ja‘far! you have spoken a very great thing.’

“Then an-Najāshī ordered the gong to be rung. It was done and every priest and monk gathered near him. When all were assembled, an-Najāshī said: ‘I adjure you by Allāh Who revealed the Injīl to ‘Īsā, do you find (any news of) a prophet messenger between ‘Īsā and the Day of Resurrection?’ They said: ‘By God! Yes. He has given us the good news of him and said: “Whoever shall believe in him shall believe in me, and whoever shall disbelieve in him shall disbelieve in me.”’ an-Najāshī said to Ja‘far: ‘What does this man say to you? What does he enjoin you to do? And what does he forbid you from?’ (Ja‘far) said: ‘He recites to us the Book of Allāh and enjoins us to do good and forbids us the evil; he

enjoins us to be good to our neighbours and relatives and to the orphans, (and) tells us that we should worship Allāh, the One, (Who) has no partner.’ (an-Najāshī) said to him: ‘Recite to me from what he recites to you.’ Then (Ja‘far) recited to him the Chapters of ‘The Spider’ and ‘The Greeks’. The eyes of an-Najāshī and his Companions overflowed with tears, and they said: ‘Recite to us some more from this good talk.’ Then Ja‘far recited to them the Chapter of ‘The Cave’. (At this stage) ‘Amr, intending to incite (the anger of) an-Najāshī against them, said: ‘These people abuse ‘Īsā and his mother.’ an-Najāshī said (to Ja‘far): ‘Well, what do you say about ‘Īsā and his mother?’ Then he (Ja‘far) recited the Chapter of ‘Maryam’. When he came to the story of Maryam and ‘Īsā, an-Najāshī raised his tooth-stick just a small bit (enough to disturb one’s eyes) and said: ‘By God! The Messiah did not say more than what you have said.’ Then he said turning towards Ja‘far and his Companions: ‘Go, you are free in my land; you are safe from ill-treatment, and it will be a crime to give you any trouble.’ Again, he said: ‘Be of good cheer; do not be afraid; there is no downfall today for the party of Ibrāhīm.’ ‘Amr said: ‘O an-Najāshī! and who are the party of Ibrāhīm?’ (an-Najāshī) said: ‘This group and their companion (i.e., the Prophet) whence they have come here, and those who follow them.’ The polytheists denied it and claimed (themselves to be on) the religion of Ibrāhīm. Then an-Najāshī gave back to ‘Amr and his companion the presents they had brought (to him), and said: ‘Surely your present is just a bribe; you take it back because God gave this kingdom to me and He did not take any bribe from me.’ Ja‘far said: ‘Then we returned (from the court), and we were under the best protection.’ And Allāh revealed to the Messenger (s.a.w.a.) (who was in Medina) the verse about their dispute about Ibrāhīm: *Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed him and this prophet and those who believe; and Allāh is the Guardian of the believers.*’ (at-Tafsīr, al-Khāzin)

The author says: This story has been narrated with other chains, and also from the *Ahlu ‘l-bayt* (a.s.). We have copied it here in spite of its length, and although it has nothing to do with the circumstances in which the verses under discussion were revealed, because it contains important information about the trials of the first migrants among the Muslims.

It has been narrated from aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) about the words of Allāh, *Ibrāhīm was not a Jew nor a Christian*, that he said: “The Leader of the Faithful, said: ‘Neither a Jew praying to the West nor a Christian praying to the East; but he was an upright Muslim on the religion of Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.)’ ” (*at-Taḥfīr*, al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: We have explained in the Commentary the meaning of his being on the religion of Muḥammad, blessing of Allāh be on them and their progenies! This tradition looks at the direction of prayer when the *qiblah* was changed to the Ka‘bah (and the Ka‘bah is almost to the south of Medina). The Jews and the Christians denied its validity; and felt themselves obliged to turn towards the west (where Baytu ‘l-Maḥdī is situated), or the east (to which the Christian face). This has been counted as a deviation of these two groups from the middle course. This aspect is supported by wordings of the verse: *And thus We have made you a medium nation* (2:143). However, it is just an interesting and fine literary inference, and nothing more.

Explaining this verse, aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said: “Pure, sincere, totally free from idol-worship.” (*al-Kāfī*)

The Leader of the Faithful said explaining the verse: *Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrāhīm are those who followed ...*: “Surely the nearest of the people to the prophets is he who practises most faithfully what they have brought.” Then he recited this verse and said: “Surely the friend of Muḥammad is he who obeys Allāh, even if his relationship is far from him; and surely the enemy of Muḥammad is he who disobeys Allāh, even if he has a near relationship with him.” (*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān*)

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said: “They are the Imāms and their followers.” (*al-Kāfī*; *at-Taḥfīr*, al-‘Ayyāshī)

‘Umar ibn Udhaynah narrates from the same Imām that he said: “You, by Allāh, are from the progeny of Muḥammad.” I said: “From themselves? May I be your ransom!” He said: “Yes, by Allāh, from their own selves.” He said it three times; then he looked at me and I looked at him and he said: “O ‘Umar! surely Allāh says in His Book: *Most surely the nearest of people to Ibrāhīm ...* ” (*at-Taḥfīr*, al-Qummī; *at-Taḥfīr*, al-‘Ayyāshī)

There is a tradition narrated from al-Bāqir (a.s.) that he said about

this verse: *And a party of the People of the Book say: ‘Avow belief ...’*: “Verily, when the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) came to Medina he was praying towards Baytu ’l-Maqdis, (and) the people (i.e., the Jews) were pleased with it. When Allāh turned him from Baytu ’l-Maqdis towards His Sacred House, the Jews were annoyed. And the change of *qiblah* had happened in the noon prayer. So they said: ‘Muḥammad prayed the morning prayer facing towards our *qiblah*; therefore, believe in that which was revealed to Muḥammad in the first part of the day; and disbelieve the latter part’; they meant (disbelieve in) the *qiblah* when the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) faced towards the Sacred Mosque.” (*at-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

The author says: As you see, the tradition takes the adverbial phrase, (in) *the first part of the day*, as related to the verb, *was revealed*; and not to the verb, *Avow belief*. And we have explained it in the Commentary.

Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim have narrated through al-‘Awfī from Ibn ‘Abbās, that he said about the verse: *And a party of the People of the Book say: ‘Avow belief ...’*: “A party of the Jews said: ‘Avow belief when you meet the Companions of Muḥammad in the first part of the day; and when it is the end of it then pray (according to) your own prayer; perhaps they, that is, the believers, would say: ‘These are the People of the Book and they are more knowledgeable than us.’” Perhaps they would then turn away from their religion.’ ” (*ad-Durru ’l-manthūr*)

The author says: This meaning has been narrated in the same book from as-Suddī and Mujāhid also.

al-Bāqir (a.s.) said about the verse 2:27: “It has been revealed about the covenant: (As for) *those who take a small price for the covenant of Allāh and their own oaths — surely they shall have no portion in the hereafter, and Allāh will not speak to them, nor will He look upon them on the Day of Resurrection nor will He purify them, and they shall have a painful chastisement*. And ‘portion’ means share. So he who shall have no share in the hereafter, with what will he enter the Garden?” (*al-Kāfī*)

ash-Shaykh aṭ-Ṭūsī narrates through his chains from ‘Adiyy ibn ‘Adiyy from his father that he said: “Imra’u ’l-Qays and a man from

Ḥaḍramawt brought their dispute concerning a land to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.). (The Prophet) said: ‘Do you have a proof?’ He said: ‘No.’ (The Prophet) said: ‘Then (it will be decided) by his (i.e., the opposite party’s) oath.’ He said: ‘Then, by Allāh, he will take away my land.’ (The Prophet) said: ‘If he takes your land by his (false) oath, he shall be among those that Allāh will not look upon him on the Day of Resurrection nor will He purify him and he shall have a painful chastisement.’ (Hearing this) the man was frightened and gave the land back to him.’ (al-Amālī, ash-Shaykh)

The author says: As you see, the tradition does not show that the verse was revealed about this event. Several traditions have been narrated through the Sunnī chains that it was revealed about this event. But those traditions give conflicting reports. Some like the above, say, that the dispute was between Imra’u ’1-Qays and a man from Ḥaḍramawt; others say that the conflict was between al-Ash’ath ibn al-Qays and a Jew concerning a land; yet, another tradition says that it was revealed about an unbeliever, who had offered in the market a merchandise for sale, and in order to deceive a Muslim customer, swore by Allāh that he was offered for it a price which in reality he was not offered. Then the verse was revealed.

You have seen in the Commentary that obviously the verse explains the reason of the preceding verse. In this background utmost that is possible is to take these traditions as an application of the verse on that happening ; but they cannot be accepted as an account of the circumstances in which the verse was revealed.

* * * * *

مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُ اللَّهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحُكْمَ وَالنَّبُوءَةَ ثُمَّ يَقُولَ
 لِلنَّاسِ كُونُوا عِبَادًا لِي مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ كُونُوا رَبَّائِيِّنَ بِمَا
 كُنْتُمْ تُعَلِّمُونَ الْكِتَابَ وَبِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَدْرُسُونَ — ٧٩ . وَلَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ
 أَنْ تَتَّخِذُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ أَرْبَابًا أَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْكُفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ
 مُسْلِمُونَ — ٨٠ .

It is not meet for a man that Allāh should give him the Book and the Judgment and Prophethood, then he should say to men: ‘Be my servants rather than Allāh’s;’ but rather (he would say): ‘Be worshippers of the Lord because of your teaching the Book and your reading (it yourselves)’ (79). Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords; what! would he enjoin you with unbelief after you are Muslims (Submitting Ones)? (80).

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

The verses come after those related to the affairs of ‘Īsā (a.s.); it implies that it is the second stage of the argument exonerating ‘Īsā from the responsibility of what the Christians believe about him. We may summarize the whole argument as follows:

‘Īsā (a.s.) was not as you think about him. Neither was he Lord nor had he claimed Lordship for himself. (1) He was not Lord, because he was a mortal creature; was conceived in his mother’s womb who gave

birth to him and brought him up in a cradle. Of course, just like Adam (a.s.), he had no father, thus his likeness was with Allāh as the likeness of Adam. (2) Nor had he claimed to be Lord, because he was a prophet, and was given the Book, the Judgment and Prophethood; and a prophet, having that status, cannot transgress the limit of servitude, nor can he divest himself of submission to Allāh.

How can a prophet tell people: Take me as your Lord, be my servants rather than Allāh's? Or, how can he allow it for any other creature of Allāh? A prophet would never enjoin men to take the angels or the prophets for lords. He would not give to any servant of Allāh more than his due, nor would he deny prophethood of any prophet of Allāh divesting him of his status and dignity.

QUR'ĀN: It is not meet for a man that Allāh should give him the Book and the Judgment and Prophethood, then he should say to men: "Be my servants rather than Allāh's": "al-Bashar" (البَشَرُ = man) is synonymous with "al-insān" (الإنسَانُ); it is used for singular as well as plural; one man is al-bashar and also a group of men is al-bashar. and also a group of men is *al-bashar*.

Mā kāna li basharin (مَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ = it is not meet for a man); *li* (لِ) in *li-basharin* (لِبَشَرٍ) denotes ownership; that is, it does not belong to him; it is not meet for him; he has no right to it. The same expression has been used in some other places; for example, *It does not beseem us that we should talk of it* (24:16); *And it is not attributable to a prophet that he should act unfaithfully* (3:161).

The clause, "that Allāh should give him the Book and the Judgment and Prophethood", is the subject of *kāna* (كَانَ = was; is). It prepares the ground for the next statement; "then he should say to men; 'Be my servants rather than Allāh's.'" Apparently, the sentence could be shortened by omitting the introductory clause, "that Allāh should give him the Book ..."; yet, it was inserted to give a new connotation to the phrase, "It is not meet for a man". Let us see what happens if the sentence is rewritten, omitting the introductory clause; then the verse would run as follows: It is not meet for a man that he should say to men. The meaning then would be as follows: He was not given that right, although possibly he could say so if he transgressed the limit and became insolent. But there is no room for such inference in the sentence as it now

stands. The verse in the present form means as follows: When Allāh gives a man knowledge and gnosis of reality, and brings him up with Divine Care, that man can never transgress the boundary of servitude; nor does he feel free to interfere in what does not belong to him, or to dispose what he has no right to; as Allāh describes the declaration of ‘Īsā (a.s.), in the verse: *And when Allāh will say: ‘O ‘Īsā son of Maryam! did you say to men, ‘take me and my mother for two gods besides Allāh’ ’, he will say: ‘Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say)’ ’* (5:116).

The verse says, “that Allāh should give him ...”, instead of saying: a man whom Allāh gave the Book and the Judgment and Prophethood. The reason for it is clear from the above explanation. The latter wording points only to the basic legislative prohibition of such transgression. On the other hand, the present construction, “that Allāh should give him ...”, shows that such behaviour is definitely impossible. The Divine Guidance and upbringing cannot fail to attain its goal, as Allāh says: *These are they whom We gave the Book and the Judgment and the Prophethood, therefore if these (i.e., the tribesmen of the Messenger of Allāh, s.a.w.a.) disbelieve in it, We have (already) entrusted with it a people who are not disbelievers in it* (6:89).

In short, the verse says that it is not possible for a man to join these Divine Favours with calling the men to his own worship. It is not possible when he is given a Book, the Judgment and Prophethood that he should say to men: Be my servants rather than Allāh’s. In this context the verse resembles to a certain extent the verses: *The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of Allāh, nor do the angels who are near to Him ... and as for those who disdain and are proud, He will chastise them with a painful chastisement. And they shall not find for themselves besides Allāh a guardian or a helper* (4:172 — 173). The implication is that the Messiah and the angels who are near to Allāh are too high in prestige and too great in status to disdain the worship of Allāh; because disdaining His worship brings painful chastisement on the culprit; and far be it from Allāh to chastise His honoured prophets or the near angels.

Objection: The verse uses the word, *thumma* (^{ثُمَّ} = then) in the phrase, “then he should say to men”; this conjunctive denotes some

delay; and the delay does not conform with the joining you have mentioned.

Reply: What we have said about joining the Divine Favours with calling men to disbelief gives the gist of the matter. Togetherness and combination can happen with simultaneous things as well as with two things appearing consecutively — that too is a sort of combination.

“Be my servants rather than Allāh’s”: *al-‘Ibād* (الْعِبَادُ) like *al-‘abīd* (الْعَبِيدُ) is plural of *al-‘abd* (الْعَبْدُ = slave; servant); the difference between the two plurals is in usage; *al-‘ibād* is mostly used in relation to Allāh, for example, *‘ibādu’llāh* (عِبَادُ اللَّهِ = slaves/servants of Allāh); while *al-‘abīd* is generally used when related to man; they say, *‘abīdu ’n-nās* (عَبِيدُ النَّاسِ = slaves/servants of men), and not *‘ibādu ’n-nās* (عِبَادُ النَّاسِ)

The proviso, “rather than Allāh’s”, has been added after the words, “my servants”, as a matter of necessity. Allāh does not accept any worship unless it is purely for His own person. Allāh says: *Now, surely, sincere religion* (obedience) *is for Allāh* (alone); *and* (as for) *those who take guardians besides Him*, (saying), “*We do not worship them save that they may make us nearer to Allāh*”, *surely Allāh will judge between them in that in which they differ; surely Allāh does not guide him aright who is a liar, ungrateful* (39:3). Thus, Allāh has rejected outright the worship of those who join worship of others with His worship, even if the others are worshipped merely as interceders and intermediaries, and only with intention of reaching near Allāh through them.

Moreover, the reality of worship does not come into existence until some independence is admitted for the worshipped even in polytheism. The partner, *per se*, has some independence; while in reality it is only to Allāh that absolute Lordship and Godhead belongs. Therefore, His Lordship cannot be complete, nor can His worship be correct except with negation of independence from every other thing in every possible way. The worship of someone else is worship of other than Allāh, even if Allāh is worshipped with him.

QUR’ĀN: *but rather* (he would say): “*Be worshippers of the Lord because of your teaching the Book and your reading* (it yourselves)”: “*ar-Rabbānī*” (الرَّبَّانِيُّ = translated here as worshippers of the Lord) is derived from *ar-Rabb* (الرَّبُّ = the Lord), to which “*a*” and “*n*” (اُنْ) have been added for augmentation of meaning; as for example, they use:

al-lihyānī (اللّٰهْيَانِيُّ) for one having a luxuriant beard. Thus *ar-rabbānī* means the one having special relationship with the Lord, and spending his life in His servitude and worship. *Bi* (بِي) in *bi-mā* (بِمَا) is causative, and means “because”; while *mā* (مَا) is for *al-maṣḍar* (الْمَصْدَرُ) and has changed the past tenses into infinitive verbs; that is why we have translated it in the following way: “but rather (he would say): ‘Be worshippers of the Lord because of your teaching the Book and your reading (it yourselves)’ ”

ad-Dirāsah (الدِّرَاسَةُ = to study) is more specific than *at-ta‘allum* (التَّعَلُّمُ = to learn; to study), as the former is generally used for studying from book by reading and reciting. *ar-Rāghib* says: ‘*Darasa* ‘d-dār (دَرَسَ الدَّارُ = vestiges of the house remained); it implies that the house itself was obliterated; and for this reason *ad-durūs* (الدُّرُوسُ) is translated as obliteration. Likewise, *darasa* ‘l-kitāb (دَرَسَ الْكِتَابُ) (or, *darasa* ‘l-‘ilm = دَرَسَ الْعِلْمُ) means, he got trace of book (or, knowledge) memorizing it; he grasped its meaning. As it is attained by regular recitation, such recitation is called memorization. Allāh says: *and they have read what is in it* (7:169); *because of your teaching the Book and reading; And We have not given them any books which they read* (44:44).’ ”

The theme is that a man having such a high status will call you only to attainment of faith and to believe in the teachings of the Book which you learn and teach — the Book that contains the fundamental Divine Knowledge; he will enjoin you to acquire noble character and good traits found in the Book; and to practise and do good deeds to which you call the people. He will do so, in order that you attach yourselves exclusively to your Lord, and thus become divine scholars.

Bi-mā kuntum (بِمَا كُنْتُمْ = lit., because you were), being a past tense, shows that the action had already taken place; that the audience was already teaching and reading the Book. It gives a hint that, possibly, it is an allusion to the Christians, who said that ‘*Isā* had told them that he was the son of God and His Word (with all the differences in the meaning of sonship). The fact is that the Children of Israel had been given a revealed Book which they taught and read; then they differed in it — a difference that was accompanied by textual changes and alterations. ‘*Isā* (a.s.) was sent only to explain to them a part of what they differed in and to allow them part of that which was forbidden them; in short, to call them to fulfil their obligations concerning the learning and teaching — that they

should attach themselves exclusively to their Lord in reading and teaching His Book.

Although the verse may somehow be applied to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) — because his mission covered the People of the Book too, who used to teach and read the Book of Allāh — but ‘Īsā (a.s.) was before the Prophet and the verse applies to him in a more befitting manner; also because he was sent exclusively to the Children of Israel, unlike the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.).

So far as other *ulu’l-‘azm* prophets (who came with a Book), i.e., Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm and Mūsā are concerned, the verse obviously cannot be applied to them.

QUR’ĀN: *Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lord:* The verb ‘*aw ya’murakum*’ (أَوْ يُأْمُرْكُمْ) = or that he should enjoin you), because of the vowel ‘*a*’ after *ya’mur* (according to the well-known and common recital), is in conjunction with ‘he should say’.

A group of the People of the Book had taken the angels for lords. For instance, the Sabaeans worshipped the angels and attributed that custom to the authority of religion. Likewise the Arabs, while claiming to follow the religion of Ibrāhīm (a.s.), said that the angels were Allāh’s daughters.

As for taking the prophets for lords, the Jews, for instance, said that ‘Uzayr was the son of Allāh — as the Qur’ān quotes them — although Mūsā (a.s.) had not allowed it to them, nor was there in the Torah anything other than monotheism. Had Mūsā (a.s.) allowed it to them he would be enjoining it — far be it from him!

The style of the verse, ‘then he should say to men: ‘Be my servants rather than Allāh’s’’, differs in two ways from that of the next verse, ‘Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords’: (1) The subject matter in the former is worship of other than Allāh, and in the latter it is taking them for lords. (2) The enjoined people in the former are described in third person, ‘men’, while the latter addresses them directly in second person. Let us look at both changes:

First: The former verse adversely alludes to the Christians concerning their worship of ‘Īsā. As is known, they believe in his godhead openly, saying that he had invited them to his own worship. Thus they have

clearly ascribed this call to ‘Īsā that he said to them: ‘Be my servants’. On the other hand, taking the angels and the prophets for lords (in the meaning used in the case of others than ‘Īsā) is opposed to the belief of monotheism only by implication, not clearly. That is why the latter verse uses the word, “lords”, instead of gods.

Second: Both expressions (*‘Be my servants’; that he should enjoin you*) deal with a subject which was relevant to the audience of these verses, that is, the People of the Book and the Arabs. The first verse has used the word, “should say”; and “saying” implies a face to face talk. But the people present at the time of the Prophet were not present at the material time, that is, when ‘Īsā was supposed to say it. It is for this reason that the verse says, “he should say to men”, instead of saying, he should say to you. On the other hand, the second verse uses the word “enjoin”; enjoining does not necessarily require face to face talk; it may be done even when the enjoined one is absent. An order given to, or a matter connected with, the ancestors is applied to the later generations if the latter identify themselves with the former. As for “saying” — because it employs transmission of voice — it denotes oral conversation and presence of the audience (except when it is used simply in the meaning of instruction).

It is therefore evident that basically these verses require second person plurals (as in, *or that he should enjoin you ...*); but exception was made in the first verse owing to special reasons.

QUR’ĀN: *What! would he enjoin you with unbelief after you are Muslims (Submitting Ones)?*: Apparently, the question is directed to all who followed a prophet like the People of the Book, or claimed to do so like the Arabs of the days of Ignorance who believed that they were on the religion of Ibrāhīm. The talk is based on a hypothetical proposition and the meaning is as follows: If it is true that you do follow this man who was given the Book, the Judgment and Prophethood, then you have already submitted to Allāh, acquiring the characteristics of Islam; then how will it be possible for that prophet to enjoin you with disbelief, diverting you from the very path to which he had guided you by the order of Allāh?

It is clear from the above explanation that in this verse, Islam refers to the religion of monotheism; the religion which Allāh sent all the

prophets with. This view is supported by other verses preceding and following this verse, in which the word, “Islam”, has been used in this very meaning: *Surely the religion with Allāh is Islam* (3:19); *Is it then other than Allāh’s religion that they seek* (to follow) ... *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers* (3:83 — 85).

An exegete has said that the two verses under discussion refer to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.). His view is based on a tradition (quoted earlier) describing the circumstances of its revelation which says that Abū Rāfi‘ al-Qurazī and a Najrānite Christian said to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.): “Do you want us to worship you? O Muḥammad!” Then Allāh revealed: ‘It is not meet for a man that Allāh should give him ... after you are Muslims?’ Then the said exegete has argued by the last phrase, ‘after you are Muslims’; “because Islam is the religion brought by Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.).”

COMMENT: He has confused the Islam of Qur’ānic terminology (the religion of monotheism which was preached by all the prophets) with the Islam of the Muslims’ terminology — a term which came into use after the time of revelation. (We have explained it earlier).

CONCLUSION

(Having Seven Chapters)

1. The Story of ‘Īsā and his Mother in the Qur’ān

Maryam, daughter of ‘Imrān, was the mother of the Messiah. When her mother was pregnant with her, she made a vow that she would release what was in her womb to be devoted to the service of the Temple. She believed that she was pregnant with a male child; but when she brought it forth and came to know that it was a female, she was disappointed and dejected. Then she named her Maryam, that is, servant. Her father, ‘Imrān, had died before she was born; so the mother brought her to the Temple for handing her over to the priests — Zakariyyā was one of them.

They contended one with another to get the privilege of her custody; then they agreed to decide it by lot, in which Zakariyyā's name was drawn; and he became her guardian. When she reached the age of puberty, Zakariyyā made for her a partition to protect her from men's eyes. She used to worship Allāh therein and nobody entered that sanctuary except Zakariyyā. Whenever Zakariyyā entered the sanctuary to see her, he found with her food. He said: "O Maryam! whence comes this to you?" She said: "It is from Allāh, and surely Allāh gives sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure."

Maryam was a truthful woman, and was sinless by Allāh's protection; purified, chosen and spoken to; the angels spoke to her and purified her. She was obedient to the Lord and a sign of Allāh for the worlds. Vide 3:35 — 44; 19:16; 21:91; 66:12.

Then Allāh sent to her His Spirit when she had hidden herself behind a curtain, and he appeared to her as a well-made man. He said to her that he was a messenger of her Lord so that he should give her, by permission of Allāh, a pure boy without a father. He also gave her good news of the manifest miracles which were to happen on the hand of her son; and informed her that Allāh would surely strengthen him by the Holy Spirit, and would teach him the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah and the Injīl. He also told her that her son would be a messenger to the Children of Israel and would have clear signs. After informing her of the boy's status and story, he breathed into her the Spirit and she became pregnant with 'Īsā (a.s.), as a woman conceives her child. Vide 3:33 — 50.

Then she withdrew herself with him to a remote place. And the throes of childbirth compelled her to betake herself to the trunk of a palm-tree. She said: "Oh, would that I had died before this, and had been a thing quite forgotten!" Then (the child) called out to her from beneath her: "Grieve not; surely your Lord has made a stream to flow beneath you: And shake towards you the trunk of the palm-tree, it will drop on you fresh ripe dates: So eat and drink and refresh the eye. Then if you see any man, say: 'Surely I have vowed a fast to the Beneficent God, so I shall not speak to any man today.' " And she came to her people with him, carrying him (with her). Vide 19:20 — 27. His conception, birth, talk and all related affairs were similar to those of other men.

When her people saw her in such a condition, they were enraged, and blamed and taunted her — as was natural in case of an unmarried woman

conceiving and bringing forth a child. They said: “O Maryam, surely you have done a strange thing. O sister of Hārūn! your father was not a bad man, nor was your mother an unchaste woman.” But she pointed to him. They said: “How should we speak to one who is a child in the cradle?” He said: “Surely I am a servant of Allāh; He has given me the Book and made me a prophet: And he has made me blessed wherever I may be, and He has enjoined on me prayer and *zakāt* so long as I live: And dutiful to my mother, and He has not made me insolent, unblest: And peace on me on the day I was born, and on the day I die, and on the day I am raised to life.” Vide 19:27 — 33.

This talk of ‘Īsā (a.s.) was a sort of prologue which pointed to his future mission — that he would rise against oppression and injustice, revive and reform the *sharī‘ah* of Mūsā (a.s.), renovate what was obliterated from the revealed knowledge and make clear to them what they had differed in.

‘Īsā (a.s.) grew up and became a young man. He and his mother used to eat and drink in normal way with all the necessary concomitants and accidents of human life upto the end.

Then ‘Īsā (a.s.) was made a messenger to the Children of Israel. He stood up calling them to the religion of monotheism and told them: “I have come to you with a sign from your Lord, that I create for you out of dust like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird, with Allāh’s permission, and I heal the blind and the leper, and bring the dead to life, with Allāh’s permission, and I inform you of what you eat and what you store in your houses. Most surely there is a sign in this for you. Surely Allāh is my Lord and your Lord, therefore, worship Him only.”

He called them to his new *sharī‘ah*, which verified the Law of Mūsā (a.s.); but he abrogated some parts of it, allowing them somethings which were forbidden in the Torah as a punishment to the Jews. ‘Īsā (a.s.) used to say: “Surely I have come to you with wisdom, so that I may make clear to you a part of what you differ in. O Children of Israel! surely I am the messenger of Allāh to you, verifying that which is before me of the Torah and giving the good news of a Messenger who will come after me, his name being Aḥmad.”

He showed the miracles which he had mentioned, e.g., creation of bird, raising the dead to life, healing the blind and leper, and giving the

news of the unseen — all by Allāh's permission.

He continued like that calling them to monotheism and his new *sharī'ah* until he was convinced that they would not believe in him. Seeing their insolence, enmity and hatred, and the arrogance of their priests and rabbis, he turned away from them and selected his apostles (from the small band that had believed in him) to be his helpers to Allāh.

Then the Jews rose against him with the intention to kill him. But Allāh took him away completely and raised him. The Jews were put in confusion: some thought that they had killed him, others that they had crucified him; but in fact it was made to appear to them like that. Vide 3:45 — 58; 4:157 — 158; 5:110 — 111; 43:63 — 65; 61:6 — 14.

This is in short the story of 'Īsā (son of Maryam) and his mother as given in the Qur'ān.

2. Position of 'Īsā Before Allāh and in His Own Eyes

'Īsā (a.s.) was a servant of Allāh and a prophet (vide 19:30); a messenger to the Children of Israel (vide 3:49); was one of the five *ulu 'l-'azm* prophets, bringing a new *sharī'ah* and a Book, i.e., Injīl (vide 5:46; 33:7; 42:13); Allāh named him the Messiah, 'Īsā (vide 3:45); he was the Word of Allāh and a Spirit from Him (vide 4:171); an Imām (vide 33:7); one of the witnesses of deeds (vide 4:159; 5:117); he brought the good news of the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) (vide 61:6); was worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter, and one of those who are made near to Allāh (vide 3:45); was one of the chosen progenies (vide 3:33); one of the selected and righteous ones (vide 6:85 — 87); was made blessed wherever he might be, and purified; was a sign to the people, a mercy from Allāh, and dutiful to his mother; greeted himself with peace (vide 19:19 — 33); and was among those whom Allāh taught the Book and the Wisdom (vide 3:48).

These twenty-two characteristics, from the stations of *al-wilāyah* (الولاية = friendship and guardianship of Allāh), give the gist of the attributes which Allāh has used to praise this honoured prophet and to raise his rank. These may be divided in two categories: (1) The acquired ones, like servitude, righteousness and nearness to Allāh; (2) Those bestowed by Allāh as His special grace. We have explained each characteristic in relevant places of this book according to our

understanding. Anyone, wanting more details should look it up in those volumes.

3. What 'Īsā Said, and What was Said About Him?

The Qur'ān says that 'Īsā (a.s.) was Allāh's servant and messenger; and that he did not claim for himself what the Christians ascribe to him, nor did he tell them anything other than conveying the Divine Message. Allāh says: *And when Allāh will say: "O 'Īsā son of Maryam! did you say to men, 'Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allāh' ", he will say: "Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); if I had said it, Thou wouldst indeed have known it; Thou knowest what is in my mind, and I do not know what is in Thy mind; surely Thou art the great Knower of the unseen things. I did not say to them aught save what Thou didst enjoin me with: That worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord, and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst take me (away) completely, Thou wert the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things. If Thou shouldst chastise them, then surely they are Thy servants; and if Thou shouldst forgive them, then surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise." Allāh will say: "This is the day when their truth shall benefit the truthful ones" (5:116 — 119).*

This wonderful reply contains the essence of servitude and shows outstanding manner; it is a mirror of 'Īsā's attitude and behaviour towards his Lord; it shows how he looked at himself in relation to his Creator and what he thought of the people and their deeds. He says that he looked at himself just as a servant of his Lord, who had nothing to do other than obeying the Lord; he does not proceed except when directed to, and does not stop unless told to. And he was not ordered except to call people to the worship of Allāh and he did not tell them except what he was enjoined with: *That worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord.*

And so far as his relationship with his people is concerned he shall be the witness for their deeds, and that is that; it is none of his business what Allāh does with them and about them — whether He forgives them or chastises them.

Question: If so, then how would you justify what you had written in

the topic of intercession that ‘Īsā shall be among the intercessors on the Day of Resurrection, he shall intercede and his intercession will be honoured and accepted?

Answer: The Qur’ān says expressly — or almost expressly — that he is an intercessor. Allāh says: *And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth and they know* (43:86); *and on the Day of Resurrection he (‘Īsā) shall be a witness against them* (4:159); *and when I taught you the Book and the Wisdom and the Torah and the Injīl* (5:110). And we have already written extensively on the subject of intercession.

This intercession is something quite different from the atonement which the Christians believe in. The theory of atonement invalidates the system of reward and punishment, and consequently negates the absolute sovereignty of Allāh — as we shall explain later on. It is the idea of atonement which the above-mentioned talk of ‘Īsā (a.s.) refutes. But this verse has nothing to do with intercession — it neither confirms it nor rejects it. Had it wanted to confirm it — in spite of its inconsistency¹ with context — it should have said: If Thou shouldst forgive them, then surely Thou art the Forgiving, the Merciful. And if it wanted to refute it, it should not have mentioned his being a witness for the people. We shall describe in detail this topic later on, Allāh willing.

Looking at what the people said about ‘Īsā (a.s.), we find that they were divided after him into various sects, and disintegrated to perhaps more than seventy denominations. This number looks at fundamental and major divisions only, because minor differences are too numerous to count.

Nevertheless, the Qur’ān concerns itself only with what they say about ‘Īsā (a.s.) and his mother, because it affects the foundation of monotheism which is the only goal to which the Qur’ān calls and the natural straight religion leads. The Book of Allāh is not concerned with other relatively minor points, e.g., the problem of alteration of the Book and that of atonement.

The beliefs which the Qur’ān ascribes to them (or quotes them) are as follows:

¹ Because the situation demands self-abasement, not relaxedness. (*Author’s note*)

1. *and the Christians say: "The Messiah is the son of Allāh" (9:30); And they say: "The Beneficent God has taken to Himself a son" (21:26);*
2. *Certainly they disbelieve who say: "Surely Allāh, is the Messiah, son of Maryam" (5:72);*
3. *Certainly they disbelieve who say: "Surely Allāh is the third of the three" (5:73);*
4. *and say not, Three (4:171).*

Apparently these verses contain different phrases, describe different beliefs. (That is why some people ¹ apply various verses to various sects, for example, the Melkites ² who believe in real sonship; the Nestorians ¹

¹ Like ash-Shahristāni in his *al-Milal wa 'n-niḥal*. (*Author's Note*)

The author has taken these descriptions from ash-Shahristāni (vide *al-Milal wa 'n-niḥal* [Egypt, 1381 A.H. = 1961 C.E.] vol. 1, pp. 220 — 228). But ash-Shahristāni's information is superfluous and apparently based on hear-say; and his comments on Christianity remind one of his flight of fancy regarding Shī'ite faith and its various imaginary branches.

The fact is that almost all the splits in the early Christian Church were centred around the nature and substance of the Christ. It is not the place to go into historical details. Suffice it to say that gradually four groups had come into being about the nature of Jesus Christ:

- a. *Homoousians* who believe that the Son was *of one substance* with the Father; they are called the Orthodox;
- b. *Homoeans* who believed that the Son was *like* the Father; they are called the Arians;
- c. *Homoiousians* who believed that the Son was *of like substance* with the Father; they are called the Semi-Arians;
- d. *Anomoeans* who believed that the Son was *unlike* the Father; they are called Ultra-Arians.

Ultimately the Orthodox (*Homoousians*) prevailed. They say that the Son was of one substance with the Father, and that the Incarnate Christ was a single Person of a doubt nature — Divine and human — at one God and man.

All the sects are united on the "sonship", although they differ in its interpretation. That is why the Qur'ān rejects sonship — and the resulting trinity — to refute the Christians' belief in general. (*tr.*)

² Melkites (or Melchites) were those Christians of Syria and Egypt who, refusing the doctrine of Monophysitism (for its meaning see note no.2 p.152), and accepting the definition of faith of the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.), remained in communion with the Imperial See of Constantinople; hence their

who explain descendance and sonship as radiance of light on a transparent body like crystal; and the Jacobites ² who explain it in the terms of change and transformation, that is, the God was transformed into flesh and blood.)

But evidently the Qur'ān does not look at the peculiarities of their diverse sects. It is concerned only with one belief which is common between all of them — that 'Īsā is the son of God and of one substance with God, with the resulting belief of trinity — although they differ very much in its explanation (which has led to extreme conflicts and discords). That this explanation is correct is supported by the fact that the Qur'ān brings one and the same argument to refute the views of all of them.

It may be explained as follows:

name that means “Emperor’s men”. (ash-Shahristāni thinks that Malka was some individual who started this sect!) They like other Orthodox Christians, believe that the Logo (Word) of God being conjoined with the man Jesus — together called the Christ — was begotten in a non-literal sense by God. They do not believe in physical human-like sonship. Today there are about a million Melkites, most of them belonging to the Patriarchate of Antioch, whose headquarters are at Damascus. (*tr.*)

¹ Nestorians: Followers of Nestorius (*cir.* 380 — 451 C.E.), who was the Patriarch of Constantinople (428 — 431 C.E.). He believed that there were two separate Persons in the Incarnate Christ — that the physical nature of Jesus was separate from his divine one, as opposed to the orthodox doctrine. According to him, it was Jesus the man, who was born of the Virgin Mary. Consequently, he rejected the term, *Theotokos*, (lit., God-bearer; usually translated as “Mother of God”), that was used to refer to Maryam. For this heresy he was anathematized by the Council of Ephesus (431 C.F.). (ash-Shahristāni says that Nestorius lived during the reign of al-Ma'mūn — 813 — 833 C. E. !) (*tr.*)

² Jacobites: The body of the Syrian Monophysites who rejected the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.) on the Person of the Christ. Monophysitism was the doctrine that in the Person of the Incarnate Christ there was but a single, that is, Divine, nature, as opposed to the orthodox belief of a single person of double nature. They were named after Jacob Baradaeus through whom they became the national Church of Syria. They flourished in spite of recurring Imperial persecutions, which led them to welcome the Muslim army when it attacked Syria. Although there were many converts to Islam (*cir.* 640 C.F.), the Jacobite Church continued. The Mongol invasions in 13th and 14th centuries caused their real decline. (*tr.*)

The present Torah and Gospels all together clearly mention the Oneness of Allāh; on the other hand the Gospel clearly mentions the sonship declaring that the Son is the Father and none else.

They do not interpret the postulated sonship in the terms of distinction, honour and excellence, although many verses of the Gospels clearly give this meaning. For example:

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. That you may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” (*Matt.*, 5:44 — 48)¹

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (*Matt.*, 5:16)

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.” (*Matt.*, 6:1)

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.” (*Matt.*, 6:9)

“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” (*Matt.*, 6:14)

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.” (*Luke*, 6:36)

Also he said to Mary Magdalene: “go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God.” (*John*, 20:17)

These and other similar sentences of the Gospels refer to Allāh as the Father of ‘Īsā as well as of others, all in the sense of distinction and honour.

There are some sayings in the Gospels which allude to the union of

¹ The quotations of the Old and New Testaments, here and elsewhere, are from King James version, because the Arabic version (printed in 1811 C.E.) used by the author, conforms to it. (*tr.*)

the Son with the Father. For example:

“These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.” (*John*, 17:1)

Then he went on praying for his disciples and finally said: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (*John*, 17:20 — 23)

However, there are other verses which apparently cannot be explained in the terms of distinction and excellence. For example:

“Thomas saith unto him (i.e., Jesus), Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me.” (*John*, 5:11)

“For I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me.” (*John*, 8:42)

“I and my Father are one.” (*John*, 10:30)

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing¹ them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (*Matt.*, 28:19)

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things

¹ Baptism is a Christian sacrament of initiation into Church by immersing in water or sprinkling water on the head. (*Author's note*)

were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was light of men.” (*John*, 1:1 — 4)

These and similar other statements of the Gospels have led the Christians to the belief of trinity in unity. The belief of trinity is an attempt to reconcile the belief that the Christ is the Son of God with the belief in one God which the Christ himself had taught. For example, *Mark*, 12:29 quotes him as saying: “The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord.”

The believers in the trinity say (although it does not impart any intelligible meaning): God is one substance with three Persons. The word Person denotes an attribute with which a thing appears to others; and the attribute is none other than the thing itself. The three Persons are: The Person of existence, the Person of knowledge, i.e. the Word, and the Person of life, i.e. the Spirit.

These three Persons are the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. The first is the Person of existence; the second, the Person of knowledge (the Word); and the third, the Person of life. The Son who is the Word and the Person of knowledge descended from his Father (i.e. the Person of existence) accompanied by the Holy Ghost (i.e. the Person of Life) that gives light to all things.

Then they differ among themselves in explanation of this vague statement; and ever-occurring conflicts have divided them to more than seventy sects and denominations. We shall mention some of them to the extent that is necessary in the framework of this book.

Think over the above description; then look at what the Qur’ān ascribes to the Christians, or quotes them as saying: and the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of Allāh” (9:30); Certainly they disbelieve who say: “Surely Allāh, He is the Messiah, son of Maryam” (5:72); Certainly they disbelieve who say: “Surely Allāh is the third (Person) of the three” (5:73); and say not, “three”; Desist (4:171). Then you will realize that all these statements point to a single idea, i.e. the trinity in unity which is the common factor of all the sects which sprang up in the Christianity (as we have said above).

Why did the Qur’ān concentrate on this common factor? It was because the same objections apply to all their beliefs regarding ‘Īsā (a.s.) — in spite of their diversity and numerousness. The arguments put by the Qur’ān are applicable to all their interpretations with equal force, as will

be explained later.

4. Argument of the Qur'ān against the Belief of the Trinity

Coming to the belief of trinity, the Qur'ān refutes it in two ways:

First: The general method, i.e. showing that it is impossible for Allāh to take a son for Himself, no matter whether the presumed son be 'Īsā or someone else.

Second: The particular method, i.e. describing that 'Īsā son of Maryam was neither a son of God nor God; that he was but a servant created by Allāh.

First Method: What is the quiddity of sonship and birth? What do these words really mean? A living material thing (like man, animal or vegetable) separates from itself a portion of its own matter, then gradually develops it until it becomes another individual of the same species similar to its parent; the offspring has the same characteristics and traits as the parent body had. An animal separates semen from its body, or a plant removes a seed from itself, then it preserves and grows the semen or seed gradually until it becomes another animal or plant similar to its parent. This is what sonship and birth mean. It is no secret that such a thing is impossible for Allāh:

First: Because it needs a physical material body; and Allāh is far above matter and its concomitants without which matter cannot exist like motion, time, space and other such things.

Second: To Allāh belongs absolute Divinity and Lordship; consequently, He has absolute authority over, and total management of, all things in His hand. Every thing is in need of Him to bring it into existence, and depends on Him for its continuity. It is just impossible to imagine a thing similar to Allāh in “species” — a thing having the identity, attributes and characteristics similar to those of Allāh and independent of Him.

Third: If Allāh could beget or give birth to a son, it would entail graduality of action for Allāh. In other words, He would be governed by the laws of matter and movement; and it is contradiction in term, because whatever takes place by His Will comes into being at once without delay, without graduality.

The above explanations are inferred from the words of Allāh: *And*

they say: “Allāh has taken to Himself a son.” Glory be to Him; rather, whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His, all are obedient to Him. The Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees an affair, He only says to it, “Be”, and it is (2:116 — 117).

As we have explained above, the words, *Glory be to Him*, are a complete proof; the clause, *whatever is in the heavens and the earth is His; all are obedient to Him*, is another proof; and the verse, *The Originator of the heavens and the earth; and when He decrees an affair, He only says to it, “Be”, and it is*, is a third proof.¹

It is also possible to take the clause, *The Originator of the heavens and the earth*, as an allegorical expression in which the attribute of the object has been transferred to the subject. In other words, the clause may denote that the heavens and the earth are original in their creation and design; Allāh has created them without any previous model. Therefore, He cannot beget anyone, otherwise it would be a creation on His own model. (After all, the Christians believe that the Son is one with the Father.) In that case this clause would be an independent proof by itself.

The Christians generally use the sentence, ‘the Messiah is the Son of God’, in a somewhat allegorical sense, and not in its literal meaning. They expand the meaning of sonship. Probably, it means separation of a thing from another of similar quiddity without physical and material division and without graduality. This interpretation may remove the problems of body, materiality and graduality. Yet, the problem of similarity will remain unsolved.

The problem of similarity may be described thus: Evidently, to believe in God the Father and God the Son is to believe in number, in real plurality, even if we suppose that the Father and the Son are one in “species” or quiddity. A human father and his son are one because both have the same quiddity, both belong to the homosapien species; but they are in fact more than one because they are two individual human beings. Now, if we suppose that God is one, then all other things (including the Son) would be “no-God”; they would be owned by God and dependent on Him; consequently the putative son would not be a God like Him. On the other hand, if we suppose a son similar to God, free of, not dependent

¹ The three proofs point to the above-mentioned three arguments respectively. (tr.)

on, Him, then it would invalidate and negate the Oneness of God.

This exposition is found in the following words of Allāh: *and say not, "Three". Desist, it is better for you; Allāh is only one God; far be it from His glory that He should have a son; whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His; and Allāh is sufficient for a Protector (4:171).*

Second Method: ‘Īsā son of Maryam could not be a son of God sharing Godhead with Him, because he was a human being having all the concomitants of humanity.

The Messiah (a.s.) was conceived by Maryam and grew up in her womb; then she brought him forth as women give birth to their children, and brought him up, as a child is brought up by his mother. He grew up proceeding through normal stages: from infancy to childhood, from youth to the middle age. All this time, his condition was like any other normal human being in march of life. He was governed by all normal accidents and conditions undergone by other men. He was hungry and satiated; felt joy and sorrow; was pleased and displeased; affected by delight and pain, comfort and discomfort; he ate and drank, slept and woke up, was tired and rested etc.

This was the condition of ‘Īsā (a.s.) when he was among the people. Doubtlessly a person having such characteristics is just a mortal man like any other member of his species. As such he, like all other human beings, was a creature made by Allāh. Now, let us look at the miracles and supernatural things that happened on his hand, like giving life to dead bodies, creating the birds and healing the blind and leper. Also, there are extraordinary signs related to his birth, that is, his conception without father. All these things are supernatural, against the normal custom which people are familiar with; yet they are unfamiliar because of their rarity, not because they are impossible. There was Adam who by evidence of the heavenly Books was created from dust and had no father. And here are the prophets, for example: Ṣāliḥ, Ibrāhīm and Mūsā (peace be upon them) on whose hand so many miraculous signs had appeared (which are mentioned in revealed scriptures). But nobody thinks that those miracles negated their humanity or proved their divinity.

This method has been used in the verses: *Certainly they disbelieve who say: "Surely Allāh is the third (Person) of the three"; and there is no god but the One God, ... The Messiah, son of Maryam is but an*

apostle; apostles before him have indeed passed away; and his mother was a truthful woman, they both used to eat food. See how We make the signs clear to them, then behold how they are turned away (5:73 — 75).

Eating food has been specially selected for mention in preference to other activities, because it rather more forcefully proves his materiality and shows his neediness and wants, which cannot be combined with Godhead. Obviously, a person who by his nature feels hunger and thirst and satisfies it with a morsel of food and a cup of water, is nothing but an embodiment of poverty and need — a need that cannot be removed without help of some extraneous agent. How can such a man be God? What is the meaning of such divinity? A man surrounded by needs, depending for their fulfilment on something outside his own being, is deficient in himself, and managed by some other than himself. He cannot be self-sufficient god; rather he shall be a creature who is looked after by the Lord the Lord Who has His creatures' affairs in His Own Hand. The verse 5:17 may possibly be explained in this light: *Certainly they disbelieve who say: "Surely Allāh He is the Messiah, son of Maryam". Say: "Who then could control any thing as against Allāh when He wished to destroy the Messiah son of Maryam and his mother and all those on the earth?" And Allāh's is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and what is between them; He creates what He pleases; and Allāh has power over all things.*

The same is the case with the verse (coming after 5:75 quoted above) addressing the Christians: *Say: "Do you worship besides Allāh that which does not control for you any harm, or any profit?" And Allāh — He is the Hearing, the Knowing (5:76).*

The basis and theme of such arguments is this: 'Īsā (a.s.), as is seen from his condition and affairs, lived according to, and was governed by, the natural law which permeates a man's life. He had all the attributes, did all the deeds, and underwent all the conditions which a human being does; like eating, drinking, fulfilling all other human needs, showing all characteristics of the human race. Also this material involvement, these physical attributes were real; not an illusion or imagination. 'Īsā (a.s.), was a real man who had those natural attributes, conditions and actions. The Gospels contain many verses in which he calls himself man and son of man; are full of the stories of his eating, drinking, sleeping, walking, travelling, tiring, speaking and many such things which cannot be

explained away, nor can they be interpreted otherwise. This being the case, the position of the Messiah would be the same as that of other human beings; he did not own or control any affair of the others, and he could be destroyed like others.

The same is the implication of his prayers and invocations; no doubt that he worshipped Allāh, his intention being to reach nearer to Allāh, with humbleness and humility to the sublimity and majesty of Allāh; certainly it was not for the purpose of teaching others how to pray or for any other such aim.

The verse 4:172 arguing against ‘Īsā’s supposed divinity points to his prayer. Allāh says: The Messiah does by no means disdain that he should be a servant of Allāh, nor do the angels who are near to Him, and whoever disdains His worship and is proud, He will gather them all together to Himself. ‘Īsā’s service and worship is the first and foremost proof that he was not God and that he had no share in Godhead which is reserved for the One other than him. How can a man put himself in the position of servitude to himself? How can he be the slave of himself? How can a thing be self-sufficient in the same framework in which it is dependent on someone else? The answer is clear: In no way.

Likewise, the worship of the angels clearly shows that they are not Allāh’s daughters. Nor is the Holy Ghost a God, because they all are worshippers of Allāh and obedient to Him. Allāh says: *And they say: “The Beneficent God has taken to Himself a son.” Glory be to Him. Nay! they are honoured servants; they do not precede Him in speech and (only) according to His commandment do they act. He knows what is before them and what is behind them, and they do not intercede except for him whom He approves, and for fear of Him they tremble (21:26 — 28).*

Moreover, the Gospels contain verses showing that the Spirit or Ghost is obedient to Allāh and His messengers, following their commands, acting on their orders. There is no sense in saying that a thing orders itself or obeys itself, or that it accepts and acts on the orders of its own creatures (i.e., messengers).

In the same way as ‘Īsā’s worship of Allāh proves that ‘Īsā was not Allāh, his call to the people to worship Allāh proves it; as the verse points to it: *Certainly they disbelieve who say: “Surely Allāh, He is the Messiah, son of Maryam ”; and the Messiah said: “O Children of*

Israel! worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord, surely whoever associates (others) with Allāh, then Allāh has forbidden to him the garden, and his abode is the fire; and there shall be no helpers for the unjust'' (5:72). The method of argument used in this verse is self-evident.

Although the Gospels do not contain such comprehensive sentence as, “*worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord*”, they are full of his sayings calling people to Allāh and to His worship; he repeatedly declares that Allāh is his Lord in Whose Hand is the management of his affairs; he openly says that Allāh is the Lord of the people; and never invites them to his own worship — in spite of his reported saying: “I and my Father are one” (*John*, 10:30). If we accept that it is a correct reporting, then, all things taken together, it must mean: my obedience is Allāh’s obedience; thus, it shall have the same connotation as the verse of the Qur’ān: *Whoever obeys the Messenger, he indeed obeys Allāh* (4:80).

5. ‘Īsā is An Intercessor, not A Redeemer

The Christians believe that Jesus Christ atoned for their sins with his blood; and that is why they call him the Redeemer, the Saviour. They explain this belief as follows:

“Adam disobeyed Allāh by partaking of the forbidden tree; it was a sin which remained with Adam, and it is inherited by his progeny who come into this world burdened with that original sin; and the recompense of sin is punishment in the next world, the eternal perdition, the everlasting ruin — which cannot be warded off. And Allāh is Merciful and Just — both at the same time.

“This situation created a knotty problem which defied all solutions: If Allāh were to punish Adam and his progeny for their sin, it would have been against the mercy for which He had created them; and if He were to forgive them, it would have been against His Justice. Justice demands that a sinner should be punished for his sins and errors, just as a good-doer and obedient person should be rewarded for his good deeds.¹

¹ That is what most of the Christians believe. But some of them, like Bishop Mār Ishāq, say that there is no difficulty if one refrains from inflicting a threatened punishment. In other words, it is all right not to fulfil a threat, although one is not allowed to break a promise of reward. (*Author’s Note*)

Bishop Mār Ishāq’s view has been taken from ash-Shahristāni’s *al-Milal wa ‘n-niḥal*, pp. 223 — 224. (*tr.*)

“This problem remained unsolved until Allāh solved it through Christ. Christ — the Son of God who was Himself God — entered the womb of a descendant of Adam, that is, the Virgin Maryam, and was born from her as a human being is born. In this way, he was a complete man, because he was a son of man; and at the same time, was a complete God, because he was the Son of God.

“And the Son of God, being God Himself, was sinless and protected from every sin and error.

“He lived among his people for sometime, mixing and dealing with them; he joined them in eating and drinking, talked and walked with them and befriended them. Thereafter he surrendered to his enemies enabling them to kill him the worst killing — killing by crucifixion, because one who is crucified is, according to the Divine Scriptures, cursed by God.

“He took upon Himself the Divine curse and crucifixion, with all the condemnations, sufferings and chastisement which it entails. In this way he redeemed the people through his sacrifice, in order that they might be saved from the chastisement of the hereafter and the eternal perdition. Thus, he is the atonement for the sins of the believers, nay, for the sins of the whole world.”¹ This is what the Christians believe.

The Christians have made this theory (i.e., the crucifixion and atonement) the foundation of their religion. It is the Alpha and Omega of their call and mission — in the same manner as the Qur’ān has founded the Islam and its mission on monotheism; as Allāh says addressing His Messenger (s.a.w.a.): *Say: “This is my way: I invite (you) unto Allāh: with clear sight (are) I and he who follows me; and glory be to Allāh; and I am not of the polytheists”* (12:108).

It is the Christians’ belief in spite of the fact that Christ (as the Gospels clearly say, and we have mentioned earlier) used to admonish them first of all to believe in one God and to love Him.

The Muslims as well as many non-Muslims have shown the Christians the defects and invalidities of the above-mentioned belief of

¹ “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ — the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John, 2:1 — 2) (*Author’s Note*)

Christianity. Countless books and booklets have been written and numerous pamphlets and articles published, showing that this theory is not only contrary to logic and reason, but is also contradictory to the Books of the Old and the New Testaments. What we are concerned with here — and what comes within the purview of this book of ours — is to show how this idea is opposed to the basic Qur’ānic teachings, and to explain the difference between intercession (as confirmed by the Qur’ān) and atonement (as claimed by the Christians).

Moreover, the Qur’ān clearly says that it talks with the people explaining the things in such a way as to bring it to the level of their understanding, to make it easier for them to grasp its realities. It explains what helps them to distinguish the truth from the falsehood, so that they may accept that and reject this. It enables him to differentiate between virtue and evil, between beneficial and harmful, so that he may take the one and leave the other. The fact that the Qur’ān keeps in view the level of the healthy reason and understanding is abundantly clear to all who study the Divine Book.

Now let us have a critical look at the above mentioned Christian theory of atonement:

First: They say that Adam committed a sin by eating from the forbidden tree. But the Qur’ān refutes this idea in two ways:

1. The said prohibition was not like a binding order given by a master to his slave; it was only an advisory counsel aiming at the good of the person so advised — in order that he may live more comfortably. Such an advice does not bring any judicial reward or punishment whether one acts upon it or ignores it. It is not different from the order or prohibition of an advisor to the one who seeks his advice, or the directions given by a physician to his patient. What happens in such situations is this. If the person concerned acts upon the advice, he achieves what is good and beneficial to him in this life; and if he neglects such advice, he may come to harm in this world. When Adam ate from the forbidden tree, the only harm he suffered was his removal from the Garden, and thus he lost the comfort and happiness he had been enjoying there. But there was no question at all of any punishment of hereafter, because he had not disobeyed any compulsory legislative order which could have resulted in “punishment”. (For detail, see the Commentary of the verses 2:35 —

39).¹

2. Adam (a.s.) was a prophet: The Qur’ān clearly says that the prophets were sinless; they were protected by Allāh from committing sins and transgressing the “orders” of Allāh. Logical reasons support this belief and the Qur’ān proves it. (See our discourse on the sinlessness of the prophets given in the Commentary of the verse 2:213).²

Second: They say that the said sin remained with Adam. But the Qur’ān rejects this idea when it says: *Then his (Adam’s) Lord chose him, so He turned to him (with mercy) and guided (him) (20:122); Then Adam received (some) words from his Lord, so He turned to -hiim mercifully; surely He is Oft-returning (to mercy), the Merciful (2:37).* The reason also supports, nay, proves it. Retribution of sin is a frightening and formidable thing which the reason — or the master — thinks necessary for him who disobeys the command or shows obstinacy; it is from fear of punishment that legislations and laws are obeyed. Had there been no reward and punishment, the mastership could not be enforced and no order or prohibition would be obeyed. The master has the right and power to punish the sinners for their sins as well as to give rewards to the obedient ones for their obedience. Likewise, it lies within his power to exercise his discretion in a way he thinks fit, within the jurisdiction of his mastership. He has every right to pass over and overlook the disobedience and mistakes of wrong-doers by forgiving and pardoning them their sins and wrongs. This power of forgiveness is a part of management and rule as much as is the authority to mete out punishment. There is no doubt in any mind that forgiveness and pardon, in certain cases, is good and commendable when the forgiver has full power to punish; even today reasonable persons practise it and put it into effect. In this background, there is no reason why a wrong done by a man should remain attached to him forever. Otherwise, forgiveness and pardon would have no meaning at all. One forgives and pardons for erasing a mistake, for nullifying the effect of a sin; and if we say that the mistake and sin remains attached and cannot be removed, then forgiveness and pardon are meaningless. Moreover, the Divine Revelation is full of descriptions of forgiveness and pardon; also the Old and New Testaments speak of it.

¹ Vide *al-Mīzān* [Engl. transl.], vol. 1, pp.178 — 213. (*pub.*)

² *ibid.*, vol.3, pp.195 — 204. (*pub.*)

Not only that, even the afore-mentioned “Christian dogma” speaks about it. In short, the claim that a certain sin or mistake had been attached to a man, which could not be erased or forgiven even after repentance and expression of sorrow, even after returning to the Lord with sincerity, is a thing which no reason would accept, nor would any straight thinking person agree with.

Third: They say that the sin of Adam has remained attached not only to him but even to his progeny upto the Day of Resurrection. It means that the punishment of a crime of one person was extended to the others too who had no hand in that sin. In other words, a slave commits a sin and the master widens the circle of punishment to include even those who were in no way connected with that sin! (We are not speaking about a situation where someone had committed a sin and his descendants were pleased with his action; because in that case all would be counted as sinners.) What the Christians say puts the burden of sin on those who had nothing to do with that supposed sin. And the Qur’ān rejects it when it says: *That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another: and that there is not for man (aught) except what he strives for* (53:38 — 39). Sound reason supports this dictum, because it is an evil to penalize someone for a sin he has not committed. (Vide the discourse on the “Deeds”, under the verses 2:216 — 218.)¹

Fourth: Their argument is based on a misconception that every mistake and sin — without any exception — throws the man into eternal perdition. In other words, sins do not differ in size and magnitude — all are great and capital. But the Qur’ān teaches us that the sins and errors are of various categories: some are great, others small; some may be forgiven, others like polytheism shall not be forgiven except after repentance. Allāh says: *If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden, We will expiate from you your (small) sins and cause you to enter an honourable (place of) entering* (4:31); *Surely Allāh does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases* (4:48). Thus Allāh has taught us that some of the forbidden things, that is, sins and mistakes, are great, and others are, by implication, small; some are not forgivable while others are forgiven. In any case, sins vary in their seriousness, and not

¹ Vide *al-Mīzān* [Engl. transl.], vol. 3, pp. 239 — 278. (*tr.*)

every sin puts the sinner in eternal perdition or everburning fire.

Reason also refuses to lump all sins together, to put all mistakes in one category. A slap on face is different from murder; a lustful eye and fornication are not one; and so on. Never in the long human history have people treated all sins and errors alike. Sane persons in every age have prescribed different punishments for different crimes. How can it be possible to bracket all sins together without any discrimination, when there is so clear difference among them? In view of this accepted difference, only a few of them may cause eternal perdition, never-ending chastisement (for example) associating others with Allāh, as the Qur’ān has said: Obviously going against the prohibition of partaking of a tree cannot be put in the category of disbelief in Allāh or polytheism or things like that. Thus there is no reason why it should cause an eternal punishment. (Vide the above-mentioned discourse on Deeds).

Fifth: Let us look at what they have said about the problem of the conflict between the Divine attributes of mercy and justice; how a plan was devised to overcome that difficulty; and how Christ came down and then ascended to heaven to effect that scheme — with all the ramifications they have mentioned.

Ponder on this statement and its concomitants, and see what type of god they believe in. Here you will find a Creator God Who is the beginning and the end of this created universe and all its components. But all His actions emanate from a will and a knowledge which are found in Him; and His will depends on an academic preference — in the same way as a man opts for a course of action after weighing its pros and cons according to his knowledge. Likewise, God ponders on the positive and negative sides of a thing and then decides whether to do it or not. Sometimes He makes a wrong choice and repents for it ¹; at other times He meditates upon a problem without finding its correct solution; often He remains unaware of many affairs. In short, in their eyes, God in His attributes and actions is not different from a man. Whatever He does, He does it after thinking and meditating over it, directing His endeavours to the advantages of that action. His decision is thus governed and controlled by some extraneous factors, that is, the said advantages. He

¹ “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” (Gen., 6:6). (*Author’s Note*)

may find His way to the correct decision; also He may take a wrong decision; there may be error, misunderstanding or forgetfulness in the course He has taken. Sometimes He knows, at other times He does not; often He overpowers, and frequently is Himself overpowered. His power, like His knowledge, is limited. When all this is believed about Him, then it should be equally possible for Him to be subjected to all the conditions which prevail in a human being who decides to do a work after pondering on its pros and cons: God will thus experience joy and grief, vainglory and shame, happiness and sorrow — and things like that. Needless to say that such a being would be a physical and material one, governed by the laws of movement, change and gradual completion. A thing having these attributes must be a transient being, a created thing; it cannot be the Self-existing God Who is the Creator of all things.

If you study the Old and New Testaments, you will know that all that we have said above is true; and that they believe in a god who has a body and has all the attributes found in a body, and especially in a man.

As for the Qur'ān, it declares the Lord's glory in all these matters, showing that He is far above such myths and superstitions, as it says: *Glory be to Allāh (for freedom) from what they describe (37:159)*. We have many incontestable rational proofs to show that Allāh is One in Whom all the attributes of perfection are united. His are the existence without any hint of inexistence, absolute power without any shade of weakness, all-encompassing knowledge without any taint of ignorance, absolute life without any possibility of death or destruction. This being the case, there can never come any change in His existence, power, knowledge or life.

Consequently, He cannot be a body or a thing related to body, because body and the things connected to it are surrounded by change and alteration, subdued by incorporeality, neediness and shortcomings. As He is not a body, nor related to body, He is not subjected to varying circumstances or changing conditions; He is far above forgetfulness or obliviousness, mistake or repentance, undecidedness or uncertainty, reaction or despondency, weakness or defeat — and things like that. We have fully explained the rational arguments (related) to these topics in this book in relevant places; those who want a thorough study should look for them under relevant verses.

A discerning reader may easily judge between the two beliefs: Here is

the Qur'ān, declaring the glory of the Lord of the universe; it affirms for Him every attribute of perfection, and asserts His freedom from every imperfection; and declares that He is too great to be comprehended by our understanding — beset as it is by limitations and imperfections. And there are the Old and New Testaments describing God in terms which can only be found in the Greek, Indian and Chinese mythologies of the ancient times; and ascribing to Him such things which primitive man imagined and which his superstition led him to believe.

Sixth: They say that Allāh sent His Son, Christ, and told him to enter into the womb of a woman — in order that he could be born a man while he was a god. It is the same unintelligible theory which has been strongly refuted by the Qur'ān; there is no need to repeat here the earlier-explained Qur'ānic arguments against it.

Also the reason does not support this theory. First look at the attributes which are essential for the Self-existing Being. His existence is eternal, without beginning or end; there can be no change in Him; His existence knows no limit; He encompasses everything, but Himself is above the limits of time, space and their concomitants. Then think over the creation of man from the time he was a sperm to the stage when it is a foetus in a womb — no matter which interpretation you accept for this human birth of god: that of the Melchites, or the Nestorians, or the Jacobites or some other groups. In the end you will have to admit that there is no relationship between a thing that has a physical body with all its accidents and concomitants and a Being that has neither a body nor any of its concomitants or accidents (like time, space, movement etc.). How can one even think of unity between the two in any way?

The fact is that this theory does not agree with self-evident rational propositions. That is why St. Paul and other leaders of Christianity hold philosophy in contempt and spurn and disdain rational arguments. St. Paul writes: “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? ... For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified.” (Epistle of Paul, ch. 1) ¹

¹ I Corinthians, 1:19 — 23. (*tr.*)

We find a lot of pronouncements — in similar vein — in his as well as in others' writings. This line was adopted only for propagation of their ideas and missionary activities. Anyone pondering on these epistles and books and studying the way they address the people may easily understand the motive behind it.

The above discourse also exposes the flaw in their statement that: “God is sinless and protected from sins and errors.” The God they have imagined is not safe from errors at all; He errs in His perceptions and He errs in His actions. Of course, He does not disobey anyone because none is superior to Him. That is why the question of sin and disobedience does not arise at all, so far as God is concerned. Consequently, it is irrelevant, nay, unimaginable, to say that He is “protected from sins”.

Seventh: They say that God became man and then lived with his people as a man lives in society until he surrendered to his enemies.

It means that the Self-existent God may acquire for Himself some properties especially reserved for transient and incorporeal creatures — only then He can be God and man all at the same time. If so, then He can also become any of His other creatures; He may acquire for Himself the reality of any of the species created by Him. One day He may appear as a man, the next day as a horse; sometimes as a bird, at other times as an insect, and so on. He may even acquire more than one reality at a time, that is, He may come to this world as a combination of several species, for example, He may appear as perfect man and perfect horse and perfect insect, all at the same time.

Likewise, He may do any action done by His creatures — because He may appear as a certain species and then would do the actions reserved for that species. Going a step further, it would be possible for Him to do two opposite things together like justice and injustice, or to acquire opposite attributes for Himself, for example, knowledge and ignorance, power and lack of power, life and death, want and freedom from want. Glory be to Allāh Who is far above such absurdities! (This snag is different from the one explained in the Sixth Objection.)

Eighth: They say that he suffered until he was crucified and took upon himself the curse, because a crucified person is cursed. What do they really mean when they say that he took the curse upon himself? What is the meaning of curse? In common usage and language curse means removal from Divine Mercy and Honour. Does that supposed

curse imply the same meaning? Or is it something else? If it has the same meaning which is known to the language and common usage, then how can God remove Himself from His own mercy? Or, how can anyone else remove Him away from His own mercy? What is mercy? It is a positive bestowal, a grant of favours and bounties, a bequeathal of especialities of existence. When one is cursed — taken away from Divine Mercy — it results in poverty, disgrace or effects like that — in this world or the next or in both. This being the case, what is the sense of saying that God was effected by curse? Choose any meaning for curse, it cannot apply to God — the God Who is Self-sufficient and fulfils the needs of everything.

The Qur'ānic teaching is diametrically opposed to this truly amazing theory of the New Testament. Allāh says: *O men! you are the ones who stand in need of Allāh, and Allāh is He Who is Self-sufficient, the Praised One (35:15)*. Also the names and attributes of Allāh mentioned in the Qur'ān make it clear that it is impossible for any type of need or want, shortcoming or defect, loss or extinction, evil or abomination, disgrace or stigma to reach the sublime majesty of Allāh.

Poser: God suffered disgrace and took the curse upon Himself only because He became one with man. Otherwise, He in His own Self is too high to be affected by such things.

Reply: Did God, by becoming one with man, take upon Himself that curse and those sufferings in real sense of the word? Or, was it all just a metaphor, only an allegory? If it was in real sense, our objection stands. And if it was only in a metaphorical sense, then the original “problem” would remain unsolved; the birth of Christ would not solve the conflict between Divine Mercy and Divine Justice. If it was not God — but someone else — who suffered all those indignities and curse — the so-called scheme of atonement would remain unfulfilled. Obviously, the said plan was based on the idea that God Himself should be the ransom for human beings.

Ninth: They say that ‘Īsā atoned for the sins of the believers, nay, for the sins of the whole world. This talk shows that they do not understand the real meaning of sin and error, nor do they comprehend how the sins bring the next world’s punishment, or how that punishment is affected. Also, they have not grasped the relationship between sins and errors on

one side and Divine Legislation on the other, nor do they know the stand of the *sharī'ah* about it. But the Qur'ān clearly describes all these things and teaches us these realities — as we have explained in the Commentaries of verses 2:26 (*Surely Allāh is not ashamed to set forth any parable ...*) and 2:213 (*Mankind was but one nation...*). We have described there that the orders and laws (which might be the subject of disobedience) and the sins and errors all are mentally posited things based on subjective consideration. They have been made for the protection of society's welfare; and the punishment of its disobedience is the unpleasant result which has been prescribed with a single aim in view — to discourage and prevent a responsible man from indulging into sin, from disobeying the law. This is the view of the sages who have laid the foundation of human society.

But the Qur'ānic teaching leads us to a still higher level in this respect (and the rational reasoning supports it, as we have explained). It says that when a man obeys the *sharī'ah* prescribed for him by Allāh, his psyche acquires some noble and praiseworthy inner traits; and if he disobeys the said *sharī'ah*, he acquires unworthy, hideous and evil traits. It is these deeply ingrained traits and characteristics which prepare for him the rewards or punishments of the next life, respectively. That reward and punishment is represented by the Paradise and the Hell, respectively — and their respective reality is nearness to Allāh or distance from Him. Thus the merit and demerit of deeds are based on things which actually exist and have a system. Unlike our social laws they are not based on any imaginary thing emanating from subjective consideration.

Also it is not a secret that the Divine Legislation perfects and completes the Divine Creation. It brings the creative guidance to its final destination. In other words, Allāh brings every thing to the perfections of its existence, to the final goal of its being. And among the perfections of human existence are a good social system in this world, and a happy, bounteous life in the hereafter. The way to that perfection is religion which enacts and promulgates laws for society's reform and development, and contains d'rections for reaching nearer to Allāh (and these directives are called acts of worship). When a man follows the laws of religion, his life and livelihood are improved, and his soul becomes ready to receive Allāh's bounties; and he is qualified — in his self and in

his actions — for the Divine Honour in the hereafter. All of this emanates from the light put in his heart, and the purity that is found in his self. This in short is the reality.

Man gets nearer to Allāh or goes far away from Him. This nearness and distance are the foundations of his eternal happiness and unhappiness, respectively — and also for his social development (or otherwise) in this life. And religion is the only factor that brings about his nearness and distance. All these are real things, not based on imaginary assumptions or subjective considerations.

Now suppose that one putative sin of Adam — his partaking of the forbidden tree — brought eternal perdition on him, and not only on him, but on all his descendants also; and that there was no remedy for it, no relief from that ruination — except atonement through Christ. Then what was the use of sending religion — any religion — before Christ? And what was the use of ordaining it with Christ? And what is the use of promulgating it after Christ?

Let us put it this way: Eternal perdition and punishment in hereafter was a firmly-decreed fate of man — because of the said sin; it could not be removed or averted from him either through good deeds or through repentance; the only effective remedy was the atonement through Christ's suffering and crucifixion. Then why did Allāh promulgate the laws, revealed the books, and sent the prophets and messengers? What was the sense behind all this exercise? Were not all those promises and threats, all those good tidings and warnings devoid of truth? What could all those endeavours avail mankind when the whole species was doomed to perdition, and when eternal punishment was their firmly-decreed fate?

Also, suppose there were people who perfected themselves by sincerely following the previous *sharī'ah* (and there were countless prophets and also men of God in previous *ummah* who were like that, for example, the honoured prophets Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and others); they lived perfectly and died before the time of atonement. Now what would you say about them? Did they end their life in infelicity and perdition? Or in felicity and happiness? What did they face when they met death and went to the next world? Did death bring them to chastisement and ruination? Or to Divine bounties and happy life?

Moreover, Christ clearly says that he was sent only to save the sinners and wrong-doers, and that good-doers and righteous have no need

of such help.¹

Frankly speaking, no valid reason can be given for promulgating the Divine Laws, for ordaining the religious values — before the supposed atonement was affected through Christ; it was but a vain, senseless and aimless exercise. Nor can any good and correct reason be advanced for this “strange” action of God. The only thing that can be said is this:

God knew very well that, unless the problem of Adam’s sin was solved, no law promulgated by Him would do any good. Yet He went on promulgating those laws just to be on safe side, hoping that one of these days He would get a chance to solve this problem and then He would be able to harvest the fruits of those legislation! Thus He legislated the laws and promulgated them through the prophets — hiding the truth from the prophets and their people alike. He did not tell them that there was a big problem which — if it remained unsolved — would nullify all the efforts of the whole group of the prophets and the believers, and which would render all the laws ineffective and useless. On the contrary, He pretended that the legislations and the prophetic missions were very serious, very important and very real things.

Thus God deceived the people, and deceived Himself too. He deceived the people by promising that their safety and happiness was guaranteed if they faithfully followed the *sharī’ah*. And He deceived Himself because, once the atonement was affected, legislation of the *sharī’ah* would become irrelevant, without having any effect on the people’s felicity — in the same way as it was without any effect as long as the problem of Adam’s sin was not solved. This was the case before affectation of the said atonement.

Coming to the time when atonement was affected, and to the later days, ineffectiveness and futility of the *sharī’ah*, of prophetic mission and of Divine Guidance is much more self-evident. What is the use or benefit of believing in divinely-sent realities and doing good deeds now that the problem of the original sin has been solved, and the atonement has brought forgiveness and mercy to all men, believers and unbelievers,

¹ “But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke, 5:30 — 32)
(*Author’s Note*)

righteous and unrighteous, all alike, without any difference between the most impeccable righteous one and the most incorrigible impious one: Both were to suffer eternal perdition when the original sin was not redeemed and both are to share in the Divine Mercy now that it has been redeemed through the said atonement. (Remember that no good deed could remove that stigma, if there were no atonement.)

Objection: The atonement would benefit only those who believe in Christ. Therefore, the prophetic mission did have its use and benefit, as Christ has said in the Gospel.¹

Reply: First of all, it contradicts the saying of St. John referred to earlier. Secondly, it destroys all the edifice built so far, because nobody — right from Adam to the Last Day — would enter the sanctuary of safety and deliverance except a very small group, that is, those who believe in Christ and the Holy Ghost; and not even all the Christians but only a certain group among all those widely differing denominations — all other denominations would be thrown into eternal perdition. I wish I knew what would happen to the honoured prophets (who came) before Christ, and to the believers of their *ummah* ! What would be the status of their mission, of the books they brought and of the wisdom they taught? Was it true? Or just a lie? The Gospels verify the Torah and its mission, and there is no mention at all of the Ghost and the atonement in the Torah. Does the Gospel verify a true book? Or does it verify a pack of lies?

Poser: As we know, the previously revealed books give the good tidings of Christ. This was a sort of a general call by them towards Christ, although they did not give any detail about his coming and atoning the sin. God was always telling His prophets about the advent of Christ in order that they might believe in him and be happy with what he would do.

Reply: First: To make such claims for the prophets before Mūsā is to shoot in the dark, to venture into *terra incognita*. Moreover, if there was

¹ “Also I say unto you, whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God.” (Luke, 12:8 — 9)
(*Author’s Note*)

any good news, it was not an invitation to believe in, and follow, him. Secondly, that good tidings does not solve the problem of futility of the *sharī'ah*; if Christ delivered all those who believed in him, then was it not useless and futile to invite people to follow the laws of the *sharī'ah* and to practise good ethics and morality? Even Christ exhorted people to follow the rules of religion and be of good conduct; and the Gospels are full of his sermons to this effect. Thirdly, the basic problem still remains. They had talked about the original sin and the unfulfilment of the Divine Purpose, and that purpose is still unfulfilled. God had created mankind to bestow His mercy on all of them, to cover all of them with His favour and bounties, felicity and happiness. But what is the result? Almost all of them — with the exception of a small group — are going to be punished, suffering under the wrath of God, thrown into eternal perdition.

These are just a few of the rational reasons showing the absurdity and invalidity of this theory. The Qur'ān too supports these reasons. Allāh says: *Our Lord is He Who gave to everything its creation, then guided it (to its goal) (20:50)*. He has made it clear that everything is guided to its goal and to what its existence demands. The guidance is of two kinds: creative and legislative. It is the established way of Allāh to bestow every relevant guidance on everything, and it includes the religious guidance bestowed on man.

Then Allāh says — and it is the first religious guidance given to Adam and those who were sent down with him from the Garden: *We said: "Get down you therefrom all together; if there comes to you a guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, no fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve, And (as to) those who disbelieve in and belie our signs, they are the inmates of the fire, in it they shall abide"* (2:38 — 39). It gives in a nut-shell what various laws were to promulgate in detail upto the Day of Resurrection; it contains legislation as well as promise and threat — all in clear terms without ambiguity. Again He says: *... and the truth do I speak (38:84); The word is not changed with Me, nor am I in the least unjust to the servants (50:29)*. Allāh declares that He has no hesitation or misgiving about what He decides, He does not break what He has joined; whatever He decides, He enforces; and what He says, He enacts; His action does not deviate from the line He has prescribed for it. He does not waver or hesitate when He wills; nor is it befitting to His knowledge that He should intend a thing

and then some demerit should appear in that course of action which He did not know before and thus He should decide not to do it. Nor can anyone else hinder His plan: It is not that He should will a thing, deciding to do it and then some rational defect should prevent Him from doing it, or some snag should appear in its execution and He should abandon the plan — because all such things, if they ever happened, would show helplessness of God. Allāh says: *and Allāh is predominant over His affairs* (12:21); *surely Allāh attains His purpose* (65:3); and Mūsā is reported as saying: *The knowledge thereof is with my Lord in a book: errs not my Lord, nor does He forget* (20:52); and Allāh says about the Day of Judgment: *This day every soul shall be rewarded for what it has earned; no injustice (shall be done) this day; surely Allāh is quick in reckoning* (40:17).

These and similar other verses clearly show that Allāh, after creating His creatures, has not neglected to look after their affairs, nor is He ignorant of what they would do, nor is He sorry for what He has done. As He is constantly looking after their welfare, He has ordained for them His laws — a serious and important legislation which He has ordained not because He is afraid of something or expects to gain something through it. He shall reward every doer for his action — if good, then good; and if evil, then evil. In all these affairs nobody can overpower Him, nor can anyone impose his will on Him — because He has no partner or colleague. There will be neither any ransom nor any redemption to save anyone; nor can anyone intercede for someone without Allāh's permission. Because all such propositions are against His absolute ownership which He has over His creatures.

Tenth: Let us look at the story of atonement. What is atonement or ransom? A man — or a thing related to him — is involved in some crimes or sin, as a result of which he faces the possibilities of harm or destruction of life or valuable property; and therefore he offers something less important in order to save his life or the more valuable property. A man taken prisoner redeems himself with offer of some money; crimes are redeemed with money paid as fine. The thing given for this purpose is called ransom, fine or redemption. Atonement, in short, is a deal which transfers the right of the claimant from the person so redeemed to the thing given in ransom or redemption — and thus the redeemed one is saved from captivity or from the evil consequences of the crime he had

committed.

This description shows that atonement and redemption is simply unimaginable in the matters related to Allāh. The Divine Authority — unlike human authority which is merely an abstracted idea, a subjective consideration — is the real authority which cannot be changed or transferred. Things, in their species and with their effects, actions and reactions, have been created by Allāh and continue to exist because of Him. It is a reality, a fact; and reality and fact cannot change into non-reality, non-fact. Such a proposition cannot be imagined — let alone its ever coming into being. Allāh’s ownership, authority and rights are not like those of us human beings. We are bound with social norms and laws. Our social rights, authority and ownership are merely subjective considerations, abstracted ideas based on our imaginations; their status and worth is in our own hands; we may establish a right today and abolish it tomorrow — as our interest and outlook change concerning our life and livelihood. For details see Commentaries of the verses 1:4 (*the Master of the Day of Judgment*)¹, and 3:26 (*Say: ‘O Allāh, Master of the Kingdom ...’*)².

Allāh has specifically refuted the idea of atonement in the following verse: *So today ransom shall not be accepted from you nor from those who disbelieved; your abode is the fire (57:15)*. And as explained earlier, the same is the import of the words of the Messiah quoted by Allāh in the Qur’ān: *And when Allāh will say: ‘O ‘Īsā son of Maryam! did you say to men, ‘Take me and my mother for two gods besides Allāh’’, he will say: ‘Glory be to Thee, it did not befit me that I should say what I had no right to (say); ... I did not say to them save that what Thou didst enjoin me with: ‘That worship Allāh, my Lord and your Lord’, and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them, but when Thou didst take me (away) completely, Thou wert the watcher over them, and Thou art witness of all things. If Thou shouldst chastise them, then surely they are The servants; and if Thou shouldst forgive them, then surely Thou art the Mighty, the Wise’’ (5:116 — 118)*. His words: *“and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them ...”*, have the following import: ‘I had nothing to do with them except what Thou hadst entrusted me to do, that

¹ Vide *al-Mīzān* [Engl. transl.], vol. 1, pp. 29 — 31. (*pub.*)

² *ibid.*, vol. 5, pp. 193 — 202. (*pub.*)

is, conveying Thy message to them and being a witness over them — as long as I was among them; whether Thou shouldst chastise them or shouldst forgive them, entirely depends on Thy discretion; I have nothing to do with it. I do not have any authority on Thy will, with which I could save them from Thy chastisement or sentence them to punishment.’

It clearly refutes the idea of ransom and atonement. Had there been any ransoming or redeeming, it would have been wrong for him to wash his hands of the fate of his *ummah*, telling Allāh that it was His (Allāh’s) discretion whether to punish them or forgive them, and that he (‘Īsā — a.s.) had nothing to do with it.

Of similar connotation are the following verses:

And be on your guard against the Day when one soul shall not avail another in the least, neither shall intercession on its behalf be accepted, nor shall any compensation be taken from it, nor shall they be helped (2:48).

... before the day comes in which there is no bargaining, neither any friendship nor intercession ... (2:254).

The day on which you will turn back retreating; there shall be no saviour for you from Allāh ... (40:33).

Obviously, the “compensation” (in the first verse), the “bargaining” (of the second) and the “saviour” (of the third) all apply to the idea of atonement and redemption; the verses in refuting these things refute the belief of atonement.

Of course, the Qur’ān accepts the Messiah as one of the intercessors — but not as an atonement. We have explained about “Intercession” under the verse 2:48 (*And be on your guard against the day when one soul shall not avail another...*)¹. We have explained there that intercession shows the nearness of the intercessor and his good standing with the master, without there being any transfer of authority from the master to the intercessors; without affecting in any way the ownership or power of the master; without nullifying or abrogating the master’s commandment which the sinner had disobeyed; and without negating the system of recompense, reward and punishment. Intercession is but a sort of prayer and request by the intercessor that the master — in this case, the Lord — should manage the affairs of His creature with mercy. The

¹ *ibid.*, vol.1, pp.221 — 265. (pub.)

intercessor accepts the Master's right to punish the sinner (because he had sinned and the law of recompense makes him liable to punishment), but asks the Master to exercise His power of forgiveness — because He has the right to forgive as He has the right to punish.

The intercessor thus requests the Master to exercise His right of pardon and forgiveness, when the sinner has become liable for punishment, without in any way affecting the Master's ownership or authority. But atonement is something else; it is a deal, a bargain, which transfers the Master's authority from the sinner to the ransom given in his place, and removes the sinner from the Master's power as soon as the Master accepts the ransom in his place.

That the Messiah is ari' intercessor is proved by the following verse: *And those whom they call upon besides Him have no authority for intercession, but he who bears witness of the truth and they know* (43:86). It clearly says that the people excepted would have the authority to intercede. 'Īsā (a.s.) is among those whom they call besides Allāh. But he has the authority of intercession because he is included in the exception: Allāh confirms in the Qur'ān that He had taught him ('Īsā) the Book and the Wisdom, and that he ('Īsā) shall be among the witnesses on the Day of Judgment. Allāh says: *And He will teach him the Book and the Wisdom* (3:48), and quotes him as saying: *and I was a witness of them so long as I was among them* (5:117). He also says: *and on the Day of Resurrection he shall be a witness against them* (4:159).

All these verses read together prove that 'Īsā (a.s.) is one of the intercessors. We have described it in detail under the following verse: *And be on your guard against the day when one soul shall not avail another in the least ...* (2:48).

6. The Origin of These Beliefs

The Qur'ān rejects the idea that these theories and beliefs were started or propagated by 'Īsā (a.s.). The fact is that the Christians blindly followed their leaders, leaving all affairs in their hands; and the leaders transplanted the myths of ancient idolators into Christianity. Allāh says: *And the Jews say: " 'Uzayr is the son of Allāh"; and the Christians say: "The Messiah is the son of Allāh"; these are the words of their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before; may Allāh*

destroy them; how they are turned away! They have taken their doctors of law and their monks for lords besides Allāh, and (also) the Messiah son of Maryam, and they were not en-joined but that they should worship one God only, there is no god but He; far from His Glory be what they set up (with Him) (9:30 — 31).

Who are the unbelievers whom Allāh refers to when He says: *they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before?* Surely it does not refer to the idolaters of pre-Islamic Arabia, who said that the angels were the daughters of God. Because the People of the Book believed God to have a son long before they came into contact with the Arabs — and especially so the Jews; while the words, *who disbelieved before*, apparently refer to the unbelievers who were before the Jews and the Christians. Moreover, the Arabs themselves were not the originators of idol-worship — it was brought to them from abroad.¹

Moreover, the idolaters of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Syria and India were nearer to the People of the Book (who lived in Palestine and its neighbourhood), and it was easier for the Jews and the Christians to adopt those people's beliefs and rituals, and the influencing factors were more conducive to it.

Therefore the unbelievers of earlier times (whose ideas concerning sonship of God, the People of the Book imitated) referred to by the

¹ It is said that the first man to place idols in the Ka'bah and to call the people to their worship was 'Amr ibn Luḥayy, a contemporary of Shāpūr Dhu'l-Aktāf. He became the chief of his people in Mecca and took over the management of the House. Then he journeyed to the Syrian city, al-Balqā', and found the people there worshipping idols. He enquired about it. They said: "These are the Lords, we have made them in the images of the celestial deities and human sages; we seek help from them and we get help; we pray to them for rain and we get rain." 'Amr requested them to give him one of the idols; they gave him the Hubal. He brought it to Mecca and putting it on the Ka'bah, he invited the Meccans to worship it. He also had with him Asāf and Nā'ilah in the image of a couple; he called people to them too in order to come nearer to Allāh through them. This has been written by ash-Shahristānī in his *al-Milal wa 'n-niḥal*, as well as by others. It is very interesting to see that the Qur'ān uses names of some idols of Arabia in the story of Nūḥ (a.s.), where it quotes his complaint against his people: *And they say: "By no means leave your gods, nor leave Wadd, nor Suwā'; nor Yaghūth, and Ya'ūq and Nasr"* (71:23). (Author's Note)

Qur'ān were the ancient idolaters of India and China, as well as those of Rome, Greece and North Africa. The history shows close resemblance of such Jewish and Christians beliefs with the myths of those nations — like sonship, fathership, trinity, as well as the stories of crucifixion and atonement etc. These are the historical facts to which the Qur'ān has drawn our attention.

Similarly, the following verse points to this historical fact: *Say: "O People of the Book! be not unduly immoderate in your religion, and do not follow the low desires of the people who went astray before and led many astray and went astray from the right path"* (5:77). This verse shows that their immoderation in religion, their excessive love of some creatures which led them to raise them to godhead, had come to them from some previous nations who had gone astray before them, and in whose footsteps the Jews and the Christians were following.

The phrase: *the people who went astray before*, does not refer to their scholars or monks. The phrase is unrestricted and unconditional; it does not say, 'the people among you'. or 'led many among you astray'. Nor does it point to the Arabs of the days of ignorance — as we have explained earlier.

Moreover, it describes those people as having led many people astray; in other words, they were leaders of falsehood, whose words were listened to and whose directions were followed. Arabs did not have such a position in those days; they were just a small group of unlettered people, and did not have any knowledge, civilization and development in which — or because of which — other people could follow them. But the case of Iran, Rome and India etc., was different; they were highly civilized and developed nations.

Clearly the verse points to the idol-worshippers of China, India and the western countries, as we have explained.

7. Which Book the People of the Book Belong to? What is Its Condition?

Although traditions count the Zoroastrians among the People of the Book (and it means they must have had a special Book of their own, or should have belonged to one of the Books mentioned by the Qur'ān, for example, the Book of Nūḥ, the Scriptures of Ibrāhīm, Torah of Mūsā,

Injīl of ‘Īsā and Zabūr of Dāwūd), but the Qur’ān does not make any reference to them, nor does it mention any book of theirs; the Avastha which they have is not mentioned in the Qur’ān at all, and they do not acknowledge any of the other Books.

When the Qur’ān uses the term, *the People of the Book*, it means the Jews and the Christians, because of the Books which Allāh had revealed to them.

The Jewish Scripture contains 35¹ Books: five are together called the Torah of Mūsā²; twelve are called the Kings³; then there are the Books of Job and Psalms of Dāwūd; then come three Books of Sulaymān⁴; and lastly seventeen Books called the Prophets⁵.

The Qur’ān has not mentioned any of them except the Torah of Mūsā and the Zabūr of Dāwūd.

The Christians’ Scriptures are as follows: The four Gospels (of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John); the Acts of the Apostles, and several Epistles⁶, and lastly the Revelation of John.

The Qur’ān does not mention any of these Christians’ Books. But it says that there was a Divine Book revealed to ‘Īsā son of Maryam, which was named Injīl; it was a single Book, not many. Although the Christians do not know it, nor do they acknowledge its existence, there are sentences in the writings of their leaders which contain admission that ‘Īsā did have a Book, Injīl by name⁷.

¹ The Hebrew Old Testament contains 39 Books, as the list given by the author himself shows. Roman Catholic Church follows the Greek O. T. which includes some more books and passages. (*tr.*)

² Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. (*Author’s Note*)

³ Joshua, Judges, Ruth, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, I Chronicles, II Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther. (*Author’s Note*)

⁴ Proverbs, Ecclesiastics and Song of Solomon. (*Author’s Note*)

⁵ Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. (*Author’s Note*)

⁶ There are fourteen Epistles of Paul, one of James, two of Peter, three of John and one of Jude. (*Author’s Note*)

⁷ Paul writes to Gelatians: “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of

Nevertheless, the Qur'ān gives a hint that a portion of genuine Torah is still preserved in the Scriptures of the Jews, as is a part of genuine Injīl still extant in the Scriptures of the Christians. Allāh says: *And how do they make you a judge and they have the Torah wherein is Allāh's judgment?* (5:43); *And of those who say: 'We are Christians', We did take their covenant, but they forgot a portion of what they were admonished with ...* (5:14). Both verses clearly imply what we have said.

JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY FROM HISTORICAL POINT OF VIEW ¹

1. The History of the Present Torah:

The Israelites were descendants of Israel, that is, Ya'qūb. In the

Christ.' (Gal., 1:6 — 7)

an-Najjār has given in his *Quṣaṣu 'l-anbiyā'*, this and similar other quotations from the Epistles of Paul to prove that there was there a book — other than the four Gospels — which was called the Injil of the Messiah. (*Author's Note*)

¹ The author in this section has given a lot of references from the Christian and western writers. He had to rely on Arabic translations of the English or other languages, given in *Tafsīr al-Manār* (ed., Rashīd Riḍā, Egypt, 4th ed., 1380/1961, vol. 6, pp.31 — 36 and 88 — 92), and some other books and Encyclopaedias. I tried to get hold of original sources, so that in my translation I could include those quotations in their original wordings — it would have been odd to retranslate into English an English passage through its Arabic rendering. Unfortunately oriental authors generally do not give the original spellings of the names of western writers or their work, nor do they put vowels on them to help in pronunciation. To compound the difficulty, there were some printing mistakes in *al-Manār* which were faithfully copied in *al-Mīzān*. For example, *Anacaly psis* of Higgins appears as الانگلساكسن (al-Anglo-Saxon) in Arabic, and Monier Williams has become Morifore Lims!

After spending more than a month in various sections of the British Library, London, I was able to get many sources — and then it transpired that a large portion of quotations given in *al-Manār* was not taken directly from the original books, but from *Bible Myths and their Parallels in other Religions* (by Doane, Thomas William).

There are still some names which I could not ascertain. While writing such a name in English I have given first the Arabic rendering, then its English transliteration followed by question mark within brackets [?]. I shall be obliged if any reader could help me in finding their correct spellings. (*tr.*)

beginning they lived a nomadic tribal life; then the Pharaohs brought them to Egypt, where they treated them as captive slaves. This continued until Allāh delivered them through Mūsā from the Pharaoh and his deeds.

During Mūsā's time they followed the line of their Leader, that is, Mūsā (a.s.), and thereafter Yūsha' (a.s.) (Joshua). For sometime thereafter their affairs were in the hands of the judges like Ehud and Gideon etc. Then began the era of the Kings; the first of the Kings was Saul (Plat of the Qur'ān); and then came Dāwūd and Sulaymān (a.s.).

After Sulaymān the Kingdom was divided¹, and their power weakened. Still there came on throne more than thirty Kings like Rehoboam, Abijam, Jeroboam, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram and others.

The division continued to sap the nation's strength until they were vanquished by the Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, who subdued Jerusalem, that is, Baytu'l-Maqdis around 600 B.C. Later the Jews revolted; so he sent his army which besieged them, and on reconquering the city, ransacked it, plundering the King's treasures as well as those of the Temple. The Babylonians gathered the Jews and took about ten thousand souls — wealthy people, strong youths and artisans — in captivity to Babylonia, leaving only weak persons and beggars in Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah (the last Israelite King) to govern them as his vassal.

Ten years passed, Zedekiah gathered some strength and established some contact with the Pharaoh of the time. Then he revolted against Nebuchadnezzar. This enraged the latter who himself led his army against the Jews and besieged their towns. They fortified themselves and the siege continued for about one and a half year; the besieged population faced famine and epidemic. Still the siege continued until Nebuchadnezzar conquered all the forts in the year 586 B.C.; he massacred the Jews, turned their towns into ruins, demolished the Temple and destroyed every religious symbol. When he left, the Temple was only a mound of dust and rubble; and the Torah and the Ark in which it was kept were irretrievably lost.

The things continued like that for about fifty years. The Jews were captives in Babylonia; their Book (Torah) was lost and there was

¹ There appeared two Kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. (tr.)

nowhere any trace of it; their Temple was a ruin, their towns middens of rubble.

Then Cyrus, the Persian King, appeared on the scene. He vanquished Babylonians, conquered Babylonia and stayed there for a short time. He released the Israelite captives, and appointed Ezra as their leader; Ezra was authorized by him to rewrite the Torah for them, rebuild their Temple and re-establish their original rites and rituals. Ezra led the Israelites back to Jerusalem in 457 B.C.¹ . Thereafter he compiled and edited the books attributed to Mūsā — and it is what is known today as the Torah.²

¹ Modern scholars think that it happened in 397 B.C. (*tr.*)

² Vide *Qāmūsu 'l-Kitābi 'l-Muqaddas* (Dictionary of the Bible) by هاکس Mr. Hawks [?], and other books of history. (*Author's Note*)

Translator's Note: The first five books of Old Testament, commonly known as the Torah, are also called Pentateuch. In the 18th Century, some Christian scholars started what is now known as the “Higher Criticism”. Their views are now accepted by a great part of Christianity. They have proved that it contains writings of unknown number of people right upto 1000 years after the death of Mūsā. I append below the time table and sequence of its editing (in short) as given by Rev. W.K.L. Clarke, in his *Concise Bible Commentary* (S.P.C.K., London, 1952): He says that by the end of the 19th Century, it was generally recognized “that there are four main sources in the Pentateuch, to be assigned to the 9th, 8th, 7th and 5th or 4th Centuries (B.C.) respectively.”

“The first look at the Pentateuch shows three characteristics styles illustrated by Genesis:1, Genesis:2 and Deuteronomy, and the documents marked by these styles were first to be noticed.”

“The obviously early source begins in Gen. 2:4. This source is called ‘J’, after the J of Jehovah (pronounced Jahweh). ‘J’ is generally thought to have been put into written form about 850 B.C.

“Another source is ‘D’, so-called from the book of Deuteronomy, which was the book of law discovered in Josiah’s reign. The third source is called Priestly document, P for short. A large part of P is believed to have been composed in Babylonia and brought to Jerusalem by Ezra in 397 B.C. How much of P was omitted in final compilation of Pentateuch we have no means of knowing. There was a subordinate source, known as the Code of Holiness, H for short. Opinions differ whether it was written before 586 B.C. or after the fall of Jerusalem. It is found in Lev. 17:28.

“Now comes the fourth source. After taking P, D and J from the Pentateuch a considerable amount of material remains, parallel to J, but in Genesis using

If you think over these events you will see that the chain of the narrators of today's Torah is broken, and not connected upto Mūsā (a.s.) — except through a single person, that is, Ezra. But first of all, we do not know who Ezra was; secondly, we do not know how much he knew of the Torah or how deep his knowledge was; thirdly, we do not know how honest and trustworthy he was; fourthly, we do not know from where he collected what he compiled as the books of the Torah; and lastly, we do not know with which authentic source he compared his collection to correct the mistakes which might have crept into the text.

This unfortunate episode has given rise to another disturbing theory. Some western scholars now deny the existence of Mūsā (a.s.) and the events related to him. They say that he is a mythical being who never existed. (The same theories have been advanced about 'Īsā son of Maryam. But we the Muslims cannot entertain such ideas, because the Qur'ān in very clear terms confirms his existence (peace be on him).

2. The Story of 'Īsa and the Gospel:

Elohim for God and not Yahweh. This non-P Elohim matter begins in Gen. 20:1 — 17 ... Altogether E is more mature religiously and is thought to have reached written from about 750 (B.C.).”

How were these four main sources compiled to form the Pentateuch?

“The first step was to combine J and E. This must have been done after the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. The two were combined in a document which is called JE.

“Then in 621 Deuteronomy was discovered, or at least a large part of it. The next stage was to put JE, and D together. This will have taken place during the exile ... A perceptible amount of editing of JE took place.

“P was written in Babylonia and brought to Jerusalem by Ezra in 397 B.C. Later, editors used it as a framework and incorporated JED, thus producing the Pentateuch ... in about 300 B.C.”

Rev. Clarke sums it up in these words: “Probably a multitude of persons have combined to give us Genesis (etc.), covering in their lives a span of 1000 years.”

Even that minority of the Christian scholars which still holds fast to the theory of “Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch has to admit that it must have been rewritten by the subsequent generations to modernize the language. This concession has to be given because “it is hardly probable that the Hebrew of Moses' day was like that of Biblical Hebrew.” See the *Westminster Dictionary of Bible*, under “Pentateuch”.

The Jews pay particular attention to their history. They have recorded main events through which they have passed. Nevertheless, if you hunt through their books and literature you will not come across any mention of ‘Īsā son of Maryam. Jewish literature throws no light on his birth or mission, nor does it say anything about his character or life story. It is silent about the miracles appearing on his hand; and does not say how his life on the earth was ended — did he die a natural death? Was he killed or crucified? Or, was there something else? Why this silence? Why had his affairs remained hidden from them? Or, why did they keep it hidden?

The Qur’ān mentions that the Jews had falsely accused Maryam and calumniated her regarding the birth of ‘Īsā, and that they claimed to have killed ‘Īsā. Allāh says: *And for their unbelief and for their having uttered against Maryam a grievous calumny. And their saying: “Surely we killed the Messiah, ‘Īsā son of Maryam, the messenger of Allāh”*; and they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it appeared to them so (like ‘Īsā); and most surely those who differ therein are only in a doubt about it; they killed him not for sure (4:156 — 157).

Was this claim of theirs based on some oral tradition which was never put to writing? Every nation does have such folklores — some facts, some myths — which should not be taken seriously unless they are based on correct, reliable sources.

Or, was it that they heard the Christians talking about the Messiah and his birth and mission; and taking the story from them they accused Maryam of indecency and claimed to having killed the Messiah? No definite answers can be found to these questions. As far as the Qur’ān is concerned, it clearly ascribes to them only the claim of killing, not of crucifying; then it says that they are in confusion and there is a difference of opinion among them about the whole matter.

As for the Christians, the story of the Messiah is based on their Scriptures, that is, the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John; as well as the Acts of the Apostles (by Luke) and several Epistles of Paul, Peter, Jacob, John and Jude. Authenticity of all depends on genuineness of the four Gospels; therefore let us have a look at them.

The Gospel of Matthew: It is the first and earliest of the Gospels so far as compilation and publication is concerned. Some say that it was written

in 38 C.E.; others that it was compiled between 50 and 60 C. E.¹ In any case, it was written after the Messiah.

The ancient and modern Christian scholars are of the opinion that it was originally written in Hebrew; and then translated into Greek and other languages. But the original Hebrew version is lost; and as for the translation, its condition (correctness, etc.) cannot be verified, nor is it known who had translated it².

The Gospel of Marks: Marks was a disciple of St. Peter; he was not one of the twelve disciples of the Christ. It is often said that he wrote his Gospel on Peter's orders, and that he did not believe in divinity of the Christ³. Accordingly some people say that he had written his Gospel for the tribes and villagers, and that was why he introduced Christ as a messenger of Allāh who brought and conveyed the *sharī'ah* of Allāh⁴. He wrote this Book in 61 C.E.

The Gospel of Luke: Luke was neither one of the disciples nor had he seen Christ. He learnt Christianity from Paul. Paul was a Jew who hated the Christians and Christianity; he oppressed those who believed in Christ and used to hinder their activities and disturb their affairs. Then all of a sudden he came to them and claimed that he had been seized by an epileptic fit in course of which Christ appeared to him, and admonished him for his bad treatment of the Christians; according to his claim, he believed in Christ in the same trance and Christ in the same vision

¹ هاكس Hawks [?], *Dictionary of Bible*, under "Matthew". (*Author's Note*)
This Book is referred to hereafter as *Dic. of Bib. (tr.)*

² Vide *Mīzānu 'l-ḥaqq; Dic. of Bib.*, too admits it with some reluctance.
(*Author's Note*)

³ 'Abdu 'l-Wahhāb an-Najjār, *Qaṣaṣu 'l-anbiyā'*, [p.400, 2nd ed., Cairo, n.d.], quoting from بطرس قرماج Baṭrus Qarmāj [?] *Marūju 'l-akhbār fī tarājimi 'l-abrār* [Beirut, 1880]. (*Author's Note*)

⁴ As described in the *Dic. of Bib.* It says: "Although the early fathers unanimously say that St. Mark had written his Gospel in Rome and that it was published after the deaths of Sts. Peter and Paul, but this is not very credible, because it appears from his Gospel that he had written it for the tribes and villagers, not for the (civilized) people leaving in cities — and especially Rome." Ponder on this statement. (*Author's Note*)

appointed him as his apostle to propagate the Christ's Gospel.

It was St. Paul who laid the foundation of Christianity, as it is today¹. He taught that mere believing in the Christ was enough for salvation; there was no need of acting on it. Accordingly, he allowed them to eat pork and dead animals; and forbade circumcision and a lot of the *sharī'ah* of the Torah². This was in spite of the fact that Injīl was revealed just as a verifier of the Torah, and had made lawful only a few things which were forbidden in Torah. 'Īsā (a.s.) had come to re-establish the *sharī'ah* of Torah, and to bring the deviators and transgressors back to it; he had not come to abrogate the *sharī'ah* or to base the eternal felicity on a belief devoid of action.

Luke wrote his Gospel after that of Marks, and it was after the deaths of Sts. Peter and Paul. Some people have firmly opined that the Gospel of Luke is not a revelation like other Gospels, as may be understood from his Prologue³.

¹ Vide *Dic. of Bib.*, under the heading "Paul". (*Author's Note*)

² See the *Acts of the Apostles*, and the *Epistles* of St. Paul. (*Author's Note*)

³ Luke begins his Gospel with these words:

"Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the word. It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus." (Luke, 1:1 — 3)

It clearly shows that it is a book based on human understanding, not on revelation. This view has also been attributed to كدل Mr. Cadell [?] in the booklet, *Revelation*. St. Jerome has said that some early Fathers had doubts about the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke, and that they were missing from the version of the Marcionites*. Eichhorn** declares in his book (p.95) that verses 43 to 47 of the 2nd chapter of the Luke's Gospel are an interpolation. Also he says on p. 61 of his book: "Fictitious narratives have been mixed up in description of miracles mentioned by Luke; and the writer has included them as poetic exaggeration. But it is difficult at this point of time to separate truth from falsehood." And an-Najjār quotes in *Qaṣaṣu 'l-anbiyā'* (p. 401) the saying of كلي مي شيس Mr. Clemesious [?] that: Matthew and Mark differ in their narration; and when they identify, their report would be given preference over that of Luke. (*Author's Note*)

* Marcionites, followers of Marcion (d. cir. 160), who rejected the Law and believed in Gospel of Love only. He rejected the Old Testament, and believed

The Gospel of John: Many Christians say that the John who wrote it was John son of Zebedee, the fisher, one of the twelve disciples, and the one whom the Christ loved¹.

They say that as Cerinthus² and Ebionites³ and their followers thought that the Christ was nothing more than a created human being whose existence did not precede his mother's existence, the bishops of Asia and others visited John in 96 C.E. and urged him to write what others had not written in their Gospels so that he could particularly describe the divinity of the Christ. John had to comply with their request and wrote this Gospel⁴.

There is a difference of opinion when it was written: Some say, in 65 C.E., some say, in 96 C.E., and others say, in 98 C.E.

Another group says that it was not written by John the disciple: Some say that it is the work of a student of Alexandria⁵; others say that this

that the twelve Apostles and the Evangelists were blind to this reality. and only St. Paul understood it. For them the only Canonical Scriptures were ten of the fourteen Epistles of Paul. (*tr.*)

** Eichhorn, Johann Gottfried (1752 — 1827) was Biblical scholars and orientalist. He was among the first to make comparison between the Biblical Books and other Semitic languages; and one of the earliest critics who laid foundation of the High Criticism of the Bible. (*tr.*)

¹ Vide *Dic. of Bib.*, under John. (*Author's Note*)

² Cerinthus, who flourished around 100 C.E., was a Gnostic "heretic". Among other things, he taught that Jesus began his earthly life as a mere man; at his baptism 'the Christ', a "higher divine power", descended on him, only to depart from him again before the crucifixion. He seems to have had connections both with the Ebionites and Alexandrine Gnosticism. (*tr.*)

³ Ebionites, literally 'poor men', were a sect of Jewish Christians which flourished in the early centuries of the Christian era. Apparently, two of their principle tenets were: (i) belief in humanity of the Person of Christ, to the effect, for example, that Jesus was the human son of Joseph and Mary, and that the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove lighted on him at his baptism; and (ii) emphasis on the binding character of the Mosaic Law. (*tr.*)

⁴ an-Najjār, *Qaṣaṣu 'l-anbiyā'*, quoting Jirjīs Zuwayn al-Futūhī of Lebnon. (*Author's Note*)

⁵ an-Najjār, *op. cit.*, quoting from the *Catholic Herald*, 1844, vol.7, p. 205 quoting استادلن Ostadelane [?]; also *Dic. of Bib.* points to it, under 'John'.

Gospel as well as the Epistles of John were authored in the beginning of the 2nd Century by an unknown person who attributed them to John so that the writings might gain credence in people's eyes¹; yet others think that the Gospel of John originally contained twenty chapters and after his death the Church of Ephesus added the twenty-first².

This is then the condition of the four Gospels. What is certain is that all these narrations depend on seven persons: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul and Jude; and they rely on the four Gospels, which in their turn rely on the earliest one, that is, the Gospel of Matthew. And we have already seen that it is a translation whose original is lost; nobody knows who had translated it. What was the theme and teaching of the original? Did it teach messengership of Christ? Or, his divinity?³

(Author's Note)

¹ It is the view of Bretschneider, as an-Najjār has written in his *Qaṣaṣu 'l-anbiyā'*, quoting from *al-Fārūq*, vol. 1. (Author's Note)

Bretschneider, Karl Gottlieb (1776 — 1848) had written a treatise on the Gospel of John in 1820. (tr.)

² *ibid.* (Author's Note)

³ Traditionally, the Gospel of Matthew is held to be the oldest of the four. But modern scholars commonly hold that it is Mark which is the oldest. There occurs a large amount of common subject matter in the three Synoptic Gospels (i.e., Matthew, Mark and Luke) and often similar phrasing in more than one Gospel. That this parallelism, of varying degree of closeness, must be accounted for by their literary interdependence is nowadays almost universally held by scholars. There is also wide, but less complete, agreement (1) that Mark is the earliest of the three Gospels and was used as a framework by both Matthew and Luke; (2) that the non-Markan material common to Matthew and Luke is derived from a single lost source known to critics as 'Q' (from German 'Quelle' = source); and (3) that the authors of Matthew and Luke used further sources for the matter peculiar to them. In view of the fact that Matthew drew extensively on Mark, which he expanded with the aid of 'Q', the early tradition that the Gospel was written in Hebrew is untenable. The chief objection to its ascription to St. Matthew is the unlikelihood that an Apostle, who was an eye-witness of the events, would have taken as his principal source of the work of St. Mark, whose material is in any case secondhand. Vide *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed., 1974 (OUP). See also the *Concise Bible Commentary* (by Rev. W. K. L. Clark; pub. by S. P. C. K., London, 1952) and the *Westminster Dictionary of Bible*.

It is not only the Gospel of Matthew whose author is unknown; the Gospel

The present Gospels show that there had appeared among the Children of Israel a man named ‘Īsā son of Yūsuf, the carpenter; he began calling towards Allāh; he claimed that he was a son of God, born without agency of a human father, and that his Father had sent him to atone for the sin of the people through being killed by crucifixion; that he gave life to the dead, healed the blind and the lepers, and restored the possessed to health by removing devil from them; that there were twelve disciples with him, one of them being Matthew the Evangelist; he blessed them and sent them to propagate his religion ...

This is the gist of the Christianity and its mission — in spite of its having been spread to every corner of the world. It all boils down to a report by one person whose name and particulars are unknown, whose identity and character is shrouded in obscurity.

This curious weakness just in the initial stage has compelled some independent minds of Europe to claim that Christ, ‘Īsā son of Maryam, is a mythical being, invented by some religious movements for or against the government of the time. This view has been strengthened by another mythical character which it resembles in every detail, and that is the character of Krishna: The idol-worshippers of India believe that Krishna was the son of God, who descended to earth from his divine abode, and atoned for the people by being crucified in order to deliver them from their sins and mistakes. It is the same belief which the Christians have about Christ ‘Īsā. (Details are given below.)

Other scholars have found it necessary to say that there were in fact two Christs, one uncrucified, the other crucified, who came more than five centuries after the former.

The Christians Era (which at the time of writing is 1956 C.E.) does not correspond with any of the above-mentioned two dates. The former (uncrucified) Christ had preceded it by more than two hundred and fifty years (and lived for sixty years), while the latter (crucified) Christ came more than two hundred and ninety years after the beginning of the said Era (and lived for about thirty-three years)¹.

of John suffers the same fate. Many scholars believe that its author was some disciple and follower of the Apostle John the son of Zebedee. “His name is either unknown to us, or more likely, was John the Presbyter, or Elder.” (*tr.*)

¹ This subject has been described in detail by the scholar Behrūz, in a book he recently wrote on the Prophetic foretellings. I hope to quote some parts of it

However, difference of the Christians Era with the actual birth-date of Christ is a fact which is not denied even by the Christians — and it is a historical disjunction¹.

Moreover, there are some other matters which give rise to doubts and mistrust. They have written that during the first two centuries many more Gospels, including the four now used, were written — their number exceeded a hundred. Then the Church banned all of them except the four which were canonized because they corresponded with the views of the Church².

Among the discarded ones was the *Gospel of Barnabas*, a copy of which was found years ago, and which has been translated into Arabic and Persian. The story of Christ, ‘Īsā son of Maryam, as given in this

at the end of the Commentary of Chapter Four “The Women”. What is certain (and with which we are concerned here) is the incorrectness of the Christians Era. (*Author’s Note*)

¹ Vide the *Die. of Bib.*, under Christ. (*Author’s Note*)

² Celsus, the 2nd Century’s philosopher, admonished the Christians, in his book, *Logos Alethes* (True Word) for their manipulations of the Gospels — that they erase by tomorrow what they had written yesterday. [He wrote this book about 176 — 180 C.E. It was the first notable polemic against Christianity. The book itself has perished, but fragments of high interest occur as quotations in Origen’s *Contra Celsum*.]* In 384, Pope Damasus ordered a new Latin translation of the Old and New Testaments to be prepared for the Church — the Emperor Theodosius had tired of the polemics and controversies raging among the bishops. That translation, called Vulgate, was completed; it covered only the four Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The editors wrote: “After comparing various old Greek copies, we edited them, that is, we discarded what was contradictory, and left the remaining parts as they were.” That version was confirmed by the Trent Council held in 1546, that is, some eleven centuries later. In 1590, Pope Sixtus V declared it to contain errors and mistakes, and ordered a new version to be published. Pope Clement VIII found fault with the second version too, and ordered in 1592 publication of a new revised version — which is used by the Catholic Church today. (*Tafsīr al-Jawāhir*, 2nd ed., vol. 2, p.121) (*Author’s Note*)

* **Note:** The material given within the brackets, here and elsewhere in the text or within the Author’s Notes, has been added by the Translator for deeper understanding or greater clarity. (*tr.*)

Gospel, generally corresponds with that given in the Qur'ān¹.

Strangely enough, even the non-Jewish historical records are silent about what the Gospels present as the Christ's mission — sonship, atonement and other related matters. The famous American historian, Hendrick Willem Van Loon has given in his book, *Story of Mankind*, a letter of a Roman physician, Aesculapius Cultellus, which he wrote in 62 A. D. to his nephew, Gladius Ensa, who was a soldier in Syria².

In that letter, he says:

A few days ago I was called in to prescribe for a sick man named Paul. He appeared to be a Roman citizen of Jewish parentage, well educated and of agreeable manners ...

A friend of mine ... tells me that he heard something about him in Ephesus where he was preaching sermons about a strange new god. I asked my patient if this were true ... Paul answered me that the kingdom of which he had spoken was not of this world and he added many strange utterances which I did not understand ...

His personality made a great impression upon me and I was sorry to hear that he was killed on the Ostian Road a few days ago. Therefore I am writing this letter to you. When next you visit Jerusalem, I want you to find out something about my friend Paul and the strange Jewish

¹ This Gospel in Italian had been discovered sometime ago. Dr. Khalīl Sa'ādah of Egypt translated it into Arabic, and the well-known scholar Sardār Kābūli, into Persian in Iran. (*Author's Note*)

The said manuscript was found in the Imperial Library, Vienna. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg edited the Italian text and translated it into English which was published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, in 1907. It was from that version that the above-mentioned Arabic version was prepared. Strange as it may seem, now only two copies of the 1907 edition are known to exist, one in the British Library, London, and the other in the Library of Congress, Washington. Within the last two decades Begum Aisha Bawany Waqf, Karachi, has printed it several times and distributed it widely throughout the Muslim World.

Understandably, the Christians, including the translators (Lonsdale and Laura Ragg) themselves claim that the Vienna manuscript is spurious, not genuine. Their arguments deserve careful consideration. (*tr.*)

² It appears, in the book, under the heading: "The Story of Joshua of Nazareth, whom the Greeks called Jesus." I have copied Verbatim a part of the physician's letter which the author of *al-Mizān* has given only a gist of it. (*tr.*)

prophet, who seems to have been his teacher.... I would like to know the truth about all these romours ...

Six weeks later, Gladius Ensa, the nephew, [a captain of the VII Gallic Infantry], answered as follows:

[I received your letter and I have obeyed your order. Two weeks ago our brigade was sent to Jarusalem ...]

I have talked with most of the older men in this city but few have been able to give me any definite information.¹

A few days ago a peddler came to the camp. I bought some of his olive and I asked him whether he had ever heard of the famous Messiah who was killed when he was young. He said that he remembered it very clearly.... He gave me the address of one Joseph, who had been a personal friend of the Messiah and told me that I had better go and see him if I wanted to know more.

This morning I went to call on Joseph. He was quite an old man. He had been a fisherman on one of the freshwater lakes. His memory was clear, and from him at last I got a fairly difinite account of what had happened during the troublesome days before I was born.

Tiberius, our great and glorious emperor, was on the throne, and an officer of the name of Pontius Pilatus was governor of Judaea and Samaria ... In the year 783 or 784 (Joseph had forgotten when) Pilatus was called to Jerusalem on account of a riot. A certain young man (the son of a carpenter of Nazareth) was said to be planning a revolution against the Roman government. Strangely enough our own intelligence officers, who are usually well informed, appear to have heard nothing about it, and when they investigated the matter they reported that the carpenter was an excellent citizen and that there was no reason to proceed against him. But the old-fashioned leaders of the Jewish faith, according to Joseph, were much upset. They greatly disliked his popularity with the masses of the poorer Hebrews. The "Nazarene" (so they told Pilatus) had publicly claimed that a Greek or a Roman or even a Palestinian, who tried to live a decent and honourable life, was quite as good as a Jew who spent his days in studying the ancient laws of Moses. Pilatus does not seem to have been impressed by this argument, but when

¹ This, when it was 62 C.E., and they were older men! Strange, isn't it? (*Author's Comment*)

the crowds around the temple threatened to lynch Jesus, and kill all his followers, he decided to take the carpenter into custody to save his life.

He does not appear to have understood the real nature of the quarrel. Whenever he asked the Jewish priests to explain their grievances, they shouted “heresy” and “treason” and got terribly excited. Finally, so Joseph told me, Pilatus sent for Joshua (that was the name of the Nazarene, but the Greeks who live in this part of the world always refer to him as Jesus) to examine him personally. He talked to him for several hours. He asked him about the “dangerous doctrines” which he was said to have preached on the shores of the sea of Galilee. But Jesus answered that he never referred to politics. He was not so much interested in the bodies of men as in Man’s soul. He wanted all people to regard their neighbours as their brothers and to love one single God, who was the father of all living beings.

Pilatus, who seems to have been well versed in the doctrines of the Stoics and the other Greek philosophers, does not appear to have discovered anything seditious in the talk of Jesus. According to my informant he made another attempt to save the life of the kindly prophet. He kept putting the execution off. Meanwhile the Jewish people, lashed into fury by their priests, got frantic with rage. There had been many riots in Jerusalem before this and there were only a few Roman soldiers within calling distance. Reports were being sent to the Roman authorities in Caesarea that Pilatus had “fallen a victim to the teachings of the Nazarene”. Petitions were being circulated all through the city to have Pilatus recalled, because he was an enemy of the Emperor. You know that our governors have strict instructions to avoid an open break with their foreign subjects. To save the country from civil war, Pilatus finally sacrificed his prisoner, Joshua, who behaved with great dignity and who forgave all those who hated him. He was crucified amidst the howls and the laughter of the Jerusalem mob.

That is what Joseph told me, with tears running down his old cheeks. I gave him a gold piece when I left him, but he refused it and asked me to hand it to one poorer than himself. I also asked him about your friend Paul. He had known him slightly. He seems to have been a tent maker, who gave up his profession that he might preach the words of a loving and forgiving God, Who was so very different from that Jehovah of whom the Jewish priests are telling us all the time. Afterwards, Paul

appears to have travelled much in Asia Minor and in Greece, telling the slaves that they were children of one loving Father and that happiness awaits all, both rich and poor, who have tried to live honest lives and have done good to those who were suffering and miserable ...¹

This is the main theme of this letter as far as the subject of our present discussion is concerned.

On pondering on this letter one may easily understand which direction Christianity had taken — among the Israelites — soon after ‘Īsā (a.s.). Clearly it was a prophetic mission of a messenger sent by Allāh — not a claim of divinity calling people to believe that God had taken a human form and descended to the earth to deliver mankind by offering an atonement for their sins.

Then some disciples of ‘Īsā and/or those claiming connection with him, like Paul, and the disciples of disciples journeyed — after the said crucifixion — to various regions of the world, like India, Africa, Rome, etc., and spread the message of Christianity. But soon after that, in the wake of those missionary activities, they differed among themselves about the basic teachings of the new religion. Was Christ a God? Was belief in Christ enough for salvation without any need of following the Mosaic Law? Was the religion of the Gospel an independent one which had abrogated the Mosaic Law? Or, was it a part of the Mosaic religion sent merely to perfect it? In this way they divided into various sects and groups.²

We should keep in mind the fact that all the nations where Christianity was propagated in the beginning — like Rome and India, etc. — were at that time idol-worshippers, the Sabaeans, the Hindus or the Buddhists, etc. Also there was some mystic influence on one side and the hold of Brahmanic philosophy on the other. All these systems and religions believed to a great extent in incarnation and appearance of gods and deities in human form. Also the beliefs of trinity in unity, coming down of a deity in human body, and its suffering and being crucified³ to

¹ Van Loon, Hendrick Willem: *The Story of Mankind*, London, 1922, pp. 119 — 123. (tr.)

² It is mentioned in the *Acts of the Apostles* and the *Epistles* of Paul; also it is admitted by the Christians themselves. (*Author's Note*)

³ Killing by crucifixion is one of the oldest methods. They used to crucify the hardest criminals who had committed very heinous crimes, because crucifixion

atone sins of mankind was very much prevalent among ancient idol-worshippers of India, China, Egypt, Chaledonia, Assyria and Iran. The same was the situation among ancient western idolators like Romans, Scandinavians and others — as may be seen in the books written about ancient religions and beliefs.

Doane writes in his *Bible Myths and their Parallels in other Religions*:

“If we return to India we shall find that one of the most prominent features in the Indian theology is the doctrine of a divine triad, governing all things. This triad is called *Tri-murti* — from the Sanscrit (*sic.*) word *tri* (three) and *murti* (form) — and consists of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. It is an inseparable unity, though three in form.”¹

Then he goes on to explain that Brahma is the Father; Vishnu, the Son; and Siva, the Holy Spirit.²

Then he writes [in the footnote] about Vishnu, the Son that he is “the Lord and Saviour Crishna³. The Supreme Spirit, in order to preserve the world, produced Vishnu. Vishnu came upon earth, for this purpose, in the

was the most torturous way of killing and left the blackest stigma on the name of the one so executed. The cross was made by joining two wooden logs which formed angles with each other [like T, t or X] as we see the crosses nowadays; it was done in a way that a man could be placed on it. The criminal was attached to it with outstretched hands and arms; his palms were fixed on the horizontal piece with nails, and the legs nailed to the upright post — sometimes they were tied to it and not nailed. Then the cross was erected vertically in the earth, leaving a space of about a yard between the earth and the victim’s feet. He was left on the cross for a day or more; then his legs were broken and he was killed on the cross, or was brought down from the cross and then killed. The victim, before being put on cross, was tortured, whipped or mutilated. It was an indelible disgrace for a family or clan if one of them was crucified. (*Author’s Note*)

¹ Doane, Thomas William: *Bible Myths and their Parallels in other Religions; being a comparison of the Old and New Testament myths and miracles with those of heathen nations of antiquity, considering also their origin and meaning*; New York, 1883, p. 369. (*tr.*)

² *ibid.* (*tr.*)

³ The author of *al-Mizān*, like many others, opines that the word ‘Crishna’ has been taken in European languages as Christ, to mean the Anointed Saviour. (*tr.*)

form of Chrishna. He was believed to be an incarnation of the Supreme Being, one of the persons of their holy and mysterious trinity, to use their language, ‘The Lord and Saviour — three persons and one god.’ ’’¹

He writes that like the Christians, the Hindus too use the dove for the emblem of the third person of their trinity.²

[Doane further writes:]

“Mr. Faber, in his *Origin of Heathen Idolatry*, says: ‘Among the Hindoos, we have the Triad of Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva; so, among the votaries of Buddha, we find the self-triplicated Buddha declared to be the same as the Hindoo Trimurti. Among the Buddhist sect of the Jainists (*sic.*), we have the triple jiva, in whom the Trimurti is similarly declared to be incarnated.’ ’’³

[Doane further quotes from the same book of Mr. Faber:]

“Among the Chinese, who worship Buddha under the name of *Fo*, we find this God mysteriously multiplied into *three persons* ... ’’⁴

Doane now turns to Egypt:

“The priests of Memphis, in Egypt, explained this mystery to the novice, by intimating that the premier (first) *monad* created the *dyad*, who engendered the *triad*, and that it is this *triad* which shines through nature.

“Thulis, a great monarch, who at one time reigned over all Egypt, and who was in the habit of consulting the oracle of Serapis, is said to have addressed the oracle in these words:

“ ‘Tell me if ever there was before one greater than I, or will ever be one greater than me?’

“The oracle answered thus:

“ ‘First *God*, afterward the *Word*, and with them the *Holy Spirit*, all these are of the same nature, and make but *one* whole, of which the power is eternal. Go away quickly, *mortal*, thou who hast but an uncertain life.’ ’’⁵

¹ *ibid.* p.370. (*tr.*)

² *ibid.*, footnote no. 4. (*tr.*)

³ *ibid.*, p. 371. (*tr.*)

⁴ *ibid.*, p.372. (*tr.*)

⁵ *ibid.*, p.373, quoting from Higgins, Godfrey: *Anacalypsis: An Enquiry into the Origin of Languages, Nations, and Religions*; London, vol. 2, p. 14. (*tr.*)

Doane quotes Bonwick:

“Some persons are prepared to admit that the most astonishing development of the old religion of Egypt was in relation to the *Logos* or Divine *Word*, by whom all things were made, and who, though from God, was God.”¹

It should be noted that these are the very words with which the Gospel of St. John begins.²

Doane quotes from Higgins *Anacalypsis* that: “*Mithras*, the Mediator, and Saviour of the Persians, was called the *Logos*.”³

Doane has proved that the ancient pagans used to believe in one god with three persons. He has extensively shown that the pagan belief of trinity in unity was prevalent among the Greeks, Romans, Finns, Scandinavians, Chaldeans, Assyrians and Phoenicians.⁴

[On the question of atonement], he writes:

“The idea of expiation by the sacrifice of a *god* was to be found among the Hindoos even in *Vedic* times.”⁵

Then giving the references, he, *inter alia*, writes.

“Crishna, the virgin-born, “the Divine Vishnu himself”⁶, ‘he who is without beginning, middle or end’⁷, being moved ‘to relieve the earth of her load’⁸, came upon earth and redeemed man by his *suffering* — to *save*

¹ *ibid.*, quoting Bonwick, James: *Egyptian Belief and Modern Thought*; London, 1878; p.402. (*tr.*)

² Doane says on p.375: “The celebrated passage: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,’ is a fragment of some Pagan treatise on the Platonic philosophy, evidently written by Irenaeus.” And he writes a footnote on it: “The first that we know of this Gospel [i.e., John] for certain is during the time of Irenaeus, the great, Christian forger.” (*tr.*)

³ *ibid.*, p.373, footnote no. 5, quoting Higgins: *Anacalypsis*, vol. 2, p. 102. (*tr.*)

⁴ *ibid.* Vide his chapter, “The Trinity”, pp. 368 — 383, where he mentions some other ancient nations too, having such beliefs. (*tr.*)

⁵ *ibid.*, p.181.

⁶ *Vishnu Purana, A System of Hindoo Mythology and Tradition*, translated by H.H. Wilson; London, 1840; p. 440. (*tr.*)

⁷ *ibid.* (*tr.*)

⁸ *ibid.* (*tr.*)

him.”¹

“In the earlier copies of Moor’s, *Hindu Pantheon*, is to be seen representations of Chrishna (as *Wittoba*) with marks of holes in both feet, and in others, of holes in the hands. [In Figures 4 and 5 of Plate II (Moor’s work) the figures have *nail-holes in both feet*. Figure 6 has a *round hole in the side*;] to his collar or shirt hangs the emblem of a *heart* (which we often see in pictures of Christ Jesus) ... Instead of the *crown of thorns* usually put on the head of the Christians Saviour, it [Figure 7] has the turreted coronet of the Ephesian Diana ...”²

Doane quotes Huc that among the Hindus, “*the idea of redemption by a divine incarnation*, who came into the world for the express purpose of redeeming mankind, was ‘general and popular.’”³

“ ‘A sense of original corruption,’ says Professor Monier Williams, ‘seems to be felt by all classes of Hindoos, as indicated by the following prayer used after the *Gayatri* by some Vaishnavas.

“ ‘ ‘I am sinful, I commit sin, my nature is sinful, *I am conceived in sin*. Save me, O thou lotus-eyed Heri (Saviour), the remover of sin.’ ”⁴

Rev. Geo. W. Cox remarks on two opposite conceptions of Krishna’s character, in one of which he is described “as a selfsacrificing and unselfish hero”, who is, “filled with divine wisdom and love, who offers up a sacrifice which he alone can make.”⁵

“P. Andrada la Crozius, one of the first Europeans who went to Nepal and Thibet (*sic.*), in speaking of the god whom they worshipped there — *Indra* — tells us that they said *he spilt his blood for the salvation of the human race*, and that he was pierced through the body with nails. He further says that, although they do not say he suffered the penalty of

¹ Doane, op. cit. p. 184.

² *ibid.*, p.185, quoting Edward Moor: *Plates Illustrating the Hindu Pantheon*; London, 1816; and Higgins: *Anacalypsis*, vol. 2. (*tr.*)

³ *ibid.*, quoting M. l’Abbe Huc: *Travels (Christianity in China, Tartary and Thibet)*; London, 1857, vol. 1, pp. 326 — 327. (*tr.*)

⁴ *ibid.*, quoting Monier Williams: *Hinduism*, London, 1877, p. 214. (*tr.*)

⁵ Cox, George William, *The Mythology of the Aryan Nations*; London, 1870, vol. 2, p. 132. (*tr.*)

the cross, yet they find, nevertheless, figures of it in their books.”¹

“The monk Georgius, in his *Tibetinum Alphabetum* (p. 203), has given plates of a *crucified god*, who was worshipped in Nepal ... He calls it the god *Indra*.” [Figure 9 of these plates] shows a cross having arms of equal length fixed much high on the stem; Thus the head portion is shorter and the body portion longer — no one would think that it represented a man except for the image of face on it.²

What the Buddhists narrate about Buddha fits even more perfectly on what the Christians believe about Jesus Christ. The Buddhists call Buddha, the Messiah, the Only Begotten, the Saviour of the World, the God who sacrificed his life to wash away the offences of mankind, and thereby to make them partakers of the Kingdom of Heaven³.

This subject has been explained by many orientalist, like Bell⁴, Huc, Muller⁵, and others⁶.

This was a sample of the belief of deities taking human form, and of crucifixion and atonement as it was found in ancient religions prevalent in the nations among which Christianity was propagated in the very beginning. The new religion very much attracted the people in all these places where the Christian missionaries went. And the reason was clear: The Christian Fathers took the fundamentals of Christianity and remoulded them in the moulds of idolatry, and in this way got the people attracted to their call and made it easier to them to accept their teachings.

¹ Doane, op. cit., pp. 187 — 188, quoting Higgins: op. cit., p.118. (tr.)

² *ibid.*, p. 187. (tr.)

³ *ibid.*, pp.188 — 189. (tr.)

⁴ John Bell, *New Pantheon, or Historical Dictionary of Gods, Demi-Gods, Heroes and Fabulous Personages of Antiquity* ... in two volumes, London, 1790. (tr.)

⁵ Max Muller, *A History of Ancient Sanscrit Literature, so far as it illustrates the Primitive Religion of the Brahmins*; London, 1860. (tr.)

⁶ Vide chapter XX (The Crucifixion of Christ Jesus) of the Doane’s Book. (tr.)

The author of *al-Mizān* writes: “The reader will find these quotations in *Tafsīr al-Manār* (vol. 6, under the Chapter of ‘The Women’), various encyclopaedias and the book, *al-‘Aqā’idu ‘l-wathaniyyah fī ‘d-diyānati ‘n-Naṣrāniyyah*, and others.” The last named book is authored by Muhammad Tāhir Āfandī. (tr.)

This view is strengthened when we see how Paul and others disparage the wisdom and philosophy of the philosophers, and how they look down with disdain at rational argument, declaring that the Lord God prefers the foolishness of the fools to the wisdom of the wise.

The fact is that they presented their teaching to the schools of logic and philosophy, and the intellectuals rejected it saying that there was no way of even understanding it — let alone accepting it. To overcome this difficulty, they started talking of revelation, apocalypse and vision; and claimed that they were filled of the Holy Ghost. In this, they followed the life of the ignorant mystics who claim that their way is beyond the reach of reason and intellect. Thereafter, their missionaries went to various cities and regions (as described in the *Acts of Apostles* and the history books) and propagated the Christianity. Wherever they went, the masses welcomed them. The main reason of their success — and especially within the Roman Empire — was the simmering discontent and disgruntling despair which had spread everywhere because of the never-ending oppression and injustice; the ruling class treated the masses as their slaves and serfs; there was a yawning gap between the lives of the rulers and the ruled, an unbridgeable chasm between the high and the low classes; the extravagant life-style of the rich was sustained by the sweat and blood of the poor and slaves. In this social structure, the Christian missionaries called the people to brotherhood, love, equality and good neighbourliness; they exhorted them to discard this world and its transient painful life and to concentrate on the pure and happy life that was in heaven. It was this theme which the ruling classes — the kings and emperors — found advantageous to themselves, and they thought that it was in their interest to turn a blind eye to the missionaries' activities; as a general rule, this tacit understanding saved the new group from punishment, torture and banishment.

Their number kept increasing, and so did their power. A great multitude embraced Christianity within and outside the Roman Empire; it reached upto Africa and even India. Invariably opening of a church heralded the closure or destruction of a temple. With number and power, their attitude changed. Not only that they disregarded the resistance of the pagan leaders (as they went on undermining idol-worship), they even refused obeisance to the rulers and emperors. Their refusal to obey imperial decrees in this respect resulted in their punishment,

imprisonment and even murder. Many were tortured and killed; others imprisoned or banished.

This continued until the Emperor Constantine came on throne. He accepted Christianity and recognized it as the State religion. Churches were built in Rome and throughout the empire. It was in the second half of the fourth century of Christian Era.¹

From then on the Church of Rome became the centre of Christianity. Bishops and missionaries were sent to all regions and countries within the Roman Empire. Countless churches, monasteries and seminaries (to teach Christianity) were built.

There is an important point which the reader should ponder on: All their talks and discussions begin on some evangelical postulates, like the theme of Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the scheme of crucifixion and atonement, and similar other principles. They base their talks on these ideas as though they were self-evident truths — and then go on building their edifice on them. They do not realize that it is their first and basic weakness. No matter how strong and lofty a structure may be, it cannot make up for the weakness of the foundation. And the foundation on which they have built their edifice — the three-in-one theology and the crucifixion and atonement — is simply incomprehensible.

Many Christian scholars agree that it is an idea that cannot be understood. Still they say that it is a religious tenet, therefore, it must be believed without asking for reason — after all, there are many things in religion which the reason says are impossible.

But it is one of the invalid ideas which spring from that invalid base. How can there be an impossible principle in the religion of truth? As far as we are concerned, it is through reason and understanding that we accept a religion and discern its truth and validity. How can a true belief contain something which reason invalidates? Is it not a contradiction in term?

Of course, religion accepts validity of miracles — the things which are possible in reason but impracticable; but an idea impossible in reason

¹ It happened in the first (not the second) half of the fourth century. Constantine I (the Great) established Christianity as State religion in 324; Nicaean Council was held in 325; his new capital at Byzantium was inaugurated in 330 (hence Byzantine Empire) which was renamed Constantinople (City of Constantine); he died in 337. (*tr.*)

can never happen.

However, the above-mentioned way of “argument” led their thinkers and scholars into conflicts, discords and disagreements in the very early days when the students gathered to learn Christianity at Alexandria, Rome and other places.

The church increased its watchdog role to preserve the unity of creed. Whenever a differing view was expressed or new idea raised its head, the church called a council of the bishops and presbyters to convince the party concerned to leave their ideas and beliefs; and if they persisted they were anathematized, banished or even killed.

The first such council was held in Nicea, to counter the views of Arius¹, who said that the Son was not like the Father, that only God was eternal while Christ was a created being.

The bishops, and presbyters assembled at Constantinople, in presence of the Emperor Constantine; they were three hundred and thirteen in number. They adopted the following creed:

We believe in one God, the Father, almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things came into existence, who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnated from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures and ascended to heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father and will come again with glory to judge

¹ Arius was Presbyter of Bancalis. A follower of Origen, he believed that Christ was a created being, not of the substance of God but created from “nothing”; he had a beginning and was thus not eternal. Although he was defeated at the Nicene Council (held in 325), subsequent Councils held at Arles, Milan and Sirmium (held in 353, 355 and 357, respectively) upheld his views. But it was again defeated in the Constantinople Council held in 381. Christian scholars say that Arians’ ‘temporary triumph’ “had been made possible by imperial interference.” But so was the case with the “original Nicene success” and its later victories. (See Williston Walker, *A History of Christian Church*, Edinburgh, 1970, pp. 107 — 117.) (tr.)

living and dead, of whose Kingdom there will be no end;

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, Who spoke through the prophets; in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. We confess one baptism to the remission of sins; we look forward to the resurrection of the dead¹, and the life of the world to come². Amen !

That was the first Council; after that numerous Councils were held to anathematize newly appearing schisms, like the Nestorians, Jacobites, الالبيانية Ilyanites [?], اليليارسية Yalyarsites³ [?], Macedonians¹, Noetus²,

¹ people have commented on the last sentence that it affirms physical resurrection, while the Christians believe in spiritual resurrection only as the Gospel shows.

But I think that the Gospel only indicates the absence of physical worldly enjoyments in the next world; it does not say that man will be resurrected in spirit only without his body. It rather says that man in the resurrection will become like angels, and there will be no sexual enjoyment among them. On the other hand, the Bible shows that even God and angels have bodies, let alone the man after resurrection. (*Author's Note*)

² The author has taken these details from ash-Shahristānī's *al-Milal wa 'n-niḥal*. ash-Shahristānī is confused when he says that the "first Council held at Nicea" assembled "at Constantinople". The Nicene Council had assembled in 325 at Nicea, and another Council was held at Constantinople in 381 C. E. The actual Nicene Creed is now only a matter of surmise. Probably it ended with the sentence, 'And in the Holy Spirit'. However, the Constantinople Council reconfirmed and enlarged it. That is why scholars refer to it as, "the so-called Nicene Creed", and sometimes with its technically correct name, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed. But in spite of all that, its first appearance was at the Council of Chalcedon (451 C.E.); it was signed on 25/10/451, in presence of the Emperor Marcian. (See J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Longman, London, 3rd ed., 1972, pp. 296 — 297; and *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*, 2nd ed., O.U.P., 1977).

In ash-Shahristānī's book, the number of participants of the first Council is given as 318 and not 313. (*tr.*)

³ The author has taken these names from ash-Shahristānī. I could not find the names, الالبيانية and اليليارسية in the books I referred to ash-Shahristānī, however, it gives the following details:

a). **Ilyanites:** A sub-sect of the Jacobites, found in Syria, Yemen, and Armenia. They believed that 'Īsā was not a body in reality; all the

Sabellians³, Paulianists⁴, (or Paulicians)⁵, and many others.

sufferings, killing and crucifixion happened only on an illusion (or illusory being).

b). **Yalyarsites:** They believed that people, on arriving at the heaven, would enjoy eating, drinking and sexual relations for a thousand years; thereafter, they would proceed to the bounties promised by Arius. (*tr.*)

¹ **Macedonians:** Named after Macedonius (died c. 362), Bishop of Constantinople. He strongly supported the semi-Arian cause in Council of Seleucia (359). From end of the fourth century, he is regarded as the founder of Pneumatomachi who are called Macedonians after him. They denied the full God-head of the Holy Ghost. See *The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*; also W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 118. (*tr.*)

² **Noetus:** In Arabic text this name is mentioned in the last. I have put it before the Sabellians, etc., as it would facilitate understanding. Noetus, probably of Smyrna, taught in his native region in 180 to 200 “that Christ was the Father Himself, and the Father Himself was born and suffered and died”. His views were called Modalistic Monarchianism. (W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p.69). Another name for that belief was Patripassion doctrine; Noetus also rejected Logo doctrine. (*The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*). (*tr.*)

³ **Sabellians:** Sabellianism is an alternative title for the Modalistic Monarchianism. Named after Sabbellus, who was teaching in Rome *cir.* 215. His theology was essentially that of Noetus, but much more carefully wrought out, especially in that it gave a definite place to the Holy Spirit, as well as to the Son. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all one and the same. They are three names of one God, Who manifests Himself in different ways according to circumstances. (W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, p. 69). (*tr.*)

⁴ **Paulianists:** Followers of Paul of Samosata; he became Bishop of Antioch *cir.* 260. He taught a form of Dynamic Monarchianism in which God-head was a closely knit trinity of Father, Wisdom and Word, and until creation formed a single hypostasis. He was a precursor of Nestorius, holding that from Incarnation the Word rested upon the human Jesus as one person upon another, and that the Incarnated Christ differed only in degree from the prophets. (*The Oxford Dictionary of Christian Church*). (*tr.*)

⁵ **Paulicians:** A sect of the Byzantine Empire. Their name may have been derived from St. Paul, or more probably from Paul of Samosata. Endlessly persecuted, many of them assisted the Muslims in their wars against the empire and adopted Islam. Apparently they ceased to exist as an independent sect in the

The church was ever vigilant in guarding what in its eyes was the true faith. The missionary work continued in full force, until by the end of fifth century all European governments (except Russia) were parts of Christendom: France, England, Austria, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Holland, etc., were all converted to Christianity by 496 C.E.

The Church continued to progress becoming stronger day by day. On the other hand, the Barbarians of the North were attacking the Roman Empire every now and then. The wars and internal strifes and unrest weakened the Empire — until a time came when the people of Rome together with the victorious tribes decided to hand over the affairs of the State to the Church. Now the Pope of the time, Gregory the Great ¹, had in his hand the reins of the temporal as well as the spiritual powers. It was in 590 C.E.

Consequently, the Church of Rome acquired absolute power over the Christians world. But by that time the Roman Empire had divided in two parts: the Western Roman Empire with its capital at Rome and the Eastern Roman (i.e. Byzantine) Empire with its capital at Constantinople. The Byzantine Emperors claimed for themselves the headship of Church within their domain, without accepting the authority of the Church of Rome. This led to the division of Christianity between the Catholics — the followers of the Church of Rome and the Orthodox, i.e., others.

The things continued in this manner, until the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople, and Palaeologus, the last Byzantine Emperor and Head of the Eastern (i.e. Orthodox) Church, was killed in the Cathedral, Hagia Sophia².

The Tzars of Russia now claimed the headship of the Church — as a legacy of the Byzantine Emperors to whom they were related by marriage. (Russia had been Christian since the tenth century.) The Russian Emperors thus became the Heads of the (Orthodox) Church in their land, independent of the (Catholic) Church of Rome. It was in 1454

twelfth century. (*ibid.*) (*tr.*)

¹ Gregory I (590 — 604) established the temporal power of the Papacy in that period of unrest in Italy. However, it was Pope Innocent III who during his Papacy (1198 — 1216) made several European Kings and Emperors to pay homage to him, accepting him as their overlord. (*tr.*)

² Constantine XIII palaeologus (1394 — 1453) was killed on 29th May, 1453. (*tr.*)

C. E.

The things continued in this way for about five centuries, until the last Tzar, Nicholas, was killed, with all his family, in 1918, by the Communists. Thus the Church of Rome almost returned to the condition that prevailed before the division.

Meanwhile, during the Middle Ages when the Vatican had reached the highest point of its glory and the Popes controlled every aspect of the people's lives, a lot of good Christians revolted against the Vatican in order to free themselves from the shackles which the Church had put on them.

One group refused to follow the Church of Rome or to obey the Popes, but they continued to accept the religion as interpreted by the Councils and agreed upon by their scholars. They are called the [Greek] Orthodox. Another group discarded the Roman Church altogether; they neither accept the said Church's interpretation of religion nor do they recognized the Pope's authority in any religious matter. They are the Protestants.

In this way, the Christians world is mainly divided into three sects: the Catholics who follow the Vatican and its teachings; the Orthodox, who accept the Catholic teachings but do not recognize the authority of the Vatican. As described above, this group resulted from the division of the Church [on the line of the Western and Eastern empires] and especially after the transfer of the Patriarchate from Constantinople to Moscow; and the Protestants, who recognize neither the authority of Vatican nor its teachings — they became independent in the fifteenth century of the Christian Era.

This is, in a nut-shell, the history of the Christian Church of the last two millenniums. Those who know the main theme of our book, will understand why we have written here this short account of their history. Our aim was three-fold:

First: To provide to a research scholar an insight into various changes taking place in the religion of the Christians; and to make them aware as to how alien ideas have been implanted in their beliefs and rituals; how pagan superstitions and idolatrous thoughts have crept into Christianity — by hereditary influences, or social give and take, or wilful adoption, or just because old habits die-hard.

Second: The power of the Church — and especially the Church of

Rome — gradually increased until it reached its zenith in the Middle Ages; the Popes had taken both temporal and spiritual powers in their hands, and the kings and emperors in Europe had to submit to the Papal decrees, and pay homage to the Popes. The Popes put on throne whomsoever they wished and removed whoever they wished¹.

It is narrated that the Pope once ordered the German emperor to stand barefoot on the door of the Papal Palace for three days (in the winter) — for expiation of some mistakes which he beseeched the Pope to forgive².

On another occasion, the Pope kicked with his foot the crown of a king who had approached him kneeling down to seek Papal pardon³.

Those church leaders had described the Muslims to their followers in a way that the Christians were bound to regard Islam as a religion of idol-worshippers. You will see it in the slogans and poems which were written to incite and arouse the Christians against the Muslims during the Crusades which raged between the two powers for long years.

The Christians were led to believe⁴ that the Muslims worshipped idols; that they believed in three gods: (1) Māhom (who is also called افوميد Afomed [?] and Mahounde), he is the first among gods and he is Muḥammad; (2) Apoline who is the second; and (3) Tervagān who is the third. Others added two more to this list: مارتوان Māratwān [?] and Jupiter; but their rank was below the first three. They said that Muḥammad's religion was based on his claim of divinity — that he claimed to be god. Sometimes the “information” was added that Muḥammad had taken for himself an idol made of gold.

Richard composed poems to incite the Franks against the Muslims, in which he, *inter alia*, says: “Arise and dislodge Mahound and Tervagan and throw them into fire, so that you may get near your God.”

Roland described Mahom, the “god of Muslims”, in a poem, in which he says: “It is made of gold and silver; if you see it, you will know that no artisan can even imagine a more beautiful face, let alone make it; big in size, admirable in workmanship, majesty radiating from its

¹ *al-Futūḥātu 'l-Islāmiyyah. (Author's Note)*

² *ibid. (Author's Note)*

³ *ibid. (Author's Note)*

⁴ This and the following descriptions have been taken from هنري دوکاستري Cte Henry de Castries; *ad-Diyānātu 'l-Islāmiyyah*, ch.I. (*Author's Note*)

features, Māhom is made of gold and silver, its brilliant splendour dazzles the eyes to blindness; it has been placed on an elephant which is the finest work of art; its stomach is hollow, and an onlooker may find lustrous light glowing from it (because) it is set with precious brilliant gems, (it is transparent, and) its inside may be seen from outside; its fine workmanship is matchless.

“The gods of Muslims used to inspire them at times of trouble and turmoil. The Muslims were once defeated in a battle; so their commander sent someone to call their god who was in Mecca (i.e., Muḥammad, s.a.w.a.). An ‘eye-witness’ says that the god (i.e., Muḥammad, s.a.w.a.) came to them; a huge mob of his followers surrounded him; they were beating drums, playing lutes and blowing pipes and bagpipes made of silver; singing and dancing around him they brought him to the battleground, they were full of joy and happiness, making merry. His deputy was waiting for him; when he arrived (the deputy) stood up and began worshipping him with humbleness and humility.”

Richard explains the revelation sent by the god, Māhom, in this manner: “The sorcerers captured a genie and put it in the stomach of that idol. That genie used to thunder and hammer inside and then speak to the Muslims, who listened to him with rapt attention.”

Such droll flippancies are found in a lot of their books written during, or about, the Crusades. Our readers will, no doubt, be astounded and scandalized to read such accounts of their pure religion — may be some would even doubt the authenticity of these quotations. After all, they have ascribed such things to Islam that no one has ever seen in his life, nor has any Muslim imagined them or even dreamt of them¹.

Third: A deep thinker may easily recognize the changes that have occurred in the Christianity during the past twenty centuries. The idolatrous beliefs crept imperceptibly into Christianity: first it was excessive reverence for Christ; then his message was cast into the mould of trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), which was further developed in the theory of crucifixion and atonement, which in its turn gave rise to the belief that law and its obedience was not needed at all, the faith was

¹ Many such astonishing “revelations” have been quoted by Norman Daniel in his, *Islam and the West. The Making of an Image*, Edinburgh University Press, 1960. (tr.)

sufficient for salvation.

At first it appeared in religious garb; the Church insisted on some religious rites like prayer, fast and baptism. But opposite trends continued to grow and various ideas raised their heads, until the Protestantism appeared on the scene; the political turmoil and unrest gave way to formal secular laws based on the principle of freedom in the matters which were not covered by those laws. In this way, the teachings of religion became weaker and weaker, and continued to give ground to anti-religion forces, until moral values and virtuous conduct could not stand the onslaught of materialism which “the unrestricted freedom” had let loose on humanity.

Then appeared socialism and communism, based on Dialectic Materialism; belief in God and adherence to moral virtues and religious rites and deeds were discarded. Spiritual humanism was succeeded by materialistic animality composed of only two instincts: greed to gain for oneself whatever one desires and impulse to crush down whoever comes in one’s way. Today the world is speeding to that animalistic goal, to its doom.

Various new religious revival movements that have lately appeared everywhere are but political games invented and played by political groups, who want to attain their goals through them. We know that politics, as a profession, now knocks at every door and uses every conceivable device to realize its aims.

According to Dr. Joseph Sittler, of Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary, the underlying weakness of the current U. S. religious revival is that it seeks to give divine sanction to the cultural values modern man lives by. ‘We make God say amen to what we believe, instead of saying amen to God.’ The greatest danger, he feels, is that this pious self-flattery may immunize Americans against any desire to join in a genuine religious revival if one should arise¹.

According to Dr. Georges Florovsky, the ‘foremost U. S. spokesman for Russian Orthodoxy’, Christian teaching, which reaches most Americans through sentimental literature, consoles them instead of

¹ *The Life* (New York edition), John Knox Jessup, in the article, *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*, 26th December, 1955, p. 143. (tr.)

awakening them through deeply felt or ‘witnessed’ experience¹.

Whence the caravan of religion started from, and where has it arrived? The message began in the name of revival of religion (i.e., belief), morality (i.e., virtuous character) and the *sharī‘ah* (good deeds); and ended up by repudiating and abolishing all of it, replacing it with animalistic enjoyment.

This has happened because of the first deviation affected by St. Paul the Apostle and his disciples. We are living in a civilization that admittedly threatens mankind with extinction. Some people say that Christ is the leader and standard-bearer of the modern civilization. But it would be nearer to truth to call it the Paulian civilization.

TRADITIONS

al-Qummī narrates about the verse: *It is not meet for a man that Allāh should give him the Book and the Wisdom and Prophethood, then he should say to men, ‘Be my servants rather than Allāh’s’*. “Surely ‘Īsā did not say to men: ‘I have created you, therefore you should be my servants rather than Allāh’s’, rather he said to them: ‘Be worshippers of the Lord’, that is, having true knowledge.” (*at-Tafsīr*)

The author says: The context and associations given in the Commentary support this explanation. “Surely ‘Īsā did not say to men: ‘I have created you.’ ” It is a sort of a proof to show that he had not said it. Had he told them to worship him, it would have been necessary to tell them that he was their creator; but he had not said it, nor had he created them.

The same exegete narrates about the verse: *Or that he should enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for lords*. “There were people who worshipped the angels; the Christians thought ‘Īsā was the Lord; and the Jews said that ‘Uzayr was the Son of God. Allāh therefore said that no prophet would enjoin you that you should take the angels and the prophets for Lords.” (*ibid.*)

¹ *ibid.* (tr.)

The author says: It has been explained in the Commentary.

It is narrated in *ad-Durru 'l-manthūr* from Ibn Ishāq, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim and al-Bayhaqī (in his *Dalā'ilu 'n-Nubuwwah*) from Ibn 'Abbās that he said: “When the Jewish scholars and Christians of Najrān gathered near the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and he invited them to Islam, Abū Rāfi‘ al-Qurazī said: ‘Do you wish, O Muḥammad, that we should worship you as the Christians worship ‘Īsā son of Maryam?’ Thereupon a Christian of Najrān said: ‘Well, do you want this from us, O Muḥammad?’ The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘I seek refuge in Allāh that we should worship other than Allāh, or that we should enjoin worship of someone else; He has neither sent me with it nor has He enjoined me this.’

Therefore, Allāh, revealed the verses (because of their question): *It is not meet for a man ... after you are Muslims* (submitting ones)?” (*ad-Durru 'l-manthūr*)

It is reported in the same book: “ ‘Abd ibn Hamid has narrated from al-Ḥasan that he said: ‘I have been told that a man said: “‘O Messenger of Allāh! We greet you (exactly) as we greet each other. Should not we prostrate before you?’” He said: “No. But you should honour your Prophet, and recognize the right of the ones having that right; because prostration should not be done for anyone other than Allāh.” Then Allāh revealed the verses: *It is not meet for a man ... after you are Muslims* (submitting ones)?’ ” (*ibid.*)

The author says: Also other events have been narrated concerning revelation of these verses. Obviously, all of them are based on academic inferences: and we have discussed in detail about them. Also, it is possible for various reasons to combine in relation to one verse. And Allāh knows better.

* * * * *

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ لَمَا آتَيْتُكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ ثُمَّ جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ مُصَدِّقٌ لِمَا مَعَكُمْ لَتُؤْمِنُنَّ بِهِ وَلَتَنْصُرُنَّهُ قَالَ أَأَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَخَذْتُمْ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكُمْ إِصْرِي قَالُوا أَقْرَرْنَا قَالَ فَاشْهَدُوا وَأَنَا سَاهِبٌ مِنَ الشَّاهِدِينَ — ٨١. فَمَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ — ٨٢.

أَفَغَيْرَ دِينِ اللَّهِ يَبْغُونَ وَلَهُ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ طَوْعًا وَكَرْهًا وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُونَ — ٨٣. قُلْ آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَالنَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ — ٨٤. وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ — ٨٥.

And when Allāh made a covenant with the prophets: “Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom — then a Messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him.” He said: “Do you affirm and accept My compact in this (matter)?” They said: “We do affirm.” He said: “Then bear witness, and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you” (81). Whoever therefore turns back after this, these it is that are the transgressors (82). Is it then other than Allāh’s religion that they seek (to follow), and to Him

submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly, and to Him shall they be returned? (83). Say: ‘‘We believe in Allāh and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl and Ishāq and Ya‘qūb and the tribes, and what was given to Mūsā and ‘Īsā and to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make any distinction between any of them, and to Him do we submit’’ (84). And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers (85).

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

The verses are not disjointed from the preceding ones; they have been revealed in the same context. Earlier, Allāh had described that the People of the Book transgressed the limits by indulging in alteration of the Books they were given, creating doubts and confusion among the people, making differences between the prophets, and rejecting the signs of the truth of the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.); then He showed how impossible it was for a prophet like Mūsā or ‘Īsā (peace be on them both) to tell the people to take him or some other prophets or the angels as their lords — as the Christians openly claimed and the Jews implied.

Now He puts more emphasis on the impossibility of such an idea. How can any prophet give such an order to his people, when Allāh has made covenant with the prophets that they must believe in and help every prophet no matter whether he preceded them or came after them? They were to fulfil that promise by confirming the truth of the preceding prophets and giving good news of those who were to come after them — as ‘Īsā (a.s.) verified the prophethood of Mūsā (a.s.) and his laws, and foretold the advent of Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.). Likewise, Allāh made a covenant with them that they should make a similar covenant with their people, and made them witnesses over them; and then declared that it was the Islam — submission — which dominates all those who are in the heavens and in the earth.

Then Allāh enjoins His Prophet (s.a.w.a.) to adhere to that covenant:

he is to believe in Allāh and all that was sent to His prophets — without making any distinction between them, and to surrender to Allāh. He was to enter into the covenant on his own behalf, and also on behalf of his *ummah*. That is why it is said that the covenant was made with him directly, and with his *ummah* through him, as we shall explain later.

QUR’ĀN: *And when Allāh made a covenant with the prophets: “Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom — then a Messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you must believe in him, and you must aid him”:* The verse speaks of a covenant that was made. ‘*Mīthāqa’n-nabiyyīn*’ (مِيثَاقَ النَّبِيِّينَ = translated here as “covenant with the prophets”), literally means ‘covenant of the prophets’. This covenant was taken for the prophets (as the clause, “*then a Messenger comes to you ... you must aid him*”, points to), as well as “with the prophets” (as the clauses, *He said: “Do you affirm ... ”*, and, *Say: “We believe in Allāh ... ”*, show). The covenant was therefore made for the prophets and with the prophets — although it was made with the prophets’ people too, through the prophets.

The phrase, “covenant of the prophets”, may therefore refer to the covenant made “with” them and to that “for” them, while in fact it is the same covenant looked at from different angles. In other words, “the prophets”, may refer to those prophets “for” whom the covenant was made, and also to those “with” whom it was made. However, the import of the preceding two verses (*It is not meet for a man ... after you are Muslims*) which were revealed in the same context, gives rather more weight to the idea that, “the prophets”, refers to those “with” whom the covenant was made. Looking in this context the verses have the following connotation: ‘It was not possible for the prophets, after Allāh gives them the Book, the Wisdom and Prophethood, to call the people to take someone other than Allāh as their lord or to worship him. How can it be possible while Allāh has made covenant with them to believe in, and help, other prophets of Allāh — who enjoin their peoples to believe in one God.’ It is for this reason that this verse begins with mention of the covenant — focusing our attention to it.

‘*lamā ātaytukum min kitābin wa ḥikmah*’ (لَمَّا آتَيْنٰكُمْ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَحِكْمَةٍ = Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom): ‘*lamā*’ (with the

vowel ‘a’ after ‘l’, and without putting emphasis on ‘m’) is in accordance with the well-known recital (of all the reciters except Ḥamzah). Accordingly ‘mā’ (مَا) is relative pronoun meaning, “what” or “whatsoever”; ‘ataytukum’ (أَتَيْتُكُمْ = I have given you) is its ‘aṣ-ṣilah’ (الصَّلَةُ = antecedent). Its another recital is ‘ātaynākum’ (أَتَيْنَاكُمْ = We have given you). The objective pronoun that should come here is omitted because the phrase “of Book and Wisdom”, points to it. The whole phrase is the subject, and, “you must believe in him, and you must aid him”, the predicate. ‘la’, in ‘lamā’, denotes beginning of the sentence, while in ‘latu’minunna bihi’ (لِتُؤْمِنَنَّ بِهِ = you must believe in him) it is for emphasis and oath. The whole sentence describes the covenant that was made, which would be as follows: ‘That which I have given you of Book and Wisdom, then a Messenger comes to you verifying that which is with you, you should believe in that Messenger and aid him without fail.’

There is another syntactical possibility: ‘ma’ in ‘lamā’ may be a conditional pronoun, meaning “when”; and “you must believe in him”, its answer. The meaning, in this case, would be like this: ‘When I have given you of Book and Wisdom and then a Messenger comes to you ... you must believe in him, and you must aid him.’ This explanation is rather more appropriate (because it is more common to add ‘la’ of oath on the “answer” of a conditional sentence), and the meaning in this case is clearer; also it is more usual to put conditional clauses in covenants.

A reciter has recited ‘limā’ using the vowel ‘i’ (instead of ‘a’) for ‘l’. In that case ‘li’ would denote reason, and ‘limā ataytukum’ would mean ‘because of that which I have given you’. But the first recital has more weight.

The second person plural pronoun “you” in “have given you” and “comes to you”, apparently refers to “the prophets”. But the speech, *Do you affirm and accept my compact in this?*, indicates that it includes the people of the prophets too; that is, the talk is directed to the prophets only but the order (i.e., covenant) covers their people too. The people are as much obliged to believe in and help the coming Messenger as are the prophets themselves.

The conjunctive “then” in the clause “then a Messenger comes to you”, obviously shows a delay in time; in other words, it was incumbent on a preceding prophet to believe in and help a prophet who would come

after him. On the other hand, the verse 3:84 (*Say: ‘We believe in Allāh and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Ibrāhīm ...’*) , implies that the covenant was made with each of the preceding and the following prophets for the other — the following prophets too were required to believe in and help the preceding ones. But it is only an inference; the words are silent about this matter — as we shall explain later, Allāh willing.

There are two third person singular pronouns in the clauses, “you must believe in him, and you must aid him”. Both may refer to the “Messenger” who was to come later; there is no difficulty in the idea of one prophet believing in another; as Allāh says: *The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and (so do) the believers; everyone of them believes in Allāh and His angels and His books and His messengers (2:285)*. Nevertheless, it appears from the verse: *Say: ‘We believe in Allāh and what has been revealed to us, and what was revealed to Ibrāhīm ...’*, that the first pronoun refers to the Book and the Wisdom that was revealed, and the second one to the Messenger.

The meaning therefore would be as follows: ‘You must believe in what I have given you of the Book and the Wisdom, and you must aid the Messenger who comes to you verifying that which is with you.’

QUR’ĀN: *He said: ‘Do you affirm and accept my compact in this (matter)?’ They said: ‘We do affirm’:* The question was put for confirmation. ‘*al-Iqrār*’ (الإقرار = affirmation; acknowledgement); ‘*al-iṣr*’ (الإصر = compact, covenant), it is the object of the verb, “accept”. Literally, the clause means, ‘and take my compact in this’. The prophets were to take or make God’s covenant; obviously there should be a second party there to enter into covenant with them, and it could be none except their own *ummah*. The verse therefore means: ‘Do you affirm this covenant and have you made this compact of mine with your people? They said: “We do affirm.”’

An exegete has said: Taking God’s compact means that the prophets accepted that covenant for themselves. If so, then, “(Do you) take my compact in this (matter)”, would be an explicative apposition of the preceding clause, “Do you affirm?” This explanation is strengthened by their response, as they only said, “We do affirm”, without saying

anything about taking the compact. Accordingly, the covenant would be restricted to the prophets; their *ummah* would not be included in it. On the other hand, the next directive, *Then bear witness*, goes against this explanation; obviously one bears witness for or against other than oneself. Also, the next directive (*Say: ‘We believe in Allāh ... ’*) uses plural pronoun, *We*, and not, *I*, apparently, it is a declaration of faith by the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) for himself and on behalf of his *ummah*. Therefore, “taking of compact” would mean making the compact with the *ummah*. Although, it may be said that it is these two sentences, *Then bear witness*, and, *We believe in Allāh*, which prove the participation of the *ummah* with the prophets in this compact, while, “take my compact in this”, is not related to this matter.

QUR’ĀN: *He said: ‘Then bear witness, and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you’*; Obviously, the witness, as explained above, is borne for or against someone else; therefore, it is concerned both with the prophets and their people. As mentioned above, also the next directive, (*Say: ‘We believe in Allāh’*), proves it. And the context too supports this meaning: The verses were revealed to reprove the People of the Book for their rejecting the message of the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and for ascribing falsehoods to ‘Īsā, Mūsā and some other prophets (peace be on them all); and it is in this background that they have been rebuked: *Is it then other than Allāh’s religion that they seek (to follow)?*

Some exegetes have said that the order, “Then bear witness”, refers to the prophets bearing witness for one another; others have written that this order was given to the angels who were to bear witness, and that it is not concerned with the prophets.

COMMENT: These two meanings, although possibly correct in themselves, cannot be inferred from the verse without an association; and you have seen that the association goes against it.

One of the fine points in this verse deserves special attention. Read the words, *Allāh made a covenant with the prophets*, in conjunction with the clause, *then a Messenger comes to you*. You will see that the covenant was made with the prophets for the Messenger. And we have described in the Commentary of the verse 2:213 (*Mankind was but one people ...*) that messengership is more particular than prophethood, that

every messenger is a prophet but not every prophet is a messenger. The verse therefore obviously means that the covenant was made with the rank of prophethood for the rank of messengership — but not vice versa.

Keeping this connotation in view, we may question the comprehensiveness of the explanation given by an exegete that the covenant was made with the prophets that they would believe in each other and would tell one another to believe in each other — the religion is one which all the prophets invite to.

The meaning in fact should be as follows: Allāh made a covenant with the prophets and their people that if Allāh gave them Book and Wisdom and then a messenger came to them, verifying that which was with them, they would surely believe in what he would bring to them and help him; a later coming prophet would help a preceding (or contemporary) messenger by affirming his truth, and a preceding prophet would foretell the coming of a later messenger and enjoin his *ummah* to believe in him (the coming messenger), affirm his truth and help him in his cause. This covenant thus implies and affirms the Oneness of Divine Religion.

Another exegete has explained the verse as follows: “Allāh made a covenant with the prophets that they would affirm the truth of Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.) and give their people the good tidings of his advent.” This meaning is correct in itself; but it cannot be discerned from the wording of the verse. Of course, we may infer it from the context, as we have explained earlier: The verse is among the ones that argue against the People of the Book, admonishing and rebuking them for their tendency of altering the Books, hiding the signs foretold of the Holy Prophet of Islam, transgressing the limit and turning away from the clear truth.

QUR’ĀN: *Whoever therefore turns back after this, these it is that are the transgressors:* It puts emphasis on the above-mentioned covenant. The meaning is clear.

QUR’ĀN: *Is it then other than Allāh’s religion that they seek (to follow), and to Him submits ... ?:* The question arises from the preceding verses. Well, Allāh’s religion is one; it was about that religion that the covenant was made with the prophets and their people; it was incumbent upon the

preceding prophets and their people to foretell the advent of the Messenger who was to follow and they had to believe in his message and help him. Well, is it not strange — in this background — the way the People of the Book are behaving? What do they want when they deny your truth? They show the desire to follow the religion. If so, then do they seek a religion other than Islam which is the only Divine Religion? There can be no other explanation why they do not accept your truth, why they do not hold fast to the religion of Islam. Undoubtedly, it was incumbent upon them to accept and follow Islam, because it is the religion which is based on nature — a religion should not go against nature. Do they need a proof? Then see how all those inhabitants of the heavens and the earth (who have been endowed with sense and intelligence) submit to Allāh — on the level of creation — then let them also submit to him on the level of legislation.

QUR'ĀN: *and to Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly:* This is the Islam — submission — that encompasses all who are in the heavens and the earth, including the People of the Book, who it says, are not Muslims. The word used here is “*aslama*” (اسلمَ = he submitted), in past tense, which shows that the action has already taken place; in other words, they have already submitted to Allāh.

Obviously, it can only refer to their submission in creative affairs — they cannot go against His decree in matters of creation. It does not refer to Islam in the sense of religion, or in the meaning of belief and worship. The words, “willingly or unwillingly”, support, nay, prove this explanation.

Keeping the above explanation in view, it appears that the words, “to Him submits”, gives a proof, a reason, without mentioning, for the sake of brevity, its result and conclusion. The complete talk would be as follows: ‘Do they seek to follow a religion other than Islam? But it is the religion of Allāh; whoever is in the heavens and the earth submits to Him and obeys His order. If these People of the Book would accept it, their submission would be done willingly; if they disliked what Allāh has decreed for them and tried to seek something else, the Divine Decree would nevertheless be enforced, however they might dislike it.’

It appears from it that the conjunctive ‘*wa*’ (و = or) in, “willingly or

unwillingly”, denotes division. The alternatives point to their willing acceptance of what Allāh has decreed for them of the things they like; and their resentment of Divine Decrees in matters they dislike, for example, death, poverty and sickness, etc.

QUR’ĀN: *and to Him shall they be returned:* It is another reason why they must seek Islam as religion. They are bound to return to Allāh, their true Lord; they would not be able to hide from Allāh or to go to what their disbelief and polytheism leads them to rely on.

QUR’ĀN: *Say: “We believe in Allāh and what has been revealed to us:* Allāh enjoins the Prophet to adhere to the covenant which was made with him and the others. He should declare as follows, for himself and on behalf of the believers from his *ummah*: “We believe in Allāh and what has been revealed ...”

It is a proof, as we have said above, that the covenant was made with the prophets and their people together.

QUR’ĀN: *and what was revealed to Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl ... and to Him do we submit’’:* All those mentioned here were prophets from the progeny of Ibrāhīm. The verse implies that the word, “the tribes”, refers to the prophets from the progeny of Ya‘qūb — from the Children of Israel — like Dāwūd, Sulaymān, Yūnus, Ayyūb and others. Then comes the phrase, “the prophets from their Lord”; it makes the declaration comprehensive, as it covers Adam, Nūḥ and all the others. Then a reference is made to the whole group, saying, “we do not make any distinction between any of them and to Him do we submit.”

QUR’ĀN: *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam ... shall be one of the losers:* It negates and nullifies all that is outside the purview of the said covenant. It further emphasises the obligation of following the terms of the covenant.

TRADITION

The Leader of the faithful (‘Alī, a.s.) said: “Verily, Allāh made

covenant with the prophets (who came) before our Prophet that they should inform their people of his advent and his characteristics, give them his good news and enjoin them to affirm his truth.” (*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān*)

Ibn Jarīr has narrated from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (may Allāh be pleased with him) that he said: “Allāh did not send any prophet — Adam and those who came after him — without making a covenant with him about Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.): If he (Muḥammad, s.a.w.a.) was sent when that prophet was alive, he must believe in him and help him; and He enjoined him to make a (similar) covenant with his people.” Then the Imām recited the verse, *And when Allāh made a covenant with the prophets: Certainly what I have given you of Book and Wisdom ...*” (*ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*)

The author says: These two traditions explain the verse keeping both the words and the context in view, as we have written above.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) explained this verse as follows: “When Allāh made a covenant with the people of the prophets — (with) every *ummaḥ* — for affirming the truth of its prophet and following what they (the prophets) would bring to them; but (the people) did not fulfil it (i.e., the covenant) and neglected much of their laws and altered (it) to a great extent.” (*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān; al-Jawāmi‘*)

The author says: The above tradition applies the verse to a particular situation; it therefore does not conflict with the explanation given in the Commentary that the verse refers to a covenant made with the prophets together with their people.

The Leader of the faithful (a.s.) said explaining the words: *He said: ‘Do you affirm ...’*: “He (Allāh) said: ‘Do you affirm? And have you made this compact with your people?’ They (i.e., the prophets and their people) said: ‘We do affirm what Thou hast enjoined us to affirm.’ Allāh said: ‘Then bear witness over your people in this respect, and I too am one of the bearers of witness with you, over you and your people.’” (*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān*)

Ibn Jarīr narrates from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib that he said about the words, *Then bear witness ...*: “Allāh said: ‘Then bear witness over your people in this respect; and I too am one of the bearers of witness with

you, over you and them. Then whoever turns away from you, O Muḥammad, after this covenant taken from all the people, these it is that are the transgressors, they are the disobedient ones, (steeped) in disbelief.’ ” (*ad-Durru 'l-manthūr*)

The author says: Its explanation has been given earlier.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said: “(Allāh) said to them (when they were) in (the state of) particle: ‘Do you affirm and accept my compact in this matter?’ They said: ‘We do affirm.’ Then Allāh said to the angels: ‘Then bear witness.’ ” (*at-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

The author says: The wording of the verse is not in conflict with this explanation, although, as we have said earlier, it is not inferred from its apparent meanings.

It is written in *ad-Durru 'l-manthūr* concerning the verse, *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam ...*: “Aḥmad and aṭ-Ṭabarānī (in his *al-Mu‘jamu 'l-awṣaṭ*) have narrated from Abū Hurayrah that he said: ‘The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: “The deeds shall come on the Day of Resurrection. So the prayer will come and say, ‘O Lord, I am prayer,’ and He will say, ‘Surely you are on good.’ And the alms will come and say, ‘O Lord I am alms,’ and He will say, ‘Surely you are on good.’ Then the fast will come and say, ‘I am fast,’ and He will say, ‘Surely you are on good.’ Then the deeds will come (one after another) and Allāh will go on saying, ‘Surely you are on good.; (until Islam will come and Allāh will say:) ‘With thee shall I take today and with thee shall I give.’ Allāh says in His Book: *And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted from him, and in the hereafter he shall be one of the losers*’ ” ’ ”

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said about this verse: “It (i.e., Islam) means their believing in the Oneness of Allāh, the Mighty, the Great.” (*at-Tawḥīd*; *at-Tafsīr*, al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: The belief in monotheism requires that the servant should accept, and submit to, whatever Allāh wants him to do. It therefore implies the same thing which has been written in the

Commentary. If on the other hand it is explained just as “not ascribing anyone or anything to Allāh”, then the willingness and unwillingness (mentioned in a preceding verse) would imply voluntary and compulsory guidances.

There are several other traditions narrated by al-‘Ayyāshī and al-Qummī (in their books) and others, in explanation of the verse, *And when Allāh made a covenant with the prophets ...* In those traditions the words, *you must believe in him, and you must aid him*, have been explained as follows: You must believe in the Messenger of Allāh and you must aid the Leader of the faithful — blessings and peace be on them. Obviously, these traditions refer the former pronoun, *him*, to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and the later, *him*, to the Leader of the faithful (‘Alī, a.s.), without there being any proof or association for it in the wording of the verse.

Nevertheless, a tradition given by al-‘Ayyāshī may solve this problem. He narrates from Salām ibn al-Mustanīr, from Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.) that he said:

“They have taken for themselves a name, that Allāh named no one with it except ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib — and there has not come its interpretation yet.” I said: “May I be your ransom ! When will its interpretation come?” He said: “When it comes, Allāh shall gather before Him the prophets and the believers, so that they should help him. And it is the words of Allāh, *And when Allāh made a covenant with the prophets ... and I (too) am of the bearers of witness with you.*”

This tradition solves the problem. The problem arises if we take those traditions as an exegesis or explanation of the verse [but this tradition shows that they do not purport to give the exegesis; they aim at pointing at its interpretation]. And we have described earlier that interpretation is not meaning of the word, nor a thing related to word. Vide for detail the discourse under the following verse: *He it is Who sent down to thee the Book ...*¹ (3:7).

* * * * *

¹ See *al-Mīzān* (Engl. Transl.), vol. 5, pp. 26 — 129. (tr.)

كَيْفَ يَهْدِي اللَّهُ قَوْمًا كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ وَشَهِدُوا أَنَّ الرَّسُولَ
 حَقٌّ وَجَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الظَّالِمِينَ — ٨٦ . أُولَئِكَ
 جَزَاءُهُمْ أَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ — ٨٧ . خَالِدِينَ
 فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ — ٨٨ . إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا
 مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ — ٨٩ . إِنَّ الَّذِينَ
 كَفَرُوا بَعْدَ إِيمَانِهِمْ ثُمَّ أَزْدَادُوا كُفْرًا لَنْ تُقْبَلَ تَوْبَتُهُمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ
 الْعَصَاوُونَ — ٩٠ . إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْ
 أَحَدِهِمْ مِلءُ الْأَرْضِ ذَهَبًا وَلَوْ افْتَدَى بِهِ أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ
 وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ — ٩١ .

How shall Allāh guide a people who disbelieved after their believing, and they have borne witness that the Messenger was true and clear arguments had come to them? And Allāh does not guide the unjust people (86). (As for) these, their reward is that upon them is the curse of Allāh and the angels and of men, all together (87). Abiding in it; their chastisement shall not be lightened nor shall they be respited (88); Except those who repent after that and amend, then surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful (89). Surely those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in unbelief, their repentance shall never be accepted, and these are they that have gone astray (90). Surely, those who disbelieve and die while they are unbelievers, the

earth full of gold shall not be accepted from one of them, though he should offer to ransom himself with it; these it is who shall have a painful chastisement, and they shall have no helpers (91).

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

The verses may possibly be connected to the preceding ones dealing with the People of the Book; but apparently they are separate and revealed in another context.

QUR'ĀN: *How shall Allāh guide a people ... Allāh does not guide the unjust people:* The question shows improbability of the situation; that it is impossible for them to get guidance. The verse ends with the sentence, “and Allāh does not guide the unjust people”. We have explained somewhere earlier that in such sentences the adjective explains the reason, that is, Allāh does not guide them because they are unjust, and as long as they persist in injustice they will not get Divine Guidance. Of course, they could not be debarred from that guidance if they repented and returned to Allāh.

The clause, “and they have borne witness that the Messenger was true”: If the verse refers to the People of the Book, then the bearing of witness would refer to their realization that the signs foretold of the awaited prophet perfectly fitted on the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.); and the next clause, “and clear argument had come to them”, would refer to that reality. If, on the other hand, it refers to those who apostatized after professing Islam, then the “witness” refers to their affirmation of the truth of the Prophet — not only a ritual affirmation resulting from ignorance or tribal influence, but the one based on clear understanding, as the clause, “and clear arguments had come to them”, indicates.

In any case, as the verse contains the clause, “and they have borne witness that the Messenger was true”, it shows that the disbelief refers to their rejection of Faith after the truth was made clear to them, after the proof was completed against them. They had disbelieved only because they hated the truth, because they haughtily wrangled with the believers

and transgressed the limit unjustly. It is this injustice which does not let its people find their way to safety and deliverance.

There is another syntactic explanation given for the clause, “and they have borne witness”. It has been said that it is in conjunction with the word *‘imānihim’* (إِيمَانِهِمْ = their belief) and it means, ‘who disbelieved after they had believed and after they had borne witness.’ Yet another explanation: The conjunctive, “and”, in the clause, “and they have borne witness”, has a circumstantial connotation, and the sentence means, ‘while they have borne witness’. In this case it would be a circumstantial clause.

QUR’ĀN: (As for) *these, their reward ... nor shall they be respited: We have earlier explained how all the curse returns to such people. For detail see the Commentary of the following verse: ... these it is whom Allāh does curse, and those who curse do curse them (too) (2:159)*¹

QUR’ĀN: *Except those who repent after that and amend, then surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful: ‘Aṣṣalḥū’* (أَصْلَحُوا = amended, changed to better); it points to sincerity of repentance; that they repent with true heart, by which the impurity of disbelief is removed and their soul is purified by true belief. This word does not refer to doing good deeds; of course, good deeds follow the sincere repentance and are inseparable from it, yet they are not a part of repentance. The clause, “then surely Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful”, puts the reason to point to its unspoken result. Its connotation is as follows: then Allāh forgives them and has mercy on them, because Allāh is Forgiving, Merciful.

QUR’ĀN: *Surely those who disbelieve after their believing ... are they that have gone astray. Surely those who disbelieve and die ... they shall have no helpers:* The two verses together explain the reason of the verse in the beginning, “How shall Allāh guide a people who disbelieved after their believing.” It applies a general rule to a particular case. A man, who disbelieves after truth has been made manifest to him and proof completed against him, and who then does not sincerely return to Allāh, can belong to one of the two categories: Either he is an apostate who

¹ See *al-Mīzān* (Engl. transl.), vol. 2, pp. 254 — 261.

disbelieves after believing, then increases in unbelief and goes on transgressing without ever thinking of amending his ways; Allāh shall not guide such a person nor will He accept his insincere repentance, because he does not turn to God with sincerity; he is totally lost, and there is no hope at all of his returning to the right path. Or, he is an unbeliever who dies in his disbelief, in his aversion to truth, without ever repenting; Allāh shall not guide him in the hereafter to the Garden, because he himself never tried to return to his Lord; and there is no substitute for this returning to Lord, for repentance. He therefore will have nothing to offer as ransom, nor will any intercessor or helper intercede on his behalf or help him.

In this context, look at the sentence, “and these are they that have gone astray”. In Arabic it is a “nominal sentence”, because its predicate is a *nomen agentis*, ‘*aḍ-ḍāllūn*’ (الضَّالُّونَ = lit: strayers); such a sentence indicates permanence. Then there is the demonstrative pronoun ‘*ulā’ika*’ (أُولَئِكَ = lit: those) which is used for distant objects; and it shows that they are removed far from mercy of Allāh. Thus there are three modes of emphasis which have been combined here: addition of a separate personal pronoun, “they”, use of a noun (*nomen agentis*) for predicate; and the definite article ‘*al*’ (الْ = the) before the said predicate — all these together prove that they are hardened wrong-doers and transgressors for whom there is no hope of guidance.

Likewise, the last sentence, “and they shall have no helpers”, proves that they will not get benefit of intercession — it is the intercessors who shall be the helpers on the Day of Resurrection. We have earlier explained that the use of plural, e.g., *intercessors*, in the verse 26:101 (*So we have no intercessors*) proves that there shall be intercessors on the Day of Judgment but the unbelievers shall not be able to avail themselves of their intercession. (See the details in the discourse of “Intercession” under the verse 2:48¹.) The same is the import of the plural, “helpers”, in this place.

The second verse says that no ransom shall be accepted from them, nor will they get any helper. It is because these things are substitutes, which are used when the original thing is not available. They lost their chance of repentance in this life and there is nothing that can be a

¹ See *al-Mīzān* (Engl. transl.), vol. 1, pp. 226 — 265. (*tr.*)

substitute of repentance in the hereafter.

It also shows that the clause, “and die while they are unbelievers”, implies that they died without repentance. As such, there is no conflict between this apparently exclusive statement and the following verse which says: *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 (4:18).* In this verse, *when death comes*, means, when the death approaches and man sees the signs of the next world and his ties with this world are cut off. Obviously at this point of time the door of repentance is closed on him.

‘*al-Mil*’ (المِلءُ = a quantity that fills a pot); ‘*mil’u ’l-arḍi dhahaban*’ (مِلءُ الأَرْضِ ذَهَبًا = a quantity of gold that would fill the earth); in this phrase, the earth is taken for a pot that is filled by gold. It is an imaginative ‘*al-isti’ārah bi ’l-kināyah*, (الاستِعَارَةُ بِالْكِنَايَةِ = extended metaphor).

TRADITIONS

It is reported in *Majma’u ’l-bayān* about the verses, *How shall Allāh guide a people ...*: “It is said that the verses were revealed about a man from the Anṣār, al-Ḥārith ibn Suwayd ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit by name; he had treacherously killed al-Mujadhdhar ibn Dhiyād al-Balawī, fled (from Medina), renounced Islam and reached Mecca. Thereafter he felt remorse and sent a message to his people to ask the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) whether he would be allowed to repent. They asked (the Messenger of Allāh); so the verses were revealed: *How shall Allāh guide a people who disbelieved after their believing ... Except those who repent after that and amend ...* A man from his clan took these verses to him. (Hearing them) he said: ‘I surely know that you are truthful, and the Messenger of Allāh is truer than you, and Allāh is the most truthful of the three.’ So he returned to Medina, repented and his Islam was good. It is reported from Mujāhid and as-Suddī; and the same is narrated from Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.).”

Ibn Ishāq and Ibn al-Mundhir have narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās that he said: “Verily al-Ḥārith ibn Suwayd killed al-Mujadhdhar ibn Dhiyād and

Qays ibn Zayd (from Banū Ḍubay‘ah) during the Battle of Uḥud, and then went over to Quraysh, and remained at Mecca. Thereafter he sent message to his brother, al-Julās, expressing his desire of repentance, so that he could return to his people. Thereupon, Allāh sent these verses about him: *How shall Allāh guide a people ...*’ (Then the story continues as above.) (*ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*)

The author says: This story has been narrated through other chains, and there are many differences among them: For example, ‘Ikrimah says that it was revealed about Abū ‘Āmir ar-Rāhib, al-Ḥārith ibn Suwayd ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit and Waḥwah ibn al-Aslat (among twelve persons) who had renounced Islam and went over to Quraysh. Later they wrote to their families whether their repentance would be accepted. Then these verses were revealed.

Another example is found in *Majma‘u ‘l-bayān*, that the verse, *Surely those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in unbelief ...*, was revealed about the eleven companions of al-Ḥārith ibn Suwayd. When al-Ḥārith returned (to Medina), they said: ‘We shall remain in Mecca in our disbelief as long as we wished; later on if and when we wanted to return (to Medina) we would return, and there would come for us too what had been revealed about al-Ḥārith.’ When the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) conquered Mecca, some of them re-entered into Islam and their repentance was accepted. And it was revealed about those of them who had died in disbelief, *Surely those who disbelieve and die while they are unbelievers ...* (This report has been attributed to some exegetes.)

There is a third view that it was revealed about the People of the Book. Others say that the verse, *Surely those who disbelieve after their believing, then increase in unbelief ...*, was revealed particularly for the Jews, because at first they believed (in Mūsā), then disbelieved in ‘Īsā, then increased in unbelief by rejecting Muḥammad (blessings of Allāh be on him and his progeny and the two prophets).

There are other explanations given by other people.

If you ponder on these views, explanations and traditions, you will realize that all are based on personal opinions of the ancient exegetes —

as some later ones have remarked. As for the tradition attributed to aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.), it is *al-mursalāh* and weak. Moreover, it is possible for a verse to have more than one cause for its revelation; and Allāh knows better.

* * * * *

لَنْ تَنَالُوا الْبِرَّ حَتَّى تُنْفِقُوا مِمَّا تُحِبُّونَ وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ
فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِهِ عَلِيمٌ — ٩٢ . كُلُّ الطَّعَامِ كَانَ حَلَالًا لِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِلَّا
مَا حَرَّمَ إِسْرَائِيلُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تُنَزَّلَ التَّوْرَةُ قُلْ فَأَتُوا بِالتَّوْرَةِ
فَاتْلُوهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ — ٩٣ . فَمَنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ الْكَذِبَ مِنْ
بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ — ٩٤ . قُلْ صَدَقَ اللَّهُ فَاتَّبِعُوا
مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ — ٩٥ .

Never shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love; and whatever thing you spend, Allāh surely knows it (92). All food was lawful to the Children of Israel — except that which Israel had forbidden to himself — before the Torah was revealed. Say: “Bring then the Torah and read it, if you are truthful” (93). Then whoever fabricates a lie against Allāh after this, these it is that are the unjust (94). Say: “Allāh has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Ibrāhīm, the upright one; and he was not one of the polytheists” (95).

COMMENTARY

The connection of the first verse with the preceding ones is not clear; possibly it was not revealed with the remaining verses (which are clearly

connected to each other). We had encountered a similar difficulty in deciding the revelation date of the verse: *Say: "O People of the Book! come to a word common between us and you ..."* (3:64).

Someone has tried to show its relation with the other verses. He says: The verse like the rest of the talk is addressed to the Children of Israel. Previously they were admonished and rebuked because they loved this world, and preferred wealth and riches to the Divine Religion. Now it says to them: You tell a lie when you claim a special relationship with Allāh and His prophets, and when you say that you are pious and righteous ones. See what the truth is; you love your good property and sit on it refusing to spend from it in Allāh's way. You only spend from undesirable things which you do not care about. But man can never attain to righteousness unless he spends out of what he loves, that is, from good properties; and if you spend out of it Allāh shall preserve it for you and give you its reward in the hereafter.

That is the gist of what he has written; but, as you see, it is stretching the point too far.

As for the rest of the verses, their connection with the preceding one is quite clear.

QUR'ĀN: *Never shall you attain to righteousness until you spend (benevolently) out of what you love: "an-Nayl"* (النَّيْلُ = to reach, to attain); 'al-birr' (الْبِرُّ) means comprehensive good-doing. ar-Rāghib says: "'al-bar'r' (الْبِرُّ = land) is opposite of 'al-baḥr' (الْبَحْرُ = sea); it led to the idea of spaciousness, and from that is derived 'al-barr' = spaciousness (or comprehensiveness) in good-doing."

"Good-doing" is used in an unrestricted sense. It covers the action of heart (like true belief and pure intention) as well as the action of body (like worship of Allāh and spending in His way). (We have used the word "righteousness" in translation to convey this comprehensive goodness.) And it is this very sense in which this word has been used in the following verse: *It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards the East and the West, but righteousness is the one who believes in Allāh and the Last Day, the angels and the Book and the prophets, and gives away wealth out of love for Him to the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and the beggars and for (the emancipation of) the captives, and keeps up prayer and pays the zakāt;*

and the performers of their promise when they make a promise, and the patient in distress and affliction and in time of conflicts (2:177).

Reading this verse in conjunction with the one under discussion, one may clearly understand that spending wealth out of love for Allāh is an essential part of righteousness; and making righteousness dependent on this spending shows the utmost importance attached to it particularly. It is because man by nature has too much attachment with the wealth he has gathered; he thinks that it is a part of his being, if it goes then a portion of his life is gone. There is no such difficulty in other acts of worship and good deeds where nothing seems to be lost.

It is not difficult, in view of the above discourse, to see the weakness of an exegete's explanation that 'righteousness is spending from what you love.' Perhaps he thought that the verse is framed in the style of the sentence, 'You cannot get rid of hunger until you eat!' The verse 2:177 is enough to show inaptness of this explanation.

The same verse (2:177) also makes it clear that '*al-birr*' has been used in its literal sense, that is, comprehensiveness in good-doing, because it explains it by enumerating all-encompassing good of faith and deed. And it shows the inappropriateness of an explanation that '*al-birr*' means bounty and favour of Allāh; or of someone else's interpretation that it means the Garden.

QUR'ĀN: *and whatever thing you spend, Allāh surely knows it: It strengthens and gladdens the spenders' hearts. They should know that what they have spent from their cherished wealth and property is not wasted, has not gone unnoticed, because Allāh Who has enjoined them to do so, knows their spending and what they spend.*

QUR'ĀN: *All food was lawful to the Children of Israel — except that which Israel had forbidden to himself — before the Torah was revealed: "at-Ta'ām" (الطَّعَامُ = whatever is eaten); the people of Hījāz [in whose language the Qur'ān was revealed] use this word particularly for wheat, and it is this meaning they understand when the word is used without any association. 'al-Ḥill' (الْحِلُّ = lawfulness) is opposite of 'al-ḥurmah' (الْحُرْمَةُ = unlawfulness, prohibition); probably it is derived from 'al-ḥall' (الْحَلُّ = to open) which is opposite of 'al-'aqd' or 'al-'aql' (العَقْدُ, العَقْلُ = to tie, to bind) — thus lawfulness has a connotation of openness,*

unrestrictedness. Israel was (the acquired name of) the Prophet Ya‘qūb; he got this name because he endeavoured hard in the way of Allāh; the People of the Book say that it means ‘one who vanquished God and prevailed against Him’. The Torah says that he wrestled with God in a place called Peniel and vanquished Him¹³⁰. But the Qur’ān rejects it and the reason says that such thing is impossible.

The clause, “except that which Israel had forbidden to himself,” is exception from the above-mentioned “food”. The next clause, “before the Torah was revealed”, is related to the verb “was lawful”; it means: Allāh had not forbidden any food to the Children of Israel before the Torah was revealed, except that which Israel had forbidden for himself.

The following sentence, “Say: ‘Bring them the Torah and read it, if you are truthful,’ ” indicates that the Jews were not admitting that every food was lawful to them before the Torah was revealed. They had to say so because they did not accept that Divine Laws could be abrogated. (We have described it under the verse 2:106¹³¹, *Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it.*) No wonder, they disputed the words of Allāh where He says: *Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful to them* (4:160).

Likewise, the last verse, *Say: ‘Allāh has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Ibrāhīm ... ’*, indicates that they were trying to create doubts in the minds of the Muslims through these denials. They did not admit that every food was lawful to them before the revelation of the Torah; nor that many lawful things were forbidden to them because of their iniquity; and through these denials they disputed the claim of the Messenger of Allāh (which was based on Divine Revelation) that his religion was that of Ibrāhīm, and that it was the natural religion free from excess and shortcoming. The Jews said: “How can it be true, when Ibrāhīm was a Jew in religion, on the *sharī‘ah* of Torah? How could religion of Ibrāhīm allow what was forbidden in the Torah, when abrogation is not allowed?”

It is clear now that the verse intends to answer the questions which the Jews had put about, and by which they had tried to confuse the

¹³⁰ See Genesis 32:24 — 30. (*tr.*)

¹³¹ See *al-Mīzān* (Engl. transl.), vol. 2, pp. 42 — 52. (*pub.*)

Muslims. Obviously, they had not put these questions directly to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.), but to the believers during their social contacts. This inference is supported by the fact that the Qur’ān has not mentioned here their objection or question at all, unlike many occasions where it has quoted their sayings before replying. For example, *And the Jews say: ‘The hand of Allāh is tied up’* (5:64); *And they say: ‘Fire shall not touch us but for a few days’* (2:80); *And they say: ‘Our hearts are covered’* (2:88); there are several such verses.

Moreover, the verses 3:99 — 100, coming soon after this talk clearly show that the Jews were trying to mislead the believers through such insidious propaganda: *Say: ‘O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allāh? ... ’ O you who believe! if you obey a party from among those who have been given the Book, they will turn you back as unbelievers after you have believed.*

In short, the Jews objected as follows: How can your Prophet be true as he accepts validity of abrogation? He says that God had disallowed many lawful things to the Jews because of their iniquity. But it entails abrogation of a previously ordained law, which is not acceptable in case of Allāh. What is unlawful will remain unlawful forever; it is not possible for a Divine Law to change.

Allāh directed His Prophet to answer them as follows: The Torah says that every food was lawful to the Children of Israel before the revelation of the Torah. Therefore bring the Torah and read it if you are truthful in your claim. (*All food was lawful ... if you are truthful.*) But if you refuse to do so, then you must admit that you have fabricated a lie against Allāh and that you are unjust. (*Then whoever fabricates a lie against Allāh after this, these it is that are the unjust.*) It will prove to you that I am truthful in my mission. You should therefore follow my religion which is the religion of Ibrāhīm, the upright one; (*Say: ‘Allāh has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Ibrāhīm, the upright one; and he was not one of the polytheists.’*)

The exegetes have variously explained these verses — each in his own way. But all have said that the verses aim to refute the objection of the Jews concerning abrogation — as we have said above.

The strangest explanation (given by one of them) is as follows:

“The verse replies to a Jewish objection regarding abrogation. It appears that the Jews had said: ‘O Muḥammad! If you are, as you claim,

on the religion of Ibrāhīm and the succeeding prophets, then how is it that you have allowed, for example, camel meat that was forbidden to him and them? And now that you have made lawful what was unlawful to them, you should not claim that you affirm their truth and are on their religion; nor should you especially mention Ibrāhīm.’

‘The reply runs as follows: ‘Every food was lawful to all people including the Children of Israel. But the Children of Israel had forbidden some things to themselves by indulging into sins and evils, as Allāh says: *Wherefore for the iniquity of those who are Jews did We disallow to them the good things which had been made lawful for them ...*’ (4:160). Therefore, the word, ‘Israel’, refers to the whole nation, to all the Children of Israel, not to Israel (Ya‘qūb) alone. And such usage in tribes’ names is common. The clause, ‘Israel had forbidden to himself’, actually means that the Children of Israel indulged in injustice and committed sins, as a result of which Allāh forbade it to them. The clause, ‘before the Torah was revealed’, qualifies the preceding verb, ‘Israel had forbidden to himself’; that is, what the Israelites had forbidden to themselves before the revelation of the Torah. If we take, ‘Israel’, to mean Ya‘qūb alone, then this clause (*before the Torah was revealed*) would be superfluous, because everybody knows that Ya‘qūb had preceded the revelation of the Torah.’”

This is the gist of what he has written. Someone else has given the same explanation with one difference. He writes: “The clause, ‘that which Israel had forbidden to himself’, means that the Children of Israel had themselves forbidden those things to themselves, making laws of their own, without any revelation from God; in the same way as the Arabs of pre-Islamic days were doing and which Allāh has mentioned in the Qur’ān.”

Both exegetes have strained the words to an intolerable limit, which no knowledgeable person would agree with. They have diverted the whole talk from its proper line. Actually, they were misled in this way because they thought that the clause, “before the Torah was revealed”, was related to the clause, “Israel had forbidden” — while in fact it qualifies the words in the beginning, “All food was lawful”; and the exception clause, “except that which Israel had forbidden to himself”, is just a parenthetical clause.

Consequently, there is no reason why “Israel” should be interpreted

as “the Children of Israel”, as they have done, thinking that without it the verse could not be explained!

Now we come to the usage of tribes’ names. It is true that the Arabs say, Bakr, Taghlib, Nizār and ‘Adnān, when they actually mean, the children of Bakr, the children of Taghlib, the children of Nizār and the children of ‘Adnān, respectively. But we have never seen them — at the time when the Qur’ān was revealed — using “Israel” for “the Children of Israel”. Nor has the Qur’ān used this word in that sense anywhere else; although it has mentioned “the Children of Israel” in about forty places, including this very verse: “All food was lawful to the Children of Israel — except that which Israel had forbidden to himself.”

Let us ask them one thing: What is the difference (according to their explanation) between the two clauses? The Qur’ān refers to them first as “the Children of Israel” and then immediately after that as “Israel”. Why this change if both words mean the same? If their explanation is correct, then was it not necessary to use the same word in both places, lest there be any confusion? And confusion was bound to occur; because, from the point of view of these two writers, the whole lot of the exegetes was misled into thinking that Israel refers to Ya‘qūb, not to his children!

The best proof to show that the name “Israel” refers to Ya‘qūb alone, is the singular masculine pronoun, “to himself”, used for “Israel”. Had “Israel” stood for “the tribe of Israel” or “the Children of Israel”, it was essential to say “to itself” or “to themselves”.

QUR’ĀN: *Say: ‘Bring then the Torah and read it, if you are truthful’:* So that it may be seen who is right, I or you. Allāh guides His Prophet to reply them in this way.

QUR’ĀN: *Then whoever fabricates a lie against Allāh after this, these it is that are the unjust:* Apparently it is Allāh’s talk addressed to His Prophet; accordingly, the aim is to strengthen and gladden the Prophet’s heart, by declaring that it is his enemies, the Jews, who are the unjust, because they fabricate lies against Allāh. It is an indirect adverse allusion to the Jews.

There is another syntactical possibility: It may be a continuation of the reply given to the Jews by the Prophet, although the second person singular pronoun used in the demonstrative pronoun ‘*dhālika*’ (ذَلِكَ =

this) does not fit this explanation. However, according to this explanation too, the sentence would be just veiled aside, giving the vanquished adversary a chance to save his face — because it does not clearly say that the Jews are the unjust ones. Putting the matter in general terms gives the enemy an opportunity to surrender gracefully.

It is the same style that has been used in the following verse which says: *And most surely we or you are on a right way or in manifest error* (34:24).

The demonstrative pronoun, “this”, in “after this” points to the explanation and proof offered to the Jews.

Why has this proviso, “after this”, been added here? Is not he, who fabricates a lie against Allāh, unjust in all circumstances? The fact is that he cannot be called unjust until proof has been clearly explained to him — as some scholars have said. However, the sentence, “these it is that are the unjust”, is an exclusive one, and it implies that such fabricators cannot be but unjust.

QUR’ĀN: *Say: “Allāh has spoken the truth; therefore follow the religion of Ibrāhīm ... ”*: As the truth is on my side (in what I have told you and called you to), you should follow my religion; also you should admit that camel meat, for example, is a good thing made lawful by Allāh, and that Allāh had forbidden it to you as a punishment for your injustice and transgression — as He has said.

The clause, “therefore follow the religion of Ibrāhīm”, is a sort of indirect invitation to follow the Prophet’s religion. It was not mentioned directly because: first, the Jews affirmed the truth of Ibrāhīm’s religion; secondly, the present wording shows that the religion to which they are invited is the upright and natural one — after all, nature does not prevent man from eating good sustenance given by Allāh, including meat.

TRADITIONS

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said: “Whenever Israel ate camel meat, he felt throbbings of pain in his sides. Therefore, he forbade camel meat to himself. And it was (long) before the revelation of the Torah. When the Torah was revealed, (Mūsā) neither forbade it, nor ate it.” (*al-Kāfi*; *at-*

Tafsīr, al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: An almost similar tradition is narrated through the Sunnī chains. The verbs in the clause, *neither for bade it nor ate it*, refer to Mūsā (a.s.) whose name, although not mentioned, is clearly understood. The verb, ‘*lam ya’kulhu*’ (لَمْ يَأْكُلْهُ = did not eat it) may alternatively be read from the paradigm ‘*at-taf’īl*’ as ‘*lam yu’akkilhu*’ (لَمْ يُؤْكَلْهُ = did not feed it, i.e., did not tell them to eat it). The dictionary, *Tāju ‘l-‘arūs*, says that the verb ‘*al-akl*’ (الْأَكْلُ = to eat) when conjugated on the paradigms of ‘*at-taf’īl*’ (التَّفْعِيلُ) and ‘*al-mufā‘alah*’ (الْمُفَاعَلَةُ), has the same meaning. It means that ‘*at-ta’kīl*’ (التَّأْكِيلُ = to feed) and ‘*al-mu’ākalah*’ (الْمُؤَاكَلَةُ = to eat together) have the same connotation.

* * * * *

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى
 لِلْعَالَمِينَ — ٩٦ . فِيهِ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ مَّقَامُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَنْ دَخَلَهُ كَانَ
 آمِنًا وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى النَّاسِ حِجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ
 فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ — ٩٧ .

Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for the worlds (96). In it are clear signs, the standing place of Ibrāhīm; and whoever enters it shall be secure; and for the sake of Allāh, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men, (upon) every one who can afford the journey to it, and whoever disbelieves, then surely Allāh is Self-sufficient (independent) of the worlds (97).

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

The two verses are in reply to another objection which the Jews were putting to the believers, because of the “abrogation”. Their target, this time, was the change of *qiblah* from Baytu ’1-Maqdis to the Ka’bah. We have explained under the verse 2:144 (... *turn then thy face towards the Sacred Mosque* ...) that the change of *qiblah* was a very important matter which had profound effect, materially as well as spiritually, on the People of the Book, especially the Jews; apart from the fact that it offended their views about abrogation. That is why they vehemently objected to it and

contentions and conflicts between them and the Muslims continued for a long time after the change of *qiblah*.

It may be inferred from the verses that they had combined two elements in their objection: their aversion to abrogation, and a denial that the new direction of *qiblah* had anything to do with Ibrāhīm. How could the Ka‘bah be considered the *qiblah* of Ibrāhīm, when Allāh had appointed Baytu ‘l-Maqdis as *qiblah*? This new rule entails abrogation of Ibrāhīm’s law — admittedly the true religion — when we know that abrogation is impossible and void.

The verse deals with it as follows: The Ka‘bah was appointed as the House of worship long before other houses like Baytu ‘l-Maqdis were built. Undoubtedly it was Ibrāhīm who built it and dedicated it for Divine Worship; there are many clear signs, like the standing place of Ibrāhīm, which prove this fact. Baytu ‘l-Maqdis, on the other hand, was built by Sulaymān¹ who came centuries after Ibrāhīm.

QUR’ĀN: *Most surely the first house ... for the worlds:* Meaning of house is well-known; that the Ka‘bah was appointed for men, means that it was dedicated in order that people should worship Allāh in that place. It was a means of Divine Worship, helping men and making it easier for them to pray to Allāh, by journey to, or facing towards it; and in various ways turning their attention to Him. All this may be inferred from the phrase “blessed and a guidance for the worlds”. Also the expression “one at Bakkah” hints at it. The word “*bakkah*” (بَكَّةٌ) means gathering of people, and its use here points to the fact that there is always a large gathering of people therein who are engaged in circumambulation, prayer and other rites of worship.

The wording however does not show that the Ka‘bah was the first House built on the earth or appointed for the benefit of men.

Bakkah — refers to the land on which the Ka‘bah stands; it has been given this name because there is always a huge gathering of people there. There are also other explanations: (1) Bakkah is Mecca, the letter ‘*m*’ (م) has been changed to ‘*b*’ (ب), as it has been done in ‘*lāzim*’ (لَازِمٌ) and ‘*lāzib*’ (لَازِبٌ) or ‘*rātim*’ (رَاتِمٌ) and ‘*rātib*’ (رَاتِبٌ) etc.; (2) It is a name of the Meccan Sanctuary; or (3) of the Sacred Mosque; or (4) of the area of

¹ It was founded by Dāwūd and completed by Sulaymān. (*tr.*)

circumambulation.

“*al-Mubārakah*” (الْمُبَارَكَةُ) is on the paradigm of *al-mufā‘alah* (الْمُفَاعَلَةُ) from the root word *al-barakah* (الْبَرَكَةُ = abundant good); it has been translated here as ‘blessed’; it means bestowal of abundant good on the House, making it blessed. Abundant good covers good of both worlds; but in this verse it has been put face to face with the phrase “a guidance for the worlds” and it indicates that the blessing refers to worldly good. The best of such blessings are abundance of sustenance in Mecca, and deep yearning of people to go there for pilgrimage, to present themselves there and to keep it in highest regard. In other words, it would show the fulfilment of Ibrāhīm’s prayer:

O our Lord! surely I have settled a part of my offspring in a valley, uncultivable, near Thy Sacred House, our Lord! that they may establish prayers; therefore make the hearts of some people yearn towards them and provide them with fruits; haply they may be grateful (14:37).

The Ka‘bah is a guidance, as it shows the people the way to their happiness in the hereafter, leads them to nobility and Divine Nearness; because, Allāh has designated it for worship, and has prescribed various prayers, acts of worship and rituals to be performed there; also, it has remained the longed for destination of believers and a place of worship for worshippers.

The Qur’ān shows that it was in Ibrāhīm’s time — after he had completed the construction of the Ka‘bah — that pilgrimage was prescribed for the first time: Allāh says: *And We enjoined Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl (saying): Purify (you two) My House for those who make circuit and those who abide (in it for devotion) and those who bow down (and) those who prostrate themselves (2:125).* And He had enjoined Ibrāhīm as follows: *And proclaim among men the Ḥajj; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel, coming from every remote path (22:27).* This verse clearly says that this call, this cry, would surely be answered with general acceptance by the people from near and afar, from various clans and tribes.

Also the Qur’ān proves that this divinely-initiated “symbol” was firmly established and quite well-known in the days of Shu‘ayb (a.s.). Allāh quotes him as saying to Mūsā (a.s.): *I desire to marry one of these two daughters of mine to you on condition that you should serve me for*

eight years (lit.: pilgrimages); *but if you complete ten, it will be of your own free will* (28:27). He used the word “pilgrimages” for “years”. There can be only one explanation for it: the years were counted in terms of pilgrimage, as it happened every year.

Also there are many points in Ibrāhīm’s invocation which show that the House all the time served as a worship centre, was a symbol of guidance. (For detail see ch. 14 — Ibrāhīm).

The Arabs even in the days of ignorance, held the House in reverence and performed its pilgrimage, rightly believing it to be a part of Ibrāhīm’s *sharī’ah*. History says that other nations too accorded respect to it. This in itself is a sort of guidance because it fixes man’s mind on remembrance of Allāh. So far as the period after the advent of Islam is concerned, Ka’bah’s guidance needs no elaboration. Its fame encompasses the East and the West. The Ka’bah is always present in people’s minds and hearts. The Muslims turn to it every where and at all times: during worship and prayer, while standing or sitting, for slaughtering animals and in a number of other religious affairs.

In this way, the House is a guidance (with all stages of guiding), be it just attention of mind or complete surrender to Allāh — the stage which may be attained only by the purified servants of Allāh — from among those who are free of sin and error.

Moreover, it guides the Muslim’s world to their worldly blessings, because it unifies their goal, unites the *ummah* and opens for them avenues of benefit and profit. Also it is a guidance for the others, because it makes them appreciate the fruits of this unity and they realize how beneficial it is to unite all separate forces together.

It appears from the above that:

First: The Ka’bah is a guidance to the happiness of this world and the next; and it encompasses all the stages of guidance. In short, the guidance is general and unconditional.

Second: It is a guidance for the whole world, not for a particular world or special group like the progeny of Ibrāhīm, or the Arabs, or the Muslims. It is because of unrestrictedness of the guidance.

QUR’ĀN: *In it are clear signs, the standing place of Ibrāhīm:* The “signs” are qualified by the adjective “clear”, it particularizes the signs to a certain extent. Yet the ambiguity, the vagueness remains. But the

context demands that the distinctions and special qualities of the House be clearly shown, in order that the audience may know why it has got precedence over all other houses of worship. It requires definitive description of its distinctions, free from ambiguous expression or vague depiction. Looking from this angle, it becomes clear that the next phrases and clauses have been put there as classifications of the “clear signs”. What are the clear signs? They are the standing place of Ibrāhīm, its being a sanctuary and place of safety, and obligatoriness of its pilgrimage for those who can afford.

But it does not mean that the three clauses are in “ ‘*atfu 'l-bayān*’ ” (عَطْفُ الْبَيَانِ = explicative apposition) to the phrase “clear signs” or serve as its “*al-badal*” (الْبَدَلُ = substitute). Otherwise it would require reconstruction of all the sentences. For example, it will have to be rewritten as follows: “These signs are the standing place of Ibrāhīm, and safety for those who enter it, and its pilgrimage for him who may afford the journey.” Thus we will have to reduce a whole sentence (*whoever enters it shall be secure*) to a single word “security” (it makes no difference whether we take that sentence as an imperative or a declarative one), and to change the imperative sentence (*and for the sake of Allāh, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent ...*) into a declarative one and then setting it in conjunction with the preceding sentence; and this too will have to be reduced to a single word. Alternatively we will have to add ‘*an*’ (اِنْ) of *maṣḍar* before both sentences. But the context does not agree with all these alterations.

The fact is that the three sentences are independent; each has a certain connotation — either declarative or imperative — and all three together describe the clear signs. It is as we say: Zayd is a noble man; he is the son of a great father; his house is always open to guests; and we should follow in his footsteps. [Thus the three independent sentences explain the nobility of Zayd.]

QUR’ĀN: *the standing place of Ibrāhīm:* It is a subject with its predicate omitted; the complete sentence would be, “There is in it the standing place of Ibrāhīm.” It is the stone that has the imprint of the feet of Ibrāhīm. It is reported that the stone is fixed in the place now called “*Maqāmu Ibrāhīm*” (مَقَامُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ = standing place of Ibrāhīm) on the

periphery of the circumambulation area ¹, facing ‘*al-Multazam*’ (المُتَزَمُّ) = the Ka‘bah’s wall between its door and the Black Stone). It is this stone that Abū Ṭālib, the uncle of the Prophet, refers to in his well-known poem:

*And the footprints of Ibrāhīm in the stone identify,
With his (i.e., Muḥammad’s) feet — when they are bare.*

Sometimes this phrase gives the idea that there is in the House — or the House itself — the place where Ibrāhīm stood or stayed for Divine Worship.

Another syntactical possibility: We may say that the implied sentence is as follows, ‘In it are clear signs, and they are the standing place of Ibrāhīm, and security and pilgrimage’; but the last words (i.e. ‘and security and pilgrimage’) have been omitted for brevity because the next sentences allude to them. The next sentences, (*and whoever enters it ... , and for the sake of Allāh pilgrimage ...*) give imperative connotation, but are constructed as declarative ones.

This verse, therefore, shows one of the wonderful Qur’ānic styles: It uses a talk (which has its own theme) — to serve another purpose — it is placed in such a way as to point to the other meaning too. Thus one sentence serves two purposes without sacrificing either connotation. For example, sometimes it puts direct quotation in an indirect narration: ... *everyone of them believes in Allāh and His angels and His books and His messengers: We make no difference between any of His messengers* (2:285). Two examples are found in the verse 2:258 (*Did you not see him who disputed with Ibrāhīm about his Lord ...*) and also 2:259 (*Or like him who passed by a town, and it had fallen down upon its roofs ...*); and we have pointed to this in the Commentary of the second verse. Other examples are seen in 26:88 — 89 (*The day on which neither property will avail, nor sons, except him who comes to Allāh with a heart submissive*); and also 2:177 (*It is not righteousness that you turn your faces ... , but righteousness is the one who ...*) wherein *righteousness* has been used for “righteous”; the same modality is seen in 2:171 (*And the parable of those who disbelieve is as the parable of one who calls out to that which hears not more than a call and a cry*). This modality is used in most of

¹ Now it is enclosed in a hemispherical glass through which the imprints may be seen. (*tr.*)

the Qur'anic parables.

The modality used in this verse, *In it are clear signs ... independent of the worlds*, which frequently switches from declarative to imperative mood and back, is the same as that employed in the verses: *And remember Our servants Ayyūb, when he called upon his Lord: The Satan has afflicted me with weariness and torment. Stamp your foot, here is a cool washing place and a drink. And We gave him his family and the like of them with them, as a mercy from Us, and as a reminder to those possessed of understanding. And take in your hand a bundle of rushes and beat her with it and do not break your oath; surely We found him patient; most excellent the servant! Surely he was frequent in returning (to Allāh) (38:41 — 44).*

However, the explanation given above is totally different from that given by some people who speak in term of explicative apposition, and which we have rejected earlier. If one thinks it necessary to treat it as an explicative apposition, then it is far better to treat only one phrase “the Standing Place of Ibrāhīm”, in this way; and treat the next two sentences as independent ones, which by their meanings point to other two explicative appositions which are deleted for brevity — as we have done. The completed sentence then would be as follows: In it are clear signs, the Standing Place of Ibrāhīm, and the security of the visitor, and the pilgrimage of one who can afford it.

There is no doubt whatsoever that each of the above-mentioned things is a clear sign that leads to Allāh and reminds one of His majesty. What is a sign? It is a thing that points to something else. And there is no sign that may lead to Allāh, may remind His servants of His majesty, greater and clearer in people's eyes than the Standing Place of Ibrāhīm, the sanctuary that provides security to the one who enters it, and the worship and rites which are performed by millions of people year after year and which the alternations of days and nights cannot set aside.

It should be made clear that it is not necessary for a “sign” to be a super-natural thing that should contradict the normal system of nature; neither miraculousness is a part of this word's meaning, nor its use in the Qur'ān is confined to this sense. Allāh says: *Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring one better than it or like it (2:106).* No doubt, abrogated laws of the *sharī'ah* are included in the meaning of the word, “signs”, here. Also He says: *Do you build on every height a*

monument (lit. sign)? *Vain is it that you do* (26:128). There are many such verses in the Qurʾān.

Now you may see how untenable is the position of those who say that only the Standing Place of Ibrāhīm is a “clear sign”, and that the security and the pilgrimage are not related in any way to the “clear signs”.

The same is the position of those who insist that the phrase “clear signs” refers to various special characteristics of the Kaʿbah. (We do not think it necessary to quote them here; whoever so desires, should refer to some detailed books of exegesis.) Such an explanation takes it for granted that “signs” means miraculous and super-natural things; but as we have explained just now, there is no evidence to prove it.

The fact is that the sentence “Whoever enters it shall be secure”, points to a legislative law, not to any creative characteristic. Apparently it is a declarative sentence which refers to a law that was in force since long and had made the House a place of security. This may be inferred from the invocation of Ibrāhīm quoted in the ch.14 (Ibrāhīm) and ch. 2 (The COW). This right of sanctuary was recognized even by the Arabs of pre-Islamic time, and its origin may be traced to Ibrāhīm’s days.

Some exegetes have said: The sentence declares that violence and upheaval, turmoil and turbulence cannot happen in, or reach, the sanctuary. But experience refutes this explanation; we know how many battles and wars were fought in that area; how much distance and violence had occurred there — and especially before this verse was revealed. Also the verse 29:67 (*Do they not see that We have made a sacred territory secure, while men are carried off by force from around them?*) does not show any creative security inherent in the nature of Kaʿbah. It only points to the fact that safety and security surrounded the sacred area, because people respected the sanctity of the House and accorded it full honour as it was established by the *sharīʿah* of Ibrāhīm; thus ultimately it depends on Divine Legislation, on the law ordained by Allāh.

This view is further supported by the invocations of Ibrāhīm as he implored Allāh: *My Lord! make this city secure* (14:35); *My Lord! make it a secure town* (2:126). He prayed to Allāh to make Mecca a secure town, and Allāh answered his prayer by promulgating a law to that effect and implanting acceptance of this law in people’s hearts so that they

could continue respecting this sanctuary generation after generation.

QUR'ĀN: *and for the sake of Allāh, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent upon men, (upon) every one who can afford the journey to it: ‘al-Ḥijj’ (الْحِجُّ), which has also been recited ‘al-ḥajj’ (الْحَجُّ), literally means, to intend, to aim; then it was reserved for intention of, or repairing to, the House in a particular manner laid down by the sharī‘ah; ‘sabīlan’ (سَبِيلًا = lit.: way; translated here as, the journey) is ‘at-tamyīz’ (التَّمْيِيزُ = accusative of specification) related to the verb ‘‘can afford’’.*

The verse approvingly describes the institution of ‘ḥajj’ as a law that was ordained for the sharī‘ah of Ibrāhīm; as Allāh describes in the verse 22:27, where He mentions His order to Ibrāhīm: *And proclaim among men the hall; they will come to you ...* It appears from the above, that the modality of the sentence ‘‘and for the sake of Allāh ...’’ is the same as that of the preceding one ‘‘and whoever enters it shall be secure’’. Each is a declarative sentence which approvingly describes a previously ordained law. Alternatively it is possible to treat both as imperative sentences meant to reconfirm the two Ibrāhīmīc laws. But the context obviously supports the first explanation.

QUR'ĀN: *and whoever disbelieves, then surely Allāh is Self-sufficient (independent) of the worlds.* Disbelief, in this verse, means disbelieving in a law, in a branch of religion; like the disbelief resulting from neglect of prayer or zakāt. The word in this context means neglecting the important law of ḥajj. In this clause, the effect has been used to describe the reason; in other words it says, ‘Whoever neglects ḥajj becomes a disbeliever.’ On the other hand, the clause ‘‘Allāh is Self-sufficient’’ puts the reason in place of effect; that is, he will not cause any harm to Allāh because Allāh is Self-sufficient. The full sentence, therefore, means as follows: Whoever neglects ḥajj becomes a disbeliever, but he, by his disbelief, cannot harm Allāh in any way because Allāh is Self-sufficient and independent of the worlds.

TRADITIONS

Ibn Shahrāshūb narrates from the Leader of the Faithful (‘Alī, a.s.)

about the words of Allāh, *Most surely the first house appointed for men* ..., as follows: “A man asked him whether it was the first house (built). He said: ‘No. Surely there were houses (built) before it, but it is the first House appointed for men, blessed, in which there is guidance, mercy and blessing. And it was Ibrāhīm who first built it; then an Arabian group from the (tribe of) Jurhum built it, then it was demolished, so the al-‘Amāliqah rebuilt it; again it fell down and then the Quraysh rebuilt it.’ ”

Ibnu ‘l-Mundhir and Ibn Abī Ḥātim have narrated through the chain of ash-Sha‘bī, from ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, that he said, explaining this verse: “There were houses before that; but it was the first House made for the worship of Allāh.” (*ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*)

The author says: as-Suyūṭī has also narrated a similar tradition through Ibn Jarīr from Maṭar (ibn Ṭuhmān). And there are numerous traditions of the same theme.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said: “The land on which the House stands is Bakkah; and the town is Mecca.” (*‘Ilalu ‘sh-sharāyi‘*)

The same book quotes the same Imām as saying: “Bakkah was named Bakkah because people are crowded therein.”

The author says: “*Yabakkūn*” (يَبْكُونُ = they are crowded).

al-Bāqir (a.s.) said: “Mecca is called Bakkah because men and women are crowded therein; a woman prays in front of you, and on your right, and on your left, and with you, and there is no harm in it (at that place); but surely it is disliked in all other towns.” (*ibid.*)

The same Imām said: “When Allāh intended to create the earth, He ordered the winds and they agitated the face of water until it produced waves (and) then brought up foam (and froth); so (all of) it became one foam. Then Allāh gathered it in the place of the House (i.e., where the House now stands) and made it a mountain of foam; thereafter He spread out the earth from beneath it. And this is the (meaning of the) words of Allāh: *Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakkah, blessed.* Thus the first plot created of the earth is the Ka‘bah; then the earth was expanded from it.” (*ibid.*)

The author says: There are numerous traditions saying that the earth was expanded and extended from beneath the Ka‘bah. There is nothing against the Qur’ān in these traditions. Nor is there any rational reason to refute it — except the ancient philosophers’ theory that the earth was an eternal indivisible element; but that theory has so manifestly been proved wrong that it needs no further exposition.

This narrative explains how and why the Ka‘bah was the first House (i.e., piece of land) of the earth — from traditions’ point of view. But so far as the obvious meaning of the verse is concerned, it supports the first two traditions.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) was asked what were the clear signs mentioned in the verse: *In it are clear signs*. He said: “The Standing Place of Ibrāhīm — where he stood upon the stone and his feet left their prints in it, and the Black Stone, and the House of Ismā‘īl.” (*al-Kāfi*; *at-Tafsīr*, al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: There are other traditions of the same meaning. Perhaps the Imām (a.s.) mentioned them as examples, although some of them are not mentioned in the verse.

‘Abdu ’ṣ-Ṣamad said: “Abū Ja‘far [al-Manṣūr] wanted to buy from (some) Meccans their houses in order to extend the (Sacred) Mosque; but they refused. Then he induced them; they still resisted. So he was frustrated. Then he came to Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.) and said to him: ‘I requested these people (to sell to us) some of their houses and compounds, so that we could extend the Mosque; but they have refused; and it has put me into utmost grief.’ Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.) said: ‘Why does it grieve you and your proof against them is (very) clear?’ He said: ‘And what should I argue against them with?’ (The Imām) said: ‘With the Book of Allāh.’ He said: ‘In which place (is it explained)?’ (The Imām) said: ‘The words of Allāh: *Most surely the first house appointed for men is the one at Bakkah*. And Allāh has informed you (in this verse) that the first House appointed for the men is the one that is at Bakkah. Now if they had taken the possession (of the land) before the House (was built) then their plots would belong to them; but if the House was there before them, then it (the Ka‘bah) owns its plot.’ Abū Ja‘far then called them and argued with them accordingly. Thereupon they said: ‘Do whatever you

want.’ ” (at-Tafsīr, al-‘Ayyāshī)

al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn an-Nu‘mān says: “When al-Mahdī built (i.e., extended) the Sacred Mosque, there remained there one house (because of which) the Mosque could not be made square. He asked for it from its owners; but they refused. He asked jurists about it, and all of them told him that he should not include in the Sacred Mosque anything taken by force. Then ‘Alī ibn Yaḳfīn said: ‘O leader of the faithful! I am writing (a letter) to Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (peace be on them both), so that I may tell you what the proper ruling is in this matter.’ So he wrote to the Governor of Medina to ask Mūsā ibn Ja‘far (peace be on them both) about the house which we wanted to include in the Sacred Mosque but its owners refused (to sell it) — how this problem could be solved? (The Governor) told Abu ‘l-Ḥasan (Mūsā ibn Ja‘far — peace be on them both) about it. Abu ‘l-Ḥasan (a.s.) said: ‘Is it necessary to give its reply?’ He said: ‘(Yes), it is a matter that is necessary.’ Then (the Imām) said to him: ‘Write down: “In the Name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful, if the Ka‘bah had settled down with the people, then the people have more rights on its courtyard; but if the people have settled down around the Ka‘bah, then the Ka‘bah has more right over its courtyard.” ’ When the letter reached al-Mahdī, he took it and kissed it, then he ordered to demolish the (said) house. The house owners then came to Abu ‘l-Ḥasan (a.s.) and requested him to write a letter to al-Mahdī regarding the price of the house. He wrote to him to give them something, so he made them happy.’ ” (ibid.)

The author says: The two traditions contain a very fine point of argument. It was Abū Ja‘far al-Manṣūr who began the extension of the Sacred Mosque which was completed during al-Mahdī’s reign.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) said about the words of Allāh, *and for the sake of Allāh, pilgrimage to the House is incumbent ...*: “(Allāh) means by it the *hajj* and the *‘umrah* both, because both are obligatory.” (al-Kāfī)

The author says: al-‘Ayyāshī too has narrated it in his *at-Tafsīr*. This tradition takes the word *‘hijj*’ in its literal sense, i.e., to proceed to.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) has explained the word, *and whoever disbelieves*, as “whoever neglects”. (at-Tafsīr, al-‘Ayyāshī)

The author says: ash-Shaykh has narrated this tradition in *at-Tahdhīb*. We have explained it earlier that disbelief, like belief, has many grades; and that the word, as used in this verse, means disbelieving in — i.e., not complying with — a commandment of the *sharī‘ah*.

‘Alī ibn Ja‘far narrates from his brother Mūsā (a.s.), a tradition in which he, *inter alia*, says: ‘‘I said: ‘Then whoever among us does not go for *ḥajj*, is an unbeliever?’ (The Imām) said: ‘No. But whoever says that it is not so (i.e., it is not obligatory) becomes an unbeliever.’’’ (*al-Kāfi*)

The author says: There are many traditions of the same theme. Disbelief, as explained in this tradition, means rejection and refutation, and the verse could mean it. Thus disbelief has been used here in its literal meaning, i.e., hiding the truth; and it may refer to various grades of disbelief according to various situations.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE KA‘BAH

It is *mutawātir* and definitely known that it was Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl (a.s.) who built the Ka‘bah. The residents around it at that time were his son, Ismā‘īl, and the tribe of Jurhum (originally from Yemen). It is an almost square building whose sides face the cardinal points of the compass; the winds, no matter how strong, lose their force when they strike it — without doing it any harm.

The construction of Ibrāhīm stood intact, until it was rebuilt by al-‘Amāliqah, and later by the tribe of Jurhum (or vice versa), as has been described in the earlier narrated tradition of the Leader of the Faithful (‘Alī, a.s.).

When the management of the Ka‘bah came into the hands of Quṣayy ibn Kilāb — an ancestor of the Prophet — in the second century before *hijrah*, he demolished and rebuilt it on firm foundation, putting a roof of doom palm timber and date-palm trunk on it. He also built ‘*Dāru ‘n-Nadwah*’ (دَارُ النَّدْوَةِ = Council House) on one side. It was the place from where he ruled and where he held counsel with his colleagues. Then he

divided various sides of the Ka‘bah among different clans of the Quraysh and each clan built their houses at the side allotted to them; and they opened their doors towards the Ka‘bah.

Five years before the start of the Prophet’s mission, there came a flood which destroyed the Ka‘bah’s building. The Quraysh divided among themselves the various responsibilities connected with its reconstruction. They hired a Roman mason to build it and an Egyptian carpenter to help him with the woodwork. When the time came to fix the Black Stone, a dispute erupted as to which clan should be accorded the honour of putting the Black Stone in its place. Then they agreed to leave the decision to Muḥammad (s.a.w.a.), who at that time was thirty-five years old — because they had full faith in his deep wisdom and sound judgment. He got his robe, and putting the Stone on it, told all the clans to hold the sides of the robe and raise it together. When the Stone reached the required height (on the eastern corner), he took it in his hands and fixed it in its proper place.

But the Quraysh found their funds exhausted. So they reduced the size on one side — as it is today; thus a part of the original foundation was left out, and that is the portion known as ‘*Hijr Ismā‘īl*’ (حجرُ إسماعيلُ) = the Enclosure of Ismā‘īl).

The building remained in that condition until ‘Abdullāh ibn az-Zubayr established his rule over Ḥijāz during the reign of Yazīd ibn Mu‘āwiyah. Ḥusayn ibn Numayr, the commander of Yazīd’s army, besieged him at Mecca and struck the Ka‘bah with catapult. The Ka‘bah was demolished, the ‘*al-Kiswah*’ (الكِسْوَةُ = covering of the Ka‘bah) and some roof timbers were burnt down. The siege was lifted when news came of Yazīd’s death. Ibn az-Zubayr decided to demolish the Ka‘bah completely and rebuild it on its original foundation. He got good mortar from Yemen and constructed the new building. Ḥijr Ismā‘īl was re-included in the Ka‘bah; the door was fixed at the level of the ground; another door was fixed on the opposite side, so that people might enter from one door and go out from the other. He fixed the height of the House at twenty-seven arms. When the building was ready, he covered the whole building with musk and perfume inside out, and put silken Kiswah on it. The construction was completed on 17th *Rajab*, 64 A.H.

When ‘Abdu ’l-Malik ibn Marwān came to power in Damascus, he sent his commander, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, who defeated Ibn az-Zubayr and

killed him. Entering the Sacred Mosque, he saw what Ibn az-Zubayr had done regarding the Ka‘bah. He wrote to ‘Abdu ’l-Malik about it who ordered him to return it to its previous shape. Ḥajjāj, therefore, demolished six and a half arms from the northern side and rebuilt it according to the plan of the Quraysh; he raised the eastern door and closed the western one; he also filled the inside with the stones that could not be re-used (thus raising the inside floor to the new level of the door).

When the Ottoman Sultan Sulaymān ascended the throne in 960 A.H., he changed the roof of the Ka‘bah. Sultan Aḥmad (who came to power in 1021 A.H.) made some other repairs and alterations. Then came the great flood of 1039 A.H. which demolished parts of its northern, eastern and western walls. Therefore, the Ottoman Sultan Murād IV got it repaired. And the same building continues till this day and it is the year 1375 by lunar hijri calendar, and 1338 according to the solar one.

The Shape of the Ka‘bah: The Ka‘bah is nearly square in shape, built with hard dark bluish-grey stones. It now rises to sixteen metres; but was much lower at the time of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) as may be inferred from the fact that, on the day of conquest of Mecca, the Prophet raised ‘Alī (a.s.) on his shoulders so that ‘Alī could remove and break the idols that were placed on the roof of the Ka‘bah.

The wall [the northern one that faces the Enclosure of Ismā‘īl and] over which is placed the water trough and the one on its opposite side [the southern one] are ten metres and ten centimetres long; while the [eastern] wall which has the door and the one opposite to it are twelve metres long. The door is placed at a height of two metres from the ground level. The Black Stone is fixed in the [east-south] corner, so that if one wants to enter the door, the Stone would be on his left. This Stone is one and a half metres above the ground level, that is, above the level of the circumambulation area. The Black Stone is a hard rock of irregular oval shape, black with some reddish tint; it has red dots and yellow wavy lines which appeared when some broken pieces were soldered and joined. It has a diameter of about thirty centimetres.

The Ka‘bah’s corners, since ancient days, are called ‘*al-arkān*’ (الركن؛ pl. of ‘*ar-rukna*’ الرُّكْنُ = pillar); the northern one is called, the Iraqī *rukna*; the western, the Syrian; the southern, the Yemenite; and the eastern (wherein the Black Stone is fixed), is named the Black. The area

between the door and the Black Stone is called ‘*al-Multazam*’ (المُتَزَمُّ = lit.: the place where one clings to) because when one circumambulates one adheres to it for invocation and prayer.

The trough fixed over the northern wall, which is called the Trough of Mercy, was an innovation of al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf; in 954 A.H. Sultan Sulaymān changed that with a silver one; that too was replaced by Sultan Aḥmad in 1021 A.H. with another one of enamelled silver with golden designs. In 1273 A.H. Sultan ‘Abdu ’l-Majīd replaced it with another one made of gold, and it is the present one.

Facing the northern wall is a wall — half circle in shape. It is called, al-Ḥaṭīm. It is like a bow whose two ends face the northern [Iraqī] and the western [Syrian] *rukns*; there is a gap of two metres and three centimetres between the ends of the bow and the said *rukns*. The wall, al-Ḥaṭīm, is one metre high and one and a half metres wide. It is panelled with carved marble. The distance between the centre of al-Ḥaṭīm and the centre of the northern wall of the Ka‘bah is eight metres and forty-four centimetres. The area covered by al-Ḥaṭīm and the northern wall is known as Ḥijr Ismā‘īl [Enclosure of Ismā‘īl]. About three metres of this space was included in the Ka‘bah built by Ibrāhīm (a.s.); and the remaining area was the pen for sheep of Hājirah and her son. It is said that Hājirah and Ismā‘īl are buried in the same Enclosure.

The changes and alterations that were done inside the Ka‘bah, and the rituals and *sunnah* rites connected with the House are not so necessary to be described here.

The Covering of the Ka‘bah: We have described, in the chapter of ‘The Cow’, in the traditions relating the story of Hājirah and Ismā‘īl and their settlement at Mecca, that Hājirah hang her mantle as a curtain on the door of the Ka‘bah when its construction was completed.

As for the covering of the House itself, it is said that the first to cover it was the Tubba‘¹ Abū Bakr As‘ad, who hang on it the sheets embroidered with silver threads. His successors followed this custom. Then people started covering it with sheets of various kinds — putting one upon the other. Whenever a covering looked old, a new one was put over it. This continued until Quṣayy came on the scene. He imposed a tax

¹ Tubba‘ — was the title of the Kings of Yemen. (*tr.*)

on the Arabs for putting a new covering every year. This system continued in his descendants. Abū Rabī‘ah ibn al-Mughīrah used to put a covering one year and all the clans of Quraysh did so the next year.

The Prophet covered the House with Yemenite sheets. This custom continued. When the ‘Abbāsīde caliph al-Mahdī went for pilgrimage, the attendants of the House complained to him about the coverings that had accumulated on the roof of the Ka‘bah. They said there was a danger of the roof collapsing down because of that load. The King ordered that all the old coverings should be removed and that every year a new covering should replace the old one — and that custom is followed uptil now.

The Ka‘bah is draped from inside too. The first to do so was the mother of ‘Abbās, son of ‘Abdu ’l-Muṭṭalib — she had done so because of a vow she had taken regarding her son — ‘Abbās.

Prestige of the Ka‘bah: The Ka‘bah was held in high esteem by various nations. The Hindus respected it, believing that the spirit of Siva, the third person of their Trimurty, entered into the Black Stone, when he was accompanied by his wife visited Hijāz.

The Sabaeans of Persia and Chaledonia counted it as one of their seven holy sanctuaries¹. Many of them said that it was the House of the Saturn — because it was the most ancient, and the longest in existence.

The Persians too respected the Ka‘bah, believing that the spirit of Hormoz was present therein; they sometimes went for its pilgrimage.

The Jews honoured it and worshipped God there according to the religion of Ibrāhīm. There were many pictures and images in the Ka‘bah, including those of Ibrāhīm and Ismā‘īl which had divining arrows in their hands. Also there were pictures of the virgin Mary and Christ — which indicates that the Christians too respected the Ka‘bah like the Jews.

The Arabs held it in the highest esteem; they believed that it was the House of Allāh, and came to its pilgrimage from every place. They believed the Ka‘bah to be built by Ibrāhīm and the *hajj* to be a part of his religion which had come to them as his legacy.

¹ The seven sanctuaries were: (1) The Ka‘bah; (2) Mars — on the summit of a mountain in Iṣfahān; (3) ‘Mandūsān’? (مندوسان) in India; (4) Naw Bahār in Balkh; (5) House of Ghamdān in San‘ā; (6) Kawsān in Farghānā, Khurāsān; and (7) a House in Upper China. (*Author’s Note*)

Trusteeship of the Ka‘bah: The trusteeship was in the hands of Ismā‘īl; and after him it remained in his descendants. Then the Jurhumites became more powerful and took over the trusteeship. They in their turn were vanquished after several wars by the ‘Amāliqah, who were a part of Banū Karkar. The ‘Amāliqah resided at the lower section of Mecca while the Jurhumites had settled in its upper section. They had their own Kings.

Later on, the Jurhumites defeated the ‘Amāliqah and regained the trusteeship, which remained with them for about three hundred years. They extended the area of the House and increased its height.

Gradually the Ismā‘īlites grew in number and gained power; and they found the place too congested and over-populated. Then they fought the Jurhumites, defeated and expelled them from Mecca. The leader of the Ismā‘īlites at that time was ‘Amr ibn Laḥiyy, the chief of the clan of Khuzā‘ah. He became over-lord of Mecca and took over the trusteeship of the Ka‘bah. It was he who put idols in the Ka‘bah and called people to worship them. The first idol he put there was Hubal which he had brought from Syria; then he brought others. Gradually there were a lot of idols, and idol-worship spread among the Arabs; the upright religion of Ibrāhīm was discarded.

Shaḥnah ibn Khalaf al-Jurhumī refers to this episode, when he addresses ‘Amr ibn Laḥiyy in the following ode:

*O ‘Amr! you have invented various gods;
At Mecca — idols around the House.
And there was for the House One Lord from ever;
But you have made for it several lords (which are now
worshipped) by the people.
Surely you should know that Allāh is in no hurry;
Soon He will choose for (His) House stewards other
than you.*

The trusteeship remained in the clan of Khuzā‘ah upto the time of Ḥalīl al-Khuzā‘ī. He nominated his daughter (who was married to Quṣayy ibn Kilāb) to succeed him, and gave the right of opening and closing the door to a man from his clan, Abū Ghabshān al-Khuzā‘ī by name. Abū Ghabshān sold his right to Quṣayy ibn Kilāb for a camel and

a skinful of liquor. The proverb, ‘‘More loss incurring than the deal of Abū Ghabshān’’, alludes to this sale.

The trusteeship was thus transferred to the Quraysh. Quṣayy rebuilt the House, as we have mentioned above. The things continued as they were, until the Prophet conquered Mecca, and entering the Ka‘bah ordered the pictures to be effaced, and the idols to be thrown down and broken.

The Standing Place of Ibrāhīm — the stone with the imprints of Ibrāhīm’s feet — was at first put in a kneading trough near the Ka‘bah; then it was buried in the place where it is at present. It has a dome on four pillars where the people offer their prayers after the circumambulation.

There are a lot of details of various aspects of the Ka‘bah and other religious buildings attached to it. We have described here only the things which are necessary for understanding the verses of *ḥajj* and the Ka‘bah.

One of the especialities of this House — which Allāh has blessed and made a guidance — is that no Muslim group has ever disagreed about it or its prestige, honour and respect.

* * * * *

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَىٰ
 مَا تَعْمَلُونَ — ٩٨ . قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
 مَن آمَنَ تَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَنتُمْ شُهَدَاءُ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ —
 ٩٩ . يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن تَطِيعُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ
 يَرُدُّوكُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ كَافِرِينَ — ١٠٠ . وَكَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ وَأَنتُمْ تُتْلَىٰ
 عَلَيْكُم آيَاتُ اللَّهِ وَفِيكُمْ رَسُولُهُ وَمَن يَعْتَصِم بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ هُدِيَ إِلَىٰ
 صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ — ١٠١ .

Say: "O People of the Book! why do you disbelieve in the communications of Allāh? and Allāh is a witness of what you do" (98). Say: "O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allāh? You seek (to make) it crooked, while you are witnesses, and Allāh is not heedless of what you do" (99). O you who believe! if you obey a party from among those who were given the Book, they will turn you back as unbelievers after you have believed (100). But how can you disbelieve while it is you to whom the communications of Allāh are recited, and among you is His Messenger? And whoever holds fast to Allāh, he indeed is guided to the straight path (101).

COMMENTARY

The verses as is evident from thematic continuity, indicate that the People of the Book (a group of them — i. e., the Jews — or a group of the Jews) disbelieved in the Divine Revelation, and hindered the believers from the way of Allāh by trying to show that it was a crooked and unright way, and presenting to them the actually crooked misleading way as the way of Allāh. They did so by creating doubts in the believers' minds, in order that the believers would see the truth as falsehood and the falsehood (to which they invited them) as truth. The preceding verses had pointed to the Jews' deviations, for example, their denial of the fact that all food was lawful to them before the revelation of the Torah, and their rejection of the abrogation of the previous *qiblah*, that is, Baytu 'l-Maqdis.

These verses therefore put the finishing touches to the preceding ones which had described the lawfulness of all food before the Torah and declared that the Ka'bah was the first House appointed for the men. Now these verses admonish the Jews because they were constantly trying to create doubts and mislead the believers; also the verses warn the believers against following the advice of those unbelievers, because if they listened to their call, they would themselves become unbelievers; then they exhort and encourage them to hold fast to Allāh so that they would be guided to the path of true faith and their guidance would continue for ever.

It has been narrated by Zayd ibn Aslam (as as-Suyūṭī has reportedly¹ written in *Lubābu 'n-nuqūl*) as follows:

“Shāsh ibn Qays, a Jew, saw some people of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj engaged in (friendly) talk, and he was incensed by what he saw of their friendship and unity after their (hereditary) enmity. Therefore, he ordered a young Jew (who was with him) to sit with them and remind them of the Battle of Bu'āth. He did and they started boasting and quarrelling with each other. The argument continued until two men — Aws ibn Qurazī from the Aws and Jabbār ibn Sakhr from the Khazraj — jumped up and abused each other; the two groups were enraged and stood against each other for fighting. The news reached the Messenger of

¹ Vide *Tafsīru 'l-Manār*, vol. 4, Commentary of this verse. (*Author's Note*)

Allāh (s.a.w.a.); he came and admonished them and established peace between them. They heeded his call and obeyed. Then Allāh revealed about Aws and Jabbār: *‘O you who believe! if you obey a party from among those who were given the Book ...’*; and about Shāsh ibn Qays: *‘Say: “O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allāh?”’* ’ ’ ’

This tradition is abridged from the one narrated (by as-Suyūfī) in *ad-Durru ’l-manthūr* in detailed form from Zayd ibn Aslam; he has narrated nearly similar traditions from Ibn ‘Abbās and others.

However, these verses obviously fit more properly on the explanation given by us than on this tradition. Moreover, they speak about disbelief and belief, and also about testimony of the Jews, recitation of the revealed verses to the believers, and things like that; and all these matters are more relevant to the explanation given by us. It is also supported by the words of Allāh: *Many of the People of the Book wish that they could turn you back into unbelievers after your faith, out of envy on their part, (even) after the truth has become manifest to them ... (2:109)*. Therefore, the fact is, as we have said, that these verses are a sort of prologue to the preceding ones.

QUR’ĀN: *Say: “O People of the Book! why do you disbelieve in the communications of Allāh and ... ”*: The continuation of the context indicates that “the communications” refers to the lawfulness of food before the revelation of the Torah and to the Ka‘bah being the *qiblah* in Islam.

QUR’ĀN: *Say: “O People of the Book! why do you hinder him who believes from the way of Allāh? You seek (to make) it crooked; “aṣ-Ṣadd” (الصَّدُّ = to hinder; to divert); “you seek it,” that is, you want this way to be crooked; “iwajan” (عَوَجًا = crooked, perverted); it refers to the fact that they wanted the way of Allāh to be deviated, not straight.*

QUR’ĀN: *“while you are witnesses, and ... ”*: You know very well that all food was lawful before the revelation of the Torah, and that one of the signs of the promised prophet was that he would change the *qiblah* to the Ka‘bah. The Jews have been counted as witnesses in this verse, while the preceding verse declared Allāh to be a witness of their activities and

disbelief. The implication of this fine juxtaposition cannot be lost on a man of literary taste. They are witnesses of the truth of what they deny; and Allāh is a witness of their denial and disbelief. As “witnessing” was ascribed to them in this verse, the ending clause of the preceding verse (*And Allāh is a witness of what you do*) was changed here to: “and Allāh is not heedless of what you do”. The implication is that they are witnesses for the truth of the Prophet’s claim while Allāh is a witness for everyone and everything.

QUR’ĀN: *O you who believe! If you obey a party from among those who were given the Book, ... and among you is His Messenger? ...:* As mentioned earlier, “a party”, refers to the Jews or a Jewish group. “while it is you to whom the communications of Allāh are recited, and among you is His Messenger”: It is possible and easy for you to hold fast to the truth (which has been sent and explained to you) if you just listen to the verses recited to you and then meditate on them; then if you encounter any difficulty because of faulty meditation, you may refer to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) for clarification; you may refer to the Messenger even before meditating on the verses to explain it to you: he is present among you, it is not difficult for you to approach him because he is neither hidden nor far away from you; you may easily find the reality by referring to him, then you may clear the doubts which the Jews try to create in your minds. To hold fast to the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) and the Divine Communications is to hold fast to Allāh; “And whoever holds fast to Allāh, he indeed is guided to the straight path.”

The disbelief, mentioned in the clause, “But how can you disbelieve”, refers to disbelieving after believing; the clause, “while it is you to whom the communications of Allāh are recited,” points to the possibility of holding fast to the communications of Allāh and the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) in order to protect oneself from disbelief; the clause, “And whoever holds fast to Allāh,” is a sort of the major premise of a syllogism, [the full form of which has been given above]. The guidance to the straight path means being guided to the firmly-rooted true belief; it is the path that does not deviate nor does it fail to reach the destination; it keeps all those who proceed on it in proper line without letting them deviate hither or thither lest they go astray.

The Arabic word translated here as, “is guided”, is a past tense in

passive voice; it implies that they have been guided without realizing who has guided them.

The verse shows that the Book of Allāh and the verbal and practical guidance given by the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) are sufficient to guide a man to every truth and reality in which he could possibly go astray.

* * * * *

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ
مُسْلِمُونَ — ١٠٢ . وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا وَاذْكُرُوا
نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ
إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ
اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ — ١٠٣ . وَلَتَكُنَّ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ
إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ
الْمُفْلِحُونَ — ١٠٤ . وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا
جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ — ١٠٥ . يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ
وُجُوهُهُ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهُهُ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكْفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ
إِيمَانِكُمْ فذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ — ١٠٦ . وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ
ابْيَضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ — ١٠٧ . تِلْكَ
آيَاتُ اللَّهِ تَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِلْعَالَمِينَ — ١٠٨ .
وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ — ١٠٩ .
كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ
الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ
مِنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ — ١١٠ .

O you who believe! fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him, and do not die unless you are Muslims (102). And hold fast by the cord of Allāh all together and be not divided and remember the bounty of Allāh on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favour you became brethren; and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He delivered you from it; thus does Allāh make clear to you His signs that you may follow the right way (103). And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful (104). And be not like those who became divided and disagreed after clear evidences had come to them, and these it is that shall have a grievous chastisement (105). On the day when (some) faces shall become bright and (some) faces shall turn black; then as to those whose faces will have turned black: Did you disbelieve after your believing? Taste therefore the chastisement for what you were disbelieving (106). And as to those whose faces shall have become bright, they shall be in Allāh's mercy; in it they shall abide (107). These are communications of Allāh which We recite to you with truth, and Allāh does not desire any injustice to the creatures (108). And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allāh's; and to Allāh all things are returned (109). You are the best nation raised up for the (benefit of) men; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and you believe in Allāh; and if the People of the Book had believed it would have been better for them; of them (some) are believers and most of them are transgressors (110).

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

The verses conclude the speech addressed to the believers, warning them of the People of the Book and their machinations. It reminds them that they have got a life-line which if they hold fast to they shall not

perish, shall not go astray and shall not fall into pits of perdition. It is a speech branching from the preceding talk. However the previous context, that is, exposition of the behaviour of the People of the Book, has not been concluded yet, as may be seen from the verses coming after these: *They shall by no means harm you but with a slight distress.*

QUR'ĀN: *O you who believe! fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him,:* We have explained that ‘*at-taqwā*’ (التَّقْوَى = to be on guard; fear; piety) when related to Allāh, means to be on guard against His punishment, to fear His chastisement. Allāh says: *then be on guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel* (2:24). One may guard oneself from the Divine Wrath by behaving according to Allāh’s pleasure. In other words, it is doing what He has enjoined one to do, and abstaining from what He has forbidden; being grateful for His favours and patient when He puts one in adverse conditions. The last two attributes are actually two facets of gratefulness — because gratefulness is to put a thing in its proper place. In short, fear of Allāh means that man should obey (and not disobey) Him, and should submit to Him in all that He bestows or withholds.

But the verse talks of *at-taqwā* as it rightfully should be done, that is, a piety that is not tainted by the least wrong. Such piety is the pure servitude which is never marred by an iota of obliviousness or heedlessness; it is obedience without disobedience, gratitude without ingratitude, remembrance without forgetfulness; it is the true Islam, that is, the highest grade of Islam. Accordingly, the words, *and do not die unless you are Muslims*, would mean: Continue on this condition of ideal *at-taqwā* until you die.

This verse gives a different ideal than the words: *Therefore fear Allāh as much as you can* (64:16). This command enjoins man not to leave fear of Allāh in anything as much as he can. But ability differs from man to man according to people’s strength, understanding and will. There is no doubt that the ideal piety is not within easy reach of a majority of men. There are, in this spiritual journey, many stations, locations and danger points which cannot be spotted except by those who know. Also there are many delicate points and subtle differences which cannot be recognized except by those who have been purified. There is many a stage of piety which a common man would say, was beyond human ability; he really

believes it to be far above the human strength — while the truly pious people have long past that stage and are now progressing towards even more difficult goal, through much more harder terrains.

The verse, *Therefore fear Allāh as much as you can*, has been so worded that different minds would interpret it in different ways, according to one's perceived strength and ability. This will provide a means to proceed to the real goal which is given in the verse under discussion: "fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him, and do not die unless you are Muslims." They will then understand that the main purpose is for them to take to the path of the ideal piety and to progress towards that lofty station. In this respect, it is not different from being guided to the Straight Path: Although all men are invited to it, only the true believers, the pure monotheists, get to that path.

The two verses (*fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him; fear Allāh as much as you can*) then give the following connotation: All people are called and invited to the ideal piety; then they are told to proceed to that goal as much as they can, everyone according to his own ability and strength. In this way, all will come on the path of piety; but they will be in different stages and various stations according to their own understanding and ambition, coupled with the Divine help and support, that is, bestowed on deserving servants. (This is what one understands after pondering on the two verses.)

It is clear from the above explanation that the two verses are neither different from each other in meaning nor identical; rather, the first verse (*fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him*) points to the ultimate goal, while the second (*fear Allāh as much as you can*) shows the way.

QUR'ĀN: *and do not die unless you are Muslims:* Death is a creative affair that is beyond the circle of our will and power. An order or a prohibition concerning this or similar things shall be a creative order or prohibition, as Allāh says: *Then Allāh said to them, Die (2:243); ... is only that He says to it, 'Be', and it is (36:82).*

But sometimes an affair beyond our control is joined to one within our control, and then the combined phrase comes within our power, control and authority. At this stage, it may become a subject of legislative order or prohibition, as Allāh says: *therefore you should not be of the doubters (2:147); and be not with the unbelievers (11:42); and be with*

the true ones (9:119), and many similar verses. Obviously, “to be” is an intransitive creative affair upon which man has no control or power; but when it is joined with an action within his power, like doubting, disbelieving and holding fast to the true ones, it comes within our power; and then it may become subject of legislative order and prohibition.

In short, the prohibition that they should not die unless they are Muslims is a legislative one because the said proviso has made it a voluntary action; and it implies that man should hold fast to Islam in all conditions and at all times, until death comes to him in one of those conditions. Thus he would die on Islam.

QUR’ĀN: *And hold fast by the cord of Allāh all together and be not divided: Allāh has said before to the believers: But how can you disbelieve while it is you to whom the communications of Allāh are recited and among you is His Messenger; and whoever holds fast to Allāh, he indeed is guided to the straight path* (3:101). It had shown that holding fast to the communications of Allāh and to His Messenger (the Book of Allāh and the *sunnah* of the Prophet) is to hold fast to Allāh; and whoever holds fast to Allāh is safe and secure and his guidance is guaranteed; also holding fast to the Prophet is holding fast to the Book, because it is the Book itself that enjoins us to do so: *and whatever the Messenger gives you, take it, and from whatever he forbids you, keep it back* (59:7).

Now the verse under discussion has changed the phraseology; instead of telling us to hold fast to Allāh, it enjoins to hold fast to the cord of Allāh. It shows that the cord of Allāh is the Book revealed by Allāh; it is the cord that joins the creature to his Lord, that connects the heavens to the earth. You may also say that the Divine Cord is the Qur’ān and the Prophet because the end result of all is the same.

The Qur’ān invites only to the ideal piety and firm Islam. Yet the aim of this verse is different from the preceding verse that had enjoined ideal piety and the death on Islam, inasmuch as that verse was concerned with guidance of the individual, while this looks at the good of the society. The words “all together” and “be not divided” point to this fact. The verse therefore orders the Muslim society to hold fast to the Book and the *sunnah*, as they had earlier enjoined the individual to do so.

QUR'ĀN: *and remember the bounty of Allāh on you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts so by His favour you became brethren;*: The clause “when you were” explains the bounty of Allāh, and the next clause, *and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He delivered you from it*, is in conjunction with it.

The order to remember this Divine bounty and favour is based on the established Qur'ānic system: it builds its education on explanation of its reasons and causes; and invites to the good and the guidance through proper door; it does not demand blind following from its adherents. Far be it from the Divine Teaching to guide the people to eternal happiness — that is useful knowledge and good deed — and then to tell them to wander in the darkness of ignorance and blind following.

But the reader is warned here not to confuse the subject matter. Allāh teaches men the reality of their happiness and then shows them its proper way and reason, in order that they would understand the mutual relationship between the realities and know that all emanate from the fountain-head of monotheism. It continues side by side with men's obligation to totally submit to Allāh because He is Allāh, the Lord of the universe, and to hold fast to His cord because it is the cord of Allāh Who is the Lord of the universe. The last two verses (*These are communications of Allāh which we recite to you ...*) point to this fact.

In short, Allāh has ordered them not to accept any word, nor to obey any order, except after knowing its reason. At the same time He has told them to surrender totally to Him, giving for its reason the fact that He is Allāh Who owns them totally and unconditionally, they have got nothing except that which Allāh has willed for them and done for them; also He has ordered them to unconditionally obey what His Messenger has brought to them, giving for its reason the fact that he is His Messenger who conveys to them only that which he has been entrusted by Allāh to do; then Allāh explains to them the realities of knowledge and describes the ways of happiness, giving them a comprehensive reason in order that they could understand the inter-relation of the spiritual knowledge and the ways of happiness, and thus arrive at the root of monotheistic belief; it provides them with a Divine Training which enables them to think what is correct and speak what is true. Thus they would be alive with knowledge, free from blind following. Result: If they would understand the reason of any established religious reality (or any related thing) they

would accept it; and if they did not understand they would not reject it outright; instead they would try to understand it by research and meditation without rejecting, or objecting to, it — because it is an established reality.

But it does not mean that one should not accept anything — even from Allāh and His Messenger — without asking for its reason. Such a proposition would be the height of folly, as it would imply that Allāh wants His creatures to demand for proof after the proof is given to them: His lordship and His ownership is the basic reason and argument that makes it incumbent on everyone to submit to Him and obey His command. Likewise, the messengership of His Messenger is the solid reason and proof to prove that whatever he says has come from Allāh. Otherwise, we would have to say that Allāh has no authority in that which He manages by His authority. Is it but a contradiction in terms? In short, the Islamic way and the prophetic method calls only to knowledge, and not to blind following as these so-called critics — who are nothing if not blind followers themselves — claim.

Perhaps that is why Allāh has called it a favour (*the bounty of Allāh on you*). It indicates the reason as to why We enjoin you to unite together: you have already experienced the bitterness of enmity and sweet taste of love and brotherhood; you have seen that you were on the brink of the pit of fire and Allāh has saved you; We point this reason to you not because We have to support our sayings with some proof (obviously, Our saying is true whether We point to its reason or not), but only to let you know that it is a favour of Us on you, in order that you may appreciate that in this unity — like everything else We enjoin on you — lies your felicity, comfort and success.

Allāh has given here two proofs, one of which (... *you were enemies...*) is obviously based on their experience, while the other (... *you were on the brink of a pit of fire...*) is based on rational explanation.

The clause “so by His favour you became brethren” reminds the Muslims a second time of the Divine Favour mentioned in the preceding clause “and remember the bounty of Allāh on you”. The bounty and favour refers to their unity; hence the brotherhood too (which results from this bounty) refers to the same love and unitedness. The brotherhood, as used here, is therefore a claimed reality.

Also possibly it may be a reference to the brotherhood that has been

legislated as between the believers, vide the verse: *The believers are but brethren* (49:10); this legislated brotherhood creates very important mutual rights and duties between one believer and the other.

QUR'ĀN: *and you were on the brink of a pit of fire, then He delivered you from it:* “*Shafā ḥufratin*” (شَفَا حُفْرَةً = brink or edge of a pit where one is in danger of falling down); “fire” may be of the hereafter or of this world. If former, then it would refer to the fact that previously they were unbelievers and about to fall down in the hell the moment they died — and death is nearer to man than is the iris of eye from its white — then Allāh saved them from it through the true faith. And if the aim is to point to their evil society which they were living in before they accepted Islam and became brethren, and the fire refers to their wars and conflicts — and it is a commonly used metaphor — then the meaning would be as follows:

A society built on disunited hearts and divergent minds cannot proceed under one leader or in one direction; it is bound to turn into a disorientated and deranged collection of people — each one pulling it to his side, as it suits his own wishes and desires. Such a society would be a cauldron of dissension and strife, always pushing its members to ever-new conflicts, embroiling them in wars and fights, and threatening them with decline and extinction. It is the fire that neither allows one to endure nor does it leave one alone, raging in the pit of ignorance from which no inmate could hope to escape.

The immediate audience of this verse, were the Muslims who before the verse was revealed, had accepted Islam after their disbelief. They had spent all their pre-Islamic lives in constant threat of battle and war. There was no security, no peace, no law and order. They did not understand what constituted public safety — the concept that covers the society in all its aspects like property, honour and life, etc.

When they joined hands to hold fast to the cord of Allāh, perceived the signs of happiness and felicity, and tasted the sweetness of Divine Bounties, they understood by this experience the truth and reality of what Allāh reminds them of His pleasant favours and the resulting wholesome felicity. In this background, this speech was bound to win their hearts — as well as of the others — most effectively and in all totality.

That is why the call to unite has been based on their own experience

and observation instead of just philosophical presumptions. One picture is worth a thousand words. And it is because of the same reason that the next warning (*And be not like those who became divided and disagreed after clear evidences had come to them ...*) points to the condition of those who had preceded them. The believers have seen and heard what happened to those nations — how they declined and fell — because of their disunitedness and internal strife; the believers should learn lessons from them; they should not walk on the same path, should not proceed in the same direction.

Then Allāh draws their attention to the special nature of this speech and says: *thus does Allāh make clear to you His signs that you may follow the right way.*

QUR'ĀN: *And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and these it is that shall be successful.*: Experience shows that the knowledge a man acquires in his life (and he acquires and preserves for himself only that which may be of some use to him) is soon forgotten if not repeatedly remembered, if not frequently put in practice and acted upon — it makes no difference how that knowledge was acquired and preserved. Also there is no doubt that action, in all its aspects, turns on the pivot of knowledge; its strength or weakness, its efficiency or deficiency all depends on the strength or weakness, efficiency or deficiency of knowledge. Allāh has given a likeness of knowledge and action in the following verse: *And as for the good land, its vegetation springs forth (abundantly) by the permission of its Lord, and (as for) that which is bad (its herbage) comes forth but scantily; thus do We repeat the communications for a people who give thanks (7:58).*

Undoubtedly, there is an interaction between knowledge and action. Knowledge is the strongest motive of action, and action is the greatest teacher that imparts knowledge.

This reality binds a good society (that which has got useful knowledge and virtuous action) to preserve and keep intact their knowledge and culture; and obliges them to bring a deviator back to the right path, to make sure that nobody goes astray leaving the known way of righteousness for the unforgiving desert of evil — they must protect him from falling into the pit of sin and error by forbidding him to go near it.

This is the call to educate the society members; the obligation of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. It is this important obligation to which Allāh refers when He says: “... who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong”.

The Arabic words translated here as “right” and “wrong” (*enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong*) are ‘*al-ma‘rūf*’ (الْمَعْرُوفُ) and ‘*al-munkar*’ (الْمُنْكَرُ) which literally mean “known” and “unknown” respectively. Ponder on the explanation given above and you will understand why Allāh has used these expressions. The verse under discussion is based on the preceding one, *And hold fast by the cord of Allāh all together and be not divide ...* A society which follows this guidance must be the ideal society. It would only be the right and the good which they would recognize, which would be “known” to them; and only the wrong and the evil which they would not recognize, which would be “unknown” to them. If this fine point is not kept in mind, then the only possible explanation would be that the right and the wrong were respectively known and unknown in the eyes of religion — but not in actual practice of the society.

The clause “And from among you there should be a party”: It has been said that “from among” indicates portion, obliging only a party among the Muslim *ummah* to enjoin the good and forbid the evil and call to the truth. Others have said that the particle ‘*min*’ (مِنْ = from among) has here an explanatory connotation; that the sentence means as follows: If you unite together you will become a party who invite to good, enjoin the right and forbid the evil. In other words it is as we say: ‘I should find in you a friend’, which actually means: ‘Be my friend’. Apparently, the said explanatoriness of “from among” means that the whole Muslim *ummah* is obligated to call to the good.

Actually, the controversy whether “from among” is for division or explanation is quite irrelevant. Calling to good, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong are things which, even when obligatory, cannot be obligatory except on a few; because once the goal is achieved it would not be necessary for others to do so. Even if we were to say that the whole *ummah* invited to good, enjoined the right and forbade the wrong, it would only mean that there were some people in the *ummah* who did so. Thus the responsibility lies on only a selected group in any case. If the verse is addressed to a group of the *ummah*, the matter is clear; but if

it is addressed to the whole nation, that is because of that particular group. In other words, initially the responsibility lies on everybody's shoulders, but when some perform the duty, they get its reward and the others are then exempted from the obligation. That is why the verse ends with the clause "and these [i.e., those who perform this duty] it is that shall be successful"

It appears from the above that "from among" indicates here a portion; it is this meaning that is generally understood from such combinations in common conversation, and it is not right to go for another meaning without a good reason.

The three — inviting to good, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong — are profoundly extensive subjects which require deep exegetic discourse, and we shall write about it, Allāh willing, in proper places; also we shall deal there with its academic psychological and social aspects.

QUR'ĀN: *And be not like those who became divided and disagreed after clear evidences had come to them, and...* Probably the clause, "after clear evidences had come to them", is an adverbial phrase related to the verb, "disagreed", only. If so, then the "disagreement" would refer to difference of belief while the "division" to their physical separation and dissociation. Division has been mentioned first, because it is the prelude to divergence of belief. As long as the members of a community remain in contact with each other, there continues a harmony in their ideas and ideals, and their constant meetings — and the inevitable interaction — welds their beliefs into a single entity, protecting them from ideological differences. If on the other hand, they lose contact and become separated the process of mutual action and reaction comes to a standstill; their views and ideas start developing independently, each going his own way, and it does not take each group very long to develop its own views, ideals, theories and beliefs. It is in this way that ideological disagreements are born and unity of nations is shattered. It is as though Allāh was warning the Muslims not to be like those who began their journey to disaster by separating from each other, losing mutual contacts and remaining aloof from the community, and ended by having different beliefs and divergent ideas.

Allāh has mentioned in various places that this disagreement and

difference springs from revolt and envy; for example: *And none differed about it but the very people who were given it, after clear signs had come to them, revolting among themselves* (2:213).

Of course, it is inevitable for ideas and opinions to differ, because knowledge and understandings differ from individual to individual; but at the same time it is essential for a society to remove that difference and bring back the deviators to the fold of unity. It is possible to remove the differences through various means; and if the *ummah* neglected this duty, it would in itself be a revolt which would throw them into perdition.

The Qur'ān has given utmost importance to unity and forcefully warned the Muslims against disunity. Why? Because it knew which path this *ummah* would take; they would differ, disagree and disunite not only as the previous people did, but even more. A peculiarity of the Qur'ānic style has already been mentioned in several places: When it emphatically warns against some pitfall, it serves as a prophecy that the Muslim *ummah* was going to fall into it, nevertheless; the more forceful the admonition, the more likely the people were to violate it. This difference and disunity was foretold by the Prophet as well as by the Qur'ān; he said that difference would creep into his *ummah*, then it would raise its head in the form of divergent sects; also he prophesied that the *ummah* would become divided as the Jews and the Christians were before. Some of those prophecies will be given under "Traditions".

History testifies to the truth of this prophesy. No sooner was the Prophet gone than the people scattered in all directions; they were divided into several sects, each accusing others of apostasy. This has been going on since the days of the Companions to this time of ours. Every attempt at uniting two sects, results in the creation of a third.

Experience and analytical study of Islamic literature and history prove that the fount-head of this difference were the hypocrites. Read the Qur'ān and you will see how forcefully it speaks against them and condemns them; how seriously it denounces their schemes; and how dangerous it takes their plans to be. Ponder on what Allāh has said about them in the Chapters of: The Cow, The Repentance, The Confederates, and The Hypocrites, etc., and you will be stunned. This was their condition and behaviour during the lifetime of the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.), when the revelations were regularly coming from Allāh. But as soon as the Prophet departed, the hypocrites were immediately forgotten;

we find no mention of them in the Muslim literature; it was as though they vanished the moment the Prophet died!

(It was) *as though there never was any intimate friend between
al-Hujūn and aṣ-Ṣafā,*

Or there never conversed at night any talker at Mecca.

Soon the people found themselves scattered to the four winds and sectarian differences cut them asunder. Despotism and tyrannical governments succeeded in subjugating them, and their felicity of life was transformed into infelicity of error and straying. And we seek help from Allāh. We hope, by the grace of Allāh, to write on this subject in detail in the Chapter of The Repentance.

QUR'ĀN: *On the day when (some) faces shall become bright and (some) faces shall turn black;... they shall abide.:* As the talk centres around ungratefulness which, like treachery and breach of trust, causes shame and bashfulness, Allāh has selected here a chastisement of the hereafter that is analogous to it, that is, blackness of face which metaphorically denotes shamefacedness, abashment and disgrace. It is implied, or rather clearly shown, by the words of Allāh: “then as for those whose faces will have turned black: Did you disbelieve after your believing?”

For the same reason, those who are grateful for this Divine Favour, shall be given a reward that will be appropriate for thankfulness, and that is brightness of face, which is metaphorically used for contentment and delight.

QUR'ĀN: *These are communications of Allāh which We recite to you with truth,:* The clause, “with truth” is related to the verb, “We recite”, that is, the recitation is the recital of truth, it is not false, nor is it from Satanic whisperings. Alternatively, it may be related to “communications” giving it an adjectival meaning, that is, true communications. Or it may be related to a deleted word. In any case, the verse means as follows: These verses which describe what Allāh will do with two groups — the ungrateful and the grateful — are accompanied by and based on truth, there is no falsehood or injustice in them. This meaning is more appropriate because the verse ends on the words: *and Allāh does not desire any injustice ...*

QUR'ĀN: *and Allāh does not desire any injustice to the creatures:* The word “injustice”, is a common noun used in a negative context, implies comprehensiveness, that is, every type of injustice is negated. Likewise “the creatures” being a plural with definite article “the” denotes comprehensiveness. Therefore, the meaning will be as follows: Allāh does not desire any injustice — of whatever type it may be — to any of His creatures or a group of creatures.

It is a fact that difference and conflict among the people is such a bad thing that its evil consequences adversely affect all the creatures, the whole mankind.

QUR'ĀN: *And whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is Allāh's; and to Allāh all things are returned.:* After the declaration that Allāh desires no injustice whatsoever, this verse gives its reason to remove any possible misunderstanding to the contrary. Allāh owns everything in all its aspects; He has right and authority to manage it in any way He likes. There is nothing outside His ownership. Had there been anything outside His ownership, only then He would do any injustice or exceed the limit by managing or usurping that “unowned” thing. Moreover, man inclines to injustice when he has a need which cannot be fulfilled except by manipulation of something he does not own. But Allāh is Self-sufficient to Whom belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. (This argument has been given by an exegete, but it is not in conformity with apparent meaning of the verse. This reply is based on the Self-sufficiency of Allāh, and not on His ownership, while the verse mentions the latter, not the former.) However, the Divine Ownership offers irrefutable proof that Allāh is not unjust.

Then comes another proof: Everything and every affair, whatsoever it may be, returns to Allāh. If anyone other than Allāh would have had any authority on any thing. or affair, only then Allāh would have been committing injustice if He would have removed it from that other's authority and manipulated it according to His own will. This proof is pointed at in the concluding statement: “and to Allāh all things are returned”.

The two proofs, as you see, are complementary. One is based on the premise that everything belongs to Allāh, and the other on the principle

that no affair belongs to anyone other than Allāh.

QUR'ĀN: *You are the best nation raised up for the (benefit of) men; ...:* The word translated as “raised up” is ‘*ukhrijat*’ (أُخْرِجَتْ = lit. taken out); it has a connotation of introduction. Taking out also implies incidence, bringing forth and creation. Allāh says: *And Who brought forth herbage* (87:4). The verse is addressed to the believers; therefore, the word “men” should mean general public, the humanity at large. Someone has said that the verb, ‘*kuntum*’ (كُنْتُمْ = lit.: you were), is here devoid of time factor and means ‘you are’. The word ‘*ummah*’ (أُمَّة = nation, group), is used for a party as well as for individual — when they have the same goal which they aim to reach; it is derived from ‘*al-amm*’ (أَلَّامٌ = to intend, to aim). The clause, “and you believe in Allāh”, has been placed after mentioning the enjoining the right and forbidding the evil; it is like mentioning the whole thing or the root after describing some components or branches. According to the above explanation, the verse means as follows: O Muslims! you are the best group which Allāh has brought out for the mankind by guiding it; because you are united, you believe in Allāh, and perform the twin duties of enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. Obviously, this honoured title has been given to the whole *ummah* only because some of them have attained to the true belief and do fulfil the obligations of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. This is in short what some exegetes have written about it.

But obviously the word ‘*kuntum*’ (كُنْتُمْ = you were), is not devoid of time factor; it is a past tense and refers to the believer’s condition in the early days of Islam. It speaks about those who were foremost among the Emigrants and the Helpers; the belief here refers to their positive response to the call of holding fast to the cord of Allāh without being divided; this belief is opposite of the disbelief in that call — the disbelief that is mentioned in the words: *Did you disbelieve after your believing?* The same is the import of the belief as related to the People of the Book in this verse, “and if the People of the Book had believed.” In short the meaning will be as follows:

O Muslims! you were — when you were brought forth first of all and appeared for the people — the best group that was ever formed, because at that time you enjoined good and forbade evil, and holding fast by the cord of Allāh you became united and unified like one body and one soul;

and if the People of the Book too were like that it would have been better for them, but they are divided and disunited — some of them are believers while most of them are transgressors.

Many times in these verses the talk switches from third to the second person, and from plural to the singular number, and vice versa. Also there are clauses where noun has been used instead of pronoun, for example, the Divine Name “Allāh” has been repeated several times. The reasons for these changes are not difficult to find after meditation.

TRADITIONS

Abū Baṣīr says: “I asked Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.) about the words of Allāh, *fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him*, and he said: ‘He should be obeyed, and not disobeyed; remembered, and not forgotten; and thanked, and not shown ingratitude.’ ” (*Ma‘āni ‘l-akhbār; at-Tafsīr, al-‘Ayyāshī*)

al-Hākīm and Ibn Marduwayh have narrated through another chain from Ibn Mas‘ūd that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘*Fear Allāh as He should be feared*; (it means) that He should be obeyed and not disobeyed, and remembered, and not forgotten.’ ” (*ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*)

al-Khaṭīb narrates from Anas that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘No servant fears Allāh with the fear which is due to Him until he knows that what has befallen him could not miss him, and what has missed him could not reach him.’ ” (*ibid.*)

The author says: We have explained in the Commentary how the meaning given in the first two traditions could be inferred from the verse. As for the third one, it gives a concomitant of the Qur’ānic meaning, and it is clear.

Ibn Shahrāshūb quotes from *at-Tafsīr* of Wakī‘ that ‘Abd Khayr said: “I asked ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib (a.s.) about the words of Allāh: *O you who believe! fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him*, (and) he said: ‘By Allāh, no one acted upon it except the House of the Messenger of Allāh; we remembered Him, so we do not forget Him; and we thanked Him, so

we are never ungrateful to Him; and we obeyed Him, so we never disobeyed Him. When this verse was revealed, the Companions said: “We are unable to do it.” Then Allāh revealed, *Therefore fear Allāh as much as you can.*” ’ ’ ’ Wakī‘ said: “that is, as much as you are able to do.” (*al-Burhān [fī tafsīri ‘l-Qur‘ān]*, al-Bahrānī)

Abū Baṣīr said: “I asked Abū ‘Abdillāh (a.s.) about the words of Allāh, *fear Allāh with the fear which is due to Him.* He said: ‘(It is) abrogated.’ I said: ‘And which (verse) abrogated it? He said: ‘The words of Allāh, *Therefore fear Allāh as much as you can.*’ ’ ’ (*at-Tafsīr*, al-Ayyāshī)

The author says: It may be inferred from the tradition of Wakī‘ that “abrogation” (as mentioned in the tradition of al-‘Ayyāshī) refers to various stages of piety and fear of Allāh. But it does not mean abrogation in the sense of cancellation (as some exegetes have said) because it is against the apparent meaning of the Qur‘ān.

aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) explained the clause, *unless you are Muslims*, in these words: “unless you are submissive.” (*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān*)

as-Suyūfī writes under the words of Allāh: *And hold fast by the cord of Allāh ...*: “Ibn Abī Shaybah and Ibn Jarīr have narrated from Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī that he said: ‘The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘The Book of Allāh, it is the cord of Allāh (which is) outstretched from the heaven to the earth.’ ’ ’ ’ (*ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*)

Ibn Abī Shaybah narrates from Abū Shurayḥ al-Khuzā‘ī that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘Surely this Qur‘ān is a rope, one end of which is in the hand of Allāh, and the other end is in your hands; therefore hold fast to it; because you shall never slip nor will you ever go astray after (holding fast to) it.’ ’ ’ (*ibid.*)

as-Sajjād (a.s.) said, *inter alia*, in a *ḥadīth*: “And the cord of Allāh — it is the Qur‘ān.” (*Ma‘āni ‘l-akhbār*)

The author says: There are other traditions on this theme, narrated by both sects.

al-Bāqir (a.s.) said: “The progeny of Muḥammad, they are the cord

of Allāh which He has ordered (the believers) to hold fast to; so He has said: *And hold fast by the cord of Allāh all together and be not divided.*” (at-*Tafsīr*, al-‘*Ayyāshī*)

The author says: There are other traditions of the same meaning; they are supported by what has been written in the Commentary; also other traditions given below, support it.

aṭ-Ṭabarānī has narrated from Zayd ibn Arqam that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.), said: ‘Surely, I am to depart from you; and surely you are to come to me near the *‘hawḍ’* (الْحَوْضُ = reservoir, i.e., of *‘al-Kawthar’* = الْكَوْثَرُ). Therefore be careful how you follow me about the two weighty things.’ He was asked: ‘And what are the two weighty things? O Messenger of Allāh!’ He said: ‘The greater one is the Book of Allāh, the Mighty, the Great, (it is) a rope one end of which is in the hand of Allāh and (another) end is in your hands; therefore hold fast to it, you shall never slip up nor will you ever go astray. And the smaller one is my progeny. And surely they will never separate from each other until they reach me near the waterreservoir; and I have asked for them this (especiality) from my Lord; therefore do not precede them lest you be destroyed; and do not (try to) teach them because they are more knowledgeable than you.’ ” (ad-*Durru ‘l-manthūr*)

The author says: The tradition of the “Two Weighty Things” is among the *mutawātir* ones, which has been narrated unanimously by both the Sunnīs and the Shī‘ahs. We have mentioned in the beginning of the chapter that some scholars of traditions have narrated it from thirty-five different narrators — males and females — and a multitude of narrators and scholars have narrated it from those original narrators.

Ibn Mājah, Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥātim have narrated from Anas that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘The Children of Israel became divided into seventy-one sects, and surely my *ummah* will soon be divided into seventy-three sects — all of them shall be in the fire except one.’ They said: ‘O Messenger of Allāh! and who is this one?’ He said: ‘The party.’ Then he recited: *And hold fast to the cord of Allāh all together.*’ ” (ibid.)

The author says: This too is one of the famous traditions. The Shī'ahs have narrated it in a different way, as may be seen in *al-Khiṣāl*, *Ma'āni 'l-akhbār*, *al-Ihtijāj*, *al-Amālī*, the *Kitāb* of Sulaym ibn Qays and *at-Tafsīr* of al-'Ayyāshī. We quote it here from the first-named book. aṣ-Ṣadūq narrates through his chains from Sulaymān ibn Mihrān who narrates from Ja'far ibn Muḥammad (peace be on them both) who narrates, through his forefathers, from the Leader of the Faithful (peace be on them all) that he said: "I heard the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) saying: 'Verily, the *ummah* of Mūsā became divided after him, into seventy-one sects, one of them (was) saved, and seventy (were thrown) into the fire. And the *ummah* of 'Īsā became divided after him, into seventy-two sects, one of them (was) saved, while seventy-one (were thrown) into the fire. And surely my *ummah* will soon be divided after me, into seventy-three sects, one of them (will be) saved, and seventy-two (will be thrown) into the fire.'"

The author says: It conforms with the next tradition.

Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim (who has confirmed correctness of this *ḥadīth*) have all narrated from Abū Hurayrah that he said: "The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: 'The Jews were divided into seventy-one sects; and the Christians were divided into seventy-two sects; and my *ummah* will be divided into seventy-three sects.'"

(*ad-Durru 'l-manthūr*)

The author says: This theme is found in other traditions narrated through other chains from Mu'āwiyah and others.

al-Ḥākim has narrated from Ibn 'Umar that he said: "The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: "There will happen in any *ummah* all that happened in the Children of Israel in a completely identical manner, so much so that if there were among them someone who had openly had incestuous relation with his mother, there would be someone like that in my *ummah* too. Verily the Children of Israel were divided into seventy-one sects, and my *ummah* will become divided into seventy-three sects — all of them (will go) into the fire except one.' He was asked: 'Which

one?’ He said: ‘That on which are I and my Companions today.’ ” (*ibid.*)

The author says: A similar tradition has been narrated in *Jāmi‘u ‘l-uṣūl* (by Ibnu ‘l-Athīr) from at-Tirmidhī, on the authority of the son of ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ from the Prophet.

aṣ-Ṣadūq has narrated through his chains from Ghiyāth ibn Ibrāhīm, from aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) (through his forefathers, peace be on them all) that he said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘All that happened in the previous nations will surely happen in this *ummah* in a completely identical manner and exactly alike way.’ ” (*Kamālu ‘d-dīn*)

The Prophet said: “Most surely you will follow the customs of those who were before you, in a completely identical manner and exactly alike way; you will not deviate from their path; you will imitate them faithfully (in every conceivable manner), span to span, hand to hand and arm to arm; so much so that if someone in previous nations had entered an iguana’s den, you will surely enter it.” They said: “Do you mean the Jews and the Christians? O Messenger of Allāh!” He said: “Who (else) do I mean? Surely you will unravel the rope of Islam strand by strand; the first thing you will destroy of your religion shall be trustworthiness, and the last of it (to go, shall be) the prayer.” (*at-Tafsīr*, al-Qummī)

The author of *Jāmi‘u ‘l-uṣūl* has narrated on the authority of the correct books — also at-Tirmidhī has narrated it — from the Prophet that he said: “By Him in Whose hand my soul is, most surely you will follow the custom of those who were before you.” And Razīn has added the words: “in a completely identical manner and exactly similar way; so much so that if there were among them one who had cohabited with his mother, someone among you too would do so. But I do not know whether you would worship calf or not.”

The author says: This too is a famous tradition. The Sunnīs have narrated it in their correct and other books, while the Shī‘ahs have recorded it in their collections of traditions.

Anas said: “The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘Surely there will arrive at the Reservoir a group of my Companions, until when they shall be removed (from there) they shall tremble before me. So I shall

say: O Lord! my Companions.’ Then it will be said: ‘You do not know what they did do after you.’ ” (*aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*, al-Bukhārī; *aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Muslim)

Abū Hurayrah said that the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said. “There will arrive near me on the Day of Resurrection a group of my Companions (or according to another report: of my *ummah*), and they will be evicted from the Reservoir. Then I will say: ‘O Lord! my Companions.’ And (Allāh) will say: ‘You have no knowledge of what they did do after you; they became apostates, going backwards (to their previous disbelief).’ Then they will be avicted.” (*ibid.*)

The author says: This tradition also is very well-known; both the Sunnīs and the Shī‘ahs have recorded it in their correct books and collections, on the authority of many Companions, like Ibn Mas‘ūd, Anas, Sahl ibn Sā‘id, Abū Hurayrah, Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudrī, ‘Ā’ishah, Umm Salmah, Asmā’ bint Abī Bakr, and others, and also from some Imams of the *Ahlu ’l-bayt* (a.s.).

These traditions, numerous and varied as they are, confirm what we have inferred from the verses; and the historical events and strifes confirm these traditions.

al-Ḥākim has narrated (and confirmed its correctness) that Ibn ‘Umar said: “Verily the Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘Whoever went out of community about a hand-span, he surely removed the collar of Islam from his neck — until he returns. And whoever died without having a leader of community over him, then surely his death shall be a death of ignorance (i.e., disbelief).’ ” (*ad-Durru ’l-manthūr*)

The author says: The theme of this *ḥadīth* too is well-known. Both the Sunnīs and the Shī‘ahs have narrated from the Prophet that he said: “Whoever died without knowing the Imām of his time, he died the death of ignorance (i.e., disbelief).”

It is recorded in the *Sunans* of at-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd that the Prophet said: “There shall always be a group of my *ummah* on truth.” (*Jāmi‘u ’l-uṣūl*)

The Leader of the Faithful (‘Alī, a.s.) said about the words of Allāh: *Did you disbelieve after your believing?*: “They are the people of

innovations and heretic tendencies and wrong views from this *ummah*.’’
(*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān*)

Abū ‘Amr az-Zubayrī narrates from aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) about the words of Allāh: *You are the best nation raised up for the (benefit of) men ...*, that he said: ‘‘(Allāh) means the *ummah* (group, nation) for which the prayer of Ibrāhīm (a.s.) was granted; and they are the people Allāh raised (His Messenger) among them, and from them and to them; and they are the medium nation, and they are the best nation that has been raised up for the people.’’ (*Majma‘u ‘l-bayān; at-Tafsīr, al-‘Ayyāshī*)

The author says: We have explained this tradition under the Commentary of the following verse: ... *and (raise) from our offspring a group submitting Thee* (2:128).

Ibn Abī Ḥātim has narrated from Abū Ja‘far (a.s.) that he said about the verse: *You are the best nation raised up for the (benefit of) men ...*: ‘‘The People of the House of the Prophet.’’ (*ad-Durru ‘l-manthūr*)

Aḥmad has narrated through good chains from ‘Alī (a.s.) that he said : ‘‘The Messenger of Allāh (s.a.w.a.) said: ‘I have been given that which no prophet was given: I have been helped with awe, and I have been given keys of the earth, and I have been named Aḥmad, and the earth has been made a means of cleansing for me, and my *ummah* has been made the best nation.’’ (*ibid.*)

* * * * *

لَنْ يَضُرُّوكُمْ إِلَّا أَذَى وَإِنْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ يُؤَلُّوكُمْ الْأَذْيَارَ ثُمَّ لَا
يُنصَرُونَ — ١١١. ضَرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ أَيْنَ مَا نَفَقُوا إِلَّا يَحْبِلُ مِنَ
اللهِ وَحَبْلِ مِنَ النَّاسِ وَبَانُوا بِغَضَبٍ مِنَ اللهِ وَضَرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَسْكَنَةُ
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقِّ
ذَلِكَ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ — ١١٢. لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً مِنْ أَهْلِ
الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَانِئَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللهِ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ — ١١٣.
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ
الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ — ١١٤.
وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ — ١١٥. إِنْ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللهِ شَيْئاً
وَأُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ — ١١٦. مَثَلُ مَا يُنْفِقُونَ
فِي هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَثَلِ رِيحٍ فِيهَا صِرٌّ أَصَابَتْ حَرْثَ قَوْمٍ
ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ فَأَهْلَكَتْهُ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللهُ وَلَكِنْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ —
١١٧. يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةَ مِنْ دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْلُونَكُمْ
خَبَالاً وَدُّوا مَا عَنِتُّمْ قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَمَا تُخْفِي

صُدُّورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ — ١١٨ .
 هَا أَنْتُمْ أَوْلَاءُ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ كُلِّهِ وَإِذَا
 لَقُوكُمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَضُّوا عَلَيْكُمُ الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ قُلْ
 مُؤْتُوا بِعِظِّكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ — ١١٩ . إِنْ تَمَسَّكُمْ
 حَسَنَةٌ تَسُؤْهُمْ وَإِنْ تُصِيبْكُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا وَإِنْ تَصِيرُوا تَتَّقُوا
 لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ — ١٢٠ .

They shall by no means harm you but with a slight distress; and if they fight you they shall turn (their) backs to you, then they shall not be helped (111). Abasement is brought down upon them wherever they are found, except under a protection from Allāh and a protection from men, and they have become settled in wrath from Allāh, and humiliation is stamped upon them; this is because they used to disbelieve in the signs of Allāh and slew the prophets unjustly; this is because they disobeyed and used to exceed the limits (112). They are not all alike; of the People of the Book there is an upright party; they recite Allāh's communications in the night-time and they prostrate (to Him) (113). They believe in Allāh and the last day, and they enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong, and they strive with one another in hastening to good deeds, and those are among the good (114). And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied it, and Allāh knows the pious ones (115). (As for) those who disbelieve, surely neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them in the least against Allāh; and these are the inmates of the fire; therein they shall abide (116). The likeness of what they spend in this life of the world is as the likeness of a wind in which is intense cold (that) smites the tilth of a people who have done injustice to their souls and destroys it; and Allāh does no injustice to them, but they are doing injustice to themselves (117). O you who believe! do not take for intimate friends from among others than your own people; they do not fall short of

inflicting loss upon you; they love what distresses you; vehement hatred has already appeared from out of their mouths, and what their breasts conceal is greater still; indeed, We have made the signs clear to you, if you would understand (118). Lo! you are they who will love them while they do not love you, and you believe in the Book (in) the whole of it; and when they meet you they say: "We believe," and when they are alone, they bite the ends of their fingers in rage against you. Say: "Die in your rage;" surely Allāh knows what is in the breasts (119). If a good befall you, it grieves them, and if an evil afflicts you, they rejoice at it; and if you are patient and guard yourselves, their scheme will not injure you in any way; surely Allāh comprehends what they do (120).

* * * * *

COMMENTARY

The verses, as you see, now revert to the original theme, describing the behaviour of the People of the Book — and particularly the Jews — exposing their disbelief in the Divine Revelation, their going astray and their hindering the believers from the way of Allāh; the preceding ten verses were a talk within talk, a parenthetical speech. The verses are thus connected with the foregoing discourse.

QUR'ĀN: *They shall by no means harm you ... they shall not be helped:* "al-Adhā" (الآذي = slight distress) denotes a harm suffered by a creature, either to his soul or body or to those related to him, be it of this world or of the hereafter — as ar-Rāghib has said in *Mufradātu 'l-Qur'ān*.

QUR'ĀN: Abasement is brought down upon them wherever they are found, except under a protection from Allāh and a protection from men; "adh-Dhillah" (الدُّلَّة = abasement) denotes here species of abasement; 'adh-dhull' (الدُّلُّ) is the humiliation imposed by someone else; 'adh-dhill' (الدُّلُّ) is that which results from one's own obstinacy — as ar-Rāghib has written. However, its general import is the condition of

humiliation and degradation. Its opposite ‘*al-‘izz*’ (الْعِزُّ) means honour, strength and pride.

The word ‘*thuqifū*’ (تُقْفُوا) means ‘‘are found’’; ‘*al-ḥabl*’ (الْحَبْلُ) literally means rope or cord which provides protection to one who holds fast to it; it is metaphorically used to everything that provides a kind of safety, security and protection, e.g., a covenant, guarantee or amnesty. The meaning is as follows — and Allāh knows better: Abasement is stamped on them as a design is stamped on a coin, or it encompasses them as a tent encompasses a man. Anyhow, they are either branded with, or overwhelmed by abasement and humiliation — except when they get a protection or guarantee from Allāh and a protection or guarantee from men.

The word ‘‘protection’’ is repeated when referring to Allāh and then to men, because the connotation differs from one place to the other. Protection given by Allāh is His decree and command, either creative or legislative; and that provided by men is their decision and action.

Abasement is stamped on them; it means that Allāh has ordained a law affirming their abasement. This meaning is supported by the proviso ‘‘wherever they are found’’. Obviously, it means that wherever the believers find them and subjugate them; this proviso is obviously more appropriate to legislative abasement, one of whose effects is the imposition of *jizyah*.

The meaning of the verse therefore is as follows:

They are abased and humiliated, according to the law of Islamic *sharī‘ah*, except when they come under the protection of an Islamic State, or somehow get protection from people.

One of the exegetes has said that the clause ‘‘Abasement is brought down upon them’’ is not a legislative order; it is rather a statement of fact describing what they had suffered by the Divine decree and measure — because when Islam came, the Jews were paying *jizyah* to the fire-worshippers of Persia, and some of them were subjects of the Christians.

COMMENT: This meaning could be correct; and the end portion of the verse might even support this view, because it apparently explains the reason of their being branded with abasement and humiliation in terms of

their misdeeds, e.g., their disbelief in the signs of Allāh, their slaying the prophets and their continuous transgression. But then we would have to apply this verse exclusively to the Jews — and there is apparently nothing in the verse to suggest such exclusiveness. We shall write some more on this subject under the following verse: *and We have put enmity and hatred among them till the Day of Ressurrection (5:64).*

QUR'ĀN: *and they have become settled in wrath from Allāh, and humiliation is stamped upon them;: ‘Bā’ū’* (بَاءُ وَا = they settled in; they returned with); ‘*al-maskanah*’ (الْمَسْكَنَةُ) translated here as humiliation, literally means extreme poverty. Apparently it is used when a man finds no way of escape from a threatening poverty or need. Accordingly the end of the verse conforms with its beginning.

QUR'ĀN: *this is because they disobeyed and used to exceed the limits:* They disobeyed, and, even before that, they were habitually and continuously transgressing the limits.

QUR'ĀN: *They are not all alike; ... and Allāh knows the pious ones:* “*as-Sawā’*” (السَّوَاءُ = literally, to be equal) is a *maṣḍar* which is used in the meaning of adjective, that is, equal, alike. The People of the Book are not all alike in their behaviour, nor in the rules applying to them; there is among them an upright group whose attributes the verse describes. Obviously, the phrase “of the People of the Book there is ...” shows the reason as to why the People of the Book are not all alike.

Various meanings have been given for the word ‘*qā’imah*’ (قَائِمَةٌ = literally, standing; translated here as upright): It is said that it means ‘firm in obeying the command of Allāh’, or ‘just’, or ‘proceeding on straight path’. The fact is that the word is of a general nature which could be interpreted in any of the above meanings. But the mention of the Book and of their good deeds makes it certain that it has been used here in the meaning of being standing or firm in belief and obedience.

‘*Ānā’*’ (أَنَاءُ) is plural of ‘*inan*’ (إِنِّي) or ‘*anan*’ (أَنِّي) or reportedly ‘*anū*’ (أَنُو), all of which mean “‘time’”.

‘*al-Musārah*’ (الْمُسَارَعَةُ = to vie with one another in hastening); it is on paradigm of ‘*al-mufā’alah*’ (الْمُفَاعَلَةُ) from the root verb ‘*as-sur’ah*’ (السَّرْعَةُ = to be fast, to make haste). It is explained in *Majma’u ’l-bayān*

as follows: “The difference between *as-sur‘ah* and ‘*al-‘ajalah*’ (الْعَجَلَةُ) is as follows: *as-Sur‘ah* is to go ahead in a matter in which going ahead is allowed; it is a praiseworthy trait, and its opposite is ‘*al-ibtā‘*’ (الْإِبْتَاءُ = to be late) which is a disliked action. And *al-‘ajalah* is to go ahead in a matter in which one should not go ahead; it is a disliked trend, and its opposite is ‘*al-anāh*’ (الْإِنَاهُ = deliberateness) which is a good trait.

Apparently, *as-sur‘ah* is an attribute of movement, while *al-‘ajalah* shows an attribute of the one who moves.

‘*al-Khayrāt*’ (الْخَيْرَاتُ) means good deeds in general — be it worship, or spending in the way of Allāh, or justice or looking after the needs of needy persons. It is a plural with prefix ‘*al*’ (ال) which denotes comprehensiveness. It is mostly used for monetary good deeds, as its singular ‘*al-khayr*’ (الْخَيْرُ = good) is mostly used for wealth and property.

In these verses, Allāh has enumerated most of the basic good attributes, i.e., belief, enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and hastening towards good deeds; then He has praised them that they are among the good people. It means that they are the people of the straight path, and among the companions of the prophets, the truthful ones and the martyrs. Read, for proof, the following verses: *Guide us to the straight path, the path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed favours, not of those inflicted with Thy wrath, nor of those gone astray* (1:6 — 7); in conjunction with: *And whoever obeys Allāh and the Messenger, these are with those upon whom Allāh has bestowed favours from among the prophets and the truthfals and the martyrs and the good ones; and excellent are these as companions* (4:69).

It has been said that the verses under discussion refer to ‘Abdullāh ibn Salām and his companions.

QUR’ĀN: *And whatever good they do, they shall not be denied it: ‘Lan yukfarūh’* (لَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ = they shall never be denied it); the root word is ‘*al-kufrān*’ (الْكُفْرَانُ = ungratefulness) which is opposite of ‘*ash-shukr*’ (الشُّكْرُ = gratefulness). Allāh will reward them for whatever good they do, they will receive its recompense from Allāh, He will not let it be lost; He says: *and whoever on his own accord does good, then surely Allāh is Grateful, Knowing* (2:158). Also He says: *and whatever good thing you spend, it is to your own good; ... and whatever good thing you spend shall be paid back to you in full, and you shall not be wronged* (2:272).

QUR'ĀN: (As for) *those who disbelieve, surely neither their wealth nor their children shall avail them ...*: The continuation of context apparently shows that the phrase “those who disbelieve” refers to the other groups of the People of the Book which did not respond to the call of the Prophet; those were the people who used to hatch conspiracies against Islam and had left no stone unturned in extinguishing the light of the truth.

Some people have said that this verse refers to the idol-worshippers; according to them, it paves the way for the story of the Battle of Uḥud which comes after a few verses. But this explanation does not take into account the next statements, that is, *and you believe in the Book (in) the whole of it, and when they meet you they say: ‘We believe’...* Obviously it describes the Jews’ behaviour with the Muslims, not that of the idol-worshippers. It proves that the context is the same; it has not changed yet.

An exegete has tried to combine both explanations by applying the verse under discussion to the idolaters and the next one to the Jews. But it is a mistake.

QUR'ĀN: *The likeness of what they spend ...*: ‘*aṣ-Ṣirr*’ (الصِّرُّ = intense cold). What they spend has been qualified with the proviso “in this life of the world” to indicate that they are completely cut off from the life of the hereafter; whatever they spend is related only to this life. The smitten tilth is qualified by the phrase “of a people who have done injustice to their souls” this proviso perfectly meshes with the coming statement, “and Allāh does no injustice to them”.

The verse means that whatever they spend in this life (in order to better their conditions and achieve their evil goals) brings nothing to them except infelicity and unhappiness; it destroys what they ardently desire and which they think would bring happiness to them. It is like an intensely cold wind that smites the farm produce of an unjust people; it is because they had done injustice to their own selves — after all, an evil deed can bring only evil results.

QUR'ĀN: O you who believe! do not take for intimate friends from among others than your own people; ...: Intimate friend has been called ‘*al-bitānah*’ (البِطَانَةُ = inner lining of a garment) — i.e., opposite of ‘*az-zihārah*’ (الظَّهَارَةُ = outer side of a garment) — because such a friend

knows the inner thoughts and secrets of man; “they do not fall short,” i.e., they leave no stone unturned; *‘khabālan’* (خَبَالًا = harm, mischief); insanity is called *‘al-khabl’* (الخَبْلُ) because it harms or destroys understanding; “they love what distresses you”: “what” in this sentence is for *maṣdar*, and it means: they love your distress, your grievous harm; “vehement hatred has already appeared from out of their mouths”: it means that their enmity and hatred is very obvious from their way of talking, from slips of their tongues; it is a fine metaphor; the verse does not describe what they have kept hidden in their hearts, it just says: “and what their breasts conceal is greater still”; this apparent vagueness indicates that the hatred hidden in their hearts is so varied and so great that it is beyond description — this vagueness puts even greater stress on the word “greater”.

QUR’ĀN: *Lo! you are they who will love them while they do not love you,... Allāh knows what is in the breasts:* Apparently *‘ulā’i’* (أُولَاءِ = they, these) is demonstrative pronoun, and *‘hā’* (هَا = lo!) is exclamatory particle, and between the two has been inserted the pronoun “you”; the meaning thus will be, ‘you these’, as we say ‘Zayd this did so’, or ‘Hindah this did so’.

The article *‘al’* (ال = the) in “the Book” denotes genes, i.e., you believe in all the Books which have been revealed by Allāh — your Book as well as their Books — while they do not believe in your Book.

The clause “and when they meet you they say: ‘We believe,’ ” shows that they are hypocrites; “and when they are alone, they bite the ends of their fingers in rage against you”: *‘al-‘aḍḍ’* (الْعَضُّ = to bite forcefully); *‘al-anāmil’* (الْأَنَامِلُ) is plural of *‘al-unmulah,* (الْأُثْمَلَةُ = fingertip); *‘al-ghayz’* (الْغَيْظُ = rage, wrath, anger); to bite fingertips against something proverbially expresses one’s anger or sorrow on that thing.

The clause “Say: ‘Die in your rage,’ ” is a curse against them in the form of command. It connects the foregoing sentences to the next one “surely Allāh knows what is in the breasts”. The meaning together will be as follows: “O Allāh ! cause them to die in their rage; surely Thou knowest what is in the breasts, that is, what is in their hearts or souls.”

QUR’ĀN: *If a good befalls you, it grieves them ...: ‘al-Masā’ah’*

(المَسَاءَةُ = to grieve) is opposite of 'as-surūr' (السُّرُورُ = to make happy; happiness). The verse shows that the believers may protect themselves only if they have patience and piety.

* * * * *

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APPENDIX 'A'

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF THE FOURTEEN INFALLIBLES

THE HOLY PROPHET, HIS DAUGHTER AND THE TWELVE HOLY IMÁMS

NOTE: Where there are differences of opinion on the dates of birth or death, the most popular view has been quoted.

Sl. No.	Designation	Agmomen (<i>Kunyah</i>)	Name	Father's Name	Title (<i>Laqab</i>)	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Martyred by means of	Place of Burial
1.	The Last Prophet of Allāh	Abu 'l-Qāsim	Muhammad (Aḥmad) (al-Muṣṭafā)	'Abdullāh	Rasūlu'llāh, Nabīyyu'llāh, an-Nabīyy, Khātamū 'n-Nabīyyīn	17th Rabi' I, in the Year of the Elephant. (25. 8. 570 AD)	28th Šafar, 11 AH (25. 5. 632 AD)	Natural	Holy Medina, al-Munawwarah, Saudi Arabia.
2.	One of the Fourteen Infallibles	Umm Abihā	Fāṭimah	Muhammad	az-Zahrā', as-Šiddiqah, al-Batūl, Sayyidatu 'n-Nisā'	20th Jumādā II, in the fifth Year after the declaration of the Prophethood. (2. 1. 615 AD)	3rd Jumādā II, 11 AH (26. 8. 632)	Injured	Holy Medina, Saudi Arabia.
3.	1st Imām	Abu 'l-Ḥasan, Abu 'l-Ḥasanayn, Abū Turāb.	'Alī	Abū Tālib	Amīr al-Mu'minīn, al-Waṣīyy, al-Murtadā, (Ḥaydar).	13th Rajab, 10 Years before the declaration of the Prophethood. (25. 5. 600 AD)	Struck on 19th Ramaḍān (25th January); Died on 21st Ramaḍān 40 AH (27. 1. 661 AD)	Sword – while he was engaged in prayers.	Holy an-Najaf al-Ashraf, Iraq (al-Ghāriyy)
4.	2nd Imām	Abū Muhammad	al-Ḥasan	'Alī	al-Mujtabā, as-Sibṭ (al-Akbar)	15th Ramaḍān, 3 AH (1. 3. 625 AD)	7th Šafar, 50 AH (6. 3. 670 AD)	Poison	Holy Medina, Saudi Arabia.
5.	3rd Imām	Abū 'Abdillāh	al-Ḥusayn	'Alī	Sayyidu 'sh-Shuhadā', as-Sibṭ (al-Aṣghar)	3rd Sha'bān, 4 AH (8. 1. 626 AH)	10th Muḥarram, 61 AH (10. 10. 680 AD)	Sword – in the Battle of 'Ashūrā	Holy Karbalā' (at-Tā'if), Iraq.
6.	4th Imām	Abū Muhammad	'Alī	al-Ḥusayn	Zaynu 'l-'Abidin, Sayyidu 's-Sajidin, as-Sajjād.	5th Sha'bān, 38 AH (6. 1. 659 AD)	25th Muḥarram, 94/95 AH (31.10.712/20.10.713 AD)	Poison	Holy Medina, Saudi Arabia.

7.	5th Imām	Abū Ja'far	Muḥammad	'Alī	al-Bāqir	3rd Šafar, 57 AH (16. 12. 676 AD)	7th Dhi'l-Ḥijjah, 114 AH (28. 1. 733 AD)	Poison	Holy Medina, Saudi Arabia.
8.	6th Imām	Abū 'Abdillāh, Abū Mūsā.	Ja'far	Muḥammad	aṣ-Šādiq	17th Rabi' I, 83 AH (20. 4. 702 AD)	25th Shawwāl, 148 AH (14. 12. 765 AD)	Poison	Holy Medina, Saudi Arabia.
9.	7th Imām	Abu 'l-Ḥasan (<i>al-Awwal</i> = The First), Abū Ibrāhīm	Mūsā	Ja'far	al-Kāzim, al-'Abd aṣ-Šāliḥ, al-'Ālim.	7th Šafar, 129 AH (28. 10. 746 AD)	25th Rajab, 183 AH (1. 9. 799 AD)	Poison	Holy al-Kāzimi- yyah, Iraq.
10.	8th Imām	Abu 'l-Ḥasan (<i>ath-Thāni</i> = The Second)	'Alī	Mūsā	ar-Riḍā	11th Dhi'l-qi'dah, 148 AH – (29. 12. 765 AD)	17th Šafar, 203 AH (24. 8. 818 AD)	Poison	Holy Mashhad, (Tus - Khurāsān), Iran.
11.	9th Imām	Abū Ja'far (<i>ath-Thāni</i> = The Second)	Muḥammad	'Alī	at-Taqī, al-Jawād.	10th Rajab, 195 AH (8. 4. 811 AD)	30th Dhi'l-qi'dah, 220 AH (25. 11. 835 AD)	Poison	Holy al-Kāzimi- yyah, Iraq.
12.	10th Imām	Abu 'l-Ḥasan (<i>ath-Thāliṯ</i> = The Third)	'Alī	Muḥammad	an-Naqī, al-Hādī.	2nd Rajab, 212 AH (27. 9. 827 AD)	3rd Rajab, 254 AH (28. 6. 868 AD)	Poison	Holy Sāmarrā' (Surra-man-rā'ī), Iraq.
13.	11th Imām	Abū Muḥammad	al-Ḥasan	'Alī	al-'Askarī	8th Rabi' II, 232 AH (3. 12. 846 AD)	8th Rabi' I, 260 AH (1. 1. 874 AD)	Poison	Holy Sāmarrā', Iraq.
14.	12th Imām	Abu 'l-Qāsim	Muḥammad	al-Ḥasan	al-Mandī, al-Qā'im, al-Ḥujjah, al-Ghā'ib, Šāhibu 'z-Zamān, Šāhibu 'l-Amr, al-Muntazar.	15th Sha'bān, 255 AH (29. 7. 869 AD)	Still alive, but in occultation.	--	--

APPENDIX “B”

In this book the references of the Qur’ānic verses have been given by writing serial number of the relevant chapter, followed by a colon (:) that is followed by the number/s of the verse/s. The names of the chapters have been omitted for the sake of brevity.

The names of the chapters with their serial numbers are given here for the guidance of the readers.

To find, for instance, the verse 5:67 in the Qur’ān, the reader should open the fifth chapter, that is, *al-Mā'idah* (المائدة = The Table) and then find the 67th verse.

S. No.	Arabic Names of the Chapters	Transliteration	Meaning
1.	فَاتِحَةُ الْكِتَابِ	<i>Fatihatu 'l-kitāb</i>	The Opening of The Book
2.	الْبَقَرَةَ	<i>al-Baqarah</i>	The Cow
3.	آلِ عِمْرَانَ	<i>Āl 'Imrān</i>	The House of Imran
4.	النِّسَاءِ	<i>An-Nisā'</i>	Women
5.	الْمَائِدَةَ	<i>Al-Mā'idah</i>	The Table
6.	الْأَنْعَامِ	<i>Al-An'ām</i>	Cattle
7.	الْأَعْرَافِ	<i>Al-A'rāf</i>	The Battlements
8.	الْأَنْفَالِ	<i>Al-Anfāl</i>	The Spoils
9.	التَّوْبَةَ	<i>At-Tawbah</i>	Repentance
10.	يُونُسَ	<i>Yunus</i>	Jonah

S. No.	Arabic Names of the Chapters	Transliteration	Meaning
11.	هُود	<i>Hūd</i>	Hood
12.	يُوسُف	<i>Yūsuf</i>	Joseph
13.	الرَّعْد	<i>ar-Ra'd</i>	Thunder
14.	إِبْرَاهِيم	<i>Ibrāhīm</i>	Abraham
15.	الْحَجْر	<i>Al-Ḥijr</i>	El-Hijr
16.	النُّحْل	<i>An-Naḥl</i>	The Bee
17.	الْإِسْرَاءُ	<i>al-Isrā'</i>	The Night Journey
18.	الْكَهْف	<i>al-Kahf</i>	The Cave
19.	مَرْيَم	<i>Maryam</i>	Mary
20.	طه	<i>Ṭā Hā</i>	Ta Ha
21.	الْأَنْبِيَاءُ	<i>Al-Anbiyā'</i>	Prophets
22.	الْحَجَّ	<i>al-Ḥajj</i>	The Pilgrimage
23.	الْمُؤْمِنُونَ	<i>al-Mu'minūn</i>	The Believers
24.	النُّور	<i>an-Nūr</i>	Light
25.	الْفُرْقَان	<i>al-Furqān</i>	Discrimination (Salvation)
26.	الشُّعْرَاءُ	<i>Ash-Shu'arā'</i>	The Poets
27.	النَّمْل	<i>an-Naml</i>	The Ant
28.	الْقَصَص	<i>Al-Qaṣaṣ</i>	The Stories
29.	العَنْكَبُوت	<i>Al-'Ankabūt</i>	The Spider
30.	الرُّوم	<i>Ar-Rūm</i>	The Greeks
31.	لُقْمَانَ	<i>Luqmān</i>	Lokman
32.	السَّجْدَة	<i>As-Sajdah</i>	Prostration
33.	الأَحْزَاب	<i>Al-Aḥzāb</i>	The Confederates
34.	سَبَأً	<i>Saba'</i>	Sheba
35.	فَاطِر (المَلَائِكَة)	<i>Fāṭir (or, al-Malā'ikah)</i>	The Originator (or The Angels)
36.	يس	<i>Yā Sīn</i>	Ya Sin
37.	الصَّافَّات	<i>aṣ-Ṣāffāt</i>	The Rangers
38.	ص	<i>Ṣād</i>	Sad

S.No.	Arabic Names of the Chapters	Transliteration	Meaning
39.	الرُّمَر	<i>az-Zumar</i>	The Companies
40.	المُؤْمِن	<i>al-Mu'min</i>	The Believer
41.	فُصِّلَت	<i>Fuṣṣilat</i>	Distinguished
42.	الشُّورَى	<i>ash-Shūrā</i>	Counsel
43.	الرُّخْرُف	<i>az-Zukhruf</i>	Ornaments
44.	الدُّخَان	<i>ad-Dukhān</i>	Smoke
45.	الجاثية	<i>al-Jāthiyah</i>	Hobbling
46.	الأحْقَاف	<i>al-Aḥqāf</i>	The Sand-Dunes
47.	مُحَمَّدٌ (ص)	<i>Muḥammad</i>	Muhammad
48.	الْفَتْح	<i>al-Fath</i>	Victory
49.	الحُجُرَات	<i>al Ḥujurāt</i>	Apartments
50.	ق	<i>Qāf</i>	Qaf
51.	الذَّارِيَات	<i>adh-Dhāriyāt</i>	The Scatterers
52.	الطُّور	<i>aṭ-Ṭūr</i>	The Mount
53.	النَّجْم	<i>an-Najm</i>	The Star
54.	القَمَر	<i>al-Qamar</i>	The Moon
55.	الرَّحْمَن	<i>ar-Raḥmān</i>	The All-
56.	الوَاقِعَة	<i>al-Wāqi'ah</i>	The Terror
57.	الحَدِيد	<i>al-Ḥadīd</i>	Iron
58.	المُجَادَلَة	<i>Al-Mujādalah</i>	The Disputer
59.	الحَشْر	<i>al-Ḥashr</i>	The Mustering
60.	المُتَمَدِّنَة	<i>al-Mumtaḥanah</i>	The Woman
61.	الصَّف	<i>aṣ-Ṣaff</i>	The Ranks
62.	الجُمُعَة	<i>al-Jumu'ah</i>	Congregation
63.	المُنَافِقُونَ	<i>Al-Munāfiqūn</i>	The Hypocrites
64.	التَّغَابُن	<i>At-Taghābun</i>	Mutual Fraud
65.	الطَّلَاق	<i>aṭ-Ṭalāq</i>	Divorce
66.	التَّحْرِيم	<i>at-taḥrīm</i>	The Forbidding
67.	المُلْك	<i>al-Mulk</i>	The Kingdom

S. No.	Arabic Names of the Chapters	Transliteration	Meaning
68.	القلم	<i>Al-Qalam</i>	The Pen
69.	الحاقة	<i>Al-Hāqqah</i>	The Indubitable
70.	المعارج	<i>Al-Ma'ārij</i>	The Stairways
71.	نوح	<i>Nūḥ</i>	Noah
72.	الجنّ	<i>Al-Jinn</i>	The Jinn
73.	المزمل	<i>al-Muzzammil</i>	Enwrapped
74.	المدثر	<i>al-Muddaththir</i>	Shrouded
75.	القيامة	<i>al-Qiyāmah</i>	The Resurrection
76.	الدّهر (الإنسان)	<i>Ad-Dahr (or, al -Insān)</i>	The Time (or, Man)
77.	المُرسلات	<i>al-Mursalāt</i>	The Loosed Ones
78.	النّبا	<i>an-Naba'</i>	The Tiding
79.	النّازعات	<i>An-Nāzi'āt</i>	The Pluckers
80.	عبس	<i>'Abas</i>	He Frowned
81.	التّكوير	<i>At-Takwīr</i>	The Darkening
82.	الإنفطار	<i>Al-Infṭār</i>	The Splitting
83.	المطفّفين	<i>al-Muṭaffifīn</i>	The Stinters
84.	الإنشقاق	<i>al-Inshiqāq</i>	The Rending
85.	النّروج	<i>Al-Burūj</i>	The Constellations
86.	الطّارق	<i>aṭ-Ṭāriq</i>	The Night-star
87.	الأعلى	<i>Al-A'lā</i>	The Most High
88.	الغاشية	<i>al-Ghāshiyah</i>	The Enveloper
89.	الفجر	<i>Al-Fajr</i>	The Dawn
90.	البلد	<i>Al-Balad</i>	The Land
91.	الشّمس	<i>Ash-Shams</i>	The Sun
92.	اللّيل	<i>Al-Layl</i>	The Night
93.	الضحى	<i>aḍ-Duḥā</i>	The Forenoon
94.	الإنشراح	<i>Al-Inshirāh</i>	The Expanding

S. No.	Arabic Names of the Chapters	Transliteration	Meaning
95.	التِّين	<i>At-Tīn</i>	The Fig
96.	العَلَق	<i>Al-‘laq</i>	The Blood-clot
97.	القَدْر	<i>al-Qadr</i>	Power
98.	البَيِّنَة	<i>al-Bayyinah</i>	The Clear Sign
99.	الزَّلْزَال	<i>Az-Zilzāl</i>	The Earthquake
100.	العَادِيَات	<i>Al-‘Ādiyāt</i>	The Chargers
101.	القَارِعَة	<i>al-Qāri‘ah</i>	The Clatterer
102.	التَّكْوِيْن	<i>at-Takāthur</i>	Rivalry
103.	العَصْر	<i>Al-‘Aṣr</i>	Afternoon
104.	الهُمَزَة	<i>al-Humazah</i>	The Backbiter
109.	الفيل	<i>Al-Fīl</i>	The Elephant
106.	قُرَيْش	<i>Quraysh</i>	Quraish
107.	المَاعُون	<i>Al-Mā‘ūn</i>	Charity
108.	الكَوْثَر	<i>al-Kawthar</i>	Abundance
109.	الكَافِرُون	<i>Al-Kāfirūn</i>	The Unbelievers
110.	النَّصْر	<i>An-Naṣr</i>	Help
111.	تَبَّتْ	<i>Tabbat (or, Lahab)</i>	Perish (or, The Flame)
112.	الإِخْلَاص (التَّوْحِيد)	<i>al Ikhlās (or, at-Tawhīd)</i>	Sincere Religion (or, Divine Unity)
113.	الفَلَق	<i>Al-Falaq</i>	Daybreak
114.	النَّاس	<i>an-Nās</i>	Men