

THE MUSLIM QUR'AN COMPARED WITH THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

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In keeping with the stated theme of the symposium, we will not concern ourselves here with the history of Islam nor with the life of its foremost prophet Muhammad. Our responsibility is to focus on the holy book of Islam, the Qur'an, and search out the major differences between it and our Bible. This study aims to help us win a larger understanding of and a higher appreciation for the uniqueness of the Christian Scriptures.

The Qur'an has had an impact on those who submit to its teaching, the Muslims, which is as great as if not greater than the Bible has had on Christians. Why this is so will become clear as we proceed. For non-Muslims like us, if further handicapped by having to read the Qur'an in translation, it is incomprehensible how this book could persuade so many that it speaks God's truth. I have now read the Qur'an three times, my last bout through January and February of this year, and it has always been a tedious experience. The book is totally lacking in unity, that first requirement for good, coherent writing. It confronts the reader with a confused jumble of longwindedness, endless repetition, emotional outburst, and constant damnations to hell. Outsiders like us need Sitzfleisch¹ to get through it at all. Its length is 85 percent that of the New Testament. Its chapters called suras vary from 285 verses or 30 pages of text to three suras or two lines of text, 114 suras and 6200 verses in all. The chapters are arranged in sequence without regard to time, place, or circumstance of revelation, reflecting, in my judgment, its quality of being history-less, that is, it has no discernible connection with the natural time-and-place flow of history. The general order of the chapters is from the longest to the shortest; and this arrangement, I was told by a Muslim official whom I interviewed in February, is by the will of Muhammad and therefore carries the finality of a papal imprimatur.

That this book, so disorganized in both its form and content, has been read by some faithful Muslims at the rate of once in 24 hours up to even three times in 24 hours -- although once a week spaced out in sections over the seven days is recommended as ideal; and, more amazing, that the Qur'an in all of its 6200 verses has been committed to memory not only by dedicated Muslims over the space of a lifetime but also children by the time they are ten years old, but with results, I have read, that their minds were so stretched by the effort as to leave those minds incapable of any serious thought all this is mind-boggling to us westerners. The natural poetic rhythm in much of the Qur'an's original language of course makes far easier its memorization in Arabic than in translation. The other factor contributory to this stupendous feat is that the Arabs, before they came into possession of the Qur'an and in an age when writing could not be widely practiced, had trained themselves to rely prodigiously on their memories. It was common practice among them to learn long poems by heart and pass these on by word of mouth from generation to generation.

¹ a person's buttocks. power to endure or to persevere in an activity; staying power.

Such talent for memorization is illustrated in the no doubt apocryphal story of an Arab prince who owned a slave boy and slave girl so gifted with memory that the boy could repeat any poem after hearing it once, and the girl after hearing it twice. The prince entertained himself by letting it be known throughout the land that if any poet could recite before him a poem which neither his slave boy nor slave girl had heard before, he would give the poet the weight of the material on which it was written in gold. Poet after poet responded to the challenge with an original composition, but no sooner would he finish reciting it than the slave boy would say, "I have heard this poem before," and proceed to repeat it without a slip. To confound the poet even more, the prince would then turn to the slave girl, who having heard the poem twice, would recite it flawlessly. At last a clever poet appeared before the prince and recited an endless poem made up of meaningless tongue-twisters. When he finished, the prince turned to the boy, who shook his head in despair, unable to repeat what he had heard. The girl looked on even more helpless. "Well," said the prince, "it would seem that your poem is truly original. So, bring forth your scroll that we may give you its weight in gold." The poet answered, "Your Highness, I am a poor man and could not afford the cost of expensive parchment, so I inscribed my poem on a slab of stone which is outside on my camel's back. Please order some of your servants to bring it in, because I alone cannot carry it." (taken from Atiyah, *The Arabs*, 22-23).

As stated earlier, the Wan has made an enormous impact on peoples exposed to its teaching, and this both horizontally and vertically. The map identifies those regions in the eastern hemisphere where Islam is predominant, an expanse which extends over most all of Africa north of the equator, blankets its homelands in the Middle East as far as Pakistan, and then, leapfrogging Hindu India and Buddhist southeast Asia, embraces most of Indonesia. This brings the number of people who claim to be Muslims to over 950 million at the present time; and among these a larger percentage probably practice their religion more seriously than the 1 billion, 800 million who outwardly profess Christianity.

In speaking of the Qur'an's vertical influence I have in mind another surprising fact. While the peoples of Islam speak a Pentecost of different languages which include, besides Arabic, also Turkish, Farsi, Kurdish, Pushtu, Urdu, Malay, and Indonesian Bahasa, nevertheless a considerable portion of this multiplicity of races can read and understand the Qur'an also in its own Arabic language. Bearing in mind that Islam has no clergy but only a laity among whom some few are more knowledgeable in the Wan and Islam's other religious literature, we may wonder why this facility with the Arabic? It would be like finding a goodly percentage of Christian lay folks in our congregations who read the Greek New Testament in their daily devotions with good understanding. Why this is so with the Muslims will also become clear as we go on.

So the large riddle of the Qur'an has yet to be resolved and, indeed, has grown more puzzling. How can this book, so disorganized, repetitious, and devoid of historical mooring, win such strong attachment both horizontally and vertically? And how is it possible that Muhammad, this book's messenger who is regarded by Muslims as no more than a human being like us, nevertheless commanded such enormous respect after his revelations won acceptance that his everyday life and conversation have taken on an almost sacred character, his every act and saying -- how he washed himself, how he cleaned his teeth, how he wore his beard -- made the source of about 7400 traditions called the hadith which are second in authority to the Qur'an? To our minds, all of this has so much the color of absurdity as to ensnare us in the common human error of ridiculing the ways and thoughts of people of whom we know little and understand less.

If, on the other hand, we make the effort to approach Islam and its prophet with an open and inquiring mind instead of with arrogant scorn, we go much farther in getting at the secret of

Muhammad's success and the overpowering impact which his message in the Qur'an had on the society where he lived. To dismiss him as a dunce or dreamer or schemer misses the point completely. The man was in dead earnest, with a single-minded objective to liberate his people from a primitive, savage, self-destructive mode of life.

To understand Muhammad and the power of his message we must as usual take the hard uphill road; we must try to live ourselves into his times and his mind, that is, familiarize ourselves with the Arab world on which the Qur'an was imposed. I say "imposed" because, unlike the Christian faith whose founder cautioned his followers to sheath the sword and make disciples by the quiet, peaceable route of teaching, Islam, under the militant leadership of its founder and his warrior followers, won ascendancy over the Arab world by unsheathing the sword.

Muhammad waged unrelenting war on an Arab society sunk in polytheism and fractured by constant feuds among one another that were relieved only in part by visits at the pagan shrine in Mecca to worship, besides over 300 idols, an object of superstitious veneration, probably a meteorite fallen from the skies. Arab society was furthermore dominated by the men; women were inferior, wives were property, and infant girls were regularly buried alive.

Since trade served a vital need in their life, Arabs came into frequent contact with outsiders, especially the Persians to the northeast, infidels like the Arabs, and, to the northwest, many settlements of Jews and Christians. Both of these peoples derived the message of their religion from a book, and both of them shared with Arabs the heritage of Abraham as blood father through Isaac to the Jews and through firstborn Ishmael to the Arabs, and as spiritual father through Christ to the Christians. Indeed, it was commonly circulated among Arabs that Abraham and his son Ishmael had in their journeyings visited Mecca and there built the shrine that housed the sacred stone from heaven. Before Muhammad burst into their world, the Arabs through long contact with Jews and Christians had also gained familiarity with many other bits and pieces of Old and New Testament history, especially those dramatic episodes in the Bible such as God's creation of the world in six days, Cain's murder of Abel, Noah's building of the ark, Lot's escape from Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses' miracles in the presence of Pharaoh, Israel's passage through the Red Sea, David's career as a warrior; and, in the New Testament, the annunciation of John the Baptist to Zacharias and the annunciation of Jesus to Mary. But these Bible stories, having come to the Arabs by word of mouth, were, as we could expect, consistently marred by distortion and grossly exaggerated drama.

In his early travels as an agent for his wife's commercial business, Muhammad had had above normal contact with Jews and Christians. He had heard the familiar stock of Bible stories at first hand, and he had been most unfavorably impressed by the endless quibbling among Jews and Christians over what seemed to his simple, unlettered mind an exercise in trivial pursuit, for example, the debates, then still at full tide among Christians, whether God's Son was of identical or of similar substance with the Father, whether Jesus was two natures or one nature in a single person, whether Jesus had one will or two wills; and, no less abhorrent to Muhammad, that among communities of Christian monks the veneration of Mary had taken on the color of worship. So the idea may have formed in his mind not only that these divisions were a scandal but also that a major cause of this wrangling was a faulty understanding of their holy book made worse when that book was translated into other languages, such as Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, or Latin.

So it happened that in the 40th year of his life, about the year 610 in our calendar, Muhammad burst on his compatriots at Mecca with what he claimed to be revelations from God, etched on his memory, word for word, syllable for syllable, and letter for letter, through the mediation of the angel Gabriel and aimed squarely at putting an end to the ruinous state of paganism and immoral life

among the Arabs while at the same time sparing them from the horrendous factionalism among Jews and Christian. In their disorganized form and their repetitious quality, I find these revelations to be precisely what one might expect would tumble from a mind possessed with passionate zeal for reform. It would stamp out polytheism in favor of submission to a single God. It would freeze its message to its Arabic language, the language inseparable from the message. It would instill into the people a morality of a higher order. It would turn the stock of familiar stories in the Christian Bible away from offering grist for endless quarreling into simple lessons and warnings about correct behavior.

Therefore we need not be surprised that the single central teaching of Islam on which there can be no compromise is the singleness of God. He is not Triune. He may have a son in the sense that all believers are his children, but he has not begotten a Son who shares his Godhead equally. God is one. As a Muslim leader in the Twin Cities told me, all other sins are forgivable by the merciful God, but violation of God's singleness is unforgivable. Intimately joined to this teaching and inseparable from it is the doctrine that Muhammad's revelations, written down by his servant and later organized into the QUR'AN, in their every word, syllable, and letter of the Arabic language are God's. They are God's so much so that orthodox Muslims declare them uncreated. This must be so, they say, because the word by means of which God created the world when he said "Be" and things were -- this word or speech of God cannot be spoken to. Therefore the Qur'an in its original language is uncreated; it is as eternal as God is eternal. Therefore also Muhammad, this word's messenger who shares the status of messenger only with Moses and Jesus, is the last and greatest of God's messengers. To help us grasp this relationship, the following analogy, though not perfect, may be helpful the Qur'an is for Muslims what Christ is for us; Muhammad is for Muslims what the 12 apostles are for us; the hadith or traditions collected from Muhammad's everyday life and sayings is for Muslims what the Bible is for us. Actually, Muhammad has higher status than apostleship for Muslims. Besides being God's messenger, he also was military leader, law-giver, judge, and mediator between Muslims and their God.

From all of this we come to realize that while the Qur'an may in a general way share some resemblances with our Scriptures, there are huge differences. It teaches the unity of God, but not in the mystery of the Trinity as we do. Like the Bible, it also recognizes the role of prophets. It honors many heroes of faith in the Old Testament and a few in the New. On the other hand, it knows nothing of the Apostle Paul whose theology, no doubt, soared far beyond Muhammad's comprehension. In summary, Muslim reverence for the QUR'AN is of an entirely different quality from Christian commitment to the Bible. For the Muslim, the written Arabic text of the Qur'an is the very sword come from God to work its will among peoples on earth, an idea already current among ancient pagan religions in Mesopotamia and floating around also in the Jewish Talmud. For Christians, on the other hand, the Bible, whether formed in Hebrew or Greek or German or English tongue, is, in Luther's explanation, the sheath which houses the true sword of the Spirit, and that is the message of the Gospel spoken by the living human voice whatever shape the words, syllables, and letters may have to take in the mouth, just so that what is spoken remains faithful and true to what Jesus taught.

On this background of knowing what Muslims believe about the Qur'an and of understanding also why they believe as they do, let us now hear the book speak for itself and by its speaking strengthen our appreciation for the uniqueness of the Christian Scriptures. Our overview of the Qur'an will not single out the unusual to make a case for its difference but will keep to messages that repeat themselves with monotonous regularity throughout the book. The quotations were taken from the translator's fifth revision, in which he replaced the name Allah with the name God, as our Bible uses the Old High German God (meaning "supreme reality") instead of the Hebrew Elohim or Greek theos. It will also become apparent that the cited references draw largely from the

earlier chapters or suras of the book. This is so because the first 19 suras comprise half of its total length and, on account of the constant repetition, almost 100% of its whole message. As a matter of fact, one can gain a fair grasp of the Qur'an by reading its first ten suras which contain 33% of its content or about 2000 of its approximately 6000 verses.

Since Muhammad set an example of militance to impose his revelations, let us make our beginning with this subject. Though the quotations have some connection to incidents in Muhammad's life -- and commentators shed light on this in the footnotes -- there is no clue for such connections in the text itself an example of its disinterest in history. The messages are generalized and unattached, as we know from our own experience is the nature of dreams.

Muhammad is told:

Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home an evil fate. 9:73.

Again:

When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly. Then grant them their freedom or take ransom from them, until War shall lay down her burdens. 47:4

Again:

When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. 9:6

Again:

The believers who stay at home . . . are not equal to those who fight for the cause of God with their goods and their persons. God has given those that fight with their goods and their persons a higher rank than those who stay at home. 4:95

Following is an example which highlights the absence of a historical dimension:

We have given you a glorious victory, so that God may forgive you your past and future sins. . . . God was well pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree. . . . God has promised you rich booty, and has given you this with all promptness. . . . And God knows of other spoils which you have not yet taken. God has power over all things. 48:1,2,18,20,21

The strangest case of a report without historical mooring is this single verse standing alone without a shred of context:

Glory be to Him who made His servant go by night from the Sacred Temple to the farther Temple, whose surroundings We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. 17:1

Out of this isolated verse Muslim commentators have spun the tale of Muhammad's night journey in 620 from Mecca to the Sacred Temple in Jerusalem and from there to the further Temple or Seventh Heaven. This verse has led Muslims to venerate Jerusalem as a holy city where Muhammad had the experience of ascending into heaven.

One of the Qur'an's tediously repeated claims is that Muhammad's revelations are the very word of God -- a kind of you'd-better-believe-it-or-else stance, so different from the spirit of the Bible where the message of the Gospel persuades hearers almost imperceptibly to come to the conviction that the holy men who penned Scripture spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In the following reference with its haphazard piling up of names, Muhammad is told:

We have revealed Our will to you as We revealed it to Noah and to the prophets who came after him as We revealed it to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes; to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, and David. . . . God bears witness, by that which He has revealed to you, that He revealed it with His knowledge; and so do the angels. There is no better witness than God. 4:163-166

Again:

This Koran could not have been devised by any but God. It confirms what was revealed before it, and fully explains the Scriptures. It is beyond doubt from the Lord of the Universe. If they say, "He invented it himself," say, "Bring me one chapter like it." 10:38,39

Again:

It is He who has revealed to you the Book. Some of its verses are precise in meaning . . . and others are ambiguous. Choose whose hearts are infected with disbelief follow the ambiguous part, so as to create dissension by seeking to explain it. But no one knows its meaning except God. 3:7

Besides the ambiguities, there may also be contradictions in the Qur'an. Therefore, in the event that one statement in the Qur'an should conflict with another, Muhammad's revelations cover their tracks with the following:

If we abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We will replace it by a better one or one similar. Did you not know that God has power over all things? 2:106

Muhammad's garbled reports about Jewish and Christian teaching and his obsession with refuting Christ's deity is amply illustrated in the following

The Jews say Ezra is the son of God, while the Christians say the Messiah is the son of God. Such are their assertions, by which they imitate the infidels of old. God confound them! How perverse they are! 9:30

Again:

God is One, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him. 112:1f

Again:

He is the creator of the heavens and the earth. How should he have a son when he had no consort? 6:102

Here is a longer excerpt from the story of Gabriel's visit to Mary:

"I am the messenger of your Lord," he replied, "and have come to give you a holy son." "How shall I bear a child," she answered, "when I am a virgin, untouched by man?" "Such is the will of your Lord," he replied. "That is no difficult thing for him."

Thereupon she conceived him, and retired to a far-off place. And when she felt the throes of child-birth she lay down by the trunk of a palm tree, crying, "Oh, would that I had died and passed into oblivion!" But a voice from below cried out to her: "Do not despair. Your Lord has provided a brook that runs at your feet, and if you shake the trunk of this palm-tree it will drop fresh ripe dates in your lap. . . ."

Carrying her child, she came to her people, who said to her: "Mary, this is indeed a strange thing! . . . Your father was never a whore-monger, nor was your mother a harlot." She made a sign to them, pointing to the child. But they replied: "How can we speak with a babe in the cradle?" Whereupon he spoke and said: "I am the servant of God. . . . I was blessed on the day I was born, and blessed I shall be on the day of my death." . . .

Such was Jesus, the son of Mary. That is the whole truth, which they still doubt. God forbid that He Himself should beget a son! When he decrees a thing He need only say: "Be," and it is. 19:19-35

In other words, Jesus was created in the virgin Mary's womb by divine fiat, as with plants, animals, and fish. Here is another statement on the same theme:

Then God will say: "Jesus, son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: 'Worship me and my mother as gods besides God?'" "Glory to you," he will answer, "how could I ever say that to which I have no right?" 5:116

The Qur'an also rejects the story of Jesus' death:

They denied the truth and uttered a monstrous falsehood against Mary. They declared. "We have put to death the Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of God." They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did. . . . They did not slay him for certain. God lifted him up to Him(self); God is mighty and wise. 4:156-158

One final quotation to bring this topic to a finish:

People of the book, do not transgress the bounds of your religion. Speak nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was no more than God's apostle. . . . So believe in God and His apostles and do not say: "Three." . . . God is but one God. God forbid that He should have a son. 4:171

Another distinctive trait of the Qur'an, out of keeping with the spirit of our Bible, is the constant harping on hell. Of the 83 suras in the book which are more than a few lines long, 77, often in dramatic fashion, threaten hell. From the examples that follow, one forms the impression that the Qur'an aims to terrify people to the faith. What follows is spoken by Muhammad as if he had read Dante's Hell 800 years before that poem was written:

Those that deny Our revelations We will burn in fire. No sooner will their skins be consumed than We shall give them other skins, so that they may truly taste the scourge. God is mighty and wise. 4:56

Again:

Garments of fire have been prepared for the unbelievers. Scalding water shall be poured upon their heads, melting their skins and that which is in their bellies. . . . Whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape from Hell, back they shall be dragged, and will be told: "Taste the torment of the Conflagration." 22:19-22

One more of these will suffice:

They shall lose much, those who forfeit their souls . . . on the Day of Resurrection. That shall be the ultimate loss. Above them there shall be sheets of fire, and sheets of fire shall be beneath them. By this God puts fear into His servants' hearts. 39:15,16

With its assortment of doctrines, threats, and injunctions, the Qur'an abounds furthermore in snatches of stories from Bible history. Some of these are close to the Bible text, more are distorted and decked out in high drama. These narratives burst in on the reader unexpectedly, lacking all context, like the stuff of dreams. The Qur'anic version of Jesus' birth we have heard. Here is another story that occurs at least three times in the Qur'an:

We created man from dry clay, from black moulded loam, and before him Satan from smokeless fire. Your Lord said to the angels: "I am creating man from dry clay. . . . When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, kneel down and prostrate yourselves before him. The angels, one and all, prostrated themselves, except Satan. . . . "Satan," said God, "why do you not prostrate yourself?" He replied: "I will not bow down to a mortal whom You created of dry clay." . . . "Be gone," said God, "you are accursed. My curse shall be on you till Judgment-day." 15:26-35

The next story also occurs at several places:

"Who is the Lord of the Universe?" asked Pharaoh. (Moses) replied: "He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. . . . If only you had faith." . . . "If you serve any other god but myself," replied Pharaoh, "I shall have you thrown into prison." "Even if I have showed you a convincing sign?" said Moses.

He replied, "Show us your sign, if what you say be true." Moses threw down his staff and thereupon it changed to a veritable serpent. Then he drew out his hand, and it was white to all who saw it. "This man," he said to his nobles, "is a skilful sorcerer. . . . What is your counsel?" They replied, "Put them off awhile, him and his brother, and . . . summon every skillful sorcerer to your presence. . . . And when the sorcerers came to Pharaoh, they said: "Shall we be rewarded if we win?" "Yes," he answered, "and you shall become my favoured friends." Moses said to them: "Throw down all that you wish to throw." They cast down their ropes and staffs, saying, "By Pharaoh's glory, we shall surely win." Then Moses threw down his staff, and it swallowed their false devices. The sorcerers prostrated themselves in adoration, saying, "We now believe in the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of Moses and Aaron." 26:23-48

A last excerpt of this garbled history taken from the story of Moses on Mt. Sinai:

And when Moses came at the appointed time. . . . he said: "Lord, reveal Yourself to me, that I may look upon you." He replied, "You shall not see Me. But look upon the Mountain; if it remains firm upon its base, then only shall you see Me." And when his Lord revealed Himself to the Mountain, He levelled it into dust. Moses fell down senseless, and, when he came to, said: "Glory be to You! Accept my repentance. I am the first of believers." 7:143

Besides the constantly recurring statements about God's unity, goodness, compassion, and mercy, and his vengeance on unbelievers and evildoers, the other most dominant theme in the Qur'an is its demand that good works be done to escape punishment. If the good works of Muslims outweigh the evil works, then there is early entrance into heaven on the day of judgment because God is compassionate and merciful. If, however, the evil works of Muslims outweigh the good works, they must suffer hell punishment before being received into heaven, because God is just. Islam has no doctrine of original sin. At birth, human nature is good, and each person will be held totally responsible for his own acts. That someone else could atone for the sins of the human race is for Muslims an audacious defiance of common sense and flies in the face of God's power to forgive. God's curse on sin, therefore, is not interpreted as being absolute. His mercy overrides his justice. The soul that sins will not die eternally if one submits to God and does good works. In this light the Qur'an must be understood when it says:

Those who recite the Book of God and attend to their prayers and give alms in private and in public may hope for imperishable gain. He will give them their rewards and enrich them with His own abundance. 35:29,30

Again:

But God will deliver those who fear Him, for they have earned salvation. 39:61

Finally:

Those who keep faith with God and do not break their pledge, . . . who ward off evil with good these shall have a blissful end. They shall enter the gardens of Eden, together with the righteous among their fathers, their wives, and their descendants. From every gate the angels will come to them, saying: "Peace be to you for all that you have steadfastly endured. Blessed is the reward of Paradise." 13:20-24

This brings us to the close of our quick survey. The Qur'an has spoken for itself and by its speaking has accentuated for us the uniqueness of the Christian Scriptures. We may agree with Muslims that God is merciful and just. Indeed, all 114 suras of the Qur'an begin with the refrain, "In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful." But to think with Muslims that God's justice is satisfied by the merits of our own good works humanizes divine justice, as if God looks at our sins through his fingers, and this never brings the troubled spirit true and lasting peace. Such religion, born from the natural human heart, puts Islam into the same company with all other natural religions conceived of human reason.

We, on the other hand, have by God's grace become heirs to a truth which did not enter of its own accord into the human mind nor pour of its own accord from the deepest emotions of the human heart. We have learned that the guilt of our sin is bottomless and that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. We have been assured that God's mercy and justice were perfectly brought together in the sacrifice of the man, Christ Jesus who, because he also is God, could make an infinitely good atonement for the infinite multitude of sins. This theme rings through our Scriptures; it sets them apart as unique, and it empowers us to be a holy people zealous of good works.

On this background of investigation, at first hand, into the dominant and persistent themes of the Qur'an, we are now equipped to summarize the stark contrast between Qur'an and Bible in a few passages properly representative of the heart and core of both books. The careful student of religion does not begin with such summarizing passages, nor does one settle the issue of religious

differences by limiting one's study to a few such passages. This would be the proof passage method that characterizes superficial theology. Rather, one concludes a study and summarizes an issue with a few key passages only after the hard spadework of searching out the entire context has been done. This, then, is

THE SUM OF THE MATTER

Thus speaks the QUR'AN:

Unbelievers are those that say: 'God is one of three.' There is but one God. 5:73

If you avoid the enormities (wicked acts) you are forbidden, We shall pardon your misdeeds and usher you in with all honour. 4:30

If anyone attacks you, attack him as he attacked for you. Have fear of God, and know that God is sons with the righteous. 2:194

He that obeys God and His apostle shall dwell forever in gardens watered by running streams. That is the supreme triumph. But he that disobeys God and His apostle and transgresses His bounds, shall be cast into a Fire where he shall abide forever. 4:13

Thus speak the Christian Scriptures:

Hear, O Israel: the Lord, our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. Dt. 6:4,5

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 Jn. 1:9

But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray those who persecute you, that you may be of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Mt. 5:44,45
For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes on him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jn.

GLOSSARY OF MAJOR TERMS

Allah: God

Qur'an (Koran): recitation

Islam: submission to Allah

Muslim: one who has submitted to Allah

hadith: traditions received from Muhammad

sunna: custom -- rules of right conduct

Sunni: traditionalists -- conservative branch of Muslim world

Shia: partisan -- rigorous branch of Muslim world

jihad: pursuit of Allah's will -- holy war against oppressors

jinn: fiery spirits, both good and bad

Ramadan: month of fasting (from sunrise to sunset)

hajj: pilgrimage to Mecca (if possible, once in one's lifetime)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Are the attributes of God as found in the Bible--eternity, unity, justice, goodness, wisdom, compassion--discernible or imaginable by the unaided human reason?

Does the religion of Islam teach an absolute divine determinism?

Do translations hinder one's grasp of the central message of the Bible?

Is the militance much found among Muslims an aberration or is it inherent in Islam?

Why is the historical dimension in divine revelation of such great significance?

Since Muslims recognize our Bible as the word of God, how do they reconcile the different versions of Bible stories in their Qur'an with the earlier texts in the Bible?

Why are so many Muslims, though they cannot converse in Arabic, able to read and understand the Qur'an in its original Arabic language?

What is the status of women among Muslims?

Is the Qur'an's description of a sensual heaven to be understood literally?

How does Muslim prayer differ from Christian prayer?

What is the meaning of the seventh heaven?

What do Muslims believe about the future of Jews and Christians?