

ISLAM & CHRISTIANITY



Ulfat Aziz-us-Samad

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**ISLAM
AND
CHRISTIANITY**

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PREFACE

To investigate, compare, and analyze, through honest and clear means, with the aim of realizing the truth, is a Divine as well as a human approach. However, prejudice, pride and envy based on ignorance of the other is extremely uncultured and totally rejected conduct.

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY is devoted for this very aim. Following this very method, namely, reaching the truth by means of thorough investigation, comparison and analysis.

As Divine religions, Islam and Christianity have much in common as they are revealed by the One and Same Sender; ALLAH, the Almighty.

As a matter of fact, both Muhammad and Jesus (pbuh) are great Divine Prophets, each of them spoke honestly and friendly of the other. Jesus gave glad tidings of Muhammad's coming as he said:

Ò... I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.Ó

(John 16:12,13)

Muhammad (pbuh), on his part, considered belief in JesusÕ Prophethood a prerequisite for a full and perfect Faith. As the Glorious QurÕan says:

ý...Say, ye: "We believe in God, and the Revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them and we bow to God (in Islam).û

(QurÕan II. 136)

As this is the stand of both prophets, Muslims and Christians alike should have been following in their exact footsteps. Unfortunately, most of them, due to great ignorance,

misunderstanding and even envy have gone astray and lost their steps.

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY clarifies the way for those who have the will to go on the Right Path, through intellectual as well as textual evidences. It sheds light on the different fundamentals of both religions; the Glorious QurĀn & the Gospels, Muhammad & Jesus (pbut), doctrines and moral teachings found in Islam and Christianity, etc.

AL-FALAH, for it has committed itself and devoted all its resources and efforts to remove and clarify all misconceptions and distortions aroused around Islam and Muslims all over the world, presents this new edition of the valuable book ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY for all those who beseech the truth.

General Supervisor
Sheikh Muhammad `Abdu

INTRODUCTION

The Muslim approach to Comparative Religion is quite different from the Christian one.

The Christian is brought up to believe that his religion is the only true one along with Judaism which is a preparation for Christianity, and that all other religions are false. He thinks that God has chosen and set apart the children of Israel for the purpose of revealing His Messages and sending His prophets. And so, he believes only in the prophets and religious teachers of Israel and considers all other Prophets as impostors. Christian missionaries have all along employed their energies at proving the holy founders of other religions to be false and wicked men, so that they might establish the unique claim of Jesus Christ. One has only to read their books about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his Religion to find how their religious preconceptions and prejudices have made them incapable of seeing the truth of others. They have not hesitated even to mistranslate the Glorious Qur'an and spread many misstatements about the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to serve their own purpose. If they find anything in another religion resembling something in their own, instead of feeling happy, they feel discouraged and hasten to explain it away as due to Christian influence.

The Muslim, on the other hand, believes in the Divine Origin of all the Divine religions of the world. The Sacred Book of Islam declares that God has raised prophets in every nation to guide the people to the Path of Truth and Righteousness. Being the loving Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds, He cannot become partial and choose one nation to the exclusion of all others for revealing His Messages. A Muslim must believe in the prophets of all the Divine religions. He may feel sorry to see how Jews and Christians have in part forsaken and altered the

true teachings of Moses and Jesus, but he can never speak against the prophets of their religions. For, he has been directed by the Glorious Qur'an to respect and believe in them as true and righteous prophets of God as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). It is, therefore, with a feeling of deep love and respect for both Jesus and Muhammad (pbuh), and for the religions which they preached, that I embark upon a comparative study of Islam and Christianity. If at times I find myself disagreeing with the Christians, it is not over the religion of Jesus, but over the altered shape and features that they developed after his departure. In the words of Lord Headley, "Islam and Christianity, as taught by Christ himself, are sister religions, only held apart by dogmas and technicalities which might very well be dispensed with."(1)

CHAPTER 1

THE GOSPELS AND THE QUR'AN

Both Christianity and Islam claim to be revealed religions. Jesus Christ (pbut) declared that the message he was delivering was not his but God's:

"I have not spoken of myself: but the Father which sent me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak."

(John 12:49)

He described himself as

"A man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God"

(John 8:40)

In the same way it is claimed in the Qur'an that the Revelation which came to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was from the Lord of the worlds:

ýAnd lo it (i.e., the Qur'an) is a Revelation of the Lord of the worlds, which the True Spirit hath brought down upon thy heart (O Muhammad), that thou mayest be one of the warnersû

(Qur'an 26: 192-194)

From this it follows that the truth of either religions depends on the accuracy with which the inspired words of its Founder have been recorded and on the textual purity of its Scripture. If the message which was revealed by God to a prophet has not reached us exactly as it was delivered, but has been misreported and altered, then to that extent that religion may be regarded as having deviated from truth. In this chapter we shall see how far the inspired words and Revelations of Jesus and Muhammad (pbut) have been faithfully recorded in the Gospels and the Qur'an respectively, and how far these Scriptures have remained free from alteration or interpolation

of any kind.

Composition & Character of the Gospels

There are four Gospels involved in the Bible - the Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. In these Gospels, we come across many sayings claimed to be by Jesus. They were composed between forty and eighty years after the departure of Jesus relying on some earlier documents which are now lost. Biblical scholars have identified some of these earlier documents as (1) 'Q' (German Quelle = 'Source'), a lost document in Aramaic, which reached the writers of the Gospels in a Greek translation, (2) ('Urmarcus' = Primitive Mark) an earlier draft of Mark's Gospel written on the basis of Peter's discourses about Jesus, and (3) 'L', a collection of reports about Jesus used only by Luke. A comparison of the Gospels will show that their authors used these lost documents in a somewhat free manner; they did not even hesitate to change some sayings contained in them to suit their own purpose.

The first Gospel to be written was that of Mark. It was written at Rome at least forty years after the so-called crucifixion of Jesus. The Gospel as we have it today is an expanded version of Urmarcus, about which Papias, an early Christian writer, has the following to say:

"The elder John used to say, Mark having become Peter's interpreter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied him, but subsequently as I said, attached himself to Peter who used to frame his teaching to meet the wants of his hearers, and not as making a connected narrative of the Lord's discourses."(1)

It is not possible to say whether Urmarcus was expanded and

revised to give us the Gospel of Mark as we have it by Mark himself or by some other person. Dr C. J. Cadoux who was Mackennal Professor of Church History at Oxford, thus sums up the conclusions of eminent Biblical scholars regarding the nature and composition of this Gospel:

"It was written after Peter's martyrdom (65 A. C.), and at a time when Mark, who had not himself been a disciple of Jesus apparently had none of the personal disciples of Jesus within reach by whose knowledge he could check his narrative. These circumstances of its composition account for the existence in it, side by side, of numerous signs of accuracy and a certain number of signs of ignorance and inaccuracy."(2)

The Gospel of Matthew was written in Greek at Antioch about 90 C. E. The author made use of at least two lost documents; 'Q' and 'Urmarcus'. No independent scholar regards this Gospel as the work of Matthew the apostle of Jesus. If Matthew composed anything it must have been only 'Q'. Regarding the liberties taken by the unknown author of this Gospel with the original material, C.J. Cadoux writes:

"But a close examination of the treatment he gives to his borrowings from Mark shows that he allowed himself great freedom in editing and embroidering his material in the interest of what he regarded as the rightful honouring of the great Master. The same tendencies are often visible elsewhere when he is producing 'Q' or providing matter peculiar to himself. Anything, therefore, strictly peculiar to 'Matthew' can be accepted as historical only with great caution."(1)

The third Gospel, the Gospel of Luke, was written somewhere in Greece about the year 80 A.C. for the benefit of "the most excellent" Theophilus, probably a high official in the Roman Empire. It was an apologetic addressed to non-Jews. The writer, who was the friend and travel-companion of St. Paul, made use

of at least three lost documents, two of these were identical with those used by the writer of Matthew's Gospel and the third was peculiar to himself. Luke, who wished to bring his Gospel in line with the Pauline point of view, took even greater liberties with his source than the writer of Matthew's Gospel had done.

The Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke are called "the Synoptic Gospels", because they proceed on the basis of the same lost documents and have much in common. But the Gospel of John is very different. The divinity and pre-existence of Jesus are affirmed in this Gospel alone, though never as a claim put forward by Jesus himself. In the opening lines of this Gospel, the writer claims that the Divine Logos, the Word or Reason of God, Who created the world, had become incarnate in Jesus. The Gospel of John was written at or near Ephesus between the years 110 and 115 of the Christian era by some unknown writer who was anti-semitically inclined: This is evident in his representation of Jews as the enemies of Jesus Christ (pbuh). No independent scholar regards it as the work of John the Son of Zebedee, who, according to R. H. Charles, Alfred Loisy, Robert Eisler, and other scholars, was beheaded by Agrippa I in the year 44 A.C., long before the Fourth Gospel was written. The modern Biblical scholars doubt the genuineness not only of the writer's own views expressed in this Gospel, but also of the words put by him in the mouth of Jesus Christ. C. J. Cadoux writes:

"The speeches in the Fourth Gospel (even apart from the early messianic claim) are so different from those in the Synoptics, and so like the comments of the Fourth Evangelist himself, that both cannot be equally reliable as records of what Jesus said: Literary veracity in ancient times did not forbid, as it does now, the assignment of fictitious speeches to historical characters: the best ancient historians made a practice of composing and

assigning such speeches in this way."(1)

The Unreliability of the Gospels

The Gospels were composed after the early Christians had become divided into different factions. They were in fact composed to propagate the special teachings of the various schools. Thus, their authors showed no hesitation in tampering with the earlier documents and other traditional materials regarding the life and teaching of Jesus to bring them in line with the views of their schools. Rev. T. G. Tucker states:

"Thus Gospels were produced which clearly reflected the conception of the practical needs of the community for which they were written. In them the traditional material was used, but there was no hesitation in altering it or making additions to it, or in leaving out what did not suit the writer's purpose."(1)

The four Gospels included in the Bible were not the only Gospels written in the early centuries of Christianity. There were many others, including the one called "The Gospels according to the Hebrews", an Aramaic work which was used by the Nazarenes (as the early disciples of Jesus were called), who denied the divinity of Jesus and regarded him only as a great prophet. Towards the end of the second century the Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John were included in the Canon and the rest were declared to be heretical or apocryphal by the Church. Before they were canonized and accepted as scriptures, the Gospels did not have that sanctity which they have now and no one felt any compunction in altering them if anything contained in them did not suit his purpose or the purpose of his sect. Even after they were included in the Canon and declared to be the Word of God, changes continued to be made in them, as is clear from the different early extant manuscripts. Referring to this, Professor Dummelow from Cambridge writes in his

famous Commentary on the Holy Bible:

"A copyist would sometimes put in not what was in the text, but what he thought ought to be in it. He would trust a fickle memory, or he would make the text accord with views of the school to which he belonged. In addition to the versions and quotations from the Christian Fathers, nearly four thousand Greek MSS of the Testament, were known to exist. As a result the variety of reading is considerable."(1)

In considering how far the four Canonical Gospels faithfully present the inspired message or Gospel of Jesus we must bear the following facts in mind: (1) that no written copy was made of the inspired sayings of Jesus in his life time; (2) that the earliest records of the sayings of Jesus, which were made shortly after his departure, when the glorification of Jesus had already begun, have all been irretrievably lost; (3) that in the Gospels, which were written between 70 and 115 C. E. on the basis of some lost documents, the material contained in them was handled rather freely; the Gospel-writers felt no hesitation in changing it for what they considered to be the greater glory of Christ or to bring it in line with the views of their sects; (4) that none of the Evangelists had known Jesus or heard him speaking; (5) that the Gospels were written in Greek, whereas the language spoken by Jesus was Aramaic;(6) that they were composed to propagate the points of view of the different factions and chosen from many others which represented different view-points, (7) that for at least a century after they were written they had no canonical authority and were actually changed by the copyists of the different sects to serve their own purpose; (8) that the earliest extant manuscripts of the Gospels - Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Codex Alexandrinus - belong to the fourth and fifth centuries, and no one knows to what extent the Gospels had been changed during the centuries

of which no manuscript is available; (9) that there are considerable differences at many places among the various extant manuscripts of the fourth and fifth centuries; and (10) that the Gospels, taken as a whole, are full of contradictions.

These facts disclosed by distinguished Western scholars go to show that the Gospel of Jesus, by which we mean the Message which Jesus had received from God, has not reached us in its original form. The four Gospels included in the Bible cannot be considered identical with the inspired Gospel of Jesus. The manner of their composition and the circumstances through which they have passed are such that they cannot be relied upon to give us the exact knowledge of what Jesus had said and taught. C. J. Cadoux sums up the position in these words in his book *Life of Jesus*.

"In the four Gospels, therefore, the main documents to which we must go if we are to fill-out at all that bare sketch which we can put together from other sources, we find material of widely-differing quality as regards credibility. So far-reaching is the element of uncertainty that it is tempting to 'down tools' at once, and to declare the task hopeless. The historical inconsistencies and improbabilities in parts of the Gospels form some of arguments advanced in favour of the Christ-myth theory. These are, however, entirely outweighed - as we have shown - by other considerations. Still, the discrepancies and uncertainties that remain are serious and consequently many moderns, who have no doubt whatever of Jesus' real existence, regard as hopeless any attempt to dissolve out the historically-true from the legendary or mythical matter which the Gospels contain, and to reconstruct the story of Jesus' mission out of the more historical residue."(1)

The Authenticity of the Qur'an

On the other hand, there is no such doubt about the Glorious Qur'an. It contains nothing but the Revelations received by the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The Revelations came to him in fragments, from time to time. As soon as he received any, he used to communicate it to his Companions and ask them not only to commit it to memory, but also to write it down. Muhammad (pbuh) used to indicate in a precise manner the place to which the Revelation belonged. Thus the complete Qur'an was committed to writing and also preserved in the hearts of hundreds of Muslims in the life time of the Prophet.

After the demise of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, the first Caliph, charged Zaid ibn Thabit with the task of preparing an authentic copy of the entire Text in the form of a book. The Companions of the Prophet wrote the Revelations that had come to the Prophet on parchments or pieces of leather. Zaid ibn Thabit collected all these and, after comparing them with what the followers of the Prophet had learnt by heart, compiled a copy, called Mushaf (bound leaves), about the genuineness or correctness of which there was absolutely no doubt.

At the order of 'Uthman, the third Caliph, seven copies of the Mushaf edition of the Glorious Qur'an, again confined by the memory of those who had learnt it by heart (hafiz), were prepared and sent to the different centers of the vast Islamic world. One of these seven copies is still in existence in Tashkent. The Czarist government of Russia had published it with a facsimile reproduction; and we see that there is a complete identity between this copy and the text otherwise in use all over the world. The same is true of the other extant MSS of the Qur'an, complete or fragmentary, dating from the first century of the Muslim era.

From the time of the Prophet to our own time the practice of

learning the whole of the Qur'an by heart has continued unbroken, and the number of huffaz can now be counted by hundreds of thousands all over the world. The result is that no scholar, Eastern or Western, Muslim or non-Muslim, has ever cast any doubt on the purity of the text of the Glorious Qur'an. Even such an unfriendly critic as Sir William Muir writes about the Qur'an:

"There is probably in the world no other book which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text."(1)

CHAPTER 2

JESUS AND MUHAMMAD

Nothing brings out the contrast between Islam and Christianity so much as a comparison between the Islamic attitude towards Jesus (pbuh) and the Christian attitude towards Muhammad (pbuh). For, while Muslims believe in Jesus as a great prophet of God and love and respect him as the Prophet Muhammad, the Christians not only reject Muhammad, but are never tired of speaking of him in the most disparaging manner.

An impartial study of their lives will, however, show that the prophets of Islam and Christianity were both godly men, completely dedicated to the task of preaching God's Religion, of delivering men from error and sin and making the Will of God prevail in the world.

The Life and Mission of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ (pbuh) was born about 7-5 B.C. in a humble home in Palestine. Very little is known about the early years of his life. All we can say, in the words of Luke, is that he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men". When he was between thirty-three and thirty-five years of age, a prophet appeared in Palestine preaching "the baptism of repentance for the remission of sin." The name of this prophet was John the Baptist, and Jesus went to him and was baptized by him. At that moment, it was revealed to Jesus that he had been chosen by God as the Messiah of the Jews to revive the true Religion and complete the long line of Israelite prophets.

The Religion of God was not unknown to the children of Israel, but at the time when Jesus began his ministry, the spirit of true Religion had been stifled by the worldliness of the Sadducees

and the formalism and trivial legalism of the Pharisees. They declared, in the words of the Talmud, "He who lightly esteems hand washing will perish from the earth". And Jesus rebuked them, saying "Full well ye reject the Commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." They had absurd rules about the Sabbath. For instance, a man might walk two thousand cubits on the Sabbath, but no more. Vinegar, if swallowed, could be used to relieve a sore throat but it could not be gargled. In case death threatened, a physician could be summoned, but a fracture should not be attended to on the Sabbath. Jesus impatiently brushed aside all such elaborate and artificial regulations. He told them that the Sabbath was for man and not man for the Sabbath, and he warned them:

"Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith ... Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel!"

The essence of his religion was the Love of God and the love of His fellow-men, which he tried to instill into the hearts of his people by means of his inspired sermons and beautiful parables. The Sadducees and Pharisees, instead of acknowledging him as the Messiah about whose coming the earlier Israelite prophets had given glad tidings, turned to be his mortal enemies and pressed the Roman Procurator to pass the sentence of crucifixion on him.

This man who was treated as a common malefactor by his blind people was one of the most inspiring characters of history. He led a pure, noble and godly life. He showed a rare combination of mildness and courage in doing the Will of God and in dealing with his misguided compatriots. He was all gentleness, selflessness and humility; serving his friends and praying for his enemies. He worked many wonders, yet never took pride over

them, ascribing them always to the "Finger of God" and even admitting others' ability to do the same. His compassion for the sinners and sufferers was truly admirable. About him it may well be said that he had conquered the Devil.

The Prophecies of Jesus About Muhammad

The crime of Jews against Jesus (pbuh) deprived them of God's Blessings and Favors. Jesus told them that after him no prophet would appear among them and that the Kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to a nation more worthy of it. Moreover, he announced that the stone which the builders had rejected, the same had been chosen by God to become the corner-stone. Meaning there-by that the children of Ishmael, whom the children of Israel had rejected and disowned, were chosen by God for His greatest Blessings... the World-Prophet would appear from among the Ishmaelites. Jesus (pbuh) gave the prophecy of his coming in no uncertain terms:

"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth."

(John 16 : 12,13)

In a non-canonical Gospel, the Gospel of St. Barnabas, Jesus mentioned the Spirit of truth or the Comforter - the Prophet who was to come after him to guide the world "into all truth" - by name thus:

"Then said the Priest, 'How shall the Comforter be called, and what signs shall reveal his coming?' " Jesus answered, ' The name of the Comforter is admirable, for God gave him the name when he had created his soul, and placed it in Celestial Splendour. God said: 'Wait Muhammad, for thy sake I will create paradise, the world, and a great multitude of creatures, whereof I make thee a present, in so much that whoso shall

bless thee shall be blessed, and whoso shall curse thee shall be cursed. When I shall send thee into the world, I shall send thee as My Messenger of salvation, and thy word shall be true, in so much that heaven and earth shall fail, but thy faith shall never fail.' Muhammad is his blessed name. Then the crowd lifted up their voice saying: O God, send us thy Messenger. O Muhammad, come quickly for the salvation of the world."(1)

The Prophet Muhammad

The Comforter, the Spirit of truth, the Messenger of God, about whose coming Jesus (pbuh) had given the good news, was born in Arabia in the year 571 A.C. At the time of his birth the true Religion had been forgotten or distorted all over the world. The people among whom he was born, the Ishmaelite Arabs, were polytheists and idolaters. They were sunk in vice and superstitions of every kind. There was no law among them except the law of the jungle and, perchance, a few primitive tribal mores.

Among these people who had drifted far from God's Way, Prophet Muhammad grew up to be a Man of God. He was conspicuous among them by his pure and spotless character, his love of truth and compassion towards the poor and the downtrodden. They called him Al-'Amin the trustworthy, the faithful.

As he grew older the superstitions and evil ways of the people caused greater and greater sorrow to his heart. He spent many hours in communion with his Creator and in meditation on the end or object of man's life. He longed to bring people to the Straight Path, to "render God unto man and man unto God." When he was forty years of age Gabriel, the Messenger of God, shone the Divine light in its full resplendence in Muhammad's heart.

He preached to them One and Only God, the Loving Creator and Sustainer of all the worlds. He exhorted them to shun all kinds of evil and cruelty and to love one another. He told them that real Religion was the removal of the want and suffering of others and the selfless service of fellow-men, that the religious ceremonies were entirely useless if they did not train and discipline man to become more righteous and to work for the good of others:

ýHast thou observed him who belieth religion? That is he who repelleth the orphan, and urgeth not the feeding of the needy. Ah, woe unto worshipers who are heedless of their Prayers; who would be seen at worship, yet refrain from works of mercy!û

(The Qur'an 107)

He struck at the root of the false superiority based on color, caste, race or nationality, declaring that all human beings were equal brothers.

The treatment meted out to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by his people was not different from that meted out to the earlier prophets. He was rejected by people with vested interests and subjected to all kinds of cruelties. Many of those that believed in him were badly tortured. A combined attempt was made by all the tribes of Mecca to put an end to his life. After bearing these tortures and cruelties for thirteen long years with almost superhuman patience and forbearance, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) at last migrated to Medina, where a large number of people had already embraced Islam and become his followers. This was the turning point in his life. The people of Medina not only believed in him and his message but also made him the head of their new Islamic state. Here Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), in addition to his moving appeals for individual change of heart and transformation of character, worked out the social

implications of his message. The many revolutionary changes that he introduced included the raising of women to a position of equality with men, taking steps to abolish slavery, total prohibition of all kinds of intoxicating drinks and of gambling, putting an end to exploitation of every kind, doing away with priesthood and granting religious freedom to all individuals and communities, bringing into force the most enlightened code of laws ever known to man and the establishment of a welfare state and a form of administration which was an ideal blend of justice and mercy. He brought into being a universal brotherhood in which there was no distinction whatsoever on the basis of race, color, language, wealth or sex. The distinguishing feature of those who joined this fold was zeal for the Worship of One God and of humanity. After accomplishing his mission, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) the last prophet of God, departed from this world in the year 632 A.C., leaving behind the Glorious Qur'ān which was revealed to him by God, and his own sayings, to guide people for all times to come.

The Ideal Character

The Prophet of Islam lived a life which can only be described as godly. He was the model par excellence for men in various situations and walks of life, as the Glorious Qur'an says:

ýVerily in the Messenger of God ye have a perfect example for him who looketh unto God and the Last Day and remembreth God much.û

(33:21)

ýO Prophet! Lo! We have sent thee as a witness and a bringer of good tidings and a warner, and as a summoner unto God by His Permission, and as a lamp that giveth light.û

(33:45,46)

He lived up to the highest ideals of the Glorious Qur'an and