

En Nära titt på Kristindom

Av

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PREFACE

To be at peace with one's self regarding God: this is, quite simply, the idea behind this entire paper. Many of us are content to go through life, accepting things "as they are"; we ignore those nagging little questions and doubts in our minds, especially in matters regarding religion. In so doing we make it by, yes, but we never quite achieve that state of peace within ourselves.

Others of us, however, are not content to take things at face value, so to say, and we actively seek out answer - s to those questions which come up during the course of our lives. We question the faith of our fathers, not willing to settle for blind acceptance. This road is not easily traveled by any means, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

I was raised as a Christian, brought up in a denomination of protestantism known as the "Christian Reformed" faith. Despite a thorough religious background -- church services twice on Sunday and on holidays, Sunday school, church doctrine classes, Christian youth group, private Christian education, summer Bible schools and Bible camps--I found myself with questions concerning the very basics of my faith that no person nor avenue of religious instruction could answer. For thirty-seven years, I wandered about in this haze of uncertainty regarding God and the right way to pay homage to Him until, in 1991, I discovered Islam.

The "Desert Storm" conflict in the Middle East was at its height; alongside the books on war strategy and weaponry at the local bookstore was a thin paperback entitled Understanding Islam. I paged through it, having that same sense of curiosity about this "mysterious" Middle-Eastern religion that many others did at this time. Curiosity quickly turned to amazement, however, when I learned through the pages of this book that Islam offered me the answers to those questions which had plagued me for all those years--and I wasted no more time. I became a Muslim. At long last, I had finally achieved that goal of being at peace within myself regarding my relationship with God. Since God has given me the ability to express myself quite well on paper, I want to reach out to others who have all those questions floating around in their minds regarding religion, and I hope to perhaps steer them towards some answers. The material I present here may surprise and even even shock some who read it, but the pursuit of the Truth is never easy, especially in the face of long-held beliefs and principles.

I began my work some time ago by writing several small papers—

- 1) Three In One, a look at the Christian doctrine of the trinity, which was published in early 1993 by The Open School of Chicago;
- 2) a paper entitled A Closer Look at Christianity, which is a study of Christian doctrines, and
- 3) a paper entitled A Case of Corruption, which is a study of text-tampering in the Bible.

This work you have in your hands represents the cumulation of all the above, with added research as I continued to read more between my first and final drafts for The Open School. It is my hope

that, in the following pages, the readers have an opportunity to see the point-of-view on Christianity as I have come to understand it.

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INTRODUCTION

Within the multitude of religions that exist in the world today are three which consider themselves to be monotheistic--that is, faiths in which belief is centered around the One God.

A closer look, at two of these religions--Judaism and Islam--will show this to be true: both Jews and Muslims worship One God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth.

The other religion, that of Christianity, presents a problem, however, when it comes to the definition of monotheism as opposed to what Christianity stands for. Instead of making God the center of their faith, the Christians have turned their focus on Jesus, who is known to them as "Jesus Christ", or "Jesus the Anointed One". To the Jews, Jesus was "a nice Jewish boy"; to the Muslims, Jesus was a human prophet; one of God's Chosen Messengers. To the Christians, however, Jesus is much more.

Christianity is focused on Jesus Christ. The religion takes its name from Jesus Christ. All Christian doctrines are centered around Jesus Christ. Major Christian holidays mark events in the life of Jesus Christ. The symbol of the Christian faith, a cross, is indicative of Jesus Christ. Prayers of the Christians are addressed to Jesus Christ, as they consider God Himself to be unapproachable by a mere man.

According to Christian author Fritz Ridenour, "the key to Christianity is that Jesus Christ really is the reason for it all and that he is holding it all together."¹

Many Christians today are unable to comprehend the existence of God without Jesus Christ standing there in the foreground for them. Mr. Ridenour says that Christianity is "...a relationship with a person, Jesus Christ"², and all too many Christians are in this position: they know God in no other way but through Jesus Christ.

The Christians say they worship God, but Jesus is also right there in the picture. As they see him--in addition to God--as being divine, Christianity is a religion with TWO gods, not one; and a religion with more than one God is not monotheistic.

How did this situation come to be? How did the religion of Christianity turn a human prophet from God into a god himself?

A CONVENANT GONE AWRY

In order to understand the actual mission of Jesus, we must go back before his time in history to find out why he was sent in the first place.

Fed up with the idolatry among his people, Abraham left his country in approximately 2000 B.C.E. in order to have freedom to worship God alone.

It was hard for him to leave his family behind, however, so God blessed him with two sons; He then comforted Abraham by saying that, of his youngest son Isaac, He would make a great nation (Genesis 17: 16,19). Of Isaac was later born the Jewish nation, God's "chosen" people. (We look later on at God's promise to Abraham's other son, Ishmael.) Despite this lofty position of the designated "Chosen People" of God, the Jews continually slipped back into idol worship and God sent prophet after prophet in order to warn the Jews of His displeasure with their behavior. When

the warnings failed to change the situation, hostile neighboring countries came in and wreaked havoc upon the Jewish people.

Although God granted respite in many instances upon hearing the Jews' cries for mercy, His wrath was so kindled in 581 B.C.E. at their continued disobedience that He allowed the Babylonians to sweep into the southern Jewish kingdom of Judah, where King Nebuchadnezzar and his armies proceeded to destroy Jerusalem and carry the Jews off into captivity.

The upper Jewish kingdom of Israel had met a similar fate in 721 B.C.E. at the hands of the Assyrians.

Scattered abroad with their Temple destroyed, the Jews turned their focus onto the Law.

Monotheism was once again lost, but this time in an ever-increasing maze of elaborate rites and rituals.

It was this situation that was present in the world when Jesus received his calling from God.

THE MISSION OF JESUS

Upon beginning his ministry at the approximate age of 30, Jesus made it clear that his mission from God was to get the Jews back on track:

"For the son of man is come to save that which was lost." (Matthew 18:11)

"For I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24)

Jesus also made it clear just what God wanted him to do:

"For 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)

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfil." (Matthew 5:17)

A careful study of Jesus' words will show that, contrary to what Christians may think, Jesus had no intention of starting a new religion; he only came to reiterate the message that God had given to all prophets before him:

man was to obey God's Laws and worship Him alone.

At no time during his ministry did Jesus claim to be anything more than a human being, inspired by God.

Indeed, he referred to himself as the son of man, and made it clear, in a number of verses throughout the Gospel, that he was merely a Messenger of God:

"Why callest thou me good? There is none good but One, that is God." (Mark 10:18)

"...whosoever receives me, receives not me, but Him who sent me." (Mark 9:37)

"And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent." (John 17:3)

"Now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard from God." (John 8:40)

"I ascend unto my Father and your Father, my God and your God." (John 20:17)

Despite all his efforts--wonderful words backed up with some pretty nifty miracles--Jesus was soundly rejected, especially by his own people.

Three years after he began his ministry, he was arrested and charged with sedition and blasphemy. Success had eluded him--at the end of his life on earth, he left behind only a mere handful of followers, nor more than 500 at most.

This all changed dramatically, however, when a new preacher, claiming to speak in the name of Jesus, came upon the scene only a few years later.

THE TRUE FOUNDER OF CHRISTIANITY

The followers of Jesus, who called themselves "Nazarenes", continued to incite controversy wherever they went after Jesus had left the earth; they did this by continuing to echo his words of doom ahead for the Jews if they did not get their act together very soon.

One of these Nazarenes, a man named Stephen, finally pushed things too far by letting loose with an inflammatory speech when hauled up in front of the Jewish judges known as the Sanhedrin. Howling with fury at his "Blasphemous" words, the judges jumped up and dragged Stephen out of the city, where he was stoned to death. This story can be found in Acts chapter 7 in the Bible.

The execution of Stephen was observed by a young Jew named Saul. Born in Tarsus, not much later than Jesus himself, Saul had become part of the Jewish sect of the Pharisees; these "legal eagles" had become fanatic in their pursuit of the Nazarenes; following the execution of Stephen, Paul himself began to take a very active role in this endeavor.

His performance in this capacity was so good that he was made chief agent for this purpose in Jerusalem, and he was given the necessary documents to extend the purge into neighboring cities.

Approximately five years after Jesus' ascension into heaven, this twenty-five-year old zealot was on his way to Damascus to pick up a group of Nazarenes for return to Jerusalem when he had a vision in which he claimed Jesus appeared, asking why Saul was persecuting him.

Various theories have been advanced as to just what happened to Saul that day--such as sunstroke, a hallucination, and even an epileptic seizure--but nothing is for certain except that whatever did happen changed a zealous persecutor into an ardent preacher. Saul changed his name to Paul and went off into the deserts of Arabia in order to think about just how he was going to go about carrying out what he believed to be a command from Jesus to go out and preach.

Exactly WHAT to do was quite a dilemma for him, however; since the Jews had rejected Jesus and his message, Paul didn't think he stood much of chance of getting through to them, either. He made up his mind that it would be best to simply dismiss them off and target the Gentiles (non-Jews) instead. In order to do this, however, some creative thinking was definitely called for.

The Romans and the Greeks, who made up the Gentile population of Paul's world, were pagans who worshiped a plethora of gods and goddesses. Temples and statues of their deities abounded in

the land, and Roman law had it that all people, with the exception of the Jews, must pay homage to the gods.

Paul knew that people with such deep-reaching pagan beliefs were not going to accept the idea that grace and salvation could come from a person who was only considered to be a most upright and righteous human being.

If Paul wanted quick results in his ministry, he knew that he would have to "modulate" things a bit, taking into account the culture of the Gentiles.

Paul Maier, in his book "First Christians", tells us that thirteen years elapsed between the time Paul "received his calling" and the time that he began preaching. During that thirteen years, Paul's creative mind put in a lot of overtime; when he finally returned to Damascus, he came back armed with the knowledge that the Gentiles would demand a tangible god within their new religion, and he was prepared to give this to them.

Paul was wildly successful in his subsequent missionary efforts, what with the accommodations he ended up making for the Gentiles. Although the religion of Christianity takes its name from Jesus Christ, Paul of Tarsus must be considered as its true founder, as he is the one who conceived all of its doctrines, and set up its churches throughout the world of his time. Christians don't deny this, either: "No figure in Christian history stands so tall or has had such a tremendous influence as has Saul of Tarsus..."³

In his book "The 100: A Ranking of the most Influential Persons In History", author Michael Hart concurs in saying:

"No other man played so large a role in the propagation of Christianity."⁴

There is one big problem with this picture, however: the teachings of Paul, the true founder of Christianity, cannot be found anywhere in the teachings of Jesus or in those of prophets before him.

Not only that, but Paul had little contact with the true disciples of Jesus who also might have set him straight; they were not in agreement with Paul's innovative teachings, and let him know this as much as possible. In the end, however, Paul's brand of Christianity won out because, through his charismatic personality, not to mention the fact that he and his companions out-matched the true disciples of Jesus in important manners such as social rank, wealth and education, he gained such a large following among the Gentiles. Judeo-Christianity, that of the disciples of Jesus, didn't stand a chance.

Let's take a closer look at all of the innovations that Paul introduced into "his" religion of Christianity.

THE DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIANITY

1) Son of Man or Son of God?

Simply put, the Doctrine of Divinity states that Jesus is the son of God--the Word of God made flesh.

Even though Jesus himself, as mentioned earlier, never claimed to be divine, Paul gave him this attribute for one reason: to gain converts among the Gentiles.

The Gentiles were pagans who were used to worshipping gods that had wonderful legends and myths behind them.

Several of the pagan deities of the time--Mithras, Adonis, Attis and Osiris, to name a few--were all the offspring of a supreme ruling god, and each had died a violent death at a young age, coming back to life a short time later in order to save their people.

Paul took this into account, giving the pagans something similar in Christianity: he attributed divinity to Jesus, saying he was the son of God (the Supreme), and that he, too, had died for their sins. In so doing, Paul compromised the teachings of Jesus with pagan beliefs in order to make Christianity more acceptable to the Gentiles.

Paul did not, of course, make mention of pagan origins for this particular doctrine. Only one who does some real digging into that particular time in history--the people and their culture--will learn of this fact, Paul justified this doctrine in other ways. In particular, he felt that there were five reasons why Jesus was to be considered divine:

1) Jesus was born of a Virgin without the "aid" of a father.

To this, one can bring up the matter of Adam, the first man. He was born without the aid of a father OR a mother, yet he is not thought of as divine;

2) Jesus performed miracles.

To this, one can bring up Moses and the prophet Elisha; both performed some pretty spectacular miracles, yet neither is thought of as divine. The fact that Jesus did perform miracles is not really proof of divinity as he was quick to point out, when such things occurred, that the power to perform these marvelous feats came from God--not from him. His miracles were done for the same reason that earlier prophets performed them: to authenticate his message for some rather stubborn people.

3) Jesus had a "Peerless" character.

To this, one can point out a number of instances in the Gospels--such as his calling Peter "Satan" in Matthew 16:23, and calling others "snakes and sons of vipers" in Matthew 23:33 after making a point of saying earlier, in Matthew 5:22, that use of hurtful names is wrong--that raise some doubts about this attribute, as far as the Jesus of the Gospels is portrayed;

4) Jesus rose from the dead.

Yes, to "conquer death" is quite a feat, but what of the prophet Elijah who didn't even die, but was taken directly to heaven in a fiery chariot (II Kings 2:11)? Quite a spectacular feat, yet he is not thought of as divine. And finally, Christians say that

5) Jesus was prophesied in the Old Testament.

Christians are quick to point out Isaiah 53 as a prophecy of the coming of Jesus and his mission to mankind. The problem here, however, is that no name is mentioned in this chapter. Without a specific name, who knows exactly WHO this chapter is talking about.

The Term "Son of God"

The term "son of God" was not something new, however; it had been used in the Old Testament to refer to David (Psalms 2:7) and his son Solomon (I Chronicles 22:100), and to refer to Adam (Luke 3:38) in the New Testament.

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, detailed in Matthew 5, Jesus tells his listeners:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." In all cases, the term "son of God" was NOT meant to be applied literally, but to signify love and affection from God to the righteous. "Son of God" means a special closeness TO God--not to be OF God. After all, every man is a son of God, as He is the Creator of all life.

The Term "Messiah"

Another term used by Christians to back up their theory of Jesus being divine is that of Messiah (see John 1:41). The word "Messiah" is a Hebrew word which means "God's anointed", and the word "Christ" is simply the Greek translation of this Hebrew word. Messiah or Christ, Hebrew or Greek--both words mean the same thing: "God's anointed".

This term, however, was not applied to Jesus exclusively, having been applied to others before him. In psalms 2:2, it is applied to David, and in Isaiah 45:1, it is applied to Cyrus.

The Jews thought of their kings as "messiahs", in the sense that God had figuratively anointed them. The whole concept of Messiah was Jewish, applied to a national deliverer who they believed would, with divine assistance, save them from oppression by the Gentiles. It did not bring with it the attribute of divinity.

The Term "Savior"

A final term used by Christians is that of "Savior". In this case, also, Jesus was not the first to whom this was applied.

When Syria waged war against the kingdom of Israel, Jehoahaz the king begged God for help; in 11 kings 13:5, God told him:

"And the Lord gave Israel a savior, so that they went out from under the hand of the Syrians."

When Jehoash, his son, took over the throne, he did as God promised; in II Kings 13:25, Jehoash became the savior of his people because he defeated the Syrians and recovered the cities of the northern kingdom of Israel. The word Savior does not bring the attribute of divinity with it, either.

The use of Mistranslations

Names aside, another method used by Christians when trying to prove the divinity of Jesus is that of mistranslating various passages in the Bible. They have two favorites they love to quote in this regard:

1) The first we find is John 10:30, where Jesus says:

"I and my Father are one."

Use of logic on this verse shows that it only implies that Jesus speaks IN the name of God--not that he IS God.

Jesus and God have a oneness in purpose--not in essence.

The Christian would do well to look further at John 17, for instance. Jesus is praying in this chapter, and his words leave no doubt as to the fact that he is only a servant of God.

For confirmation of this idea of oneness in purpose, not essence, we look to several verses found in the seventeenth chapter of John, the first of which is John 17:8. Here Jesus says:

"For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me and they have believed that thou didst send me."

In John 17:11 is yet another affirmation of a oneness in purpose, for Jesus says:

"...Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."

This theme of oneness in purpose is again reiterated in John 17:21-23.

In short, John 10:30 is NOT a statement by Jesus attesting to his divinity, but to a oneness with God in purpose, as can be seen by the afore-mentioned verses from John 17.

2) The other favorite verse quoted by Christians is that of John 14:9. In it, Jesus tells Phillip:

"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

The Christian who takes this as an affirmation by Jesus of his divinity would do well to look at John 5:37 in which Jesus says:

"And the Father Himself which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His shape."

If not convinced, the Christian might check back into the Old Testament book of Exodus where, in chapter 33, verse 20, God tells Moses:

"...Thou canst not see my face: for there shall be no man see me, and live."

A better way to look at John 14.9 would be in a figurative sense: since Jesus was bringing the Word of God, seeing and listening to him was like having God right there.

Jesus was acting on the command of God--he was not actually God. This is most clearly seen in John 8:19, where Jesus says:

"If you knew me, you would know my Father also".

There are other verses, of course, that a Christian will turn to in his efforts to attribute divinity to Jesus, but all can be seen as nothing more than a mis-translation on his part--a desire to read or see something there that is not really there.

We have only to look at John 17:3 to see that Jesus was not conveying any new message; here he says:

"...and this is life eternal that they should know Thee the only True God and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent."

He is telling us that we must believe in the One and Only True God and that he, Jesus Christ, is only a Messenger sent from God.

Did Jesus Actually Come Out and Say He Was Divine?

Christians are quick to point out the many references Jesus makes to himself in the Gospel of John as the "son of God". On the other hand, they tend to ignore the equally numerous references in the

very same gospel where Jesus refers to himself as the "son of man". This clearly points up to the fact that, once again, the term "son of God" is not meant to be taken in a literal sense. Jesus had a very special closeness with God--he was a child of God in the sense that we are all God's children. In Matthew 16:13, Jesus asks his disciples who do they think he is. Christians gravitate toward Peter's answer, found in Matthew 16:16, where he says "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God." Interestingly enough, in the account of the same event that is found in Mark 8: 16, Peter says only "Thou art the Christ." Just a few words added in Matthew as opposed to Mark, but quite a change to the whole meaning of the words!

Even more interesting, however, is a point most Christians again tend to ignore, found just a few verses further down in Matthew 16. In verse 20--and also in Mark 8:30--Jesus tells his disciples that they are not to tell anyone else that he is the Christ. Why did he not want others to know this?

What Did Paul Accomplish?

By saying that Jesus was divine, Paul appealed to the masses in terms they were very much at home with, and his success was ensured. His enthusiasm and charisma, coupled with his ready willingness to compromise the true message of Jesus with pagan beliefs led him to ascribe sonship to Jesus--a dubious belief at best, since sonship describes one who was created, while divinity describes a being eternal in nature.

Later Church leaders thought to neatly end the confusion by saying that Jesus was God-incarnate--an eternal being who "chose" to become a man in the womb of Mary. Jesus had, in other words, two natures--divine and human-- which were united in one single person. While they probably meant well, making a statement such as this only led to more confusion.

The Islamic View

As does the Bible, the Qur'an says that Jesus was born without the aid of a human father. This does not imply, however, that Jesus was divine; it simply shows that God, who established the laws of Nature in the first place, is equally able to suspend them at will.

If Jesus were actually God's son, "...he would be a sharer in the Godhead and of Divine nature himself, and in that case, God would have simultaneously begotten, been begotten, been born, lived as a human being, and died" 5.

This is a notion too ludicrous for consideration.

Islam stands firmly behind the belief Jesus was only a human prophet, divinely inspired by God:

"...Christ Jesus the son of Mary was no more than a Messenger of Allah..." (4:171)

To say that he was a god besmacks of polytheism, which goes against the concept of the Oneness of God:

"...For Allah is One God: glory be to Him. Far exalted is He above having a son..." (4:171)

A doctrine that has its roots in paganism and also goes against the concept of One God has no place in a religion which claims to be monotheistic.

2) Three In One?

Simply put, the Doctrine of the Trinity states that the Godhead is comprised of three divine beings: God the Father, Jesus the son, and the Holy Spirit. Along with belief in Jesus, the doctrine of the trinity is one of the most fundamental principals of Christianity upon which the rest of Christian doctrines are based 6.

The Concept of Monotheism

Webster's New World Dictionary defines monotheism as "the belief or doctrine that there is only one God.⁷ The religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam all claim to share this concept. It was stressed by Moses in a Biblical passage known as the "Shema", or the Jewish creed of faith:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord"

(Deuteronomy 6:4). Approximately 1500 years later, it was repeated word-for-word by Jesus when he said:

"...the first of all the commandments is, 'Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord'"
(Mark 12:29)

When Muhammad came along approximately 600 years after Jesus, he brought the same message yet again when he said:

"And your God is One God: there is no god but He..." (The Quran 2:163)

Christianity has digressed from the concept of Oneness of God, however, in their vague and mysterious doctrine of the trinity. How can God be One when you add Jesus and the Holy Spirit to the picture?

The Influence of Paul and His Gentile Audience

Although this is one doctrine that was not formally proposed by Paul, there can be no doubt that he had such a doctrine in mind: after all, if he made Jesus a divine son, it stands to reason that a divine father was needed; accommodations were also called for in order to account for the Holy Spirit, who Paul believed to be the vehicle for bringing God's revelations to man. In essence, Paul named the principle players, but it wasn't until the fourth century that the Church put the whole thing together.

As was the case with other doctrines proposed for Christianity by Paul, a trinity of divine beings also had its roots in pagan beliefs. The cult of Nimrod, first begun in Babylon, was still alive and well in Paul's world: Nimrod, a handsome young man who had married his mother, was looked upon as a god among his people; they believed that Baal, the sun god, was his father. Upon his death at a fairly young age, Nimrod's mother became head of the cult and she put forth the idea that her son continued to survive as a spirit. Thus, the first trinity came into being: Baal, the divine father, Nimrod's mother, and Nimrod the divine son. It is most likely from this legend that Paul drew his idea of a trinity of divine beings for Christianity.

Trinity In the Bible

There are only two references in the Bible to a trinity of divine beings, and both are vague at best:

1) The first reference is found in Matthew 28:19. Here, Jesus tells his disciples "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost".

There are some problems with this verse, however:

- a) While it does make mention of the three persons later put into the Christian trinity, it says nothing about the three persons being part of one divine being;
- b) In looking at another account of this same event--"the Great Commission"--in Mark 16:15, Jesus says "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". Where did the extra words come from that we find in Matthew's account?
- c) Baptism in the early Church was done only in the name of Jesus, as affirmed by Paul in his various epistles.

2) The second reference is found in I John 5:7, where we read: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one".

While this is a clearer reference to a trinity of divine beings, Biblical scholars admitted in the 19th century that the words "the Father, the Word and the Holy Ghost" are interpolations--text not found in the oldest existing copies of the Bible--and these words are subsequently not found in Bibles of today.

Other than these two verses--one which is vague, the other an admitted addition to Biblical text--there are NO other references OF ANY KIND in the Bible to a trinity. In short, the idea of a trinity in Christianity--God the Father, Jesus the son, and the Holy Spirit as the being who guides mankind--was never put forth by Jesus or any prophet before him. The roots of such a doctrine were already present in paganism, however, not to mention the fact that, during the course of his preaching, Paul had put forth the components needed to form a trinity in Christianity. All that remained was for later Church scholars to put the whole thing together, passing off what was strictly a man-made doctrine as a fundamental Christian belief.

Early Christianity

Tertullian, a lawyer and presbyter of the Church in Carthage, was the first to use the word "trinity" during the third century when he put forth the theory that the son and the spirit participate in the being of God, but all are of one being of substance with the Father.

Controversy over the matter raged for years among the higher leaders of the church: some agreed with Tertullian that the trinity consisted of three distinct persons or essences, while others claimed it to be merely a trinity of revelation--that Jesus was a man who was inspired by the spirit of the Father which dwelled within him.

Emperor Constantine found himself drawn into the fray in 318 C.E. When the controversy over the trinity began to rage between two churchmen from Alexandria: Arius, the deacon, and Alexander, his bishop.

The Council of Nicea

Unsure of church dogma but sure in the knowledge that a unified church was necessary for a strong kingdom.

Constantine tried to negotiate a settlement between the two men. When his bishop failed to resolve the matter, Constantine called for the first ecumenical council in Church history, which met in 325 C.E. at Nicea.

300 bishops attended; after six weeks' of work, the doctrine of the trinity was formulated. The God of the Christians was now seen as having three essences--or natures--in the form of father, son, and holy spirit.

The doctrine hammered out by the Council stated: "...we worship one God in trinity, and trinity in unity...for there is one person of the father, another of the son, and another of the holy spirit...they are not three Gods, but one God...the whole three persons are co-eternal and co-equal...he therefore that will be saved must thus think of the trinity..."⁸

The matter was far from settled, however, despite high hopes for such on the part of Constantine. Arius and the new bishop of Alexandria, a man named Athanasius, began arguing over the matter even as the Nicene Creed was being signed; "Arianism" became a catch-word from that time onward for anyone who didn't hold to the doctrine of the trinity.

Written In Stone

In 451 C.E., at the Council of Chalcedon, the Nicene/Constantinople Creed was set as authoritative.

Debate on the matter was no longer tolerated; to speak out against the trinity was now considered blasphemy, and such earned stiff sentences that ranged from mutilation to death.

Christians now turned on Christians, maiming and slaughtering thousands because of a difference of opinion.

Although the brutal punishments of earlier times have now ended, the controversy over the doctrine of the trinity continues even today. Undaunted, however, the majority of Christians continue to stand firm behind this fundamental tenet of their faith.

Rational or Irrationality?

The doctrine of the trinity may be a fundamental tenet of Christianity, but it has absolutely no Scriptural basis--it is entirely man-made in origin. It is yet another example of how pagan beliefs were pulled into the dogma of Christianity in order to make it more palatable to a pagan people.

The majority of Christians, when asked to explain this doctrine, can offer nothing more than "I believe it because I was told to do so". They explain it away as a "mystery"--yet the Bible says, in I Corinthians 14:33 that "...God is not the author of confusion...".

Even the very author of this doctrine had problems with its comprehension: it is said that Athanasius, the bishop who formulated the doctrine of the trinity, confessed that the more he wrote on the matter, the less capable he was of expressing his thoughts clearly regarding it.

The Islamic View

While Christianity may have a problem defining the essence of God, such is not the case in Islam:

"They disbelieve who say: Allah is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God." (The Qur'an 5:73)

American Muslim author Suzanne Haneef puts the matter quite succinctly when she says "...God is not like a pie or an apple which can be divided into three thirds which form one whole; if God is three persons or possesses three parts, He is assuredly not the Single, Unique, Invisible Being which God is...". ⁹

Looking at it from another angle: the trinity has God being three separate entities--the father, the son and the holy spirit. If God is the father and also the son, He would then be the father of Himself because He is His own son.

This is not exactly logical...

Christianity claims to be a monotheistic religion. By setting up a trinity of divine beings, however, there is no doubt in the mind of the Muslim that Christianity has lost the idea of worshipping just One God. They have moved away from monotheism into polytheism because they no longer worship One God--they worship three.

This is a charge not taken lightly by Christians. They, in turn, accuse the Muslims of not even knowing what the trinity is, claiming that the Qur'an sets it up as Allah the father, Jesus the son, and Mary his mother. While veneration of Mary has been a figment of the Catholic Church since 431 when she was given the title "Mother of God" by the Council of Ephesus, a closer examination of the verses in the Qur'an most often cited by Christians in support of their accusation shows that designation of Mary by the Qur'an as a "member" of the trinity is simply not true.

While the Qur'an condemns both Trinitarianism (4: 171;5:73) and the worship of Jesus and his mother Mary (5: 116), nowhere does the Qur'an identify the actual three components of the Christian trinity. The position of the Qur'an is that WHO or WHAT comprises this doctrine is not the issue; the issue is that the very notion of a trinity is an affront against the Oneness of God.

There is no place in monotheism for any other being to be worshipped but God, and on this the Qur'an stands firm:

"And your God is One God: there is no god but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful" (2:163)

"...I am your Lord and Cherisher: therefore serve Me and no other..." (21:5,2)

3) One Death To Absolve All

Simply put, the Doctrine of Atonement states that Jesus suffered and died upon the cross in order to free man from the yoke of sin.

The Concept of the Original Sin Paul may have been a tentmaker by trade, but he was a shrewd man, as evidenced by the way he built up a convoluted system of belief for salvation in Christianity.

This is best seen in this Doctrine of Atonement, a creed that every other creed---that of the divinity of Jesus, the trinity and salvation by faith--depend completely upon for substance.

In the eyes of Paul, mankind is a race of wrongdoers, a dubious distinction that all have inherited from Adam and his sin in eating of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. This "original sin" has tainted all of mankind since Adam; because of this taint of sin, man cannot serve as his own redeemer. Jesus could serve in this capacity as he was not conceived through the seed of a man.

Although logically a great injustice to both God and mankind, Christianity has heartily endorsed this doctrine of Original Sin in order to justify their concept of the mission of Jesus, that of atonement for the sins of mankind.

In putting forth this doctrine of original sin, Paul seems to have overlooked God's words in Ezekial 18:20-22:

"...the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son..."

The Ultimate Sacrifice

According to Paul, mankind's redeemer came in the form of Jesus: God sent His only son to earth so that he would endure pain and death on the cross in order that the shedding of his blood would atone for the sins of mankind.

Jesus was the sacrificial victim. Paul recalled the sacrifices offered up by the Jews to God in the Old Testament, and somehow decided that these sacrifices were done in order to receive God's forgiveness for the sins of the people.

While some of the sacrifices offered by the early Jews WERE done for atonement purposes, the prophets who came along later on said to forget about doing this sort of thing. In Hosea 6:6, for example, we read:

"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice".

God wanted love--which comes down to faith in Him and obedience to His Law--rather than blood.

Jesus himself reiterated this message once again in Matthew 9:13, where we read:

"Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."

Paul set all this aside, however, saying that Jesus, a perfect being, became the "ultimate sacrifice" when he gave up his life on the cross.

Paul's theory was that God cannot be considered just unless He punishes the sinner. Repentance alone simply cannot bring about the justification "necessary" for sins committed. Atonement, he says, is necessary because the honor, justice, holiness and righteousness of God cannot be satisfied by "mere" repentance. To a Christian, Jesus "reconciled" men to God through his death.

Christian author Anis Shorosh took a closer look at this matter several years ago, and he concluded that there is nothing of atonement in confession and repentance; who is going to pay for our sins?
10

Through the whole business of saying God demanded the life of Jesus in payment for the sins of mankind, Paul took, the concept of a God who loves and cares for His creatures, and made Him into a very stern and distant being that nothing short of blood sacrifice will reach.

A God of love

A theme first instituted by Paul--and one which surfaces again and again in Christianity, especially in regards to Jesus--is that of God's love.

According to the Christian, God's love is behind the crucifixion and death of Jesus--the symbol of God's love is the cross, they say. According to their way of thinking, God so loved us that He sent Jesus and caused him to suffer and die in order to save mankind from his sins.

Can God Die?

Getting around the confusing idea that the God of the Christians will only forgive a host of smaller sins by way of a bigger sin--that of murder--there is the more compelling matter of divinity in question here. God is an eternal being--has always been, will always be. He was not created; He cannot die.

If Jesus is the son of God, as Christians claim, this would make him a god, also; how could he, as a god, die on the cross as they claim him to have done?

If his "human component" took over at the time of his death, this would mean that he died as any other man in which case, the whole doctrine of atonement has no basis--the blood of a man cannot atone for the sins of anyone else.

The Pagan Influence

Paul misread the purpose of sacrifices by the Jews in the Old Testament: they were done to show gratitude to God for the bounty He blessed them with--not to ensure God's forgiveness for sin. Nearly all pagan religions, however, truly believe that sacrifices made to their gods would ensure forgiveness of sin. Plants, animals and even humans were killed to ensure this "divine favor". Not only that, but nearly all pagan religions carry with them some sort of a rite wherein its adherents partake of consecrated food, primarily bread and wine. Pagans believed that, by eating these consecrated foods, they were sharing in their god's attributes and powers--his spirit would then dwell within them.

Paul carried this pagan concept over into Christianity, calling it the Sacrament of the Last Supper, or the Eucharist. Considered to be a big part of the doctrine of atonement, this ceremony has now become one of the most important sacraments in Christianity because it symbolizes Jesus giving his own flesh and blood as a sacrifice for the sins of mankind.

The doctrine of atonement did not present much of a problem to Paul's Gentile converts to Christianity, since the idea of a god dying young and coming back to life in order to save his people was present in their pagan backgrounds anyway. If Adonis or Mithras had done this sort of thing for them before they converted, why not have Jesus do it now?

What Did Paul Accomplish?

The Gentiles were once again placated: they had their redeemers in their old religions, and Paul nicely provided them with one in their new faith, also. He told them that all they had to do to ensure that God would forgive their sins was to believe that Jesus died for those sins; that was all there was to it.

In Jewish law, the elements of atonement consist of Divine mercy, repentance and a sincere effort to do good; blood sacrifice did not have a thing to do with it. In his attempts to win over the Gentiles, however, Paul reinterpreted Old Testament scriptures and gave the new Christians their redeemer--a man who sacrifices his life for others.

The Christians of today no longer have that closeness to paganism that was present in the time of Paul. His doctrine of atonement has become one that current Christians are often at loss to adequately explain, having found the whole matter to be quite confusing when the forces of logic and theology come into play within their minds.

The Islamic View

Muslim take this Christian doctrine one part at a time:

1) The Concept of the Original Sin The Christian doctrine of Original Sin has no place in Islam, as Muslims believe that man is born pure free of sin.

In the Qur'an, God says:

"So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright--the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man..." (30:30)

This verse tells us that God created man good, in a natural state of purity; that is, with a natural tendency towards submission to the will and law of God. Sin is not hereditary: it is something that man brings upon himself when he does things he should not and or does not that which he should. To say that each of us comes into the world saddled with a burden of sin that had been committed by a very remote ancestor is nothing short of denying God's attributes of justice and mercy.

Although God has endowed man with the faculties to make choices in life, man is a finite creature with finite natures and capabilities. External forces--that of good and evil--shape the outcome of our nature, not something that was done in the past by a far distant relative. What we do in the past by a far distant relative. What we ultimately make of ourselves will be taken into account by God on the Day of Judgment; during this life, He gives us every chance possible. We are, in ourselves, pretty much the architects of our own destiny.

This is because the Muslim believes that God forgave Adam for his disobedience:

"Then did Satan make them slip from the Garden, and get them out of the state of felicity in which they had been...then learnt Adam from his Lord words of inspiration, and his Lord turned towards him; for He is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful" (2: 36,37) God forgave Adam, and subsequently removed any stigma of sin that the Christians claim to be inherited by mankind from the time of Adam onward.

2) The Death of Jesus

As for the death of Jesus upon the cross...although it is clear that Jesus--as did the prophets before him--suffered for the cause of trying to bring God's Word to a people who were not too interested, and that he was well aware this would happen to him, he does not go so far as to say he would be killed--especially for the purpose that Paul later attributed to him, that of saving mankind from sin. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus fervently prays for God to "let this cup pass from me" (Matthew 26:39), where "this cup" refers to his capture and death. Are we to believe that a devoted servant of God would pray for mercy and not receive it?

The whole idea of atonement for mankind through the death of Jesus comes across as a rather illogical concept, totally out of character with the idea of a just God. Would a just God be unwilling to forgive Adam--and all mankind after him--for his sins until Jesus came along? Would a just God both demand and allow the humiliation and murder of one of His most dedicated prophets? Would a just God force one man to pay for the sins of another? In Islam, we think not.

If one looks at this from the angle of God's love for mankind, the same arguments for a God of Justice also prevail: Would a God of love punish all of mankind until Jesus came along? Would a God of love demand the dreadful humiliation and death of one of His most beloved and dedicated servants? One can only wonder just what TYPE of love would demand such a high and terrible price.

Islam stands firm behind the theory of personal responsibility: each person is responsible for his/her own wrongdoings. It is inconceivable that a just God would hold one person responsible for the sins of another:

"Every soul draws the meed of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another." (6:164) No man can nor will be punished for the sins of another.

God tells us that He will reward and or punish each man on what that man alone has done in his life:

"On no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear. It gets every good that it earns, and suffers every ill that it earns." (2:286)

3) As for sacrifice,

"To every people did We appoint rites of sacrifice that they might celebrate the name of Allah over the sustenance He gave them...it is not their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah; it is your piety that reaches Him.." (22:34,37)

As such, Islam does not believe that Jesus was killed. In the Qur'an, we read:

"...they said in boast, We killed Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah '--but they killed him not, nor crucified him...nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself..." (4:157-158)

In short, the Christian doctrine of atonement as a means of forgiving sin has no place in Islam. Muslims believe that God desires only sincere repentance on the part of mankind:

"But ask forgiveness of your Lord and turn unto Him in repentance. For my Lord is indeed full of mercy and loving-kindness" (11:90)

Salvation comes from God alone:

"But any that in this life had repented, believed, and worked righteousness, will have hopes to be among those who achieve salvation". (28:67)

If we believe in God, surrendering ourselves completely to Him and following His Guidance, we can be assured of His Grace and Mercy towards us. As seen in the verse above, if repentance on our part is sincere, God can and does forgive our sins. There is no need for an intercessor, as each of us has direct access to God at all times. In short, there is no need for a savior: God Alone can handle it all 12.

4) Saved By Faith Alone

Simply put, the Doctrine of Salvation in Christianity states that man is saved simply by having faith in the idea that Jesus died for the sins of all mankind.

To Appease the Gentiles

There was still the matter of what happens after death. All prophets taught of the joys of heaven and the horrors of hell; Jesus was no exception. Paul's new converts worried about this, too. They wanted to know just how they could ensure themselves a place in heaven when the world finally came to an end.

Jewish Law taught that salvation was attained through obedience of that Law. The Gentiles, however, were not happy with this idea. They complained to Paul that the Law was too strict and involved for them, and Paul handled this in a unique way by saying that obedience to the Law was no longer necessary:

"..no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God...and the Law is not of faith...Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law..." (Galatians 3:11-13)

While the Law alerted man to what was right and what was wrong, Paul said that the coming of Jesus had abrogated obedience to it as a means of salvation:

"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law."
(Romans 3:28)

Despite the fact that Jesus himself had said that he came not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17), Paul threw it all out, saying that only faith in Jesus was necessary for salvation. According to Paul, the coming of Jesus, and his sacrifice of his life for the sins of mankind, put an end to the need for following God's Law in order to attain salvation. Only faith in this "saving power" of Jesus was now necessary.

Salvation was no longer based on the manner of life one led or the good deeds that one performed, but on the faith that one had.

The Curse of the Law

Paul had another reason for taking the stand he did on God's Law. In Deuteronomy 21:23, God tells Moses that a man who is "hanged upon a tree"--in other words, one who is crucified--is "accursed of God".

In order to get around this, Paul simply decided that the Law itself was a curse:

"For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse...Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having himself become a curse for us. For it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree'". (Galatians 3:10,13)

Because Paul felt God's Law to be as a curse, the Words of God from Deuteronomy 21:23 had no further significance. He explained those words away by saying that, while Jesus had been subjected to a curse because he was put to death by crucifixion, due to his innocence, he bore this curse for the sins of others and there was no stigma of being accursed thus attached to him. What Paul did, in essence, was to glorify what had previously been considered a shameful way of death simply because he had to justify this salvation scheme of his.

According to Anis Shorosh, "The cross, a symbol of shame, became through Christ the symbol of challenge. The cross, a symbol of death, became through Christ the symbol of life."¹³

Actual Implementation of This Doctrine

Due to strenuous objection on the part of the disciples of Jesus, Paul had to move slowly on this issue. He started out with the one thing that the Gentiles had the biggest objection to: circumcision. According to Paul, Abraham had been righteous before he was circumcised, so why bother with it anymore?

What Paul ignored, however, was the fact that God had made a covenant hundreds of years earlier with Abraham, sealed by orders of God with circumcision on the part of Abraham and all his male descendants thereafter. In Genesis 17:14, God was quite clear in this matter: "And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant." One can again only wonder how Paul could so brightly brush these words aside.

Circumcision was replaced with baptism, the sprinkling of water now being made a means of sealing a covenant between God and the Christian. The Gentiles were, of course, quite thrilled.

Next went the dietary regulations, and other matters followed, one after another. In a short period of time, God's Law had become nothing more than preparation for the saving power of Jesus to the Christians--something to no longer bother with.

While good works, according to Paul, would naturally "come" to a Christian, he better realize that good works alone would no longer ensure salvation; only faith in the saving power of Jesus would do that.

What Did Paul Accomplish?

Paul gave the new Christians this doctrine of salvation by faith alone for one reason: to win converts among the Gentiles. They had observed the Jews and the rituals they undertook in their religious practices, and they were hesitant to make a commitment to Christianity because of a keen desire to steer clear of all the rules and regulations present in Mosaic Law.

This last doctrine, that of salvation by faith in Jesus alone, was by far the most radical, yet the one that ensured the success of Paul's ministry because it gave them exactly what they wanted, and they flocked to him in droves. Jesus may not have had designs to go beyond the Jews with his message, nor to start a new religion, but Christianity was born and became a universal force, thanks to the teachings of Paul.

The Islamic view

God sent Jesus to the Jews because they had pushed the worship of God into the background in favor of details and elaborations of the Law. The 63 books of the Talmud--commentaries on Jewish Law--are proof of this.

For the Jew, salvation was attained by obeying God's Law.

Jesus was sent in an effort to get the Jews to realize that good works weren't everything--one had to have faith in God, too. Jesus stressed over and over that "empty ritual and an insincere show of devotion" were not what God wanted in the way of worship; instead, the Jews were to follow earlier scriptures "with sincerity, inner piety and true God-consciousness"¹⁴. This is what Jesus tirelessly preached, but it is not, unfortunately, what Christianity now stands for.

That message of Jesus—

"...the first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God is One Lord."

--found in Mark 12:29, is nothing more than writing on a page. Paul set Jesus up as a divine being, then concocted an elaborate scheme of salvation around him that involves mere faith alone.

Obedience to God's Law has been shoved aside, called a "curse".

The Qur'an sets the matter straight once and for all by saying that the components of salvation are two: belief in the One God, and obedience to His Laws:

"To those who believe and do deeds of righteousness hath Allah promised forgiveness and a great reward" (5:9)

AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES

Through use of these four doctrines--that of divinity of Jesus, the trinity, atonement and salvation by faith--Paul achieved phenomenal success in his ministry. The Jews may have brushed Jesus aside, but the Gentiles flocked to Paul's side, as he gave them just what they wanted in their new religion. The term for the earlier followers of Jesus--Nazarenes--was dropped in favor of a new, more appropriate name: Christians, or followers of Jesus Christ.

This new religion of Christianity "...was abundantly interwoven with mythological content drawn heavily from pagan sources..." along with having a theology "...which was produced as the need arose to suit the mentality of the times..."¹⁵.

The Jews did brush Jesus aside; in a way, however, the religion of Christianity as conceived by Paul has also brushed Jesus aside. Despite what a Christian might say, one will find no evidence wherein Jesus himself puts forth any of the afore--mentioned doctrines within the Gospels. Since Jesus had no plans to start a new religion, it goes without saying that he also did not formulate any doctrines for such.

All Christian doctrines are the work of Paul, based on his desire to gain favor--and new converts--among the non Jews of his time. By incorporating pagan beliefs into the teachings of Jesus, Paul achieved phenomenal success in his ministry, but at the price of tearing down everything that true monotheism stands for. In so doing, Paul abrogated all teachings of Jesus and gave mankind a set of beliefs that have plagued his sense of reason ever since. It is here --the true nature and role of Jesus, as opposed to the Christian view of such -- where we find the fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity.

It is interesting to note that of Christianity "...those doctrines which the Qur'an affirms can be easily proven to be part of the teachings of the early disciples, whereas those doctrines which the Qur'an rejects prove to be later Church additions, inspired by the philosophies and cults of pagan Greece and Rome"¹⁶.

THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

While creeds do play an important role in Christianity, the true foundation of the faith is to be found in a collection of 66 books known as the Bible. The Bible is the guideline for the Christian; within it God's blueprint for man, built around Jesus, has been revealed.

A revealed religion is only as sound as the revelation upon which it is based. In the case of Christianity, this all-important foundation is quite weak due to tampering in its scriptures by man. The revelation is there alright, but the problem rests with what happened between the time that the divine inspiration was given and the time that these revelations were then written down.

A Closer Look At the Old Testament

The Jews saw their Temple at Jerusalem utterly destroyed in 581 B.C.E., and with it went their original copies of the Torah. Although scribes--most notably Ezra--did eventually restore that loss, these scribes worked with copies from which they made yet more copies. That changes were made is a fact that few Biblical scholars will deny: changes in style, changes in grammar, additions to various stories to embellish the tale, and even deletions for things the scribe himself didn't feel comfortable with. The work of these scribes was, in short, affected by both the times they lived in, along with their own personal feelings and beliefs.

Several examples of text alterations are as follows:

1) there are two different versions of creation found in Genesis: in chapter one, it says that creation took six days; according to in chapter two, however, God did it all in just one day (2:4). Going along with this line of thought is the fact that Adam was said to be the last thing that was created in the first version (1:27), whereas he was created first, before anything else, in the second version (2:4-9).

Along with two different versions of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, we can find two different versions of the Flood in Genesis 6, 7 and 8: we read two different versions of the number of animals Noah takes into the ark, two different versions of the agent of the Flood, and two different versions of how long the Flood lasted.

2) in Genesis 22:2, God issues the following command to Abraham: "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac...". The words "thine only son" can be taken as nothing else than an interpolation as Abraham had TWO sons at that time--Isaac AND his older brother Ishmael--not just one.

3) and if Moses is considered to be the author of the book of Deuteronomy, how is it possible that he could write the account of his own death as is found in Deuteronomy 34?

There is also the matter of how God is depicted in the Old Testament as a rather stern and savage being:

1) in Numbers 21:5,6 when God sent poisonous snakes among the Jews, with the result that many people were bitten and died, simply because they complained about their food.

2) in Deuteronomy 7:2 when God tells the Jews that they are to kill every one of the people they capture in battle--they are to show no mercy.

3) in II Samuel 24:1-7 when 70,000 Jews die from a plague sent by God because He was not pleased with a census of the people taken by David.

In addition to these odd depictions of God, there are numerous examples of defamation and degradation of various prophets of God:

1) Lot's daughters get him drunk in order to seduce him in Genesis 19:30-38.

2) David is said to be an adulterer in II Samuel 11:4,5.

3) Solomon is said to be an idol worshipper in II Kings 11:9,10.

Yes, it is necessary for us to realize that these early prophets were human beings in all respects, but saying such degrading things about them, as in the afore-mentioned examples, is going a bit TOO far.

This is not all. The books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles recount many of the same events that took place in early Jewish history, but also contain a fair number of contradictions between them in their treatment of said events. The book of Isaiah, a favorite "prophecy" book for the Christians, holds the distinction of having the most glaring example of corruption in the Old Testament, that of outright plagiarism: look at Isaiah 37, which is nearly an exact copy of an earlier effort by a Biblical author to be found in II Kings 19.

These are just a few of the many examples that can be found within the pages of the Old Testament to substantiate a charge that text has been tampered with. It would be hard to think otherwise, given the numerous examples that attest to such, not to mention the fact that no original manuscripts of the Old Testament are in existence.

A Closer Look At the New Testament

While the Old Testament is of utmost importance to the Jews, it does not hold such a prominent place for the Christians, who see it mainly as a collection of prophetic testimony for the coming of Jesus. Its commands and teachings hold no real validity for them anymore.

Their affections are reserved for the New Testament.

These twenty-seven books consist primarily of writings by Paul; the books--including the four Gospels--which he did not write do, however, support ideas that he introduced. In essence, it is pretty much Paul's "show" all the way.

Having taken a close look at both the Bible and the Qur'an, Dr. Maurice Bucaille says that "...a complete reading of the Gospels is likely to disturb Christians profoundly"¹⁷. He makes such a statement because, according to his studies, the contradictions, improbabilities, inconsistencies and textual distortion "...add up to the fact that the Gospels contain chapters and passages that are the sole product of human imagination"¹⁸.

Several examples of contradictions in the Gospels are:

1) Matthew's gospel contains a genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:7) which traces him from Abraham on down through Solomon, a son of David, whereas the genealogy found in the gospel of Luke (3:31) traces Jesus from Adam through Nathan, a completely different son of David. Even a cursory study will show names present in Matthew's account that do not match up to those in Luke, and vice versa.

A point to note here is that to include ANY sort of a male genealogy of Jesus through Joseph is somewhat of an oddity, being that Jesus did not have a biological father. A more proper genealogy would have to be that of his mother, Mary--not of Joseph.

2) the gospel of John is at odds with the other three gospels on nearly EVERY facet of Jesus' life and ministry such as where he was born and grew up, his baptism, and even the places and the length of his ministry. It is said, in fact, that 92% of the material in John is not even covered in the other three gospels¹⁹.

One of the more interesting differences between the Gospel of John and that of the other three is that John says absolutely nothing about the institution of Holy Communion. During John's account of the Last Supper, found in chapters 13-17, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and then gives them a long (and now considered rather controversial) speech about the coming of a Comforter after him, There is not even a passing mention in these chapters to the consecration of the bread and wine which is a mainstay in Christianity today.

3) Neither Matthew nor John speak of Jesus' ascension.

While Luke speaks of it in both his gospel and in the other book he wrote entitled the Acts of the Apostles, the time and place differs in both accounts. Mark also talks about the ascension, but Biblical scholars now agree that the entire record of this event as reported in the gospel of Mark is "not authentic" (see later section on versions of the Bible).

In the manner of "odd teachings", we look to the Christian doctrine of atonement, which is based on the principle that Jesus was a perfect being in all respects. One can only wonder how, in light of that, the Christians justify various references in the Gospels to Jesus as a not so-perfect person, some of which are as follows:

1) in Matthew 16:23, Jesus calls Peter "Satan" and a "dangerous trap" when Peter tries to protect him.

- 2) in Mark 11, Jesus curses a fig tree simply because it did not have fruit out-of-season when he happened to be hungry and came across it.
- 3) in John 2: 1-4, Jesus is quite disrespectful of his mother.

In Matthew 28:19, Jesus tells his disciples to go out and baptize in the name "of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost". That these nine words were most likely a later addition to the text can be seen by simply reading the letters of Paul: he says therein that baptism in the early church was done in the name of Jesus alone.

It is interesting to note that in Mark 16:15, Jesus says:

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Mark accounts the same event in 16:15 as Matthew does in 28: 19; exactly where did those extra words come from that we find in Matthew's account?

Jesus In the Gospels

As mentioned earlier, the New Testament--three Gospels in particular--hold a special place for the Christians. They look to these four books for guidance, and with good reason: the Gospels were written FOR Christians BY Christians. In the four gospels, the historical Jesus has been set aside in favor of a "christianized" Jesus.

The authors of the gospels themselves are still in question. Although not exactly sure who wrote them, most Biblical scholars are in agreement that Matthew and Mark were not the authors of the gospels that bear their names.

The Gospel according to Luke is thought to have been written by a Gentile friend of Paul's who never even met Jesus; it is part one of his account of early Christianity that also includes the book of Acts. While many Christians say that the Gospel of John was written by a disciple of Jesus who had this name, Biblical scholars now question this in light of the fact that this book was written around 100 C.E., and John, the disciple of Jesus, was martyred 70 C.E.-- over 30 years earlier.

In accepting the theory that men other than the disciples of Jesus wrote the four gospels, it must also be accepted that these authors were probably not eye-or even ear-witnesses to many-- if not all--of the events they wrote of. Even if one wishes to cling to the idea that Jesus' disciples did have a hand in the writing of the gospels, we know that they were not witnesses to the events that took place once Jesus was taken by the soldiers from the Garden of Gethsemane because we read "...then all the disciples forsook him and fled..." in both Matthew 26:56 and in Mark 14:50. In short, much of what we find in the gospels is based on hearsay-- not the writings of men who actually witnessed said events.

Another point to take into consideration regarding the gospels is that none of them were written during the time of Jesus, since no record was kept of his activities during his lifetime. In fact, nearly forty years elapsed between the time when Jesus left the earth and the first gospel made its appearance. When the Gospel of Mark did finally come out, Paul had already been preaching for nearly twenty years; he had even written his epistle to the Romans, which is the one in which he laid out all his doctrines for Christianity. In this light, we can see that the teachings of Paul undoubtedly influenced the writers of the Gospels to a great degree.

The gospels were all written between 70 C.E. and 100 C.E., with Mark coming first; it was followed by Matthew, Luke, and the John. The first three gospels follow pretty much the same general outline; in fact, a cursory examination will show that the authors of both Matthew and

Luke borrowed rather heavily from Mark when writing their respective gospels. This is why these three appear to tell "Synoptic" gospels.

The Gospel of John is completely different from the other three, however, and is one which still incites controversy simply because its author was more concerned with the significance of Jesus for the Christian faith than of what Jesus actually said or did.

We can reasonably conclude, therefore, that due to the time factor, writing from hearsay, and the influence of Paul, the picture of Jesus which is presented to us in the gospels is not that of the historical Jesus; instead, these authors wrote of a legendary Jesus, using a theological point-of-view that "christianized" the truth of what took place. The authors were committed to Christian beliefs, and they wrote with that view in mind.

The result is that the four gospels contain more myth than they do fact. The Divine Message of Jesus is all but lost under a mass of what men hoped and wanted Jesus to say and do rather than what actually took place.

Copies of Copies

All early copies of the Bible were just that: copies. These copies were made entirely by hand (the first printed copy of the Bible did not come along until the thirteenth century---the so-called "Gutenberg" Bible); original manuscripts were discarded early off in favor of newer copies and also because they had simply become worn out through use. These newer copies, in turn, then served as the basis for even more copies.

Each copy made, however, meant that there more chances for changes--whether inadvertant or even deliberate--to creep into the text. As with the Old Testament, the text of the New Testament also suffered from imaginative editing, unintentional modifications and deliberate manipulation of the text on the part of its scribes.

It must be pointed out that there was no way to go back and check on authenticity of the scribes' work, as there are no original manuscripts of either the Old or New Testament of the Bible still in existence. The oldest existing copies of the old Testament date back to the 7th or the 8th centuries C.E., when a standardized text was produced from all the various manuscripts--themselves copies of copies--that were floating around at the time. As for the New Testament, no original manuscripts of it exist, either--we have only copies, the earliest of which dates to the fourth century, the time when the "canonical", or official, scripture was set by the Church. This lack of original manuscripts eliminated the opportunity for anyone to check on accuracy; changes that crept into the Biblical text stayed in the Biblical text.

A Case of Incompleteness

The early Christian churches did not have any official set of Holy Scriptures. Some churches had one set of books, others had another. Still others were happy with only one of the gospels, believing as they did that all told pretty much the same story. There were even books in circulation that one cannot find in most Bibles of today--fifteen extra ones from the Old Testament, and sixteen from the New Testament.

Due to this lack of organization in the Church regarding its Holy Scriptures, the bishops gathered together to set official Church policy on the matter of the trinity at the Council of Nicea in 325 C.E. also took it upon themselves to set up an official "Canon of Scriptures" for the Church.

They gathered everything together that was currently in circulation and made a decision once and for all on what would comprise Christendom's sacred Scriptures. In the end, sixty-six books were chosen--39 for the Old Testament, and 27 for the New.

Seven of the fifteen extra Old Testament books were retained by the Catholic Church, but even these were dropped by the Protestants during the Reformation movement of the sixteenth century. NONE of the extra sixteen books of the New Testament, however, were made part of the official Canon of Scripture.

Now called the " Apocrypha" --a Greek word that means "hidden"--these extra books that were once part of the Bible were simply discarded by Church leaders because they were "at variance" with accepted Church doctrine: "the authors of these Apocryphal books were certainly pious and sincere laborers..and yet when you read what they have written, you will soon perceive that their words are...far below the dignity and sublime power of the Scriptures..."²⁰

Interestingly enough, references to some of these hidden books can even be found in the official Bible of today such as "The Book of the wars of Jehovah", mentioned in Numbers 21:14, and "The Book of Jashar", which is mentioned in Joshua 10:13.

Thus, the Bible of today, besides being a victim of text-tampering, cannot even be considered as complete.

How is it possible that the Words of God can be removed and discarded at the whim of man??

The Problem of Translation

The Italians have an interesting adage which says that "translators are liars". This is not so much a vicious accusation as it is an acute observation. Taking something written in one language and trying to put it into another is problematic because one always encounters words in one language that simply have no equivalent in the other. Substitutions must be made, and the meaning of phrases change as a result.

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew, but was translated during the third century B. C. E. into Greek for the Jews who lived outside of Palestine (and who spoke Greek rather than Hebrew on a regular basis). Called "Septuagint", this version was widely used even by the early Christians.

The New Testament was written in Greek; since Jesus himself spoke Aramaic, however, this means that his words were subsequently translated and the possibility for error brought into play.

The Septuagint was joined up with the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament in the fourth century; these manuscripts of the complete Bible are now known as the "Codex Sinaiticus" and the "Codex Vaticanus", and are the earliest manuscripts in existence today. Nothing earlier has survived.

During the fourth century, the Bible was translated into Latin by St. Jerome, and this remained the language of the Bible until the early sixteenth century when men of the Reformation like John Wycliffe, William Tyndale and Martin Luther translated the Bible into the languages of the people--an act which was strictly forbidden and for which Tyndale paid with his life. They did this because of a desire to put the Bible into the hands of the people who, up until this time, were not allowed access to their own Scriptures.

Other translations soon made their appearance; near the end of the sixteenth century, the many and varied versions of the Bible currently in circulation had become the cause of so many arguments that King James I of England appointed a committee of fifty-four scholars to produce an "authoritative" version. These men studied all the known translations in existence at the time and, in 1611, produced the King James Version of the Bible--which became the standard among Christians for hundreds of years.

The Modern Problem: New Versions

Where the mischief associated with translations pretty much ended in 1611 with the publication of the King James Version of the Bible, the problem of revision--"updating" or "modernizing" the Bible--has now taken over.

The extent of this new form of mischief can be seen as follows: in 1952, an article entitled "The Truth About the Bible" appeared in Look magazine. This article said that there were at least 20,000 errors in the New Testament alone. Jehovah's Witnesses addressed this issue in the September, 1957 issue of their Awake magazine, making a rather unique statement in the process: "...translators made errors in translation {of the Bible} that have been corrected by modern scholars..."²¹. And what fun these modern scholars have had in so doing!!

In the nineteenth century, the Christians decided to modernize the language of the King James Version. Their effort, called the American Standard Version, was published in 1901. The Christians who worked on this version, however, not only updated the language--they made changes to the text itself:

1) Admitting to an interpolation--the fact that such was not found in the early Greek manuscripts of the Bible that were still in existence--the words "Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost", found in I John 5:8 of the King James Version were changed by the scholars to read "the Spirit, and the water and the blood".

2) the entire verse found in Matthew 17:21 that deals with spiritual advancement by prayer and fasting was removed from the American Standard Version, and the word "fasting" deleted from a similar verse found in Mark 9:29.

The explanation for this, found in a footnote, reads "many authorities, some ancient, insert ver. 21".

3) Admitting to yet another case of interpolation, John 7:53 and John 8:1-11 are bracketed off with yet another note that these "are not found in the most ancient manuscripts".

A number of years later, Church people again got together and decided to update the American Standard Version. The result of their efforts, the Revised Standard Version, was released in 1952.

In the preface to this Version, we read the following: "...the King James Version has grave defects...these defects are so many and so serious as to call for revision..."

In the Revised Standard Version, we find that the verses in the gospel of Mark pertaining to the ascension of Jesus (Mark 16:9-20) have been removed because it was said, once again, that these particular verses are not to be found in the "most ancient" manuscripts.

In 1989, the New Revised Standard Version was published--an "update" of the Revised Standard Edition of 1952--and the verses dealing with the ascension of Jesus in Mark chapter 16 reappear here. Since many Christians didn't take well to the "undermining" of a basic belief by the editors of the Revised Standard Version, the verses were put back in this version.

In summation, through copying over the years, translations and various new "versions", what is known as the Bible is now more the writings of man than of revelations from God.

Taking the Matter To the Christians

Back in the fourth century, St Augustine himself noticed problems in Biblical text. Addressing the matter in his letter No. 82, he said that deficient understanding was most likely the cause; it was inconceivable to him that human interference with Biblical text could be at the heart of the matter.

Critical studies made of the Scriptures, contrary to what many think, are quite recent. The Bible was accepted "as is" for hundreds of years. It was considered a sin to level even the slightest criticism at it--and the Church successfully squashed any attempts at such.

The first breakthrough in this aspect came in 1678 when Richard Simon published his book entitled *Critical History of the Old Testament*. It caused a scandal, but it also served to open the way for others to come forth in the 18th and 19th centuries with critical studies of the Old Testament. Yielding to all of the evidence being brought forth, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) made an interesting statement on the matter by saying that "...the Books of the Old Testaments...contain material which is imperfect and obsolete..."²².

The New Testament has also come under fire. Even though the Second Vatican Council maintains that the Gospels "are historically authentic" and that they "faithfully transmit" what Jesus "actually did and taught during his life among men",²³ other scholars have come forth with statements that are quite the opposite of the Vatican's position:--in his book *The Call of the Minaret*, Dr. Kenneth Cragg says that there is "condensation and editing" in the New Testament; the Gospels have "come through the mind of the Church behind the authors" , and that they "represent experience and history"²⁴.

--Father Kannengiesser, a professor at the Catholic Institute in Paris, warned in his book *Faith in Resurrection*, *Resurrection in Faith* that one "should not take literally" the facts reported about Jesus in the Gospels--a statement also made by Father Roguet of Paris in his book *Initiation to the Gospels*.

--Carl Andrey, professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Ball State University in Indiana says that the four gospels "...were written by enthusiasts of the early Christian movement" and that "...they give us only one side of the story and they are in great degree the products of the assumptions of their authors" ²⁵,

--Finally, there is the statement by Dr. W. Graham Scroggie of the prestigious Moody Bible Institute, who says "Yes, the Bible is human...those books have passed through the minds of men, are written in the language of men, were penned by the hands of men, and bear in their style the

characteristics of men. 26.

This is the position of the Biblical scholars; what, however, does the "ordinary" Christian have to say about this?

Many don't even get to this point because the writers of introductory notes and commentaries in the Bibles of today use clever literary tactics that are designed specifically to stave off questions a Christian may have regarding inconsistencies within the Bible. Among other things, these writers:

- 1) present as fact what is still considered as uncertain, and
- 2) cover up problems in the text with apologetics--a literary defense mechanism,--that serve to draw the reader's attention to something other than the text in question.

The lengths to which these commentators go is a pretty good clue as to the uneasiness they experience regarding Biblical errors.

If pressed on the matter of explaining errors in the Bible, the typical Christian reaction is one of hostility. I presented a rough draft of my findings on Biblical corruption to a Christian missionary who came back to me a short time later, accusing me of making an "attack" upon the Bible. He went on to say that "...the Bible has been attacked for centuries, but it still stands. It has withstood analyzing from without and within"²⁷.

I wonder how one can cling to such an attitude in the face of fully verifiable examples, and I would be interested in seeing what passes for "analyzing" with him. Perhaps it runs along the line of what is found in a "masterpiece" of Christian apologetics entitled *Is the Bible Reliable?* In this book, author Bjurg Horstad says that God "moved" the writers of the Scriptures "...to write the imperfections that cling to language", and that we should "...leave it to the Lord to adopt as many styles and even human infirmities as He pleases..."²⁸.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have put out an entire book, entitled *The Bible: God's Word or Man's?*, that addresses problems in the Bible. In this book, they address this matter in yet another unique fashion by saying that, while there are some "apparent inconsistencies" in the Bible that "are difficult to reconcile", we should not assume that these are definite contradictions; often it is "...merely a case of lack of complete information"²⁹.

I obtained a copy of the Jehovah's Witnesses translation of the Bible, *The New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, and asked a high-ranking member from a local Hall how they explain the curious entry for Matthew 17:21, which reads "21----". There is no verse: only the number, a long line and a space. The man, obviously flustered after he looked it up, said he would "get back" to me; I have yet to hear from him on the matter.

In short, Christians don't take kindly to the charge that their Scriptures have been corrupted, and with good reason; after all, they say, "If the foundation becomes shaky and uncertain, what have we then to stand on in the days of afflictions? 30.

Not only this, but there is the "little matter" of what is said regarding the alteration of Holy Scriptures in the Holy Scriptures themselves:

"...if any man shall add to these things (or delete) God shall add unto him the plagues written in this Book" (Rev. 22:15,19).

The evidence is there, however, plain and simple for all to see: while God may have inspired the men who wrote the books of the Bible, there is no doubt that human interference HAS come into play. And once again, a most important question must be asked of a Christian: how is it possible that the Word of God can be altered, removed and even discarded at the whim of man??

The Islamic Standpoint

The whole matter of man tampering with God's revelations is the reason why the Qur'an was given to Prophet Muhammad: the Final Revelation to the Last of God's Messengers.

The Qur'an talks about this tampering with previous Divine Revelations in a number of verses, such as:

"...the transgressors changed the word from that which had been given them..." (2:59)

"...a party of them heard the Word of God and perverted it knowingly after they understood it." (2:75)

"There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues as they read so that you would think it is a part of the Book But it is no part of the Book, and they say, 'That is from God', but it is not..." (3:75)

These verses also point up to another fact that, while Muslims are told to believe in revelations that came before the Qur'an, belief in these books--that of the Torah, the Psalms and the Gospel--refers to belief in the ORIGINAL revelations from God; certainly not in what we find in the Bibles of today, nor even of the Jewish and Christian scriptures that existed in the time of Prophet Muhammad.

The Muslim belief is that the Qur'an came forth from God to correct all those inadvertent and deliberate alterations to His earlier revelations. God made it quite clear that this, His Final Revelation, would not suffer the fate of previous work:

"We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it from corruption." (15:9)

On this, the Qur'an stands firm. It has remained unchanged since the time it was revealed to Prophet Muhammad, and there are original manuscripts still in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, is a copy of the Qur'an from the 7th century: it is the earliest copy known in existence, and was handwritten on gazelle skin only a few years after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Another 7th century copy, this one from the time of Caliph Uthman, is in the Topkapi Museum in Istanbul, Turkey. If one were to take an Arabic Qur'an from today and compare the text in it with the text in one of these 7th century Qur'ans, he would find no discrepancies.

The Arabic text has not been altered in any way despite the passage of over 1400 years. As such, there can be no better proof than this for the Qur'anic injunction that God has kept His promise to guard this, His Final Revelation.

As for man altering Divine Revelations, the Qur'an says the following:

"And recite and teach what has been revealed to thee in the Book of the Lord: none can change His Words, and none wilt thou find as a refuge other than Him". (18:27)

PURE MONOTHEISM IS RESTORED

When the Jews continued to reject Jesus despite the fact that he was one of them, and despite the scope of his work, he told them that the covenant God had made with them was to be rescinded in the face of their stubbornness and hard-headedness:

"Therefore I say unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruit thereof" (Matthew 21:43)

The followers of Jesus eagerly latched onto this, seeing themselves as the new "Chosen People" of God.

Christianity Continues To Digress From the Straight Path

By the fourth century, however, Christianity was well established as a religion: doctrines were formalized, as was a Canon of Scripture.

As seen earlier, the true teachings of Jesus were all but forgotten by Christians in favor of the teachings by Paul of Tarsus. Pagan beliefs and traditions were brought into Christianity by Paul in order to win converts among the pagan Gentiles of his time; all Christian doctrines have their roots in paganism. As more and more pagans converted to Christianity, this meant that more and more pagan beliefs found their way into Christianity.

Pagan holidays were "made over" into Christian holidays:

the birthday of Mithras on December 25 became the birthday of Jesus (with the help of pagan rituals from the Roman festival of Saturnalia thrown in for good measure);

the festival for the dead became All Saints' Day; the day set aside to celebrate the resurrection of the god Attis became the day set aside to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus (with various pagan fertility rites thrown in for good measure here, too).

The Jewish Sabbath, set by God on the seventh day of the week in the Mosaic Law, was changed by Christianity to the first day of the week. Sunday was figured to be the day in which Jesus rose from the dead, but it also must be kept in mind that, first and foremost, Sunday was the Mithraic "Day of the Conquering Sun".

Christian ideas on sexuality and marriage were heavily influenced by pagan traditions found in Neoplatonism, Stoicism and Gnosticism. All these religions thought sex to be an evil force, with monasticism and chastity being virtues to strive for; Christianity heartily embraced such ideas, thus putting mankind and the family unit in a unnatural state that had never been decreed by God.

Pagan rituals and beliefs were annoying to early Christian missionaries, as these traditions were simply too entrenched for dislodgement by any means. In 598 C. E., Pope Gregory the Great came to the aid of the missionaries by issuing a bull which said that the priests should allow the people to continue using old customs and beliefs, but that such should be "steered" towards "the praise" of God.

Therefore, the people continued their belief in sorcery, witchcraft, hobgoblins, black magic, etc., as the priests told them that such delusions were "manifestations" of Satan.

Saints and "holy relics" were also encouraged, as such were believed to have power to drive away the devil.

Christianity, with its heavy infusion of pagan beliefs and traditions, along with its having Jesus--rather than God--as the focus of faith, was a mess, plain and simple.

The Need For Another Messenger

The Jews were lost in their books of Law; the Christians were lost in their veneration of a human prophet. God decided to give mankind one more try in a last effort to establish pure monotheism on earth.

The Prophet Abraham, as noted in chapter one, had two sons; in addition to Isaac, there was Ishmael, the elder to the two. When God made His covenant with Abraham concerning Isaac, He also had some words to say of Ishmael:

"And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation." (Genesis 17:20)

The Covenant with Ismael Is Fulfilled

Ishmael and his mother settled in Arabia where they lived and developed, over the years, into that great nation which had been foretold by God. In 610 C.E., God's promise of blessing his progeny was fulfilled when a descendant of Ishmael, an upstanding 40-year-old merchant named Muhammad, was called by God to bring His Word to all mankind.

The covenant God had made with Abraham was now complete, and the establishment of pure monotheism--Islam, or submission to the One God--was on its way to becoming a reality at last.

That blessing was indeed one of great power as Prophet Muhammad saw the firm establishment of Islam take place during his lifetime, and he brought the Words of God to his people in a form that has remained unchanged to this very day.

The foundations of Islam are the foundations of true monotheism: worship of God and God alone, and obedience to His Law. Pure monotheism was once again restored.

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Christians seem to have an incredible ego, especially when it comes to other religions. Almost without exception, a Christian believes that his is the only true religion. Judaism have come along beforehand, but to the Christian, it was simply a preparation for the faith of Christianity.

To his way of thinking, God made the Jews His Chosen people. This designation meant that the Jews were set aside by God, and it was to them, and them only, He sent His revelations and prophets. Therefore, the Christian feels he can only believe in Israelite prophets, and all others are impostors.

Islam presents another matter altogether for the Christian. Almost as soon as Islam burst out of Arabia following the death of Prophet Muhammad, the Christians began to carry on about the fact that a man from Arabia actually had the audacity to go around claiming he was a Messwenger from God.

Even though Islam emphatically stated that it would be a denial of universal providence to God by saying that He would raise prophets in only one nation, the Christians still would not listen. Prophet Muhammad was not a Jew, therefore, in their eyes, he was a false prophet bearing false witness from a false god.

At first, the Christians reaction to Islam was simply that of low grumblings. When the Fatimid caliph Hakim destroyed the Christians shrines In Jerusalem in 1010, however, the grumbles developed into a roar. The Christians in Europe were already living in fear of a Muslim invasion, and this was the last straw. When Pope Urban 11 called for a Crusade in 1095 to liberate the Holy Land from the infidel, the hate campaign against Islam took off like a rocket, coming into its heyday in the twelfth century.

In their verbal assaults upon Islam, many vile and shameful things were foisted off by the so-called "learned people" of that time upon the people at large. Prophet Muhammad was considered to be the Anti-Christ; a false prophet; a nationalistic charlatan a bombastic egotist; a tyrant; and a sensualist, among other things.

The Qur'an was said to be a collection of harangues, insane drivel, and "toilsome reading that is wearisome, confused jumble". In the eyes of the Mediveal Christians, the Qur'an could not possibly be the Word of God, since Muhammad was a false prophet, so it was said to be a forgery; they went on to say that it was nothing more than the result of epileptic seizures on the part of Muhammad which he then proceeded to pass off as divine revelation.

Islam, the religion, was seen as nothing more than an aberration--a heresy--of Christianity; it was viewed as the "religion of the sword", and was insultingly termed "Mohammedanism". Muslims themselves did not escape the wrath of the Medieval Christians, who called them infidels, pagans, Saracens and Mohammedans.

Unable to accept Islam, the Christians became downright hostile. In their verbal assaults, the Church leaders made full use of techniques such as bias ands distortion, mispresentation, inventing details in order to attack them, etc. Time has not made things better, unfortunately; the time of the Crusades is long gone, but Christians still cannot accept Islam. For many modern Christians, however, a new approach is being taken to what they consider "the menace" of Islam.

The Missionary Efforts

The violence against the Muslims that marked the Crusades was also coupled with a missionary effort on the part of the Christians in order "to return the pagans to the Lord". These missionary efforts, however, met with very little success, despite all the time and money that has been spent over the many hundreds of years that it has been going on.

First efforts at converting Muslims utilized the same polemic that was used on the Christians themselves, and the Muslims, naturally, refused to listen to such talk. Time has shown the Christians that insults do not gain interest, so the modern Christian missionary effort to the Muslims has taken a whole new direction, in that the Christians are now "reaching out to Muslims with love".

In the United States, an organization called "Center for Ministry To Muslims" has put out quite an array of material aimed at presenting the message of Christianity to a Muslim. Polemics are not

used, but methods are still unsavory as distortions, mis-translations and even fabrications are being used. The truth of Christianity is covered up under a sugary coating, and CMM targets those Muslims who are alone in this country, without the spiritual and moral support of family and friends.

One of the more interesting efforts on the part of the folks at CMM is a magazine entitled "Noor Ul Haq", or "Light of Truth". Printed in English and Arabic, its format gives all the appearance of it being an Islamic publication, yet it is really a Christian missionary magazine aimed at reaching Muslims. It makes use of Islamic terminology and Quranic revelations, but subtleness is the key here, as these things are distorted and interpreted out-of-context in order to give the impression to a Muslim that they back up Christian teachings. For a Muslim with limited knowledge, this sort of thing can lead to a good deal of confusion.

CMM is small-time, however, in the face of the Zwemer Institute For Muslim Studies. This California-based institution, which takes its name from a Dutch Reformed missionary who spent approximately fifty years in the early part of this century ministering to Muslims in the Middle East, trains Christians in the technique of ministering to Muslims. The students at this institute study Arabic, Islamic history, Islamic culture, and the state of Islamic faith and practice. These people really have their act together, and are not, by any means, ignorant when it comes to Islam. Biased, yes; ignorant, no.

This is a very thorough effort: Student ministers and missionaries enrolled at the Institute take all sorts of regular classes on Islam; in addition to study carried out at the Institute itself, nine-hour seminars on Islam are available for interested church groups, and the Institute has a publishing center that churns out all manner of flyers, newsletters, brochures, pamphlets, books, and even films and videotapes.

It is all quite impressive for the Christian, but dangerous for the Muslim. The Christian missionaries who come out of this place no longer attempt to show that Islam is a "mass of errors". They now try to show that Islam contains "fragments of disjointed truths", and from there, they try to convince a Muslim that these fragments of truth are made whole in Christianity. Verbal assaults have now been set aside in favor of trying to establish doubt in the mind of a Muslim regarding his beliefs. The Christians hope that this doubt will lead to dissatisfaction, which will then lead to a switch from Islam to Christianity.

The Christian missionaries look with great interest at the tensions within the Muslim world today. The Zwemer Institute tells its people:

"Such displacement of peoples and disruption of normal lives has shaken old traditions and brought new openness among many Muslims to hear the good news of Jesus Christ...the myth of an impregnable Islam is no longer valid."³¹ The figures given by the Zwemer Institute for converts are no doubt "enhanced"--after all, small numbers won't keep the students and the money coming in--but the fact does remain that this Christian "tree" IS bearing fruit.

Muslims are being enticed to leave Islam for Christianity.

As Islam continues to grow, organizations like CMM and the Zwemer Institute are getting stronger and more adept themselves at what they do. No longer can the Muslim sit back and ignore this; it will come knocking on his door sooner or later, and he must be prepared. He must be strong in his faith, and he must know about "the other guy" in order to stand up to it.

The Anti-Hate Campaign

Although organizations such as CMM and the Zwemer Institute are chugging along quite nicely with their "reach out to Muslims with love" campaign, in the background lurks the other method Christians use even frequently to deal with Islam; it is the one that began during the time of the Crusades, and one which never fully died out. Dubbed "the Crusades Mentality", these verbal assaults on Islam are simply a continuation of activities that began over 900 years ago when Pope Urban II whipped up the crowds at Clermont regarding the infidels in the East.

Evidence that this hate campaign still continues to rear its ugly head can be seen in bookstores--particularly the Christian ones--and on the shelves of public libraries.

So-called "orientalists" in the nineteenth and twentieth century have written some pretty disgusting things on the Islamic world: examples can be found in Durant's "Story of Civilization", Gibbons' "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire", Gunther's "Inside Asia", H.G. Wells' "The Outline of History" --all of which are considered to be "classics" in the world of history. Bias and hostility shine through in all cases, and one can only wonder why these men would choose, as their life's work, to study a region of the world for which they feel so much hatred. Even Albert Hourani's recent and celebrated "A History of the Arab Peoples" is replete with bias and hostility.

But the anti-hate material really comes its own in the hands of the fundamentalist Christians: take the book "Islam Revealed", written by an Arab Christian in 1988. On its back cover, it promises to give its readers "an eye opening look at the deadly beliefs of every one in five people on earth".

American author Robert Morey, an "internationally acclaimed scholar" in the field of comparative religions--and a fundamentalist Christian to boot--recently came out with a book entitled "Islam Unveiled: The True Desert Storm" (1991) which claims, on its back cover, to "prove" that all the rituals and beliefs of Islam can be traced to pre-Islamic pagan origins. Dr. Morey also has a radio show in which he regularly blasts Islam; in a recent show, he actually came out and said:

"...if Muhammad were alive today, he most likely would be diagnosed as a psychotic serial-killer massmurderer and child-molester. " Material such as this, just a representation of the considerable volume of hate material being produced today, is despicable. It merely serves to strengthen and expand the stereotypes of Islam held by Christians, and to increase the levels of distrust and hostility between members of the two faiths. How is it possible to approach one another on a friendly basis when garbage like this is permeating one's mind?

As Islam continues to grow and spread, these attacks will increase. The Christians are afraid, and this is one way they have chosen to deal with that fear. It is a method that has been around for hundreds of years, and they are most comfortable with it. Rather than try to open the doors of dialogue, they lash out in vitriolic fury.

Portrayal In Other Forms of Media

Besides the books, pamphlets, radio shows, etc., that are aimed directly at Islam, there are the more subtle attacks made by Christians through main-stream works of fiction and non-fiction, along with television and movie portrayals of Islam and Muslims as a seething mass of terrorism and terrorists. Books include such works as "The Source" by James Mitchner and the recent "The Sum of All Fears" by Tom Clancy; then there are the stereo-typing titles such as "Jihad", "The Holy Sword", and "Sacred Rage". One quite disturbing novel, "Holy of Holies", tells the story of how several Frenchmen, with Soviet backing and Israeli support, level the Grand Mosque during hajj. And of course, forget Salman Rushdie's infamous novel "The Satanic Verses"; he has said time and time again that insulting Islam was not his purpose, but the names and places he has used in his book are just too coincidental to believe what he says.

Attacks made through television are interesting. In the summer of 1991, for instance, a series of debates were held between two Muslims and two Christians on matters of difference between the two religions. The six debates were televised on a Christian gospel show over several weeks, and the Muslims did a very good job of representing their faith, even in the light of outright hostility

from all sides, including the moderator, the two Christian debaters, and even the predominately Christian audience.

The people from the television show, however, managed to get "the last laugh". first of all, they "edited" the broadcast tapes in order to cast the Muslims in a particularly bad light, and secondary, they issued a booklet in conjunction with the debate series for home viewers that was entitled "The Facts On Islam". A more appropriate title for the booklet would have been "The Fallacies of Islam", since one finds very little truth therein, but a lot of distortion, misrepresentation and outright lies. As for films, there is "Black Sunday", where Palestinian "Terrorists" plot to annihilate all those attending the Superbowl (annual professional football championship game), along with the movie "Not Without My Daughter", which paints a truly terrible picture of relationships within Muslim families.

Stereotypes are fostered and continued by things such as this; as long as such continues, Islam will have a difficult time being seen in anything but an unfavorable light.

As Muslim, we must be strong when it comes to attacks such as this upon our faith--be it by "methods of love", or outright venom. God tells us in the Qur'an:

"Ye Shall certainly be tried and tested in your possessions and in yourselves; and ye shall certainly hear much that will grieve you, from those who received the Book before you and from those who worship partners besides Allah. But if ye perseveres patiently, and guard against evil, --then that indeed is a matter of great resolution." (3:186)

DENOMINATIONS OF CHRISTIANITY

Christianity has grown into a major force in the world of today. Despite the fact, however, that they lay claim to the largest number of adherents in the world, Christianity is in itself a mass of various denominations, each differing from the other in some manner.

While Islam does have the two divisions of Sunni and Shia, this divisions is political-- not religious. In Christianity, however, the divisions come along religious lines. While all share belief in God---and let's not forget Jesus--things differ from there.

Although the exact number is not known, I am aware of close to fifty different denominations within Christianity, ranging from the Amish, who have chosen to withdraw from the world, setting aside modern conveniences such as electricity and automobiles, to the Unitarians who most Christians don't even consider Christians because they do not believe in either the concept of Jesus being the son of God or the trinity.

The Roman Catholics, the biggest denomination of Christianity in the world today, venerate saints and the mother of Jesus; the "host" during their communion service is said to become the actual body of Christ, the wine his actual blood, when blessed by the priest.

Unwilling to content with a vow of celibacy, the Orthodox Church split from Rome during the Middle Ages, and now reigns supreme in the East. They maintain the ornateness of Catholicism, but have taken different Holy days for themselves, and swear allegiance to a different "Holy Father" than do the Roman Catholics.

In 1517, the Protestant Christians came into being, which was, in effect, a revolt certain practices within the Catholic Church. For instance:

- 1) The Catholics go for ornate and elaborate churches and church services; the Protestants kept it nice and simple.
- 2) The Catholic scriptures contain a number of books from the Apocrypha; the Protestants steer clear of every one of these "hidden books".
- 3) The Cathloics have statues in their churches, statues in their homes, statues in their cars, bury statues in their front lawns when they put their homes up for sale, and have the figure of a crucified

Jesus adorning their crosses. The Protestants scream "idol worship" to this and many don't even have a plain cross as adornment inside their churches.

Within the Protestant branch of Christianity has developed a tremendous variety of denominations and associated beliefs.

The Lutherans follow the teachings of Martin Luther; the folks in the Reformed churches didn't think he was strict enough, however, so they follow the teachings of John Calvin.

The Baptists, who believe that adults--not children--should be baptized, were mercilessly persecuted by both Catholics and Protestants during the Middle Ages, but have now grown to a substantial denomination within Christianity.

The Catholics never took kindly to the Protestant movement, and it was a quest for religious freedom that drove Europeans out of their homelands and over to the New world. When the Puritans settled in America during the seventeenth century, a whole new group of denominations came into being in the New World in the years to come.

The Shakers believed in strict celibacy; it is no wonder that they no longer exist.

The Pentecostals claim to "speak in tongues"—their church services are said to be quite interesting. They also believe the Bible to be infallible--that is, totally without error. From their ranks we have come to know some "memorable" persons such as Jimmy Swaggert, along with Jim and Tammy Fay Bakker.

The Jehovah's Witnesses spend most of their time pouring over the Book of Revelations, dreaming of the day when everyone and everything on earth will be annihilated except for them.

The Mormons had their own prophet, one Joseph Smith, who brought them a book of scriptures they hold to be just as sacred as the Bible. Their policy of "celestial marriage"--a.k.a. polygamy--almost ended up keeping Utah from becoming a state in this country.

The Christian Scientists also have their own book of scripture besides the Bible; Mary Baker Eddy, their prophetess, told her followers that faith and science conquers all--even the sexual desire. So many different denominations with so many different practices, but all united in one cause: their faith of Christianity is "the only true faith". This fanatic allegiance to theology has been the cause of many incidents of untold violence against those of other faiths, such as the Crusades, the Inquisition, and even the Nazi Holocaust. Intolerance is a frightful thing when born from and fueled by unreasonable theology.

As for the Muslim, God tells us:

"And hold fast all together, by the Rope which Allah stretches out for you, and be not divided among yourselves..." (3:103)

We must--

"...persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and fear Allah; that ye may prosper"" (3:200)

--because

"Whoever submits his whole self to Allah, and is the doer of good, has grasped indeed the most trustworthy hand-hold: and with Allah rests the End and the Decision of all affairs" (31:22)

IN CONCLUSION

While Christianity is most definitely OF Jesus, it is most definitely not FROM Jesus. It bears no resemblance to the message brought by this Messenger from God. Instead, it has become a mass of

convoluted theology built around the persona of a human being who was later turned into a god. In his book "Basic Christianity", John Stott puts forth an interesting thought:

"Essentially Christianity is Christ. The person and work of Christ are the foundation rock upon which the Christian religion is built. If he is not who he said he was, and if he didn't do what he had said he had come to do, the whole superstructure of Christianity crumbles in ruins to the ground..."³² Prophet Muhammad, after a number of hassles with the Jews of Madinah on religious matters, said that theology is childish nonsense--the enemy of religion. Islam, as a consequence, is a simple religion that is not buried beneath a maze of vague and illogical doctrines. There is no clergy, no saints, no hierarchy, no sacraments. Theology has no place in Islam, as it is a way of life--not a bunch of words.

Judaism, while somewhat side--tracked at times in their books of commentary on the Law, do have as a fundamental tenet of faith that God is One.

Islam stands for submission to the One God, with this concept of Oneness of God being its most fundamental belief.

Christianity, on the other hand, comes right out and says that its Master is Jesus Christ. According to Fritz Ridenour, "...we submit to his authority..."³³

We once again look at Matthew 4:10, where Jesus says:

"Thou shalt not prostrate before any but the Lord, your God. And Him alone shalt thou worship."

Jesus clearly states that God Alone is the one we must worship.

Religion is not a matter of conjecture and speeches, but of fact and conduct. True religion is a matter of conduct, which is the mark of sincerity on the part of the believer.

Our Christian brothers and sisters need to take these matters to heart: not only do they not live their religion--except for Sundays--but they have lost all connection with the teachings of the man whose name forms the very basis of their faith, taking to heart pagan beliefs and traditions which they attempt to cloak in the guise of monotheism. Our Christian friends most definitely have some deep soul searching to do.

As for the Muslim, he must, first of all, remember what God said in the Qur'an:

"Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion..." (2:120)

We must then remember those last words revealed by God to Prophet Muhammad:

"...this day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion..." (5:3)

When all is said and done, we must ever keep in mind these most important words from God:

"We hurl Truth against Falsehood, and it prevails over it, and behold, falsehood vanishes. Then woe to you for what you have uttered." (21:18)

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3. Islam Revealed, p. 129.
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16. Jesus in the Qur'an, p. 14.
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32. Basic Christianity, p. 20.
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Many of us are content to go through life, accepting things "as they are"; we ignore those nagging little questions and doubts in our minds, especially in matters regarding religion.

I found myself with questions concerning the very basics of my faith that no person nor avenue of religious instruction could answer. For thirty-seven Years, I wandered about in this haze of uncertainty regarding God and the right way to pay , homage to Him until. in 1991, I discovered Islam.

I began my work some time ago by writing several small papers.

- 1) Three in One, a look at the Christian doctrine of the trinity, which was published in early 1993 by The Open School of Chicago;
- 2) a paper entitled A Closer Look at Christianity, which is a study of Christian doctrines, and .
- 3) a paper entitled A Case of Corruption, which is a study of text-tampering in the Bible. .

It is my hope that, in the following pages, the readers have an opportunity to see the point-of-view on Christianity as I have come to understand it.

Barbara A. Brown

