

"...come let us reason together." Isiah 1:16

Missionary Christianity

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APPLICATION TO ISLAM

Of course one might ask if the points raised in this article cannot be applied to Islam. So in the same order as above, let us consider Islamic doctrine and the status of the Qur'an subjected to similar arguments.

What could be identified as theology in Islam contains no contradictory mysteries for the simple reason that the Qur'an reveals God by revealing His attributes and His will. That is, descriptions of God and worship given to God are due to Him because of His position as God. There is no incarnation doctrine leading to the combination of Godly and un-Godly attributes in one individual. Islam does not ask one to believe in anything outside of reason. The resurrection of the dead, for example, is no more than today's researchers in biology have considered. Soviet scientists once reproducing an extinct species of elephant by the use of a microscopic unit of long dead gene material. A subtle point is found in the precise grammar of the Qur'an's description of God's power. We do not read: "*With God all things are possible.*" More correctly, we read instead:

"Over all things, God has power."

These things are the things He created. These things include good and evil since these words are relative descriptions. For example, the good of the vulture is good for the vulture, but evil for a man. This is the contrast in Islam between Good and Evil: beneficial versus harmful. All things originate with God including the rules which bring harm on the evildoer. So it is that the Qur'an states that God rewards, but wrong done brings harm on the doer in the settling of accounts.

The Qur'an does not present us with mysteries of faith. Instead it is a guide. Left to ourselves we could not reproduce its contents because our research is largely trial and error. The error would prove disastrous - before we accomplished the project. So while the Qur'an is beyond reasoning, it is not beyond reason - given the guidance, we can verify its truthfulness.

ORIGIN OF THE QUR'AN

Several times the Qur'an announces itself as a sufficient sign (e.g. 29:49). Although the Muslims of Muhammad's time were a persecuted minority, their opposers never answered the challenge of the Qur'an, as it says: *"And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to our servant, then produce a chapter like it. And call your witnesses or helpers besides God if you are correct."* (Qur'an 2:23).

PRESERVATION OF THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an promises its own preservation (15:9). It mentions itself by name about seventy times. The Arabic word "*Qur'an*" means "*recitation*". Reciting the Qur'an is part of a Muslim's daily prayer. In addition to careful writing of copies, there has always been this double checking of its contents. Gather any small number of sincere Muslims together and it is possible to repeat the Qur'an from their collected memories. Some centuries ago an aberrant group claimed that there was more to the Qur'an than now available. Their embarrassment has been the fact that even in this century there are copies of the Qur'an that date from centuries before the time of this controversy. Recently a prominent missionary dishonestly challenged the authenticity of Qur'anic manuscripts. He claimed that twenty different people, governments or institutions claim to possess the oldest copy of the Qur'an. The thought he wants his audience to finish is that there are twenty versions of the Qur'an. The truth is, all the ancient copies agree letter for letter with today's text. Which one happens to be the oldest is irrelevant to considerations of authenticity.

WORDS AND MESSAGE

The very words of the Qur'an are the message of the Qur'an. The speaker is God, not His spokesman recasting matters in his own words. Islam was not founded by Muhammad. God's message was given by prophets in every nation since at least the time of Adam. The particular religious observances of Islam and use of the term Muslim were well known in the time of Abraham. (See the Qur'an at 22:78; 2:135; 3:67-68; 16:123.) While the Prophet Muhammad is said to be a good example for us (33:21) the same is said of Abraham, word for word, at 60:4. The vital point here is that Islam is not the cult following of a man. Muhammad himself was told to make all his judgments by referring to the Qur'an (5:48-51). The Prophet was also told to ask for forgiveness, especially when he knew his death was approaching, for it is God alone that must be called on and asked for forgiveness (Chapter 110 and 40:12). The Prophet himself was corrected by admonitions in the Qur'an (e.g. Chapter 80).

THE CHRISTIAN CHARGE

In spite of an abundance of such considerations that show the Qur'an and the practices of Islam as something separate from the man Muhammad, the Christian insists that the Qur'an

was his own invention. They simultaneously maintain that he was a forger and a psychotic - that he deceived and was deceived on the same issue. They say that he lied about being a prophet and yet they say that he himself believed that he was a prophet! Of course, a man cannot be both true and false to himself regarding precisely the same point: If he believes he is a prophet, he does not fool people into believing him. The Qur'an itself denounces forgery (10:15-18).

TWO HYPOTHESES

The Christian difficulty is that they need both hypotheses: the forger and the psychotic, to begin to explain the existence of the Qur'an. They need to name the Prophet as a forger because he had an outside source. For example, the Qur'an recites material unknown to the Arabs and yet recognized as correct by a learned Israelite in the Prophet's time (11:49; 10:94; 26:197). They need to name the Prophet as a psychotic because he obviously was moved to behave as though he was a prophet. For example, against everyone's better judgment, the Qur'an announces the behavior of Muhammad's worst enemy - Abu Lahab. This man used to contradict every item of Islam, but in ten years never seized the chance to contradict the Qur'an's contents (Chapter 111). Until now there are similar statements in the Qur'an; the very instructions are given to those who wish to demolish the Qur'an; e.g. 5:82 tells Jews how to prove the Qur'an false.

A THIRD HYPOTHESIS

As a last resort, there is a third hypothesis made by the missionary. Given an outside source for the Qur'an and Muhammad's sincerity, they suggest that he was deceived by Satan. The missionary steps deeper into difficulty with this suggestion. The Qur'an itself tells us that we should seek refuge in God from Satan before reading the Qur'an (16:98). Satan has undone himself here, if he is the author. (Compare Jesus' words at Mark 3:26). In any case, the biggest complaint against mankind voiced in the Qur'an is his unsupported claims *"let them produce their proof"* is the repeated admonition. A direct challenge regarding this last hypothesis is found at 4:82: *"Have they not carefully considered the Qur'an? If it came from other than God, surely they would have found in it many inconsistencies."*

ACCURACY OF THE QUR'AN

Now the Muslim would not consider using as an excuse that some of the Qur'an has been lost in recopying. He will only insist that the Qur'an is the Arabic text and not a translation. The Arabic text is complete. A small effort has been made to produce contradictions in the Qur'an. The points made are fatuous. We have to wonder about the mental capability or the honesty of those who have brought forward these items. Some examples follow:

* The Bible reports that the Jews sarcastically addressed Jesus as "*Messiah*" (or the Greek equivalent "*Christ*") at the crucifixion (Mark Chapter 15). Despite this, one Toronto group of missionaries has insisted that a Jew would never do this and so the Qur'an must be in error at 4:157!!!

* The Qur'an commands that a man provide equally for each wife should he marry more than one. An active religious propaganda center in Rochester, New York, claims that this contradicts the fact that a man is restricted to four wives at most. They have mistaken the contrapuntal for the contradictory.

* Another common challenge is that the Qur'an states that God does not guide the wrongdoers. This is said to contradict the statement that God guides whom He pleases (28:50; 35:8). Actually the verses are complimentary, telling us that God chooses not to guide the wrongdoers.

MUSLIM MISUNDERSTANDING?

Related to this kind of thing we have the charge made that the Qur'an does not have an understanding of Christianity. As it happens, the Qur'an denounces many beliefs which are considered heretical by Christians. Instead of rejoicing that Muslims reject the same heresies as Christians, the missionary insists that Muslims have been given only a misunderstanding of Christianity. This claim can only be made by deliberate hiding or careless ignoring of the facts. The Qur'an deals in detail with the most precise points of Christian doctrine.

ABROGATION?

Still another misunderstanding concerns the so-called doctrine of abrogation. At: 16:10, "*And when We change any Ayah for an Ayah - and God knows best what He reveals - they say: 'You are only a forger'. Nay, most of them know not.*"

The word

Ayah

here can mean sign, message, or verse. So it is that many Christians have imagined that some verses of the Qur'an were changed. Some Muslims seem to agree when they say that some verses cancel other verses. Their difficulty is with language. The Christians misunderstand (or misinterpret) the word cancel (actually the Arabic word

"naskh"

). For example, the Qur'an commands one not to pray when drunk. Since the Qur'an was revealed gradually over a period of twenty three years, a later verse forbade intoxicants. But this later verse does not cancel the earlier one. Compare restricted drug laws in most countries: There are laws giving penalties for possession, but other laws penalizing those who sell these drugs. Yet the first kind of law does not cancel the second kind. The missionary trades on this misunderstanding, hoping to cause confusion. However, he seizes the opportunity too quickly. All charges of abrogation are said to apply to legal matters. However the verse of 16:101 refers to something that had already happened. Yet this verse was revealed in Mecca. All verses relating to legal matters were revealed later in Medina. There is no inconsistency in the Qur'an -

remember, this is the claim of 4:82.

The best explanation of the Qur'an is the Qur'an itself. The clarification of 16:101 is found at 2:106. Here the same thought is expressed but this time the context shows that the Jews were being addressed. The word *Ayah* refers then to previous messages of the prophets. In particular, some of the Jewish Law was supplanted by the Qur'an. (Compare the words of Jesus reported in the Qur'an at 3:49.)

INTERPRETATION

We discussed interpretation of the Bible. Is the Qur'an subject to misinterpretation? Certainly it is, and for the same reason that the Bible is - namely, the isolating of certain passages from those verses which explain them. Our point was not that the misinterpretation of the Bible was to be blamed on the Bible itself. Rather, the origin of the problem is the carelessness of men.

THE CONCLUDING POINTS

In the preceding section, the first three points have already been addressed to both Christians and Muslims. The fourth and the fifth may be dealt with by simply mentioning two points. First, the only "*evolved*" item in Islam is judicial decision. New circumstances bring new problems which must be ruled upon by the original principles. This is a body of knowledge that grows. Second, the most intelligent of Muslim scholars have always been ready to admit where they have crossed over into speculation. No mental consideration has ever led to the widespread acceptance of a theological doctrine which was unknown to the Muslims of Muhammad's time.

THE GOOD NEWS OF ISLAM

Finally, the Muslim really has something that one man can give to another: the Qur'an. This Book speaks to each reader asking him to consider the things that every man must admit. The reader is asked to arrange this collection of facts into a coherent whole and think on it. By reminding us of facts the Qur'an makes contact with reality as the Bible does. But the key difference in Christian and Muslim thought appears in the next step. The facts are not simply a feature of the Qur'an. The things we come to believe in are directly based on these facts, deduced from them in the legitimate sense of the word. The good news of Islam is that a man who loves truth, detests falsehood, and fears only God has moved toward Islam and thus ultimate success.

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Sunday, 23 August 2009 11:38 - Last Updated Saturday, 05 September 2009 20:45
