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Editorial

‘I shall cause thy message to reach the corners of the world.’

This was one of the earliest revelations received by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as), a person hardly known outside Qadian, a village in the Punjab. At the time of this revelation he did not even have a message to convey and wondered what the import of such a revelation might be. What is clear from these words, however, is that the message he was later to deliver was intended for the whole world and was not to be confined just to the Punjab or just the country of India.

Since he claimed to be only a devoted servant of Hadhrat Muhammad^(sa) the founder of Islam, propagating only the faith of Muhammad^(sa), it was clear from the above revelation that Islam had universal relevance and appeal. Muslims have claimed this since the earliest days of Islam, for the Holy Prophet^(sa) of Islam was

commanded to convey his message to the whole of mankind in the early Makkan revelations. Muslims believe this contrasts with all other faiths whose messages were for localised benefit and addressed to specific nations. Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) claimed that he was the Promised Messiah and Reformer of the Age awaited by all great world revealed religions: his message was therefore addressed to followers of all faiths. With the spread of channels of communication, today’s world is much enlarged as compared with previous ages. The message of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as), and hence that of Muhammad^(sa), has already reached the shores of America, Australia, New Zealand, etc. Hence, in view of the revelation, ‘I shall cause thy message to reach the corners of the world,’ it would be futile today to claim that Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) originally envisaged his remit to only cover the Indian sub-continent. To suggest that it was only later incidental successes that led his followers to claim universal application of his teachings, would carry no weight. This in effect is

what orientalists have consistently claimed about the mission of the Holy Prophet of Islam^(sa), so much so that they question the historicity of the letters he sent out to the rulers of surrounding nations.

If similar arguments were used against Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as), objectors would be saying that it is highly unlikely he ever wrote a letter to the Queen of England, head of a great empire. As one who had raised serious questions against the faith of the monarch, it was likely that he would suffer the wrath of her empire for daring to invite her to join Islam. For him to have done so would be against common sense. Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) had a great amount of common sense. Such is the line of argument used by various orientalists against the view that Muhammad^(sa) ever sent out letters to the neighbouring rulers, inviting them to join Islam. In this issue, Nuruddin Muneer's article refutes the hostile criticism of orientalists who claim that Islam was not originally envisaged as a universal religion.

As did the followers of Muhammad^(sa), so too have the followers of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) recorded in their histories the fact that he sent a letter to the ruling monarch of a great empire, inviting her to join Islam. They too have recorded its exact contents. This was no ordinary letter, it was to a monarch and therefore carried great significance for the followers of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as). It stands to reason that they would record not only the fact that it was sent but also the actual wording of that letter.

Perhaps Ahmadis, should be aware of how future generations of objectors may try and twist history or pick holes in it. In fact, concerned at not receiving a response, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as) followed this by another invitation to Her Majesty Queen Victoria on her Jubilee. A copy can surely be found by any doubting Thomases in the archives of the British Museum.

Basit Ahmad – UK

The Human Soul According to Qur'anic Teachings –

from the writings of the Promised Messiah^(as)

(Translated from *Chashma-i-Ma'rifat* of Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Sahib, pp.158_168 Ruhani Khazain, Vol.23)



The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad^(as).

In 1891, he claimed, on the basis of Divine revelation, that he was the Promised Messiah and Mahdi whose advent had been foretold by Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and by the scriptures of other faiths.

His claim constitutes the basis of the beliefs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

Unlike the Vedas, the Qur'an says that the souls are not uncreated but that they come into existence along with the body. This is the truth about the birth of souls which is borne out by established facts and which we cannot but accept. When we say that the soul comes into existence out of nothing, we do not mean to say that before it was created it was nothing. What we mean to say is that before the soul came into being, there was no pre-existing matter out of which man could extract the soul with his own efforts. It is only the power and wisdom of God which brings the soul into existence out of some matter. It was for this reason that when the Holy Prophet^(sa) was asked What is the soul, he was commanded by God to respond:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ
الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي
وَمَا أُوْتِيتُمْ مِنَ
الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٨٦﴾

And the unbelievers ask thee as to the reality of the soul and the manner of its creation; say the soul is created by the command of my Lord. (i.e. it is a mystery of divine power) and you have no knowledge concerning the soul save a little, (i.e; your knowledge of the soul is confined only to the birth of the soul: as we observe that insects, etc., come into being under our observation from some matter). (Ch.17:V.86)

The law of God pertaining to the creation of the human soul is that the human mould is gradually developed, from the union of two seminal fluids. Then, as by the mixture of certain medicines, a certain quality is generated in their mixture which the elements did not

individually possess, in the same way a special quality is created in the mould that is compounded by the blood and sperm drops and it takes on the colour of a type of phosphorus. When the breeze of the Divine manifestation blows upon it under the command: 'Be!' it suddenly flares up and spreads its effect into all parts of the mould. Thereby the embryo comes alive. It is then that a life is breathed into the body and that bright essence when kindled by the command of God is called the soul. This command is described as the Word of God because the faculty of the pregnant mother, which creates all the limbs of the embryo by the command of God and weaves its framework like the web of the spider, has no concern with the soul which is created by a special Divine manifestation. Though the phosphorous out of which the soul takes birth is produced by the framework or mould, the spiritual spark which is called the soul cannot be born without the touch of the heavenly breeze. This is the true knowledge of the soul, which is revealed to us by the Holy Qur'an; and the Vedas, like all other books, are devoid of it. It is

beyond the reach of the reason of the philosophers. It is thus that the soul is said to come into existence out of non-existence, but by this we do not mean to say that it is brought into existence out of absolute nothingness, for the whole universe depends on the system of cause and effect.

The objection may be raised that if the soul is created, it should also follow that it is mortal and subject to death. The answer to this objection is, that it is indeed subject to death. Anything that loses its attributes is said to die. If any drug has lost its properties, it is said to be dead. Similarly, with regard to the soul it is an established fact that under certain circumstances the soul is bereft of its quality and loses its attributes. In fact, it undergoes even greater changes than the body itself. It is when these changes separate the soul from its attributes that it is said to die, for when a thing leaves its essential attributes, it is said to die. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'an describes only those souls as being alive after their departure from this life as retain their essential qualities and have attained the object of their creation,

viz., the souls characterised by perfect love of God and perfect submission to the Divine Being. All other souls are represented as dead. In short, the death of the soul consists in its being separated from its attributes. For instance, when a man is subjected to a kind of death during his sleep, his soul also undergoes a simultaneous death, i.e. it loses the attributes it possessed in the state of wakefulness. In sleep, it no longer possesses the attributes which it possessed when the man was awake and its relinquishing its attributes during sleep may be fitly represented as its death, for death only means the loss of attributes. The word *death* is often misunderstood.

Death does not only mean non-existence; being bereft of essential qualities is also a sort of death. When a body dies, it does not become quite extinct, for its dust still exists. Similar is the death of the soul, for it too is deprived of its attributes and properties. As the body ceases to do its work during sleep, similarly the soul of a sleeping person is deprived of the powers which it possessed when

the person was awake. For instance, the soul of a living person meets a dead person in a dream and does not know that the person had died. It totally forgets this world as soon as a person sinks into sleep. Then it casts off the garb of this world and dons quite a new garb. It remembers nothing of this world, except that much as God may keep alive. It suspends all its activities and truly arrives before God. All its movements, words and passions pass under the control of the Divine Being, and it is so completely under the power of God that everything which it does, or speaks, or hears, and every movement it makes, cannot be said to be proceeding from its own will or choice. On the other hand, it is totally deprived of all will and displays every sign of death. During sleep the soul suffers an even greater death than the body. I wonder at those who do not ponder even over their state of sleep. If the soul was to be exempted from death, it ought to have been exempted from it even in sleep. The state of sleep serves a mirror for the purpose of our comprehension of our condition in the state of death. One who wants to attain a true knowledge

respecting the soul should ponder much over the state of sleep. Every secret of death may be resolved through one's experience during sleep. If you will properly ponder over the state of sleep and dreams and will consider attentively the way in which the soul undergoes a death during sleep, when it is bereft of its knowledge and qualities, you will be convinced that the state of death is similar to the state of sleep. So it is wrong to say that after its departure from the body the soul continues in the same condition in which it was in this life. Under the command of God, the soul is subjected to a death similar to that to which it is subjected during sleep, but that death is much stronger than the death of the soul during sleep. Every attribute of the soul is, then, ground under the millstone of extinction, and that is the death of the soul. Then only those are raised from death, who, while here, did deeds which could give life. No soul has power to remain alive on its own. Does it lie in the power of man to maintain a fast hold, during sleep, of the attributes and knowledge which he possessed during wakefulness? Nay, the moment one closes one's

eyes, the state of the soul is completely changed and it suffers a type of non-existence whereby .

God says with reference to the death of the soul:

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ
مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي
مَنَامِهَا فَيُمْسِكُ الَّتِي
قَضَىٰ عَلَيْهَا الْمَوْتَ
وَيُرْسِلُ الْأُخْرَىٰ إِلَىٰ
أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ إِنَّ فِي ذَٰلِكَ
لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

This verse means that *God takes hold of the souls at the time of their death. They come completely under the control and power of God and lose all choice and self-consciousness. They are deprived of the attributes of life and become as if they were non-existent. And*

the souls that are not really dead but whose condition bears a close resemblance to death are the souls of those that go to sleep. In the state of death, the soul goes into the control of God and undergoes a change when they lose all worldly consciousness and feeling. In short, both in the state of death and in sleep, the soul is so completely under the control of God that it parts with its choice and will and self-consciousness, which are the signs of life. Then God retains such souls as have been made to undergo real death and sends or restores such souls back to the world for a time as were not subjected to real death. In this there are signs for those that ponder and reflect.

(Ch.39:V.43)

This is the translation and explanation of the verses quoted above. This verses shows that there is a death for the souls, as there is a death for the body. But the Holy Qur'an also shows that the souls of the righteous and elect of God are recalled from death after some days, some after three days, some

after a week, and others after 40 days after death. This new life of theirs is a life of extreme bliss, sweetness and enjoyment. It is to attain this life that the righteous servants of God turn to God with all their power and strength and with complete sincerity and devotion. It is to be blessed with this life that they exert themselves to the utmost of their powers to free themselves from the darkness of their egos and impurities of the worldly life. It is to achieve this life that they adopt a bitter life here and bring on themselves a sort of death in order to win the pleasure of their Divine Master.

In short, as the foregoing verse shows, there is a death for the soul as there is a death for the body. Though the most secret conditions of the next life are unknown to us in this dark world, yet the state of sleep, no doubt, serves as a specimen of the life to come. The death which overtakes the soul in this life is well exemplified in the state of sleep, for we know that as soon as we close our eyes, all the attributes of our wakefulness and everything connected with it is totally forgotten, and all the

knowledge that we possessed while awake is buried in oblivion. We experience such scenes during sleep which prove beyond doubt that our soul has been totally changed and has lost all the attributes it possessed during wakefulness. This is a condition which bears a close resemblance to death, nay, it is really a kind of death, and is a conclusive evidence of the fact that the death which overtakes the soul at the time of the death of the body is like the death which overtakes the soul at the time of sleep; but the real death is far greater than the death of the soul during sleep.¹

In brief, the Vedas have committed a serious mistake in representing the souls as eternal and everlasting like God, and it is sheer ignorance to regard such a book as a source of all wisdom, a book which sets up the creatures of God as partners with Him in eternity. Unlike the Vedas, the Holy Qur'an represents the souls as created and subject to death and not eternal and undying. As to the souls being created, the Holy Qur'an states:

ثُمَّ أَنشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ

When the human mould is prepared, We bring about in it a new creation, i.e; We create therein the soul. (Ch.23:V.15)

Again it says:

قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٣٠﴾

Say, (O Prophet,) that the soul is created by the command of my Lord and of the knowledge thereof you have been given but little. (Ch.17:V.86)

The Holy Qur'an has also hinted many times that the substance from which the soul is created determines its spiritual values or the morals of a soul are according to the substance of the seed. If we consider the beasts, the birds, and the insects, etc; we come to the conclusion that the attributes of the soul of each animal are according to the substance of the seed. In addition to the verses quoted above,

there is another verse which shows that the souls are created. It means:

وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ نَقْدَرَهُ

God is He who has created everything; (there is nothing creation that has not been created by Him), and He has ordained a proper measure on (the body, powers, faculties, properties and forms of) each, (so that their limitations may point to a limiter, who is God). (Ch.25: V.3)

But God Himself is unlimited, therefore we cannot ask respecting Him, who is the limiter of God? The verse quoted above clearly states that every thing that has come into existence, with all its powers and faculties, has been created by God. This teaching is in consonance with the perfect unity of God; for it represents God as the source of all bounties, and according to it there is nothing which is not created by God and is not sustained by Him.

The teaching that every thing is created by God is the first part of the teaching of Divine unity. The

second part of the doctrine of Divine unity consists in the teaching that nothing in itself is exempt from death, except God. On this point, God says:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

Everything will perish except God, Who is free from it.
(Ch.28:V.89)

Similarly another verse says:

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ

Everything that is on the earth will pass away. (Ch.55:V.27)

As God has included all things in His creation by saying:

خَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدْ رَءَاهُ

He created everything.
(Ch.25: V.3)

The word *kul* conveying the idea of totality, similarly He represents all things as subject to death by saying:

كُلُّ شَيْءٍ هَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ

Everything will perish except God. (Ch.28:V.89)

the same word, *kul* (every) being repeated in this verse. Similarly, the other verse:

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ

Everything on this earth will pass away. (Ch.55:V.27)

represents all things as subject to death. As the body undergoes a death by decomposition and decay, similarly, the soul under-goes a death when it loses its qualities. But those who lose themselves in God are again raised to life, as they had attained a union with God, and because their lives adumbrated or were shadows of Divine life. The unclean souls are also given a sense so that they may be subjected to chastisement, but they are neither among the dead nor among the living. They are, like the man who is suffering from an excruciating pain, his condition is as bad as death and the whole earth and heavens grow dark in his eyes. Of

these, the Holy Qur'an says:

إِنَّهُ مَنْ يَأْتِ رَبَّهُ
مُجْرِمًا فَإِنَّ لَهُ جَهَنَّمَ
لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا
يَحْيَى

For him who comes to his Lord as a sinner, there is Hell, wherein he will neither die nor live. (Ch.20:V.75)

When a man looks into his own self and considers how his soul undergoes changes in wakefulness and sleep, he will not hesitate to admit that his soul, too, like his body, is subject to change and death is nothing but a change and loss of attributes. When a living being dies, the body still exists, but we apply the word death to it on account of the change it undergoes. It is to this that God refers when he says:

وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَفَلَا
تَبْصُرُونَ

*Do you not look carefully into your own selves?
(Ch.51:V.22)*

This verse means that there are placed in the souls wonderful properties and reformation qualities that are not placed in the bodies, and that if a man reflects deeply on the state of his soul, he can soon recognise God. There is also a saying of the Holy Prophet^(sa) to that effect. He is reported to have said:

One who recognises his own self has recognised God.²

Referring to the souls, God says:

أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ

I said to the souls, Am I not your Lord? They responded, Yes. (Ch.7:V.173)

This verse means that a belief in the existence of God is implanted in the nature of souls, and that if a man looks carefully into his soul, he will recognise God. But when a man plunges himself in the darkness of negligence and is affected by unholy teachings, he

denies the existence of God who is His creator, and entertains doctrines which are not in consonance with what God has impressed on his nature. It is apparent that every person bears love for his parents, so much so, that some children die after the death of their mothers. So, if the soul of man does not proceed out of the Hand of God and is not created by Him, who is it that has implanted the love of God in its nature, and why is it that as soon as the eyes of man are opened and he casts off his negligence, his heart is attracted towards God and a river of the love of God flows in his breast? This shows that there is some connection between God and the souls which makes them 'mad' in divine love. They are so lost in the love of God that they are prepared to sacrifice their all in His path. The truth is, that the bond which unites the souls with the Divine Being is so wonderful that the relations of children with their mothers and father are not comparable to it. If, as the Arya Samajists represent, the souls are self-existent, how did this wonderful bond come into existence? Who placed this love,

this passion, in the souls? This point deserves the deepest consideration and is a key to the true knowledge of God.

It is an admitted scientific fact that the human body completely superseded by new cells every three years and a new body takes shape. The old particles of matter composing the body are, every moment, being replaced by new ones. How old is repaired by new matter may best be seen when a man recovers from a long disease which has decimated his body and has reduced it to a mere skeleton. After recovery, he gradually gains in flesh, until he recovers his original bulk. Thus every moment, the body is undergoing a death and gaining a life. And just as the body undergoes changes, similarly the soul also undergoes changes. The soul, too, like the body, is undergoing a death and gaining a life every moment. The only difference is that the changes of the body are apparent and palpable, while those of the soul are hidden as the soul itself is hidden. Again, the changes of the soul are unending. From the Holy Qur'an it appears that even in paradise the

souls would be undergoing changes, but the changes there would be for the better. The souls would always be advancing forward in their spiritual journey, every stage of their advancement being so much higher than the preceding stages, that the state of the souls in a later stage may be likened to a death of the earlier stage.

NOTES

1. We see strange scenes during sleep. Sometimes we see ourselves as children and we forget the fact that we are aged men and have children and a wife. These scenes which manifest during sleep conclusively show that the soul loses memory and is separated from its other attributes. This state may be justly called death.
2. Man cannot derive much benefit from the changes which bodies undergo, for physical factors soon habituate. But the changes of the soul, particularly during our exertions to purify it and in visions, are so wonderful that they, seem to reveal the countenance of God. At every stage of their spiritual advancement, spiritual wayfarers feel that the former condition of their souls was a state of death, and that in their earlier stages their souls did not possess the knowledge and light which they have attained in the later stages. Even those who learn the worldly

sciences realise how immersed in sleep their were souls in childhood, and what a new light has dawned on their souls after they made an advancement in learning and science.

[Throughout this translation we have used the free translation of the verses from the Holy Qur'an as used by the author to explain its meaning instead of the literal translation of the relevant verse - Ed]

In this journal, for the ease of non-Muslim readers, '(sa)' or 'sa' after the words, 'Holy Prophet', or the name 'Muhammad', are used. They stand for '*Sallallahu 'alaihi wa sallam*' meaning 'Peace and blessings of Allah be upon him'. Likewise, the letters '(as)' or 'as' after the name of all other prophets is an abbreviation meaning 'Peace be upon him' derived from '*Alaihis salatu wassalam*' for the respect a Muslim reader utters.

The abbreviation 'ra' or (ra) stands for '*Radhiallahu Ta'ala anhu* and is used for Companions of a Prophet, meaning Allah be pleased with him or her (when followed by the relevant Arabic pronoun). Finally, 'ru' or (ru) for '*Rahemahullahu Ta'ala* means the Mercy of Allah the Exalted be upon him.

A refutation of hostile criticism by orientalists on the Universality of Islam

by Nuruddin Muneer

Islam, according to its two principal sources, the Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet^(sa) is intended for the whole mankind and unlike its predecessor it is not subject to any limitations of race and time. But orientalists in general, excepting some like Noeldeke, Goldziher and T. W. Arnold reject it and insist that the Holy Prophet^(sa) had in his mind only the Arab nation. They profess that his followers imbibing this idea from Christianity framed it on Islam (*Encyclopaedia of Islam* vol. III 1936, p.733).

More than a century has gone by when orientalists like Muir took this stand. Some recent orientalists also maintain the same position, for instance, Montgomery Watt, whose books *Muhammad at Mecca* and *Muhammad at Medina* appeared as late as 1956, denounces this dimension of Islam even more forcibly than Muir. An endeavour has been made here to make a fresh

critical appraisal of the whole subject.

Hostile criticism has the potential to shake the faith of not-so-well informed Muslims in the viability of Islam. Those not well-grounded in its essentials require instruction in the facts of their faith. The realisation of the prime object of Islam in the unification of the whole mankind into one brotherhood presupposes disabusing non-Muslim friends of the misconceptions created by hostile criticism enabling them to appreciate it in its true perspective.

Sir William Muir's Bias

Muir, in his *Life of Mahomet* (1878. p.60) asserts that the Holy Prophet^(sa) 'was ordained a prophet with a commission to the people of Arabia' – But he does not quote any tradition although the Holy Prophet's^(sa) precepts and practices on every aspect of Islam have come down to us.

Contrary to what Muir asserts, with such confidence, there is a tradition, conveniently ignored by him, in which the Holy Prophet^(sa) unequivocally claims to be a universal Redeemer. Enumerating five distinctions relating to himself he is reported to have said:

‘While prophets before me were commissioned to their particular people, I have been sent to the whole of mankind.’
(*Bukhari*)

Muir touches upon this subject again in his history of Caliphate. But here also he gives no proof and bases his opinion on an incident which happened in the caliphate of Hadhrat Umar^(ra).

After their great victory at the battle of Qadsiyyah, Muslim armies had again routed the Persian hosts at Jalaula. The Muslim Commander Sa’d bin Abi Waqqas wanted to advance and pursue the Persian forces on the run, but Hadhrat Umar^(ra) did not let him. Muir says that the permission was declined, for ‘the conviction of a worldwide mission of Islam was yet in embryo and the obligation to enforce its claim by a universal

crusade had not yet dawned upon the nation.’ (*Annals of Early Caliphate*, 1883, p.189)

This, if accepted, would signify that the Holy Prophet^(sa) as well as his great lieutenant, Hadhrat Umar^(ra) were both unaware of the real scope of Islam and it was sometime after the conquest of Persia that the nation suddenly discovered its true destiny.

Universality in the Holy Qur’an

The fact is that the universality of Islam has been clearly spelt out in the Qur’an and it would be absurd to suppose that the meaning of the relevant verses (see below) was not known to the Holy Prophet^(sa), who had received them as revelation nor to Hadhrat Umar^(ra), his close companion and himself an ardent student of the Qur’an. We reproduce below some of the relevant verses.

And we have not sent thee but as a Mercy for all peoples.
(21:108)

Say, O mankind, truly I am a messenger to you all
(7:159)

And we have not sent thee but as a bearer of glad tidings and a warner for all mankind; but most men know not.

(34:29)

Blessed is He who has sent down Al-Furqan to His servant that he may be a warner to all the world

(25:2)

Rodwell admits that these four chapters were revealed in Makkah. It means that very early in his ministry the Holy Prophet^(sa), had been ordained as a universal Messenger. In the face of this chronological evidence Muir's allegation is wholly untenable.

It is patent from the above verses that the Holy Prophet^(sa) fully knew the scope of his mission. The words *all peoples, you all, all mankind, all the worlds* can in no way be construed to mean anything else. It is noteworthy in this context that both Rodwell and Sale have translated these verses to cover the whole of mankind. Sale's footnote in explanation of verse 7:158 states: 'that is, to all mankind in general and not to one particular nation as the former prophets were

sent' (Sale's translation. Frederick Wane, London. p. 160).

Encyclopaedia of Islam's Poor Knowledge

The writer of the article 'Muhammad' in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* however differs on this issue and asserts that such verses do not mean what they apparently say. The article alleges:

'It is very doubtful if Muhammad ever thought at all of his religion as a universal religion of the world. The passages in the Meccan Surahs which can be quoted in favour of this theory are limited by their context.' (Vol. III. E.J. Brill Leiden, 1936, p. 733)

The context is there. Anybody can refer to it and verify for himself the truth of the matter. There is not a single verse before or after these verses in the whole of the Qur'an, which limits their scope or is in any way averse to the universality of Islam. In fact there is no possibility of such a contingency. The Qur'an is without any contradiction (4:83).

The article goes on to say:

‘The decisive consideration, however, is that Muhammad at the “height of” his power never demanded from Jews or Christians that they should adopt Islam but was content with a political subjugation and the payment of tribute. . . The idea of a great missionary enterprise arose later under the influence of Christian traditions, notably of the miracle of Pentecost.’

The writer is obviously confusing free conversion with political subjugation. It is true that, as king and sovereign, the Holy Prophet^(sa) never forced anyone, may he be a Jew or a Christian or a follower of any other religion, to adopt Islam. But as a prophet of God he invited the whole of mankind to join Islam of their own free will, very early in his ministry at Makkah. The verses, which have already been quoted, illustrate this point beyond any doubt. The Holy Qur’an expressly calls upon Jews and Christians to join Islam and threatens them with dire consequences if they do not heed the Divine call:

O people of the Book (Jews and

Christians)! believe in what we have now sent down, fulfilling that which is with you before we destroy some of your leaders or turn them on their backs or curse them as we cursed the people of the Sabbath. And the decree of Allah is bound to be fulfilled (4:48)

In response to the call in Madinah Abdullah Bin Salaam, a learned Jew and a leader of the Madinite Jewry, joined Islam with his entire household. He exhorted his community also to do the same. Many other Jews entered the fold of Islam. For instance, Thalaba b. Sa’ya, Usayd b. Sa’ya. Asad b. Ubayd, etc. (Ibn Ishaq’s *Sirat Rasul Allah*. translated by A. Guillaume p.19). 262). Similarly, Christians like Salman^(ra) the Persian and Suhayb^(ra) the Rumi and many others embraced Islam.

Moreover, when the Holy Qur’an explicitly proclaimed that Islam will come to prevail over all other faiths, Judaism and Christianity are not exceptions.

He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance

and religion of truth that He may cause it to prevail over all religions, however much those who associate partners with Allah may dislike it.

(61:10)

All *faiths* in the above verse obviously mean 'all followers of all faiths'. This covers the whole of mankind. The verse quoted above, alone, is sufficient to establish that the Holy Prophet^(sa) was fully aware of the worldwide mission of Islam. Christian orientalists, certainly of the old school, deny it, as they are theologically prejudiced. Orientalists of the new school do the same with slightly different vocabulary.

The Holy Qur'an, though not acknowledged by orientalists as the word of God, is frankly conceded as the genuine and unaltered composition of the Holy Prophet^(sa). Muir says:

'We may upon the strongest presumption affirm that every verse in the Qur'an is the genuine and unaltered composition of Mahomet himself and conclude with in least a close approximation to

the verdict of Von Hammer: that we hold the Quran as surely Mahomet's word as the Mohammadans hold it to be the word of God.' (*Life*. p.563)

As, according to this avowal, the Holy Qur'an portrays the conceptions and views of the Holy Prophet, the verses quoted above, which clearly attribute universality to Islam, would conclusively prove that it was intended to serve the whole of mankind.

Universality in Traditions of the Holy Prophet^(sa)

The Holy Prophet's^(sa) practice also shows that he was fully conversant with the meaning and intention of his mission. The letters he wrote to the potentates outside the borders of Arabia are a visible proof. He wrote to Roman and Iranian Emperors to the Negus, the ruler of Abyssinia, and to Mukawqis the Governor Of Egypt, etc. In these letters he called upon them to join Islam and to worship only One God. Had his mission been confined to Arabia why should he have addressed non-Arab people?

He wrote these letters on his return from Hudaibiyyah where he had

negotiated a ten-year truce with the Makkans. He had also sent similar epistles to many Arab chiefs at that period but we are not concerned with these in connection with our subject matter. Orientalists in general dub his letters to non-Arab potentates as apocryphal.

By another clause of the treaty the Arab tribes were left free to forge alliance either with the Holy Prophet(sa) or with the Makkans, whomsoever they liked. This brought the Islamic Republic of Madinah politically at par with that of the Makkans. The clause was decidedly a major gain for Islam, for by virtue of it the Holy Prophet(sa) drew a great many Arab tribes to him. As the treaty ended the war between the Makkans and the Holy Prophet(sa), he now preached Islam more extensively. The astounding success, which he achieved in this field, is apparent from the fact that two years hence, when he conquered Makkah in 8 AH, he had with him 10,000 Companions. While in the previous period of about nineteen years he had rallied some 1,200 persons in all. This was the size of the force that defended Madinah in the Battle of the Ditch or, if the count

of children and women who participated in digging the trench were included, the total number would come to 3,000 at the most. In these two years, besides enlisting the allegiance of numerous Arab tribes, the Holy Prophet(sa) invited some leaders of the non-Arab world also to Islam. This was to implement the Qur'anic injunctions to preach Islam to the whole of mankind (7:159; 5:68).

As his companions told him that kings and monarchs did not receive any dispatches unless they were attested by a seal, he had a seal made of silver, engraved with the words '*Muhammad Rasul Ullah*' (Muhammad, Messenger of Allah) and sealed his letters with it. These letters which the Holy Prophet(sa) addressed immediately after the truce of Hudaibiyyah were dispatched early in 7 AH (Ibn Sa'd)

Letter to Heraclius

The text of the letter to Heraclius the Roman emperor, is as follows:

'In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.
From Muhammad, the servant

of Allah and His Messenger, to Heraclius, the chief of Rome. Peace be on him who follows the Guidance. After this I call you to Islam. Accept it and you will be saved. Embrace Islam and God will reward you twofold. If you turn away from the offer of Islam then on you be the sins of your people. And, O people of the Book, come to a word which is equal between us and you, that we worship none but Allah, associate naught with Him and forsaking Him take not any one from among us as God. If they (people of the Book) turn away tell them, beware, we are Muslims.’ (*Bukhari Zurqani*)

This letter to Heraclius was entrusted to Dihya b. Khalifa al-Kalabi, a sagacious and devoted disciple of the Holy Prophet^(sa) who had already travelled to Syria and was quite familiar with it. The Holy Prophet^(sa) further directed him to convey his letter to the emperor through the latter’s governor at Bosra, Harith b. Ali Shimr.

The narrative, as contained in al-Bukhari, continues to say that

Heraclius received this letter when he was celebrating his victory over the Persians at Jerusalem. He considered it in his court and under his orders Abu Sufyan and his associates were also presented to him. They happened at that time to be in Syria on a trade mission. Abu Sufyan as yet had not joined Islam.

The story goes on that the letter was read in court and the emperor binding Abu Sufyan to speak the truth, asked him some questions about the Holy Prophet^(sa). These were about his ancestry; his integrity and character; his teachings; the condition of his followers; whether they were increasing or decreasing; whether they apostated or not and about his observance of his compacts with his enemies, etc. Abu Sufyan answered correctly fearing that if he lied his associates would belie him. He could get no chance, as he afterwards confessed, to speak deprecatingly of the Holy Prophet^(sa), and of the moral and spiritual revolution which he had wrought among his followers. The emperor was very much impressed.

This illuminating dialogue between Heraclius and Abu Sufyan is

contained in full in *Bukhari* and can be seen there advantageously. However, this much is certain from the nature of the questions he put to Abu Sufyan and his subsequent remarks upon his answers that Heraclius was seriously seeking the truth about the Holy Prophet's^(sa) claim and had in his heart become convinced of it. His object in conducting this dialogue before his courtiers was obviously to win them over to his viewpoint and he tried his utmost to convert them. But this was not to be. The narrative continues, that on hearing the answers, the emperor testifying to the truth of the Holy Prophet^(sa) told his courtiers that shortly this prophet would occupy the Holy Land and that had it been possible for him he would have gone to him and sought blessings by washing his feet. Upon this, the story concludes that his courtiers began to shout their dissent and Abu Sufyan and his companions were driven out of the court.

Questioning the Sources of traditions

This episode is reported by Ibn Abbas to whom it was related by Abu Sufyan b. Harb, a prominent Makkan chief, with whom the

above dialogue had taken place and who was an eyewitness to the whole affair. He is known for his enmity towards Islam in which he persisted up to the submission of Makkah when he also joined the new faith. Previously he had commanded the large Makkan army that fought the believers at Uhud and also which besieged Madinah entailing the Battle of the Ditch. Obviously, he enjoyed a position of importance in the Makkan society and his version of contemporary events cannot be rejected without assigning some cogent reason.

Moreover, he was an enemy of the Holy Prophet^(sa) at the time when Heraclius questioned him and as such he had no inclination to exalt him in any way. His evidence, in the circumstances being against his own inclinations, deserves to be admitted as authentic. This criterion is implicitly accepted by Muir, when he asserts that any statement given in his disparagement by any of the Holy Prophet's^(sa) friends and companions carries a good ground of credibility (*Life* p.599).

However, the criterion devised by Muir is extremely unfair and

betrays his own prejudice for calumniating the Holy Prophet^(sa) on the least possible ground. A companion may be a hypocrite, mentally deficient and bereft of discriminating power, yet according to Muir, his words in abasement of the Holy Prophet^(sa), have the force of an unchallengeable truth.

Ibn Abbas is a fully reliable transmitter of the Prophet's traditions. From an early age he had ample opportunity to benefit from his company. He is also, in the words of Montgomery Watt (*Encyclopaedia of Islam* 1971, vol. I. p 40): 'Considered one of the greatest scholars if not the greatest of the first generation of Muslims.' The fact that tradionists and historians like al-Bukhari, Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Sa'd and Tabari, well known for their probity and integrity, have all included this story in their collections leaves no doubt regarding its reliability. All these sources are taken as highly reliable by orientalists inimical to Islam.

There is no occasion for doubting the authenticity of this story, or of the conclusion to which it leads,

i.e. the Holy Prophet^(sa) conceived of Islam as a universal religion. However, orientalists like Muir and Montgomery Watt reject this point altogether.

Montgomery Watt's Claims

Montgomery Watt, perhaps the latest exponent of this view, is very vehement in its denial. He suggests, quite arbitrarily, that if ever these letters were written, the purpose was to negotiate a neutrality pact with the princes and not to invite them to Islam. This is sheer high handedness and a plain example of upholding his pre-conceived notions at the cost of history. We will find more instance of such statements in the two following passages taken from his book *Muhammad at Medina*. He says:

'The suggestion of some Muslim sources, though not the earliest, that he (the Holy Prophet) conceived of Islam as a universal religion and summoned the Byzantine and Persian emperors and other lesser Potentates to accept it, is almost certainly false. Islam indeed from its beginning was potentially a universal religion

and it is not fortuitous that with the expansion of the Islamic State it became in fact a universal religion. But it is barely credible that a wise statesman like Muhammad should have made this precise appeal at this precise stage in his career and examination shows that the reports of the embassies to the various sovereigns are full of inconsistencies.

The critical discussions of European scholars have shown that, while the story cannot be taken as it stands, there is a kernel of truth in it. According to the story Muhammad's envoys were favourably received and given presents, apart from the one to the Persian emperor. But this is incredible if the message was a summons to become a Muslim and accept Muhammad as religious leader; we cannot conceive of a Roman emperor or a Negus of Abyssinia responding to such a message. But if we admit that the persons named actually carried some message from Muhammad to their respective destinations

(though probably at different dates) and were well received, it is not impossible that the contents of the letters have been somewhat altered in the course of transmission. This may be either because the details were not known to the messenger (who is the presumptive source of information), or because later developments made the message seem trivial and unworthy of a great prophet. On this hypothesis we might suppose that, while Muhammad may have made some reference to his religious beliefs, the real point was political. Perhaps he proposed a neutrality pact. Perhaps he was merely anxious to prevent the Meccans getting foreign help and to counteract the effects of the biased accounts they gave of their relations with him. It would have been most inappropriate for Muhammad at this period to summon these powerful rulers to accept Islam. But after the siege of Medina he was sufficiently important to have some rudimentary diplomatic contacts with them and that is presumably the truth of the

matter.’ (*Muhammad at Medina* Oxford. 1956 pp.41-42)

Expressing the same idea in another passage under the title ‘Muhammad’s letters to princes’, he says:

The position has been adopted that the material collected by Ibn Sa’d in volume 1/2 pp. 15-86 is in general to be regarded as authentic. An exception must be made, however, of the story with which the collection opens, that in May 628 (1/7) on his return from al-Hudaibiyah. Muhammad sent his messengers to the rulers of the surrounding countries summoning them to accept Islam.

This story cannot be accepted as it stands. Muhammad was a wise and far-seeing statesman and he did not “lose his head” after the measure of success he obtained at al-Hudaibiyah. To appeal to these princes at this period to accept Islam would have done more harm than good. Moreover, close examination shows that the sending of some of the envoys was prior

to al-Hudaibiyah. The mission of Dihya to Bosra must have been in the summer of 627, since he was plundered by Judham on his return and a punitive expedition was sent against them about October 627 (vi/6). The two slave girls brought back by the envoy to the Mukawqis appear to have been in Medina soon after January 627 (viii/5), since Muhammad presented one of them to Hassan bin Thabit at the conclusion of the affair of the lie. Further, it is possible to discern a theological motive for the alteration of the stories. Ibn Ishaq makes Muhammad himself refer to the sending out of the apostles by Jesus, and with this connects the gift of languages at Pentecost. This appears to be intended to substantiate the claim that Muhammad was a prophet to all nations and not simply to the Arabs.’

An analysis of the two above-quoted extensive passages will reveal that despite some alleged inconsistencies in the reports about these letters, Montgomery Watt admits their factual possibility. But

then immediately he tries to nullify whatever he has conceded. He asserts that if ever these letters were written, the object was not to call the princes to Islam but to negotiate with them a neutrality pact or to dissuade them from helping the Makkans against the Holy Prophet^(sa). He insists on this point with all the emphasis he can command.

Montgomery Watt's treatment of Ibn Sa'd is paradoxical. He holds him reliable and unreliable at the same time. He has depended mostly upon him for his materials but rejected the story of the Holy Prophet's^(sa) envoys to the princes, though Ibn Sa'd has opened his collection with it. The reasons set forth by him for this exclusion are here examined in detail.

Arguments Rejecting Montgomery Watt's Inference

The first argument adduced by Montgomery Watt in support of his stand is no argument at all. He says that wisdom and statesmanship, in the circumstances in which the Holy Prophet^(sa) was then placed, required that he should not invite the princes to Islam and, as he was a wise

statesman, so he did not write the letter attributed to him.

The first premise is certainly false and so is the inference drawn from it. The whole exercise is without the least bit of logic in it. The clause brought in to rationalise the first premise sadly falls short of its object, because it is not a statement of fact but purely a matter of opinion.

It can equally be stressed that the time after al-Hudaibiyah, when the Holy Prophet^(sa) had gained a spectacular victory over his enemies was the most appropriate time for inviting the princes to Islam. So in agreement with the dictates of wise statesmanship and at the first opportunity when he could free himself from the mundane involvements in which the Makkans had entangled him, he promptly attended to his Divine and supreme mission, i.e. to call the whole of mankind, including non-Arab races, to Islam and thus to unite the whole humanity into one brotherhood (vide Qur'an 21:108; 7:59; 34:29; 25:2). So, if he invited at that particular moment the leaders of the non-Arab world to Islam it was natural for him and quite consistent

with the pattern of his personality. In fact, whatever the Holy Prophet did at various junctures in his life was most appropriate to the requirements of wisdom and completely in consonance with the compulsion of his Divine Mission.

The text of the letters which has come down to us clearly aims at calling the princes to Islam. The sources, al-Bukhari and Ibn Sa'd, etc., which have reproduced them are reliable in the eyes of orientalist also. However, Montgomery Watt says that the text has been altered in the course of transmission. He has no proof to support this assumption. Had he shown that the text in an earlier edition of the source book differed from what was given in its later edition, as is the case with some biblical stories, that would have carried some weight. But he bases his assertion merely on speculation, which he calls by the name of 'tendential shaping'. This term means that as the Holy Prophet^(sa) had omitted to proclaim himself a universal teacher, his followers had developed a 'tendency' to present him as such and motivated by this tendency they 'shaped' the text of the letters to suit their purpose.

However, this argument cannot hold. Montgomery Watt forgets that the Holy Qur'an very early in his ministry at Makkah proclaimed the Holy Prophet^(sa) as a universal teacher (vide 21:108; 7:159; 34:29; 25:2). When this concept is clearly spelt out in the Makkan Surahs, the transmitters of hadith must have fully known it. At least Ibn Abbas, who is one of the greatest scholars of those times and who transmitted the hadith contained in Bukhari, cannot be imagined to have been ignorant of the Qur'anic intention. What was then the need to tamper with the text of the letters, and what motive did subscribe to it?

Bias or Fact

The point at the back of all this contention is that, according to the Bible, Jesus^(as) never claimed to be a universal teacher and confessed frankly to be a Prophet for the sons of Israel only. So, the orientalist who come of padre families are theologically interested in denying a greater status to the Holy Prophet^(sa) also. They do so under the garb of 'scientific research' while trying to pass off their prejudice as objective fact. The New Testament says:

‘These twelve Jesus sent forth and commanded them saying: Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter you not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’
(*Matthew 10:5, 6*)

‘But he (Jesus) answered and said: I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’
(*Ibid. 15:24*)

And Jesus said unto them: Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me in the regeneration when the son of man shall sit in the throne of his Glory, ye shall also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’ (*ibid. 19:28*)

Harm Theory’s Imposing Edifice

Now let us look into the ‘harm’ theory on which Montgomery Watt has built his seemingly imposing edifice. He says that the Holy Prophet^(sa) did not call the princes to Islam, as such a step would have entailed great harm to him. This harm theory is wholly the product of his imagination otherwise, if

seen objectively, there was no such possibility.

When we consider the case of Heraclius in this context we find that there was not a whit of any danger in inviting him to Islam. He was not an uncouth and uncultured barbarian. Gibbon praises his ‘wisdom’, ‘intrepidity’ and ‘magnanimous sentiments’ and, in the words of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, he possessed ‘deep Christian faith’. It goes without saying then that he must be familiar with the Christian traditions regarding the coming of prophets and the deliverance of Divine messages by them, and the biblical prophecies concerning the advent of a mighty prophet after Jesus^(as). In view of the frame of mind which these factors must have engendered in Heraclius, who can apprehend that he would fly into a passionate rage on such an innocent invitation and hasten to harm the Holy Prophet^(sa)? The most he would feel inclined to do would be to investigate, which he did as already explained.

Even if there was a danger of harm as Montgomery Watt insists, we cannot imagine that the Holy

Prophet^(sa) would have neglected his duty. According to the Holy Qur'an (5:68), deliverance of Divine message was his supreme obligation and come what may he was to fulfil it. His conduct at Makkah and Taif shows that he did his duty even when his life was in peril.

If Montgomery Watt's theory is correct, then Moses^(as) should not have pressed the Pharaoh to release the Israelites from his cruel bondage for it imperilled his life and the life of his community. Similarly, Jesus Christ^(as) should not have denounced the Jews of his time because as a sequel to it he suffered grievously at their hands and was saved only by a miracle.

Polite Treatment of Ambassadors

Montgomery Watt expresses great surprise at the reported polite treatment by Heraclius, Mukawqis and Negus of the Holy Prophet's ambassadors. He says, had the Holy Prophet^(sa) called them to Islam it is incredible and inconceivable that they would have responded so gently. The answer is that it is a fact of history that cannot be set aside by anyone's

predilections against it. We can only say that though they were sovereigns yet they were not devoid of good manners. After all, the call was a message of love and peace to them and they did not find in it anything offensive to their sensibilities. So if they treated the embassies with consideration there is nothing anomalous in it.

History of Revelation Questioned

An objection raised against the validity of these letters is that they contain inconsistencies. For instance, it is alleged by some orientalist that the verse of the Holy Qur'an included in the epistle sent to Heraclius, calling the people of the Book to a word which is equal between them and the believers, was revealed to the Holy Prophet^(sa) in 9 AH when a Christian deputation from Najran visited him. The letter to Heraclius was written in the end of 6 AH or the beginning of 7 AH. So the argument goes that if the letter had been genuine, the verse could not have formed part of it.

This is not a new objection. Reputed commentators and historians have refuted it in *Fath*

al-Bari, *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* and *Zurqani*, etc. The fact is that revelation did not come to the Prophet^(sa) all at once. It came piecemeal and at different times. Sometimes a verse would be revealed to him twice on different dates; sometimes a phrase which he had uttered in some context would subsequently descend upon him as revelation. There is a consensus of Muslim commentators upon this point and orientalist also recognise it. For instance, in his commentary on the Qur'an, Rev. E. M. Wherry, following Noeldeke, has assigned different dates to revelation¹ of different verses of chapter Al-Maida (vide E. M. Wherry, *A comprehensive commentary on the Koran*, vol. II, p.119)

For instance, *This day have I perfected your religion for you and completed my favour upon you and have chosen for you Islam as religion* (5:4) the last verse to be revealed to the Holy Prophet^(sa), descended upon him on the momentous occasion of the farewell pilgrimage, eighty-two days prior to his demise while the rest of the chapter had been received by him long before. This shows that verses of the one and the

same surah would come to him in some cases on quite different dates.

So it is possible that the Holy Prophet^(sa) had used this phrase in his letter to Heraclius and subsequently it came to him as revelation or the verse was revealed to him twice, once immediately after Hijra and for the second time when the deputation of Najran Christians visited him. In either case the objection does not stand.

Montgomery Watt has said that some envoys, for instance to Bosra, were dispatched prior to al-Hudaibiyah. Authentic sources like Bukhari, Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Sa'd categorically place the dispatch of missions to Heraclius, Negus, Khusro Perwez and Mukawqis after al-Hudaibiyah. Dihya went to Bosra previously also, but privately. Possibly his earlier acquaintance with Heraclius led the Holy Prophet^(sa), after Hudaibiyah, to entrust him with his epistle to the emperor. Further, these authorities declare unanimously that the object of these missions was to call the princes to Islam and on this count there is absolutely no dissent.

Margoliouth's Confusion

Before we consider the remaining letters it seems proper to review some remarks about it by Margoliouth. He admits its receipt by Heraclius and quotes Greek authorities as well (*Muralt, Essai de Chronologie Byzantine*; Drapeyon L'empereur Heraclius. Paris. 1869). He says:

Arabic and Greek writers agree in making 628 the year in which Muhammad's letter reached Heraclius. (Margoliouth *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, London. 1905. p.365)

Then he makes a confusing insinuation. Traditionists like Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Sa'd, al-Bukhari agree that it was Abu Sufyan bin Harb who appeared in the court of Heraclius and answered his questions regarding the Holy Prophet. But Margoliouth says it was Abu Sufyan bin al-Harith. For proof, he adds remarks that do not lend any support to his contention, as Abu Sufyan bin Harb was also a near kinsman of the Holy Prophet^(sa).

'In the story (Wakidi W-329,

n), Abu Sufyan is represented as a near relation of Muhammad which does not suit the more famous Abu Sufyan so well.'

Similarly, he denies that Abu Sufyan had answered Heraclius' questions in the latter's court, not on any historical evidence, but merely on his own preconceived notions. He says:

'Had he (Abu Sufyan) really been summoned, he could scarcely have lost the opportunity of endeavouring to obtain help for Mecca against the dangerous exile; of pointing out the menace to the neighbouring provinces which was contained in the rise of Moslem Power.' (Ibid., p.366)

Margoliouth, however, forgets, that by the time Heraclius received this letter much water had flowed under the bridge and the Makkans had become thoroughly disillusioned about their power to undermine Islam. The battles of Badr, Uhud and the Ditch had opened their eyes and warned them of the

writing on the wall. They also knew that they had miserably failed to enlist the sympathies of the Negus against Muslim refugees. In the circumstances it was quite sensible for Abu Sufyan to abstain from entangling himself in any fruitless venture. Moreover, he was also a near relation of the Holy Prophet^(sa) and his heart must have softened by that time towards his unique countryman.

The Holy Prophet^(sa) sent a similar dispatch to a vassal of the Roman emperor, al-Harith bin Ali Shimr, the Prince of the Bani Ghassan or Harith VII, as Muir identifies him in his *Life*, p.384.

When Shuja bin Wahab al-Asadi presented the Holy Prophet^{'s(sa)} letter to him, Harith threw it away in anger and threatened to storm Madinah. Heraclius, however, did not permit him to do so and called him instead to Jerusalem for celebrating his victory over the Persians (Zurqani, Vol. III. p.357).

Referring to this incident, Muir remarks, 'But Heraclius, regarding the ominous voice beneath his notice, forbade the expedition' (*Life*, p. 384). He does not tell us

on what evidence he has attributed these sentiments to Heraclius. On the contrary, according to the report contained in Bukhari, he had become so enamoured of the Holy Prophet^(sa) that he longed to wash his feet for blessings. His conduct indicates that he forbade the expedition out of love for the Holy Prophet^(sa). Muir is so used to depicting everything concerning the Holy Prophet^(sa) in dark colour that it seems he is not writing a biography but an indictment. Similar is the case, more or less, with Margoliouth, another detractor of the Holy Prophet^(sa).

Letter to Khusro Perwez

A similar and slightly augmented dispatch was sent to Khusro Perwez, Emperor of Persia, who, on being apprised of its contents, tore it to pieces and grossly mistreated its bearer, Abdullah bin Hudhafa al-Sahmi (Ibn Ishaq; Tabari; Khamis and Zurqani). When the Holy Prophet^(sa) was told of the emperor's obnoxious reaction, he is reported to have exclaimed. 'May God smash them into pieces' (*Bukhari*).

Besides rending the letter to shreds,

the impetuous Kisra directed Badhan, his governor at Yemen to apprehend the Holy Prophet^(sa). The two agents deputed for this purpose reached Madinah and urged him to accompany them to the king of kings, or to face his wrath. The Holy Prophet^(sa) smiled at their master's impudence and asked them to wait for his answer till the morning. The next morning he gave them his answer. 'Apprise your chief (governor of Yemen) that my God (the All-Powerful Allah) has killed your god (Kisra) last night.'

Returning to the governor, the emissaries acquainted him with the Holy Prophet's^(sa) response. After some days he received a dispatch from Sheeruya (Siroes) intimating that he had killed his cruel father and installed himself as the new Kisra. He further forbade him from arraigning the Holy Prophet^(sa). Badhan was so impressed by the turn of events that he embraced Islam forthwith and so did a large number of his subjects (Ibn Ishaq: Tabari, Vol. III, pp. 1572-1574).

The point regarding the fate of Kisra in this narrative is very significant. Original sources like

Ibn Ishaq agree that the Holy Prophet's^(sa) prediction about this murder was based on Divine revelation and as such constituted a proof of his Divine mission. But Muir and Margoliouth, actuated by a desire to deny him the gift of prophecy, try to give it a fantastic touch. Muir says:

'At the time they (the emissaries of Badhan) arrived at Medina, tidings had reached the prophet of the deposition and death of the Persian monarch. When the dispatch, therefore, was read before him, he smiled at its contents, and summoned the ambassadors to embrace Islam. He then apprised them of the murder of Khusro and accession of his son; "Go," said he, "inform your master of this and require him to tender his submission to the prophet of God"' (Ibid. p. 395)

Taking his cue from Muir, Margoliouth chimes in with him. He says:

'Now, that Muhammad had many secret agencies for obtaining intelligence speedily

cannot be doubted.’
(Ibid. p. 368)

By this mischievous suggestion, Margoliouth wants us to believe that early in the seventh century AD the Holy Prophet^(sa) had equipped his agents with the most sophisticated instruments of communication, perhaps more sensitive than what we have now at the end of the twentieth century. Otherwise how could the news of the patricide committed by Siroes be flashed to him across expansive deserts the same night in which it had occurred? When we consider that Siroes himself took many days to convey the news to Badhan the absurdity of Margoliouth’s insinuation becomes all the more evident. There is absolutely no evidence to show that the facts of Khusro Perwez had been communicated to him by some external means and in the absence of any such indication there is no reason to deny that the event was revealed to the Holy Prophet^(sa) by the All-Knowing God.

Letter to Negus

The Holy Prophet’s^(sa) letter to Najashi (Negus), the king of Abyssinia, inviting him to Islam

was carried to him by Amr b. Umayyah ad-Damri. The king was not a stranger to the Holy Prophet^(sa), whom he had obliged some eleven years prior to the receipt of this epistle. He had granted asylum to his followers, fleeing to him from their Makkan tormentors and also firmly refused their persecutors who had subsequently come to him demanding their extradition.

The following is the text of the letter which the Holy Prophet^(sa) wrote to him. It will be observed that it is warmer and more elaborate than the letters which he wrote to some other rulers.

‘In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, to Najashi the king of Abyssinia. Peace on you. Next, I praise before you the one and the only God. None else is worthy of worship. He is the Sovereign; the Holy; the Source of Peace; the Bestower of Security and the Protector. I bear witness that Jesus, son of Mary, was a Messenger of God, who came in fulfillment of the promise made to Mary by Him.

I invite you to God, who is One, having no associate and I call upon you to join with me and to believe in the revelation which has descended upon me. Surely, I am a Messenger of Allah. I invite you and your armies to join the faith of the Almighty God. I have delivered to you the message of God in all sincerity and I trust you will respond to it in the same spirit. I have already sent to you a number of Muslims with my cousin Jaafar. Peace be on him who follows the guidance.

(Ibn Sa'd; Zurqani Vol. III. pp. 343–344)

When this letter reached the Negus he showed it great respect and answered as under:

‘In the name of Allah the Beneficent, The Merciful. To Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, from Najashi Ashima Peace and Mercy and blessings of Allah be upon you. O Messenger of Allah. None except Allah is worthy of worship. It is He Who has guided me to Islam. I have received your letter, O Messenger of Allah. By God,

whatever you have written in it about Jesus I do not hold him even a whit greater than that. We have understood your call towards Truth, and I bear witness that you are a true Messenger of God, of whose coming tidings had been given in the previous scriptures also. So, through your cousin Jaafar, I offer my adhesion to you. Peace of Allah be on you, and His mercy and His blessings.’
(Ibn Sa'd; Zurqani Vol. III, pp. 344-345)

This Najashi died in 9 AH, and the Holy Prophet^(sa), when apprised of his demise, offered funeral prayers for him in Madinah. His successor, however, did not join Islam and stuck to Christianity. Shortly afterwards Muslim armies had to encounter the Persian and the Roman Empires which they defeated and brought completely under their sway.

Subsequently, for nearly a thousand years, Muslim generals conquered one country after another till they had subdued a very large portion of Asia, Africa and almost half of Europe. But throughout this magnificent career

of conquests they never violated the boundaries of Abyssinia. Tradition tells us that they left it intact in deference to the honour which the Negus had shown to the Holy Prophet's^(sa) letter and to the fact of his acceptance of Islam. This in itself constitutes a strong evidence of the exchange of letters between the Holy Prophet^(sa) and the Negus. Had it not been for the deep regard which the Muslim commanders had come to cherish in their hearts on this account for the Negus they would have conquered this tiny kingdom in no time at all as it was hemmed in on all sides by Muslim states. It also shows how magnanimously early Muslims responded to whatever good any nation did to them.

Letter to Mukawqis

The Holy Prophet's^(sa) letter to Mukawqis, the governor of Egypt, delivered to him by Hatib bin Abi Baltas, was also well received. Its text is the same as the letter dispatched to Heraclius and need not be reproduced. According to Zurqani, Mukawqis discussed with Hatib many issues regarding the mission of the Holy Prophet^(sa) and was favourably impressed by his arguments. Unlike the Negus,

however he did not join Islam but paid his respects to the Holy Prophet^(sa) by arranging the safekeeping of his letter and by presenting to him two Copt ladies, some garments and a white mule.

Acknowledging his letter he expressed his regard for the Holy Prophet^(sa) in the following words:

‘In the name of Allah, the beneficent, the Merciful. To Muhammad bin Abdullah from Mukawqis, Chief of the Copts, Peace on you. Next I have read your letter and understood what you have mentioned therein and to what you have invited me thereby. I certainly knew that a prophet was yet to appear but I thought he will rise in Syria. I have duly honoured your ambassador and am sending to you two girls who command great respect among the Copts, a mantle and a mule for riding as presents to you.’
(Ibn Sa'd)

Montgomery Watt has made an obscure observation (why, one can only guess!) in this regard also which needs clarification. He remarks that the ‘two slave girls

appear to have been in Madinah soon after January 627 (vi/6), since Muhammad presented one of them to Hassan bin Thabit at the conclusion of the affair of the lie.’ (Ibid. p.345)

He does not offer any proof in support of this statement. As a matter of fact, original sources like Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Sa’d clearly affirm that the slave girls came from Egypt to Madinah in response to the Holy Prophet’s(sa) letter to Mukawqis dispatched to him after his return from al-Hudaibiyah. In the circumstances it is inconceivable that they were present in Madinah at the conclusion of the affair of the lie which occurred long before. Montgomery Watt is definitely wrong in forming this opinion, as the effect could not take place prior to its cause.

Relic of Letter discovered by Egyptologist

As stated earlier on the authority of traditions, the letter to Mukawqis was safely preserved by him in original. For centuries it remained undiscovered. Then in 1852 it was found in a monastery at Akhmim by the French Egyptologist E. Barthelemy and put among the

relics of the Holy Prophet(sa) in old *Serial*. Its facsimile was published in Hilal, Cairo, in November 1904 and also in Margoliouth’s book *Muhammad and the Rise of Islam* where it bears the following caption: ‘Letter by the Prophet to the Mukawqis discovered by M. Etienne Barthelemy; believed by several scholars to be the actual document.’(p.366)

Commenting on the genuineness of this find, Noeldeke, in the first edition of his *Geschichte des Quran* (1860, p. 40) remarks ‘there is nothing to doubt as regards the authenticity of the letter, whose text is to be found in so many of the best Arabic sources’²

However, the writer of the article ‘Muhammad’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. III 1936, denounces it on paleographic grounds as a forgery. But his verdict cannot be taken seriously. As stated by Margoliouth, several scholars (including Noeldeke) have testified to its genuineness. Also paleography, in view of the researches made about it by modern scholars, can have no say in respect of Arabic scripts. Its hold as yet is confined to Greek and

Latin writings. Below we quote our authority.

‘In general, however, paleography embraces writings found principally on papyrus (vellum) and paper. Today, paleography is regarded as relating to Greek and Latin scripts with their derivatives, thus, as a rule, excluding Egyptian, Hebrew and Middle and Far Eastern scripts.’ (*New Encyclopaedia Britannica* vol. 13, 1973, under the article ‘Paleography’)

So, when Arabic paleography in 1973 was yet unable to adjudge, how can a verdict pronounced on an Arabic script in 1936, when this science had not even formulated its rudiments, claim any credibility?

Further, as pointed out by Noeldeke, the text of the document is the same as contained in the Arabic source books. The seal it bears is also the same as is ascribed to the Holy Prophet^(sa). Moreover, the possibility of its having been forged by some Muslim scholars is ruled out, as they had no motive for it. They knew full well that

universality of Islam proclaimed by the Holy Qur’an and recorded by the collectors of traditions, needed no other proof.

Reference to Past Prophets

Alluding to a tradition contained in Ibn Ishaq’s collection, Montgomery Watt draws some unwarranted conclusions. The tradition purports to say that when the Holy Prophet^(sa) deputed some of his companions to carry his epistles to the princes he told them that Jesus had also sent his disciples similarly. Montgomery Watt’s comment on this incident is as follows:

‘It is possible to discern a theological motive for the alteration of the stories (i.e. about the letters under discussion).

Ibn Ishaq makes Muhammad himself refer to the sending out of the apostles by Jesus and with this connects the gift of languages at Pentecost. This appears to be intended to substantiate the claim that Muhammad was a Prophet to all nations and not simply to the Arabs.’

It is simply beyond comprehension how mere reference to a certain act of Jesus^(as) should make the occurrence of a similar act of the Holy Prophet^(sa) doubtful. If this sort of reasoning is correct, then one can even deny the amnesty granted by him to the Makkans. For it can very well be pointed out that the Qur'an speaks of the incident of Joseph^(as) pardoning his brothers (12:93) and then go on to assert that the traditions regarding the Holy Prophet's^(sa) amnesty on the fall of Makkah are all 'an afterthought' and a fabrication to show that he was as benign and merciful as Joseph^(as). It is feared that if this sort of logic comes in vogue then there would be left nothing for the compilation of the Holy Prophet's biography, because most of his sublime deeds resemble those of biblical prophets.

We reproduce below Ibn Ishaq's tradition so that the reader may judge for himself whether there is any justification for Montgomery Watt's comments.

'Yazid b. Abu Habib Al-Misri told me that he found a document in which was a memorandum (T. the names) of

those the apostles sent to the countries and kings of the Arabs and non-Arabs and what he said to his companions when he sent them. I sent it to Muhammad b. Shihab al-Zuhri (T. with a trusty countryman of his) and he recognised it. It contained the statement that the apostle went out to his companions and said, "God has sent me as a mercy to all men, so take a message from me, God have mercy on you. Do not hang back from me as the disciples hung back from Jesus, son of Mary." They asked how they had hung back. He said. "He called them to a task similar to that to which I have called you. Those who had to go a short journey were pleased and accepted. Those who had a long journey before them were displeased and refused to go, and Jesus complained of them to God (T. From that very night) every one of them was able to speak the language of the people to whom he was sent.' (T. Jesus said, "This is a thing which God has determined that you should do, so go.")

(T. Then the apostle divided his companions and sent Salit b. Amr b. Abdu Shamus b. Abdu Wudd, brother of B. ‘Amr b. Lu’ayy, to Haudha b. Ali, ruler of al-Yamama. Hatib b. Abu Balta’a to the Mukawqis, ruler of Alexandria, etc.’) (*Sirat Rasul Allah*, translated by A. Guillaume. p.653)

Acceptance by non-Arabs

Again, the admission of Hadhrat Bilal^(ra), Hadhrat Suhayb Rumi^(ra) and Hadhrat Salman^(ra) into the fold of Islam is further evidence in this regard. Hadhrat Bilal^(ra) was an Abyssinian and Hadhrat Salman^(ra) belonged to Persia. They had the honour of embracing Islam at the hands of the Holy Prophet^(sa). Had the message of Islam been limited to Arabs only, why should the Holy Prophet^(sa) have welcomed them?

Besides receiving them cordially in Islam, the Holy Prophet^(sa) referred to Hadhrat Bilal^(ra) as the ‘first fruit of Abyssinia’ and to Hadhrat Suhayb^(ra) as ‘first fruit of Greece’. This clearly indicates that he took his message to be universal and expected non-Arab nations to join Islam. This evidence is from the Makkan period of his life.

The universality of Islam is further evident from its claim to perfection and finality (5:4 quoted above). Previous to the Holy Prophet of Islam^(sa), prophets were raised on a national basis, with guidance suitable for a well-defined people and for a limited time only. The sequence of this progressive development culminated in the advent of the Holy Prophet^(sa) who was given, in the shape of the Holy Qur’an, the most perfect and final Shariah (religious law) which was to endure forever and, as envisaged in 61:10 (quoted above), to gather all nations of the world into one brotherhood.

This article is an edited version of one first printed in *The Muslim Herald* Jan. 1983 Vol. 23:1

References

- 1 In the early days of Islam, the date of revelation was unimportant. Chapters were later classified as of Makkan or Madinite period. This point has repeatedly been exploited by orientalist who disregard strong evidence with the sole

object of denying that the Holy Prophet^(sa) may have foretold an event and that the verse must have been included after the event.

Arabic inscriptions of Madinah of the early years of Hijrah' in *Islamic Culture*, October 1939 issue.

2. As quoted by Dr Hamidullah Khan, in his article on 'Some
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Interview – William Montgomery Watt

An interview with ‘the Last Orientalist’ – The Rev Prof William Montgomery Watt .

(Internet version from www.AlastairMcIntosh.com)

by *Bashir Maan & Alastair McIntosh*

The Reverend Professor William Montgomery Watt has written over 30 books including *Islamic Political Thought* (1968) and *Muslim-Christian Encounters: Perceptions and Misconceptions* (1991). In Scotland he has been a member of the ecumenical Iona Community since 1960. Amongst Islamic scholars he has been held in an esteemed position, described as ‘most reverential.’ The Muslim press have called him ‘the Last Orientalist.’ This interview was conducted in 1999, his ninetieth year, at his home in Dalkeith. With Professor Watt’s approval and careful agreement of the final text, it uses both spoken material and statements drawn from some of his most important articles of recent years. It is, in a sense, a distillation of his life’s work.

Alastair McIntosh’s work on ‘combating Islamophobia’ is part of the Edinburgh-based Centre for Human Ecology’s Action for Transformation work, supported by the Quaker Concerns programme of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. He is an Associate of the Iona Community and from 1986-1990 was its Business Advisor.

Dr Bashir Maan is Scottish Representative on the Executive of the Muslim Council of Great Britain, was for 8 years chair of the Glasgow Central Mosque Committee and, as an elected Glasgow city councillor, chairs the Strathclyde Joint Police Board – Britain’s second-largest police force.

In reproducing this interview, the *Review of Religions* neither endorses nor necessarily agrees or disagrees with some or all of the views held by William Montgomery Watt.

(Ed.)

Professor Watt, how did you become interested in Islam and Christianity?

Well, I had studied Classics at Edinburgh University and ‘Greats’ – philosophy and ancient history – at Oxford. From 1934 to 1938 I taught moral philosophy at Edinburgh University. In 1937 when my mother died, I asked an Indian (later Pakistani) Muslim to come as a paying guest to help me pay for a housekeeper. Khwaja Abdul Mannan was a student of veterinary medicine and at that time, aged about 20, a member of the Ahmadiyya Community – something he would have had to give up later when he became a Colonel in the Pakistani army. Mannan, as he called himself, was an argumentative Muslim, and our many discussions over breakfast and evening meals raised my interest in the world of Islam. I believe that he is still alive in Lahore.

When I heard that the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem wanted someone to work on Muslim-Christian relations I applied for the post. After studying theology and

being ordained priest, I began to learn Arabic in London. Between 1941 and 1943 I completed my PhD at Edinburgh on freewill and predestination in early Islam. That was with Richard Bell, famous for translation of the Qur’an (Koran). Between 1944 and 1946 I worked in Palestine under the Bishop of Jerusalem. I had hoped to have discussions with Muslims, but Jerusalem proved not to be a good place to get in contact with intellectual Muslims. In 1946 things became difficult. I lost a friend when they blew up the King David Hotel. After leave I decided not to return to Jerusalem. In 1947 I became head of the department of Arabic & Islamic Studies at Edinburgh University and continued there until my retirement in 1979 at the age of 70. In 1964 I received the title of Professor. I remain a priest in the Scottish Episcopalian Church and am presently writing another book about a Christian faith for today.

Your life’s work has been devoted to dialogue between Islam and Christianity. Why is this important?

In the outburst of missionary activity round about the year 1800 the ideal was to go into the non-Christian parts of the world and convert everyone to Christianity; and this is still the ideal of some Christians. From Islam, however, there were very few converts. I have now come to doubt the appropriateness of conversion in many cases. The nineteenth-century missionaries did not appreciate the positive achievements of the great religions in giving their communities a tolerable and meaningful form of life. In the course of the years I have made many Muslim friends, some of them in influential positions. These persons are deeply rooted in their religion and are doing excellent work not only for their fellow-Muslims but also for wider circles. I would indeed admit that sometimes conversion may be necessary for an individual's spiritual health and growth; but this is exceptional. For such reasons I hold that the Christian aim for the foreseeable future should be to bring the religions together in friendly dialogue and, where possible, in cooperation, for there is a sense in

which all are threatened by the rising tide of secularism and materialism.

Many Westerners would question the value of dialogue with Islam because, for example, they see the Sharia as being cruel. Do you think this is true?

Well, similar punishments are found in the Old Testament – including, for example, the cutting off of women's hands in Deuteronomy 25. In Islamic teaching, such penalties may have been suitable for the age in which Muhammad lived. However, as societies have since progressed and become more peaceful and ordered, they are not suitable any longer.

If we demonise one another we cannot even debate such things. Dialogue is therefore imperative. It helps us to discern not just the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, but also the relevance that God wants them to have in our times.

What about the attitude of Muhammad (peace be upon him) towards women?

It is true that Islam is still, in many ways, a man's religion. But I think I've found evidence in some of the early sources that seems to show that Muhammad made things better for women. It appears that in some parts of Arabia, notably in Mecca, a matrilineal system was in the process of being replaced by a patrilineal one at the time of Muhammad. Growing prosperity caused by a shifting of trade routes was accompanied by a growth in individualism. Men were amassing considerable personal wealth and wanted to be sure that this would be inherited by their own actual sons, and not simply by an extended family of their sisters' sons. This led to a deterioration in the rights of women. At the time Islam began, the conditions of women were terrible – they had no right to own property, were supposed to be the property of the man, and if the man died everything went to his sons. Muhammad improved things quite a lot. By instituting rights of property ownership, inheritance,

education and divorce, he gave women certain basic safeguards. Set in such historical context the Prophet can be seen as a figure who testified on behalf of women's rights.

A lot also depends on what sort of Muslim society you look at. Many Westerners today think that Islam holds women in the heaviest oppression. That may be so in some cases, but only because they look at certain parts of the Islamic world. Pakistan, Bangladesh and Turkey have all had women heads of state. I therefore don't think the perception of Westerners is entirely correct.

What about war – Jihad versus Crusade? Terrorism, for example, can be considered both unislamic and unchristian, yet we see it justified by extremists whether in Egypt or Northern Ireland. Do you think violence can be part of faith?

Well, I think fundamentalists of any religion go beyond what their religion is about. But let me take

an example from our Old Testament. I'm becoming very worried about the Old Testament because so much of it is unchristian. I read a passage every day and find it more and more so. There is a serious matter, which is not clear from some translations. The New Jerusalem Bible that I read uses the phrase 'curse of destruction,' and this was applied to towns when the Hebrews were coming into Palestine. They killed everyone in a town – men, women, children and sometimes also animals. This happened in Jericho as we see in Joshua 6, and in about a dozen other places; and there are also later instances. This is definitely unchristian.

I think on the whole Christianity is against war, though in the past Christians have supported wars. I don't think Islam is basically anti-Christian, but some extremists might take such a view.

There was a formal gathering of Scottish Christians and Muslims at the national service of reconciliation in Edinburgh following the Gulf War a few years ago. Scottish church leaders had

refused the government's wish to make it a service of 'thanksgiving.' They called it, instead, one of 'reconciliation.' The time of day coincided with the Muslim's evening call to prayer. At first the Muslims thought this would prevent them from attending. But then, to avoid any problem, they were allowed to say their prayers in St Giles Cathedral in front of the Christian altar while the Christian congregation kept silent. The following week Christians prayed in the community centre of the Glasgow Mosque. This would mirror the tradition that Muhammad allowed Christian delegations visiting him to pray in the Mosque. Such a happening in modern Scotland, even after a war, suggests that religion can bridge the wounds of war.

I therefore certainly don't think the West is locked into Jihad with Islam, though I suppose if the fundamentalists go too far they'll have to be opposed. Iran's comments about the 'Great Satan' were aimed mostly at the United States: they were not made because the West was Christian. I

think the West should try to overcome these strains between different religious groups. I do, however, think that the US is following a very dangerous policy in relation to the Middle East. The root of this trouble is that the US gives too much support to Israel. They allow them to have nuclear weapons and to do all sorts of things, some of which are contrary even to Jewish law. Jewish families occupy Arab houses without payment. That is stealing. I think that the US should be much firmer with Israel and put a lot of pressure on them, though this is difficult because of the strong Jewish lobby. Unless something is done there'll be dangerous conflict in the Middle East. Such danger would be less likely to arise if all three Abrahamic faiths – Jews, Christians and Muslims – paid greater respect to what God teaches us about living together.

Do you think that the newly re-established Scottish Parliament should take any position on the Middle East?

The Scots Parliament should keep

to a middle course and certainly not join the anti-Islamic side. I am sure it would like to see some balance of Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, and of course, fair treatment for the Palestinian Arabs, some of whom are Christian. The Scottish Parliament might try and help them to come to terms with one another.

Within Scotland, the parliament should work for some harmony between religions as there are Muslims and Jews, as well as Christians, in Scotland. With luck there'll be one or two Muslim MSPs. The big question is whether the Nationalists will win and go on to demand independence which I think might be a good thing, though I'm neither strongly for or against independence.

Islam maintains that the Word of God is final and we can't change it. Christianity, with its understanding of the dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit, is in constant flux. Where do you stand on this difference?

I would be inclined to say that the Qur'an is the Word of God for a particular time and place and will not therefore necessarily suit other times and places. The prohibition on usury may have been good for a certain time and place but that doesn't mean it will always be good.

You see, I think that Muslims need help in reaching a fresh understanding of the Qur'an as God's word, but comparison with the Bible does not help much. The Qur'an came to Muhammad in a period of less than 25 years, whereas from Moses to Paul is about 1300 years. Christians could perhaps show from the Bible that there is a development in God's relation to the human race. For example, Moses was told to order the death penalty by stoning for anyone who broke the Sabbath by gathering firewood on it. Joshua was told to exterminate the whole population of various towns, men women and children. Could the loving God taught by Jesus have given such barbaric and bloodthirsty orders? To say 'No,' as one would like to do, throws doubt on the inspiration of the

Bible. We seem to have to say that the precise commands which God gives to believers depend on the form of society in which they are living. Traditionally Muslims have argued from God's eternity that the commands He gives are unalterable, and they have not admitted that social forms can change.

I therefore do not believe that either the Bible or the Qur'an is infallibly true in the sense that all their commands are valid for all time. The commands given in both books were true and valid for the societies to which the revelations were primarily addressed; but when the form of society changes in important respects some commands cease to be appropriate, though many others continue to be valid. I do, however, believe that Muhammad, like the earlier prophets, had genuine religious experiences. I believe that he really did receive something directly from God. As such, I believe that the Qur'an came from God, that it is Divinely inspired. Muhammad could not have caused the great upsurge in religion that he did without God's blessing.

The diagnosis of the Meccan situation by the Qur'an is that the troubles of the time were primarily religious, despite their economic, social and moral undercurrents, and as such capable of being remedied only by means that are primarily religious. In view of Muhammad's effectiveness in addressing this, he would be a bold man who would question the wisdom of the Qur'an.

What do you think of the Qur'anic statement that the Old Testament has been changed, thus accounting for some of the differences between the Abrahamic faiths?

Well, I think that the later writers sometimes changed earlier things to make them more suitable for their contemporaries. I think there was a lot of rewriting of the Old Testament, though the form in which we have it hasn't been changed since the Christian era. I see the Old Testament as the record of a developing religion. As a religion develops some of the earlier stages may have to be abandoned completely. An exam-

ple might be Islamic teachings on usury. I don't see how it is possible completely to get rid of usury. We'll have to see how Islamic attempts to get rid of usury work. Undoubtedly capitalism has got to be restricted in various ways. The world is certainly in a mess at the moment, but how we can get out of it, I don't know. All I can say is that there are things that Christianity can learn from Islam, especially on its spiritual side, and Islam can perhaps learn from Christian understanding of God in relation to the universe and human life. I think Muslims would find that this might give a slightly greater emphasis to something in their own faith.

I think another thing is that we have all got to come to terms with the scientific outlook of today. That is very critical of the Old Testament. Old Testament says a lot about God's anger which I think is based on some of the false ideas that the Old Testament people had. They thought, you see, that God could interfere with the laws of nature. They thought that God made the sun stand still for a whole day so that Joshua could get

a great victory. Well, that's impossible. They thought that God could intervene with His own natural laws and punish people. Well, I think there is a sense in which wrongdoing is punished, but even in the Bible it is recognised that the wicked sometimes flourish. There are different strands of thinking in the Bible.

Islam requires belief in God as revealed in 'the books'—not just the one book. This arguably incorporates Christian and Jewish scriptures. What, then, do you think Judeo-Christian understandings might have to teach Islam?

I think Muslims will have to take the work of Christ more seriously, even if they simply regard him as a prophet. The view I take, in accordance with the creeds, is that he was truly human. He was not a superman. That leaves you with the question of how he was also divine, but I think we have to look much more at his humanity. I also don't think he was able to work miracles except for those that other saints could also do – such as

curing the sick. I don't think some of the other miracles really happened. For instance, one of the outstanding things was the supposed changing of water into wine at a marriage feast. This is given in the 4th Gospel and is said to be the first of the signs of Jesus' achievement. Clearly, this was meant to be understood symbolically, because making a lot of wine has nothing to do with the Gospel. It was meant to symbolise changing something ordinary into something precious, which is what Jesus had achieved. It was not meant to be taken literally – there was a tremendous amount of wine involved – the equivalent of about 900 bottles – and I do not think Jesus was an alcoholic.

In the Qur'an there is very little knowledge of Judaism and almost none of Christianity except about such points as the virgin birth. There are references to Moses and Abraham and so forth, but nothing about, for example, the settlement of Israel in Palestine and the achievements of the later prophets with their important emphasis on justice. I cannot believe that God would not bless the development

of greater awareness amongst Muslims of these things.

And what can Islam teach Christianity?

Speaking personally, it has taught me to think more deeply about the oneness of God. I am not happy with the traditional Trinitarian Christian formulation of God comprising three ‘persons’ – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word ‘person’ has changed since it was first used in English four centuries ago. It was a translation of the Latin *persona* – a face or mask, such as that used by actors. Now the English word means an individual, which is different. Christianity is not trying to say that God comprises three individuals. Islam, with its many different names for the qualities of God, can help the Christian see a more true meaning of Trinitarian doctrine. The Trinity is different faces or roles of the same one God. For me, that insight has been a direct result of my study of Islam.

There is a prayer that you have long used that brings together the Judeo-

Christian with the Islamic before the God of us all. Might we close our interview with that?

O Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, grant that the whole house of Islam, and we Christians with them, may come to know You more clearly, serve You more nearly, and love You more dearly. Amen.

Professor Watt, thank you, so very much.

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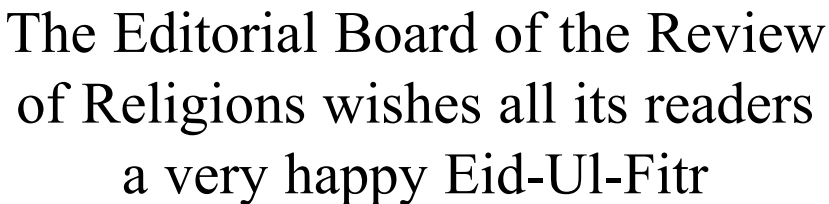
About The Iona Community

Iona is a small island off the west coast of Scotland, where in 563 Columba founded a Celtic monastery that was very influential in its own times. In the middle ages it was the site of a Benedictine abbey which over the centuries has attracted many thousands of pilgrims.

The Iona Community, founded in 1938 by the Rev George MacLeod, then a parish minister in Glasgow, is an ecumenical Christian community. The Community claims to be committed to rebuilding the common life, through working for social and political change, striving for the renewal of the church with an ecumenical emphasis, and exploring new more inclusive approaches to worship.

The Community's mainland home is in Glasgow. Though the Community is small in number, its members corporately and individually pursue some particular areas of concern, which include:

- Justice, peace and the integrity of creation (opposing nuclear weapons, campaigning against the arms trade and for ecological justice)
- Political and cultural action to combat racism
- Action for economic justice, locally, nationally and globally.



The Editorial Board of the Review
of Religions wishes all its readers
a very happy Eid-Ul-Fitr

Economic Values

by the late Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan (from The Review of Religions)

In the economic sphere the basic concept in Islam is that absolute ownership of everything belongs to God alone (2:108; 3:190). Man is God's vicegerent on earth. God has subjected to man's service *'whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth'* (45:14). This has reference to the whole of mankind. *'Allah is He Who has appointed you (mankind) His vicegerents in the earth,'* and he who fails to recognise this dignity and to act in accordance therewith shall be answerable for his neglect and will not only suffer loss but *will also incur the displeasure of his Lord* (35:40).

Legal ownership of the individual, that is to say the right of possession, enjoyment and transfer of property, is recognised and safeguarded in Islam; but all ownership is subject to the moral obligation that in all wealth all sections of society, and even animals, have a right to share.

'In their wealth they acknowledge the right of those who asked and of those who could not' (51:20).

Part of this obligation is given legal form and is made effective through legal sanctions, but the greater part is sought to be secured by voluntary effort put forth out of a desire to achieve the highest moral and spiritual benefits for all concerned. In fact, this supplementing of legal obligations through voluntary effort runs through every part of the Islamic system. Its operation can be observed in every sphere.

The object of the Islamic economic system is to secure the widest and most beneficent distribution of wealth through institutions set up by it and through moral exhortation. Wealth must remain in constant circulation among all sections of the community and should not become the monopoly of the rich (59:8).

Islam recognises the diversity of capacities and talents, which is in itself beneficent, and consequently the diversity in earnings and material rewards (4:33). It does not approve of a dead-level equality in the distribution of wealth, as that would defeat the very purpose of the diversity, and would amount to denying '*the favour of Allah*' (16:72). It is obvious that if the incentive of proportionate reward for labour, effort, skill and talent were to be removed, not only would initiative and enterprise be adversely affected, but intellectual progress would also be arrested. That is why the theoretical doctrine of equal reward irrespective of the diversity of skill, capacities and talents that have gone into the production of wealth has never been maintained for long, even where it has been proclaimed as State policy, and has had to be modified through recourse to various devices designed to secure diversity in reward. On the other hand, Islam does not leave the principle of competition and of proportionate rewards to work itself out mechanically; that too would lead to hardship and

injustice, and would retard the moral and spiritual development of individuals and of society as a whole.

The principal economic obligation is the payment of the capital levy called *Zakat* (22:79; 23:5). The word *Zakat* means 'that which purifies' and 'that which fosters.' All original sources of wealth – the sun, the moon, the stars, the clouds that bring rain, the winds that drive the clouds and carry the pollen, all phenomena of nature – are the gifts of God to the whole of mankind. Wealth is produced by the application of man's skill and labour to the resources which God has provided for man's subsistence and comfort and over part of which man enjoys proprietary rights, to the extent recognised by Islam. In the wealth that is produced, therefore, three parties are entitled to share: the workman, whether skilled or unskilled; the person who supplies the capital; and the community as representing mankind. The community's share in produced wealth is called *Zakat*. After this has been set aside for the benefit of the community, the rest is

‘purified’ and may be divided between the remaining parties that are entitled to share in it.

The *Zakat* is assessed on both capital and income. Its incidence varies with reference to different kinds of property, but on the average it works out at two and one-half per cent of the capital value. The proceeds of the *Zakat* are devoted towards relieving poverty and distress, winning over the cheerful co-operation of those who have not yet completely adjusted their lives to the Islamic system, providing ransom for prisoners of war, helping those in debt, providing comfort and convenience for travellers, supplying capital where talent is available but funds are lacking, providing stipends for scholars and research workers, meeting the expenses involved in collecting and administering the *Zakat*, and generally towards all things beneficial for the community as a whole, such as public health, public works, medical services, and educational institutions (9:60). It thus ‘fosters’ the welfare of the community (9:103).

Besides the *Zakat*, which was described by the Prophet as ‘a levy imposed upon the well-to-do which is returned to the poorer sections of the people’,¹ implying that it is their just due and must be paid back to them, there are other institutions within the economic sphere operating constantly to further the objective of the whole system. One of these is the Islamic system of inheritance and succession. Under this system a person may not dispose of more than one-third of his property by testamentary directions. While he is in the enjoyment of normal health he may dispose of his property freely, subject, of course, to the moral obligations, some of which have been noted; but neither by will nor by gift, once he enters upon a stage of illness which terminates in death, may he dispose of more than the permitted one-third. By such disposition he may provide legacies for friends, for servants, and for charity.

The rest of the inheritance must be divided among prescribed heirs in specified shares. No part of the one-third permitted to be disposed of by will may be used to augment

the share of one or more heirs to the prejudice of the remaining heirs. Each heir can take only his or her prescribed share and no more; nor can any heir be deprived of the whole or any part of his or her share. There is a wide circle of heirs. If a person should die leaving father, mother, wife or husband, sons and daughters, each is an heir and is entitled to a determined share of the inheritance. In some cases the share of a female heir in the same degree of relationship to the deceased as a male heir is equal to that of the male heir, but normally it is one half of that of a male heir in the same degree (4:8; 12-13).

The difference between the normal share of female heirs and male heirs in the same degree of relationship to the deceased is not in fact discriminatory to the prejudice of the female heirs. Under the Islamic system, the obligation of maintaining the family always rests upon the husband, even when, as is often the case, the wife's personal income may be larger than the husband's. To enable the male to discharge his obligations towards the family, his

share in the inheritance is twice that of a female in the same degree of relationship as himself. Far from operating to the prejudice of the female heir, this actually places her in a favourable position as compared with the male heir, because she does not have financial obligations to the family.

Thus the Islamic system of inheritance operates to distribute wealth so that a large number of people may have a competence or, at least, a little, rather than that one or a few should have a large share and the rest nothing. As if all this left something to be desired, the exhortation is added: *'If other relations, who are not included among the heirs, and orphans and the poor be present at the division of the inheritance, bestow something upon them therefrom and speak to them words of kindness'* (4:9).

Another major provision is the prohibition against the making of loans on interest. The word used in this connection in the Qur'an is *riba* the connotation of which is not identical with that of the word 'interest' as commonly under-

stood; but for the present purpose “interest” may be used as a rough equivalent. *Riba* is prohibited because it tends to draw wealth into the hands of a small circle and to restrict the exercise of beneficence towards one’s fellow beings. In the case of loans which bear interest, the lender in effect takes advantage of, and makes a profit out of, the need or distress of another. Islam urges the making of loans, but says they should be beneficent loans, meaning without interest. If the debtor finds himself in straitened circumstances when the time for repayment of the loan arrives, he should be granted respite till his circumstances improve, but *‘if you remit it altogether as charity, that shall be the better for you, if only you knew’* (2:281).

It is a mistake to imagine that transactions involving interest bring about an increase in the national wealth. The Qur’an says that in the sight of Allah it is not a beneficent increase. *‘But whatever you give in Zakat, seeking the favour of Allah – it is these who will increase their wealth manifold’* (30:40).

Trade, commercial partnerships, co-operatives, joint stock companies are all legitimate activities and operations (2:276). Islam does, however, lay down regulations with regard to commercial activities, designed to secure that they be carried on honestly and beneficently. All contracts, whether involving large amounts or small, must be reduced to writing, setting out all the terms thereof, as *‘this is more likely to keep out doubts, and avoid disputes’* (2:283). The writing should set out the terms agreed upon fairly, and as a further precaution it is laid down that the terms of the contract shall be dictated by the person who undertakes the liability. If the person on whose behalf the liability is undertaken is a minor, or of unsound judgment, then his guardian or the person representing his interests should dictate the terms of the contract (2:283).

Monopolies and the cornering of commodities are prohibited; so also is the holding back of produce from the market in expectation of a rise in prices.² All this is opposed

to beneficence, and those who indulge in such practices seek to take advantage of the need or distress of their fellow beings. The seller is under obligation to disclose any defect in the article offered for sale.³ Goods and commodities for sale should go into the open market, and the seller or his agent must be aware of the state of the market before proposals are made for purchase of the goods or commodities in bulk. He should not be taken unawares, lest advantage be taken of his ignorance of the state of the market and the prevailing prices.⁴

There are stern injunctions in the Qur'an with regard to the giving of full weight and measure (26:182–185). *'Woe unto those who give short measure; those who, when they take by measure from other people, take it full, but when they give by measure to others or weigh out to them, they give them less.'* (82:2–7).

Do not such people know that they will be raised again unto a terrible day, the day when mankind will stand before the Lord of the worlds?

Defective or worthless goods or articles should not be given in exchange for good ones (4:3). In short, any kind of transaction which does not comply with the highest standards of honesty and integrity must be eschewed, *'for God loves not the dishonest.'* (8:59).

Gambling is prohibited, inasmuch as it promotes dissension and hatred and tends to deter those who indulge in it from the remembrance of God and from prayer, thus occasioning a great deal more harm than any possible benefit that may be derived from it (2:220; 5:91). It also brings sudden and undeserved accession of wealth and encourages extravagance. Indulgence in gambling often brings ruin and misery in its wake.

All unlawful means of acquiring property are prohibited, as these in the end destroy a people (4:30). Acquisition of property or goods through falsehood falls in the same category. It is equally unlawful to seek to establish a title to property by obtaining judgment through corrupt means like bribery or false

evidence (2:189). The Prophet said that a party to a dispute which obtains a judgement in its favour, knowing that it is not in the right, only collects a quantity of fire for itself and not something from which it can draw any benefit.⁵

On the other hand, goods and property lawfully acquired are a bounty of God which is provided by Him as a means of support. They should be properly looked after and should not be wasted through neglect. A person of defective judgment should not be permitted to squander away his substance. It should be managed and administered for him, and provision should be made for his maintenance out of the income (4:6).

Niggardliness is condemned as a negative and destructive quality. While, on the one hand, ostentation and vanity are disapproved of, on the other, it is not considered right that a person who is well off should pretend to be poor, fearing lest he be called upon to help others. By doing this he makes himself poor in effect, and deprives himself of the benefits

that may be derived from God's bounty (4:38). The wealth of misers, instead of bringing them any advantage, becomes a handicap and arrests their moral and spiritual development (3:181). The other extreme, extravagance, is equally condemned. Even when giving to, or sharing with, others a person should not go so far as to render himself in turn an object of charity (17:30). Hoarding is absolutely prohibited because it puts wealth out of circulation and deprives the owner as well as the rest of the community of its beneficent use (9:34). The truth is that God alone is All-Sufficient, and all prosperity proceeds from Him. It is men who are in need, and prosperity is achieved not through miserliness of holding back, but through beneficent spending, which is spending 'in the cause of Allah,' namely, in the service of His creatures (47:39).

As already stated, a legal owner of property is not the only person entitled to its use. Those in need who ask, and even those who do not ask or are unable to express their need, have a right in the property of those who are better

off, inasmuch as all wealth is a bounty of God and is acquired through the use of resources which God has provided for the benefit of the whole of mankind (51:20). That is why the Qur'an directs that kindred, the needy, the wayfarer, must be paid their due (30:39). To this end there is emphatic and repeated exhortation in the Qur'an. Such giving should be in proportion to the need of the person to be helped and in accord with the means of the giver, and should not proceed from any expectation of receiving a return (17:27; 74:7).

It is indeed the highest bounty of God that He should have endowed man with appropriate faculties and capacities and then subjected the universe to man's beneficent service to enable him to achieve the fullest development of his faculties in every sphere of life. Yet some people, instead of putting their faculties to beneficent use in the service of their fellow beings and spending that which they possess for the same purpose, have a tendency to hold back, not realising that even from the purely selfish point of view the greatest

benefit is to be derived from beneficent spending and not from parsimonious holding back. This is the fundamental principle which is the basis of all prosperity, individual, national and universal. The Qur'an emphasises this repeatedly. For instance: *'Behold, you are those who are favoured by being called upon to spend in the way of Allah; but of you there are some who hold back, yet whosoever holds back does so only to his own prejudice. It is Allah Who is All-Sufficient, and it is you who are needy'* (47:39). Holding back renders a person progressively poorer in the true sense, inasmuch as he stultifies his faculties, and by putting that which he possesses out of service and out of circulation, renders it completely barren and unfruitful.

The subject of charitable and beneficent spending has so many aspects that they can be better appreciated in the juxtaposition in which the Qur'an puts them. The following excerpts contain a whole philosophy of spending, giving and sharing, on which no detailed commentary is called for:

'The case of those who spend their wealth for the cause of Allah is like that of a grain of corn which grows seven ears, in each ear a hundred grains. Allah multiplies even more for whomsoever He pleases. Allah is Bountiful, All-Knowing.

'They who spend their wealth for the cause of Allah, then follow not up what they have spent with reproach or injury, for them is their reward with their Lord, and they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

'A kind word and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. Allah is All-Sufficient, Forbearing.

'O ye who believe, render not vain your charity by taunt and injury, like him who spends his wealth to be seen of men, and he believes not in Allah and the Last Day. His case is like that of a smooth rock covered with earth, on which heavy rain falls, leaving it bare and hard. They shall not secure the benefit of aught of what they earn. And Allah guides not the disbelieving people.

'The likeness of those who spend their wealth to seek the pleasure of Allah and to strengthen their souls is that of a garden on elevated ground. Heavy rain falls on it so that it brings forth its fruit twofold, and if heavy rain does not fall on it, then light rain suffices. Allah sees what you do.

'Does any one of you desire that there should be for him a garden of palm trees and vines with streams flowing beneath it, and with all kinds of fruit for him therein-while old age has stricken him and he has helpless offspring-and that a fiery whirlwind should smite it and it be all consumed? Thus does Allah make His Signs clear to you that you may ponder.

'O ye who believe, spend of the pure things that you have earned, and of what We bring forth for you from the earth; and seek not what is bad to spend out of it when you would not receive it yourselves except with closed eyes. Know that Allah is All-Sufficient, Praiseworthy.

'Satan threatens you with

poverty and enjoins upon you what is foul, whereas Allah promises you forgiveness from Himself, and Bounty. Allah is Bountiful, All-Knowing.'
(2:262-269)

'If you give alms openly, it is well; but if you keep them secret and give them to the poor, it is better for you. He will remove from you many of your ills. Allah is aware of what you do.

'...Whatever wealth you spend, it is to the benefit of your own selves, while you spend not but to seek the favour of Allah. Whatever of wealth you spend, it shall be paid back to you in full and you shall not be wronged.

'Charity is for the needy, who are restricted in the cause of Allah and are unable to move about in the land. The ignorant person thinks them to be free from want because of their abstaining from begging. Thou shall know them by their appearance; they do not ask of men with importunity. Whatever of wealth you spend,

surely Allah has perfect knowledge thereof.

'Those who spend their wealth by night and day, secretly and openly, have their reward with their Lord, on them shall come no fear, nor shall they grieve'(2: 272-275).

References

1. *Bukhari I*, Sect.: Zakat, Ch.: Obligation of Zakat.
2. *Ibn Majah II*, Sect.: Trade, Ch.: Holding back Commodities; *Muslim II*, Sect.: sales, Ch.: Prohibition of holding back Foodstuffs.
3. *Bukhari II*, Sect.: Sales, Ch.: Revocation, etc., *Ibn Majah II*, Sect.: Trade, Ch.: Seller should disclose defects.
4. *Bukhari II*, Sect.: sales, Ch.: Prohibition against purchase of goods before they arrive in the market
5. *Bukhari IV*, Sect.: Judgements, Ch.: Admonition to Parties.

(PARANTHESSIS)

All other references in parenthesis are to the Holy Qur'an.

Letter to the Editor

Sir

I am a regular reader of *The Review of Religions*. The work done is great. I was recently going through the speeches from the various guests at the Peace Symposium held at Baitul Futuh (Morden, UK) on 25 April. I was very happy that the Ahmadiyya Muslim community organised such an event and invited people from different faiths. This is a good way to learn about other faiths and for them to learn from us. The problem is that Christians and people of other faiths do not know what Islam actually is. The only information they get is from the media about Islam. In most cases, it is the wrong description of Islam. Even in my school, I have come across some Christian teachers and fellow students who are not really aware of Islam. They try to give a wrong picture in front of others. It is difficult to explain to everyone what Islam actually is.

Besides that we also lack knowledge about other faiths like

Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, etc. and this knowledge is nowadays essential for us since we live amongst Christians and people of other faiths. In my opinion, it is very important for us to have knowledge about other faiths as well as ours.

For example, the article about Salahuddin Ayyubi (*The Review of Religions* September 2004) was very inspiring for me and would be for other younger people. So magazines like *The Review of Religions* are also very important for young people. They give you knowledge about matters that is hardly available in books nowadays.

All I want to say is: keep up the good work and promote *The Review of Religions* also amongst younger people.

**Sumera Ahmed,
Friedberg, Germany**

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