

TITLE PAGE

A Christian reads the Qur`ân

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A CHRISTIAN READS THE QUR`AN

FOREWORD

The interpretation of the Qur`ân is from my perspective as a Christian.

The aim of the study is to make the characters, teachings and events of the Qur`ân easily accessible.

The study is intended for those interested in getting acquainted with the Qur`ân and for Christians who have recently converted from Islam.

Nowadays many people have a greater interest in getting to know what the Qur`ân teaches but since they are not used to it, they find the Qur`ân unstructured and inaccessible. Very often they feel that they need some assistance, and it is such assistance that this book would like to offer. Here they can get acquainted with some of the Qur`ân's characters, events and teachings from a Christian perspective.

For many new Christians from a Muslim background their relationship to the Qur`ân is not so obvious. They may have indeed found salvation in Christ, but a question which soon arises is what they will now do with Muhammad and the Qur`ân.

For them, the Qur`ân came with their mothers' milk, so to speak, but they have perhaps never dared to pose any critical questions about the book, such questions being taboo within traditional Islam.

As new Christians they dare, often for the first time in their lives, to question the position of the Qur`ân as the Word of God. This study may help the new Christian to deal with this question.

I have many Muslim friends whom I respect. I would be disappointed if Christians used this study without love with the aim of attacking Islam.

L M Abdallah
Stockholm 1995

SIMPLIFIED TRANSCRIPTION AND PRONUNCIATION

Arabic Name/Letter	Sign Used	Pronunciation
hamza	`	glottal stop, as in "a car"
âlif	a, â	"^" marks a long vowel
bâ'	b	
tâ'	t	
thâ'	th	as in "three"
jîm	j	
hâ'	h	(aspirated)
khâ'	kh	as in German "Buch"
dâl	d	
dhâl	dh	as in "the"
râ'	r	
zâ'	z	
sîn	s	
shîn	sh	as in "she"
sâd	s	(velarised)
dâd	d	(velarised)
tâ'	t	(velarised)
zâ'	z	(velarised)
'ayn	'	voiced counterpart of "ha"
ghayn	gh	similar to throaty French "r"
fâ'	f	
qâf	q	(uvular), as "k" not "kw"
kâf	k	(palatal)
lâm	l	
mîm	m	
nûn	n	
hâ'	h	
wâw	w, û	
yâ'	y, î	

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INTRODUCTION

The word Qur`ân comes from the Arabic "Al Qur`ân" which means "The Recital", and it was only in that form that the Qur`ân was available as it grew over a period of twenty-two years. It was only after Muhammad's death that it was compiled as a book.

The Qur`ân is therefore not just a book to be read for its content, but for many Muslims the Qur`ân is in its proper form when it is recited in Arabic using the characteristic chanting of Muhammad. It is then that it exists in its original form.

The public reading of the Qur`ân has developed into an art form of its own with certain rules for rhythm, melody and pauses.

In Egypt, for example, those who can read the Qur`ân in the prescribed manner can receive wide acclaim. The best readers of the Qur`ân can be heard virtually every day on TV, radio and on tape at workplaces, markets and so on.

The Qur`ân grew gradually as Muhammad announced new "revelations" which, according to his own testimony, had been dictated to him by the angel Gabriel. One of those present would then try to remember the new verses or write them down on skin, palm leaves, pieces of bone or white stones. Then Muhammad himself would give instructions as to where these new verses should come in the text which was divided into chapters or suras. The Qur`ân was also memorised by certain people known as "hâfiz". These "hâfiz", as well as written fragments, later became a primary source during the Qur`ân's compilation.

According to Muhammad, the Qur`ân was dictated in Arabic by the angel Gabriel. If the Qur`ân is translated into other languages it ceases to be the Qur`ân in its true sense, but according to Islam, a translation can at best capture the meaning of the Qur`ân. However for practical reasons we will have to use a translation.

The first Qur`ân was compiled within two years after Muhammad's death by a "hâfiz" named Zaid ibn Thâbit by the command of the first Caliph Abu Bakr. It was called "The Leaves" or "The Pages" and was kept safe by one of Muhammad's widows, Hafsa.

Since Islam covered the whole Arabian peninsula, the Qur`ân came to be recited in seven different dialects. In time, differences and small variations arose in the text. The third Caliph, Uthmân, decided to compile a new official version of the Qur`ân. He gave the task to Zaid ibn Thâbit, who had put together the first version, along with three other "hâfiz", 'Abdallah ibn Zubair, Sa'îd ibn Al Âs and 'Abdallah ibn Hârith ibn Hishâm. We can only speculate as to why the original Qur`ân was not simply copied. The only logical explanation is that "The Leaves of Hafsa" were not a complete version of the Qur`ân after all.

When the official Qur`ânic text had been established, all other deviating versions of the Qur`ân were burned. Only the original "leaves of Hafsa" escaped the flames, but even this copy was later burned by a certain Marwân, who was the governor of Medina. These drastic proceedings eliminated much of the discussion surrounding the Qur`ânic text, but far from all of it.

Background to Introduction:

Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, pp 21-56

Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, pp 259-261

A CHRISTIAN READS THE QUR`AN

Quotations from the Qur`ân have been taken from The Holy Qur`ân (Abdullah Yusuf Ali).

A. THE QUR`AN, THE ETERNAL WORD OF GOD

The Qur`ân claims to be the eternal and perfect word of God. Traditional Islam teaches that the Qur`ân existed in eternity before God created the world. At a certain point in history it came down through the angel Gabriel and was dictated to Muhammad word for word and letter for letter. (Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p. 15, pp 36-38).

A1. The original is in heaven

"And verily, it is in the Mother of the Book, in our presence, high (in dignity), full of wisdom." Al Zukhruf 43:4

Comment: *According to the Qur`ân, God has an original book in heaven. The idea is that the Qur`ân is an exact copy of the heavenly original. The Qur`ân therefore claims that it is a copy of the eternal word of God.*

A2. God is able to change or confirm earlier books

"...For each period is a Book (revealed). Allah doth blot out or confirm what he pleaseth: with him is the Mother of the Book." Al Ra'd 13:38-39

Comment: *The Qur`ân states that God does not have to confirm the scriptures he had earlier revealed because he is God and therefore above his own word. The original book is after all with him in heaven.*

A3. No unclean person is to touch the Qur`ân

"That this is indeed a Qur`ân most honourable, in a Book well guarded, which none shall touch but those who are clean." Al Wâqi'ah 56:77-79

Comment: *Since the Qur`ân is the word of God only those who are clean may touch it. Clean, in this instance, refers both to an inward and an outward purity. A Muslim is therefore to practise ritual washing before touching the Qur`ân. A special stand for the Qur`ân to rest upon is desirable so that it is not held unnecessarily.*

CONCLUSION: *Muslims consider Islam to be the original religion. Muhammad did not consider that he introduced new revelations which in some way contradicted earlier books. (Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.18). The Qur`ân is presented as a copy of God's original book: the mother book, from which all God's books come. The Qur`ân, therefore, according to Islam, is the eternal word of God.*

B. ARGUMENTS FOR THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE QUR`AN

A considerable proportion of Muhammad's activity was geared towards convincing people that he was God's apostle and that the Qur`ân was the word of God. In reading the Qur`ân we notice a number of arguments aimed at convincing those listening that the eternal word of God was now in Arabic.

B1. The Qur`ân agrees with earlier scripture

"They say: 'Why does he not bring us a sign from his Lord?' Has not a clear sign come to them of all that was in the former Books of revelation?" Tâ Hâ 20:133

Comment: *Time after time, the Qur`ân argues its trustworthiness on the basis that it confirms earlier scripture from God, that is, the Bible.*

The Qur`ân recounts part of the Bible, above all Genesis and Exodus. Otherwise there are only names or fragments from the rest of the Bible.

Is this really a sign from God? The Bible was, after all, completed over 500 years before the Qur`ân, so it is not in itself any wonder at all that Muhammad produced a book which in part likens the Bible. The Qur`ân would, on the other hand, have been a complete miracle if it could be shown that Muhammad had never had access to the biblical accounts and yet succeed in producing a book like the Qur`ân.

Islamic sources report that Muhammad, already at the age of nine to twelve, made his first journey with a trade caravan to Syria where he came in contact with Christians. We also know that on a second visit to Syria he showed great interest in the Judaism and Christianity he encountered there. He spent some time during that period with a Nestorian Christian monk named Bahirah (The Holy Qur`ân, Ali, p.7, note 8)

Both Christians and Jews lived in the area. There were three Jewish tribes in Medina. Several Arabic Bedouin tribes were Christians with their own bishops. The whole population of the town of Najrân was in some way Christian. There were even some Christian mercenaries and slaves from Abyssinia in Mecca itself (Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.31, 32). Waraqah Abn Nûfal was a Christian from among Muhammad's own family and was besides the cousin of Muhammad's wife Khadijah. Waraqah and Khadijah were the first to be convinced of Muhammad's calling to be the Apostle of Allah (The Holy Qur`ân, Ali, C.32, p.9, 10). There was therefore a lot of potential for Muhammad to learn about biblical characters and accounts from both Jews and Christians.

We also know that between the ages of thirty and forty Muhammad was a religious seeker, who, for example, devoted himself to long periods of fasting and meditation. When he later received his first "revelation" at the age of forty he continued his dialogue with both Jews and Christians, something which the Qur`ân often confirms. Besides this, some Christians converted to Islam even from the outstart and later Jews as well.

In the light of the fact that people discussed the Bible virtually every day, it is not at all remarkable that Muhammad could talk about its characters and events. Those details from the Bible which are to be found in the Qur`ân are in addition of just the kind which can be easily passed on by word of mouth in story form. It should also be noted that there are quite a number of details in the Qur`ân which deviate greatly from the Bible's accounts but which are instead to be found in the apocryphal writings and legends of Judaism and Christianity (see also E. THE QUR`AN DEVIATES FROM THE BIBLE). One gets the impression that those Jews and Christians who had informed Muhammad about their faith could not themselves have been able to tell the difference between what was biblical and what was apocryphal or

pure legend. We are after all aware that this problem even exists among different Christian groups in the world today, despite literacy and printing.

B2. Jews converted to Islam

"Say: 'See ye? If (this teaching) be from Allah, and ye reject it, and a witness from among the Children of Israel testifies to its similarity (with earlier scripture), and has believed while ye are arrogant, (how unjust ye are!) Truly, Allah guides not a people unjust.'" Al Ahqâf 46:10

Comment: *A number of Jews converted to Islam. However, the overwhelming majority of the Jews rejected Muhammad as a prophet.*

In Medina, sharp disputes arose between the Jewish minority and the Muslims. During these disputes many Jews lost their lives, but most of them were forced into exile (see also H17. Jews who were forced to flee from Medina).

B3. The Qur`ân came in Arabic

"Verily this is a Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds...In the perspicuous Arabic tongue. Without doubt it is (announced) in the revealed Books of former peoples. Is it not a Sign to them that the Learned of the Children of Israel knew it (as true)? Had We revealed it to any of the non-Arabs, and had he recited it to them, they would not have believed in it."

Al Shu'arâ` 26:192, 195-199

Comment: *The very fact that the Qur`ân came in Arabic was considered a strong argument for its being the word of God. Neither the Old nor the New Testaments had yet been translated into Arabic. Jews and Christians read their holy scriptures in foreign languages, but now material in Arabic was emerging in a form that likened the Bible and which Muhammad claimed was authenticated by the Bible. The fact that the Bible was not available in Arabic made it quite difficult for Jews and Christians to prove that the Qur`ân did indeed deviate from the Bible on a good many points, and if anyone succeeded in convincing his audience of this fact, Muhammad explained that he was either concealing the truth or had distorted the interpretation of the earlier scriptures.*

B4. No-one can produce such a recital

"Or do they say, 'He fabricated the (Message)'? Nay, they have no faith! Let them then produce a recital like unto it - if (it be) they speak the Truth!" Al Tûr 52:33-34

Comment: *Muhammad was evidently accused of fabricating the Qur`ân and he then challenged his opponents to themselves produce a similar recital, which it appears they could not (see also Al Baqarah 2:23).*

The question is what they were unable to emulate. It ought not to have been the language itself since there were poets living in Mecca at that time who were acknowledged to be of great ability, Imra`ul Qays, for example (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.9). On the other hand there was certainly no-one among them able to produce a book likening the Bible in content since there was presumably no other Arabic poet in Mecca with the same depth of knowledge as regards the Jewish and Christian accounts.

Muslims often point out that the Qur`ân is written in the richest and most beautiful Arabic, and that the very language of the Qur`ân is a proof that it must be the word of God. Without doubt, most experts in the language consider the Qur`ân to be of the highest class, but at the same time there are a good number who say that old Arabic poetry exists, often older than the Qur`ân, which linguistically and stylistically is of an even higher class, for example "Al

Mu'allaqât" or "Maqâmât" by Harîrî (Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, p.264).

B5. The Qur`ân is Muhammad's sign

"Yet they say: 'Why are not Signs sent down to him from his Lord?' Say: 'The Signs are indeed with Allah: and I am indeed a clear Warner.' And is it not enough for them that We have sent down to thee the Book which is rehearsed to them?.." Al 'Ankabût 29:50-51

Comment: *In a good many places in the Qur`ân, Muhammad's audience demands signs in order to believe in him as God's apostle. Time after time the Qur`ân itself is pointed to as Muhammad's sign.*

CONCLUSION: *None of the above arguments seems particularly convincing today, but when we place ourselves in the situation which prevailed on the Arabian peninsula of the seventh century, the arguments become considerably more persuasive.*

C. IT IS IN ACCORDANCE WITH EARLIER REVELATIONS

This area is important since Islam teaches that the Bible is corrupted (muharraf). It is believed that Jews and Christians (called "The People of the Book" in the Qur`ân) have falsified the biblical texts so that the Bible is now a mixture of truth and lies. The question which immediately arises is of course when this alleged falsification took place. The Qur`ân itself teaches that its own text confirms the earlier revelations (the Bible) and that these scriptures were in the possession of Jews and Christians during Muhammad's lifetime.

C1. The Qur`ân confirms earlier scriptures

"And when there comes to them a Book from Allah, confirming what is with them."
Al Baqarah 2:89

Comment: *Here Muhammad is speaking about Jews and Christians. We can draw two important conclusions from this verse. Firstly, Muhammad believed that the Qur`ân confirmed earlier scripture from God, and secondly, Muhammad knew that these scriptures were in the possession of seventh-century Jews and Christians.*

C2. The People of the Book pretended that they did not know

"And when there came to them a Messenger from Allah, confirming what was with them, a Party of the People of the Book threw away the Book of Allah behind their backs. As if (it had been something) they did not know!" Al Baqarah 2:101

Comment: *Muhammad considered the Qur`ân to be "confirming what was with them" (musaddiqun limâ m'ahum), in other words, the Bible. The People of the Book should therefore have confirmed that the Qur`ân was of God. Instead Muhammad held that a number of them had thrown away God's Word and acted as if they did not know what was in the Bible.*

C3. Jews and Christians studied the Bible during the time of Muhammad

"The Jews say: 'The Christians have naught (to stand) upon'; And the Christians say: 'The Jews have naught (to stand) upon.' Yet they (profess to) study the (same) Book." Al Baqarah 2:113

Comment: *Muhammad knew that Jews and Christians disagreed as to the Bible's interpretation, but he also knew that both groups studied the same scriptures. The form of the verb "yatlûna" (translated "study") shows that they did this in the seventh century.*

C4. The Bible was studied and taught by Christians

"...Be ye worshippers of Him Who is truly the Cherisher of all: for ye have taught the Book and ye have studied it earnestly." Âli 'Imrân 3:79

Comment: *Muhammad was indignant about the claims of some Christians that Jesus had said to people that they were to worship him and not Allah. Muhammad considered this a lie which was not to be found in the Book (which is correct). Yet again he points to the fact that Christians had both studied and taught from the Bible and therefore ought to have known better.*

C5. Jews and Christians are challenged to hold to the Bible

"Say: 'O People of the Book! Ye have no ground to stand upon unless ye stand fast by the Law, the Gospel and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord.'"

Al Mâ'idah 5:68

Comment: *Muhammad is again indignant with the People of the Book for their refusal to accept that either he or the Qur`ân came from God. Since he is convinced that the Qur`ân confirms the Bible, he challenges Jews and Christians to adhere to the Bible so that they will also realise the truth about the Qur`ân. The challenge becomes meaningless if the Bible was not both available and trustworthy.*

C6. Those listening are challenged to consult the People of the Book

"If thou wert in doubt as to what We have revealed unto thee, then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee: the Truth hath indeed come to thee from thy Lord: so be in nowise of those in doubt." Yûnus 10:94

Comment: *Muhammad or those listening are challenged to ask those who had read the Book earlier, the People of the Book, in order that the Qur`ân's message be confirmed by them. This challenge becomes completely meaningless if their book was corrupted.*

CONCLUSION: *These few verses are enough to show that Muhammad was convinced that the Qur`ân confirmed the earlier books, the Bible. That is why he boldly issues a challenge to Jews and Christians to hold to the Bible and to his audience to seek the advice of the People of the Book if they have any doubts.*

We also saw how the Qur`ân confirms that the earlier scriptures existed during Muhammad's time. They were read, studied and taught by Jews and Christians. Muhammad presupposes that the People of the Book know the Bible and he can therefore not understand why Jews and Christians do not receive him as God's messenger and the Qur`ân as God's word.

An answer to the question of when the Bible was corrupted becomes therefore impossible:

- It cannot have taken place before the Qur`ân since the Qur`ân challenges both Christians and Jews to hold to the Bible and challenges people to consult the People of the Book if they have any doubts about the Qur`ân. The Bible must therefore have been reliable even in Muhammad's time.

- It cannot have taken place after the Qur`ân since we have about 4000 manuscripts of the New Testament dating back to the time before Muhammad (Evidence that Demands a Verdict, McDowell, Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972, p.46).

All prominent textual critics agree that the Bible we have today is essentially identical with the Bible of the seventh century.

D. THE QUR`AN IS POSITIVE TOWARDS THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

In most of the earlier suras it can be seen that Muhammad sets out with a positive attitude towards the People of the Book, that is to say, Jews and Christians. This is quite a natural position since he assumed that the Qur`ân really did confirm the Bible. It was only later that the Qur`ân attacked the People of the Book, when the majority of Jews and Christians neither accepted Muhammad as a prophet nor the Qur`ân as the word of God. For this reason we find both verses which are positive and verses which are negative towards the People of the Book, depending on the situation.

D1. The Jews received God's book and the task of preserving it

"It was We who revealed the Law (to Moses): therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the Prophets who bowed (as in Islam) to Allah's Will, by the Rabbis and the Doctors of Law: for to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's Book, and they were witnesses thereto..." Al Mâ'idah 5:44

Comment: The Qur`ân confessed the Pentateuch, the Books of Moses. The Books of Moses recorded God's laws and standards as a foundation and guide from God. Also on this same foundation spoke the prophets of the Old Testament. All this, according to the Qur`ân, was put together into God's book, which was the code for the Jews. Jewish rabbis and scholars also acted on the basis of this book. They had also been entrusted with the task of preserving and protecting (istahfaza) God's book.

D2. Jews are challenged to hold to the Book

"...And they study what is in the Book. But best for the righteous is the Home in the Hereafter. Will ye not understand? As to those who hold fast by the Book and establish Regular Prayer - never shall We suffer the reward of the righteous to perish." Al A'râf 7:169-170

Comment: The Qur`ân promises those Jews who hold to the Old Testament and the prayers that they will have a share in eternal life, which shows that Muhammad considered their foundation to be the right one but that many of them did not live in accordance with the Bible.

D3. Jews and Christians need not fear judgement

"Those who believe (in the Qur`ân), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians - any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness - on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." Al Mâ'idah 5:69

Comment: This verse seems to be saying that provided that Jews and Christians follow their own faith, they will go to heaven and have no need of fearing judgement. Only the problem is that in a number of other verses one must also believe in the Qur`ân as the word of God and Muhammad as God's messenger (2:40-41, 3:31, 4:150-151, 7:157, 33:40, 61:6). It is remarkable that the Sabeans are named together with Muslims, Jews and Christians since they represented the idolatry practised in the area (see O6. Idolaters were to become Muslims or be executed).

D4. Jesus' disciples were true believers

"And behold! I inspired the Disciples to have faith in Me and Mine Messenger; they said, 'We have faith, and do thou bear witness that we bow to Allah as Muslims.'" Al Mâ'idah 5:111

Comment: *The Qur`ân confesses that Jesus' disciples were true believers (see also Âl-'Imrân 3:52). It was these disciples who wrote down the Gospel and the events surrounding Jesus. They were eye-witnesses to Jesus' death and resurrection. They were also responsible for the spreading of the Christian faith in the Roman Empire. This seemingly obvious point is necessary since Islam teaches that the Bible has been corrupted by Jews and Christians (Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.17). But how would it at all be theoretically possible to carry out such a corruption of the New Testament after the Gospel had been spread out over great areas? So the questions of when, how, who and why remain regarding Islam's unproved accusations against the Bible.*

D5. Jesus' followers will be made superior to those who reject faith

"Behold! Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection..." Âli 'Imrân 3:55

Comment: *Regarding Jesus' death I will comment on this verse later (see G11. Has Jesus died after all?). But it is interesting that Jesus' followers are mentioned sufficiently positively to receive a higher position than the unfaithful.*

CONCLUSION: *The Qur`ân makes quite a number of positive statements about both Jews and Christians. This is natural if we think of Muhammad's positive attitude towards their Book, the Bible. Unfortunately it must be said that the Qur`ân also makes a great many negative statements levelled against local Jews and Christians because they neither accept Muhammad nor the Qur`ân.*

E. THE QUR`AN DEVIATES FROM THE BIBLE

Muhammad claims that the Qur`ân confirms earlier scriptures. But an accustomed reader of the Bible will see quite quickly that there are a great number of details in the Qur`ân's accounts that noticeably deviate from the Bible. I am able here, of course, to touch upon only a part of the material. There are besides this some examples that are to be found outside biblical history. As regards the Qur`ân's teaching on Jesus, I will discuss this more fully in a separate chapter. I have given the examples in a somewhat chronological order based on the Bible's chronology.

E1. Cain, Abel and the raven

"Then Allah sent a raven, who scratched the ground, to show him how to hide the shame of his brother. 'Woe is me!' said he; 'Was I not even able to be as this raven, and to hide the shame of my brother?' Then he became full of regrets." Al Mâ'idah 5:31

Comment: *There is not one word to be found about a raven in the biblical account of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-16). Where did Muhammad find out about the raven that helps with Abel's burial?*

One could contend that God revealed this new detail. But it is nevertheless worth noting that this detail about the raven is mentioned in a Jewish legend about Adam, Eve, Cain and Abel which is found in "Pirke Rabbi Eliazer" (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.15).

E2. The wives of Noah, Lot and Pharaoh

"Allah sets forth, for an example to the Unbelievers, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lut: they were (respectively) under two of our righteous Servants, but they were false to their (husbands)...

And Allah sets forth, as an example to those who believe, the wife of Pharaoh: behold she said: 'O my Lord! build for me, in nearness to Thee, a mansion in the Garden, and save me from Pharaoh and his doings...' Al Tahrîm 66:10-11

Comment: *The problem is that the Bible does not say anything about either Noah's wife being a bad example or Pharaoh's wife being a good example.*

E3. Abraham's father

"Lo! Abraham said to his father Âzar..." Al An'âm 6:74

Comment: *According to Genesis 11:26, Abraham's (Abram's) father is called Terah. Names can indeed change from one language to another but the difference in this case is genuinely great.*

E4. Abraham refuses to worship idols

"Behold! he said to his father and his people 'What are these images, to which ye are (so assiduously) devoted?'" Al Anbiyâ` 21:52

Comment: *In Sura Al Anbiyâ` 21:51-75 we can read quite a long dialogue between Abraham and his contemporaries in which he argues against idolatry and for belief in the one true God. It is not in itself incredible that Abraham had discussions with his contemporaries, and what*

Abraham says is in itself correct, but not a single word of this dialogue is to be found in the Bible.

E5. Abraham and the red-hot furnace

"They said, 'Build him a furnace, and throw him into the blazing fire!'" Al Sâffât 37:97

Comment: *Several places in the Qur`ân describe how idol worshippers were angered by Abraham's arguments against their idolatry and his teaching on the one true God. On more than one occasion we can read how they prepared a type of red-hot oven into which they threw Abraham. But God saves Abraham from the blazing furnace.*

The account is colourful; it is reminiscent of when God saved Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace in Daniel 3. The problem is that Abraham's being cast into a burning oven is to be found not in the Bible, but in the Jewish book "Midrash Rabbah" (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.16). One gets the impression that Muhammad did not know what came from the Bible and what came from extrabiblical sources.

E6. Abraham and the Kaaba

"Behold! We gave the site, to Abraham, of the (Sacred) House, (saying): 'Associate not anything (in worship) with Me; and sanctify My House for those who compass it round...'" Al Hajj 22:26

Comment: *According to the Qur`ân, Abraham received the Kaaba from God in Mecca as a holy place for worship. There are no sources or historical evidence at all, either in the Bible or anywhere else, confirming that Abraham had ever been in Mecca. Besides this, according to Islam, Abraham and his son Ishmael built the original Kaaba.*

We know that the Kaaba was the holy place for the "Sabeans", whose religion was in Mecca before Islam (Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.30). The black stone which is walked round and kissed, as well as many other rites performed during the pilgrimage, were part of the earlier religion and were retained within Islam. In the early days of Islam, Allah was worshipped facing Jerusalem, but later, after one year and four months in Medina (the year 623), the direction of prayer was changed to the Kaaba in Mecca instead (2:142-143 and The Holy Qur`ân, Ali, note 141).

E7. Joseph and Potiphar's wife

"When she heard of their malicious talk, she sent for them and prepared a banquet for them: she gave each of them a knife: and she said (to Joseph), 'Come out before them.' When they saw him, they did extol him, and (in their amazement) cut their hands: they said, 'Allah preserve us! no mortal is this! This is none other than a noble angel!'" Yûsuf 12:31

Comment: *It is true that the Bible tells us about Potiphar's wife trying to seduce Joseph (Genesis 39:1-20). But there is no banquet where the women invited each receive a knife and, on the arrival of the handsome Joseph, begin to shout and cut themselves in the hands, either to prevent themselves if possible from committing the same sin as Potiphar's wife or because they had completely lost their sense of coordination during the meal.*

E8. Moses adopted by Pharaoh's wife

"The wife of Pharaoh said: '(Here is) a joy of the eye, for me and for thee: slay him not. It may be that he will be of use to us, or we may adopt him as a son.'..." Al Qasas 28:9

Comment: *The Qur`ân's version of how Moses came to Pharaoh's court agrees with the Bible's, except on one point. In the Qur`ân it is Pharaoh's wife who adopts Moses, whereas in the Bible it is Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:10).*

E9. Moses and an unknown person's peculiar journey

"Behold, Moses said to his attendant, 'I will not give up until I reach the junction of the two seas or (until) I spend years and years in travel.'" Al Kahf 18:60

Comment: *This passage of the Qur`ân (18:60-82) is about a strange journey made by Moses and unknown man. The unknown man, acting by order of God, scuttles a boat, slays a young man and sets a wall up straight. Then the man explains to Moses why he has performed these actions. There turned out to be a deeper, unfathomable reason which the impatient Moses was not at first able to understand.*

This is another interesting legend which completely lacks biblical support.

E10. Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh and his magicians

"...Surely this must be your leader, who has taught you magic! Be sure I will cut off your hands and feet on opposite sides, and I will have you crucified on trunks of palm trees..."
Tâ Hâ 20:71

Comment: *Pharaoh's magicians had realised that God's power was greater than their own. Then Pharaoh threatened to have them crucified and cut off their hands and feet. There is nothing about this in Exodus.*

It is worth noting that neither crucifixion nor mutilation were practised in ancient Egypt, something of which Muhammad was obviously not aware. The practices themselves, however, were known to Muhammad, who himself prescribed this very punishment for those who opposed Islam (Sura Al Mâ`idah 5:33).

E11. Pharaoh and Haman

"Pharaoh said: 'O Hâmân! Build me a lofty palace, that I may attain the ways and means - the ways and means of (reaching) the heavens, and that I may mount up to the God of Moses...'"
Ghâfir 40:36-37

Comment: *Who was this Haman, who was called upon to build Pharaoh an enormous palace so that he could ascend all the way up to the God of Moses?*

Haman is mentioned in several places in the Qur`ân together with Pharaoh. One gets the impression that Muhammad believed him to be something akin to a Prime Minister to Pharaoh.

There is not one word of either Pharaoh's fantastic building plans or of any Haman in Exodus. The Bible, however, tells the story of a certain Haman who was as good as Prime Minister in Persia under King Xerxes (Esther 3:1). Could it be a case of mistaken identity for Muhammad?

E12. Mount Sinai hovering over the children of Israel in the desert

"When We shook the Mount over them, as if it had been a canopy, and they thought it was going to fall on them..." Al A'râf 7:171

Comment: *The Qur`ân teaches that when Moses and the children of Israel were at Mount Sinai, the whole mountain lifted up from the ground and floated above their heads like a giant roof.*

It is true that Exodus 19:16-19 tells us of great manifestations of God's presence on the mountain in the form of thunder and lightning, fire, smoke, loud noise and an earthquake. But there is not one single word about the whole of Mount Sinai hovering about in the air.

E13. Moses, Aaron, the golden calf and Al Samiri

"(Allah) said: 'We have tested thy people in thy absence: the Sâmirî has led them astray.'"

Tâ Hâ 20:85

"...and that was what the Sâmirî suggested. Then he brought out (of the fire) before the (people) the image of a calf: it seemed too low: so they said: 'This is your god, and the god of Moses, but (Moses) has forgotten!'" Tâ Hâ 20:87-88

Comment: *A detailed account of Moses, Aaron and the golden calf is given in the Bible (Exodus 32:1-35). It clearly states that Aaron, urgently requested by the people, made a golden calf with his own hands and said, "This is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." But in the Qur`ân it is Al Sâmirî who both led the people astray and produced the calf while Aaron is largely innocent. In verse 20:97 where Al Sâmirî was rebuked by Moses, he was told that the ashes of his idol would be scattered at sea.*

Who then is this Al Sâmirî, who is not mentioned at all in Exodus? Has Muhammad simply made up a name out of thin air?

There is a strained connection between Al Sâmirî and a golden calf in the Bible. The name "Al Sâmirî" quite simply means "the Samaritan" in Arabic. After the death of King Solomon in 932 BC, Israel was divided into two kingdoms. In time Samaria became the capital of the northern kingdom, a city which was founded in around 875 BC, hundreds of years after Moses and Aaron (Bibelfakta i färg, Libris, 1986, p.272 = Encyclopedia of the Bible, Lion Publishing). The first king in the north was Jeroboam. He had two golden calves made and said, "Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." (1 Kings 12:25-31), which is what Aaron had said several hundred years earlier. Can it be that Muhammad got the golden calves mixed up, even though they are separated by several hundred years, and therefore speaks about the Samaritan who made a golden calf?

The Samaritans as an ethnic people arose much later, after the Assyrians had defeated the northern kingdom and carried off the people into captivity in 722 BC. The Israelites remaining in the area became mixed with other peoples, and so the "Samaritans" were formed. For this reason we can exclude the possibility that an ethnic Samaritan could have been with Aaron and made a golden calf.

E14. Miriam and the Virgin Mary

"And Mary the daughter of 'Imrân, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth..." Al Tahrîm 66:12

"O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!"

Maryam 19:28

Comment: *As we can see, the Qur`ân claims that the father of the Virgin Mary was called Imran. The New Testament does not say what Mary's father was called. Where then does Muhammad get Imran?*

It can be worth mentioning that "Mary" and Moses' sister "Miriam" are identical names in Arabic, "Maryam". It is therefore possible to get these two Maryams confused. We know that

Aaron, Moses and Miriam's father was called Amram (1 Chronicles 6:3), deceptively similar to Imran, in other words. It can well be a case of mistaken identity.

The second verse (19:28) tells us that the Virgin Mary has just given birth to the baby Jesus and how people begin to call in question Mary's purity and virginity. At this, the new-born Jesus speaks in defence of his mother.

Again one gets the impression that Muhammad has mixed up the two "Maryams", that is to say Miriam (Aaron and Moses' sister) and the Virgin Mary. The Bible gives no details about the brothers of the Virgin Mary. However, we do know that Miriam, who lived more than a thousand years before Mary, was Aaron's sister (Exodus 15:20).

E15. Tâlût (Saul) and Gideon

"When Tâlût set forth with the armies, he said: 'Allah will test you at the stream; if any drinks of its water, he goes not with my army; only those who taste not of it go with me; a mere sip out of the hand is excused'..." Al Baqarah 2:249

Comment: *Tâlût is identified as King Saul (The Holy Qur`ân, Ali, note 284). The Bible says nothing about Saul's army being tested in this way. It is however almost exactly the same as the description of how Gideon's army was tested (Judges 7:4-6). We can scarcely conclude other than that Muhammad once more has mixed up events and people.*

E16. The wise Solomon

"And Solomon was David's heir. He said: 'O ye people! We have been taught the speech of Birds, and on us has been bestowed (a little) of all things: this is indeed Grace manifest (from Allah.)' And before Solomon were marshalled His hosts - of Jinns and men and birds, and they were all kept in order and ranks. At length, when they came to a (lowly) valley of ants, one of the ants said: 'O ye ants, get into your habitations, lest Solomon and his hosts crush you (under foot) without knowing it.' So he smiled, amused at its speech; and he said:..."

Al Naml 27:16-19

"He said (to his own men): 'Ye Chiefs! which of you can bring me her throne before they come to me in submission?'...Said one who had knowledge of the Book: 'I will bring it to thee within the twinkling of any eye!' Then when (Solomon) saw it placed firmly before him, he said:..."

Al Naml 27:38-40

"She was asked to enter the lofty Palace: but when she saw it, she thought it was a lake of water, and she (tucked up her skirts), uncovering her legs. He said: 'This is but a palace paved smooth with slabs of glass.'" Al Naml 27:44

Comment: *It is true that there is a lot in the Bible about Solomon's wisdom and palace in 1 Kings 1-11, but the Qur`ân's version of Solomon abounds in remarkable and fantastic details of which there is no trace in the Bible, for instance :*

- *Solomon can speak with birds (v.16).*
- *Solomon's army is made up of people, jinn and birds (v.17).*
- *The ants talk with each other and Solomon understands their conversation (v. 18-19).*
- *A bird, called "Al Hudhud", tells Solomon what is happening in Sheba where a queen rules on a great throne (v.20-26).*
- *"Al Hudhud" is commissioned to fly with a message to the queen of Sheba, who eventually decides to visit Solomon (v. 27-37).*

- Before the queen arrives in Jerusalem, Solomon asks his court if there is anyone who can arrange for the queen's throne to move from Sheba (Yemen) to Jerusalem before she gets there, whereupon someone in the court conjures up the queen's throne in the twinkling of an eye (v. 38-40).

- Solomon now orders that the queen's throne be supernaturally altered, almost beyond recognition, in order to test the queen (v. 41-42).

- When the queen enters Solomon's palace she believes that the floor is made of water! So she lifts her skirts, thereby uncovering her legs. Solomon is then quick to inform her that the floor is only made of glass (v. 44).

From where has Muhammad got this version with talking birds and ants, a flying throne and a palace with a glass floor that looks like water?

There is nothing about this in the Bible, but there is in the Jewish book "II Targum of the Book of Esther", (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.24).

Once again it seems that Muhammad has heard the Jewish legend but not realised that none of its peculiar details in any way belongs to the Bible, and in this way the whole account came to be in the Qur`ân.

E17. Dhu al Qarnayn (Alexander the Great)

"They ask thee concerning Dhu al Qarnayn. Say, 'I will rehearse to you something of his story.'" Al Kahf 18:83

Comment: *Who is this Dhu al Qarnayn (the name means "the Lord of the two Horns"), described in Sura 18:83-101?*

In Appendix VI of "The Holy Qur`ân, Ali", page 738, we read "Now the generality of the world of Islam have accepted Alexander the Great as the one meant by the epithet Dhu al Qarnayn." Ali goes on to give his personal opinion on page 740, "Personally, I have not the least doubt that Dhu al Qarnayn is meant to be Alexander the Great."

The problem is that this idolater is described in the text as a true believer (Sura 18:86, 95, 98).

We may quite simply conclude that Muhammad did not know that Alexander was an idolater, but actually believed that he instead had a real faith in the one true God.

E18. The Virgin Mary and Zechariah

"Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty; to the care of Zakariya was she assigned..." Âli 'Imrân 3:37

Comment: *According to the Qur`ân, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was instructed to bring up Mary. There is not a word of this in the Bible. It is however to be found in an apocryphal Christian book in Arabic, "History of our holy Father the Aged, the Carpenter", (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.53). Once again one gets the impression that Muhammad could not tell the difference between that which came from Holy Scripture and that from extrabiblical sources.*

E19. Zechariah was struck dumb

"He said: 'O my Lord! Give me a Sign!' 'Thy Sign,' was the answer, 'shall be that thou shalt speak to no man for three days but with signals...'" Âli 'Imrân 3:41

Comment: *According to the Qur`ân, Zechariah asks God for a sign that he will have son. God's sign was that Zechariah would be struck dumb for three days. According to Luke 1:18-20, Zechariah was struck dumb because of his unbelief, and according to Luke 1:59-64, his speechless state lasted until after the birth of his son, i.e. for nine months. Once again Muhammad fails to give accurate details in his attempt to reproduce the biblical material.*

E20. Mary gives birth to Jesus

"So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree: she cried (in her anguish): 'Ah! would that I had died before this! would that I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight!'" Maryam 19:22-23

Comment: *The whole of this portrayal of Jesus' birth under a palm tree in Sura 19, which ends in the new-born Jesus giving a speech of defence, contains many details not found in the accounts of Matthew 1 and Luke 1-2. However, many of the Qur`ân's details are to be found in various apocryphal Christian books. In the apocryphal Arabic book, "The Gospel of the Infancy" (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.58) we can read that the new-born Jesus could speak.*

Once more it seems that Muhammad did not distinguish between biblical and extrabiblical material.

E21. Jesus prophesied about Muhammad

"And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad'..." Al Saff 61:6

Comment: *Muslims often ask if we are aware of this prophecy about Muhammad. (Muhammad and Ahmad come from the same root word in Arabic). There is not a single quotation of Jesus in the Bible in which he predicts the coming of Muhammad or Ahmad. The only one whose coming Jesus foretold is the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26, 15:26, 16:5-15; Acts 1:4-8). The Spirit did indeed come upon the disciples at Pentecost as Jesus had promised (Acts 2:1-4).*

E22. Jesus is merely human

"Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a Messenger..." Al Mâ`idah 5:75

"And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, "Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah"?' He will say: 'Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say)..." Al Mâ`idah 5:116

"Say: 'If (Allah) Most Gracious had a son, I would be the first to worship.'" Al Zukhruf 43:81

"Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him." Al Ikhâlâs 112:2-4

Comment: *The Qur`ân teaches that Jesus, who was certainly born of a virgin, was only human. The Qur`ân also categorically denies that God revealed himself in Jesus and that Jesus was the Son of God.*

Regarding the Bible's claim that Jesus was the Son of God, Muhammad has completely misunderstood the implications of the biblical term. Within Islam the expression is understood literally and physically, that is to say that God is to have had sex with Mary and had a son by her. The Christian Trinity in the Qur`ân is therefore the Father, Mary and their son Jesus. By

this Muhammad understands that Christians worship three beings, of whom two are mere humans!

E23. Jesus has never died

"That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah.' - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not - nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise." Al Nisâ` 4:157-158

Comment: *Thus the Qur`ân denies Jesus' crucifixion and death (see also G10. Jesus has never died).*

E24. The sleepers in the cave

"Or dost thou reflect that the Companions of the Cave and of the Inscription were wonders among Our Signs?" Al Kahf 18:9

"Thou wouldst have deemed them awake, whilst they were asleep, and We turned them on their right and on their left sides: their dog stretching forth his two forelegs on the threshold..." Al Kahf 18:18

"So they stayed in their Cave three hundred years, and (some) add nine (more)." Al Kahf 18:25.

Comment: *In Sura 18:9-26 we read about some men who slept for over three hundred years in a cave. God saw to it that they were turned on their right and their left sides while they slept. They were able to sleep in safety since they had a dog with them guarding the entrance to the cave. After this marathon sleep they woke up and thought that they had only slept for one day or a few hours. But they had actually slept for 309 years. Now where does all this come from?*

It is a case of an old legend which is to be found in, among other sources, the book "Story of Martyrs" written in Latin by Gregory of Tours (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.48).

The remarkable thing is that Muhammad does not realise that it is a legend, but even gives the exact length of time the men were in the cave, 309 years.

CONCLUSION: *When we see all these deviations, confusions of people and events, mixes of extrabiblical material with the biblical text, we see a picture of Muhammad getting his information to a large extent from Jews and Christians who themselves did not know what belonged to the Bible, what was pure legend and what was a mixture of the two. In the light of this it was obviously difficult, if not impossible, for Muhammad himself to sort out what really belonged to Holy Scripture. As we have seen earlier he was nevertheless completely convinced that the Qur`ân agreed with previous revelations.*

Islam assumes the Qur`ân to be God's infallible word which came to Muhammad through direct dictation by the angel Gabriel. If the Qur`ân on point after point shows itself to have a human origin, then the whole of Islam, which is based on this assumption, falls.

F. CHRISTIANS AND JEWS HAVE FALSIFIED THE BIBLE

It is, as we have seen, quite easy to discover that the Qur`ân deviates from the Bible on a good many points. The question which quite quickly arises is whether both books can be true even though they sometimes contradict each other.

In time there were a lot of discussions in both Mecca and Medina about Muhammad himself and the Qur`ân as the word of God. Muhammad, as we have previously seen, persisted in his claim that the Qur`ân did indeed confirm the earlier revelations from God, the Bible. A problem arose when the majority of Jews and Christians did not receive Muhammad as God's messenger. Muhammad then issued different accusations and claims about his opponents.

F1. The People of the Book have different opinions about the Bible

"We certainly gave the Book to Moses, but differences arose therein..." Hûd 11:110

Comment: *Here Muhammad levels no criticism at Scripture, but against the People of the Book, who have different interpretations of Scripture. This observation appears again and again in the Qur`ân. If we are to be honest the same phenomenon still exists today, namely that Christians and Jews interpret Scripture differently, both from each other and among themselves.*

F2. Christians deliberately distort the Bible

"There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (as they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, 'That is from Allah,' but it is not from Allah: it is they who tell a lie against Allah, and (well) they know it! It is not (possible) that a man, to whom is given the Book, and Wisdom, and the Prophetic Office, should say to people: 'Be ye my worshippers rather than Allah's'..." Âli 'Imrân 3:78-79

Comment: *Here Muhammad is speaking against a smaller group of Christians who claimed that Jesus told people to worship him instead of God. We know that Jesus never said anything like this in the Bible. If a group of Christians really did make such an erroneous claim, then Muhammad is right in saying that they intentionally or unintentionally distorted the Bible. Once again the criticism is of a smaller group of Christians and not against the Bible.*

F3. Jews falsify the Word of God

"And there are among them illiterates, who know not the Book, but (see therein their own) desires, and they do nothing but conjecture. Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say: 'This is from Allah,' to traffic with it for a miserable price!"
Al Baqarah 2:78-79

Comment: *Here Muhammad is speaking against a group of Jews in Medina. He claims that they had illiterates among them who did not know Scripture. We do not know a great deal about the Jews living in Medina, but it is possible that some of them indeed were illiterate and had never studied the word of God. He then accuses some other Jews of having written the Scripture themselves and claimed that the book was the word of God. And besides, this writing was on sale for a very low price. Remarkably, it was for just this that Muhammad's opponents accused him. It would be extremely interesting to have the opportunity to study the book which Muhammad attacks as false. It is not out of the question that it is a case of an Arabic translation of, for example,*

parts of the Pentateuch with the strong recommendation that people discover for themselves what we have already seen, that the Qur`ân again and again deviates from the Bible. Unfortunately we will have to be content with stating once again that if it was the case that some Jews in Medina wrote their own version of the Old Testament, this was of course indefensible.

F4. God himself alters his book

"Allah doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book."
Al Ra'd 13:39

Comment: *This remarkable claim, that God should alter and make deletions in his own word, becomes intelligible if someone had really confronted Muhammad with all the Qur`ân's deviations from the Bible.*

However, this claim is still quite contrary to the teaching of Jesus:

"It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law." Luke 16:17

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Luke 21:33

F5. God replaces old Qur`ân verses with better ones

"None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar..." Al Baqarah 2:106

"When We substitute one revelation for another - and Allah knows best what he reveals (in stages) - they say, 'Thou art but a forger': but most of them understand not." Al Nahl 16:101

Comment: *These verses are about Qur`ân verses (âya) which have been annulled or been forgotten. It seems that a number of suras were changed little by little. Muhammad's opponents noticed the problem and accused Muhammad of fabricating his revelations. The Muslims however were reassured that these replacements and changes were all part of God's plan and came from him.*

From these Qur`ân verses is derived the doctrine of "replacement" (nasakha). In short this doctrine says that if two Qur`ân verses contradict each other, the newer verse is valid. According to Islam's scholars ('Ulama), there are 225 Qur`ân verses which have been replaced with others (Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, p.57).

CONCLUSION: *Nowhere in the Qur`ân does Muhammad attack the Bible, which he, on the contrary, esteems. The Qur`ân teaches that the People of the Book had these writings. He also believes that the Qur`ân confirms these earlier revelations. On the other hand, he accuses local Christians and Jews of intentionally distorting the Bible in their interpretations and expositions. The teaching that Christians and Jews had falsified the Bible itself took a decidedly firmer form when Islam, shortly after Muhammad's death, was spread in the Christian world and it was shown on comparison that the Qur`ân did indeed deviate from the Bible on quite a number of points. Since the Qur`ân, according to Islam, was held to be the infallible word of God, the Bible came to be seen as a falsification, a mixture of truth and lies. That it should be the other way round was considered to be completely out of the question. During the whole of the Qur`ân's period of emergence Muhammad claimed that the Qur`ân confirmed the Bible and thereby must be true. After this period Muslims claim that the Bible does not confirm the Qur`ân and therefore cannot be true.*

G. JESUS IN THE QUR`AN

Muslims often say that they believe in Jesus Christ and ask, a little surprised, why we do not believe in Muhammad. For this reason it is interesting to find out who Jesus is in the Qur`ân. The crucial difference between Islam and the Christian faith has to do with Jesus Christ. What is the true identity of the one born of a virgin? Why was he born into the world at all?

G1. Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary

"And (remember) her who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our Spirit, and We made her and her son a Sign for all peoples." Al Anbiyâ` 21:91

Comment: Thus the Qur`ân confirms the virgin birth, that Mary conceived through the Holy Spirit, and that this miracle was a sign for the whole world.

G2. Mary and the baby Jesus were given shelter on a hill

"And We made the son of Mary and his mother as a sign: We gave them both shelter on high ground, affording rest and security and furnished with springs." Al Mu`minûn 23:50

Comment: After the birth Mary needed to withdraw and rest. God arranged a place of refuge for them on a hill with a spring. Where Joseph was, the Qur`ân does not say.

G3. Jesus is the Word of God and the Spirit of God

"...Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and his Messengers. Say not 'Trinity': desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God. Glory be to Him. (Far Exalted is He) above having a son..." Al Nisâ` 4:171

Comment: In this Qur`ân verse Jesus bears the highly-charged names the "Word of God" and "a Spirit proceeding from him". Both expressions refer to when Mary became pregnant through a miracle of God. But so that there will be no misunderstanding of the Qur`ân's teaching on Jesus, the expression is preceded by an assurance that Jesus is merely the apostle of God, like Muhammad and many others. Besides this, the verse continues with an attack against the Trinity and an assertion that God does not have a son.

G4. Jesus is created like Adam

"The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: 'Be': and he was." Âl 'Imrân 3:59

Comment: The Qur`ân teaches that Jesus is merely human. Islam draws no other conclusions from Mary's conceiving through the Spirit of God than that Jesus was created just like Adam.

G5. The miracles of Jesus in the Qur`ân

"I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: and I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave..." Âli 'Imrân 3:49

Comment: The Qur`ân admits that Jesus performed miracles, but only with God's permission and help. That Jesus created a bird from clay, in approximately the same way as God had

created mankind, does not appear in the Bible, but in the apocryphal book "The Gospel of Thomas the Israelite" (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, p.57).

G6. Jesus received the Gospel from God

"...We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel..."
Al Hadîd 57:27

Comment: *The Qur`ân teaches that Jesus received the Gospel (al Injîl) from God. The word always appears in the singular in the Qur`ân and is understood by Muslims to be a single book dictated to Jesus, in approximately the same way as it is believed that the Qur`ân was dictated to Muhammad. It is for this reason that Muslims are often surprised when they encounter the "Four Gospels", which were written by Jesus' disciples, and the simple narrative form. This fact is often considered to be evidence that the Bible really has been falsified and the original "al Injîl" been lost.*

G7. God has never begotten anyone

"Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him." Al Iklâs 112:1-4

Comment: *This sura expresses the most important doctrine in the Qur`ân, the teaching on God's oneness (tawhîd). The Qur`ân rejects every notion of trinity as irreconcilable with the doctrine of the one true God. God has never fathered any son, full stop.*

G8. God has no son

"Say: 'If (Allah) Most Gracious had a son, I would be the first to worship.'
Al Zukhruf 43:81

Comment: *Muhammad presupposes that it is completely unthinkable for God to have a son and therefore puts himself forward as the first worshipper of this son, who according to the Qur`ân cannot exist.*

G9. Jesus denies the Trinity

"And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, "Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah"?' He will say: 'Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say).'" Al Mâ'idah 5:116

Comment: *One can only wonder where these remarkable ideas come from. It is completely alien to the Bible and therefore the Christian faith that Jesus should have put forward worship of himself and Mary as an alternative to God. The verse also shows that Muhammad believed that the Christian Trinity included the Virgin Mary instead of the Spirit of God. What then should Muhammad have believed? He did, after all, see "Christians" bow the knee and worship before statues and pictures of the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus. Muhammad saw this as erroneous and incompatible with faith in the one true God.*

The Bible instead teaches:

- that God, who is one God, reveals himself in three persons: the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Christian baptism takes place therefore in the name of the triune God. (Matthew 28:19-20)

- that Jesus Christ is true God and true human in the same person (John 1:1, 14)

- that the term "the Son of God" is spiritual, not physical (John 1:18, 14:6-11)

G10. Jesus has never died

"That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah' - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety, they killed him not - nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself, and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise." Al Nisâ` 4:157-158

Comment: *Here the Qur`ân truly contradicts the Bible! Already in the prophecies of the Old Testament we read that the Messiah would have to suffer and die for the sin of mankind (Isaiah 53). Large parts of the Gospels and remaining New Testament deal with Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. In the Bible we have eyewitnesses to his death and resurrection. Almost all of Jesus' apostles gave their lives and were killed when they gave testimony to precisely this.*

It is true that there are a number of different explanations for these Qur`ân verses, but the fact remains that the overwhelming majority of Qur`ânic commentators teaches that Jesus Christ has never been crucified or died. It is written: "but so it was made to appear to them." The teaching is that God took Jesus up to heaven before the crucifixion, and that someone else was transformed to look like Jesus. So the wrong person was arrested and the wrong person crucified! And the one behind this gigantic bluff was God himself. In doing this, he allowed all the disciples, and even Mary, Jesus' own mother, to believe that it was Jesus being crucified, though in actual fact it was "so it was made to appear to them."

From where has Muhammad got this remarkable idea?

It is plausible to believe that the "Christians" Muhammad spoke with about Jesus' crucifixion and death were in fact influenced by Gnosticism, which mixed Hellenism and Christianity. The Gnostics believed in the kingdoms of light and darkness, with all that is spiritual, for example the human soul and spirit, belonging to the kingdom of light, and all matter, the human body for example, belonging to the kingdom of darkness. The world of light was created by a good God while the world of darkness was created by an evil God. This led to the false teaching that Jesus did not have, as we do, a physical body, but instead a type of spiritual pseudo-body. His suffering and death on the cross became thereby a meaningless quasi-death. A number of Gnostics, for example Basilides who was operative in Alexandria between 120 and 140 AD, even went as far as denying that Jesus had ever died on the cross. He taught:

"...Nevertheless, when the unbegotten, unutterable Father witnessed their depravation, he sent his first-born Nous - it is he who is called Christ - in order to release those who believe in him from the power of those who created the world. However, for the people of the Archons he appeared on earth as a human who performed miracles. Therefore he did not suffer, but instead a certain Simon from Cyrene who was forced to bear the cross for him. Because of ignorance and delusion he was crucified since he had been transformed by Christ so that it would be believed that he (Simon) was Jesus. But Jesus himself assumed the appearance of Simon, stood alongside and laughed in ridicule at them (the Archons and their people). For because he was an incorporeal force and the unbegotten Father's Nous, he could assume every form at will and thus he ascended to him who had sent him. In that he ridiculed them since he could not be held down and was invisible to all. For this reason, those who know this are released from the creators of the world, the Archons. And one does not need to profess the one crucified, but instead the one who came in human form and was seemingly crucified, called Jesus..." (Jesus till Moder Teresa, Tergel, Verbum, 1973, p.29).

If we assume that the "Christians" who informed Muhammad were in fact influenced by Gnosticism, we can then understand how Muhammad could produce a verse which in principle contradicts the whole New Testament.

G11. Has Jesus died after all?

"Those of you who die and leave widows..." Al Baqarah 2:240

"...And I was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou wast the Watcher over them..." Al Mâ'idah 5:117

"Behold! Allah said: 'O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself...'" Âli 'Imrân 3:55

"So Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the Day that I shall be raised up to life (again)!" Maryam 19:33

Comment: *In Sura 2:240 it is written "Those of you who die (yutawaffûn)...", and the word must mean "die" since the word refers to widows.*

The same root word is used about Jesus in 3:55 "...take thee (mutawaffika)." According to "The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic", "mutawaffan" means "deceased, dead". The same root word is even used by Jesus when he says to God in 5:117 "...thou didst take me up (tawaffaytanî). According to Hans Wehr "tuwaffîya" means "to die".

Things do not become much clearer when the new-born Jesus speaks in Sura 19:33 of the three great and unique days in his life on earth, according to the Bible, namely his unique birth, death and resurrection.

All authorised Qur`anic commentators have chosen, however, to read these verses in the light of 4:157 "But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them."

Note again that Ali renders the Arabic words "thou didst take me up" and "I will take thee." As regards the traditional interpretation of the baby Jesus' words about his future death and resurrection, these are explained by saying that Jesus will one day return to the world. It is then that he will die and rise like all other normal mortals.

G12. Jesus prophesied about Muhammad

"And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: 'O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allah (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad...' Al Saff 61:6

Comment: *In this verse are named the Qur`ân's two most important reasons for the coming of Jesus to the world. He came partly in order to, like Muhammad, confirm God's earlier revelations, the Pentateuch, and partly to prophesy that Muhammad would come. Ahmed and Muhammad are namely two forms of the same root word in Arabic.*

Muslims often ask if we are aware of this prophecy. Unfortunately, there is not a single quotation of Jesus in the Bible where he predicts Muhammad's coming. The only one Jesus said would come was the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-26, 15:26, 16:5-15; Acts 1:4-8).

The Spirit did indeed come upon the disciples at Pentecost as Jesus had promised (Acts 2:1-4).

CONCLUSION: *Even though the Qur`ân contains almost no material which comes directly from the New Testament, there are quite a number of facts about Jesus which agree with the New Testament, for instance, the virgin birth, that he performed great miracles, that his book is called the Gospel, that he was the Messiah, God's apostle, and so on.*

There are also a great number of departures from the New Testament. The most serious deviations are, of course, that the Qur`ân denies the deity of Jesus, his death on the cross and

thereby atonement in its entirety. The idea that God has reconciled the whole world to himself in Christ does not exist in Islam. Jesus is not a Saviour, he is not a mediator between God and man. He is merely a prophet like Moses or Muhammad. The problem from a Christian perspective is that if one takes away the deity of Jesus and his death for our sins, there is no longer any Gospel left. But this is precisely the Qur`ân's message about Jesus.

- 622 *This is year nought in Islamic chronology. Muhammad and around 150 Muslims move because of persecution to Yathrib (present-day Medina). This event is known as "The Flight" or "The Hegira" (Al Hijra). Many in Medina receive Muhammad as a prophet from God. Under Muhammad's leadership Muslims begin to carry out plundering expeditions against both armed trade caravans and various Bedouin tribes. But above all continues the conflict against Quraysh, Muhammad's own clan, which ruled Mecca.*
Islam expands.
The majority of Jews in Medina reject Muhammad as a prophet from God. Muhammad, after a revelation during his second year in Medina, changes the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to Mecca. The first Jewish family, Banû Qaynuqa', is expelled to Syria in the year 3 AH (624). The second Jewish family, Banû Nadîr, is forced into exile in the year 4 AH (625) after having had to pay with their property and possessions for safe-conduct out of the area. Most badly fare the last remaining Jewish family, "Banû Quraiza". The men (about 600 in number) are executed while the women and children become slaves.
- 630 *Muhammad occupies Mecca without a battle with an army of 10,000 men. He destroys the idols at the Kaaba in Mecca, but retains many of the old religion's rites, especially those performed during pilgrimage.*
Muhammad consolidates his position as ruler of the Arabian peninsula.
- 632 *Muhammad dies and is buried in Medina.*

Now as we turn to the Qur`ân in order to find out something about this remarkable man, we realise that we cannot gain a deeper knowledge about his life from there, apart from a few details. A complete picture of him requires an in-depth study of the Hadîth (the tradition), which contains everything Muhammad said and did.

H1. The Muslim is to obey God and Muhammad

"The Day that their faces will be turned upside down in the Fire, they will say: 'Woe to us! would that we had obeyed Allah and obeyed the Messenger!'" Al Ahzâb 33:66
 "...He that obeys Allah and His Messenger, has already attained the highest Achievement."
 Al Ahzâb 33:71

Comment: *Islam requires not only submission to God but also to Muhammad. This exhortation to obey God and his apostle recurs many times in the Qur`ân (see also Sura Al Nûr 24:51-54). Many Westerners are surprised by the fact that the "Hadîth" (the tradition) possesses divine authority in Islam. In the Hadîth is all that Muhammad said and did on different occasions (this is usually called Muhammad's "sunna"). But in the light of the Qur`ân's repeated exhortations to the Muslim to obey Muhammad, the authority of the Hadîth is fully understandable.*

H2. Muhammad, the seal of the prophets

"Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Messenger of Allah, and the Seal of the prophets..." Al Ahzâb 33:40

Comment: *The expression "the seal of the prophets" means that Muhammad is the last prophet and that the office of prophethood ended with him. The Qur`ân is therefore, according to Islam, God's definitive revelation.*

H3. Muhammad performed no signs

"They swear their strongest oaths by Allah, that if a (special) Sign came to them, by it they would believe. Say: 'Certainly (all) Signs are in the power of Allah: but what will make you (Muslims) realise that (even) if (special) Signs came, they will not believe?'" Al An`âm 6:109

Comment: *The fact that Muhammad did not perform any miracles is often the subject of discussion in the Qur`ân. Muhammad never conceals this fact, but points repeatedly to the Qur`ân as God's sign.*

H4. The Qur`ân is Muhammad's sign

"Yet they say: 'Why are not Signs sent down to him from his Lord?' Say: 'The Signs are indeed with Allah: and I am indeed a clear Warner.' And is it not enough for them that We have sent down to thee the Book which is rehearsed to them?.." Al 'Ankabût 29:50-51

Comment: *The Qur`ân is unequivocal on this point. Muhammad performed no signs, but the Qur`ân was to be God's sign.*

H5. Muhammad saw Gabriel twice

"While he was in the highest part of the horizon: then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer." Al Najm 53:7-9

"For indeed he saw him at a second descent." Al Najm 53:13

Comment: *These Qur`ân verses are about the angel Gabriel. According to "The Holy Qur`ân, Ali", note 5092, Muhammad saw the angel Gabriel on two occasions, once at his call to service and again here when Gabriel revealed himself at a distance. Ali considers this second occasion to be in connection with the journey by night from Mecca to the temple in Jerusalem (see next point).*

H6. Muhammad's nocturnal journey to Jerusalem

"Glory to (Allah) who did take His Servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless - in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things)." Al Isrâ` 17:1

Comment: *The Qur`ân claims that Muhammad flew away from the Kaaba in Mecca to the temple in Jerusalem. According to Ibn Ishâq, 'Aishah, one of Muhammad's wives, said that Muhammad's body was not absent during the nocturnal journey. And besides, there are no details in the Qur`ân about what Muhammad saw or what it looked like at the temple in Jerusalem. Was Muhammad even aware that no temple remained, but only some ruins, the Wailing Wall, for example?*

In the Hadîth are different versions of what Muhammad saw and experienced during his journey, which, together with the angel Gabriel, was made on the back of a horse-like being called Burâq. According to one Hadîth which goes back to Ibn Ishâq and is recounted in the book "Sirat Ibn Hishâm", Muhammad encountered Abraham, Moses and Jesus and other prophets in the temple in Jerusalem, where he led them in the worship of Allah. Neither in this

Hadîth do we get the impression that there was in fact no temple in Jerusalem during the seventh century.

According to another Hadîth which goes back to Qutâda and is found in the book "Miskât al Masâbîh", Muhammad made a journey with the angel Gabriel's help through seven different heavens and met different prophets in the different heavens. John the Baptist and Jesus were already to be found in the second heaven, while Abraham, for example, was highest, in the seventh heaven. After this Muhammad and Gabriel continued to paradise itself, which is described as a beautiful garden. (The Sources of Islam, St Clair-Tisdall, T&T Clark, 1901, pp 76-82; Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.44).

H7. Muhammad was accused of being a false prophet

"Nay,' they say, '(these are) medleys of dreams! - Nay, he forged it! - Nay, he is (but) a poet! Let him then bring us a Sign like the ones that were sent to (Prophets) of old!'"
Al Anbiyâ` 21:5

Comment: This is a sample of the different types of accusation which Muhammad met with, and there are a good deal more of the same kind in the Qur`ân.

H8. Muhammad was accused like all other prophets

"Similarly, no messenger came to the Peoples before them, but they said (of him) in like manner, 'A sorcerer, or one possessed!'" Al Dhâriyât 51:52

Comment: Muhammad points out the fact that it was quite normal for prophets to meet with resistance from their contemporaries. In other words, he considered himself in good company when he encountered various accusations. Only the problem was that this moderate stance changed when he himself had gained greater power. His opponents then had to be careful if they wanted to avoid punishment.

H9. Muhammad's right to unlimited marriages

"O Prophet! We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowers; and those whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom Allah has assigned to thee; and daughters of thy paternal uncles and aunts, and daughters of thy maternal uncles and aunts, who migrated (from Makkah) with thee; and any believing woman who dedicates her soul to the Prophet if the Prophet wishes to wed her - this only for thee, and not for the Believers (at large)..." Al Ahzâb 33:50

Comment: Normal Muslims were given the right to have four wives at the same time. But Muhammad had at his disposal an unlimited number of marriages because he was God's apostle. Regarding women taken as prisoners of war, it was not necessary to follow the laws of marriage since they had been given by Allah as booty. The verse continues namely as follows "We know what We have appointed for them as to their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess..." (33:50). The expression "mâ malakat aymânuhum" (that which their right hand possesses) in the Qur`ân most often refers to prisoners of war or booty, as it has also been defined earlier in the passage. In reality these women became slaves, a terrible fate, in other words, for the other side's women if they were conquered by the Islamic army. This fact is confirmed by the well-known Hadîth compiler, Al Baidawi. (Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, p.328).

H10. Muhammad was prohibited from marrying again

"It is not lawful for thee (to marry more) women after this, nor to change them for (other) wives, even though their beauty attract thee, except any thy right hand should possess (as handmaidens)..." Al Ahzâb 33:52

Comment: *This ban on marriage came in the year 7AH (629 AD) when Muhammad was already 59 years old and with nine wives still alive. (In total he had eleven wives and two concubines). It seems undeniably the case that Muhammad had had enough, although he reserved the right to take from among the slaves, something which he in fact took advantage of when he took his servant, the Copt Mary, as a concubine (The Holy Qur`ân, Ali, note 3754).*

H11. Muhammad could bypass the order of wives

"Thou mayest defer (the turn of) any of them that thou pleasest, and thou mayest receive any thou pleasest: and there is no blame on thee if thou invite one whose (turn) thou hadst set aside. This were nigher to the cooling of the eyes..." Al Ahzâb 33:51

Comment: *Obviously all his wives began to clamour if Muhammad disregarded the order. He had to namely spend the night with each of them in turn. But Allah had a simple solution to the problem. He revealed to Muhammad that he was quite simply made exempt from this.*

H12. Muhammad could break inconvenient promises

"O Prophet! Why holdest thou to be forbidden that which Allah has made lawful to thee? Thou seekest to please thy consorts. But Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Allah has already ordained for you, (O men), the dissolution of your oaths..." Al Tahrîm 66:1-2

Comment: *Clearly Muhammad had promised his different wives things which became difficult to keep long-term. This problem, too, was solved with a revelation which said that the promises could quite simply be broken.*

H13. Muhammad married his adopted son's former wife

"Behold! thou didst say to one who had received the grace of Allah and thy favour: 'Retain thou (in wedlock) thy wife, and fear Allah.' But thou didst hide in thy heart that which Allah was about to make manifest: thou didst fear the people, but it is more fitting that thou shouldst fear Allah. Then when Zayd had dissolved (his marriage) with her, with the necessary (formality), We joined her in marriage to thee..." Al Ahzâb 33:37

Comment: *According to two well-known Qur`ânic commentators and Hadîth compilers, Al Baidawi (volume 2, p.129) and Al Jalâlân (commentary of 33:37), Muhammad took a liking to Zainab after having joined her in wedlock with his adopted son, Zayd. They became aware of this situation. When problems arose between them, Muhammad said to Zayd, "Retain thou (in wedlock) thy wife, and fear Allah." But Zayd nevertheless divorced Zainab, and Muhammad was then called by Allah to marry his adopted son's former wife (Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, p.331).*

This was not the only controversial marriage Muhammad entered into. He married 'Aishah when she was seven years old and he began to spend the night with her when she was nine or ten years old according to Ibn Hishâm, volume 3, p.94; Ibn Athîr, volume 2, p.117, 118; Mishkât Al Masâbîh, p.262, 272 (Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, p.329).

H14. Threat of divorce because of gossip

"When the Prophet disclosed a matter of confidence to one of his consorts, and she then divulged it (to another), and Allah made it known to him..." Al Tahrîm 66:3

"It may be, if he divorced you (all), that Allah will give him in exchange Consorts better than you..." Al Tahrîm 66:5

Comment: *One of Muhammad's wives clearly enjoyed telling people the latest news. There were certainly a lot of people interested in listening to the latest gossip about what the prophet had said. But God spoke to the wives through the prophet and threatened them with divorce. Besides this, God threatened to give Muhammad even better wives instead of those who were not careful.*

H15. Promise of blessing for lowering the voice

"O ye who believe! Raise not your voices above the voice of the Prophet, nor speak aloud to him in talk, as ye may speak aloud to one another, lest your deeds become vain and ye perceive not. Those that lower their voice in the presence of Allah's Messenger - their hearts has Allah tested for piety: for them is Forgiveness and a great Reward." Al Hujurât 49:2-3

Comment: *It seems that it was taxing for Muhammad if someone had too loud a voice. Allah noticed the problem and sent down these verses, which in short amount to people having to be less vociferous than the prophet if they did not want to forfeit forgiveness and rewards.*

H16. No-one could stay too long with Muhammad

"O ye who believe! Enter not the Prophet's houses - until leave is given you - for a meal, (and then) not (so early as) to wait for its preparation: but when ye are invited, enter; and when ye have taken your meal, disperse, without seeking familiar talk. Such (behaviour) annoys the Prophet: he is ashamed to dismiss you, but Allah is not ashamed (to tell you) the truth." Al Ahzâb 33:53

Comment: *Muhammad clearly thought it was tiresome with people who only wanted to talk and take a long time when they visited. He himself was too shy to tell them. But Allah came to the rescue with a revelation giving clear instructions as to what was what in Muhammad's house.*

H17. Jews who were forced to flee from Medina

"It is He Who got out the Unbelievers among the People of the Book from their homes at the first gathering..." Al Hashr 59:2

"And had it not been that Allah had decreed banishment for them, he would certainly have punished them in this world: and in the Hereafter they shall (certainly) have the Punishment of the Fire. That is because they resisted Allah and His Messenger: and if anyone resists Allah, verily Allah is severe in punishment." Al Hashr 59:3-4

Comment: *This exile affected a rich Jewish family in Medina called Banû Nadîr in the year 4 AH (626 AD). They could count themselves fortunate to have escaped with their lives, which was not the case for the men of the last Jewish family in Medina, "Banû Quraiza." They were executed in the year 5 AH, while the women and children became slaves. According to Islamic sources it was six to seven hundred men who were executed by beheading (Sîrat Al Rasûl, part 2, p.148, 75; Kitâb Al Maghâzî, Wâqidî, p.125, 126; Balance of Truth, Pfander, The*

Religious Tract Society, 1910, p. 332-333; Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.53).

H18. Muhammad decided over Jewish booty

"...So take what the Messenger assigns to you, and deny yourselves that which he withholds from you. And fear Allah; for Allah is strict in Punishment." Al Hashr 59:7

Comment: *The rich Jewish family Banû Nadîr owned an area of houses and orchards outside Medina called Fadak. Muhammad himself with his family seized these properties in exchange for the Banû Nadîr's safe-conduct out of the country. Fadak was later given to Muhammad's daughter Fatma as a gift and inheritance. The first Caliph Abu Bakr cited a Hadîth (which he alone heard) which meant that children of the prophet would not receive any inheritance, and thereby Fatma was declared to be without inheritance, upon which Abu Bakr himself took over the property Fadak. The property later became the cause of feuds within the family for several generations (Nahjul Balagha, Reza, Tahrike Tarsile Qur`ân Inc, 1978, p.517-529). So Muhammad thought that he should take the largest portion of the booty from this well-to-do Jewish family, Banû Nadîr. It was therefore quite fitting that Allah instructed Muslims about suitable conduct, namely that they were allowed to keep whatever they were given. There was no point complaining "for Allah is strict in punishment."*

CONCLUSION: *We cannot avoid noticing how close Muhammad came in certain situations to abusing his position. He seemed to receive a great deal of his revelations when he had a personal problem or need or could secure himself certain privileges. When we read about these circumstantial solutions to Muhammad's personal problems it is difficult to understand how just these Qur`ân verses could be eternal so that they were in the presence of God before he created the world.*

The sometimes almost inconceivable cruelty and the many remarkable relationships with women give a mystifying picture of this remarkable man who called himself God's apostle.

I. THE FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS OF ISLAM

There are many teachings to be found in the Qur`ân, some more manifest than others, and later on they have naturally been systematised and compiled to form one body of doctrine. I have touched upon a number of these teachings in other chapters, and I will therefore only list the articles of belief, as well as write a little about the most important doctrine in the Qur`ân: Allah, the one true God.

I1. The articles of Islamic belief

"...But it is righteousness - to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers..." Al Baqarah 2:177

Comment: *This verse gives five of the six articles of belief, which are usually listed in the following order:*

1. Allah: *the one true God*
2. Angels: *Archangels, lesser angels, jinn*
3. The Scriptures: *Tawrah (the Pentateuch), Zabûr (the Psalms), Injil (the Gospel) and the Qur`ân. The first three are understood to be falsified and a mixture of truth and lies, while the Qur`ân is God's definitive revelation.*
4. The Prophets: *Many of the Bible's prophets, as well as some others. Muhammad is the final prophet.*
5. Destiny: *All that happens is decided in advance by God. It is written (maktub) before it has taken place.*
6. The Day of Judgement: *Everyone will give account (hisâb) before God, and it will be decided if a person is to go to paradise or to hell.*

I2. The doctrine of the one true God

"Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; and there is none like unto Him." Al Iklâs 112:1-4

Comment: *No doctrine in the Qur`ân is more important than that about the one true God. It is the very foundation of the witness: "There is no god but Allah." The greatest sin in Islam is for this reason "shirk" (to make someone or something equal with God), (Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.11). The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is, according to Islam, incompatible with the teaching that God is one.*

I3. God has no son

"Say: 'Praise be to Allah, Who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) dominion..." Al Isrâ` 17:111

Comment: *The Qur`ân completely denies the notion that God should have a son. In the Qur`ân, the Trinity is shown to be the Father, Mary and their son Jesus. The term "the Son of God" is understood literally within Islam, physically, not spiritually. As regards the expression that God has no "partner", the Arabic word is "sharîkun" from which the term "shirk" comes.*

I4. The ninety-nine most beautiful names of Allah

"Allah is He, than Whom there is no other God - Who knows (all things) both secret and open; He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god - the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, The Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the Supreme: Glory to Allah! (High is He) above the partners they attribute to Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Evolver, the Bestower of Forms, (or Colours). To Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. Whatever is in the heavens and on earth, doth declare His Praises and Glory. And He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise." Al Hashr 59:22-24

***Comment:** As Christians we notice that in principle all the names are biblical and are fitting for the God of the Bible. The expression "God is love", of course, is missing, but on the other hand there are many other similar attributes which describe what the Bible means by love. The expression "to him belong the most beautiful names" (lahu al-asmâ` al husnâ) is the foundation of the teaching on the ninety-nine beautiful names of Allah. These are the ninety-nine attributes ascribed to Allah in the Qur`ân. The Islamic "rosary" is based on the ninety-nine names. It has ninety-nine, thirty-three or eleven beads. For a complete list of the ninety-nine names see "Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.14."*

CONCLUSION: *These six points represent the foundational beliefs of Islam. Parallel to belief (îmân) comes the practice of religion (dîn), which I will discuss in the next chapter.*

J. THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

The five pillars describe how God wants Muslims to practise their faith. Islam understands the relationship with God more or less like a treaty with certain conditions and promises. If a person fulfils his side then God will fulfil his.

J1. The witness

"And your God is One God: there is no god but He..." Al Baqarah 2:163

Comment: *A Muslim must declare the following witness: There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his apostle. Remarkably, this witness is not to be found word for word in the Qur`ân. There are, however, many verses with the same content. With every call to prayer in the mosque, the witness is cried out. It is also a part of the ritual prayers, which are prayed five times a day.*

J2. The prayers

" And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night..." Hûd 11:114

"O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say - nor in a state of ceremonial impurity (except when travelling on the road), until after washing your whole body..." Al Nisâ` 4:43

"O ye who believe! When the call is proclaimed to prayer on Friday (the Day of Assembly), hasten earnestly to the Remembrance of Allah..." Al Jumu'ah 62:9

Comment: *There is no verse which expressly mentions the five times of prayer each day, even if Sura Hûd 11:114 can be interpreted in this way (The Holy Qur`ân, Ali, note 1616, 1617). The one praying must be sober and clean. The ritual washings before prayer are very important in Islam.*

The most important time of prayer is at midday on Friday, the Muslim's holy day.

J3. The fast

"...And seek what Allah hath ordained for you, and eat and drink, until the white thread of dawn appear to you, distinct from its black thread; then complete your fast till the night appears..." Al Baqarah 2:187

Comment: *The fast is commanded during the whole month of Ramadan. The fast is from when the sun goes up until it goes down. The fast is absolute, that is to say, no food or drink is allowed. At night, however, both eating and drinking are allowed. Islam is a religion based on good works. A Muslim sees the fast as an important part of his efforts to reach heaven.*

J4. The alms

"And be steadfast in prayer; practise regular charity; and bow down your heads with those who bow down (in worship)." Al Baqarah 2:43

"Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer the (funds); for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to the Truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of Allah, and for the wayfarer..." Al Tawbah 9:60

Comment: *In many different Qur`ân verses the Muslim is exhorted to give something to the poor. In this way no poor person need starve in Islamic society (dâr al islâm). This is also the*

reason why beggars are relatively common in many Islamic countries today. It is worth noting that alms could also be used to help and encourage people who were either close to conversion or had recently converted to Islam. Alms could also be used "in the cause of Allah", which in the Qur`ân generally means those who fight for Allah, but can also refer to others in the service of Islam.

J5. The pilgrimage

"And complete the Hajj or Umrah in the service of Allah..." Al Baqarah 2:196

Comment: *Every Muslim for whom it is possible is to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in his life. It may be interesting to know that several of the religious rites a Muslim performs during the pilgrimage had been retained by Muhammad from the earlier Sabean religion in Mecca (Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, p.296). Muslims believe that the pilgrimage has a purifying effect so that God forgives many sins because of the journey. Without a doubt, it is believed that the pilgrimage weighs a great deal on the scales on the Day of Judgement.*

"Umra" (lesser pilgrimage) is a journey to Mecca outside the official period of pilgrimage. All of the rites of the real pilgrimage need not be performed either.

CONCLUSION: *Islam is a religion based on belief and good works. The Muslim sees the five pillars more or less like a treaty with different conditions and promises. If a person meets his side of the agreement, God will be gracious and merciful on the Day of Judgement and allow the Muslim to enter paradise. The Muslim who does not perform his religious duties can be doomed to hell. But everything takes place in accordance with God's will, and God is gracious and merciful towards all Muslims. Besides this, tradition says that Muhammad will pray for all Muslims on the Day of Judgement. Thus even those Muslims who have not performed their duties have a certain hope of getting to paradise after all.*

K. JUDGEMENT AND GRACE

Judgement is a very large subject in the Qur`ân. Since Jesus Christ has never died, neither does reconciliation in Christ exist. The Qur`ân's teaching on "judgement and grace" is therefore somewhat unlike that of the New Testament.

K1. Two angels record people's deeds

"Behold, two (guardian angels) appointed to learn (his doings) learn (and note them), one sitting on the right and one on the left." Qâf 50:17

Comment: *According to Islam, there are two angels following every person, one sitting on the right shoulder and the other on the left. The angel on the right shoulder notes all good deeds, while the other angel notes all evil deeds. On the day of reckoning (yûm al hisâb) when a person gives account for his life, the two angels report everything he has done. The good deeds are placed on the right-hand dish of the scales and the evil deeds on the left. And depending on which way the scales tip a person will go to paradise or hell. Everything, nevertheless, takes place in accordance with the will of Allah, and he is gracious and merciful to all Muslims. Besides this, Muhammad prays for all Muslims on the Day of Judgement, and this of course increases the Muslim's chances of getting into paradise.*

K2. All deeds are written down

"All that they do is noted in (their) Books (of Deeds): every matter, small and great, is a record." Al Qamar 54:52-53

Comment: *These verses confirm that everything is recorded. This documentation is prepared by the two angels sitting on people's shoulders.*

K3. A person is chained to his eternal destiny

"Every man's fate We have fastened on his own neck: On the Day of Judgement We shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will see spread open." Al Isrâ` 17:13

Comment: *No-one can escape the life he leads. What a person has done is, so to speak, chained round his neck, and on the Day of Judgement the verdict comes.*

K4. The scales decide paradise and hell

"Then, he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) heavy, will be in a Life of good pleasure and satisfaction. But he whose balance (of good deeds) will be (found) light - will have his home in a (bottomless) Pit. And what will explain to Thee what this is? (It is) a Fire blazing fiercely!" Al Qâri'ah 101:6-11

Comment: *At the Day of Judgement all a person's deeds are placed on the scales, and depending on the verdict, the person is sentenced to paradise or hell.*

K5. If God were to judge justly everyone would perish

"If Allah were to punish men for their wrongdoing, He would not leave, on the (earth), a single living creature: but He gives them respite for a stated Term. When their Term expires, they would not be able to delay (the punishment) for a single hour, just as they would not be able to anticipate it (for a single hour)." Al Nahl 16:61

Comment: *It is solely because of God's mercy that any human life at all continues to exist on earth. If God were to punish every sin then every single human being would have perished long ago.*

This verse is similar to the Bible's teaching on our inheritance of a sinful nature from Adam, which results in all humans sinning. The difference is, however, that according to Islam, humans sin because God created humans weak and not because of Adam and Eve's fall (see Sura Nisâ` 4:27-28 "Allah doth wish to turn to you, but the wish of those who follow their lusts is that ye should turn away (from Him) - far, far away. Allah doth wish to lighten your (difficulties): for man was created weak (in flesh).")

K6. One good deed outweighs ten evil deeds

"He that doeth good shall have ten times as much to his credit: he that doeth evil shall only be recompensed according to his evil..." Al An'âm 6:160

Comment: *Humans are sinners who have the tendency to do more evil than good. This problem is ingeniously solved by saying that one good deed cancels out ten evil ones. If someone prays once he can, in theory, sin ten times and still be even.*

Here the Bible and the Qur`ân differ. According to the Bible, the sinner stands in debt before God until he has received grace and forgiveness through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).

K7. God forgives those who turn in repentance

"...Forgive, then, those who turn in Repentance, and follow Thy Path; and preserve them from the Penalty of the Blazing Fire! And grant, our Lord! that they enter the Gardens of Eternity, which Thou hast promised to them..." Ghâfir 40:7-8

Comment: *Here is an example of the type of prayer the Muslim expects Muhammad will pray on the Day of Judgement. The Qur`ân speaks of forgiveness for the one who repents; if God wills, that person will be forgiven. But the person cannot be sure.*

A passage like this could equally well have come from the Bible. Jesus also spoke often about repentance as the condition for forgiveness, as for example in the parable of "the prodigal son", Luke 15:11-32.

Repentance and faith the Bible says are, before God, a person's responsibility. But the difference between the Qur`ân and the Bible lies partly in what a person is to believe in and partly in what God has done, that God in Christ has reconciled the whole world to himself. He thus offers a person forgiveness and salvation through Christ. This reconciliation, which the Bible says is the very foundation upon which forgiveness stands, is not to be found at all in Islam.

K8. God will fill hell

"...But the Word from Me will come true, 'I will fill Hell with Jinns and men all together.'" Al Sajdah 32:13

Comment: *According to the Qur`ân, hell will be completely full of jinn and humans. What is meant by "all together" we can only wonder.*

K9. No grace in hell

"If, then, they have patience, the Fire will be a Home for them! And if they beg to be received into favour into favour will they not (then) be received." Fussilat 41:24

Comment: *The Qur`ân says that there is no grace to be found for the one in hell. See also Sura Al Jinn 72:23 "...For any that disobey Allah and His Messenger - for them is Hell: they shall dwell therein forever." The Bible also speaks of an eternal punishment.*

CONCLUSION: *According to the Qur`ân, humans sin because God created them weak and not because they have inherited Adam's sinful nature. Thus, humans are not born sinners in need of reconciliation with God, but they instead have the capacity in themselves to obey God and do what God expects, and in this way to come to paradise.*

The Qur`ân speaks a lot about judgement. This judgement is based on a person's deeds, good and evil. If a person repents God will forgive that person's sins if he so wills. But the person cannot be sure of this.

The Bible says, however, that God acts according to his character and his Word, and therefore a person's sin will lead to punishment. The wages of sin are, as we know, death (both physical and spiritual), Romans 6:23. Since the God of the Bible keeps to his Word but at the same time loves humans, Christ had to sacrifice himself by bearing their guilt and punishment, in order to thus reconcile them with God. The believer can therefore be assured of God's forgiveness in Christ. All this is done away with in Islam.

L. PARADISE AND HELL

At first glance it may seem that the Bible's heaven and the Qur`ân's paradise are identical since they both refer to the glory a believer comes to after death.

L1. Paradise is before God's throne

"Those who sustain the Throne (of Allah) and those around it sing Glory and Praise to their Lord; believe in Him; and implore Forgiveness for those who believe..." Ghâfir 40:7

Comment: *Exactly as in the Bible, believers gather around God's throne to worship him.*

L2. Paradise for husbands and wives

"Enter ye the Garden, ye and your wives, in (beauty and) rejoicing." Al Zukhruf 43:70

Comment: *Men can take their wives to paradise. Exactly what situation the wives will be in while their husbands are entertaining themselves with other exquisitely beautiful women in paradise is not described.*

L3. Paradise contains all that could please the eye

"To them will be passed round, dishes and goblets of gold: there will be there all that the souls could desire, all that the eyes could delight in..." Al Zukhruf 43:71

Comment: *The Qur`ân describes paradise as a beautiful green garden. There is to be found everything that could please the human eye. Paradise in the Qur`ân is therefore a sensual paradise. The problem is, however, that Muhammad carries the thought of everything pleasing the eye right through to the extreme, even to things forbidden on earth. See also Suras 37:42-49 and 56:11-38.*

L4. Paradise contains beautiful virgins for the men

"In them will be (Maidens), chaste, restraining their glances, whom no man or Jinn before them has touched - then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny?" Al Rahmân 55:56-57

"In them will be fair (Companions), good, beautiful - then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? Companions restrained (as to their glances), in (goodly) pavilions - then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? Whom no man or Jinn before them has touched - then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? Reclining on green Cushions and rich Carpets of beauty. Then which..?" Al Rahmân 55:70-77

Comment: *The Qur`ân says that there will be an unknown number of exquisitely beautiful women (hûrun) in paradise. These virgins, says Muhammad, will satisfy the men in paradise. Remarkable, of course, is that this orgy is strictly forbidden on earth, but clearly not in the paradise of the Qur`ân.*

We can ask ourselves where the wife's place is in all this. But when we give thought to the fact that a Muslim had the right to four wives plus possible slave women as concubines and that Muhammad himself had the right to an unlimited number of wives on earth, Muhammad's idea of paradise becomes less far-fetched.

This sensual, sexual understanding of paradise is alien to the Bible. Jesus instead taught: "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" Matthew 22:30.

L5. People drink wine in paradise

"Their thirst will be slaked with Pure Wine sealed: the seal thereof will be Musk: and for this let those aspire, who have aspirations." Al Mutaffifîn 83:25-26

Comment: *In many Qur`ân verses it is described how believers will drink wine in paradise which will not intoxicate them. Remarkably, drinking wine is strictly forbidden in Islam, but obviously not in the paradise of the Qur`ân.*

L6. Hell is a place of eternal torment

"Truly Hell is as a place of ambush - for the transgressors a place of destination: they will dwell therein for ages. Nothing cool shall they taste therein, nor any drink, save a boiling fluid and a fluid, dark, murky, intensely cold." Al Naba` 78:21-25

Comment: *The Qur`ân says that all unrepentant sinners will go to hell, a place of fire and indescribable torment. There they will rue their defiance and regret not having listened to Allah and his apostle Muhammad. See also Sura Al Jinn 72:23 "...For any that disobey Allah and His Messenger - for them is Hell: they shall dwell therein forever."*

L7. The food of hell

"Verily the tree of Zaqqûm will be the food of the Sinful - like molten brass; it will boil in their insides, like the boiling of scalding water." Al Dukhân 44:43-46

Comment: *Even the food of hell is described as a terrible torment. It is difficult to imagine something worse than molten brass boiling in the stomach.*

L8. Fire and boiling water in hell

"(A voice will cry): 'Seize ye him and drag him into the midst of the Blazing Fire!' Then pour over his head the Penalty of Boiling Water." Al Dukhân 44:47-48

Comment: *The Qur`ân describes hell in the most cruel terms thinkable. First a person is dragged into the very centre of the fire, and then boiling water is poured over his head.*

L9. Disobedience towards Allah and Muhammad is regretted in hell

"The Day that their faces will be turned upside down in the Fire, they will say: 'Woe to us! would that we had obeyed Allah and obeyed the Messenger!'" Al Ahzâb 33:66

Comment: *The Qur`ân teaches that those who have rejected Muhammad as the messenger of Allah will regret it when their faces are fried in the fire of hell.*

CONCLUSION: *The Qur`ân gives detailed descriptions of paradise and hell. Muhammad made use of the most savage pictures imaginable in describing hell, while portraying a sensual paradise for those who became Muslims.*

There are certain similarities in the Bible's description of paradise and hell. The central difference lies, as we have seen, in that the Qur`ân places emphasis upon a sensual paradise, while the Bible's emphasis is on the presence of God and his holiness and glory. According to the Bible, it is our personal relationship with God himself that is of central importance. This difference is quite logical since it is precisely this which characterises Islam and the Christian faith here and now. Traditional Islam does not teach that a person comes near to God in a

personal, intimate relationship, as with a father and his beloved child, but rather that a person believes in God and serves him at a respectful distance, with not a little fear. The heart of the Christian faith is that God himself comes to us in Jesus Christ, that God in Christ reconciles people with himself through Christ's sacrifice. As the apostle Paul said, "But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" Ephesians 2:13. Besides this, the Bible teaches that God has let his own Spirit make his dwelling in the one who believes in Jesus Christ. In the light of this, the Bible's emphasis on closeness to God himself in paradise is completely logical.

M. JINN, ANGELS AND MYSTICISM

The Qur`ân presents us with concepts of supernatural beings unknown to the Bible. Certainly, angels are also given important tasks in the Bible, but the term "jinn", however, is not to be found, its closest biblical counterpart being demons. Remarkably, according to the Qur`ân there are both good and evil jinn.

It is otherwise in what is known as "folk Islam" that we see the occult in full-scale.

For a more thorough study of the subject I recommend "The Unseen Face of Islam, Musk, Monarch Publications, 1989."

M1. The jinn were created from fire

"And the Jinn race, We had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind." Al Hijr 15:27

Comment: *The Qur`ân teaches that these spirit beings were created out of the fire of a hot wind. What then exactly are jinn?*

Abdullah Yusuf Ali teaches the following about jinn: "... I think, from a collation and study of the Quranic passages, that the meaning is simply 'a spirit', or a hidden force... Both the Qur`ân and the Hadîth describe the Jinn as a definite species of living beings. They are created out of fire and are like man, may believe or disbelieve, accept or reject guidance. The authoritative Islamic texts show that they are not merely a hidden force, or a spirit. They are personalized beings who enjoy a certain amount of free will and thus will be called to account" (The Holy Qur`ân, Ali, note 929).

M2. Some jinn are righteous

"There are among us some that are righteous, and some the contrary: we follow divergent paths." Al Jinn 72:11

Comment: *In this sura the jinn speak in the "we"-form. They explain, among other things, that some of them were righteous and some evil.*

M3. Jinn repent and preach to others

"Behold, We turned towards thee a company of Jinns (quietly) listening to the Qur`ân: when they stood in the presence thereof, they said, 'Listen in silence!' When the (reading) was finished, they returned to their people, to warn (them of their sins). They said, 'O our people! We have heard a Book revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it...O our people, hearken to the one who invites (you) to Allah, and believe in him: He will forgive you your faults, and deliver you from a Penalty Grievous.'" Al Ahqâf 46:29-31

Comment: *God reveals to Muhammad that he had allowed some jinn to eavesdrop when he recited the Qur`ân. The result was not long in coming. The jinn noticed that the Qur`ân confirmed the Pentateuch. When Muhammad had finished speaking, the jinn returned to their own kind and called other jinn to listen to Muhammad and repent.*

M4. Jinn believe in the Qur`ân

"Say: It has been revealed to me that a company of Jinns listened (to the Qur`ân). They said, 'We have really heard a wonderful Recital!'" Al Jinn 72:1

Comment: *Another verse saying that God had revealed to Muhammad that jinn had secretly heard the Qur`ân, and they were, to say the least, delighted with what they heard.*

M5. Evil jinn are the fuel of hell

"But those who swerve - they are (but) fuel for Hell-fire." Al Jinn 72:15

Comment: *The verse is about jinn. The majority of jinn are evil, and the Qur`ân teaches that hell will be filled with humans and jinn. ("...But the Word from Me will come true, 'I will fill Hell with Jinns and men all together.'" Sura Al Sajdah 32:13). The jinn will then serve as extra fuel on the fire.*

M6. All angels fell down before Adam except the devil

"When We said to the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves to Adam', they prostrated themselves, but not Iblîs: he refused." Tâ Hâ 20:116

Comment: *This verse comes up many times in the Qur`ân. God obviously had commanded the angels to fall down before Adam. But Iblis, the devil, was disobedient towards God and refused.*

The verse is noteworthy because the verb "asjudû" (fallen down) also indicates worship. According to "The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic" the verb "sajada" means "to bow down, to bow in worship, to prostrate, to worship." In this case, God commanded the angels remarkably to fall down in worship before Adam. The whole story becomes even more remarkable when Iblis (the Devil) quite rightly refuses to fall down in worship before Adam. Iblis' sin lies nevertheless in his disobedience of Allah's command. In the Qur`ân, almost all angels are good. They carry out God's commands of justice and mercy. The archangels Gabriel and Michael are mentioned by name in Sura Al Baqarah 2:98.

M7. The angels Harut and Marut taught evil

"They followed what the evil ones gave out (falsely) against the power of Solomon: the blasphemers were, not Solomon, but the evil ones, teaching men magic, and such things as came down at Babylon to the angels Hârût and Mârût. But neither of these taught anyone (such things) without saying: 'We are only for trial; so do not blaspheme.' They learned from them the means to sow discord between man and wife..." Al Baqarah 2:102

Comment: *It is not clear from the context who these evil ones were or who the angels Hârût and Mârût were. The evil ones (Al Shayâtîn) taught magic which they in their turn had learned from the angels Hârût and Mârût. These angels seem to have warned people that they were tests, before they taught the evil.*

M8. Shooting stars chase away evil spirits

"We have indeed decked the lower heaven with beauty (in) the stars - (for beauty) and for guard against all obstinate rebellious evil sprits, (so) they should not strain their ears in the direction of the Exalted Assembly but be cast away from every side, repulsed, for they are under a perpetual penalty, except such as snatch away something by stealth, and they are pursued by a flaming Fire, of piercing brightness." Al Sâffât 37:6-10

Comment: *This remarkable thought is about evil spirits trying to listen to what is said at God's throne. But they are normally held in check by all the stars(!) Sometimes, however, an evil spirit manages to get loose and catch one or two words, but then he is immediately pursued by a shower of shooting stars.*

One can quietly wonder over what kind of cosmology Muhammad had.

M9. God gave Solomon demonic power

"Then We subjected the Wind to his power, to flow gently to his order, whithersoever he willed - as also the evil ones..." Sâd 38:36-37

Comment: *This passage lists a number of things over which Solomon was given power and which he also made use of. He thus received power over the wind and over the evil spirits (Al Shayâtîn). According to Suras 27:17 and 34:12-13, jinn made up part of Solomon's army, and also constructed buildings, images, large basins etc for him.*

In Sura 27:39, one of the jinn, an "Ifrit", or a demon, offers his powers to Solomon when he says that he can get him the queen of Sheba's throne in an instant: "Said an 'Ifrit of the Jinns: I will bring it to thee before thou rise from thy council: indeed I have full strength for the purpose, and may be trusted." We read in "The Holy Qur`ân, Ali", note 3274, "'Ifrit: a large, powerful Jinn, reputed to be wicked and crafty..." Thus it seems, according to the Qur`ân, that Solomon availed himself of both good and evil jinn.

M10. Heaven is opened during the night of power

"The Night of Power is better than a thousand Months. Therein come down the angels and the Spirit by Allahs permission, on every errand." Al Qadr 97:3-4

Comment: *Muslims usually believe that "Leylat al qadr" (the night of power), the night Muhammad received his first revelation, falls on the 23rd, 25th or the 27th of the fast month of Ramadan. It is believed that heaven is open for a short time on this night, in such a way that the one who prays during that time receives answers to prayer from God.*

No-one can know with certainty either the day or time for "Leylat al qadr", and therefore many Muslims usually pray for several nights towards the end of the month of Ramadan in the hope of receiving an answer to prayer.

CONCLUSION: *As we have seen, the Qur`ân contains a great many mystical details about jinn and Shayâtîn (evil ones) which could either be classed as pure superstition or in biblical terminology as demonic.*

Suras 113 and 114 are used by Muslims as a safeguard against different forms of magic and necromancy, which is, incidentally, a normal occurrence in the Muslim world.

Dr. Musk considers that it is verses just like the ones quoted here that have opened the way for the exceedingly large amount of superstition and magic that flourishes within folk Islam (The Unseen Face of Islam, Musk; Monarch Publications, 1989, p.224).

N. JIHAD

Many Westerners see "Jihâd" as exactly the same as a "holy war." But even though Jihâd includes such a war, the word has a much wider meaning. The word comes from the verb "jahada" which has the following definition according to "The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic": "to endeavour, strive, labour, take pains, overwork, fatigue, etc." So the word "Jihâd" actually means to struggle and strive to the utmost.

Islamic fundamentalism is gaining influence and is today making its voice heard more and more. Among these groups "Jihâd" is considered a religious duty for all true Muslims, that is to say, a sixth pillar of Islam. "Jihâd" is often given a literal and militant interpretation. In his book on Islamic fundamentalism Dr. Musk writes: "A purely 'spiritual' or 'liberal' approach to the Qur`ân in exegesis is unacceptable to the reformist muslim. We have seen his insistence upon literalism demonstrated in many situations with regard to the duty of jihâd or 'holy war'. According to the Islamists, one cannot talk of 'higher' or 'spiritual' jihâd, a kind of war against the world, the flesh and the devil. That is not what the Qur`ân and sunna refer to. One has to face up to the reality of armed conflict. Such is the literal meaning of jihâd in the source texts." (Passionate Believing, Musk, Monarch Publications, 1992, p.185). It is therefore of interest to see what the Qur`ân teaches on "Jihâd."

N1. Jihâd in the cause of God

"Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause, with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of Allah: they are the people who will achieve (salvation)." Al Tawbah 9:20

Comment: *This verse describes the broader meaning of Jihâd which is that a person completely spends himself in the cause of Allah. The Arabic has "wa jahadu fi sabîl Allah" ("and strive with might and main, in Allah's cause"). There is also to be found here the promise of special blessing for the Muslim who sacrifices himself for God in this way.*

N2. Holy war

"Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for Allah loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter..."

Al Baqarah 2:190-191

Comment: *The expression "fight in the cause of Allah" is very common in the Qur`ân since Muslims found themselves in many battles during the expansion in Medina. These wars were considered holy wars for God (Islam lära och livsmönster, Hjärpe, AWE/GEBERS, 1979, p.50). The verse seems to say that Muslims are never to attack an enemy. But in reality all who actively opposed Muhammad and Islam came to be seen as enemies which had to be fought against. It is these opponents who are to be killed wherever they are found, and it is their tumult and oppression which are worse than slaughter, that is to say, their negative influence on people was such that it even justified killing them.*

N3. Idolaters were to be killed if they did not become Muslims

"But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." Al Tawbah 9:5

Comment: *Muhammad pronounced these judgements over idolaters towards the end of his work, when the Muslims were in a clear majority in the area. They were to be fought against and killed wherever they were encountered. Only conversion to Islam could save their lives.*

N4. Combat all non-Muslims

"Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizyah with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued." Al Tawbah 9:29

Comment: *Earlier in this sura Muhammad explains what idolaters had in store, namely the choice between conversion and death. Regarding the People of the Book, that is to say, Jews and Christians, they were allowed to exist in Islamic society (dâr al islâm) on certain conditions. They were to be fought into submission and then willingly pay a special personal tax (Jizya), which only applied to them.*

N5. Paradise awaits those who die in Jihâd

"And if ye are slain, or die, in the way of Allah, forgiveness and mercy from Allah are far better than all they could amass. And if ye die or are slain, Lo! it is unto Allah that ye are brought together." Âli 'Imrân 3:157-158

Comment: *There are several clear promises in the Qur`ân that those who die in the cause of God will be allowed to go to him. Islam teaches that God forgives all the sins of those who die in Jihâd. They are thereby guaranteed a place in paradise.*

N6. Cowardly soldiers are punished with hell

"If any do turn his back to them on such a day - unless it be a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own) - he draws on himself the wrath of Allah, and his abode is Hell - an evil refuge (indeed)!" Al Anfâl 8:16

Comment: *Deserters or those who fled from battle in fear could feel certain that they would go to hell. This also applied to those who refused to even go out to war.*

N7. The spoils of war

"But (now) enjoy what ye took in war, lawful and good..." Al Anfâl 8:69

Comment: *It was a very lucrative business plundering a defeated enemy. It was not material possessions alone that Muslims were allowed to plunder but they could also take women and children as slaves. Of these women, the Muslim could then take concubines in addition to the four wives he had the right to (see Sura Al Ahzâb 33:50).*

N8. Muhammad's share of the spoils

"And know that out of all the booty that ye may acquire (in war), a fifth share is assigned to Allah - and to the Messenger, and to near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer..." Al Anfâl 8:41

Comment: *Muhammad had the right to one fifth of the spoils, which he then divided among his relatives and other needs.*

CONCLUSION: *In studying the subject of "Jihâd" in the Qur`ân we find partly the broader, more general definition and partly the meaning of a militant holy war against Islam's opponents. Without doubt Muhammad's attitude towards his opponents became all the more violent the greater the political power he gained. All were to be defeated in God's war. Idolaters were to be exterminated or become Muslims. The only ones tolerated were Jews and Christians who allowed themselves to be completely subjugated and willingly paid their special tax.*

It was every healthy male Muslim's duty to participate in the holy war against Islam's opponents. Those who did so were, in the case of death, guaranteed paradise, and those who refused were guaranteed hell.

O. ISLAM'S OPPONENTS

Islam is often presented in the West as a very tolerant religion. It is pointed out, for example, that although the word "Islam" in itself means submission (under the will of God), the word for peace, "salam", comes from the same root as the word "Islam". By this is meant that the whole religion right from the very beginning has been tolerant and peace-loving. Reference is often given to Sura Al Baqarah 2:256 "Let there be no compulsion in religion..." It is therefore of interest to study how the Qur`ân describes the situation of Islam's opponents.

O1. Terrible punishments for the opponents of Islam

"The punishment of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land: that is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter." Al Mâ'idah 5:33

Comment: *As Muhammad's political power grew in Medina, it became more and more dangerous for his opponents. This led to a great number of them being executed in the year 5AH (627 AD), among them all the men (about 600) in the last Jewish family in Medina, "Banû Quraïza". Earlier, in the year 4AH (626 AD) another Jewish family from Medina, "Banû Nadîr" was forced into exile (see Sura Al Hashr 59:2-4) (Sîrat Al Rasûl, part 2, p.148, 75; Kitâb Al Maghâzî, Wâqidî, p.125,126; Balance of Truth, Pfander, The Religious Tract Society, 1910, p.332-333).*

This Qur`ân verse shows that, ultimately, there was no mercy for Islam's opponents, but instead that they were to be punished in the most cruel ways thinkable.

It is worth noting that it is precisely this verse which is still used today in Islamic law and has served as the foundation for many death penalties in Iran after the revolution there. It has even been included in the grounds for court rulings with the death sentence against members of Baháism. The verse has regularly been cited during the sentencing of those whom we would classify as political opponents of the regime.

When someone is called "mufsid" (one who "strives with might and main for mischief" or spreads corruption) and "muhârib Allah wa rasûlahu" (one who "wages war against Allah and his Messenger"), it is a very serious accusation which brings with it a definite risk of the death penalty in present-day Iran.

O2. Punishment awaits those who leave Islam

"...And if any of you turn back from their faith and die in unbelief, their works will bear no fruit in this life and in the Hereafter; they will be companions of the Fire and will abide therein."

Al Baqarah 2:217

Comment: *Quite definitely, an apostate of Islam can only expect hell after his death. It is, according to Islamic law, strictly forbidden to leave Islam. Those who leave Islam become "murtadd" (apostate) and are, according to Islamic law, to be sentenced to death (The Religion of Islam, Dr. Ahmad Galwash, Islamic Congress, 1957, p.112).*

We can ask ourselves how it is that leaving Islam carries the death penalty in Islamic law (Shari'a), since it is not explicitly stated in the Qur`ân.

The reason is that in the Hadîth (the tradition) are direct quotations from Muhammad where he prescribed the death penalty for apostasy. Islamic law (Shari'a) is derived, namely, both

from the *Qur`ân* and Muhammad's "sunna" (that is, his approach to the practice of Islam), which is written in the "Hadîth" (the tradition).

One Hadîth, which goes back to Uthmân Ibn Affân, is as follows.

"I heard the Messenger of Allah (sala Allah 'aleihi wa sallam) say:

Shed not the blood of a Muslim man save in one of these three cases:

-The one who has committed adultery... he is to be stoned.

-The one who has killed without just cause.

-The one who has apostatised from Islam..."

(Sunun, Hâfîth Ibn Abdallah Muhammad Bin Yazîd Al-Qazwînî Ibn Mâjah, Hadîth 2533).

03. Opponents are given an ignominious burial

"Nor do thou ever pray for any of them that dies, nor stand at his grave; for they rejected Allah and His Messenger, and died in a state of perverse rebellion." Al Tawbah 9:84

Comment: *Even after his death an opponent was to be dishonoured. A Muslim was not allowed to express sympathy, something which was otherwise a social duty. The reason was quite simply that the deceased had renounced Allah and Muhammad as his apostle.*

04. Hell for the disobedient

"...For any that disobey Allah and His Messenger - for them is Hell: they shall dwell therein forever." Al Jinn 72:23

Comment: *It was dangerous not to obey Muhammad. Those who disobeyed could be sure of hell (see also Sura Al Tawbah 9:80).*

05. No protection for the apostate

"...But if they turn back (to their evil ways), Allah will punish them with a grievous penalty in this life and in the Hereafter: they shall have none on earth to protect or help them."

Al Tawbah 9:74

Comment: *The apostate, apart from hell, could be sure of that no-one would help or protect him in Islamic society.*

06. Idolaters were to become Muslims or be executed

"But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." Al Tawbah 9:5

Comment: *Those who chose to keep their idolatry in the end found no grace in Muhammad. He ordered their execution. Their only chance of survival was conversion to Islam.*

CONCLUSION: *For Islam's opponents at the time of Muhammad, Sura Al Baqarah 2:256 "Let there be no compulsion in religion..." must have sounded like quite a hollow claim. On closer examination it turns out that Islam was not at all tolerant towards its opponents, but on the contrary, rejection of Muhammad and the Qur`ân meant mortal danger.*

We must sadly say that this has also been the case with Christianity during long periods in history. The crucial difference, however, lies in the fact that the Jesus Christ of the New Testament never at any time sanctioned violence, but taught instead: "Love your enemies, do

good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."
Luke 6:27-28

P. EQUALITY BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

The form of Islam we meet in the West often tries to make it appear that men and women are equal within Islam, that women in Islam are free and not subordinate to men. But what is the real picture of women we see in the Qur`ân?

P1. Men are a degree above women

"...But men have a degree (of advantage) over them. And Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise."
Al Baqarah 2:228

Comment: *It does not say in what way men have an advantage over women in this verse, but in other places in the Qur`ân it quite clearly proves to be the case that men have certain privileges and rights which women do not enjoy. But here, however, it is enough to conclude that the Qur`ân gives men advantage over women.*

P2. Two female witnesses are like one male

"...And get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witnesses..." Al Baqarah 2:282

Comment: *Quite clearly, the Qur`ân prescribes that in court hearings the testimony of two women is equivalent to that of one man. This is a verse which shows how men enjoyed a certain advantage over women according to the Qur`ân. Since the Qur`ân teaches this, these regulations still apply today in "Shari'a" (Islamic law) (Punishment in islamic law: A comparative study, Muhammad S. El-Awa, American Trust Publications, 1982, p.125).*

P3. Two daughters inherit as one son

"Allah (thus) directs you as regards your children's (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females..." Al Nisâ` 4:11

Comment: *There are legitimate reasons for this apparent difference between sons and daughters. It was the sons who carried on the family name. They also had a special responsibility to look after their ageing parents, while the daughters were married off to other families. The fact remains, however, that a son received a double share of the inheritance. This still applies today in Islamic law.*

P4. Wife-beating

"...As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly)..." Al Nisâ` 4:34

Comment: *Here the Qur`ân shows how a wife who conducts herself badly and does not subordinate herself can be disciplined by her husband. What is remarkable is that the man has the right to use his greater physical strength by beating his wife. The word is "adribuhunna" ("beat them") and "lightly" is not in the Arabic. With this verse as a basis, it is allowed for a man to beat his wife even according to Shari'a law (The Religion of Islam: A Standard Book, Dr. Ahmed A. Galwash, Islamic Congress, 1957. p.112-113).*

P5. Maid-servants can be forced into sex

"...But force not your maids to prostitution when they desire chastity, in order that ye may make a gain in the goods of this life. But if anyone compels them, yet, after such compulsion, is Allah Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful (to them)." Al Nûr 24:33

Comment: *The verse has a promising start for a vulnerable group of women, namely those maid-servants who wished to lead pure lives. But the rest of the verse must have been a nightmare for these women. The Qur`ân teaches that God is very forgiving if men obtain sex with these poor maid-servants by force.*

P6. Men are allowed four wives

"...Marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four..." Al Nisâ` 4:3

Comment: *This privilege still applies today in Islamic law and in most of the countries where Islam is a majority religion.*

P7. Men can divorce women

"O Prophet! When ye do divorce women..." Al Talâq 65:1

"...And take for witness two persons from among you, endued with justice, and establish the evidence..." Al Talâq 65:2

Comment: *Apart from a very few exceptional cases it is the man alone who has the right to divorce his wife according to Shari'a law (The Religion of Islam: A Standard Book, Dr. Ahmed A. Galwash, Islamic Congress, 1957, p.67). In the presence of witnesses, he is to say three times that he divorces his wife. After this the divorce is fact. Besides this he is not allowed to remarry her until she has been married to another man.*

It is also worth noting that according to Islamic law a Muslim woman is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim man, while a Muslim man is allowed to marry a non-Muslim woman from the People of the Book (The Religion of Islam: A Standard Book, Dr. Ahmed A. Galwash, Islamic Congress, 1957, p.69).

P8. Paradise contains beautiful virgins for the men

"In them will be fair (Companions), good, beautiful - then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? Companions restrained (as to their glances), in (goodly) pavilions - then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? Whom no man or Jinn before them has touched - then which of the favours of your Lord will ye deny? Reclining on green Cushions and rich Carpets of beauty. Then which..?" Al Rahmân 55:70-77

Comment: *Thus, there will be an unknown number of beautiful virgins who, according to Muhammad, will satisfy the men in paradise.*

We can safely say that neither in paradise will there be equality between men and women.

CONCLUSION: *These examples are sufficient to show that men and women are not equal in the Qur`ân, but that men have certain rights and privileges that women do not have. The Qur`ân is thereby consistent in its claim, "...but men have, 'daraja', a degree (of advantage), over them."*

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