

THE TRINITY REVIEW

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare [are] not fleshly but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. And they will be ready to punish all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

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What's Wrong with Islam?

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(The reader should read Jesus' parable of the wicked farmers in Matthew 21:33-45, Mark 12:1-12, and Luke 20:9-19 before he reads this article.)

[W]e [Christians] know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true; in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

—1 John 5:20-21

Should any Muslims read this essay I would first express my appreciation to them for doing so, and I want them to know that I love them. I assure them that I have no personal animosity toward them as individuals. Rather, it is because I care very deeply for the Muslim world that I wrote this article. Second, I would respectfully urge them to examine the Qur'an and Christian theology and history to see if what I write here is true. And I would respectfully plead with them to read carefully, thoughtfully, and attentively. And to all professing Christians who read this article I would say that just because they *profess* to be Christians is no guarantee in itself that they are genuine Christians whose sins are forgiven and who are on their way to Heaven. So they as well should read carefully, thoughtfully, and attentively what I write here.

Because of the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, by militant Muslims acting in the name of Allah, Christians in the United States of America should learn all they can about Islam and its spread in this country. A study titled *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait*, released on April 26, 2001, by the Council on American-Islamic Relations headquartered in Washington, D.C., reports that over 2,000,000 Muslims were attending 1,209 mosques in the United States at the time of the study's release. What concerns me about these numbers is not so much these numbers *per se* but the fact that they represent a *three hundred percent increase* over the last

six years, showing clearly that Islam is blossoming and flourishing in the United States.¹

Taking my own advice, for some time now, and particularly since September 11, 2001, I have been studying the Qur'an, Islam's "holy book," which is composed of 114 suras (chapters). Muslims regard the Qur'an as the infallible Word of Allah. Now while I am not a recognized authority on the religion of Islam I believe I can, in spite of the Qur'an's content and style,² read it with sufficient comprehension to understand it in the main.

1 Some Christians will doubtless say, "So what? They have as much right to immigrate to these shores as anyone else, don't they?" True enough, but let me spell out why Christians should be concerned. If Islam were to become the dominant religion in the United States, since Muslims worship on Friday, the Muslim citizenry would doubtless demand and legislate that Friday be made a day of worship. America would then either move to a four-day workweek, with Muslims worshipping on Friday, Jews worshipping on Saturday, and Christians worshipping on Sunday, or Friday would become the only worship day and Jews and Christians would have to fend for themselves as far as having a day set apart for their respective times of worship, which is the pattern followed in every Muslim country in the Middle East. Furthermore, in spite of present Constitutional protection, Christians might eventually find it more difficult to build churches, openly to buy and to read the Bible, and to spread Christianity within the U. S., especially among Muslims; that is, First Amendment freedoms would disappear.

2 Thomas Carlyle's studied judgment was that the reading of the Qur'an in English is "a toilsome task," for it is "a wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; insupportable stupidity, in short, nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran." For Carlyle's full quotation see Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church* (Eerdmans, [1910] n.d.), IV, 180, who also opines that the Qur'an's passages of poetic beauty are "mixed with absurdities, bombast, unmeaning images, low sensuality. It abounds in repetitions and contradictions.... It alternately attracts and repels, and is a most wearisome book to read" (179). He concludes:

Of all books..., the Koran is the most powerful rival of the Bible, but falls infinitely below it in contents and form.... Whatever is true in the Koran is borrowed from the Bible; what is original, is false or frivolous. The Bible is historical and embodies the noblest aspirations

I also I also think I know something about what Holy Scripture teaches regarding Christian doctrine, and it is apparent to me from my reading of the Qur'an that it is laced with distortions concerning Christianity's doctrinal teachings. Admittedly, there are many ambiguities in Qur'anic teaching, about the meaning of which even Islamic scholars dispute, and these ambiguities may account for some of these distortions. But, in my opinion, any informed observer must conclude that Muhammad, the Qur'an's author, was at best ill-informed about Christianity's core teachings and thus did not "write" infallibly when he "wrote" (actually he spoke his "revelations" since he could neither read nor write) what he did about Christianity's belief system.

In this essay I do not intend to treat the many *historical* inaccuracies in the Qur'an.³ Nor will I address Muhammad's teaching that the husband may beat his disobedient wife (Sura 4, "Women," verse 34), or his belief that he was to "make war on the unbelievers... and deal sternly with them" (Sura 66, "Prohibition," verse 9; see also Sura 8, "Spoils of War," verses 13-17; Sura 9 [virtually a declaration of war against unbelievers], "Repentance," verse 14),⁴ or his fixation on the eternal fire awaiting the Jew and the Christian, and the sensual paradise of gardens, feasting, and sexual pleasure that awaits the Muslim (Sura 36).⁵ Rather, I will restrict my remarks only to Muhammad's misrepresentation to his followers concerning what Christians believe about God as Trinity; his misrepresentation of Christ's place in revelational history as penultimate, with his own alleged prophetic role being ultimate; his denials of Christ's deity, his crucifixion and resurrection; and his denial that God requires for forgiveness Jesus' atoning sacrifice for sin. Let's look in some detail at each of these Qur'anic teachings.

The Qur'an's Teaching on God as Trinity

of the human race in all ages to the final consummation; the Koran begins and stops with Mohammed. The Bible combines endless variety with unity, universal applicability with local adaptation; the Koran is uniform and monotonous, confined to one country, one state of society, and one class of minds. The Bible is the book of the world, and is constantly traveling to the ends of the Earth, carrying spiritual food to all races and to all classes of society; the Koran stays in the Orient, and is insipid to all who have once tasted the true word of the living God [181-182].

3 For some of the Qur'an's historical inaccuracies see Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Moody, 1994), 549-552; St. Clair Tisdall, *The Source of Islam*, translated and abridged by William Muir (T & T. Clark, n.d.) and Abdal Fadi, *Is the Qur'an Infallible?* (Villach, Austria: Light of Hope, n.d.).

4 *Al Bukhari* (a collection of the sayings of Muhammad), volume 1:25, asks: "What is the best deed for the Muslim next to believing in Allah and his Apostle?" Answer: "To participate in Jihad in Allah's cause." The reader should compare this "second Muslim concern" with Jesus' declaration that the second commandment, after the first that requires loving God with all one's heart, is to love one's neighbor as one loves himself.

5 Islam teaches that in Paradise even the lowliest Muslim man will enjoy seventy-two black-eyed youthful girls (*houris*) especially created for his sexual enjoyment, with the moment of his sexual pleasure prolonged to a thousand years and his faculty of sensual enjoyment increased a hundredfold.

I want to begin by noting that Christians had already enjoyed a six-hundred-year-long theological history and had already developed a carefully-thought-through theology of God by the time Muhammad (born about A.D. 570), the author of the Qur'an, began to write his alleged revelations from Allah around A.D. 610. Through the efforts of the first four ecumenical councils (Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon) early church theologians, listening carefully to the Bible, had worked out the church's doctrine of God as Trinity and its doctrine of the two-natured incarnate Christ. These doctrines, some-times expressed in philosophico-theological language, were understandably sometimes quite difficult for an average person to comprehend. In the course of developing its theology over these centuries the church also found it necessary to distance itself from the unscriptural views of the second-century Logos-Christologies, third-century forms of modalism, fourth-century Arianism and Apollin-arianism, and fifth-century Nestorianism and Eutychian-ism—all views that basically had in common the denial in one way or another of the incarnation of God the Son as true man. These unscriptural heresies, however, did not die when they were rejected but rather continued to spread throughout some regions of the Middle East, and it was these heresies, especially Arianism, that spread into Arabia and to Mecca where Muhammad was born.⁶

Now a careful reading of the Qur'an will disclose that Muhammad did not have a clear grasp of what Scripture and orthodox Christianity were teaching about the Trinity in the seventh century A.D. He was hearing views that had been rejected by the leading theologians of the church such as Athanasius, Cyril of Alexandria, and Augustine. Accordingly, his consistent misrepresentation of the Trinity suggests that he conceived of the Trinity along the lines of a crude tritheism, a heresy that Christianity had consistently repudiated. In Sura 4, "Women," verse 171, the Koran declares: "The Messiah, Jesus the son of Mary, was no more than God's [Allah's] apostle.... So believe in God [Allah] and his apostles and do not say: 'Three.' Forbear, and it shall be better for you. God is but one God. God forbid that he should have a son!" In Sura 5, "The Table," verse 73, Muhammad teaches: "Unbelievers are those who say: 'God [Allah] is one of three.' There is but one God." Apparently Muhammad believed that in order for God to have a son he would have had to have a consort (Sura 6, "Cattle," verse 101), but since God "has taken no consort" he has "not begotten any children" (Sura 72, "The Jinn," verse 3). Then in Sura 5, verse 116, he teaches that Christians believe that God's "threeness" is composed of Allah,

6 Schaff, in his *History*, IV, 159, notes that the nominal Christians who inhabited Arabia at the time of Muhammad belonged mostly to the various heretical sects that were expelled from the Roman Empire during the doctrinal controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries. "We find there traces of Arians, Sabellians, Ebionites, Nestorians, Eutychians, Monophysites, Marianites, and Collyridians or worshippers of Mary...it was a very superficial and corrupt Christianity which had found a home in those desert regions...." The sinful use of force by the relatively orthodox theologians to exile the heretics from the Empire resulted in the creation of a large and fertile field for Islam to take root and grow.

Jesus (whom he believed ill-informed Christians had wrongly deified), and his mother Mary.⁷

Now whatever sub-scriptural oddities and errors some orthodox theologians may have espoused in the early centuries of the church about God as Trinity, not one of them ever taught that God's "threeness" included the mother of Jesus, and no ecumenical council ever endorsed such a notion. This is an error on Muhammad's part and shows his ignorance of Christian teaching. It may be that he knew about the small sect called the Collyridians, made up mainly of women, that had existed in fourth century Arabia and that had rendered divine worship to Mary by offering her cakes.⁸ It may be, if he had even heard of the teaching, that Muhammad thought that the church's confessional description of Mary as *theotokos* ("God-bearer") implied that she was deity. This term, of course, was not intended to say that there was something divine about Mary; it was intended only to safeguard Jesus' full deity. Most likely, Muhammad had simply concluded that if Christians believed Jesus was the Son of God then they had to believe also that God had to have a divine consort and that his mother was this divine consort. But whatever the reasoning was behind his assertion, he was in error to conclude that Christians generally regarded Mary as a member of the Trinity.

What the church taught then and still teaches is this: that within the undivided unity of the one living and true God eternally exist three persons, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory (see the church creeds here). Perhaps this definition will not satisfy Muslims, but at least it takes seriously the infallible teaching of Holy Scripture, and it does not misrepresent to the world what Christianity has taught about the Christian God, which cannot be said for the Qur'an's misrepresentation of the doctrine of the Trinity.

The Qur'an's Teaching on Jesus' Secondary Place (along with Other Prophets) in Revelational History, with Muhammad Himself Occupying the Primary Place

Islamic orthodoxy teaches that Jesus, while he was Israel's Messiah, was only one of many national prophets to Israel and that God never intended the Christianity of Jesus to become a universal religion. Islamic orthodoxy teaches that Muhammad was the only prophet sent by God to the entire world, and that it is Islam alone that God intended to become a universal religion. However, if one studies the Qur'an carefully, he will discover that it seems to say the very opposite. It represents itself as a book written in Arabic for those who spoke Arabic (Sura 41, "Revelations Well Expounded," verse 3, and Sura 42, "Counsel," verse 7), and that it was intended primarily for Mecca and its environs (Sura 6, "Cattle," verse 93, and

7 Muhammad seems to confuse Mary in Sura 3, "The Family of Imran," verses 35-45, and in Sura 66, "Prohibition," verse 12, with Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. All efforts by Islamic apologists to explain this confusion are unsatisfactory.

8 See Epiphanius, *Adversus Haeresis*, 79. Of course, the veneration of Mary as the Mother of God, which began early, has continued to the present in Roman Catholic and Orthodox theology.

Sura 42, "Counsel," verse 7). Arthur J. Arberry surely appears to be right when he observes that the Islam of the Qur'an is fundamentally an Arabic religion, reflecting and intended for the seventh-century culture of Arabia.⁹ On the other hand, the Qur'an emphatically states in Sura 3:3 and Sura 6:92 that God revealed the Mosaic Torah and the Christian Gospel *for the light and guidance of all mankind*.

But what did Muhammad teach about his relation to Jesus? Did he not see himself as superior to Jesus? Well, it is true that, according to Sura 61, "Battle Array" or "Ranks," verse 6, Muhammad does state that Jesus taught that "an apostle...will come after me whose name is Ahmad [a variation of Muhammad]." Of course, Jesus taught no such thing. He taught that *God the Holy Spirit* whom he called the Comforter (*parakletos*, *John* 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; 16:7-8, 13-14), whom he would send from the Father, would come after him. And he taught that the Spirit/Comforter when he came would glorify him, Jesus the Christ. Apparently, Muhammad, or perhaps the compilers of the Koran after his death, confused the Greek word *parakletos* with the Greek word *periklytos*, meaning "famed, praised," for which the Arabic would be *ahmad* (Muhammad), and accordingly he taught that Jesus taught that he, Muhammad, was to be the last and "seal" of God's prophets.

The Gospels, however, make it clear that Jesus taught that revelational history reached its culmination in him and that his chosen apostles completed God's revelatory activity (2 *Timothy* 3:16-17). For instance, in his parable of the wicked farmers, found in *Matthew* 21:33-45, *Mark* 12:1-12, and *Luke* 20:9-19, Jesus tells the story of a landowner who leased his vineyard to some farmers and then went into another country. When the time arrived for him to receive his rental fee in the form of the fruit of the vineyard, he sent servant after servant to his tenants, only to have each one of them beaten or stoned or killed. *Last of all* he sent his son—Luke says his "beloved son"; Mark says "yet one [other], a beloved son"—saying: "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the landowner's son, they said: "This is the heir; come, let's kill him and take his inheritance." This they did, throwing his body out of the vineyard. When the landowner came, he destroyed the tenants and leased his vineyard to others. The interpretative intentions of the parable, as Don Carson notes,¹⁰ are obvious on the face of it: The landowner is God the Father, the vineyard the nation of Israel (*Isaiah* 5:7); the farmers the nation's leaders, the servants the prophets of the theocracy (*Matthew* 23:37a); and the son is Jesus himself.

The central teaching of the parable is obvious—as indeed it was to its original audience (*Matthew* 21:45): after having sent his servants the prophets repeatedly in Old Testament times to the nation of Israel and its leaders to call the nation back to him from its sin of unbelief, only to have them rebuffed, persecuted, and often killed, God, the Owner of Israel, had, in sending Jesus, moved beyond

9 Arthur J. Arberry, *Religion in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), 7.

10 D. A. Carson, *Matthew* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1984), 451.

merely sending another servant. Listen once again to the pertinent verses in this connection:

Matthew 21:37: "Then *last of all* he sent his son."

Mark 12:6: "...still having *one son*, his beloved, he also sent him to them *last*."

In Jesus, God had *finally* (Matthew 21:37: *hysteron*; Mark 12:6: *eschaton*) sent his own beloved Son, that is, his "one and only" Son, who was to be similarly rejected. The *finality* of his ministry Jesus makes clear from his teaching that the farmers' rejection of *him*, unlike the rejections of those before him, was to entail neither a continuance of dealing with the recalcitrant nation on God's part nor a mere change of politico-religious administration. Rather, to reject him, he taught, would eventuate in "the complete overthrow of the theocracy, and the rearing from the foundation up of a new structure in which the Son would receive full vindication and supreme honor"¹¹ (Matthew 21:42-43; Mark 12:9; Luke 20:16). The Son's exalted status in the revelational economy of God is apparent from the *finality* of the messianic investiture that he owns. From Matthew's "finally"—Mark says "he had yet *one other*" and also "finally"—it is clear that Jesus represents himself as the *last*, the *final* ambassador, after whose sending none higher can come and nothing more can be done. The Lord of the vineyard has no further resources; as God's Son, the Son of God is the highest messenger of God conceivable. The author of *Hebrews* echoes exactly this sentiment when he declares:

God who spoke at many times and in many ways in times past to the fathers by the prophets has in these last days spoken to us by his Son whom he has appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds...[and] if the word spoken [then] proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which...[was] spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those [apostles] who heard him? [*Hebrews* 1:1-2; 2:2-3].

Clearly, the author of *Hebrews* teaches, with Jesus, the finality of God's work in Jesus Christ. Both Jesus' teaching and the uniform teaching of the entire New Testament clearly fly in the face of Muhammad's claim that Jesus taught that "an apostle named Ahmad" would come after him. Jesus' teaching here also places Muhammad in hopeless conflict with himself, for when Muhammad declares, as he does several places, that Jesus was a true prophet, it means by implication that when Jesus taught what he did in this parable about his own finality, Muhammad's claim to being the last and greatest prophet is negated by the teaching of this very one whom Muhammad declares was a true prophet.

So in making himself the "Seal of the Prophets," that is, the last and the greatest of the prophets, as he does in Sura 33, "Confederate Tribes," verse 40, Muhammad misrepresented Christ's teaching about his unique and

final place in God's revelational program and thereby showed himself to be a *false* prophet.

The Qur'an's Teaching about Jesus' Deity

The Qur'an, it is true, affirms that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and a true prophet of God, that he was virgin-born and performed many miracles. Therefore, Muslims believe today, because the Qur'an teaches these true and proper things about Jesus, that Christians should be lauding them and regarding them accordingly as friendly to Christianity. But the Qur'an also teaches in Sura 5, "The Table," verses 17 and 72, that it is *unbelievers* who say that Jesus is God. And in verse 116 the Qur'an teaches that Jesus denied that he was deity:

Then God says: "Jesus, son of Mary, did you ever say to mankind: 'Worship me...as god beside God?'" "Glory be to you," he answers, "I could never have claimed what I have no right to. If I had ever said so, you would have surely known it." [See also Sura 5:75.]

Now think with me for a moment here. Suppose one nation's ambassador goes to another nation, presents his credentials to its leaders, and these leaders say in response to him: "We like you very much; you are a very nice person, you are kind, and your speeches are very edifying. But we simply do not believe you are who you say you are, and therefore we cannot accept you in the role in which you claim to have come." Would anyone say that those leaders had really received that ambassador? Similarly, unless one accepts Jesus for whom he claims to be, and in the role in which he claims to have come, he has not really accepted Jesus at all, regardless of the other nice things he may say about him! To be quite frank about it, Jesus is not flattered by all the kisses that unregenerate men may throw at him, if at the same time they deny as false his claims to deity and his claim to sole saviorhood. This is the state in which our Muslim friends actually find themselves with their incomplete list of accolades about Jesus. They have really not accepted him regardless of the true things they say about him.

Now Jesus' self-awareness is a subject that I have spent a considerable amount of my professional life assessing. I have even written a book specifically about it (see my *Jesus, Divine Messiah: The Biblical Witness*). And I will state categorically that, based upon the teaching of the four Gospels, Jesus did in fact believe that he was God the Son incarnate, the second person of the Godhead, and that he taught others to believe so as well.

For example, look again with me at the parable of the tenant farmers I read earlier. Its high Christology—reflecting Jesus' own self-understanding of his deity—finds expression in two details in his story:¹² By virtue of his sonship, Jesus claims to possess a higher dignity and a closer relation to God than the highest and closest official status that all the prophets of the Old Testament theocracy possessed. This is underscored not only by his title "Son," but also by the highly suggestive word "beloved" that he attaches to the title "Son," applying both

11 Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus* (Presbyterian and Reformed [1926] 1978), 162.

12 See Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, 161-163.

words to himself over against the unqualified word “servants” that he uses to describe all those who went before him.

This point—that Jesus represents himself as God’s beloved Son and heir over against all who went before him who were only servants—cannot be made to answer merely to a “messianic” or functional sonship, as some critical scholars would like to believe. This is apparent from two facts:

First, Jesus represents himself in the parable as God’s beloved Son *even before his mission*.

Second, he represents himself as God’s “beloved Son” *whether sent or not!* That is to say, his being sent reflects his investiture of messiahship, but his invested messiahship was brought about precisely by the necessity for God to send one who was the highest and dearest that the lord of the vineyard could delegate. Jesus’ Sonship, therefore, existed prior to his messianic mission and was *not* the result of his mission. And because he represents himself, the landowner’s beloved Son, as also the “heir” in all three synoptic accounts of the parable, this means that his Sonship is the underlying ground of his messiahship.¹³

It is impossible, then, to avoid the strong suggestion on Jesus’ part in this parable of his *eternal pre-existence* with the Father as the latter’s “beloved Son.” Here his eternal and divine station in association with his Father prior to his messianic mission in history is confirmed. Thus the “beloved Son” in Jesus’ parable—a self-portrait one may say with ample justification—is clearly divine.

To say the very least, then, Muhammad once again misrepresented Jesus’ teaching and once again misrepresented historic Christian teaching when he denied Jesus’ deity, apparently having come unwittingly under the influence of the heretical Arian teaching that had spread into Arabia. He was apparently unaware that the church had officially condemned Arianism at the first ecumenical council at Nicaea in A.D. 325.

The Qur’an’s Teaching about Jesus’ Crucifixion and Resurrection

In his story of the wicked farmers, Jesus prophetically taught that the nation’s leaders would kill him, the Son, and in his application of his story to his original auditors he taught that he would be raised from death to glory and that the destiny of all mankind would turn on their relation to him (*Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10-11; Luke 20:17-18*). Two of the best-attested facts of history are his crucifixion and resurrection. But what does Muhammad say about this teaching of the man whom he describes elsewhere as a “true prophet”?

Well, in Sura 4, “Women,” verse 157, Muhammad denies that Jesus was crucified. He writes: “[The Jews] did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but they thought they did.” According to Muslim tradition the Jews crucified a man who resembled Jesus, perhaps even Judas. Jesus himself was taken unharmed directly to Heaven (see Sura 3, “The Imrans,” verse 55, and Sura 4, “Women,” verses

156-158).¹⁴ This means as well, of course, that Islam denies Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. With these denials Muhammad attacks Christianity’s central teaching of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, both of which are necessary to his substitutionary atonement. In Sura 5, “The Table,” verse 103, Muhammad teaches that Allah does not demand sacrifices (see also Sura 6, “Cattle,” verse 164), which means, by implication, in opposition to New Testament teaching that apart from the shedding of Christ’s blood there is no forgiveness of sin (*Hebrews 9:22*), that he did not demand Jesus’ sacrificial death either. What God demands of mankind, according to Muhammad, is *absolute submission or resignation to his will*. The very word “Islam” means “submission,” and “Muslim” means “one who submits” to the will of Allah. But this leaves mankind in a hopeless condition, for mankind is unspeakably sinful with the corporate legal guilt of original sin (which Muslims deny¹⁵), incapable of such submission, and unable to save itself. And all mankind, because of this original sin, bears genuine moral guilt before God. Because of their consequent corruption and inability to please God, all men also deserve punishment, for their sin is not only morally wrong, the violation of God’s law, and therefore, undesirable, odious, ugly, disgusting, and filthy; it is also the contradiction of God’s perfection, cannot but meet with his disapproval and wrath, and *damnable* in the strongest sense of the word because it so dreadfully *dishonors* God. God must react with holy indignation. He *cannot* do otherwise. And here we come face to face, as John Murray declares,

...with a divine “cannot” that bespeaks not divine weakness but everlasting strength, not reproach but inestimable glory. He cannot deny himself. To be complacent towards that which is the contradiction of his own holiness would be a denial of himself. So that wrath against sin is the correlate of his holiness. And this is just saying that the justice of God demands that sin receive its retribution. The question is not at all: How can God, being what he is, send men to Hell? The question is, How can God, being what he is, save them from Hell?¹⁶

If people are not legally guilty and morally corrupt as the Bible teaches, they have no need of the saving benefits of the cross. If people are not sinners incapable of saving themselves as the Bible teaches, they have no need of a Savior. But when by God’s Word they begin to understand how sinful and helpless they really are, when by God’s grace they see themselves as God sees them—sinful and corrupt, incapable of saving them-selves, and

¹⁴ See J. M. Rodwell, *Koran* (Everyman’s Library, 1909), footnote on Sura 3:55.

¹⁵ This is the view of Muslim orthodoxy, but the plural, not the dual, form of the verb translated “Get you all down” in Sura 2:36 refers to three or more and thus must include the unborn descendants of Adam and Eve (see also Sura 12:53 in which Joseph is quoted as admitting that his soul “incites to evil,” suggesting the corruption of man’s inner self). See Samuel Shahid, *The Fallen Nature of Man in Islam and Christianity* (Colorado Springs: al-Nour, 1989).

¹⁶ John Murray, “The Nature of Sin,” *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Banner of Truth, 1977), II, 81-82.

¹³ Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus*, 162-163.

guilty before him—they will flee to Christ's cross and begin to glory in it alone and will turn away from any religion that would do away with the atoning work and sacrificial death of Jesus.

In light of the above information it should be evident to all—even to Muslims—that Islam, even if it could be shown beyond dispute that it is the religion of peace that some Muslim clerics today claim it is, is still, theologically speaking, a declared enemy of Biblical Christianity, misrepresenting and/or rejecting as it does the cardinal doctrines of our most holy faith. Its militant theological hostility toward Christianity is manifest in many places in the world, such as in the Muslim countries of the Middle East, in some African nations, and in Indonesia, but Islamic leaders have tried to put on a new face in the West. According to Abdullah al-Arabi, this side of Islam is "...usually hidden from new converts [in the West]. Major issues of life that are part of Islam, are carefully avoided, obscured, or omitted from the call of faith. Some passages of the Qur'an are inaccurately translated from the original Arabic to help lure converts."¹⁷

And the Islamic movement has made adaptations in order to make itself acceptable in the West. For instance, Islamic leaders abstain from mentioning "the [Islamic] code of punishment. They stress their belief in Moses and Jesus. They no longer call Jews and Christians infidels, nor would they call them Zionists and Crusaders."¹⁸ They also use Christian terminology such as "Sunday school" instead of Friday class, and their vocabulary now includes words like *love, grace, salvation, justification, and sanctification*. But all the while their strategy is to become accepted by the communities in which they live. This they do by becoming involved in local, state, and national political and social activities; by becoming members of local, state, and national educational committees for the purpose of changing educational programs to suit their beliefs; by writing to Members of Congress in order to influence legislation; and by running for public office in order to exercise the authority of their office to make Islam more tolerable and finally acceptable to the gullible masses in the West. But make no mistake about it: Islam is a sworn enemy of the Christian faith and wants to see it finally and fully eradicated, by force if necessary, from the Earth.

The Choice

As we have seen, the Qur'an misrepresents Christian doctrine, and to misrepresent the belief system of one's religious opposition as one makes the case for one's own belief system is, in my opinion, ignorance at best and moral obliquity at worst. Islam misleads its followers when it propagates by its Qur'anic teaching its errors concerning Christian doctrine. This evinces (1) that Muhammad, Islam's "prophet," was at best ignorant of Christian teaching; (2) that his teachings about Christianity are generally false; and (3) that Islamic teaching, filled with such error based on the Qur'an, is hence an untrustworthy religion. The Qur'an itself acknowledges that if it contains any errors anywhere it did not come from God (Sura 4,

"Women," verse 82). By its own standard, then, its errors about Christian doctrine mean that it is not a revelation from God in spite of all the Muslim claims to the contrary.

If Biblical Christianity is anything, it is a redemptive religion. If Islam is anything, it is *not* a redemptive religion but rather a religion of legalism or works-salvation. Islam demands of people *absolute submission to Allah*, but it can achieve only a semblance of that required submission by regulating the lives of Muslims and threatening sanctions for disobedience. So in the end Islam teaches that one must attempt to achieve Heaven by one's good works (Sura 4, "Women," verse 124, *et al.*), hoping that these good works will outweigh one's bad works and that Allah will admit one to Paradise. He who finds anything attractive in the Islamic way of salvation simply does not realize his own sinfulness and the wretched inadequacies of Islam in addressing that sinfulness. Islam leaves the world, including the Muslim world, unsaved. This is the reason my heart is heavy when people like Cassius Clay and John Walker-Lindh convert to Islam, and when I learn that Muslim strategists have determined that the black prison population in the United States is fertile soil for converts.

I should note in passing that Islam's doctrinal hostility to Biblical Christianity apparently does not bother the Roman Catholic Church, for Rome declared in its 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (paragraph 841) that Muslims are included within God's plan of salvation because they "acknowledge the Creator,...profess to hold the faith of Abraham,¹⁹ and together with [Christians]...adore the one merciful God [Muslims and Christians hardly "adore" the same "one merciful God"]." Never mind that Islam's Allah is not the triune God of the Old and New Testaments; never mind that Muslims think our Trinity is made up of God, a human Jesus, and Mary his mother, the last two of whom we blasphemously worship along with God; never mind that they deny that Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God and that he died on a cross a sacrificial death for his people's sin and rose again because of their justification; never mind that Muslims believe that Christians are idolaters because we worship Christ who they contend was simply a human Messiah and a human prophet; never mind that they see no need for Christ's substitutionary atonement or for that matter any substitutionary atonement at all. According to Rome's teaching, in spite of their unbelief, Muslims are still salvifically related to the People of God and may go to Heaven as Muslims, all of which shows how serious is Roman Catholicism's departure from Christianity.²⁰

According to Holy Scripture, Jesus declared that he alone is the way to the Father and that no one comes to the Father except through him (*John* 14:6). Peter

¹⁹ Of course, Muslims do not hold to the faith of Abraham with its messianic hope that looked directly to Christ and the Gospel dispensation. Rather, Islam is the "bastard Judaism of Ishmael" (Schaff, *History*, IV.184).

²⁰ Peter Kreeft, a well-known Roman Catholic apologist and convert from the Christian Reformed Church, in his book, *Ecumenical Jihad* (Ignatius Press, 1996), describes an out-of-body experience that he claims he had during which he as a Catholic met Muhammad in Heaven.

¹⁷ Abdullah al-Arabi, *Islam Unveiled*, 1994, 4.

¹⁸ Abdullah al-Arabi, *Islam Unveiled*, 5.

declared: "Salvation is in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Paul taught that there is only one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:6). John taught that he who has the Son has life, and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life (1 John 5:12). And they all taught that one, if he would be saved, must repent of his sin of looking to his own or others' works for salvation and must place his trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone. So I would join with their united witness and plead with all my readers to flee now in faith to Jesus and trust him alone for salvation, and to keep forever to him who is the true God and eternal life.

And he who, by God's doing (1 Corinthians 1:30), comes to know Christ savingly will discover that only in him alone dwells all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3), that only in him alone dwells the whole fullness of deity bodily (Colossians 2:9), that only in Christ does he have a divine Savior who loved him and gave himself sacrificially in death for him, paying thereby the penalty for his many sins against God, and that only in Christ can one have eternal life.

So I would earnestly plead with my Muslim readers to repudiate Islam, for it is a false religion that can only do eternal harm to them, even to its most submissive adherents who would martyr themselves in the cause of Allah, and to turn in faith to the divine Christ who alone can save them.

I would also urge the Reformed church to launch a carefully planned and vigorous effort in the twenty-first century to evangelize the Muslim world by every appropriate means. I single out the Reformed church here because, as Schaff observes, "if [Muslims] are to be converted it must be done by a Christianity which is free from all appearance of idolatry, more simple in worship, and more vigorous in life than that which they have so easily conquered and learned to despise."²¹ The conversion of the Muslim world—we are talking about 1,200,000,000 people here—will be accomplished, of course, only by the grace and power of God, and at great cost to and through great dedication and sacrifice on the part of Christian missionaries, because they will not be tolerated in Muslim lands. Even to speak a word against Muhammad or the Qur'an in a Muslim country, as I have done in this essay, is punishable by death. (Do you remember the sentence of death that Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran passed upon Salman Rushdie because of his novel, *The Satanic Verses*?) Moreover, conversion from Islam to Christianity today can result in disinheritance, loss of children, imprisonment, banishment from one's country, and even death, because those who leave Islam are looked upon as apostates and traitors. Nevertheless, the Biblical Christ is the Muslim's only hope of Heaven, and the Reformed church is under orders to evangelize the Muslim world and everyone else as well.

"Little children [and I think I am now old enough to address most readers as such: Trust Christ alone and], keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21).

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Book Review

John W. Robbins

What Went Wrong?

Bernard Lewis

Oxford University Press, 2002

Bernard Lewis, Dodge Professor of Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Princeton University, is a highly respected historian and author of more than two dozen books on Islam and the Near East. *What Went Wrong?* is his latest work, and it seeks an answer to the question of why Islam abruptly halted its centuries-long expansion in the modern era.

Dr. Lewis writes:

What went wrong? For a long time people in the Islamic world...have been asking this question..., provoked primarily by their encounter with the West.... For many centuries the world of Islam was in the forefront of human civilization and achievement. In the Muslims' own perception, Islam itself was coterminous with civilization.... [I]n the centuries designated in European history as medieval, the Islamic claim was not without justification.... For most medieval Muslims, Christendom meant, primarily, the Byzantine Empire, which gradually became smaller and weaker until its final disappearance with the Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453. The remoter lands of Europe were seen in much the same light as the remoter lands of Africa—as an outer darkness of barbarism and unbelief from which there was nothing to learn and little even to be imported, except slaves and raw materials [3-4].

During the medieval era, Islam fostered the highest civilization in the arts and sciences yet known on Earth while Western Europe was a small and unimportant appendage of the vast continent of Eurasia, an appendage populated by backward and inconsequential peoples. As the greatest political, military, economic, and religious power on Earth, Islam's global triumph seemed inevitable. The battles in Europe that the Europeans thought so decisive, such as Tours in northern France in 732, only a century after Muhammad's death, were regarded as minor setbacks by the Muslims. Rather, they saw their inexorable advance reflected in the ignominious expulsion of the Catholic Crusaders from the Levant in the 13th century, the capture of Constantinople in 1453, and their triumphant march through the Balkans toward Vienna in the early 17th century.

Had it not been for their preoccupation elsewhere (at one point their armies were operating simultaneously on four continents), the Muslims might have conquered all of Europe just as they had quickly conquered all of "Christendom" in Africa and the Near East. But in the

²¹ Schaff, *History*, IV, 154.

providence of God (Lewis does not say this), the unimportant and backward peoples of the West were not absorbed by Islam, for God would raise up from among them men like Luther, Calvin, and Knox. Long accustomed to being the center and keeper of world civilization, Islam took little notice of developments in darkest Europe, including the 16th century movement known as the Reformation.

Their failure to conquer all of Europe was not due to the strength or the freedom enjoyed by Europeans, for, as Lewis points out, many in Christendom welcomed the Muslims (which partially explains Islam's rapid expansion) as offering more freedom than the Roman ecclesio-ocracy of Western Europe permitted. The Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople said, "Rather the turban of the Turk than the tiara of the Pope," and refugees from the tyranny of papal Rome flowed for centuries into Muslim lands. To quote Lewis, "The medieval Islamic world offered only limited freedom in comparison with modern ideals and even with modern practice in the more advanced democracies, but it offered vastly more freedom than any of its predecessors, its contemporaries and most of its successors" (156).

That correlation of freedom with civilization is the key to understanding why Islam was the acme of human civilization a thousand years ago, but not today: Five hundred years ago, something changed—not Islam, but the West. Lewis notes:

[A] principal cause of Western progress is the separation of church and state.... [T]he idea that [institutionalized] religion and political authority, church and state are different, and can or should be separated—is, in a profound sense, Christian. Its origins may be traced to the teachings of Christ.... The persecutions endured by the early church made it clear that a separation between the two was possible; the persecutions inflicted by later churches persuaded many Christians that such a separation was necessary [96].

Lewis, unfortunately, does not develop this idea. Nevertheless, he provides many illustrations of how the resurgence of Christianity in the 16th century, and the growth of learning (aided, ironically, by the Muslims) that prepared the way for, accompanied, and was the result of the Reformation transformed the West. Victorious against a corrupt Christendom, outstripping it in virtually every aspect of civilization, Islam's triumphant global march was halted by the sudden reappearance of Biblical Christianity in Western Europe in the 16th century, with its attendant blessings of freedom, capitalism, technology, and prosperity.

See *Matthew* 6:25-34 for the principle involved.

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