

TEST EVERYTHING, HOLD ON TO THE GOOD

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1. TEST EVERYTHING, HOLD ON TO THE GOOD

This verse, a call to testing, is the theme of "The Good Way". The Word of God says, "If they do not speak according to this word, there is no light in them" (Isaiah 8:20).

Dear Friend,

You said at the beginning of your message, "This is my path: I call on Allah with sure knowledge, I and whoever follows me" (Sura Yusuf 12:108). This made me assume that you were a man of principle, and that you are one of those who apply the Qur'anic saying, "Dispute not with the People of the Book save in the fairer manner" (Sura al-Ankabut 29:46).

But after reading the poetry you quoted I was disappointed. The quotation, "How Astonishing Jesus is among the Christians," accords with what most Muslims with whom we have come in

contact have consistently echoed and is similar to the Qur'anic verse that says, "yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them" (Sura al-Nisa 4:157).

In the spirit of love, which is patient and understanding, and which the real Christian applies in the quest of truth, let me offer you the following:

2. THE CROSS IN THE GOSPEL AND THE QUR'AN

Paul, the dynamic apostle of Christianity, wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Corinthians 1:22-24). The same apostle also says, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:1,2).

In considering the testimony of Christ's apostles, who accompanied Him and knew Him as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth and from whose fullness they had received grace upon grace, we find that the Gospel they proclaimed at the dawn of Christianity, which people accepted and by which they were saved, was the same Good News which Paul accurately summarises in the following words: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you,... For I delivered to you first of all that

which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

Another apostle, John, says, "the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us-- that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:2,3). This agrees with the Gospel's saying, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14).

Again, another apostle, Peter, told the Jews, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death" (Acts 2:22,23).

2.1. The Testimony of the Prophets

There are many prophecies in the prophetic books about incidents relating to Christ's death on the cross. These prophecies have all been fulfilled.

- - Jesus was sold for thirty pieces of silver, and a field of the potter was bought for this price (Zechariah 11:13).
- - His hands and feet were nailed to the cross (Psalm 22:16,17).
- - He was grievously wounded (Isaiah 53:5).

- - He was severely lashed (Psalm 129:3).
- - He suffered in silence (Isaiah 53:7).
- - They beat him and spit on his face (Isaiah 53:3,4,8).
- - He was scorned (Psalm 22:6-8).
- - The Father abandoned him (Psalm 22:1).
- - He was given vinegar to drink (Psalm 69:21).
- - The soldiers cast lots for his garments (Psalm 22:18).
- - They pierced his side with a spear (Zechariah 12:10).
- - He died between two thieves and was buried among the great (Isaiah 53:9).

2.2. The Proclamation of Jesus

On a number of occasions, Christ announced to his disciples that his saving message required his crucifixion. The predictions are recorded in Matthew 17:22-23, Mark 8:31, Luke 9:22 and John 3:14,15.

2.3. The Resurrection of Christ

Three days after his crucifixion, the greatest of all miracles took place. Christ was raised from the dead. The Bible tells us, "Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of

him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay'" (Matthew 28:1-6).

2.4. The Testimony of History

Historical documents testify that Jesus was crucified. Ancient historians, both Gentile and Jews, testified to the historicity of the crucifixion.

Tacitus the Gentile (55 AD) described the crucifixion at length including the pains Jesus suffered.

Josephus the Jew, born a few years after the crucifixion of Christ, wrote the history of the nation in twenty volumes. In one of these volumes he writes that Jesus was crucified by order of Pontius Pilate.

Lucian the Greek (100 AD) wrote about Christ and the Christians. He said, "Christians still worship this great man who was crucified in Palestine because he brought a new religion into the world."

2.5. The Testimony of the Symbol of the Cross

The Talmud, a Jewish holy book, also testifies to Christ's crucifixion. In the 1943 edition, page 42, it says, "Jesus was crucified one day before the Passover, because He was a sorcerer who was out to deceive and mislead Israel."

2.6. The Testimony of Succession

The Christians' celebration of the Lord's Supper, reminding them of the crucifixion

of Christ, is a living testimony for all time that Jesus died on the cross.

2.7. The Cross in Islam

When we study the Qur'an, we see that this book negates the crucifixion but not the DEATH of Jesus before His ascension.

Three passages refer to His death, and two others state that He was killed.

1. "Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!" (Sura Maryam 19:33).
2. "When Allah said, 'Jesus, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me, and I will purify thee of those who believe not'" (Sura Al Imran 3:55).
3. "And when Allah said: 'O Jesus, son of Mary, didst thou say to men, 'Take me and my mother as gods, apart from Allah'?' He said: 'To Thee be glory!... I only said to them what Thou didst command me: "Serve Allah, my Lord and your Lord..." but when Thou didst take me (Literally: caused me to die), Thou wast Thyself the watcher over them'" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:116, 117).
4. "And We gave Moses the Book, and after him sent succeeding Messengers; and We gave Jesus the son of Mary clear signs, and confirmed him with the Holy Spirit; and whensoever there came to you a Messenger with that your souls had not desire for, did you become arrogant, and some cry lies to and some slay?" (Sura al-Baqara 2:87).
5. "Those same men said, 'Allah has made covenant with us, that we believe not any Messenger until he brings us a sacrifice devoured by fire.' Say: 'Messengers have come to you before me bearing clear signs, and that you

spoke of; why therefore did you slay them, if you speak truly?" (Sura Al Imran 3:183).

2.8. Ideas of Qur'anic Commentators

Al-Baidawi said, "A group of Jews insulted Jesus and His mother, so He cursed them and God turned them into monkeys and pigs. The Jews agreed to kill him, but God told him that he would lift him up. Jesus said to his friends: 'Which of you consents to appear like me, so that they may kill and crucify him?' One of them consented, and he was killed and crucified."

"Some say that when the Jews arrested Jesus they left him under guard, but he was then miraculously lifted to heaven. At the same time, God gave the guard the semblance of Jesus. They took him instead to be crucified while he kept shouting, 'I am not Jesus.'"

"Others say that Judas, the follower of Jesus, was a hypocrite. He came with the Jews to show them where Jesus was. God, however, made him to look like Jesus, and the Jews killed him instead." (Baidawi II, 127,128)

In his book *Jami al-Bayan*, al-Tabari mentions several stories. In one of them, Wahab Ibn Munabbeth reports that "Jesus came with seventeen of his disciples to a house. The Jews surrounded the house as they entered, God caused all those in the house to resemble Jesus. The Jews said, 'You sorcerers, if you do not tell us which of you is Jesus, we will kill you all.' Jesus had previously asked his disciples, 'Which of you would purchase paradise?' So one of them said, 'I am Jesus,' and was killed."

Many similar stories are reported in the

commentaries of Sanawi, Ibn Kuthair, Galalan and Zamakhshari. But before we bring this theme to a close, we ought to conclude the discussion by quoting Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, who refuted the story of the "appearing like Jesus". On Sura Al Imran 3:55, which reads, "O Jesus! I will cause thee to die and take thee up to myself," Razi comments, "We are faced with a problem. The Qur'an says that when God lifted Jesus up he made another person look like Jesus: 'They slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them.' We have contradictory stories about this. Some say that God made the enemies who led the Jews to Jesus to look like Jesus. Other stories related that one of his disciples was made to look like him and was killed instead of him. The appearance of some other person to look like Jesus creates the following problems:"

1. "If we accept the idea that someone appears like another, we accept fallacy. Then, for example, when I see my son I would doubt that he is really my son; it could be just an impersonation. Thus the senses cannot trust sensations. This may lead us to think that the companions of the prophet who saw him teach could not have been sure that he was in fact the prophet. Perhaps he only appeared to be the prophet. Natural laws will collapse. We have to make sure that the chain of informants is reliable. Maybe the first informant made a mistake because what he saw was only appearance. In summary, accepting this idea makes us start with fallacy and end in the abolition of prophecies."
2. "God ordered Gabriel to be with Jesus always. This is what the majority of commentators say when discussing the

verse, 'We upheld him with the holy spirit' (Sura al-Baqara 2:87). They add that the edge of one of Gabriel's wings is sufficient for taking care of mankind. Why then didn't Gabriel protect Jesus from the Jews? Jesus was also able to raise the dead: so why didn't he save himself by killing the Jews who wanted to hurt him, or at least by inflicting them with paralysis and other ailments to render them incapable of confronting him."

3. "God could have saved Jesus by lifting him up to heaven. What then is the point of making another appear like him? Wouldn't this make another person die for no reason?"
4. "If God made another person seem like Jesus then lifted Jesus, people would think that this other person was Jesus, when in fact he wasn't. That God should mislead people is not in keeping with his wise dealings."
5. "Even though they love Jesus very much, Christians all over the world reported that they saw Jesus slain and crucified. If we deny this, we are denying the chain of authorities. Denying this means refuting the prophecy, and even the historicity of Mohammed, Jesus and other prophets."
6. "This chain of transmission tells us that the crucified one lived a long time. If this were not Jesus but another person, he would have said, 'I am not Jesus. I am another person.' He would have publicly announced this, and it would have become well known to many. But this did not happen; this shows that matters are different from what you claim." (al-Tafsir al-Kabir 12:99)

3. AGITATORS OF WAR

Dear friend, you say in your letter, "The world did not face destruction until the Christians of the West took up arms."

History contradicts you in this matter; wars and destruction existed thousands of years before Christianity. But before concluding this issue, we need to compare the reasons for war in both Christianity and Islam.

3.1. In Christianity

The Gospel tells us that, when Christ knew that John the Baptist was executed, He left Nazareth and came to live in Capernaum. He travelled all over Galilee healing all sorts of illnesses and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. They brought to Him all who were sick or possessed with demons, and He healed them all.

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up the mountain and taught them saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, because great is your

reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:3-12).

"Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the Law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:17-18).

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22).

"You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27,28).

"Furthermore it has been said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that whoever divorces his wife for any reason except sexual immorality causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a woman who is divorced commits adultery" (Matthew 5:31,32).

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great

King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matthew 5:33-37).

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matthew 5:38-41).

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:43-45; also 6:7-29).

3.2. In Islam

History tells us that Omar Ibn el-Khattab was the architect of the Islamic state. He observed the following principles:

1. The religion of the state is Islam. "The Prophet, before dying, said that no two religions may co-exist in the Arab Peninsula" (Life of the Prophet, by Ibn Hisham III, 813).
2. The Arabs outside the Arab Peninsula must continue to be Jihadists, i.e. the religious military group.
3. A number of verses in the Qur'an sanction war and encourage fighting:

- "O Prophet! Urge the believers to fight. If there be twenty of you, patient men, they will overcome two hundred; if there be a hundred of you, they will overcome a thousand unbelievers" (Sura al-Anfal 8:65).
- "Fight against those who believe not in Allah and the Last Day and do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger, have forbidden -- such men as practise not the religion of truth, being of those who have been given the Book -- until they pay tribute out of hand and have been humbled" (Sura al-Tawba 9:29).
- "And slay them wherever you come upon them, and expel them from where they expelled you; persecution is more grievous than slaying" (Sura al-Baqara 2:191).
- "Fight them, till there is no persecution and the religion is Allah's" (Sura al-Baqara 2:193).
- "Count not those who were slain in Allah's way as dead, but rather living" (Sura Al Imran 3:169).
- "I waste not the labour of any that labours among you, be you male or female-- the one of you is as the other. And those who emigrated, and were expelled from their habitations, those who suffered damage in My way, and fought, and were slain-- them I shall surely acquit of their evil deeds, and I shall admit them to gardens underneath which rivers flow. A reward from Allah! And Allah-- with Him is the fairest rewards" (Sura Al Imran 3:195).
- "They will question thee concerning the holy month, and fighting in it. Say: 'Fighting in it is a heinous thing, but to bar from Allah's way, and disbelief in Him, and the Holy Mosque, and to expel its people from it-- that is more heinous in Allah's sight; and persecution is more heinous than slaying.' They will not cease to fight you, till they turn you from your religion if they are able" (Sura al-Baqara 2:217).
- "O believers, fight the unbelievers who are near to you, and let them find in you a harshness; and know that Allah is with the godfearing" (Sura al-Tawba 9:123).
- "They wish that you should disbelieve as they disbelieve, and then you would be equal; therefore take not to yourselves friends of them, until they emigrate in the way of Allah; then, if they turn their backs, take them, and slay them wherever you find them; take not to yourselves any one of them as friend or helper" (Sura al-Nisa 4:89).

3.3. Christianity and War

Perhaps Mr Alawi has accepted real Christianity, Christianity that was taught by Jesus and His inspired apostles and which is practised in many churches today. We know that not everyone called a Christian is genuine. Jesus pointed to this when He said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Unfortunately, the majority of Christians are nominal.

To identify the true Christian, Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?" (Matthew 7:16). We should measure every teaching by this principle given by Jesus. We do not infer the goodness of a tree by its leaves or flowers, but by its fruits.

In His superlative wisdom, Jesus gave the greatest law humanity has come to know for peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding: He said, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12). This verse is called "The Golden Rule". If people everywhere practised this law, peace would cover the earth, and the prophecy of Isaiah would be fulfilled, which says, "They will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks" (Isaiah 2:4).

It is related that someone asked the Jewish Rabbi Shamai to teach him the law while he stood on one foot. Shamai dismissed him curtly. Then this person went to Hillel the Rabbi and made the same request. Hillel answered, "The law is: do not do to others what you do not like them to do to you." Jesus expressed this negative statement positively.

I noticed that you are furious about the Crusaders and you said that Christianity was behind it all. I fail to see your point. The Crusaders are not to be considered real Christians. The strongest evidence for this is that they looted the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Their sole aim was territorial expansion.

3.4. Islam and War

Historians say that a few months after the Muslims settled in Medina they began to long for Mecca. With Mohammed at their head, they planned to take revenge on Quraish. What delayed their revenge was their occupation in building houses and securing their livelihood.

They soon began forming detachments of raiders. The first of these was organised by Mohammed. Led by his uncle Hamza Ben Abdul-Muttalib, it was composed of 30 riders, all from Muhajereen (those who fled from Mecca to Medina). They were sent to the coast towards 'Ais where they met Abu Jahl Ben Hisham who commanded 300 raiders from Quraish. Nagdi Ben Amro Al-Gahni separated the two and persuaded them to stop the fight.

Ibn Hisham tells us that Mohammed conducted more than 27 raids. Here are some:

- The raid of Wadan, the first raid
- The raid of Buwat, from the direction of Radwi
- The raid of Ashra, from inside Yanbo
- The raid of Badr, when they killed leaders of Quraish
- The raid of Beni Salim, until they reached Kadar
- The raid of Suwiq, to kill Abu Sufian Ben Harb
- The raid of Ghatfan
- The raid of Beni al Nadeir
- The raid of Paraa from Bahran
- The raid of Uhud, when Muslim champions were killed
- The raid of Zat al-Ruqaa, from Nakhl
- The raid of the last Badr
- The raid of Domat al-Gandal

- The raid of the Ditch
- The raid of Beni-Quraiza
- The raid of Beni Lehian
- The raid of the Zi-Qird
- The raid of Beni al-Mustalaq
- The raid of Hudaibia
- The raid of Khaiber
- The raid of Amrat al-Qadaa
- The raid of Al-Fath
- The raid of Hunein
- The raid of Al-Taif
- The raid of Tabbuk

Ibn Hisham tells us that Mohammed fought in nine of these attacks: Badr, Uhud, The Ditch, Quraiza, Mustalaq, Khaiber, Fath, Hunein and Taif (Al-Sira by Ibn Hisham, volumes III and IV, Cairo Print, 1936).

3.5. The Wars Against Apostasy

After the death of Muhammad some tribes in the south and east of the Arabian Peninsula abandoned Islam. The companions of the prophet proposed to Abu Bakr that they send armies to fight the apostates. The Caliph, however, insisted on sending the army of Usama Ben Zeid to take Syria. He said, "I will not lower a flag the apostle had lifted up." The companions of the prophet formed a new army under the leadership of Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed. He was able to bring the tribes of eastern, southern and central Arabia, as well as the apostates from Yemen, Najd and Yamama back to Islam. That is how Khalid Ibn Al-Waleed got the title "the Sword of Islam".

The spirit of aggression that existed in the

tribes that were gathered into Islam had to find a way of expressing itself. This is why new wars began. One year before the death of Abu Bakr, the armies of the Muslims began their expansionist wars.

I will leave you with history to see the wars were the continuous accompaniment of Islam, and the means of its expansion.

3.6. Persecuting Islamic Minorities

You mentioned in your letter that every Islamic minority in Christian countries is persecuted, while Christian minorities in Islamic lands get their rights.

I disagree with you. In the United States, Islamic minorities have full freedom to practise their religion. The Voice of America has broadcast a series of Islamic lectures. The Muslim theologian, Maher Hathout, has mentioned Islamic activities of propagating Islam in Christian circles. The only Islamic practice that is illegal in America is polygamy.

According to a lecture that Sheikh Tah Ramouli gave in Lebanon, Muslims in Germany did not find a place to celebrate the Adha feast, so the Christians offered them a church in which they could celebrate. Muslims would never do this. The proof of this is that an Arab Islamic country refused to let a Christian community build a church in its territory.

You say that although the Muslims in Britain are more than the Jews in number, they have no representative in Parliament. The reason for this is that the Jews are united and have one viewpoint, while the Arab Muslims have carried their local differences with them to Britain. Still worse, some Islamic states send missions

to assassinate the regions opponents instead of attempting reconciliation.

Concerning the Muslims in Philippines: The Islamic revolution there is more political than religious.

You talk about brain-washing. There is nothing like this in Christianity. We have only the blood of Jesus that washes away our sins.

You speak about Mr Alawi coming from a humble family. May I quote what the apostle Paul said: "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, 29 that no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

May I add something concerning those ones you call "theologians" and of whom you are so proud because they have become Muslims: they are no loss to Christianity. The apostle John spoke about them when he said, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:19).

4. SIN

You try to obscure the subject of sin and its absence from Islam, yet the Qur'an

gives it great importance.

The following Qur'anic terms express the idea of sin:

- **Offence** (sin), as in: "Surely, We have given thee a manifest victory, that God may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins" (Sura al-Fath 48:1,2).
- **Burden** (sin), as in "Did we not expand thy breast for thee and lift from thee thy burden, that weighed down thy back?" (Sura al-Sharh 94:2).
- **Erring** (straying from the right path or truth), as in: "Did he not find thee an orphan, and shelter thee? Did he not find thee erring, and guide thee? Did he not find thee needy and suffice thee?" (Sura al-Duha 93:6-8).
- **Evil doers**, as in: "When the Lord called to Moses, 'Go to the People of the evil doers'" (Sura al-Shu`ara 26:10).
- **Misdeed** (sin), as in: "Forsake the outward sin, and the inward; surely the earners of sin shall be recompensed for what they have earned" (Sura al-An`am 6:120).
- **Sin**, as in: "And whosoever earns a fault or a sin and then casts it upon the innocent, thereby has laid upon himself calumny and manifest sin" (Sura al-Nisa 4:112).

Then, allow me to take up your statement: "The first thing which comes to mind on the subject of sin and the firm belief in the necessity for redemption, is the laziness of the heathen to do anything for their salvation."

If these statements are examined in the light of the inspired Word, it becomes evident that they issue from someone who

throws dust in the eyes to prevent people from seeing the truth. We read in Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men."

Some philosophers have said that man is born pure. If he lives in a corrupt environment he is affected by it since there is in man a set of instincts that, although meant to be noble, carry evil propensities.

4.1. Sin is Inherited

We learn from experience that no living creature can give birth to another kind of being. An ox cannot produce a lamb, and as Christ said, "People do not pick grapes from thornbushes." This law also applies to man because Adam, the father of mankind, rebelled against God. God expelled Adam from the Paradise of Purity to live on ground cursed because of sin. On this Adam produced offspring who were, by nature, also expelled, having lost their inheritance of Paradise. The Holy Bible establishes this truth when David, the prophet, said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5).

We also have the inspired words of the apostle Paul, a warrior of the faith, who said, "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one" (Romans 3:10-12).

An English scholar, Huxley, wrote, "I know of no other inquiry which came to such a depressing conclusion as the study of human evolution; for from behind the darkness of history we see that man is

subject to a force within himself which controls him with tremendous power... He is a weak, blind prey to forces which drive him to destruction and he is victim to endless fears, making his intellectual existence a heavy burden and wasting his body with worries and hardships. After thousands of years he remains the same, fighting and persecuting, returning only to mourn his dead and build their graves..."

Does one need these eloquent testimonies from history to grasp this fact? Is it not enough for a man to look into the depths of his own being to discover his inclinations and propensities and learn that the law of sin dwells in him?

Indeed, the presence of sin in the life of every man is a fact known to all because the corruption of human nature is apparent to the senses. Man is incapable of keeping the moral law of His own accord. Even when there is personal repentance, the danger of set-backs exists unless one receives God's help through the Holy Spirit.

Take a quick look at the history of sin through the ages. You will find clear proof that, in man, there exists a tendency to evil. The earliest manifestation of this was when Cain murdered his brother Abel. Both were sons of Adam.

Great sadness gripped my heart as I read your sarcastic words about sin and redemption, two subjects taught in the Gospel. You said, "What Christians believe can be summed up in the myth of sin and of redemption by crucifixion." It would have been better for you to ask the Christians to explain this subject in accordance to the Qur'anic injunction to Mohammed which says, "We sent not any

before thee, except men to whom WE revealed: 'question the people of the Remembrance, if it should be that you do not know'" (Sura al-Nahl 16:43). The explanation of this verse according to Jalalan: "The people of the Remembrance are the authorities on the Torah and the Gospel." It goes on to say, "Those are they to whom WE gave the Book, the Judgement, the Prophethood; so if these disbelieve in it, We have already entrusted it to a people who do not disbelieve in it. Those are they whom Allah has guided; so follow their guidance" (Sura al-An`am 6:89-90).

The subject of sin and expiation by redemption is grave. Before probing into its depths, there is no option in preparing the groundwork but to mention the important events related in the Holy Bible from the creation of man - events that operated in moving God's love for the salvation of the world.

4.2. First, The Fall

The Bible teaches that God created man in His own image, after His likeness, and gave him the covenant of life on the condition of his complete obedience to His commandments. In the Holy Bible we read: "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth..... Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree

of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 1:27-28; 2:15-17).

Adam lived for a period of time in Eden's paradise in a state of purity, enjoying spiritual fellowship with the Lord God. This fellowship filled Adam's heart with joy. Adam was innocent, and innocence drew him close to God's heart. He was also perfect and anointed by God's spirit. He was a true believer and faith is the hand which reaches out to receive the blessings of God. He was righteous, for in righteousness one reflects the light of God.

But in spite of all the spiritual privileges which Adam enjoyed, God allowed the father of the human race to be tested. The purpose of this test was: Will Adam maintain his position of obedience and loyalty to God who had granted Him all these blessings? In other words, God's purpose in testing the father of mankind was to teach Him that there is a barrier between right and wrong and that crossing this barrier was transgression. He did this in a symbolic way by putting the forbidden fruit tree in the garden alongside Adam.

The simplicity of the test became apparent when Satan appeared with his temptation. The deceiver approached Eve in the guise of a counsellor, jealous for the good of the first parents. His first question to her was deceptively simple as he said, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat from every tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1). The question here expresses surprise and disapproval at the same time. As if the evil one was saying, "I am surprised - most surprised that God could have said this!"

When Eve listened to these subtle words framed by Satan, doubt swept in like a mist, questioning the goodness of God's commandment, "For God knows that in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). The words of the enemy of the good sounded logical and convincing, namely that God was resorting to unjust prohibitions to prevent her and her spouse from being his equal in knowledge. The woman's heart was invaded by doubt and soon she responded to Satan's temptation. For the first time, Eve saw that the tree was good to eat and a joy to the eyes and looked enticing. So she took its fruit and ate and gave to her husband also and he ate with her (Genesis 3:6-8). Thus occurred the fall of our first parents. The woman fell when she doubted God's faithfulness and goodness of His commandment. She climbed higher than she should have. She aspired to be equal to God in knowledge and involved her husband with her. In so doing Adam abrogated his covenant with God and overstepped his limits. "Sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4).

The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). So Adam and Eve fell under judgement, true to the divine warning, "In the day that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Such a death does not mean the dissolution of the body in the grave, but refers to death of the soul, which is eternal torment.

When Adam disobeyed he fell within the scope of God's judgement, "Then to Adam He said, Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, "You shall not eat of it": Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall

eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:17-19).

After this judgement the Lord God expelled Adam and his wife, Eve, from the Garden of Eden. They roamed the earth, tilling the ground. They had children but, of course, their children were also barred from paradise.

Romans 5:12 - "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."

Some philosophers say that man is born pure, but when he lives in a corrupt environment he is affected by it and sin gets to him. It is true that a corrupt environment helps to spread sin, but man is born with several instincts, some of which have a tendency for evil.

We understand from the divine teaching that God entered into the covenant of life with Adam, not for His own sake, but for the sake of His offspring. Thus, Adam became the representative of the whole human race, according to the Word of God, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Corinthians 15:22).

"Therefore, as through one man's offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience

many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:18,19).

You have asked the question, "What has happened to those before Christ, among whom are apostles and prophets dear to God? They did not accept the Son of God despite the need to do so, and they too did not acknowledge the cross."

To answer this question, we must return to the time before Adam's fall and expulsion. In Genesis 3:7,8 it says, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

Here we see that the first result of sin is shame, secondly fear and thirdly judgement. The Holy Bible tells us, "Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). This indicates that animals were slain in Paradise. We have no evidence that man used the flesh of animals for food then or that he had a diet of meat in Paradise, but rather that he used only herbs and fruits and other vegetarian foods. The inspired Word of God points to this when it says, "And God said, See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food" (Genesis 1:29). Thus, the skins according to reliable expositions of the Bible, came from animal sacrifices which Adam used in his offerings. Furthermore, the Holy Bible tells us that God drove Adam and his wife out of the Garden of Eden to till the ground out of which they

had been made, and He set a cherubim (angel) with a flaming sword east of Eden to guard the way to the tree of life.

In summary, the Bible teaches that the headship of Adam to the human race brought upon his offspring the same difficulties that had befallen him.

Again, Adam was the representative of his race, and the promises God gave him were likewise for his seed. When God sentenced Adam to expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the sentence applied to his offspring too. They were born into a world cursed because of him, and became subject to death even as Adam was subjected to it. Also, the pains of childbirth imposed as a punishment on Eve passed on to each of her daughters. The philosopher Abu El Alaa realised these truths when he said, "This deed, my father has done unto me, and I too must bear the pain, though I committed it not to no one."

Approximately two thousand years ago this resounding cry issued from the mouth of the apostle Paul, "For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practise; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practise. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of

God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Romans 7:14-23).

4.3. The Wages of Sin

The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). And, "from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the days that you eat the fruit of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). Indeed Adam and Eve died spiritually and lost that warm spiritual fellowship with their loving Creator and no longer desired to be in His presence. How awesome is that sentence, "For when you eat of it you will surely die." When Adam heard that verdict he and his wife hid from the face of the Lord because of their sin. So God says through the prophet Isaiah, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

The Bible teaches us that God is perfect in character, and among His attributes are justice and righteousness; and since His justice and righteousness are limitless, He judged against Adam's rebellion with death. But even as His justice and righteousness are unchanging, so His love also does not change. It is a wonderful love that knows no bounds in remission and forgiveness. He has expressed this in His words. "The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying: Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3). So this over-abundant love intervened in favour of man, for God

says, exalted be His name, "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). The famous lawyer, Prentice, said in his losing defence of an accused, "I have read in some book that God, in His eternal counsel asked justice, truth and love, 'Shall I make man?' Justice replied, 'No, for he will trample all your laws and despise them.' Then Truth said, 'No! Do not make him for he will be nasty and will follow after vanity, speaking lies.' Then Love said, 'I know that he will be as you have said, but with all his faults and wickedness, I am willing to take care of him through all the dark paths until I bring him back to you.'"

I have previously said that sacrificial offerings are as old as man, and they all point to, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). We learn from the inspired pages that the blood offering Abel made was only a shadow of the redemption to come. It was an act after the mind of God, indeed inspired and prompted by Him.

We read in the Bible that as soon as the waters of the flood had dried, Noah and his company left the ark; his first undertakings was to build an altar to the Lord and make burnt offerings of all clean animals and birds and, "the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma" (Genesis 8:20-21).

Likewise, the ram which God gave Abraham to offer in place of his son (Genesis 22:13) was indeed a symbol of the great ransom ordained by God in the future sacrifice of Christ.

The Passover lamb too which God ordered the nation of Israel to sacrifice, and to

sprinkle the lintels and doorposts of their house with its blood, was a type of Passover Lamb of the New Testament. The slain sacrifice was God's Lamb as described by the apostle Paul, "Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:7,8).

4.4. A People's Experiences

Men of God in the Old Testament appreciated man's weakness and the inability of the Law to cleanse the sinner and quieten his conscience. We read in the book of Hebrews, "It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience" (Hebrews 9:9). In other words, the Levitical system of sacrifices was no more than a shadow pointing to the blessings of the New Testament.

Before, the prophet David's voice ascended to God in these words, "For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering" (Psalm 51:16).

Also, in Isaiah we have God's word, "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? Says the Lord. I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices;

incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies-- I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting" (Isaiah 1:11-13).

We find in Amos, the prophet, this statement, "I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savour your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings and your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream!" (Amos 5:21-24).

The main point of our words is that when we look closely at the history of the people of Israel, we note that they would return to God under Moses and Joshua on the basis of sacrifice. When we reach the period of the kings we find again that sacrifices occupy a prominent position, for there we see burnt offering being made continuously so that its fire never went out. This was especially so in the time of Solomon. At that time myriads of offerings were made, which leads one to say that Israel's history, while in the path of obedience consisted of offerings and sacrifices. And yet the book of Hebrews speaks of the Saviour with such emphasis. "Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come-- In the volume of the book it is written of Me-- to do Your will, O God.' Previously saying, Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them (which are offered

according to the law), then He said, Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God. He takes away the first that He may establish the second" (Hebrews 10:5-9).

The Holy Spirit especially confirms to us that God could not possibly atone for the sinner merely by His sacrificing an animal, unless it symbolised another sacrifice.

"Then He said, Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God. He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:9,10).

Now allow me to comment on some of your statements claiming that one finds much teaching of heathen origin in Christian doctrine:

1. The Persian religion of Mitras:
According to your allegation, this religion arrived in Rome in the year 70 BC and the main point of this religion is that Mitras was a mediator between God and man. Have you failed to notice that all the heathen religions believe that the object of their worship brings them near to God? If that is the case I would ask you to read in the Qur'an, Sura al-Zumar 39:3, where it says, "...And those who take protectors, apart from Him - 'WE only serve them that they bring us nigh in nearness to God' - surely God shall judge between them touching that whereon they are at variance."
2. The myth of Baal: In a number of dictionaries that I consulted I found that Baal was a Canaanite god, the spouse of Baala or Asherah or Ashtarof. He was the god of farms and lord of fertility in fields and animals.

And the people of the East were fervent Baal worshippers and even offered human sacrifice on his altars. They chose the high places such as are found on hills or mountain tops commanding beautiful views. Here they erected splendid, richly ornamented buildings and dedicated them to their great idol.

The Holy Bible tells us that Baal became a stumbling block to the children of Israel, for they broke God's commandments when they introduced Baal worship through Jezebel, Ahab's Queen (1 Kings 18:17-40).

Briefly, I would say that Baal worship was wide-spread among the people of the East at that time. For that reason we find him referred to by different names, because each nation used the title known in that locality. And each of his names usually started with the word Baal, and ended with the name of the country or city where he was located; alternately, he was named by some attribute of his, for example:

- Baalzebub, that is the god of flies, and he was the god of Akron.
- In Lebanon he was known as god of the sun and have several temples in Baalbeck, the best known being the 'Temple of the Sun' built by the Greeks and counted among the seven wonders of the world.
- Baaltamar, that is the god of palm trees or dates. Perhaps this idol made of date palms was worshipped by the Arab tribe called Huthayfa. One year the palms did not bear dates. They were so hungry that they consumed their idol, which led a certain poet

to write, "Huthayfa has eaten her lord in the days of famine and austerity. They feared not their Lord nor cared for his punishment or favour."

- Baaljad - this is the camp of Baal.
- Baalhazur - this is the Baal of the hour.
- Baalharmon - a Baal of Mount Harmon
- Baalzabul - a Canaanite name meaning Baal of refuse
- Baalshalisha - meaning Baal of the third
- Baalsafoon - meaning Baal of the north
- Baalmarahem - meaning Baal of explosions
- Baalfaghur - the god of the Ammonites
- Baalhamoon - meaning god of the populace

And now we would ask you, the Imam Abu Zahra and Ahmad Shalabi, to advise us which of these Baals would you recommend to your followers as meriting comparison with Christian teachings of the life of Christ?

As for us, we hold to Jesus Christ of history attested to by the Qur'an.

5. BUDDHA AND CHRIST

Among your allegations is the remark, "Then there are points of similarity between Buddha and Christ in twenty-two subjects... in respect to their birth and various occurrences, but for the risk of overstatement we could cite many."

I could not allow this remark to pass without making a comparison between the two men in the early phase of their life.

5.1. Buddha and His Message

The event is related in Buddha's major book, the gist of which could be summarised as follows:

"Queen Mayana was shivering as she told her husband King Doshuadana of her strange dream. She dreamt it one night in the summer of 568 BC As she was reclining on her bed four angels in white garments approached her and bore her up with all her bedroom furniture to the highest pinnacle in the Himalayas and placed her in the shade of a huge tree. When she looked about her she saw four queens draw near; they put her through a cleansing ritual, clothed her with beautiful garments and anointed her with sweet perfume. Then they carried her to another place made entirely of silver and laid her on another holy couch. Suddenly a white elephant descended from a gold mountain, in his trunk a branch of a lotus plant. He circled around her bed thrice, touched the queen's right side then entered her womb."

"The queen had hardly finished telling her dream when the king sent for 64 of his wise men. They came to the palace and listened to the queen's dream. They told the king, 'Let nothing worry you, oh king. Rejoice for your queen has conceived a boy. He will be king over the whole land, if he stays in his palace, but if he leaves it and roams the countryside, then he will become Buddha, the lifter of the veil of ignorance from the world's face.'"

"After a few days the saying of the wise men came true. The queen felt the reality

of her conception and there was a wondrous thing the foetus could be plainly seen, squatting inside the womb of his mother. He remained in this state until the time of birth approached. Queen Mayana requested the king to allow her to travel to her own people for the actual birth. As she was on her way there, labour pains seized her while she was under the sal tree in the garden of Tobini."

"She squatted under the leafy tree, as the servants shielded her from the public gaze with a special screen. When she wanted to rise she stretched her arm towards a branch, which bent down to meet her hand."

"No sooner did she stand than the hands of four Brahmins received the new-born babe in a net woven of silver cords. The babe suddenly stood up, took seven steps forward then shouted in a melodious voice, 'I am lord of this world and this life is my last.'"

"The news of the birth of the great prince spread throughout the kingdom of the Sakyas and from all quarters people came to congratulate the king."

5.2. A Life of Luxury

The prince lived a life of luxury in his Father's palace. He himself describes it in one of his books, "I led a very extravagant life. In my father's palace were many pools covered with water lilies. One was covered with blue lilies, a second with red lilies, a third with white lilies; all had been prepared for my enjoyment and happiness."

"I had three palaces, one for the winter season, the second for the summer, the

third for the rainy season. I spent four months in the palace devoted to the rainy season. Here I was surrounded by singing girls and female slaves. I did not leave it until the arrival of the summer months."

His father, the king, decided to keep his son occupied by way of a splendid married life, and to surround him with hundreds of beautiful girls. As a bride for the prince, the choice fell on Princess Yosodhar, the daughter of his uncle King Koli. She was a picture of charm and beauty.

For a while the prince enjoyed a happy married life with his princess.

5.3. Christ and His Message

"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, 'Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!' But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.'"

"Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the

power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.'"

"Then Mary said, 'Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her" (Luke 1:26-38).

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. "

"But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.' "

"So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel, which is translated, God with us" (Matthew 1:18-23).

"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be

registered, everyone to his own city. "

"Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. "

"Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!' "

"So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.' "

"And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which

was told them concerning this Child. And all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them. "

"And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb. "

"Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord'), and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons" (Luke 2:1-24).

5.4. Footnote

It is clear to us from your above remarks that you allege a similarity between what the Buddhists and the Christians claim about the birth of their leader. This opinion is unfounded in fact, and the phrase 'Christians allege...' which you are fond of using obscures the holiness of Christ, contrary to the declarations of the Qur'an about His glories in raising the dead, healing the deaf and the lepers, His pre-eminence and nearness to God.

- **Annunciation:** Whereas Buddha's mother was a queen transported by four angels to the Himalayan mountains where a white elephant joined her and she conceived the

Buddha, **the mother of Jesus** was a poor virgin visited by the Lord's angel himself who announced to her that she would conceive by the Holy Spirit, bear a son and call Him Jesus.

- **Buddha's Queen Mother**, at the birth, was attended by tens of servants who erected a screen around her, and when she arose the babe was born on the hands of four Brahmins by means of a net woven of silver cord.

But **Jesus' virgin mother**, finding no place in the inn in Bethlehem, bore her child in a cave used for cattle, without the help of a midwife, then bound him in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger.

- When **Buddha** was born many of the great came to offer their congratulations, but when **Jesus** was born the whole world was asleep except for a group of shepherds who, hearing His birth announced by the angel of the Lord, went and beheld Him in the manger.

d) Buddha's father, the king, ordered more offerings to be made for the gods, But **Jesus**, when presented at the temple, had his mother offer a mere two doves, which were stipulated in the Law of Moses as the offering of the poor.

- Buddha's father, the king, ordered more offerings to be made for the gods, But **Jesus**, when presented at the temple, had his mother offer a mere two doves, which were stipulated in the Law of Moses as the offering of the poor.
- Buddha lived his life in sumptuous palaces among... hundreds of beautiful slave girls. But **Jesus** lived a life of

poverty as a working carpenter. When He began His ministry a certain scribe told Him, "Master, I will follow you wherever you go," but Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head."

Now let me reply to your charge that, "The Christians' statement that Jesus is the Son of God is plain blasphemy..."

5.5. Islam's Views on This Subject

We read in the Qur'an, "The creator of the heavens and the earth - how should he have a son, seeing that he hath no consort and he created all things, and he has knowledge of everything" (Sura al-An'am 6:101).

Al-Baidawi has commented on this verse by saying, "Reasonably, a son is what is born of male and female (of the same kind) but God does not marry."

This is Islam's view, that it is impossible for God to beget children since he has no partner, and neither can he have such. This is why the Muslims deny Jesus the fatherhood of God. There is no sonship in Qur'anic thinking apart from physical procreation.

This mode of thinking is supported by the book *Jams El Bayan* by the Imam Tabari where he says, (after Ibn Wahab, after Abi Zaid) "A son can only be from a male and female, and far be it from God to have a partner in order to have a son. That is because he created all things, and if there is nothing that God did not create, how then can we say he has a son?"

Some authorities suggest that the foregoing sura was written subsequent to

heretical groups who had joined themselves to the church.

They attempted to introduce a heresy to the effect that the virgin Mary was a goddess. Their aim was to substitute her for Venus whom they worshipped. In his book *Al Qawi Al Ibrizi* the great scholar Ahmad Al Makrizi mentions this fact (page 26).

Furthermore, Ibn Hazm mentions this heresy in his book *Al Malal Wal Ahwaa Wal Nahl* (page 48). It is understandable that the Qur'an should condemn such a heresy, because it is far removed from Christianity.

The reader of the Qur'an cannot but notice that the Book of the Muslims makes important and clear statements to the greatness of Christ and His superiority over other prophets. However, it falls short of drawing aside the screen to reveal His glorious perfection and transcendent exaltation. It is as if the Qur'an brings the inquirer about the truth of Christ to the courtyard but stops short of opening the door, "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

In fact Christ's eternal existence as the Son of God, and His wonderful humility and condescension to become Son of Man for our redemption is the basis of the comfort that all His followers enjoy.

The Qur'an denies the eternal Sonship of Christ and says of him that he, like Adam was made by God of earth (Sura Al Imran 3:60). We notice that nothing raises more protest from Muslims than the Christians' statement that Christ is the Son of God.

Some fanatical Muslims say that Christians believe in more than one god and they imagine that we are guilty of polytheism. This rather ignorant and arrogant talk is prompted by Satan to prevent Muslims from reading the Holy Books.

If we ask the simplest Christian, "Who is God?" he would immediately reply, "God is a spirit, limitless, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, love and truth. God is indivisible, and he cannot be separated or multiplied. He cannot be limited by His creation. No created being or human is able to grasp His being or attributes."

As "those who look to him (Jesus) are radiant, their faces are never covered with shame," so I would urge you not to misinterpret my terms "Father" and "Son" as meaning natural procreation, which would make the Father prior to the Son in existence. In the name of truth, no Christian ever utters such talk about His one and only God, who never had a partner or a son by natural animal procreation. But the Son, who is the eternal Word, became incarnate as a perfect man, first in Mary's womb, without separation from His personal essential divinity. So Christ, as a son of Mary has a temporal body. However, as the Word of God He is ancient, eternal, performing miracles by virtue of His divine nature.

The strange thing is that, although the Qur'an and traditions witness to Christ's exaltation, infallibility and wonder-making power, Muslims themselves fail to differentiate between Christ and other prophets in respect to His nature. On the contrary, we find them emphatically

denying His eternal being. Their traditions are stories filled with references to Muhammad's "light" preceding the creation (see Burhan Ed Din El Halaby's book *Insan Al Iyun*). Yet for reasons that baffle the mind, Islam attributes to Muhammad what he himself did not claim concerning agelessness, and goes on to deny them to Jesus Christ whose claims are attested by countless proofs.

Dr Zwemer has said in his book *Isa or Jesus*, "If you read the publications of Muslims in Egypt, India and the rest of the Islamic world, you will not find a subject more fervently criticised or attacked than the divinity of Christ and His redemptive work on behalf of humanity." For whereas the Christian believes that Jesus is God **and** man at the same time, besides being prophet, priest and king, the Muslim says He is just human albeit a prophet, but no more. As for kingship and priesthood, these are concepts neither understood, nor accepted, because Islam is a religion without priesthood and lacks a proper appreciation for atonement. This is why this basic concept of Christ's work has eluded the mind of the Muslim.

Dr Sayuss has indicated the absence of these concepts from Muhammad's own thinking when he says, "The gist of the matter is that Muhammad did not feel sinful, and thus did not see the need for redemption. Consequently, all his followers through all the ages have contradicted this thought. This explains why the Christian faith has claimed fewer converts from among Muslims than from others, world-wide. The Christian conviction of sin is a solid barrier between the Christian and a Muslim considering becoming a Christian."

A worker among Muslims who had been converted to Christ himself said, "The main reason for the lack of success among Muslims is their belief that God's merciful attitude to the sinner, or the willingness to forgive him without redemption, does not compromise His justice. they thus fail to see the need for a Saviour."

As to your reference to the "stone which the builders rejected," we would say that a characteristic of the Holy Bible is that no one can interpret it without aid from the Holy Spirit, who helps the believer to understand the contents of the good Book. That great hero of faith, the apostle Paul, referred to this when he said, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Corinthians 2:11-13).

So the "rejected stone" is Jesus Christ, as indicated in the Gospel, "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:10-12).

Paul testified to this truth, when he said, "Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow

citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:19,20).

In the Gospel of Luke 20:9-19 we read, "Then He began to tell the people this parable: A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out."

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.' But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it they said, Certainly not! Then He looked at them and said, What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone'? Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder. And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people--for they knew He had spoken this parable against them."

Jesus showed clearly that this "stone" refers to himself and not to Muhammad, because the outcome was that the chief priests and scribes sought to arrest Jesus.

Referring to your statement, "The kingdom of God will be taken from you," the Gospel of Matthew tells us that Jesus came to the temple to teach as was his custom, and the chief priests and elders asked him, "By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?" (Matthew 21:23). He gave them the parable of the landowner as we find related in Luke 20, and he concluded the parable by saying, "This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matthew 21:33-43).

Before taking it upon yourself to wrench a verse from its Biblical context to serve your ends you should have known that there are parallels to this parable elsewhere in the Bible. Isaiah the prophet writes, "Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it; so He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;

and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help" (Isaiah 5:1-7, see also Psalm 80:4-9). In this parable Jesus wanted to present to his hearers, and especially the chief priests and elders, proof from their own books, revealed by God to the great prophet Isaiah.

Christ commented on this parable by saying, "This was the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23). This means that the subject has puzzled all observers because it turned out contrary to what the bulk of the Jewish nation expected. Unless redemption had been in the counsel of God it would not have happened. Doubtless, all the events connected with redemption are very strange. Is there anything stranger than that God should send His only Son as redeemer, and that the eternal Word should become flesh, and that He should be rejected by the chosen nation and crucified? Is anything stranger than his rising from the dead on the third day and then becoming the Rock on which the church was founded? Jesus then closed the parable with this verdict, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it"

Christ used this verse to explain what he meant by the parable when He interpreted the vineyard as being the kingdom of God. He said to the Jews that the mans of grace and blessing pertaining to the People of

God will be taken from them and given to those who received Jesus as Saviour and Redeemer "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Revelation 5:9).

Previously, Jesus had warned the Jews saying, "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 8:11,12).

5.6. Who is the Paraclete?

For a long time this word - Paraclete - has been a subject of much controversy. Some have said that this word *paracletos* in the Greek is equivalent to *Manhamana* in Syriac, which means Muhammad. This interpretation given by Ibn Isaac on "The Life of the Prophet" was then spread among most Muslims. I do not wish to provoke a religious controversy on this subject, but in connection with the reply to Mr Abdel Rahman Swad from Egypt I see it necessary to quote the expressions spoken by the Lord Jesus and recorded by John the Evangelist in his glorious book.

First, in John 14:16,17 Jesus said, "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever-- the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you."

Second, John 14:26 says, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."

Third, John 15:26 says, "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."

Fourth, John 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you."

Whoever meditates on these passages and compares them with the other verses in the New Testament pertaining to the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the *Paracletos*, is sure to notice that they do not support those who say that the word *Paracletos* means Muhammad. The reasons are as follows:

1. Christ Himself interpreted the word *Paracletos* with several distinguishing attributes: Spirit of truth, Holy Spirit, the Spirit sent from the Father. Now these attributes do not apply to Mohammed because the *Paracletos* is a divine spirit, whereas the prophet Muhammad is a mere human being.
2. Jesus said that the *Paracletos* will stay with his disciples forever and dwell in them. Muhammad was unable to stay with them and dwell in them, because He came to this world over six centuries after Christ.
3. Among the attributes of the Comforter (another name for *Paracletos*) is that the world cannot see or know Him. But the prophet Muhammad was seen by the children of men, and he sat with them and they listened to him and spoke to him.
4. The Comforter is the messenger of Christ and the Muslims do not accept

this fact as applied to Muhammad, for they say that Muhammad is greater than Christ.

5. The Comforter testifies to Christ in the hearts of believers and reveals to them that Jesus is the Son of God, (Matthew 16:16,17), but Muhammad does not accept this fact; rather he considers it blasphemy (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:17).
6. The Comforter teaches the disciples and guides them to all truth. It was impossible for Muhammad to teach them or communicate with them since he came hundreds of years after them.
7. The attributes and works pertaining to the *Paracletos* do not apply to any flesh and blood creature, seen by the eye or touched by the hands for He is spirit. In fact the coming of this spirit the Comforter, happened before the Muslim era by nearly six hundred years.
8. In the gospel there are numerous titles for the *Paracletos* that affirm that he is a divine spirit and not a human being. He was referred to as the Comforter, the spirit of Power, the Power from on high, the one who convicts the Spirit of the Holy God, the spirit who teaches the believer to pray, and the Holy Spirit.
9. A short while before Christ ascended to heaven he instructed his disciples not to leave Jerusalem until they were baptised with the Holy Spirit, and this blessed Spirit was indeed poured upon them on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4,5). This outpouring fulfilled the prophecy in Joel 2:28 and was accompanied by the miracle of speaking in strange tongues. All this proves that it has no relation to the message of Muhammad.

6. CHRIST'S DIVINE SONSHIP

Lastly, I shall respond to your assertion: Christ is not the Son of God and, furthermore, did not claim divinity.

Scholars are unanimous in their view that the method used by Jesus to announce his divinity to the Jewish nation bears the stamp of authenticity. And actually, if one simply ponders the contents of the New Testament one is lead to acknowledge its veracity, which in turn helps to solve the problem of how faith emerged in a Jewish environment that is fanatically monotheistic. The method he used unfolds this profound mystery gradually, and in a way that suits the mentality of the hearers employing caution coupled with exceptional divine wisdom.

We can understand the mentality of the Jewish society and its fanatical commitment to monotheism when we ponder the events surrounding the murder of Stephen the martyr as recorded in the book of Acts. There we read how the members of the Council patiently heard him speak, until Stephen said, "Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it. When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped

their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul" (Acts 7:52-58).

They sentenced Stephen to death because they regarded his words about Jesus standing at the right hand of God as blasphemy, for this would mean he was equating Jesus with the Father in glory.

If Jesus had not introduced his divinity gradually, and had instead been abrupt in his speech, declaring from the start that he was God's only incarnate Son, equal with the Father and sharing his attributes, he would not have lasted three years in his ministry. However, his progressive method enabled him to deliver his message and unfold the mystery of his incarnation as the Messiah, Son of God, Saviour of the world. In fact he spoke and acted in such a way as to point to the essence of his person and to exercise the minds of his hearers, to appreciate his divinity. The following are some of the most important texts in the gospel regarding this subject:

1. When pondering the Sermon on the Mount, we find that Jesus taught with the authority that none other than the Divine Lawgiver, the God of Israel could possess. Listen to what he says, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgement.' But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:21-22). "You have heard

that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery'" (Matthew 5:27). "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne" (Matthew 5:33-34). "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also" (Matthew 5:38,39). "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:43,44).

Who is he who has the authority to say, "But I", and add to the Divine Law which Moses received from God at Mount Sinai?

Jesus said in Luke 6:22, "Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake." He matched this with the saying in Matthew 5:10, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The word "righteousness" as his hearers understood it is the Law of the Lord or the Lord himself. Thus, in stating this, Jesus made himself equal with the Lord God.

Not only this, but Jesus requested total love and total surrender to his person when he said, "He who loves father or

mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37,38).

This manner of speech reminded the Jewish listeners of the injunction in the Torah, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy strength." So Jesus, in demanding such total love for himself, made himself equal with the Lord, the God of Israel, to whom alone such devotion is due. He affirmed this truth by saying, "that all should honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23). This means that the divine will demands men to give equal honour to the Son as they give to the Father. Consequently, the Son becomes equal to the Father and we ought to render to the Son what we render to God in the way of love, honour and obedience, which is what the citizens of heaven do (Revelation 5:12).

Furthermore, Jesus taught that he would be the Judge of both the living and the dead in the last day, saying, "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:31). Who can make such a claim, unless he is the Lord himself?

2. When one reflects on the miracles performed by Jesus, one sees that he performed them in his name and his

personal authority. True, the prophets of God did similar miracles but they performed them in the name of God, whereas Jesus acted of his own accord and personal power. We read about a leper who came to Jesus asking to be healed and saying, "And behold, a leper came and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean. Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, I am willing; be cleansed. Immediately his leprosy was cleansed" (Matthew 8:2,3).

Moreover, he stilled the raging sea. He did not say, "I order you in the name of the Lord," but commanded it on his own authority, saying, "Quiet! Be still" (Mark 4:39).

Again, when Jesus raised the widow's son, at Nain, from the dead, "He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say to you, arise. So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother" (Luke 7:14,15).

Jesus did not stop at curing the lepers and raising the dead, but went on to show that he also had the authority to forgive sin. Mark, the evangelist, tells us that "Again He entered Capernaum after some days, and it was heard that He was in the house. Immediately many gathered together, so that there was no longer room to receive them, not even near the door. And He preached the word to them. Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four men. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof

where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven you.' And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, 'Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Arise, take up your bed and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins' --He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.' Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'" (Mark 2:1-12).

If we ponder the story of the sinful woman, whose sins Jesus forgave in the house of Simon the Pharisee, we see the purpose of Jesus in showing his authority to forgive sins. He addressed his host saying, "'Simon, I have something to say to you.' So he said, 'Teacher, say it.' 'There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'I suppose the one whom he forgave more.' And He said

to him, 'You have rightly judged.' Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.' Then He said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Then He said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace'" (Luke 7:36-50).

We notice in this incident that Jesus did not tell the sinful woman that her sins had been forgiven as a result of her repentance, but said, "She loved much." That means, she loved his person, which signifies that the love of Jesus equals the love of God himself.

Then we read that Jesus, when he sent out his disciples for the first time, sent them in his name, giving them authority to heal the sick and drive out devils. Read Matthew 10:1-7; Mark 3:15-19 and Luke 9:1-3.

3. He spoke of himself in terms peculiar to his relationship with the heavenly Father such as describing God as the Father of his people, and declaring that the Fatherhood of God applied to mankind. In so doing he was not an innovator, because the prophets of the

Old Testament before him had described the Fatherhood of God to his people and his followers. We read in Isaiah, "Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name" (Isaiah 63:16). There is much evidence from the sayings of Moses, Hosea, Isaiah and others. However, Jesus Christ described God's Fatherhood to himself as being unique, different from God's fatherhood to mankind. Often he addressed God as (my) "Father", although the expression "our Father" occurs once in the Lord's Prayer.

Moreover, the clearest of declarations about the relationship of Jesus with the Father comes to us in his striking utterance in which he rejoiced, saying, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight. All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:25-28).

In these glorious statements we hear an echo of eternity's voice, and realise the greatness of this wonderful mystery when we see how Jesus restricted the knowledge of the Father to himself only, and restricted the Knowledge of the Son of God only, and this

reciprocal relationship points to equality.

We have yet another incident, where Jesus wanted to bring his unique relationship with the Father to the attention of the Jews. He questioned the Pharisees, "'What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?' They said to Him, 'The Son of David.' He said to them, 'How then does David in the Spirit call Him "Lord," saying: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool"'? If David then calls Him "Lord," how is He his Son?" (Matthew 22:41-45).

Finally, we see him standing before Caiaphas, the high priest, prior to being sentenced "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, 'It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven'" (Matthew 26:63,64).

In this reply we see him pointing to a prophecy of Daniel, about the Messiah where the prophet says, "I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13,14).

7. SUMMARY

If we ponder these truths, we find ourselves faced with a person, the like of whom has never appeared in the history of mankind. The picture we have of him captivates the hearts and impels men to worship him. For we find his divinity linked to all phases of his life and connected with his sayings, his deeds, his miracles, his life, his death on the cross, his resurrection and his ascension. These are the facts that compelled the men of the New Testament - men who had suckled the milk of monotheism from their youth - to believe in his divinity. If we accept these truths we are able to unravel the paradox in suspense. And we find ourselves forced to assume that the early church fabricated this history, and that these events came from the imagination of a group of simple Galileans. But what mind can believe that simple illiterate artisans managed to create this wonderful divine personality out of their imagination? They succeeded in imagining his sinlessness, while they were weak and beset with sin. They conceived his divinity in spite of having the blood of monotheism coursing in their veins; devised the various ways and methods and the diversity of circumstances and occasions when he declared his divinity; conceived weakness coupled with strength and surpassing glory coupled with humility. That simple people thought up all this is beyond the bounds of possibility.

This is the paradox of Christianity, and this is its resolution as we find recorded in the New Testament. We accept this solution, because there is no other solution to take its place. Therefore, we too believe and "therefore we speak".

C.G. Pfander, in his book, *Balance of Truth*, has well said, "'Word' points to an expression in the mind of the speaker, and in this instance it is God himself. It follows, if Christ is the Word from God, what is he but an expression of the perfect will of God or, in other words, a disclosure from God. Later he spoke to them through his Holy Spirit. The Word of God then shows that Christ is the only one who declares God to man, because he knows God and declares his will perfectly. Jesus also stated this truth when he said, "No one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"" (Matthew 11:27,28).

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In closing this discussion I draw your attention to verse 91 of Sura al-Anbiya (21), which says, "And she who guarded her virginity, so we breathed into her of our Spirit and appointed her and her son to be a sign unto all beings." "sign" is in the singular whereas the subject is plural, reminds us of what was said of our Saviour in Isaiah's prophecy, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Baidawi tried to belittle the importance of these words to the limit of his expository ingenuity when he said, "A sign unto all beings, for whoever reflects on their lot, is convinced of the perfect might of the creator (may his name be magnified)!"

7.1. Life of Christ, His Death and

Resurrection

We are faced with three difficulties in discussing Qur'anic references to the life of Jesus Christ. First, there is fragmentation (disjointedness) of the Qur'an. There is a lack of connection between its events and their sequence. Thus one doesn't find a chronological order or a logical progress in it, because its verses descended (according to Muslims) at different times and in different places. This, in addition to the general confusion that is encountered by the reader trying to follow through a topic from its beginning to end. Thus, one finds laws mixed with stories and events, and promises with threats.

Secondly, something that is more complicated is that the references in the Qur'an to the Lord Jesus Christ are not free from contradictions. Whereas some texts (verses) speak of him as a mere man and prophet, others call him by titles impossible to apply to any other being. The gravest contradiction is the one relating to his death, because it is impossible to reconcile these verses without violating the sense.

Third is the problem of the chronological order of the suras. If we follow the origin of Muhammad's thought and its development regarding Christ, we have to start with the first mention, then progress gradually and chronologically until we reach the last sura. But regrettably no agreement exists among Islamic scholars themselves on the historical order of the suras of the Qur'an. They acknowledge that their present order is not chronological.

7.2. What Did Paul Say?

Regarding your words about sin that occurs in Christianity, "that it is no more than an echo of heathenism which coloured Christianity, Paul declared, so that everyone could learn something from him, becoming a Jew to the Jews and a heathen to the heathens..., etc."

Before his conversion, Paul was a fanatical Jew and his name was Saul. He was famous for his zeal for the Law of Moses. Paul described himself with these words, "If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:4-8).

Historians tell us that his father was a Pharisee and that he was reared according to the strictest law. When Paul completed his education opportunities in Tarsus, he was sent as a youth to Jerusalem to study the Jewish law and religious knowledge. Here his theological teacher was the famous Gamaliel, under whose feet he sat. Before Jesus Christ revealed himself to him, he actively persecuted the Christians. What increased his wrath were the words of the martyr Stephen before he was stoned, "This Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs

Moses handed down to us." Because of his zeal he had been granted authority from the Jewish rulers to destroy the Christians in Damascus. But as he was journeying to that city, Jesus Christ appeared to him and spoke to him, and Paul believed in him. Before King Agrippa, he would later relate the circumstances of his conversion in these words, "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me. And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me'" (Acts 26:12-18).

As to the saying by the noble apostle, "To the Jew I became a Jew..." it appears that you misunderstood the meaning, or perhaps you intended to confuse the sense by wrenching the text from its context.

We have already said that the apostle Paul was brought up religiously at the feet of

the Rabbi Gamaliel; in this famous school he was instructed in the laws of the Jews and their rituals, in everything that did not conflict with the dictates of the conscience. He thus refused to upset them needlessly, in order to have the opportunity of affirming to them that Jesus is the expected Messiah. Above all considerations, it was necessary to demonstrate that Christianity did not come to destroy the Law but to complete it.

He was a Hebrew by birth, as we saw, and without this heritage he would have been unable to influence the Jews, or be permitted to enter their synagogues to preach the Gospel.

As for the Gentiles, the book of Acts informs us that the first Christian churches, especially in Judea, used to conduct their worship in accordance with commandments, some of Mosaic origin; but others were added to by teachers and rabbis in successive generations in the form of numerous practices, at the head of which was circumcision which always presented a formidable barrier. According to one rabbi, "But for this ordinance (circumcision) the earth and the sky would not have been created." Another stated that it equalled all the commandments of the Law. However, the church in Antioch, where Paul and Barnabas laboured for two years, opened the door of the Christian faith to receive Gentiles who had accepted the message of the Gospel. But brethren of Jewish origin in the Jerusalem church were uneasy when they heard this news. This unease led to heated arguments.

The church in Jerusalem held a council to debate this subject. Paul and Barnabas related to them God's miraculous workings during their missionary journeys beginning

in Cyprus and going on to Asia Minor. After listening to this good piece of news, of how thousands of Gentiles had accepted Christianity, Peter got up and reminded those present that God had chosen him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles so that they too would believe.

Lastly, James, the head of the council, stood up and summarised the discussions arriving at four points, namely: that Christians of Gentile origin should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality.

Church historians tell us that Paul dealt with Gentiles in meekness and humility, contrary to Jewish objections, and demonstrated the love of Christ to the believers among them. he also invited some to participate in his missionary work, setting up others as pastors in the churches. This is how we understand his words, "to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:21-22).

8. Epilogue

On the second page of your letter you say, "This letter is to those desiring the right path," but you attacked on the other pages with abuse more like curses than a "call to understanding". We could have replied in the same way or worse because Islam has many shortcomings. But we did not, since Christ's Spirit has purified our thoughts and consequently our pens. He gave us this commandment, "But I say to you, love

your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). In fact we do pray for you, that the God whom we worship in spirit and in truth may grant you insight to know the truth, which will liberate you from the spirit of bigotry.

9. QUIZ

Dear reader,

The author's message, indicated by the title of this booklet, is a call for examination and testing. Try to test your knowledge after reading it carefully, by answering the following questions.

9.1. Questions

1. What is the proper tool for enquiry and examination?
2. What is the main point of 1 Corinthians 1:22-24?
3. For what purpose and for whom did Christ die?
4. What is the substance of those prophets' testimonies who preceded Christ, concerning him?
5. Did Christ declare that he would be crucified and die? Give one example.
6. Mention some of the events which accompanied the resurrection of Christ.
7. What has been the motto of Christianity since its appearance?
8. Quote one Qur'anic text which speaks of the death or murder of Christ.
9. Summarise al-Razi's exposition of verse 55 of Sura Al Imran ("O Jesus, lo I am gathering thee....").
10. In your opinion, which is the most

important verse in Christ's sermon on the mount?

11. Which of the religions encourage wars and fighting and which one calls people to peace and love?
12. Is it fair to judge a religion by the conduct of its followers or by its commandments and judgements?
13. In your opinion, were the early Islamic raids a means or an end in themselves?
14. What is your definition of "sin"?
15. Expound on Romans 5:18-20.
16. What are the wages of sin.
17. How do we escape the death brought upon us by sin?
18. Does Christianity enjoin people to righteousness, goodness, uprightness and holiness or to heathenism and idol worship?
19. Summarise the life of Christ in two meaningful sentences.
20. How do we defend Christianity against the charges of unbelief and polytheism?
21. Show the difference between the teaching of the Qur'an and the teaching of the Gospel on the person of the Holy Spirit.
22. Give examples of the divine sonship of Jesus in relation to God.
23. What have you learned about the life of Paul, his conversion and his preaching?

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10. Footnotes

1) The designation "Word of God" applied to Christ and indicates that Muhammad took this title over from the lips of the Christians with whom he associated. This phrase is thoroughly Christian.