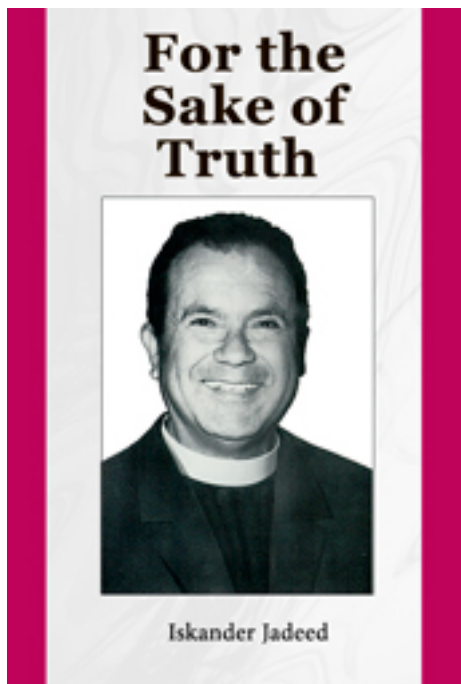


FOR THE SAKE OF TRUTH

Iskander Jadeed

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1. Introduction

I have known Taufiq since I was a child. He comes from a fine family whose members are proud of their past glories and honourable forefathers. Misfortune, however, plunged him into despair early in life. His tears were many, owing to trials and worries which deprived him of any lasting joy. He left the home of his father suddenly, setting out into God's wide world.

The villagers had conflicting things to say about him. Some claimed that he was a son who had never received love from his feuding parents; thus, it was no surprise that he would go. Others believed he had been in love, but that the young lady in question had left him and married one of his relatives; so he fled to a far-away place where he could forget her. Still, others said that he had read some religious books which influenced his beliefs, driving him

to leave the faith of his forefathers; understandably, he had to vanish. And there were those who contented themselves with the idea that he was merely crazy.

As for me, I said nothing -- either because I admired his simplicity of thought and passion for truth, or because I am not one who incriminates others, whether in thought or speech. I believe there are secrets hidden in every soul, inaccessible to investigation.

Years passed by. Slanderous reports about him reached me, but I did not publish these accounts, for fear of spreading falsehood -- the poison which villagers inject into every incident. One day, I received a registered letter from Taufiq. He asked me to visit him in Lebanon, and he had fixed the time and place. I was overjoyed at this invitation, eager for such an opportunity -- not only because I sympathised with him, but because I wanted to discover the secrets surrounding him.

Upon meeting him, I found him to be in good health. Some lines upon his countenance, the inescapable effects of time, added a distinguished look to his appearance. From the sparkle in his eyes, I detected an inner joy, pervaded with peace.

I gazed upon his face intently, seeking to find the reason for the brightness of his smile -- one which radiated a dignity in stark contrast to the slanderous things that had been said about him over the years.

"What has happened to you?" I asked. "Where is that angry mask you used to cover your face with? What has happened to the sadness that marked your youth?"

"My friend, you will learn everything," he replied, beaming. "For twenty years I have been absorbed with the reasons behind my departure from home. I have patiently endured the slander hurled at me from all directions and have borne the wounds inflicted upon me in the house of my friends. The only comfort from the pain came from the living hope within my heart -- one which arose as a result of certain books I had read. Now, my friend, the time has come to let everyone hear my cry, which refuses to be silenced. But keep my story to yourself until you find the right time for its disclosure. Then write and publish it, but do this with care -- neither filling it with trivia that do injustice to my freedom of opinion, nor lessening my thrill of doing battle for the sake of truth."

I stayed with my friend several days, listening to his spellbinding story, reliving with him step by step the events he so vividly conveyed. Before our parting embrace, he handed me a large file and said: "My brother Hassan remained true to me until the end. In this file, you will find my memoirs and the collection of letters that we exchanged -- those in which we discussed the way leading to eternal life." After a moment's silence, he continued, "I believe that publishing the contents of these letters will prompt many to stop slandering me."

Ten years have passed since the time of that encounter which affected me so indelibly. The echo of Taufiq's last words have tolled like a bell in my mind whenever I have been alone.

One day, while scanning a magazine, I came across an article that revealed fresh news about him -- news that reminded me of those letters he had left with me. I

realised the time had come to publish his story. It now gives me great pleasure to present this account to my readers.

Iskander

2. A Summary of Taufiq's Memoirs

2.1. A Call and a Choice

"Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar! The Lord has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother he has made mention of My name.
"(Isaiah 49:1)

On the brow of a green hill, backed by a mountain range stretching from Taurus in the north to Akkar in the south, parallel to the azure Mediterranean, stood a rural house with no wings or balconies. Except for the cut stones in its walls, distinguishing it from the surrounding cottages, one could not tell that it was the house of a tribal chief. It was here in 1911 that I was born.

My name was recorded as Taufiq in the register of births. Although my birth was a source of joy for some, I myself did not have a happy childhood. There was an atmosphere of strife in my home which prevented any serenity.

My father had three wives. With the passage of time, they had learned to live together under the same roof in a sort of truce. However, my father's taking a fourth wife dealt a blow to all. It gave occasion for hatred, anger and contention and the "peace agreement" in the home was shattered.

This happened before I turned six, and my mind could not fathom all that was going

on; neither could I comprehend why my mother insisted on creating a deep gulf between me and the other sons and daughters of my father. My eyes were the witnesses of a human tragedy played on the stage of a household charged passionately with rivalry and contempt.

I remember one particular morning with some bitterness, when, during my father's absence, I was snatched from my bed before dawn, dressed hurriedly and rushed off while still half-asleep. I awoke later in the house of my maternal grandfather where my two sisters had been sent an hour earlier. Here I heard my mother announce her determination to desert the home of her husband and live with us in a separate house.

When father returned, he tried hard to dissuade her, but she was inflexible, refusing any kind of settlement. He submitted to her wishes and entrusted her with some properties, so that by managing these she would have the necessary income with which to secure a decent upbringing for her children.

Although my father acted kindly towards her, she held a grudge against him all her life, refusing co-operation in any matter, even that of my upbringing. Jealousy rent her heart and she lost all reasonableness.

Despite my desire to honour her memory as a mother, I cannot but confess that she failed to provide me with a sound upbringing. She loved me sacrificially, but I had to endure her negativity, bitterness and sharp temper. These attitudes prevented her from being the mother she should have been. I can justify her behaviour to some extent, because she herself had grown up in a home with the

same painful tragedy of polygamy, the social evil which has been and still is one reason behind the disintegration of many families in our beloved Orient.

My mother was divided between loving her children and hating the other wives of her husband. Thus, I spent my childhood in an atmosphere of conflicting emotions and knew little of stability. It was only natural that I bore the imprint of the environment in which I grew up. There were knots of disturbed emotions inside me, which prevented me from forming any ties with my father's other sons and daughters. They themselves were no better off than I. If it were not for the wonderful love of God that met me with special care and prepared me to know the Saviour, I would certainly have become the most evil of men.

My father was very fond of me and wanted to supervise my upbringing. He longed dearly for me to stay with him. It may be that he kept my mother under his protection, despite her hostility, for the very reason of his love for me.

One day, he took me to the town of Jabala where he had a large house and office for managing his affairs as head of the tribe, a prominent position in our district. He wanted to put me through school in that area. However, my being under the same roof as his new wife was enough to arouse my mother's feelings. Her mistrust led her to bring me back to the village where she was living. It was in this village that I spent five years at the Kuttab al-Khoja, learning to read and write. When a preparatory school opened nearby, my mother sent me there. It was at this school that I spent another five years, learning all that Sheikh Ahmad and his colleague, Ali

Effendi, could impart to me.

When I became an adolescent, I possessed sensitivity and intelligence -- two qualities which developed despite the feverish hostility that surrounded me. Because of these attributes, I was able to discern the folly of my parents and establish a foundation for regulating my emotions and confused perceptions. Nonetheless, I sorely craved counsel, and my need kept clamouring for someone to guide me and show me the way.

My father would have been the natural person to provide me with the direction I so desperately needed because he loved me and was most fitted for this task. However, he was so busy with the children of his newest wife that he seemed not to have any time for me. It would also have been natural for my elder brothers to undertake such task, but they were unfit for such a responsibility.

In this atmosphere, void of love and harmony, it became my own duty to lay a foundation for my future. Although I had no clear idea of what to do, I felt strongly that my first step was to go to secondary school and that without delay.

News of secondary schools opening in the cities kept reaching me, and this heightened my desire to attend one. This wish grew to be my dearest longing, so I rushed to my father and asked him to help me realise my aspiration. I shed many a tear before a decision was made to send me to the boys' secondary school in Latakia. After my mother made certain that none of my father's other wives lived in that city, she could find no reason for holding me back.

Having enrolled, I applied myself to my

studies earnestly, and my own natural intelligence helped me progress rapidly. As a result, I was able to complete the higher syllabus in three years. Furthermore, my keenness and sharp power of observation helped me make up quickly for what I lacked in social graces.

During my years at secondary school, I lived in the home of a fine Christian widow. My father paid her for my room and lodging. Despite my relationship to her as a boarder, this generous lady treated me as a son and I admit with pride that her home was my first school of etiquette.

In this noble home, I observed how love that is patient, kind and forgiving spreads peace among the family members. The meekness and humility of the children there pricked my pride, and their vying to please me helped to rid me of coarseness and selfishness. This in turn urged me to re-examine much of my behaviour. In this family's simple circle of friends and relatives, I found hospitality and acceptance and the habits I learned helped to set my life on a firm foundation. The friends I made there were and still are the most loving, noble and loyal of any I have had throughout my life. How different they are from the complex-ridden children of many prominent families!

2.2. In the Way

"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd." (John 10:16)

As a child, I inclined towards piety and adherence to ethical rules, in accordance with the religious order to which I belonged. As for my attitude toward the

beliefs of other denominations, it was characterised by reserve. Furthermore, I was repulsed by the Christian religion, because it proclaims the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at the hands of the Jews; besides, certain theological treatises have accused Christianity of polytheism. I had been strongly influenced by the Batiniya school of thought in Islam which seeks the hidden meaning behind the revealed sacred writings of our faith. I believed that Christ must have been superhuman and far above the angels; so the idea that he was delivered to crucifixion by the Jews seemed preposterous.

I sometimes argued with my new friends and they appeared unable to refute my claims, owing to their lack of religious knowledge. One day, they invited a certain youth to debate with me. However, he did not contend with me at all but introduced himself to me cordially, saying, "I am A. M., a student in the Evangelical School, and I would be very pleased if we could be friends."

"*Ahlan Wasahlan (welcome)*," I said to him, "it will be a great honour for me to be counted among your friends."

This youth was very pleasant, courteous and discriminating. With such qualities, he won my highest esteem. We became quite fond of one another in a short time, and our mutual respect developed into a kind of brotherhood. God used this youth to lead me to a knowledge of the Saviour.

It happened that he invited me to accompany him to his church on one of our school holidays. "Our church will celebrate one of its feasts today," he said, "and I would be happy if you would come along and be introduced to the way we

worship."

I told him: "I am sorry, but I hold certain private opinions about Christianity which prevent me from attending. I am not at all comfortable with what you Christians keep repeating about Christ being crucified."

"Just a moment, brother," my friend said, "the teaching of the cross is very sublime, more profound than you can imagine or think. It is the work of God in redemption, in keeping with His wonderful love for man. However, since you are not ready to consider this subject, let us not discuss it just yet."

After a period of silence, he removed a copy of the New Testament from his pocket and said to me: "Take this; it is the Gospel of God. Read it sincerely. Ponder its contents. I shall ask God to illuminate your mind, so that you may know the reason for which Christ came into the world as a man and died on a cross."

I took the Book and thanked him. Before going to bed, I reviewed his words, drawing on my memory to recall the echo of that unusual tone in which he had expressed himself, for I sensed the sincerity of one who wished happiness for his friend. A host of conflicting sentiments welled up inside me. In the end, I felt myself driven by an intuition, not of this world, to reconsider my negative reaction to his invitation.

I told him one day: "I have decided to accompany you to your church. I realise that I have no reason to be apprehensive."

"Good," said he with a bright smile, "let us meet tomorrow, Sunday."

I accompanied him to church that Sunday. I experienced things there that were

altogether different from what I had previously heard or imagined. The way the church members worshipped pleased me, and it seemed not strange at all. The simplicity and reverence of all that went on impressed me. The beauty of the singing drew my attention especially, but it was the minister's sermon that affected me most, for it had an impact on my soul.

2.3. First Impressions

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

The simple folk with whom God placed me loved me so very much; it was only natural that I would be drawn by their love. I witnessed lives that were marvellously pure and saw the beauty of Christian devotion. Such a testimony did its work in my soul, melting the blind bigotry which had enveloped my mind and paralysed my thoughts, keeping me from accepting reasonable truths held by millions.

In this atmosphere, saturated with love, I could see the wisdom in my friend's advice to read the Gospel. After removing the copy he had given me from the drawer in my desk, I started to read. From the onset, I found myself gripped as though by magic; the words of Jesus seemed to have been written especially for me. Reading the Sermon on the Mount, I was introduced to a new world that glittered with love.

As I continued reading the Gospel, I grew in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. When I read John 3:16, an overwhelming sense of joy took hold of me, for in this passage of Scripture I discovered the key

to the mystery of the cross: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

My mind was opened, and the veil over my discernment, removed. Suddenly, I knew why Jesus was willing to die on the cross: God loved man to such an extent that He lavishly gave the offering of His only Son to redeem all who would believe in Him, saving them from the punishment of everlasting separation from Him. But this truth often conflicts with man's understanding. The intellect of many rebels against it, hesitating to accept the idea that God would offer His only Son for mankind. But if Abraham offered his son, Isaac, to God because he loved Him, would God Himself -- the very fountain of love -- be less generous than to give His Son? Of course not! If love can be found in the heart of man, inadequate and irregular though it be, surely it is there without bounds in the heart of God, for God Himself is love!

The gentle breezes of love blew on me in this marvellous evangelical atmosphere, quickening the deadness of my heart, hardened by my rebellion and sins. I was spellbound with the love portrayed in the Gospel, so I studied it eagerly. I memorised all the passages which speak of the love of God to sinful man and, before long, I was aware of my need to seek salvation. To my joy, I came to know Jesus as my Saviour. He died for me on the cross, so that I need never perish; I could have everlasting life.

My knowledge of the Saviour was leading me to confess Him before others. But how was this to be accomplished? Would there

be any understanding shown to one who had left the principles and traditions of his forefathers?

Danger seemed to be lurking in every corner, and the doors of compassion appeared closed in my face. It was my desperate need to hold fast to God's mercy, for the One who said, "Follow me," also said, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:28).

I still lacked a wide knowledge of things pertaining to the Christian life which would have equipped me to deal with my situation through prayer. However, the Great Shepherd knew my need for protection. I was positively assured that He cared for me and would ward off all harm, guarding me from every evil.

2.4. Events

"Keep silence before Me, O coastlands, and let the people renew their strength! Let them come near, then let them speak; Let us come near together for judgement." (Isaiah 41:1)

1929 was a year of momentous events for my family. A series of calamities befell my father. He lost his seat in the parliamentary elections, and this led to his decline politically, financially and socially. He started to drink and gamble until he was burdened by debt. His properties were foreclosed and his income shrank. This setback in my father's affairs affected the course of my life because, as his condition worsened, it became impossible for me to continue my education. I ended up having to work in order to support myself.

I left the halls of learning and sought out a position in the offices of government,

hoping that my father's former fame would still be acknowledged and that some helping hand would surely be offered me, but nothing of the kind happened. The senior officials of my school opposed my leaving, suggesting a much brighter future for me if I continued with my studies. I did not heed this advice but continued in my efforts to find a job.

I applied for a position in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, but since I had no one to back my application, my appeal was denied. My thoughts were troubled, and I became like a ship in the midst of a fierce storm, tossed about in all directions. Friends noticed the turmoil on my face, and they wondered what was happening to me -- one who had just recently faced all the situations of life with a smile. Some tried to investigate the source of the problem in order to help me. However, my pride refused any interference from others in my affairs.

In spite of these events and the accompanying upsets and painful worries, my determination to announce my faith in Christ still occupied first place in my thoughts.

One rainy day in March 1929, I went with my friend, A.M., to meet the church minister and share my concerns with him. This pleased the minister, and he prayed for and encouraged me. However, he expressed deep regret at not being able to accept me officially into his church, because the law of the land prohibited that. He also showed alarm at the thought of a possible conflict with my father over the matter. After some thought, he advised me to go to Lebanon where the citizens enjoy freedom of thought and belief. He also promised to send a letter of commendation

to the Evangelical Council there. This was done with the hope that they would accept me as a member in one of their churches.

Although the idea of moving to Lebanon seemed sound from the aspect of my benefiting from the laws in this land, it did not solve my problem. By relocating to a country where I had no friends or acquaintances, I risked being faced with new problems for which I would not be prepared. For one thing, I had to earn a living, which would be a challenge not easy to meet; I had no professional training or work experience.

I left the gracious minister without deciding on anything, because things appeared complicated and frightening. However, I did not lose my faith in God to whom I had entrusted all my affairs. Despite the many discouragements and frustrations which loomed on the horizon, I felt deep within my soul that relief was near.

As I was wrestling with my thoughts the following morning, my colleague at school, G. G., arrived. After greeting me, he said: "There has been a disagreement between my father and me, and I am unable to remain at home. I would like to leave for Lebanon as soon as possible and join the Army of the Levant, attached to the French High Command."

I quickly cautioned, "Can you cope with the hardships of army life?"

"Oh," he responded, "there are no real hardships, as far as the educated young men are concerned. After a period of training, an examination is given; those who succeed are sent to the officers' school and the rest, to the non-commissioned officers' school."

"If that is the case, what would prevent me from joining you?" I asked. It appeared to me that enlisting in the army would be the solution to all my problems; at least this is how it struck me as soon as he proposed going to Lebanon.

"I would be very pleased if we went together," my friend replied, smiling. "Give the matter some serious thought, but be quick about it. I will return tomorrow morning. If you decide to go, we can leave together."

"I have already decided and will start making preparations immediately," I said. "May God be with us."

I did not need much time to prepare, because the things I could bring with me to the barracks were few. I gave away my clothing to the sons of Mrs. S., and they grew sad when they heard of my plans to leave. As I left them the following morning, it was with tears and a heavy heart, for those good people occupied a place in my life which my family had failed to fill. If it were not for the boldness which new hope had created in my soul, I could not have left them.

G. G. and I set out in the direction of Tripoli, and we arrived by noon. After wandering about in the streets the rest of the day, we spent the night in a modest hotel. The following morning, we left for the army barracks. There, after being given a medical examination, we were enrolled into the First Infantry Division. That day was March 11, 1929, and I have been infantryman number 8382 since then.

The next day, I was sent to the training school, along with a group of youths from a variety of backgrounds. Every group of forty enlisted soldiers was allocated a

room. To my dismay, I did not have a bed but a wooden board roughly 70 centimetres wide and nailed to two crosspieces 10 centimetres thick. As for the mattress, it was stuffed with a coarse straw of palm leaves.

After registering my name in the detachment roll, I was sent to the supply room to receive my uniform, rifle, kit bag, axe, a few cooking utensils and some equipment for setting up a tent.

From then on, I had to wash my own clothes and polish my gear and weapons. I also had to participate periodically in common chores, such as cleaning the room, sweeping the yard and carrying the food of our detachment from the kitchen to the dining room. Fortunately, I was relieved of this within the first week of entering the barracks. Some of the conscripted soldiers volunteered to do these chores for me in exchange for my writing their letters home; most of them were illiterate. Furthermore, the sergeant relieved me of some of my other tasks in exchange for writing his daily reports in French; he had no knowledge of this language.

The first stage of a lonely life began, which appeared to be my destiny. Nothing disturbed the peace here, save the sound of the bugle which blared out periodically, calling the soldiers to assemble, to gather for meals, to sleep or to rise.

As the days rolled on, I met with some unpleasant surprises. My father knew something of the reasons behind my departure and took it very much to heart. He could not rest until he officially requested the French governor to discharge me from the army and return me home. To

ensure the success of this scheme, some advised him to reinforce his application by expressing concern about the adverse effects of city life on my character, owing to my youth and need for parental supervision. A friend of his, the district councillor, helped him in this endeavour by rejecting my application papers to the army. Since he himself had not signed them, he officially requested my discharge.

The governor of the district referred this application to the high commissioner who, in turn, referred it for investigation. The high command returned it to the commissariat, recommending that they reject the excuses put forward by my father. They also pressured the head of the military attaché at the high commissioner's office to endorse my papers. The councillor, however, finding this compromise an affront to his dignity, resorted to a trick. He sent an official letter demanding my expulsion from the army for the following reasons: misconduct, possession of money to spend on pleasures, a leaning toward vagrancy and leaving school before completing my studies.

These allegations were baseless fabrications, and I regarded them as the persecutions which, since that day, have dogged my footsteps continually. How irritating it was to me that these accusations were supported by statements purporting to be from my father. Was this a case of a tribal chief's pride being hurt by his son becoming an ordinary soldier, or was it a fanaticism seeking to quench my inclinations toward Christianity? Was it possible that both these circumstances made my prominent father feel doubly dishonoured?

The governor referred the matter to the high command, bypassing the military attaché of the high commissioner. Knowing that I was innocent of all I had been accused, God had prepared the detachment commander, a noble man of integrity, as my strong defender. I told him all of my story after he had summoned me into his office. No sooner had I revealed it to him than he rushed to my defence, rebutting every accusation levelled at me. In preparing his defence, he was helped by a certificate from my headmaster -- a former officer who held the Legion of Honour award -- which applauded my conduct and praised my exemplary character.

When his report reached the command headquarters, the chief of staff sent a complaint to the district councillor, asking him to either sign my papers or be charged with obstructing orders. He did not comply with these instructions fully, suggesting instead a solution which would satisfy my father, whose displeasure he considered undesirable for the mandate power. His solution was that I should be transferred to the second detachment stationed in Latakia where, according to the councillor, my training and preparation for the war college would be entrusted to officers of high calibre.

This proposal was referred to the high command for ratification. Fortunately, my detachment commander regarded this proposal as an attempt to cast doubt on his officer's standing, so he sent a detailed report, stiffly worded, accusing the councillor of conspiring with my father to deprive the army of an educated youth with a bright future. This report had a strong impact on the high command which made a final decision in my case, giving

me the following options: discharge from the army, transfer to the second regiment, or remaining in the first regiment.

Naturally, I chose to stay with the first regiment in Lebanon where I could await a suitable opportunity to request official membership in a church. It was for this very goal that I had left my own people and country. After I had announced my decision to my commander, he was visibly moved and said encouragingly, "Do not fear any harm from now on, for I personally will take an active interest in your development."

"Thank you, sir," I replied with tears, "I will justify your faith in me."

This commander lived up to his promise. When I finished my first course of training, he promoted me to the rank of corporal and appointed a secretary and interpreter for me in his office. After a few more months, he promoted me as sergeant. This raised my morale, meeting my needs and presenting me in a favourable light in the community.

During this time, I began to visit an evangelical church where I found a spiritual atmosphere that impressed me. I also found encouragement from the pastor there, a man of God by the name of Abdallah Massouh. After a brief period of attendance, I was accepted into full membership.

2.5. A Simple Wedding

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

On February 23, 1932, I was married to Martha Atieh in the National Evangelical Church of Beirut. Rev. Mufeed Abd

al-Kareem, president of the Supreme Council of the Evangelical Church, officiated.

Our wedding lacked the pomp and grandeur of others which typically begin with a large procession, the pealing of bells and the joyous trills of women's voices. The bridal procession was composed of just the bride's brother and his spouse. Three other friends, who came by foot, bore their good wishes instead of floral wreaths. As for the procession of the groom, it consisted of two witnesses who happened to be construction workers.

Despite our wedding's lack of sophistication, it had the glory of simplicity and the majesty of humility, and it was overshadowed by the presence of the Lord who blessed it as he did the wedding in Cana of Galilee. There were neither speeches, cheers, clapping, nor any grand tunes played to arouse mirth, but only a simple hymn sung by the minister's wife and daughter, which mingled with the songs of thankfulness ringing in our hearts. They sang of the One who loved us and cleansed us from our sins by His blood.

When we left the church, there was no convoy of cars, decorated with ribbons. Instead, we went by foot to the taxi station and secured two seats in a car bound for Tripoli. When we arrived at Altal Square, there was no one waiting for us, but God was our companion and His voice whispered in our hearts: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:3,5,8).

We did not have a house in the proper sense of the word, because the place I had prepared consisted merely of one room. Among the furniture were a simple bed with a mattress and pillow of straw, a small table and two chairs. However, we were happy. Our hearts were filled with a joy not of this world, created in us by the peace of God which the world can neither offer nor comprehend.

Since we did not have the money to buy kitchen utensils, we received our meals for a while at the home of our neighbour, Umm Fahd, whom we paid a modest sum in keeping with my small army salary. From our relationship with him, we learned the best lesson in communal co-operation and found it to be a great blessing, for it was here that we were drilled in the art of living simply and realistically, within our means. The Apostle Paul wrote: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (Philippians 4:11).

At that time, my wife and I were in need of social instruction, so God sent an elder sister to us, Mrs. Wajeeha Abu Rustum. She did not spare any efforts in giving my wife sound guidance and counsel. Opening her home to us without reserve, she afforded us the opportunity of meeting the best among her friends. I personally found Mr. Abu Rustum to be not only a faithful friend but also a wise mentor.

Our spiritual care was undertaken by Reverends Massouh and Nelson who kept an eye on us. They and their wives visited us regularly, and these occasions helped set my spiritual life on a solid foundation.

2.6. In the Military

"And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorra) like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar." (Genesis 13:10)

In summer 1934, I joined the military academy in Homs, where I was to spend the next five years. Half of my time was spent in the accounts division and the other half, in receiving my military and scientific training. At the end of the period, I passed the examinations successfully and obtained the certificates that entitled me to be promoted to the rank of officer.

During my stay in Homs, I joined the evangelical circle and attended the church meetings and other activities regularly. It was at the Homs Evangelical Church that I first heard a message on "the new birth". The speaker was an Egyptian preacher, Sheikh Kamel Mansour. His sermon enlightened my mind, for I learned that my Christian calling should go beyond my belief and activities with other Christians; it had to extend to the point of consecrating my life to God. I longed with all my being to devote my life to the Redeemer. However, this aim seemed to be unattainable, because life at the army barracks had made me somewhat coarse and short-tempered.

While at Homs, I won the esteem of many and made some worthwhile friendships, but these attainments were far from constituting a dedication of life. This grave subject caused me sleeplessness and much exercise of conscience. But this conviction did not last long, for the lure of worldly living soon dulled my sensitivity, and so I surrendered to so-called reality, counting dedication of life a form of mysticism,

unattainable without long strivings and that only after reaching a certain age.

Days came and went, and momentous events occurred. My conversion to Christianity ceased being a secret and became common knowledge. Comments about me increased, and I was made the butt of the ugliest accusations. I endured this harsh treatment with a love that bears and endures all things patiently. I had been wounded in the house of my friends, deprived of my mother's affection, frowned upon by my brethren and shunned by my fellow countrymen. The resentment of my father's sons and mother's daughters only served to increase my resolution to stand firm in what I believed to be right. As a result of the slander aimed at me, I became more determined in my struggle for the sake of truth which I believed and upheld.

During that period, a group of religious men volunteered to reclaim me by means of debate. So I listened, bearing the sting of their criticisms with love and patience, replying to each question plainly and simply, repaying harshness with gentleness and in-gratitude with thanks, according to the words of the Apostle Peter: "Be tender-hearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:8,9).

The Lord was with me and His Spirit guided me, putting the right words in my mouth -- words seasoned with the salt of the Holy Bible which gives grace to all who hear. My answers were based upon what I had learned from the Holy Scriptures about the love of God for the world -- that love which provided a

mediation between God and man through redemption by the Incarnate Word, secured since the foundation of the earth. I ended my words by saying, "This is the principle I have embraced, and I am unable to recant because it has illuminated my life and given me rest from my labours." The grace of God was working during that debate, dismissing anger and ending the session in peace.

Before long, another kind of approach was directed towards me by a group of educated young men. Their method was to hint at the sympathy of the mandate government for my former sect. They claimed that a special program was set up with the sons of prominent families in view. If I would recant, I would be assured a speedy promotion in the army. One of them, a friend of mine, whispered in my ear: "My brother, stick to your beliefs but pretend to renounce your faith. The important thing is to redeem your family name which is now beset by gossip and slander."

"My dear friend," I protested, "you are asking me to be something most hateful to me -- a hypocrite. You also want me to commit a most heinous sin. Have you not heard the word of Christ: `But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven'" (Matthew 10:33)?

After a brief moment of silence, I resumed speaking: "You say the government of the mandate is sympathetic to a certain sect and that I can obtain rapid promotion if I comply with your wishes. But have you considered Christ's question: "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul"

(Matthew 16:26)?

Even in my Christian circle, the Tempter tried to push me in a different direction, a road planted with wily traps aimed at my fall. This happened during an interview I had with Bishop K. who loved me dearly and showed a readiness to exercise his wide influence at the Army Chief Command to secure fast promotions for me. The condition was that I should join his denomination. He embellished the matter by adding, "I offer you not only material favours but also a spiritual blessing by rescuing you from the error of the Protestants."

"My dear sir," I said in a tone of exasperation, "what you are offering me is indeed attractive, but it was the Protestants who introduced me to Christ the Saviour. If your Christ is better, I am willing to follow Him even without promotion."

2.7. The Message of the Cross

"Then He said to them all, If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." (Luke 9:23)

Rev. Dr. Assaf Bishara arrived in Homs for a series of revival meetings. He began with a message on the role of the cross in the life of the Christian, selecting the words of the great servant of Christ, the Apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

This sermon aroused my conscience anew, for in the depths of my being I longed to

have an experience of the cross; then I could crucify my baser passions that lean toward evil and live instead for Christ the Lord -- a life of surrender, according to His righteous, good and perfect will. But no sooner did I try by my own efforts than I failed. The environment of the barracks did not assist me in this endeavour.

I decided to involve myself with Christians whom I felt possessed a high degree of spirituality. I thought that by mingling with them I would receive the desired lift. But alas, it turned out to be a search for the living among the dead. A certain headmaster and famous man of letters there insisted on celebrating our friendship with a glass of arak, an oriental drink like vodka. This disappointed me deeply, for I had thought him to be the "good salt" that would have seasoned the Bread of Life in me.

As World War II raged on, I was transferred to Company 191 of the infantry stationed in Latakia. This company was due to go to the front as soon as it was trained in the use of modern weaponry. However, this plan did not materialise, owing to the collapse of French resistance under pressure of Hitler's armies in 1940.

When the Vichy government was established, our detachment was disbanded and divided into regiments. As a result of this split, I was placed in the fifth regiment. In the summer of 1941, there were some skirmishes between the Vichy forces and the Allies on the borders between Palestine and Iraq. Our regiment was sent to south-west Syria to stop the British and Gaulists in Palestine from advancing into Syria and Lebanon. The fighting did not last long, however, owing to the combatants having started peace

negotiations. There was a cease-fire, and we received orders from the high command to regroup and return to positions held before the break of hostilities. But the Allied Forces insisted on considering us prisoners of war. Accordingly, we were led to detention centres set up sporadically. Thus, it fell to my lot to experience captivity behind barbed wire. I was not released until I had registered as a volunteer in the Free French Forces, moving to the seventh brigade which was stationed on the Syrian-Lebanese coast, defending the shores.

During the period of my captivity, the subject of the surrendered life began to engage my mind afresh, and with it came a strong sense of conviction. I decided to leave the army as soon as the war ended, in order to dedicate my whole life to my beloved Redeemer. But, as I was promoted to the rank of second lieutenant, I felt that the world lay at my feet. The pleasures and joys of life seemed to beckon me, as is often the case at the end of a war when most people give full rein to their instincts and invent countless ways of amusing themselves. I too went overboard, joining the circle of the upper classes. It was there that I lapsed into a spiritual hibernation until I was awakened by the voice of God which said, "Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5:14).

2.8. Decision to Leave

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."
(Romans 8:28)

When it was decided in 1945 that the

French should leave Syria and Lebanon, everything was ready for my family and me to leave for Europe. However, the Lord who had chosen me and brought me into His fold, protecting me through all the dangers and conflicts, did not allow this. His wondrous wisdom was at work in every way to release me from the grip of the world, so that I could enjoy true freedom as His child. It was meant for me to live the consecrated life for which I yearned since I had been illumined.

The years that I had spent in military service under the free French flag entitled me to French citizenship. While waiting for the legal formalities, an order was issued to transfer me to the French army stationed in Germany. This was a most attractive opportunity. Continuing my service in the large French army was bound to give me promotional opportunities; thus, I would attain a high rank in the military. This in turn would result in an attractive retirement income after another ten years. But God says in the Scriptures: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

In order to show the wealth of His patience toward this weak vessel which He had foreordained to honour His name, God intervened at the last minute by placing some obstacles in the way of my going to Europe. A new order was issued to send me to a colonial army stationed in central Africa. After two years, I would be allowed to rejoin my family in Marseilles. This sudden change made my wife fearful, and she refused to part from me -- a matter which obliged me to resign from the French Army. My resignation was accepted after a few days, and orders were

issued for my discharge. In keeping with the rules in such cases, I was given a compensation for my services under the flag.

After my discharge in 1946, I took up residence in Tripoli. During those first days after my return to civilian life, it seemed to me that I lived in a world whose assumptions and mode of life were altogether strange. Even so, I had to conform to those among whom I was living and had to work at something to support my wife and children.

Some associates advised me to go into business, and when I expressed my aversion to this type of work, they tried to make it appear more attractive by telling me of those who were supposed to have made a fortune in a few years. Their reasoning was so powerful that I was soon persuaded to enter the world of trade. I eventually rented a shop in the centre of town and filled its shelves with novelty goods.

In the course of my new work, I was able to study people and observe that they violated the law of love in much of their dealings. I was deeply disturbed and disgusted by what I saw of man's moral corruption and his tendency to commit debasing and soul-destroying evils for the sake of material gain.

In this atmosphere, infected with degradation, it was as if I were teetering at the edge of a pit; and more than once my foot slipped, nearly landing me in the depths of destruction. I had the will to seek the face of God in sincerity, so I cried to Him, pleading earnestly for His helping hand. But there was also another force at work trying to oppose my efforts: Satan,

the accursed deceiver, who tried everything to thwart my desire for God. This subtle schemer found an opportunity to enslave me with the guiles that abound in this type of business. He even aroused some of my previous inclinations to certain sins that I practised during my period of ignorance. We had a bitter fight -- a conflict between the Spirit which denies his thoughts, longing for self-denial and the flesh which formerly obeyed its own desires and lusted against the Spirit.

The Tempter was an expert in his approach. He displayed before me the pleasures which the world affords -- those which my new business made easier to acquire. Also, whenever he sensed any resistance from me, he tried to quell it with doubt as to whether a particular pleasure was really a sin. He whispered in my ear the subtle words with which he deceived our first parents: "Has God indeed said?" (Genesis 3:1). It was as if he were challenging me, asking, "Did God in fact say that you should not amuse yourself and pander some pleasures to your body after a hard day's work?" The wily Tempter nearly succeeded in his tricks but for the intervention of the blessed Holy Spirit who reminded me of the apostolic command that says: "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world -- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life -- is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

The Holy Spirit of God continued His work in my conscience, convicting me in matters regarding righteousness, sin and

judgement. He reminded me of all that Jesus had taught about holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. But as soon as the Tempter felt a rebuff, he would adopt a new strategy in an attempt to wear down my vigilance. This he did by introducing doubts of another kind; namely, uncertainty concerning the mercy of God. He would begin his subtleties by recalling my sins of ignorance in the ugliest settings. That which may have been a childish lapse was portrayed before me as a deep gulf separating me from God -- one which was impossible to bridge.

These forces buffeted me as I lay in bed one morning. I was distressed, and my senses were in great turmoil. I was like a ship whose captain had strayed during a fierce storm. However, the love of God opened my eyes, so that I could see the wonders of His law. Before daybreak, the Spirit reminded me of the Word of God: "'Come now, and let us reason together,' says the Lord, 'though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool'" (Isaiah 1:18).

Then I remembered the golden text which had illuminated my mind and led me to the knowledge of His love demonstrated at the cross: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

I dropped to my knees, reviewing the past, and found among my sins some that I still cherished -- those which had taken root by force of habit. So I took a pencil and started recording them on a sheet of paper -- an act prompted, no doubt, by the Spirit of God. The Lord then guided me to mount against each one in a campaign of

prayer. He was pleased to hear my supplication and granted me victory. Crossing each one out with red ink, I knew before one week had passed that the blood of Jesus had cleansed me from all sin.

2.9. Experiences

"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God!" (Hebrews 9:14)

After that memorable night when my striving with God resulted in turning over a page polluted with sin and starting with a clean slate by the grace of Him who loved me and cleansed me, I had a series of spiritual experiences near the feet of my glorious Saviour. I feel it my duty to relate some of these as a testimony to the operation of the wonderful grace of God.

I only hope that no one will think I am boasting when I mention my experiences, for, like the gentle Apostle Paul, I have learned not to glory "except in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). My purpose in recounting them is to demonstrate God's saving power and the working of His love in directing the lives of those who belong to Him. It is also to show His care for them in the hour of temptation and His preserving their souls from the grip of despair when, in His wisdom, He allows them to go through crucibles of testing and sieves of trial in order to test their faith. It also shows how He permits them to fall into shadowy depths of doubt without His speedy intervention, so that they imagine at times that He has deserted them.

2.9.1. In the Shadow of the Cross

At the dawn of my conversion, I was very enthusiastic for the cause of the cross and proud of the grace given me. However, at some point a group of brethren plotted against me and started opposing me without reason. They questioned the genuineness of my brotherly affection towards them. It grieved me that Christian brethren should disapprove of me when I loved them dearly in Christ.

It was not long before the opposition from these brethren turned into a form of persecution. My patience was strained and my composure, gone. I found the words of Jesus in Mark 10:29,30: "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the Gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time -- houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions -- and in the age to come, eternal life."

I pointed to the words "with persecutions" in dismay and asked the Lord if He was fulfilling the promise through this group of brethren. The Holy Spirit, the Comforter, did not leave me in uncertainty but quickly whispered in my ear another of the Lord's sayings: "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!" (Matthew 10:25). This verse worked on my soul, convicting me regarding these questions. I promptly cast my sorrows before my Redeemer and Saviour in a spirit of brokenness. With tears and fasting, I unburdened my inner hurts and

He heard my cries.

2.9.2. In the Shadow of the Cross ... Again

In the summer of 1954, my brethren resumed their harassment, and once again I grew bitter. I started questioning what it was that annoyed them, to the point of introspection. But this examination did not condemn me. I was sincere in my dealings with everyone, particularly in safeguarding the trust given to me. Although I spared no effort in gaining their confidence, my approaches were not reciprocated. It was necessary for me to cast the problem before the Lord. One midsummer's night, I cried out to the Lord of Hosts to save the situation. I was on my knees until overcome by drowsiness. In a deep sleep, I awoke suddenly to a resonant voice which said, "Arise, and read Psalm 84."

Being alone in the house, I understood this voice to be that of the Lord. I rose from my bed, picked up my Bible and knelt to read Psalm 84. As I read, I meditated on each phrase, digesting its meanings, so that God's message could be conveyed to me. I reached verses five and six and found the following: "Blessed is the man whose strength is in You, whose heart is set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; the rain also covers it with pools."

My understanding was illuminated to see the wisdom of God in the cross of His beloved Son. At that moment, I learned that it is necessary for all who desire to follow in the footsteps of their Redeemer to go through a "valley of tears"; they will share the anguish of the "Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" -- not as a duty but out of love for Him who laid down His life

for His friends. Only then can the apostolic word apply to them: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

This message burned in my soul with miraculous power, giving love the victory -- the love that "covers a multitude of sins". The Lord gave me fresh grace to bear the burdens of ridicule from friends, and so to go the second mile.

2.9.3. The Yoke of Christ

During my business career, a gentleman visited me to receive payment on behalf of a Beirut merchant with whom we dealt. It so happened that among the funds I had on hand was a sum of one hundred Syrian pounds. As the difference between the Syrian and Lebanese currencies was nine percent, I said to Mr. M. M., "Please give my colleague my greetings and tell him to add nine pounds to my current account." Now, although my request was reasonable and practised in business circles, this matter infuriated Mr. M. M. who shouted in my face: "Oh, you do not know me! I can crush the biggest head under my feet!"

His language was of the kind that cannot be repeated, and his threatening tone conveyed more than mere anger. But by the grace of Christ, I was able to repay his rudeness with kindness. This grace also embraced my young son who restrained himself in the face of this unwarranted insult. With the help of another young man, he was able to courteously remove this man from the shop.

I was deeply affected by the conduct of

this man whom I had never wronged. It occurred to me to exercise my rights and retaliate. However, the love which "bears all things" for the sake of Christ's honour quickly changed my mind about taking any action against the offender.

While I was telling my son about my intention to forgive in accordance with the Lord's command, "Do not resist an evil person" (Matthew 5:39), Mr. M. M. came back, looking quite dejected. Before he crossed the threshold of the store, he shouted, "Sir, I beg you in the name of Christ to forgive me."

"I have not waited until now to forgive you, my brother," I said smiling. "I forgave you from the first moment."

"Pardon me, pardon me," he repeated in a pleading voice, as though he were ashamed of his behaviour to the point of humiliation. I did not allow him to continue with his appeals, but got up and embraced him eagerly, sitting him down in a chair. Then I told my son, "Go to the nearby cafe and fetch this gentleman a cup of coffee." When Mr. M. M. had finished the coffee and calmed down, I said to him, "Mr. M. M., may God forgive you."

The day after this incident, I was teaching a lesson in translation to the baccalaureate class at Mar Elias Secondary School where I worked. Suddenly, a student stood up to speak: "Sir, I witnessed what happened to you yesterday at the marketplace and was greatly affected. Please allow me to say that it was not an incident but a tragedy. In my opinion, a person has to be a coward to suffer such a humiliation."

In the face of such a challenge, I stopped the lesson and used the occasion to tell the students the "Golden Rule" which Christ

established for Christians

"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. Give to him who asks you and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away (Matthew 5:38-41)."

Before starting to comment on the subject, I told the student: "My friend, I am not a coward. I hold the honour of the Military Cross with distinction, and this medal is not given to soldiers except for deeds of heroism." After a moment's silence, I continued, "Bearing the abuse of others and refraining from acting like them is indeed a form of bravery."

After this introduction, I began my lecture to the class, taking my text from the words of the Apostle Paul: "Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head" (Romans 12:20).

I explained to the class that, had I got into a shouting match with Mr. M. M., it most likely would have led to physical violence, and this would have brought me down to his level. As a Christian, I refused to act in such a manner. It pleased me more to dispel pride in others with the power of Christ's meekness. My appearing to be a coward was superseded when love conquered, turning evil to good and leading Mr. M. M. to apologise. And as the Good Teacher was exalted in the incident with Mr. M. M., so He was also magnified among the students. A surrendered life -- one which welcomes

Christ and bears His yoke -- was on view before them, operating through the grace of God.

2.9.4. More Opposition

It was spring 1955, and the enemy of souls was still active in his attempts to divide the beloved brethren and me. Unfortunately, he succeeded in one instance when the pastor with whom I had laboured without pay lent his ear to the false rumours which my brethren were spreading about me. As a result, he developed a negative attitude towards me. Although I remember these things, I will refrain from giving details, in keeping with the love that keeps no record of wrongs, seeks not its own and rejoices not in evil.

This incident was unfortunate. It was one reason behind my leaving that circle of brethren. It was a departure that filled my heart with grief and bitter regret. Before leaving this group which I had cherished, I spent one full week in prayer, fasting and meditation. I asked my God, whom I worship in spirit, to indicate the direction He wanted me to take. I asked Him earnestly to give me a definite message from His precious Book. He answered my plea and gave me relief from my distress. After seven days, I closed my eyes and opened the Bible randomly to Jeremiah 40. When I looked at the page open before me, I read how the general of Nebuchadnezzar's army told this prophet: "And now look, I free you this day from the chains that were on your hand. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you. But if it seems wrong for you to come with me to Babylon, remain here. See, all the land is before you; wherever it seems good

and convenient for you to go, go there" (Jeremiah 40:4).

The message was very clear to me, and I went to the Presbyterian church in Tripoli where I had been accepted for the first time as a member of the Body of Christ. The members welcomed me as a beloved son whose name was still written on their hearts. The expression of approval by the brethren over my return was so great that they chose me as an elder, and they appointed me to the board of the church. Later, I was separated for the service of the Gospel as an itinerant preacher in the Akkar, Koura and Munsef districts.

None but those who have tasted the sweetness of the salvation of God and have been dedicated to His service can understand the joy which flooded my soul as I set out for the town of Hakoura to conduct the preaching service. The words of the Lord my Saviour came to my mind at that moment: "See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name" (Revelation 3:8).

2.9.5. An Unsuccessful Merchant

I was not successful in my business. From the start, I incurred huge losses. One reason behind these circumstances was the dishonesty of some people with whom I had dealings; the commodities I handled were controlled by shrewd suppliers who had no scruples concerning the methods they employed to promote their own interests. The other was the sudden drop in prices in the first two years after the end of the war and their subsequent steep rise within a short period, owing to the start of the Korean War. This was followed by

another drop soon after. These combined factors prevented my goods from moving, and with time their value dropped. This resulted in the loss of my capital. Consequently, I was unable to continue in business.

After ten years of hard work, I found myself in a very critical situation. The shop was full of goods, but against them were many invoices due for payment. I was faced with the spectre of serious bankruptcy which threatened my reputation. Some colleagues suggested that I should declare my bankruptcy after hiding away the best part of my stock, adding: "All who are in your position do that and settle with their creditors by paying fifteen to twenty percent. In this way, you can save your capital."

"No thank you," I told my advisors, "I am a follower of Jesus Christ and as such I behave in accordance with His will which commands me to be faithful until death, so as to receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10)."

For several months, I remained in a state of confusion, trying to continue in business. Suddenly, a young man offered to purchase the business with all its stock. I did not hesitate, for I found that a sale would solve my serious predicament. As a result of the transaction, I netted a sum that exceeded my debts by a few hundred pounds.

For my wife and daughter, this outcome was a hard shock, but for my son and me, it was like a welcome detour around an impassable roadblock. Before handing over the business to the new owner, I went alone to the rear of the store and offered a prayer of thanks to God. His love willed

that I should have a taste of the rod of chastening, learning thereby to consider my monetary loss a blessing and to esteem my damaged pride as necessary for acquiring humility.

After the sale of the business, I left for home. My wife and daughter met me with tears in their eyes. I smiled and said: "Do not fear nor trouble your hearts, for we believe in God who said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' Let us look to God and expect His compassion." After pausing a moment, I directed my words to my eldest son: "Fetch the hymn books. We need to rejoice with songs to the God of our salvation, because until now He has helped us and has not held back His compassion toward us, or despised our petition, or allowed us to slip."

In our family, the hymn books helped us draw closer to God. We had in our souls something of the psalmist's emotion which he expressed in these words: "...It is good for me to draw near to God; I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works" (Psalm 73:28).

No sooner had each one taken a book than a calm descended upon everyone. After a period of quiet meditation, when hearts turned towards their Redeemer, Lord and Shepherd, we started to sing the hymn which begins thus: "Soldiers of God, who joined the Lord's army, praise Him for a lasting victory, thanking our conquering King." Our voices ascended, but with a note of sadness. When we came to the chorus which says, "Finished is salvation's work, alleluia, sing to our Lord Jesus," a burst of joy was evident in all our voices, the source of which was the consolation from our Lord, poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Our eyes glistened as we

expressed the peace of God which had filled our souls. After reading a Bible passage, we raised a prayer of thanks to the Lord who loved us, redeemed us and lovingly wielded the rod of correction. Thus, our decision was strengthened in Him who said, "You are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:31).

Each of us was glad that God had stripped us of the pride that hindered our efforts to seek the things that are above. He was now preparing us to carry the yoke of Christ and to learn the lessons of meekness and humility at His feet.

My eldest son and I spent some time looking for work, knocking at many doors and meeting more than one disappointment. But the deepest frustration we experienced was in the attitude of certain missionaries. In spite of the vacancy at their school which attracted me, they refused to employ me. My patience, which had been refined by tribulations, endured their opposition silently.

The Lord heard our cries. He provided work for my son in the deserts of Saudi Arabia. I found a job in a synod school of the National Evangelical Church before spending the last fifty pounds from the sale of the shop, and the administrators there welcomed me. I was given responsibility for the spiritual life of the student body, in addition to my teaching duties. I was very pleased with this outcome. What gladdened my heart more was the excellent response from the students to the prayer meetings which I held every morning in the library. I was also involved in religious education for all the primary classes.

2.9.6. "The Blood Shall be a Sign to

You"

During the bloody incidents in Lebanon in 1958, we lived in an area between the army barracks and the rebel strongholds. The rebels would enter our quarter to arrest those whose political loyalties were suspect. One day, an acquaintance came to me and said: "I advise you to leave town. The rebels are determined to kidnap you. One has whispered that you are opposed to the revolution."

"I am not opposed to anyone," I told the informant. "Even if I do not encourage the rebels' movement, I have not resisted it. I am a law-abiding citizen and prefer not to interfere in things that do not concern me."

"You may be right," he said, "but the information I have makes me fear some harm will come to you. Therefore, I repeat my advice to you to leave with your family."

We could not seek refuge in people's homes, because everyone was afraid. In fact, most of the population had fled to the mountains. But we knew the One who had said: "He who touches you touches the apple of [My] eye" (Zechariah 2:8). To this God, the protector of the meek, we fled! His Holy Spirit showed us the way of deliverance. One night, when the gunfire was at its worst, we gathered for family prayer as usual. I took the Scriptures and read from Exodus 12. Then I placed a finger on God's word to Moses:

"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it.

Then they shall eat the flesh on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread and with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roasted in fire -- its head with its legs and its entrails. You shall let none of it remain until morning, and what remains of it until morning you shall burn with fire. And thus you shall eat it; with a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgement: I am the Lord" (Exodus 12:5-13).

After reading the text, we fell on our knees asking our God, the keeper of the souls of His saints, to sprinkle the lintel and sideposts of our door with Jesus' blood, our Passover Lamb who was slain for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). God answered the prayer of faith and drove away the danger that night and the following nights.

Before long, conditions worsened and the danger increased. We were without electricity and water, and going to town to buy food meant possible death by a bullet. We did not have the means to go to the mountains as others had done. So I implored God to open the way for us to leave town for a remote place where I could be given an opportunity to serve Him. He answered my prayer and gave me the desire of my heart. Slipping away from our quarter the next day, I made my way to Beirut. There, I met Mrs. Alice Khoury, the wife of a church pastor. She loved our family as a mother loves her children.

Mrs. Khoury summoned the ministers in town to a meeting in the home of Dr. Farid Audeh. Driven by the love of Christ, this group acted to help me. They appointed me as preacher in the Mrouj church in the

High Metn, a district outside of Beirut. How glad I was to spend three months in the service of my Redeemer, far from any danger! How truly good the Lord was to me, granting my request for service and a safe haven! Thus, the divine words were fulfilled to me: "It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are still speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

I had to pass through Riyad al-Solh Square in order to fetch my family from Tripoli. Strangely enough, I was not hurt despite the gunfire that filled the square. Still more peculiar was what my wife encountered four months later, after returning to Tripoli for our belongings. When she arrived, she found the lock smashed and the door open. However, our things had not been touched. I am sure that the protection of our lives and belongings was due to the blood of Christ guarding us from the destroyer.

In the town of Mrouj, I enjoyed the blessings of ministry. A large number of evangelical Christians, who had fled to the High Metn, attended church every Sunday. This gladdened my heart and revived my spirit. In this atmosphere, I saw the wisdom in the advice of Rev. Dagher who was the secretary of the Evangelical Synod. He had counselled me to leave teaching and devote my time to serving Christ in the church. I began thinking seriously about this and praying for God's guidance; it soon came in the call of serving the Gospel. Thus, I joined the ranks of God's servants. When the synod secretary visited, I informed him of my decision. He was pleased and made a recommendation to the Religious Service Committee to appoint me. The committee met and decided to elect me as preacher and evangelist in the Marj Ayoun parish,

beginning September 1, 1958.

2.10. Practical Ministry

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you." (John 15:16)

In the course of my service in Marj Ayoun, I was given special grace in practical ministry. There was a reading room in Nabatiya, for which I was administrator. The contacts I had with the school teachers and students who frequented it were invaluable, because I was able to form solid bonds with them. In turn, these relationships opened the way to serve the Gospel in educational circles. Moreover, it was not long before I had gained the confidence of these students who often sought my advice regarding their personal problems. How happy I was to be given the wisdom to help them in this way! I also had the opportunity to spread the Word of God in the school attached to the National Evangelical Synod. Among my duties was providing religious instruction to all classes and a weekly sermon to the combined student body and teaching staff.

At the church, I collaborated with Rev. Wadee Antoun, the parish pastor. With much satisfaction, I remember those blessings which God allowed us to enjoy as we shared the Gospel of salvation in the parish churches. Thus, the five years spent in Nabatiya were a period of study and preparation for a wider ministry. During this time, I passed the examination in Arts and Divinity and earned the official preaching license from the National Evangelical Synod. At the end of this time, I was elected pastor of the Port Church and

Evangelical Hospital. My experiences at the Port Church proved a great blessing, whether in church services, in sharing the Word of God with the patients at the hospital, in teaching the Bible at the nursing school attached to the hospital, or in leading a Bible study on the book of Ephesians at a ladies meeting in Tripoli.

The period of service in Tripoli did not last long. After one year, it was decided to close the hospital, owing to losses incurred during the previous five years; and since all members of the Port Church were employees in the hospital, it was natural that the church should also be closed. When this happened, I found myself unemployed. At the same time, my eldest son, who bore most of the financial burdens for the family, left his work in Saudi Arabia to study engineering in the United States. The combination of these circumstances placed us in dire need, so I asked some friends to recommend me to the Carmel Mission for work as a preacher. God in His wisdom planned for me to work for one year in the Christian Publications Centre of the mission. Here I had the opportunity to translate, write and edit a large number of Christian books and to supervise their printing.

At the end of that year, Rev. Abd al-Masih visited me and presented me with the following proposal: "Rev. Dr. Farid Audeh has asked us to find a pastor for the churches of Dbayeh, Hadath and Rabiya, and after some consideration, we have selected you. Would you think of returning to a pastoral ministry with us?"

After a moment's silence, he added: "One of the aims of our mission is to provide pastors for local churches that are financially unable to support one. We do

not establish new churches in the countries where we work."

How I thanked God for this clarification from Rev. Abd al-Masih, for had he not provided it, I would have turned down his offer immediately. I was disgusted with the methods used by the majority of missions operating in our countries, which set out to establish new churches instead of co-operating with local ones. The methods most of them used caused accusations to be cast at our churches and promoted divisions among the ranks of believers. Worse still, most of the new churches gave prominence to their particular beliefs or special positions. As a result, proclaiming Christ as Saviour took second place, and these factors unfortunately produced a surplus of denominations and missions in the Arab Church. But despite my sympathetic response to Brother Abd al-Masih's clarification, I asked him to allow me some time for prayer. I needed a revelation from my Master and Lord, whom I worship in spirit, as to whether He wanted me to leave my work in publications and begin work as a pastor.

Rev. Abd al-Masih added, "I am authorised by the mission board to grant you two weeks to make your decision, so that you can pray about the matter."

This was the first week of July 1965, and that same night I began to lay the matter in prayer before the throne of grace. I adopted a method similar to that of Gideon in Judges 6:36-40, in order to make certain that the Lord would support me in this decision.

How great was my joy that God worked those things out for me before the end of the time frame. In those circumstances, I

did not hesitate to go to the head of the mission, Rev. Martin Spangenberg, indicating to him my desire to begin work as a pastor. We drew up a contract beginning on September 15, 1965. On October 14 of that same year, I was ordained as minister in a large ceremony at the Beirut Evangelical Church, in which twelve ministers participated. I felt the magnitude of the responsibility placed upon my shoulders most deeply when Rev. Farid Audeh reminded me of my duties as pastor: being an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, instructing and counselling God's people as a watchman and steward, directing them in the path of righteousness, guarding those whom He had bought by His death and for whom He had shed His blood, and guiding all in my care to the knowledge of God and to the perfection of maturity in Christ.

How great was the joy which flooded my heart when the twelve ministers laid their hands upon my head and welcomed me with the words, "We offer you the right hand of fellowship, to be a companion with us in this blessed ministry."

3. AN EXCHANGE OF LETTERS

3.1. A Brother Seeks Truth

"I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren."
(Romans 9:2,3)

The death of my father in 1936 gave occasion for my brothers and me to re-establish contact. As we exchanged kisses of consolation, a spark of reconciliation was kindled among us.

When I had returned to my house in Homs, I brought my brother, Hassan, with me. He lived with us for a while in an atmosphere of love which Christ had made possible.

Seventeen years passed, and Hassan had become an educated man with a wife and children. During this time, he neglected his relationship with me, and I rebuked him. This caused him to reflect on the days he had spent in my home -- the time when he had been stirred so positively. He sent me the following brief letter:

August 8, 1952

My dear Taufiq,

My mother told me of your annoyance, and you have every right to be angry. Nevertheless, the genuineness of my love and friendship towards you is still strong and can never be changed. No doubt you understand this.

When I remember you, my imagination paints a perfect picture of a true brother. You embody the hallmark of good taste, compassion and loyalty, and your attitudes have never worn thin. You have left a mark on my soul, the traces of which cannot be erased by time. My memories of your character have helped to form my personality. I have found in you a model to emulate. And so your annoyance with me is only a summer's cloud under which I seek shelter without fear. You certainly have the right to rebuke and blame me. I have the right to ask you for pardon. When each has received his right, no anger or disapproval remains.

Sincerely, Hassan

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It appeared that my delay in replying made

dear Hassan think that his letter did not reach me, so he sent a second one, as follows:

September 7, 1952

Dear brother,

Sincere greetings to one whose vitality is his serenity, love and honesty. I beg forgiveness from a brother with such a generous spirit.

Your rebuke reached me some months ago, and I am now writing the second response. I hope you receive it. Love is potent, be it visible or invisible, near or far, and we have received the best portion of it. I beg you not to blame me or think of me as ungrateful. Since my youth, you have been my teacher with an outstretched hand of love. I have witnessed and savoured the values that I saw in you, and I confess my shortcomings toward you in every way. I am incapable of emulating or following you, because I am weak, lacking the ability to model myself according to your example. But despite this, I still love you with a love, pure and true, nurtured in my heart since I have been a boy. I cannot be overgenerous with this love which will end only at death.

Sincerely, Hassan

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I read both of the letters and pondered every word. The adulation for virtues not innately in me was hard to accept. These qualities were of my Lord and Saviour's making; He rescued me from the deception of this evil world. Life was manifested to me, and to be faithful, I had tell of the Lord of Life who willed to give me a new birth by the word of truth (James 1:18). So in keeping with my love for my Redeemer

and Saviour, I wrote to my brother, drawing his attention to God, the Source of the virtues which he admired in me, for "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16):

September 20, 1952

My beloved brother, Hassan,

No, I am not angry with you. My chiding you was one of the sparks of love, the fire of which is quenched in the sea of forgetfulness.

Indeed, I live happily in my small world with a faithful wife and children whom I nurture in the fear and exhortation of the Lord. But the grace in which I stand has not erased the pictures of my larger world from memory -- the world from which I was removed before reaching the age of discretion.

I lived in that world in the shadows of dry, rigid, inflated traditions, having no trace of sacrifice which is the essence of love. Visualise with me the plight of a family living according to faulty customs void of spirit -- those which created deviant emotional complications at home. These difficulties affected us negatively as children, for they stamped our emotions with an instability that reflected the violent outbursts of our four mothers and the negligence of our father! These factors assaulted my innermost being, and I suffered their consequences for awhile, which left me drinking the drafts of a bitter life in various forms. I was a discouraged person with damaged feelings.

The attitudes of my parents swirled like a tide around me -- sometimes high, sometimes low. The random eruptions

from both my mother and father, disguised as concern for my future, buried me under the debris of their emotional warfare.

When I passed from boyhood to adolescence, I viewed life with pessimism and despaired of ever making something of myself. But God's care did not desert me; I had a splinter of faith and confidence in His mercy.

I desired to live in love and harmony with my brothers and sisters. Regrettably, my wish was frustrated by the reality of an environment charged with malice, hate, envy and strife. Being a rebel, I refused to surrender to the bitter reality. I often tried to draw closer to my father's other sons and daughters, but I collided with a high wall of scheming on the part of his other wives -- a barricade which blocked all my attempts. This filled me with grief and unleashed my tears.

As a rebel, I also deserted father, mother, brothers and sisters, seeking love in God's wide world. Divine providence led me to Christ's Church, and it was there that I first experienced genuine love. Thanks be to God who did not leave me to beat the air with my emotions but guided me into the fold of the chosen and beloved, those whom Jesus clothes with "tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, and long-suffering" (Colossians 3:12).

And now, I thank you for the expressions of love which overflowed from your heart. You conveyed your feelings in a wonderful way, but your superlative praise is something I find hard to accept. I magnify the Lord who willed to have mercy on me, granting me a new birth by the infilling of His Holy Spirit.

Brother, I possess no righteousness in

myself. The law of honesty demands that I confess to you that there is nothing good in me. It is God Almighty who illuminated my soul one day with His piercing light. He enabled me to see the wretchedness of my condition.

I knew I was full of things that offended God. I felt a need for cleansing from the filth of sin, so that I could be born anew. I needed to be saved from my inbred selfishness that relished hatred, pride and injustice.

To my joy, the Lord set me in the way of the Gospel of His love. More precisely, He placed the Gospel in my hands. I learned about His love from the person of Christ whom He offered, according to the divine truth: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). I understood this lesson practically from the words of Jesus: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

I was drawn by the power of love. Soon, the "Love Passage," written by the Apostle Paul, became my guideline on every occasion, and I repeated its marvellous cadences with a delight not of this world: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

It was in the school of love where I learned that those who do not do what is right are

not of God; they who do not love have not known God, for God is love (1 John 3:10). These are the requirements of love, and they should be learned and practised by all. If they are, then what was written by the prophet Isaiah will come to pass: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9). No, my brother, I have not forgotten -- nor can I -- for that is impossible. Even if my tongue has grown weak in mentioning your name, you are forever in my thoughts.

There is no need to apologise, Hassan, because Christ has healed my heart of resentment. I have no right to expect an excuse, so do not apologise. This is a form of satisfying the ego, and people have called it a duty. As for my ego, it was crucified and mortified with Christ long ago. As far as I am concerned, the "duty" of forgiveness has become a response of love.

Do not say that I live in a world of idealism and delusion, and do not accuse me of exaggeration. Be kind and understand that my condition is a result of what I have experienced. It is a reality in which I am living, and my soul is fully content. Many have criticised me, accusing me of folly, short-sightedness, apostasy and infidelity. This angered me in the past, but now I am thankful, because by their criticisms and injuries they drove me to re-examine my position. God has helped me in my endeavours, trying me, testing me and guiding me in the paths of Jesus, the Good Teacher, to learn from Him what is true.

I am not philosophising, Hassan. I am one who has the simple faith which is a gift of

God to the poor in spirit and which guards them from the evils of complicated matters. Open your heart to me, so that we can continue our correspondence on the basis of this love. Let us implore God to empty us of our selfishness and fill us with love, for He Himself is love.

Sincerely,

Taufiq

3.2. Love in Action

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58)

After mailing my letter to Hassan, I prayed to the Lord earnestly that it would be received well and that He Himself would accompany the message with His grace. God heard my prayers and granted my petition. On October 15, 1952, I received the following letter from Hassan:

My dear brother,

I have never been so late in writing a reply as I have been this time. The reason for my hesitancy could very well be the result of my wonder at the stages you passed through before you settled down in your life. With amazement, I witnessed your struggle to control and shape your personality, independent of every influence. You scorned every condition and rejected every tradition once you had received the incentive of love which set the tone for the whole of your life.

Love has a profound effect on every man in proportion to the measure he experiences it. In your case, you have had

a large portion as a result of your deep faith in it. In fact, I have noticed that you have utilised love both as a means and an end -- a means to solving your problems in keeping with your inquisitive, wholesome spirit and an end toward attaining peace and deliverance from the shackles of selfishness.

What you mentioned to me of high ideals is not new to me. These were the strong guides in your constant struggle for the peace of heart you sought. I applaud you for each step you took towards building your new world, and I wish you continued blessings and happiness.

Love is undoubtedly the fruit of faith, casting light upon our world and making sweet sacrifices in varying degrees. Indeed, one can only find pure love in a believing soul which ever strives after perfection through self-sacrifice and complete surrender to God. This striving imparts an enlightened will and hearty desire for such sacrifice, free from the inclinations and passions that oppose the noble purpose for which love was created.

Much has been said about you, and I do not doubt your position because you are able to understand things that others cannot. Those who know you and have savoured your character cannot but admire the spiritual strength which has played a large part in shaping your personality, according to the faith which you espouse. I, as one who respects the right of personal choice, feel that you have acted according to the standards you set for yourself.

Ever since you reached the age of maturity and rationality, you have been motivated by a firm belief in your heart. You discovered facts that had eluded you

earlier, and these in turn have brought about a change in your views; then you went on to practise them. Your new faith, as you explained it to me, was proof of your great concern for your soul and your emancipation from an inherited weakness. Thus, you have gained an insight which is immortal in beauty and strong in essence. Only those who, like you, seek distant horizons can aspire to such a lofty height of compassion.

I must confess that my own problems resembled yours. In fact, they were probably more complicated, for I lived lacking almost all sense of paternal security or maternal affection. I was tossed out into the world before my character had been formed and was exposed to every current, whether good or bad. I had to fend for myself single-handedly, both materially and morally, without a father's help, a mother's love or my relatives' compassion.

Instinct and disposition were my leaders -- yet without guidance or direction. Even so, God was good to me, not depriving me of all that you call love. I grew up, by nature, a lover of good. But I must confess that my fractured childhood and youth left me twisted in psychological knots, the early results of which caused me to leave school. Therefore, I did not lay a good foundation for my future.

When our father died, I returned to the village. It was then that you proposed that I should accompany you to your house in Homs. I still remember this because important events are engraved upon the mind and are never forgotten. I recall how we travelled -- me sitting on your lap as far as Tartous and beside you all the way to Tripoli. From there, in the stillness of a

July evening, we travelled on the 8:30 p.m. Homs train, riding second class. On arriving at Homs at 1:00 a.m., we hired a horse-drawn carriage which took us to your house in Hamidieh. Your wife opened the door and welcomed us, and I spent some time among you. For the first time, I lived in an atmosphere of affection and genuine love, which made me forget my former pain and banished my worries. The void in my life seemed finally to be filled. During the two times I stayed with you, I felt as if I were the most beloved and favoured among you. Given the chance, I could narrate the details of those events, for I still relive them at times. Be assured that these memories are among the most precious that I have.

My relationship with you has enriched me, for it has influenced my understanding of the meaning of life. I was a simple youth with limited perception, and since I could not find a noble role model, I always kept your picture near me and imitated you in my actions.

Through your truly noble expressions and stimulating conversation, your gracious example now appears more clear and effectual to me than ever before. The love which resounds from your heart finds an echo in mine. In truth, it is a divine grace that two brothers should share this flame which dispels all darkness of soul, illuminating life's uncertainties.

Love and light are similar in that they both shine, dispelling darkness. I believe that God is love. There is no greater love than that of a man giving himself for the sake of his loved ones.

It would please me, dear brother, if you would continue writing me.

Believe me, my heart beats with your love, and your memory is dear to me. However far we may be from one another, and though circumstances change, I shall keep my love for you because it was nurtured in pleasant circumstances. It now lodges firmly in my soul, and time cannot erase it. I am proud that you are the lofty ideal I have aspired to and the one I have sought to emulate. Thanks be to you, my brother. My greetings and respect rightly go to your wife, and my kisses to the beloved children. I hope you are all well. May God keep you.

Yours sincerely, Hassan

3.3. Love Covers Many Sins

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was in me."
(1 Corinthians 15:10)

Hassan would not refrain from making me the subject of his praise. Once again, I felt a certain shame at being given credit for something that was not intrinsically a part of me. Whatever I have, I have received as a favour from the One who condescended to love me. Thus, I sought to direct my dear brother's eyes to Him, who, with such a vast storehouse of love, is able to extract something sweet and succulent from that which is barren:

October 23, 1952

Dear brother,

Your letter arrived at a time when I desperately needed to hear from you, and it had a very positive effect on my soul. I thank the Lord my God who has given me grace in your eyes. Indeed, your love for

me is so great that it covers my sins and veils my shortcomings. Faced with your noble sentiment which wants to clothe me with perfection and your precious confidence in me despite my wretchedness, I am once again bound to point you to the source of this grace in which I now stand.

I am, O Hassan, like the rest of humanity. I have been guilty of shortcomings and have indulged in the grossest sins during my time of ignorance. I disobeyed the requirements of justice and trod its laws underfoot for awhile. But God, the Lord of compassion and every consolation, the Source of all righteousness, holiness and truth, has shown great mercy towards me. He soothed my misery and showed me the way to Jesus, the Shepherd and Bishop of souls. Jesus is the Word which, since the beginning, was with God and became incarnate, dwelling among us for a time, doing good, and healing all who were under Satan's authority, in accordance with the words: "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). About this divine person, the Apostle Paul wrote: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

Thus by laying down His life for humanity, He revealed the attributes of God, so rich in love, compassion and every kindness. Yes, the love of God has

appeared, and people everywhere have experienced the God who came as a Man into our world, carrying the heart of God, declaring that God is love. This love did not consider it improper that the Holy and Righteous One, the King of Kings, should endure trials and pain in a hard existence and humble circumstances. He bore all this in order to save people from the bondage of sin and to release them in liberty as children of God. He saved me, a sinner, personally and granted me an inheritance with the saints in everlasting light.

Dear Hassan, rest assured that Christ's message was not just a list of tenets designed to elevate the social standard of His people or a slate of political rules for unifying the nation and expanding its vital sphere, as has been the case with thinkers and leaders of nations down the ages. Rather, it was a creative act, raising the spiritual and ethical level of all who receive Him.

As for His teachings, they are a code of love in all things. Thus, they serve as an incentive for those who already lean toward goodness, crystallising their aims and propelling them in the path of perfection. They are also positive in that they convict of sin and reclaim those who are disposed toward or practising evil by winning them over to paths of righteousness.

Jesus presented His teachings to the people in a framework of a wonderful, practical love which led Him to lay down His own life for others. In His life of true holiness, none was able to convict Him of sin. In His ministry, attested by supernatural power, He demonstrated clearly that He was a wonderfully unique person. How true are the words of the great prophet

Isaiah, seven centuries before His incarnation: "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).

How could Jesus be anything but unique? He had been conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin. Thus, He was matchless in His birth. He is the eternal Word of God; this is attested by the inspired Scriptures: "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:3-5).

He is the Son who is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of His person, upholding all things by the word of His power, sitting down at the right hand of the Majesty on high after He by Himself had made purification for our sins (Hebrews 1:3). In order to redeem and save man, He humbled Himself and took on a human body, being born in a manger, because there was no other place for His mother to deliver Him. Thus, He was without parallel in His humility.

The earth in its fullness, the world, and all that dwells in it is His (Psalm 24:1). Its treasures and elements are in His hands and at His disposal. With a word from His mouth, He fed several thousand on merely two fish and five loaves of bread (John 6:1-13); yet He Himself often slept on an empty stomach, and more than once He suffered from pangs of hunger.

He was matchless in His self-denial, not

having a shelter where He could stay or a refuge to which He could resort. To a disciple who had resolved to follow Him, He declared that "foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Luke 9:58). He left His glorious throne surrounded by ministering angels and came into our world of misery and pain, living among a despised group of fishermen and tax collectors. In this circle of extreme lowliness, He refused to be waited on by anyone, for He said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

So extraordinary was He in His lowliness. He mixed with sinners and evildoers, ate with them and spoke to them -- all with the view of raising their spirits and lifting them up from their fallen state, restoring their self-respect by forgiving them their sins. When He was criticised by the religious leaders for associating with sinners, He said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Matthew 9:12,13).

The Lord of glory was wonderful in His poverty. He humbled Himself to such a degree that He renounced all possessions, not even having a plot of ground for burial; this prompted a rich man to offer his own rock-hewn tomb.

As He went about dealing with the problems of society, He solved each of them with patient love. He never judged a wrongdoer for his wrong or a villain for his villainy. Instead, He offered all who came to Him forgiveness, grace for

repentance, holiness of life and a place with Him in the life to come.

Witness a woman caught in the act of adultery, confronted by a group of scribes and Pharisees intent on stoning her. Each of them most likely cursed her and applauded the law which convicted her. They gathered around her, their own eyes darkened by their evil deeds, not seeing the spectre of their own sins. Their bloodthirstiness deafened their ears to the cries of one who, in her misery, begged for mercy. Jesus faced this malicious group with holy anger raging in his heart. His hatred of such despicable hypocrisy sanctified His wrath. Had the Pharisees truly been guardians of virtue, they would have also brought the unchaste man who was just as guilty. The Author of the law and commandments looked at them squarely. As the Judge of all the earth, He said, "He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first" (John 8:7).

His words fell on them like a whip, singeing like a flame of fire. No doubt, they were afraid, and their knees knocked together. Each looked at his neighbour, expecting him to begin the stoning, but all were mistaken in what they anticipated would happen. Their hands trembled, dropping the stones. One after the other slunk away, beginning with the eldest. Yes, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye the judges had become the accused because a shaft from the light of God had shone, piercing their innermost secrets and exposing their private lives to be full of wickedness and lust.

O Hassan, who can say that he is without sin? Is it not written in the Psalms: "Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or

who may stand in His holy place"? (Psalm 24:3).

The scribes and Pharisees scorned that woman's deed and regarded her as worse than themselves. Indeed, a corrupt human heart enjoys discovering one which is more evil. People of this sort are furthest away from mercy. Their own consciences protest when a fallen person is shown pity. They overlook the fact that God's heart is rich in pardon. His great love draws a sinner with compassion, and He quickens the fallen through forgiveness.

The accused woman was indeed guilty. Her offence was noted by a group of those who adhered to the letter of the law which kills. They had no pity in their hearts for those who broke the law of Moses. However, when faced by the Holy One, they were unable to execute the punishment they had planned. The Lord placed one condition on them: He who was without sin among them was to throw the first stone. In this way, He stripped them of their authority over the law, because they themselves were shown to be wicked transgressors.

When all had left, that unfortunate woman found herself face to face with Him who was without sin -- He who was wholly entitled to throw the first stone. But to her joy, she learned that He who was without sin was also the Saviour who had come to seek and save that which was lost. His response to her, full of mercy and truth, is recorded for us in the Gospel according to John: "Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:10,11). He said this to show that knowledge of God implies more

than punishment and that "there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

It is obvious, my brother, that Christ did not overlook her deed; neither did He belittle her sin. But He gently reminded her of her wrong and showed her that His kindness, tolerance and patience leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Thus, His forgiving her was the surest means for her to break the bondage of her past.

What shall I tell you of the work of Christ among the sorrowing whom He comforted, lightening their woes and wiping the tears from their eyes? What shall I say of the persecuted in this world, the afflicted, the outcasts? All this would require a long time to relate. But what I can tell you is that Jesus, my Saviour, the Loving One, came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. He is my great High Priest who entered God's Holy of Holies after sacrificing Himself for me. He secured the legal requirements for forgiveness through the blood of His cross. This is the Redeemer about whom the prophet Isaiah wrote:

"Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:4-6)

This is the Redeemer who met me and declared His love for me, despite my many misdeeds and hideous sins. He spoke His word to me, which captivated my soul and

filled my heart with faith, hope and love. Thus, I was drawn to His cross, "for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

I once wandered through the desert of life with a keen hunger for righteousness. My desire was one which none of the world's religions could satisfy. In my soul, I had a great thirst for truth -- a craving not quenched through any human teaching. But the Lord stopped me and said: "...Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 4:14; 6:51).

Yes brother, this is my Jesus, my Beloved, my Saviour and the Bishop of my soul. He stood by me at a time when I was deprived of a father's love and when, in the morning of my life, my mother's face frowned at me. He stretched out His precious, nail-pierced hand and wiped the tears from my eyes. In that darkest of nights, when the light of love from my brethren was hidden, He said to me: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). He is the Mediator of peace between earth and heaven, and He has reconciled me through His substitutionary death for my sins. He then refined me in the crucible of His love, making of my wretched self a new creature in accordance with the words of the Apostle Paul: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a

new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). He took away my sin, for He paid the price for it after suffering in my place on the cross. He satisfied divine justice and cancelled my punishment in hell, which I deserved for every idle word spoken and every wicked thought entertained in my mind.

Dear Hassan, my heart now overflows with many thoughts on the subject of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ. But the scope of this letter prevents me from mentioning them all. I hope we shall have an opportunity to meet personally. Then I can tell you face to face of the many spiritual experiences I had since I met the Redeemer who has given me true life and immortality.

Sincerely, Taufiq

3.4. I Believe

"All the saints greet you." (2 Corinthians 13:13)

Before I mailed my last letter, I asked a few of my close brethren to fast and pray with me, so that God's Holy Spirit might accompany the message to Hassan's heart. Accordingly, the Lord honoured the prayers of faith. Before long, I received a reply bearing the glad tidings of how he had been affected by the message of love:

January 10, 1953

My dear brother,

Your last letter has occupied all my days, filling my thoughts and gripping my imagination. In it, you tell your story, including significant confessions, hopes and aspirations in this life with its

bittersweet experiences, difficulties and humiliations. You endured all until you arrived at your present position in which all your psychological problems have been resolved. You now have rest from what had alarmed and wearied you. You are truly a self-made man entirely, both materially and morally. You can be proud at having shaped your own personality through your experiences, trials, investigations and inquiries. You have not spared yourself any effort at arriving at the highest degree of perfection attainable.

I read your letter many times over, and each time I found a freshness and magnificence in it. I sensed in its expressions your tranquil soul, born of love and purity. It conveys the noblest of human emotions and the grandest tokens of love and dedication. Your confessions have made me more attached to you. I am determined to continue keeping you as my highest example -- which you have already been these many years. Your claim to be weak and wretched has only raised you in my estimation.

The thoughts and feelings which you communicated to me through our brief association have had a deep impact on my character. You have smothered me with affection, love and generosity; the years cannot erase this. And now you display your love and sincerity in the form of teachings and truths as you did one year previously, when you wrote me a similar letter which I have kept and will keep forever. I return to it from time to time for inspiration and insight. I long to drink from it your tender spirit and purity of motive.

Spiritual conviction is one of the graces unavailable to most people. Actually, I do

not consider a person as having attained personal contentment unless he is sure of his soul's salvation and knows that he will meet his Lord with a pure heart. Happy is the man who reaches this goal, having obtained righteousness, being saved from doubts and fears. Among the roads leading to one's spiritual elevation are those within the realm of religion and philosophy, for the pious and the wise rank highest and happiest among men. Religion can be considered as high philosophy capable of helping man realise spiritual bliss, even though it causes one to exceed the bounds of logic at times.

I, like you, believe that a man is only illuminated through love. He cannot triumph over his pains and hardships without inspiration from God. You yourself once roamed the wilderness of life alone, being deprived of parental love and scorned by your next of kin. It seems as though God wanted to deliver you from your trials by allowing you to fall into despair, only to show you the face of your great Saviour, Jesus. You heard Him say to you: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). Your spiritual hunger and thirst were great when Jesus met you and showed you pity, saying: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). It was then that you grasped the new life in view of that great light which appeared to you. You rushed to seek that heavenly bread, so that you could be filled once and forevermore. You were reborn as a new creature with a new spirit, according to the apostolic words: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed

away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

I do not doubt that you have arrived at the peak of personal contentment in the shadow of these vital teachings. I applaud and congratulate you for this gigantic step and for the approval and acceptance you have found. The path toward stability and immortality -- the things most people lack -- was illuminated for you. I will not hide from you my own failure to arrive at the contentment I am seeking. This requires inspiration, which I lack.

In many ways, our troubles have been similar, stemming from the same cause, for we both lived away from our mothers and father and we both have tasted the bitterness of deprivation in all its forms. But you have been able to find the road to happiness. You had someone to wipe your tears, ease your loneliness and lift you up when you stumbled. After passing through the greatest spiritual tribulation, you have finally surrendered to joy and contentment. As for me, I have not been as fortunate.

What impressed me most was your conviction and firmness -- no doubt the result of your numerous experiences in light of what was revealed to you. I wish a situation would arise that would help me understand exactly what it is from your argument that still eludes me.

I was pleased to hear what you told me about yourself, not concealing any delicate matters. You admitted your sins as a penitent, without negative emotions and without recalling memories that arouse confusion. As your faith grew and your thinking became sound, you gained victory over your weak points. You espoused divine love after testing its

wholesomeness.

It gives me joy to be the object of your trust. You are revealing to me that which delivered you from blackest darkness to another world -- one in which the standards of love, self-sacrifice and faith reign.

You enchant me with topics that engage my mind and stimulate my deepest feelings and emotions. Thanks to you, my brother, for you are relieving my intense thirst. I acknowledge the spiritual guidance and glorious truths which you are revealing to me.

I believe much of what you are sharing with me -- indeed all of it. I believe that Jesus is Himself God, and as such He is almighty. His birth is power; his feeding the thousands on two fish and five loaves is might; His raising the dead is force; His healing the mute man and the leper is strength. Nothing is impossible for Him!

I would like you to tell me more about His death and crucifixion whenever it is convenient, for I do not understand these great themes sufficiently. Please enlighten me on these momentous events.

Your dear wife has never changed her attitude towards me since the time we first met. She has been like a mother and sister to me whenever I have stayed with you in Homs and Latakia. Nothing pleases me more than to remember those days when I accompanied her wherever she went, whether at home or market, by day or night, or when helping with the children. No other mother could have cared for me as she. No sister could have understood me the way she did. These special memories fill me with joy each time I think of them. I hope that your dear wife, my beloved

sister, is happy to hear my good news. I hope you are all well.

Sincerely, Hassan

3.5. The Cross is a Reality

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself." (John 12:32)

I read Hassan's letter, and my soul was filled with a joy that cannot be described by the pen of an ordinary writer. How could I be anything but exuberant over the Word of Life touching his heart and drawing him to the Saviour whom he confessed to be Master, Teacher and Guide! I sat down and began to pen the following lines:

January 9, 1954

My dear Brother,

At a time when I was yearning for some comfort from heaven, your esteemed letter arrived. It filled my soul with joy unspeakable!

What greater comfort can I have than to know you are prepared to exchange the inherited bonds of tradition for the freedom of the children of light -- that you should listen with me to the voice that says: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

What greater consolation than to know the Word of Truth is finding a place in your emotions and affecting your soul -- that faith should lead you to a knowledge of Jesus in His divine and wonderful love! What greater contentment than to realise you should be attracted by the power of God's sacrificial love, that you are seeking

spiritual peace in the shadow of the cross, the most overwhelming representation of God's love for man! And what greater privilege than that God should entrust me with your confidence in explaining the subject of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that I can respond to your wish as far as my humble knowledge is able, clarifying for you what you find unclear about the death of Christ!

My precious brother, the subject of the cross is a very solemn one. Before examining it in detail, it is necessary that I begin by mentioning some essential events in the Bible which involve the love of God in the salvation of man.

The Holy Scriptures teach that God created man in His own image -- in righteousness, holiness and truth -- and that He made a covenant of life with him on the basis of full obedience to His laws. A passage from the book of Genesis reads as follows:

"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 time in the Paradise of God, in a supremely pure environment, enjoying spiritual communion with Him. This fellowship filled the heart and mind of Adam with joy. He was innocent and this attribute is precious to the heart of

God. He was also pure and this condition comes from an anointing of the Holy Spirit. He was a believer and faith is the hand that receives God's blessings. He was righteous and righteousness is the essence of God's light.

The Lord God, however, permitted Adam to be tempted concerning whether he would choose to maintain his proper place of submission, obedience and fidelity. There was one command placed upon Adam, which set the limit between what he could do and what he should refrain from. God wished to teach him that there is a barrier between what is allowed and that which is forbidden, and that it is sin to cross it. God used a symbolic approach, namely, a tree with forbidden fruit.

The test came as a temptation from Satan. He approached the first woman, Eve, as a counsellor, interested in the well-being of the first family. He confronted her with a question seemingly simple, but lined with deceit: "...Has God indeed said, `You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1). It was as if this deceiver were saying, "Is it reasonable that God, who lavished so much love upon you, surrounded you with such care and gave you so much joy, should really forbid you to eat from every tree in the garden?"

Our first mother was beguiled by the cunning way in which Satan asked this question. It even made her distrust the wisdom of the first command. Under the influence of doubt, she replied, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, `You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die'" (Genesis 3:2,3).

Eve, prompted by mistrust, twisted the words of God by adding, "nor shall you touch it." This addition made her guilty of a serious offence -- that of distorting the Word of God. To increase her doubt regarding the integrity of God's command, Satan said to her, "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Thus, the Deceiver's words sounded reasonable and convincing. He made it appear as if God had restricted them by an unreasonable warning, preventing them from being equal with Him in knowledge. Doubt flooded the woman's heart, and before long she succumbed to the deceit from the enemy of good. She noticed that the fruit was good to eat and attractive to the eyes, so she took some, ate of it and gave to her husband as well: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate. 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" (Genesis 3:6,7).

Thus, the first couple fell -- Eve, because she doubted the goodness of God's command, broke it and involved her husband in her sin; Adam, because he trampled God's covenant, overstepping his bounds and trespassing (1 John 3:4). And since the wages of sin is death, according to the law of God (Romans 6:23), both offenders fell under punishment, in keeping with the divine warning they had been given: "...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 2:17). The meaning of death here is not the disintegration of the body in the grave, but that of the soul in hell -- an eternity spent in a lake of fire. The prophet Isaiah gives us a glimpse of the torments of hell: "And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Isaiah 66:24).

Adam fell and came under the bondage of the law, so God told him: "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 herbs 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). God then drove him out of the garden of Eden, and he and his wife laboured and toiled in pain. They had children who, in turn, were also barred from Eden, having lost an inheritance in Paradise.

It is understandable that the offspring of Adam and Eve would be weakened as a result of inbred sin on an earth cursed because of man. Our first parents did not merely become sinners themselves; they transmitted their sin to their children through the process of succession. This is confirmed by the Apostle Paul: "Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12).

Consequently, we cannot say that Adam's sin did not reach us or that every person is born with the unhampered ability to choose only good, owing to no trace of his parent's sin in him. I do not understand how some can hold to this view so tenaciously when the truth of the Bible refutes it plainly.

Adam was a representative of the human race. All the promises which God gave him were for him as well as his descendants. Thus, when judgement was pronounced, the earth was cursed for his progeny too. They were also destined to eat bread by the sweat of their brow. Death was to have power over them as it did over him. Also, the punishment of pain during childbirth, decreed for Eve, has been experienced by her daughters down the centuries. The blind poet, Abu Al Ala' Al Maari, realised the inherited sin-nature of man when he wrote: "This my father inflicted on me, and I have inflicted nothing on anyone."

If we can see that heredity affects all forms of life to a great extent, why do many find it difficult to acknowledge the effects of our first parents' disobedience on mankind? Human experience in every age and epoch cries out continuously with David, son of Jesse: "The boastful shall not stand in Your sight" (Psalm 5:5). The Apostle Paul understood the inherent corruption of the human heart and the inner battle we experience when we seek to do good:

"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. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:14-24).

The eminent English scholar, Huxley, has said something to the effect that he knows of no study which has come to a more wretched conclusion than that of humanity. From behind the darkness of history it became clear to him that man is subject to a force that controls him with colossal power; he is a weak, blind prey to forces that lead him to destruction, a victim of endless delusions that make his intellectual existence a heavy burden, destroying his body with sorrows and troubles. For thousands of years he has been the same: fighting and persecuting, only to return to mourn the victims and build their tombs.

Does one need these testimonies in order to appreciate the essence of their messages? Is it not sufficient for man to look into the depths of his soul, perceiving his inclinations and passions, to know that the law of sin dwells within him?

It is enough to look at society in order to sense this reality that resides within humanity. The Bible says:

- The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none

who does good (Psalm 14:1).

- All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way... (Isaiah 53:6).
- They have all gone out of the way; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practised deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways; and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3:12-16).

Yes indeed, the presence of sin in the human heart is a reality which only the self-deceived can deny. The corruption of human nature is obvious: man fails to uphold morally what he himself knows is true and proper, even after he repents. He is bound to fail in every attempt at virtue unless he receives the help of God through the Holy Spirit. Man's spirit is not undefiled, as was Adam's before he fell.

Even a casual examination of human villainy down the ages is enough to convince us that man has lost his innocence. He is thoroughly permeated by corruption. We see the first manifestation of man's inherited fallen nature in the first murder when Adam's son, Cain, slew his brother, Abel. And why did Cain murder Abel? Was it not because he was evil? Why do we fight one another? Is it not because of the evil rooted in human nature? Why does one nation go to war against another? Is it not a result of individual evil on a collective scale?

3.5.1. The Wages of Sin

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23)

Adam and Eve died spiritually when they fell, as is evidenced by their separation from God. Thus, they forfeited spiritual fellowship and a relationship of beauty, sweetness and holiness with their loving Creator. Because they lost their desire to stand in His presence "in the cool of the day," they hid from Him among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8). They hid themselves because of sin, as it is written: "...Your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

How frightening was the just verdict which God had issued: "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 2:17).

But is all hope lost? Is there no chance for man to return to his lost Paradise and forfeited purity? No! Hope is not dead, nor will it expire; for God is beneficent. God's love is bountifully kind and lavishly merciful. This rich benevolence actively sought man's deliverance in a wonderful redemption through which He bought us back to Himself.

3.5.2. The Love of God Intervenes

Since God is perfect in His attributes, among which are infinite justice and righteousness, the disobedience of man merited eternal death. However, as with His justice and righteousness, His love is also wonderfully infinite, knowing no

limits in the breadth of its capacity to forgive. God has expressed His love in this way: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness I have drawn you" (Jeremiah 31:3).

This bounteous love of God provided man with an answer to his weakness and need for salvation; thus, the impotence of man elicited God's compassion. God's heart of love is revealed in the Old Testament: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

From the beginning, this amazing love was the Word of God which, at the proper time, took on human flesh -- Jesus, who redeemed man according to God's promise of a Saviour that would come from the seed of a woman (Genesis 3:15). This blessed promise pervaded Old Testament prophecies and visions until it rested in the heart of Jesus on the cross of Golgotha where He redeemed man by shedding His precious blood to atone for the sins of the world.

Sir John Prentice, the famous lawyer, added the following words in his closing defence of a certain accused:

"I have read in a certain book that God in His eternal counsel asked Justice, Truth and Love, 'Shall I create man?' Justice replied, 'No; he will flout all Your laws and commandments.' Truth replied, 'Do not create him because he will be offensive, always going after falsehood, speaking lies.' Then Love spoke out: 'I know that these things will happen; however, despite man's evil and

corruption, I will undertake his cause and lead him through the dark until I bring him back to You."

Indeed, God created man in the best form, but he fell when he pursued falsehood, becoming preoccupied with evil. But God's love mercifully provided a full, eternal salvation for man who was shown its necessity, its inevitability, the way to it, how to receive it and the results of accepting it in this world and the next. Hopefully one day, after this life is past, we shall come to fully understand what is meant by redemption.

Let me now take you back to the Genesis story, so that we can ponder together what God's love has done to cover up the nakedness of Adam and Eve. The precious Book says: "Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). No doubt, this action necessitated the slaying of some animals in the garden, thus setting the pattern for the redemptive blood-sacrifices which were practised in the Old Testament. These were symbolic of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who bore the sins of the world by sacrificing Himself. We know from the Scriptures that the blood sacrifice offered by Abel was a foreshadowing of the coming redemption. But nonetheless, this deed was acceptable to God -- indeed, inspired and prompted by Him (Genesis 4:4).

The ram which God provided for Abraham as a redemption for his son, Isaac (Genesis 22:1-14), was likewise a symbol of the great redemption which He had prepared from eternity by the sacrifice of Christ. Also, the Passover lamb, which God instructed the Children of Israel to offer in Egypt (Exodus 12:1-42), was a clear

picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain. Witness the words of 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).

3.5.3. The Nation's Experiences

The Israelites of the Old Testament lived under the Mosaic law for over one thousand years. This law instilled in the ancients an idea of atonement for sins by means of offering crops and animals and it meted out severe punishments for offenders because it was also a means of justice and retribution. We find the following verses in the precious Book:

- "Cursed is the one who does not confirm all the words of this law." And all the people shall say, "Amen!" (Deuteronomy 27:26).
- And say to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: Cursed is the man who does not obey the words of this covenant" (Jeremiah 11:3).
- O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? (Galatians 3:1).
- For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumbles in one point, he is guilty of all (James 2:10).

Since no one has been able to keep the whole law, it is evident that the curse has descended upon all: "For all have sinned

and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). We learn that the law is unable to confer righteousness on us, because its function is only to present a standard of perfection. One can liken it to a mirror that shows us the dirt in our eye but cannot remove it. Along these lines, the Apostle Paul declares: "But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore, the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:22-24).

And so, my brother, when man was incapable of keeping the law, God was moved with compassion for him. He took away the sin which had marred man's holiness and defaced His image in him. Thus, man was delivered from the curse of the law and the bondage of its letter. He was set free in accordance with the words of Christ:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18,19).

In this connection, the Apostle Paul says: "For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans

7:5,6).

3.6. The Incarnation

"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up in glory." (1 Timothy 3:16)

In the past, men of God realised that people are weak and that the law cannot bring healing from the disease of sin. Therefore, they looked for a remedy other than sacrifice and burnt offerings. It is written in the New Testament that the gifts and sacrifices offered at the temple were not able to clear the conscience of a worshiper (Hebrews 9:9). In the book of Isaiah, it is written: "'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 and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts?'" (Isaiah 1:11,12).

During this period, God revealed to His faithful servants that He had prepared an effective way of salvation by means of a peace mediator who would come in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4) and perfect forever by the offering of Himself all who believe in His name (Hebrews 10:14).

Consider Job who was beset with the worst kind of trials and most horrible afflictions. He, in his most wretched hour of need, caught a glimpse of the Divine Mediator and deeply longed for His intervention before God: "Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his

hand on us both" (Job 9:33).

Isaiah, with the eye of prophecy, saw the Messiah, born of a virgin and called Him Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14). He also called Him by other divine titles: "Wonderful, Counsellor, Almighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). He then expanded on the redemptive work that He was to perform:

"He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was taken from prison and from judgement, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked -- but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge my righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:3-12).

The account of Saul of Tarsus (who later became Paul the Apostle) is also highly inspiring. After striving for righteousness by the law, he sought the mediator of whom Moses and the prophets spoke, seeking deliverance from his body of sin and death. This mediator, Jesus, met him on the road to Damascus, delivering him from the letter of the law which kills, freeing him with liberty in the law of life. He wrote the following testimonies out of his own experience:

- I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin (Romans 7:25).
- For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

Consider also the following verse from the book of Hebrews:

- [Jesus] became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him (Hebrews 5:9).

The basis for the work of redemption is the Incarnation, the pivotal topic in the Holy Scriptures and the subject of the many divine prophecies filling its pages. These revelations began with general signs of a deliverer who would come to save mankind in the fullness of time. He was to be a great blessing to all nations. The details concerning Him became clearer and clearer with the passing of time, starting with the mention of the seed of a woman, then the seed of Abraham, then the tribe of Judah, then the House of David and finally His birth by a virgin. In these revelations, it is said that He would have extraordinary attributes and that He would redeem a chosen people for Himself, for whom He

would be ruler and king (Isaiah 9).

In these statements, it is amazing that some very unusual and intricate details are given. These are impossible to attribute to human ingenuity. Among them is the precise place of His birth:

- But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).

It is also said that He would be both lowly and glorious:

- There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:1,2).

He would be a king; yet with humility, not visible glory:

- Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).

Incredibly, He would also be Priest:

- The Lord has sworn and will not relent, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4).

The most magnificent words concerning the Incarnation are found in the inspired prologue of the Gospel according to John:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world. He was in the world, 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, even 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. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, "This was He of whom I said, 'He who comes after me is preferred before me, for He was before me.'" And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:1-18).

Thus, the Incarnation is indubitably supported by the Book of God which teaches that it was the means used by the eternal Word to redeem mankind: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

And now dear brother, allow us to accept with meekness the specific declarations recorded for us in the Bible about the appearance of the Word in flesh. The Scriptures are presented to us not on

tablets of stone like the law but on precious pages that reveal Christ to us personally. This is indeed comforting. How thankful I am to God that the Gospel, which I received and in which I stand and am saved, did not come through a human mediator; neither did an angel bring it down to Christ on a preserved tablet; nor did God speak to Christ from a secluded position, as He did with Moses when He gave him the Ten Commandments at Sinai. The Gospel or Good News is Christ Himself, in keeping with the Scriptures: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds..." (Hebrews 1:1,2).

Therefore, dear brother, the Gospel is the eternal Word of Life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life -- 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 1-3).

Jesus upheld his unity with the Father; this is what He personally declared and taught:

Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also."... Then they said to Him, "Who are You?" And Jesus said to them,

"Just what I have been saying to you from the beginning. I have many things to say and to judge concerning you, but He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him...When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:19,25-26, 28-29).

This is the Gospel, my precious brother: the good news of the united work of God and Christ. It teaches us clearly that the Incarnate Word was the embodiment of what He came to convey to us. He Himself said: "He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:9).

The Word, which was with God from the beginning, came down from heaven as a revelation of God, dwelling in Jesus. Thus, He could say: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). This truth was also revealed to the Apostle Paul whose only ambition was to know Christ: "But 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 3:8). This apostle went on to exhort the believers at Ephesus to strive after the same goal, emphasising that the purpose of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is unity in the faith, maturity in the knowledge of the Son of God, and attainment to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13).

This is the truth of the Incarnation. In the Bible, it is described as God being

manifest in the flesh (1 Timothy 3:16). Thus, it differed from the laws of nature which govern physical birth. It was the appearance or revelation of the Word, indicating that what took bodily form had previously been veiled or hidden, for "no one has ever seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). In heaven, He dwelt in unapproachable light and no one could see Him (1 Timothy 6:16). On earth, however, He became incarnate, taking on the form of a man. But when he did appear, there was no change in His nature, for He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation (Colossians 1:15).

What truly floods the soul with joy is how the inspired Word explains the purpose of the Incarnation; namely, to undertake reconciliation between heaven and earth. And although this unveiling of the One whom no one had ever seen is almost too wonderful for the human mind to grasp, it is yet the clearest expression of God's grace and truth in His dealings with mankind: "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

When we study the Gospel in depth, we learn that the purpose of the Word becoming incarnate is that He should serve as mediator between God and man:

- For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all... (1 Timothy 2:5,6).
- Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to

Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them and has committed to us the word of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

Those who ponder the writings of John the Evangelist will notice how the Holy Spirit takes pleasure in repeating the message about the redemption completed by Christ. He reveals that the purpose of the Incarnation was to take away sin and to overturn the works of the Enemy of souls, the great Deceiver:

- And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin (1 John 3:5).
- The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit (John 3:8).

The writer of the book of Hebrews couples the incarnation of Christ with His work of redemption that justifies sinners, saying:

- ...But now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Hebrews 9:26).

All these passages point to the mediatorial role of the Word who became flesh. They make it plain that He is the One who, in the fullness of time, became flesh: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4,5).

He was that same Word who was in the beginning with God. He is an eternal being and His essential relationship as Second Person with the Father is apparent to every

serious student of the Holy Scriptures. The relationship was manifest when He became flesh. None but the spiritually blind and hard of heart can deny this truth.

If you read the divinely inspired writings of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, you can see that he was chosen to reveal the manifestation of life through Jesus Christ. We can see this in his testimony: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life -- 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..." (1 John 1:2). From these inspired words, we understand that the life in Christ was not something new; it was the eternal Word that was from the beginning with God and which became visible. John explains the purpose of its manifestation; namely, that believers might have fellowship with the Father and Son: "...Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). This blessed fellowship is a call to walk in the light: "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practise the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:5-7).

Yes, the life in Christ had been there since eternity. This marvellous truth is upheld in many passages in Holy Scripture:

- The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth... When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep (Proverbs 8:22,27).
- But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2).
- 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).
- Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (John 8:58).

It may very well be that the greatest thing in John's testimony of the Incarnation is the way it was revealed by the love of God which Jesus Christ Himself announced. This love was not something new, but eternal. It remained hidden until it was unveiled in the Redeemer of the world who quickens those dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:5). The beloved disciple writes: "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9).

The truths we have witnessed are of surpassing beauty. By faith, we can gaze upon the Word who, through love, became one with us in flesh and blood, having shared our sorrows and experienced the depth of our misery. He not only pitied us but actually partook of our flesh and became "a Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3). Before He was sacrificed for our sins on the "altar" of the cross, He, the Lamb of God, had borne every form of hurt, mocking, shame and ridicule. He was truly the Holy One in whom dwelt "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9); yet, for our sake He was spat upon, stricken, slapped, kicked, flogged and lastly, crucified on a cross. What awesome love is this! It was manifest in all its fullness and perfection, to the honour of God's great name and the joy of His heart over the salvation of all who believe. How majestic are the words of the Apostle Paul in this connection: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

The Incarnation did not break the eternal bond between Father and Son, nor did it weaken it. This bond remained intact during the Word's becoming flesh, as is attested in the words of Jesus:

- The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand (John 3:35).
- And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him (John 8:29).
- No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John

3:13).

These declarations in themselves would lack substance, had they not been supported by miracles which no normal human could do. The wondrous deeds of Christ indicate that His words were those of One who is the radiance of God's splendour and the exact representation of His being, sustaining everything by His powerful word (Hebrews 1:3). We cannot deny the amazing statements about the vital fellowship Jesus had with His Father during His time upon the earth:

- I and My Father are one (John 10:30).
- Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works" (John 14:9,10).

In Scripture, it is recorded that God shared some of His secrets with Abraham (Genesis 18:17); made oaths with him, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 33:1); and did great wonders through Moses; yet none of these men nor any other prophet or angel had authority to say, "I and the Father are one." Indeed, none except Immanuel, "God with us," was able to speak in this way and escape the punishment of God who had said, "I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8). Praise and thanks be to Jesus Christ who has been the Word with God since the beginning, and is Himself God!

On account of His great love to fallen man, He appropriated a human body and offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin, reconciling us to God with the blood He shed on the cross.

What a beautiful vision the Apostle Paul skilfully presented when he wrote to the Philippians about the attitude which was in Christ Jesus. He said: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).

If we are unable to plumb the depths of His wonderful love for us, let us be content to rejoice with David, son of Jesse: "This was the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes" (Psalm 118:23).

3.7. Redemption

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." (Ephesians 1:7)

Redemption is the work accomplished by the Lord Jesus on the cross where He fulfilled the demands of God's law and justice and took the place of sinful mankind, dying for our salvation. In His substitutionary suffering and death, all the due penalty for the sins of humanity was fully satisfied. He met the requirements of divine justice and vindicates all who believe in Him.

The word in the Scriptures that describes the gift of redemption through Christ is

grace. The heavenly Father was under no obligation to show us earthly rebels any mercy. Likewise, the Son was not coerced to become incarnate, fulfilling the function of Redeemer. However, the entire Godhead, rich in mercy and love, held back the punishment of the law and accepted the vicarious sufferings which the Incarnate Word endured on behalf of sinners. The Saviour proclaimed this truth when He said:

- "As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep" (John 10:15).
- "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul helps us understand why the Second Person of the Trinity offered to "empty Himself," take on the form of a man, suffer and bear our sins substitutionally in His body on a cross: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:3,4). In other words, the death sentence we deserved as the "wages of sin" (Romans 6:23) was borne by Jesus, the substitute, as He fulfilled the prophecy which says: "...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

Redemption guarantees forgiveness and the blessings of salvation to those who believe in God, because:

1. *It was promised to all believers as a result of Christ's obedience and sufferings:* "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).
2. *It satisfied the demand of God's justice, being based on the eternal covenant between Father and Son regarding the redemption of man.* This is recorded for us in the inspired, written Word, so that we need not doubt: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, `Behold, I come; in the scroll of the Book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart'" (Psalm 40:6-8; see also Hebrews 10:5-7).

Thus, Jesus became incarnate to represent mankind, bearing the judgement for our sins. The Apostle Paul elucidated this subject, saying: "...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

You might ask me why God chose this particular method. I would answer by saying that Scripture emphasises how man fell under the curse of the law, owing to his failure to keep its precepts by reason of the inherited law of sin in his soul. Because sin entered the world through a perfect man (Adam, before the Fall), it was necessary that the "Second Adam" -- Jesus, the Perfect Man -- should remove it.

Since perfection was unattainable by ordinary men, the eternal Word had to become flesh. He became Man in order to mediate between God and man, and this He did on the cross when He died as a redemptive sacrifice for the human race. When He uttered His last words on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30), the veil in the temple, separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, was torn. This veil represented the barrier which sin had caused between God and man. Thus, the substitutionary death of Christ for us on the cross reopened the way into God's presence. This is what Jesus was describing when He said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). This profound truth is also upheld in the book of Hebrews: "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh..." (Hebrews 10:19,20).

Yes, Christ completed the work of redemption through His substitutionary sufferings, which resulted in the justification of sinners. It is written: "...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 3:23,24).

I am presenting to you the following points that explain how redemption satisfies some vital areas:

1. *Personal need.* There is no doubt that salvation is what every person needs, for sin is the lot of the whole human race. It has been truly stated that sin is the common experience of us all. John the Apostle said: "If we say that we

have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

Furthermore, salvation is not just a social need; every individual requires it. There is no difference between black or white, ignorant or learned, rich or poor: "...The righteousness of God is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference..." (Romans 3:22).

In the heart of man there is an innate realisation that repentance alone is incapable of erasing sins. There has to be another way of obtaining full forgiveness; and this way is that of atonement. The deep understanding in man concerning the necessity of atonement for sin is evidenced through the widespread existence of sacrifice among the world's religions since ancient times. Indeed, our own ethical nature leads us to respect the demands of holiness, even though our own conduct is at variance with it. Our consciences cannot rest, owing to the consequences of our sins. There is no way to peace, except by justification through atonement.

2. *Intellectual satisfaction.* God is holy. Man is sinful. Because sin is an offence to God, it has incurred His judgement. Since justification cannot be achieved merely by a sinner's repentance, it is impossible for man to be acquitted, except by his being totally absolved from the power and consequences of sin. Repentance is a

return to obedience, an act demanding confession, penitence, sorrow and brokenness over sin. But repentance, however thorough it may be, cannot remove the consequences of sin because it fails to atone for or expiate it. If it were possible for repentance alone to atone for sin, then there would remain no honour for the justice or holiness of God. Repentance would then merely represent a sinner's own judgement for his wickedness, but it would not duly depict God's estimate of sin, His utter aversion to it and His severe condemnation of it owing to its opposition to His holiness. Repentance, in and of itself, does not truly reveal the hostility of sin to the law and rule of God or its destructive effects on man. Thus, we see the logical necessity of atonement for sins as well.

Suppose you purchased various household articles on credit from a store but had not exercised prudence, thereby incurring debts beyond your ability to pay. This led the storekeeper to deny you further purchases and to threaten with a lawsuit. You then begin to plead with the storekeeper: "My friend, please reconsider your decision towards me. In the future, I will pay cash for all my purchases." Naturally, the storekeeper would welcome cash transactions, but it would be unreasonable for him to cancel what you still owed him. Most likely, he would respond: "Very well, but what about the sum you still owe me? It is in my books, and I am unable to waive it because it is part of my assets."

3. *Legal propitiation.* The divine law is perfect and demands punishment for

those who break it. In fact, any law which lacks punishment for violations is not really a law. The law is like a public prosecutor who is not permitted to waive his demand for punishment in satisfaction of divine justice. If he would, he would be attacked for not being a faithful guardian of divine justice. Therefore, he must demand a severe punishment for an offender or a ransom for his offence.

Suppose some generous friend of yours, who knew the storekeeper previously mentioned, came forward and said: "I am both your friend and Hassan's. It grieves me that his large debt should cause conflict between you. Today I have come to repay his debts in full. Please deal with him on a new basis." What do you think would happen? Would not the shopkeeper be delighted? No doubt, he would be pleased, because this mediation would secure him the debts you owed. In addition, he would gain you as a cash customer from then on.

This story is an illustration of what the Lord Jesus did on behalf of sinners. Through His death which satisfied the demands of divine justice, all who receive Him as Saviour and Lord obtain complete forgiveness of sins. The sufficiency of Christ's atoning work does not imply a similarity between the quantity and quality of His sufferings and those of a sinner; rather, it is a result of His superior status.

Although the obedience and sufferings of Christ were those of a divine person, His divine nature did not suffer solitarily because He had two distinct natures, being God and man

simultaneously. If this principle would not have applied in regard to Christ, then His crucifixion would have been nothing more than the unjust murder of an ordinary man. But even though Christ was different from other men in this respect, the violence that was done to His body affected Him thoroughly, as would be the case with anyone else experiencing crucifixion.

The obedience and sufferings of the Incarnate Word of God have special value, and His righteousness has merited infinite worth. The following words from the book of Hebrews attest to this truth: "For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13,14). How beautiful in this connection are the words of a hymn writer:

**"Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe.
Sin had left a crimson stain;
He washed it white as snow."**

4. *Moral reparation.* is self-evident that man, despite the Fall, has a conscience. This is his moral capacity to differentiate between right and wrong and to acknowledge the superiority of justice and holiness. It judges actions as worthy either of praise or blame. One can call this capacity the voice of God's authority, which He created, having similarities to the commandments He gave on Mount Sinai. Thus, when people are convicted

of sin and cannot find expiation, their consciences are troubled. But this faculty in man, however important it may be, cannot save him from judgement. It can identify evil and even protest against it, but it is unable to justify anyone. The Apostle Paul realised this when he wrote the following:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20).

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24).

Thus, the voice of conscience and feelings of guilt are unable to save anyone from judgement. A mediator is necessary to atone for sin. But despite this necessity, there are those who try to placate their consciences by means of personal piety. They quiet their guilt-ridden inner voice with the hope that their good deeds will somehow appease a holy God and draw out His mercy. This is what most religions suggest for their adherents. For instance, Buddhism exhorts man to strive after perfection without the need of sacrifice, atonement or confession of sin. Likewise, the followers of Socinianism, a sixteenth-century Christian heresy, imagine that repentance alone satisfies divine judgement, eliciting the mercy of God. But the offering of sacrifices down the ages shows the fallacy of such an assumption. The inspired Word puts its seal on this subject by saying: "According to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without

shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

It is true that the sacrifices that were offered at the temple were not able to ultimately clear the conscience of the worshiper (Hebrews 10:2). But thanks be to God for Christ who came in the fullness of time, took on a body and entered the Most Holy Place to obtain redemption for us! This He did -- not by the blood of goats or calves -- but by His own blood, once and for all! (Hebrews 9:12).

Oh, my dear brother, how I long for the sacrifice of Christ to unite us one day in the inheritance of light, so that we can join with the saints and angels in the glorious anthem to the Lamb that was slain: "...You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10).

Indeed, we must not allow ourselves to be deceived by teachings about mercy without redemption. Only in the atoning death of Christ can the opposites of justice and mercy be reconciled. The redemptive death of Christ for us on the cross demonstrates that sinners cannot break God's laws with impunity; but it also shows us the riches of God's mercy. Assuredly, the theme of redemption is a divine paradox: On the one side, it arouses in us a feeling of guilt and fear of punishment, but on the other, it gives us hope in the forgiveness and gracious love of God. He did not desire to

destroy us, but sent His Son that we might live through Him.

If there had been no necessity for redemption, God would not have ordained it. Jesus said that He came to give His life as a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28) and that all who believe in Him can have eternal life (John 3:16). The Apostle Paul wrote: "...When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4,5).

God loves man with a wondrous, infinite and merciful love. This love came to us in Jesus, and it was translated into the redemption that He accomplished for us on the cross. All mankind can now see that God is both just and loving. This amazing transaction arouses the conscience of a sinner and forges a bond between him and the cross which Jesus said would draw all men to Himself (John 12:32).

In his book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan skilfully portrays his main character, Christian, arriving at the hill of Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified. Bunyan writes:

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Up this way, therefore did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back. He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little

below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more. Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, He hath given me rest by His sorrow, and life by his death. Then he stood still awhile to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks... Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing:

**"Thus far I did come
Laden with my sin;
Nor could aught ease
The grief that I was in,
Till I came hither;
What a place is this!
Must here be the
Beginning of my bliss?
Must here the burden
Fall from off my back?
Must here the strings
That bound it to me crack?
Blessed cross!
Blessed sepulchre!
Blessed rather be**

**The Man that there
Was put to shame for me!"**

3.8. The Truth of the Cross

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2:13)

This is the main subject of my letter to you, Hassan, because here I will expound what you have found difficult concerning the death of Christ. It appears to you like a riddle whose answer evades you. Your search, like that of others who have tried to uncover the details of this subject apart from the Gospel, can be likened to someone looking for the living among the dead.

In the previous sections, I submitted brief discourses to you on the Incarnation, salvation and redemption (atonement). This served as an introduction to the subject of the cross -- the "altar" on which the substitutionary sacrifice for the human race was offered.

Some are tempted to say that the cross is a fictitious event and that, if it signified anything, it shows the ignorance of those who believe in it; thus, reason must brand it as folly. To such people, the Apostle Paul said: "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 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 1:21-24).

I have already mentioned to you that the death of Christ demonstrated the law of reciprocation. This principle may be difficult for the purely carnal man to grasp, but it is one of the most fascinating aspects of nature. For instance, wind and rain and other elements disintegrate the rocks, through which process alluvium is released, enriching the soil throughout the earth. Also, the sun expends huge amounts of its energy continually, supplying us with heat and light. Yet another example is the silkworm which, before becoming a butterfly, "dies" to its larval stage; but before that, it leaves behind hundreds of eggs which, in turn, also become silkworms. Jesus made a profound statement in connection with this fundamental principle of nature: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain" (John 12:24).

There are indeed other examples which would show the cross to be the acme of this principle, revealing to the careful investigator the amazing fact that self-giving is the basis of fruit-bearing.

I will now offer you several facts substantiating the death of Christ on the cross:

3.8.1. 1. Historical Evidence:

The Apostle Peter said, "...Prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21). Thus, the Christian faith is founded on facts recorded by writers of the inspired Scriptures and supported by prophecies.

Furthermore, history confirms it, and experience and continuity testify to it.

The reality of Christ's sufferings, crucifixion and death does not depend solely on the testimony of Christians, but is also confirmed by the ancient writings of pagans and Jews:

A. *witness of Tacitus, the pagan.* This competent historian was among the most eloquent orators of his day. Born in AD 55, he joined the army under the reign of Emperor Vespasian from AD 69-79. In AD 88, he became chief justice. He is famous for his historic records and his sixteen volumes of the Roman Empire's annals which trace the chronicles of the Empire from AD 14 to 68. He wrote a separate chapter on the crucifixion of Christ and the bravery of the Christians who derived their courage from their unwavering faith in the cross. He writes that the name Christian was taken from Christ who had been killed by order of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, during the reign of Tiberius.

B. *The witness of Lucian, the pagan.* This historian was born in AD 100. He was a prominent Greek writer and was among the most brilliant and well-versed in the writings of antiquity. His many travels added depth and richness to his commentaries. But since he was of the sect of Epicureans, he could not understand the faith of the Christians or their willingness to be martyred for the sake of Christ; nor could he grasp their spiritual longing for heaven. He ridiculed their belief in the immortality of the soul and considered them a deluded group clinging to the fringes of the world to come, instead of enjoying the present. He wrote: "The Christians still worship that great man who

was crucified in Palestine, because he brought a new religion to the world."

C. *The testimony of Josephus, the Jew.* This man was a famous Jewish historian. Born in Jerusalem a few years after the death of Christ, he documented in twenty volumes the history of the Jewish people from their beginnings until the reign of Emperor Nero, twenty years after the death of Christ. In his writings, he mentions Christ and his forerunner, John the Baptist. He includes a detailed account of the violent death of Christ and its consequences. He wrote: "Pilate condemned Christ to be crucified as a result of the persistence of the leaders of our nation. Those who loved Christ did not turn back from Him but have remained till now. They are called 'Christians' after Him."

D. *The testimony of the Talmud.* The Jews consider the Talmud a sacred book. It was compiled in several volumes which any researcher can consult. In the 1943 edition of the Talmud in Amsterdam, one reads on page forty-three, under the heading Sanhedrin, that Christ was crucified one day before the Passover. Forty days prior to His death, it was proclaimed that He would be killed as a magician and that He intended to deceive and lead Israel astray. An invitation was given to those who wished to defend Him. When no one came forward, He was crucified on the eve of the Passover. To imagine that anyone would have dared to defend Him is absurd, for He was considered a corrupter in the eyes of the Jews; thus, He was to be shown no pity, according to their law (see Deuteronomy 13:6-9).

E. *The testimony of Rabbi Joseph Clausner.* This famous scholar wrote a

book about Jesus of Nazareth. After careful analysis and criticism, he concluded that the Gospel accounts are accurate historic records and that Jesus lived and died as the writings described.

F. *The testimony of Pontius Pilate.* This Roman governor sent a full report to Tiberius Caesar, mentioning the miracles, death and resurrection of Christ. This report, kept in the records of Rome, was later used by Tertullian in his historic defence of the Christians, presented to the Roman governor of North Africa, sixty years after Jesus' death.

3.8.2. 2. Traditional Evidence:

A. *The Christian Passover.* In the traditional Christian Passover or "Lord's Supper," there is tangible evidence which cannot be ignored or belittled, because it is the result of historical continuity. Our blessed Saviour instituted this sacrament, because it would be necessary for all His followers to keep a continual remembrance of His death -- the most important of all events. He commanded His disciples: "...Do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). The continual observance of the Lord's Supper in the Church down the ages is sure proof of the event which it commemorates. The death of Jesus on the cross is a certainty, and the sacrament which honours it is not only proof of that death, but is also a clear testimony to the purpose of that death. When He broke the bread and passed the cup during the Passover meal with His disciples, He said: "This is My body which is given for you... This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:19,20). These words prove that He died as an offering.

For Christians, the Lord's Supper has more than one meaning. It is:

a.) A covenant between Christ and His own in every generation and age. Christ inaugurated the age of grace, mercy and forgiveness with blood. The Jewish Passover was a covenant only foreshadowing the truth of the Lord's Supper.

b.) A continuous fellowship between the Church and Christ who is the Head of the Church and the Saviour of the body of believers. The Apostle Paul wrote: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16). Christ intended this profound sacrament to be the basis of our fellowship with Him.

c.) An expression of thanks. Because Christ blessed the bread and gave thanks for the cup, we thank Him for His great salvation and excelling love which led Him to the cross.

d.) A memorial. Regarding the Lord's Supper, Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." It is necessary for us to know that this memorial is not just an historical remembrance of the crucifixion but also a living, vital affectionate acknowledgement of Christ who is present with us. It is a commemoration of the cross which is real in the lives of believers, according to the words of the Apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

e.) *A permanent witness to the crucified Christ.* Those who participate in the Lord's Supper confess their faith in Christ crucified and renew their allegiance to Him, acknowledging His grace towards them and declaring His death until He returns. Christians throughout the world have observed the command of their Saviour and kept this sacrament which was passed on to them by the apostles. Notice the words of the Apostle Paul on this subject: "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

The apostolic sayings confront us with the following facts:

- Jesus foretold His death, the breaking of His body and the shedding of His blood.
- He really did die on a cross -- the message His disciples proclaimed and passed on to future generations.
- If anyone other than Christ had been crucified, such a person would not have ordained this ordinance or appointed it for future generations.

If you were to ask a Muslim about the truth of a particular belief or the source of any of his precepts, he would reply that the traditional continuity down the years and

generations is itself the best proof. For instance, the pilgrimage to Mecca indicates the existence of an Islamic ordinance that prescribes this practice for those who are able to do it. The Muslim will therefore cite ongoing practice as evidence of the veracity behind the Qur'anic texts on this subject.

It remains for me to give you some historical pointers which abound in Christian writings -- those which confirm that the memorial of Christ's death was observed wherever there has been a Christian presence:

1. *Sacred writings.* The authors of the four accounts of the Gospel describe the conditions under which Jesus ordained this sacrament. When He told them of the painful events that were to overtake Him, they were filled with sorrow. He desired to instil courage in their hearts, so that they would be able to endure the hardships that were to occur. Thus, He ordained the Lord's Supper as a memorial love feast, adding the following words of encouragement: "...You are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30).

He then instructed them to be steadfast in Him, His words and His love, explaining that His love for them was of the same kind as the love of the heavenly Father for Him (John 15:1-9). He commanded them to love one another, saying:

"This is My commandment, that you love

one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name he may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:12-17).

Jesus explained to His disciples that the world would hate and persecute them as it had Him (John 15:18-25). Then, He uttered His magnificent intercessory prayer. Those who wrote the Gospel accounts described what happened during the last night Christ spent with His disciples. Read Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 13, 14 and 15.

Western sceptics have subjected the Gospel accounts to the most stringent critical scrutiny. However, they concluded that the writers were among Christ's oldest associates; several of them ate the Lord's Supper with Jesus. In the book of Acts, we find the first mention of a group that partook of the Lord's Supper after Jesus had already ascended into heaven. Luke, the writer of an account of the Gospel bearing his name, tells us that they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42).

2. Liturgical writings. The Church has numerous books which describe rituals dating back to the first Christian

decade. In them, there is mention of the prayers used during the observance of the Lord's Supper.

3. Church rules. The Church councils have laid down numerous regulations since the Council of Nicaea in AD 325, and all mention the sacrament of the Lord's Supper or Communion.
4. Writings of the ancients. The oldest Christian writings mention this ordinance, setting it out as something to be passed on from father to son. The churches have observed it down the ages as an essential to worship. Among these writers are:

A. Clement of Alexandria (AD 150).

He wrote copiously on the sacrament of Communion. Among his sayings on the subject is the following: "The Saviour took bread, blessed it, then broke it, and gave it saying, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He blessed the cup, saying, 'Take, drink; this is My blood.'"

B. Irenaeus (AD 135). He was trained in the school of Polycarp, a disciple of John the Apostle. This writer mentions the Lord's Supper and explains the relationship between the death of Christ and the bread and wine.

C. Justin Martyr. He died in the first Christian century. This scholarly philosopher, in a defence of the Christians, explains the ordinance of the Lord's Supper in detail. His purpose was to enlighten the heathen on the doctrines of the Christians.

D. St. Ignatius (ca. AD 55). He was a contemporary of John the Beloved and Polycarp, a disciple of this apostle. He wrote a number of letters to the

churches in his parish on the subject of the Lord's Supper. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, he said: "Obey the bishop and the elders with one mind, breaking one bread which is the health of our immortality. For there is only one body of our Lord Jesus Christ and one cup for the union of His blood."

3.9. The Trial of Christ

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth." (Isaiah 53:7)

I will now narrate to you the stages in the trial of Christ, beginning with events that preceded it and influenced its outcome:

1. *The implication of crime.* During the latter half of Christ's ministry on earth, the number of those who accepted His teachings increased; and so the Jewish elders grew fearful. They tried to incite Him against the Roman authorities who then ruled Palestine. When this attempt failed, they tried to make Him violate the law of Moses, which would rouse the nation against Him. Their motive was to have Him commit a crime that would render Him guilty. Christ disappointed them, however. He did not break either the law of Caesar or the law of Moses, but commanded that they should both be kept (Matthew 22:21).

The Jewish high priest, Caiaphas, did not accept defeat. He met with the other chief priests and Pharisees to find a reason for incriminating Christ. When that also failed, some asked: "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone

like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation" (John 11:47,48). Caiaphas then said, "...It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish" (John 11:50). Thus, Caiaphas re-installed the desire of the Pharisees and chief priests to find a suitable crime for which to blame Christ.

2. *The bargain.* Among the twelve disciples of Christ was one called Judas Iscariot, and it appears that he initially loved his Master. However, the love of money and fame got a hold of Judas, making him think he could attain his goals if Jesus were proclaimed king. But when he realised that Jesus had no intention of establishing an earthly throne, he was deeply disappointed -- especially when he heard his Master say that those who followed Him would be exposed to opposition, persecution and even death. When Jesus declared the inevitability of His being delivered to the Jews for crucifixion, all Judas' hopes were dashed. Thereafter, his love for Christ grew cold; this was evidenced at Bethany where he objected to Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointing Jesus' feet. Because the Jewish high priest, elders and Pharisees were a powerful party, Judas sided with them, even though they were enemies of his Master. When this group was conspiring to kill Jesus, Judas went to them and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" (Matthew 26:15). The evil plotters were glad because this traitor was defecting to their side. After some

bargaining, they promised to give him thirty pieces of silver. This was in fulfilment of what was prophesied in Scripture:

- Then I said to them, "If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain." So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
 - ...They sell the righteous for silver... (Amos 2:6).
 - Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver. So from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him (Matthew 26:14-16).
3. *The Last Supper.* The celebrations for the great Passover Feast had begun, and the women of Israel were busy preparing the special bread which is eaten during the eight days of the celebration. The men went to market to select the sacrificial lambs which were to be slain on the first day after the feast. The law prescribed that each household should offer a lamb.

Jesus realised that his hour was near and went to an upper room with His disciples, to eat the Passover Feast with them there. In the evening, He sat down with His twelve disciples. While they were eating, He became greatly troubled. Then He said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me" (John 13:21). This was in fulfilment of the prophecy of betrayal in Psalm 41:9: "Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against

me."

The disciples looked intently at their Master's face. They were greatly shaken and saddened that He would say such a thing or even entertain such a thought. One by one, they asked Him, "Is it I, Lord?" But Judas remained silent. While the others were occupied with this issue among themselves, Judas quietly asked if he was the one. He wanted to know if Jesus had discovered his evil designs. Jesus faced Judas and acknowledged that he was indeed the one (Matthew 26:25), for He knows what is in a man (John 2:25). As soon as Judas took the bread that was handed to him, Satan entered him. Jesus then told him to go quickly and do what he was planning to do (John 13:27). Judas got up and left. And it was night.

In the conversation between Christ and Judas, one notices that the Lord's words were kind. Maybe He wanted to give the traitor a chance to repent of the evil in his heart, even at the last moment. But alas, Satan entered him.

It was during this last supper with His disciples that Jesus ordained the sacrament of the Christian Passover. After He said that He had fervently desired to eat the Passover with them, He took the bread, broke it, and gave it to them, saying: "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). These words were not all that strange to them, for He had said earlier: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh,

which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

When the disciples had eaten the bread, Jesus took the cup and offered thanks, and gave it to them, saying: "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:27,28).

The disciples took the cup reverently and drank all of it. After this, Jesus rose and went out with them into the moonlit night. They proceeded toward the garden of Gethsemane across the Kidron Valley. In the garden, Jesus began to be sorrowful. Then He said to his disciples: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me" (Matthew 26:38).

4. *The traitor's kiss.* Judas the traitor went to the Jewish elders and informed them that Jesus had announced His intention to surrender Himself to be crucified. He added that Jesus had even asked him to hasten the betrayal. Thus, there would be no difficulty in arresting Him and delivering Him to the Roman governor early the following morning before the people of Jerusalem woke up.

Judas knew the place where Jesus often went with His disciples. So he led an armed detachment of troops to the garden, along with the officers from the chief priests and Pharisees. He told them that the One he would kiss was He whom they should arrest and seize (Matthew 26:48). Once he had kissed Jesus, those with the swords and clubs laid hands on Him, taking Him by force. The Lord asked them whom they were seeking. "Jesus of

Nazareth," they replied. "I am He," said Jesus, with an air of authority. John the Evangelist mentions that they drew back and fell to the ground after Jesus had spoken. He asked them a second time whom they were seeking, and again they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied: "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way..." (John 18:8).

The servant of the high priest was among the fiercest assailants, so Peter resisted him and cut off his right ear with a sword. But Christ compassionately healed the ear which Peter had severed. This was in keeping with His command: "Do good to those who hate you" (Matthew 5:44). The Lord reached out His hand and healed the ear of the high priest's servant. Through this miracle, it could be that He intended to convince His captors that they could not have laid hands on Him if He had not allowed it. Then, turning to Peter in disapproval for such a deed, Christ ordered him to return his sword to its sheath, reminding him of the saying: "All who take the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). The garrison then led Him into the city. As for the disciples, they fled the scene.

The fact that it was Christ who was in the garden is reliably attested, for at least three of His disciples were with Him when He was seized. They recorded this in their Gospel accounts, and their witness is true. The fact that the garrison fell to the ground when Christ spoke authoritatively is a vital proof that it really was Christ in all His majesty. Also, no other hand but that

of Christ's could have healed the severed ear of the high priest's servant. Therefore, the belief that he whom the guards arrested was one other than Christ -- one upon whom the likeness of Christ was cast -- is a weak allegation, lacking any evidence. Far be it from God, the truly Holy One, to deceive mankind in this way! Far be it from Christ, the Speaker of truth, to deceive His disciples concerning the inevitability of His crucifixion at the hands of His own people! He Himself had told them time and time again that He would suffer, die and rise again. Is it possible that He would then withdraw and escape, and by a miracle cast His likeness onto another who was killed in His place? How could anyone believe this allegation which would reduce God to a liar and Christ to the level of a murderer, allowing another man to be killed in His stead!

Indeed, it is one of the gravest treacheries for someone to believe that God -- the Holy, Righteous and Just -- while sparing Christ from a shameful death on a cross, allowed millions to be deceived during twenty centuries. Would a loving, merciful and just God permit millions of Christians to be martyred for their faith -- a faith allegedly based on deception? I do not think you could believe that!

5. *The religious trial.* John, in his Gospel account, wrote that the guards led Christ captive to Annas, the former high priest who was a Sadducee. Seven years earlier, wicked Herod had brought Annas up from Alexandria and installed him as high priest. Annas occupied this elevated post for seven years until deposed by the Romans

over his suspect loyalty. This position, after five of his sons had filled it, was given to his son-in-law, Caiaphas. As for Annas, he was one of the chief conspirators against Jesus, because He had done away with his illegal, profit-making commerce in the temple.

After a hasty interrogation, Annas sent Jesus to Caiaphas bound and guarded, with orders that the Sanhedrin should examine Him immediately. This sly man was careful to exclude any moderate Pharisees, so that he could stack a full court with members who were against Jesus. With a death sentence in view, He planned to conduct a hasty trial which would enable him to deliver Jesus to the Romans before sunrise. He would also exert every manner of pressure on Pilate to carry out the sentence before the start of the feast, for no one could be executed during any day of the Passover. This evil ruler got what he wanted. The council met quietly at night in his own home, and the basest trial in the history of mankind took place.

The examination started, and Jesus was asked about His disciples and teachings. It was a loaded question in that it accused Him of having secret as well as open followers and disciples. It also charged Him with having pure teachings which he proclaimed publicly as well as corrupt ones by which He ruined men secretly. But Jesus, although He submitted Himself to His foes, challenged this allegation by saying: "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogues and at the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I

have said nothing" (John 18:20).

This reply angered Caiaphas and upset those of his group who were unused to hearing anything but flattery in the presence of their leader. An evil officer (perhaps Malchus, whose ear had been restored) came forward and slapped Him, saying, "Do you answer the high priest like that?" This slap was not the only offence committed against Christ during His trial, but was one of a series of violations of which the gravest are the following:

- The meeting of the council at night, which was forbidden by the law.
- The sentencing of a man to death, an act which the Romans had denied the Jews for some years.
- The failure to appoint an advocate or defence as well as witnesses, in accordance with the provisions of the law.
- An expression of opinions by the president and some members of the court, aiming to influence the case.
- Insufficient ground for a death sentence. Also, the accusers of Christ had asked for His death some time before the trial. This made the trial a farce.
- The pleasure taken in mocking Christ by the followers of the high priest. This was a fulfilment of the prophecy from Isaiah: "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6).

When Caiaphas failed in his attempt to indict Christ, the Jewish leaders found false witnesses to accuse Him of criminal activities. These witnesses differed in their testimonies, however; so they found two others who distorted the words that He had uttered three years earlier about the destruction of the temple -- that is, His body. They said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days'" (Matthew 26:61).

Jesus did not reply to this accusation, because He saw that this testimony did not deserve rebuttal, being patently absurd. The high priest then resorted to flattery and said, "I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Jesus answered: "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 26:64).

This statement of Christ, a quote from prophecy, affected those present. Caiaphas felt uncomfortable, and his confidence in directing this trial was shaken. So he resorted to a wily theatrical display and tore his clothes, saying: "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?" (Matthew 26:65,66). This incredible charade by the high priest worked, removing hesitancy from the audience. All joined together in demanding His death sentence.

My dear Hassan, you might be thinking that I have digressed from my

subject by expounding these details. But I want you to realise that the purpose of this exposition is to assure you that Jesus was constantly under the scrutiny of His enemies. In His replies during the trial, I want you to see the vindication of His character, especially in what pertains to the prophecies.

6. *Before Pilate.* The council finished sentencing Jesus at about six in the morning. The Jewish elders had stirred up those accompanying Jesus, who were leaving the palace of Caiaphas. They passed through the streets to Pilate's residence and stopped outside. Had they entered the home of a Gentile, they would have been made unclean and thus unfit to eat the Passover. It seems as though they were determined to have Jesus' blood before they shed the blood of the lambs prepared for the feast. When Pilate heard their arrival, familiar as he was with their religious customs, he went out to meet them. When he saw that they had brought a prisoner with them, he asked them what the accusation against Him was.

The high priest and elders had hoped that Pilate would confirm their sentence without examining the reasons upon which the council had based it. Not wishing to be an easy ploy in serving their ends, he disappointed them and inquired. They attempted to dodge the question and cunningly replied, "If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you" (John 18:30). But Pilate insisted that they define the charge which drove them to render such a hasty verdict. They said, "We found this fellow perverting the nation,

and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (Luke 23:2).

They said this rudely, intending again to make Pilate confirm their sentence without examining the real reasons behind it. But Pilate refused to be taken in by their cunning and responded with a blow to their egoism: "You take Him and judge Him according to your law" (John 18:31). He said this sarcastically, wounding their pride, because the Roman authorities had stripped them of the right to pass the death sentence. In the face of this humiliation which struck at the heart of their national honour, they bowed their heads and said timidly, "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death" (John 18:31). In reality, the Jews would have stoned Jesus, had Rome not deprived them of this power. But divine counsel had decreed His death on a cross, and the words of Jesus about Himself had to come to pass: "...As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14,15).

Pilate, although wounding the Jews with his sarcasm, could not ignore their last statement about Christ, since it was political, connected with the emperor. So he called Jesus inside and interrogated Him. This incident is recorded for us in John's account of the Gospel:

"Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself on this, or did others tell you this about Me?" Pilate

answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?" Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here" (John 18:33-36).

Pilate then tried to trap Jesus with a word which he could use against Him. But the Lord of Glory foiled his attempts: "Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I bear witness to the truth'" (John 18:37). Here, it is as if Jesus were saying: "I am indeed a King, but the basis and weaponry of My kingdom is truth. This is the difference between My kingdom and Caesar's."

Jesus then spoke His final words to the tyrannical ruler, which made Pilate feel his seat shake under him; for it seemed to him that the accused, whose life was in his hands, had become the Judge: "...Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice" (John 18:37). By these words, it was as if Christ were telling Pilate, "You are of the false one, and you are unable to hear my voice which is the voice of truth." Thus, the unjust governor realised that to continue questioning Jesus would get him into trouble, so he decided to end the subject with a frivolous question, asking, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). Jesus did not reply.

This examination of Christ by a pagan ruler calls a passage from the Psalms to mind: "Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the

rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 'Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us'" (Psalm 2:1-3).

No doubt, you have noticed that no one but Jesus could possibly have passed such an examination. None other could have caused such embarrassment to a man like Pilate, a governor known for his cunning. In light of all this, can you understand that the claim of another taking Jesus' place, whether willingly or unwillingly, is sheer folly?

7. *Before Herod.* It is recorded in the Gospel that Pilate went out and told the Jews: "I find no fault in Him at all. But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:38,39). Angrily, the leaders shouted back, "He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judaea, beginning from Galilee to this place" (Luke 23:5).

Pilate was attempting to extricate himself from this difficult situation. When he heard that Jesus had been active in Galilee, he was glad. He thought he could be spared further involvement in this case by sending Jesus to King Herod of Galilee. Not only did Pilate think he had found a way out of his dilemma, but he also saw this as an opportunity to win Herod's favour, restoring the relationship between them which had become strained. Thus, he sent Jesus to Herod.

Herod was in Jerusalem at the time, and he received Jesus gladly. He had

wanted to meet Him for quite some time, on account of the miraculous things he had heard about Him. He even hoped that Jesus would perform a miracle for him. But Jesus did not comply with Herod's wish, despite his persistence; neither did He reply to his questions regarding the accusations of the high priest and the Jewish elders. He preferred silence, because His miracles were too noble and holy than to become a device to entertain evil Herod. Also, had He performed a miracle for Herod, He might have been released; but the redemption of mankind, for which He had come into the world, would have been frustrated.

Wicked Herod took Jesus' silence as an insult to his honour and a violation of his authority, so he sought to avenge himself. Luke, in his account of the Gospel, tells us that Herod and his soldiers mocked Jesus, putting a sumptuous robe around His shoulders. Some have said that this was a white robe, the type worn by kings on special occasions. The German scholar, Rosenbach, an authority on Biblical exposition, says that this robe resembled the one used by priests during religious celebrations.

Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate with a word of thanks, because he regarded Pilate's gesture as a sign of esteem. These two then became friends after a long period of hostility.

8. *The end of the trial.* Pilate was determined to set Jesus free. So when he saw that Jesus was returned to him, he gathered the chief priests, elders and the people, and said:

"You have brought this Man to me, as one

who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing worthy of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). And they all cried out at once, saying, "Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas" -- who had been thrown into prison for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder (Luke 23:14-19) ...Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!" Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has he done?" (Matthew 27:22,23) ...From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar" (John 19:12) ...Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15).

With this admission before the representatives of Caesar and the people, the chief priests and elders of the Jews sentenced themselves and their nation to disgrace, misery and spiritual destruction. They had rejected the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who had come to unite all the children of God (John 11:52) and had chosen instead a heathen king. By asking Herod to crucify their Messiah, they left their children a legacy of bloodguilt. It is indeed a shame that hatred worked in their hearts to such a degree that they turned away from Christ who is wisdom from God, righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30).

The downfall of the Jewish nation was that it was saddled with such a clique

of religious and intellectual leaders. So blinded and overpowered were they by their intolerance and material passions that they were plunged into the abyss of error. They chose to have a criminal released to them instead of Christ. Thus, they branded themselves as allies of darkness instead of light, thereby falling under judgement, fulfilling the words of Christ: "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

Faced with the persistence of the Jews, and fearing their threat when they said, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend," the cowardly Pilate trembled. He washed his hands in front of them all (Matthew 27:24), a Jewish custom symbolising the removal of guilt. This may have been a desperate attempt on Pilate's part to conceal his fear. He then said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person" (Matthew 27:24), not knowing that water can never cleanse the guilt of shedding innocent blood. The Jews who were gathered shouted back, "His blood be on us and on our children" (Matthew 26:25), in order to forestall any further effort Pilate might exert to spare Christ. Pilate then released Barabbas to the Jews but had Jesus scourged, delivering Him to be crucified.

Amazingly, the history of the Jews from that time onward has been a realisation of that curse which they invoked upon themselves and their descendants. But the mercy of Christ does not exclude any of them who repents of his evil and receives Him as

Messiah, Lord and Saviour.

My brother, I hope that you now firmly reject any foolish allegations about anyone such as Judas taking the place of Christ. Even if he had been willing to impersonate Jesus and endure mockery and painful scourging, do you think he would have silently undergone the injustice of a horrible death on a cross? No matter how often certain individuals suggest that Jesus was replaced by Judas, their claims are dashed on the rock of reality. Judas would not have withheld his identity during the trial, because it is known that he had no love for his Master which might have led him to offer his life for Him. There is a consensus of opinion that Judas, when despairing over Christ's rejection of worldly power, turned against Him and betrayed Him to His foes.

3.10. The Crucifixion

"I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me. They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots."
(Psalm 22:17,18)

The soldiers of Pilate gathered the whole garrison around Christ, stripped Him and covered Him with a purple robe. Then they wove a crown of thorns and put it on His head. A reed was also thrust into His hand, in mockery of a royal sceptre. They bowed before Him and said, "Hail, King of the Jews" (Matthew 27:29). After this abuse ended, Christ was taken back to Pilate who presented Him before the crowd. Perhaps he thought that the bloody appearance of Christ would arouse pity in the crowd, making it easier to have Him released. But the vengeful crowd, excited at the sight of

the wounded prisoner, shouted loudly, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

Thus, the office of Christ as teacher and performer of miracles had come to an end. His role as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, began. In the past, He had demonstrated His authority by works of power. But now it was no longer necessary, because all things were at an end. The time had come for Him to take the place of sinful men and bear their curse (Galatians 3:13).

The crucifixion did not take Jesus by surprise. He had alluded to it when Nicodemus visited Him at night (John 3:14-16). He had made reference to it shortly before the Transfiguration (Matthew 16:21). He had also revealed it to the Jews halfway during His ministry (John 12:32).

Death by crucifixion originated with the Phoenicians, and it was Alexander the Great who had brought it to the Holy Land. The Jews, however, rarely used this form of execution because of the following instructions in their law: "If a man has committed a sin worthy of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God" (Deuteronomy 21:22,23).

The Romans used this form of execution against foreigners and slaves who had committed heinous crimes. Under no circumstances could this sentence be passed on a Roman -- no matter how vile his crime -- owing to the shame it incurred

upon the victim. But when Jesus was lifted up, He transformed the shame of the cross into the hallmark of glory and a source of blessing.

At last, the rulers succeeded in getting rid of Jesus. They marched Him to Golgotha, followed by a large procession. All eyes were fixed on the Teacher from Galilee who was drained of energy, spattered with blood from his open wounds and carrying His cross on His back, torn by the scourge. Thus was fulfilled what was written by the prophet Isaiah: "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6).

Christ passed through the alleys of Jerusalem, bearing His cross, the "altar" upon which He would be offered; and thus, another prophecy was fulfilled: "The Lord is God, and He has made His light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up to the horns of the altar" (Psalm 118:27; NIV).

Jesus was in a state of great exhaustion because He had not slept at all since His arrest in the garden. He had been taken captive from the garden of Gethsemane to the palace of Annas, then to the residence of Caiaphas and then to the governor's palace. He stood during the long interrogations, and the abuses were interrupted with beatings and scourging that resulted in a loss of blood. Added to that were the bitter psychological agonies which beat upon His tender, noble, loving and perceptive soul. It pained Him to remember His disciples quarrelling about who was greatest at their last supper together (Luke 22:24-30). It grieved Him that Judas had betrayed Him, that Peter

had denied Him and that the others had fled. Moreover, He was disappointed over the change in the crowd's attitude toward Him -- the crowd which only a few days earlier had hailed Him, crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Matthew 21:9). This same crowd now wanted Him crucified.

All these factors served to weaken Him physically until He collapsed under the load of His cross. It was then that the soldiers seized a man from Cyrene, Simon by name; him they compelled to carry the cross of Christ. It could be that the centurion in charge of the soldiers pitied Jesus and ordered Simon to carry the cross. It even seems that this centurion was righteous, for when Jesus died on the cross he said, "Certainly this was an innocent Man" (Luke 23:47).

The death procession moved onwards, joined by others, among whom were many women who wept and lamented. Turning to them, Jesus said tenderly, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28).

From the Gospel, we learn that many people treated Jesus with contempt; yet, nowhere do we find mention of a woman who hurt Him. Could the reason for this be that His teachings elevated the place of women in society? Even as He suffered on the way to Golgotha, He faced the mourning women, forgot his own pain and seized the opportunity for preaching. He drew their attention to what was more important than shedding tears for Him out of pity: shedding tears of repentance.

This is a masterpiece of a picture, my brother. It shows you the Lamb of God

who takes away the sin of the world on the way to the altar of redemption. How I wish you could stand before this wonderful scene with reverence, feasting your eyes on the colours of sacrificial love, replete with God's light -- the light of Him who gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

The procession finally reached Golgotha, and the soldiers hurried to set up the cross. Meanwhile, the Roman officers offered Jesus vinegar mixed with gall; this was to numb His senses from feeling the full extent of the acute pain which was soon to follow. Jesus refused this however, because it was His intent to experience the full dregs of the anguish of the cross while totally conscious. I do not think any other person would have refused this offer.

After these preparations, the Roman officers ordered Jesus to lie down on the cross. They proceeded to nail His hands and feet. Then they raised the cross with Him on it and lowered it into a slot in the ground. Thus, Jesus was suspended between heaven and earth, and between two thieves who were also being crucified. This was a fulfilment of prophecy: "...He was numbered with the transgressors..." (Isaiah 53:12).

In his account of the Gospel, John the Evangelist records that Pilate wrote a title and placed it on the cross. This title was in three languages: Hebrew, the language of religion, for Christ was the Son of David and the Son of God; Greek, the language of learning, for Christ is the Light of the World and the Eternal Truth; and Latin, the language of political might, because Jesus is the King of Kings. As for the inscription, it read: "Jesus of Nazareth, the

King of the Jews" (John 19:19). The Jews objected to this and wanted it changed to read: "He said, 'I am the King of the Jews'" (John 19:21). Pilate refused, because, from the start, he had despised and ridiculed the Jewish nation. He said, "What I have written, I have written" (John 19:22).

Jesus transformed the cross into a glorious platform from which He pronounced the highest expressions of love, forgiveness and hope. At the peak of His sufferings, the Lord of Glory made seven statements:

"Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (Luke 23:34)

These words form a prayer of intercession on behalf of His murderers. Such a request had never been heard before. Previously, He had granted pardon as One who had the authority to do so. From the cross, He spoke as one interceding on behalf of His enemies, sparing them God's wrath for what they were doing to Him. It has been suggested that since He was undergoing punishment on behalf of man, it was not fitting for Him to use His authority in the matter of forgiveness; so, He requested divine pardon from His Father in heaven. How consistent He was with the very command He gave to us: "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).

By requesting forgiveness for His tormentors, He was also fulfilling the prophecy which says: "...He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

In His intercession, He assumed the role of

advocate, saying, "...They know not what they do." Although the Jews were wise in many ways, they missed their Messiah, owing to their blind fanaticism for the letter of the law. Thus, they "did not know the time of their visitation" (Luke 19:44). Because of their zeal for the traditions of their forefathers, they neglected the Holy Scriptures which testify of Jesus. How accurately did the Lord of Glory describe their condition: "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). Had they opened their eyes, they would have recognised His glory in the teachings He had conveyed and in the signs He had performed among them. They were blinded to his works of mercy, because the hardness of their hearts had greatly diminished their capacity to truly see. Well was it said of them in Matthew 15:14: "They are blind leaders of the blind." The Jews were ignorant of the reality of the redemption which Jesus had come to accomplish for mankind; their vengeful priests and elders had turned them against Him. But despite their evil ways, the Saviour forgave them and disregarded their ignorance.

A godly man once said that the restitution of good with evil is satanic; the reparation of evil with evil, bestial; and the repayment of good with good, humane. However, rewarding evil with good is a divine act, and no one is able to do it except Christ and those who, by faith, have come to share in His divine nature.

"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

Earlier, the Lord of Glory had said, "I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32). He was soon to fulfil these words, beginning with

the thief being crucified at His right hand. It appears that this villain was moved by the prayer of Christ for His murderers. He must have been amazed at His patience in the face of the taunts by those who reproached Him -- especially by the thief on the left. The virtue of the Lord had a profound effect on his soul, and he was lead to trust the crucified Saviour and repent of his former sins. During those moments after his conversion, he served the Redeemer by rebuking his blaspheming companion. In this service, he proved more courageous than the disciples of Christ who had scattered and deserted their Master.

The Lord said to him, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." Jesus said today, not the Day of Judgement when "at the name of Jesus every knee [shall] bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and every tongue [shall] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11).

What had this thief done? He had broken the laws of God and man. He did no good deeds, but spoke words which were acceptable to God. These words were met by God's love which forgives sins and transgressions. This thief confessed his guilt and did not seek to hide his iniquity: "We receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). After a moment's pause, he turned to Him who had come to seek and save that which was lost: "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). This man had a kindred mind with the tax collector who had prayed in the temple afar off, not even looking up to heaven, beating his breast, pleading, "God be merciful to me a

sinner!" (Luke 18:13). And as this tax collector went away justified, so the thief went to heaven justified. Bible scholars have called him "the thief who stole Paradise."

The words this thief uttered embody the confession the Lord expects from all if they want justification, sanctification and an inheritance in His kingdom. It is truly a miracle that at such a moment, on the day of a shameful crucifixion, this thief recognised what the Jews and their priests, scribes and Pharisees had failed to see when the Lord of Glory lived among them.

"Woman, behold your son!" (John 19:26)

The Gospel according to John tells us that a group of women stood nearby when Jesus was on the cross; among them were His mother and her sister, and the mother of James and John. Since He had been stripped of His clothes and had nothing of value to leave behind, it was natural for Him to entrust His blessed mother to the care of her nephew, John, the disciple whom He loved. Even though pain racked His body, He still thought of others. To His murderers, He granted forgiveness (Luke 23:34); to the repentant thief, Paradise (Luke 23:43); and to John, He entrusted the care of His mother (John 19:27).

It is worth noting that Jesus addressed Mary as "woman" and not "mother". By this, He wanted her to perceive His relation to her as Saviour, an office vastly higher than His kinship to her as son.

To John, He said, "Behold, your mother!" Thus, to the disciple whom He loved, He left a precious legacy, fragrant with blessings. John is indebted to Mary, the

mother of Christ, for important details regarding her wonderful son, the details of which are on the immortal record of the Gospel according to John.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Mark 15:34)

Around noon that day, the sun was overshadowed by a darkness that enveloped the universe for three hours. As He hung between heaven and earth, Jesus was separated from mankind to face sufferings on a deeper level.

Great expositors have understood this darkness to symbolise the withholding of God's favour from Jesus as He bore in His body the guilt of the whole world and the attendant punishments of the curse of the law and the wrath of God.

Human perception cannot fully grasp the kind of suffering that Jesus endured. But knowing that He bore all the world's sin in His body, it is not hard to imagine Him recoiling at the extent of evil with which He was faced.

Dr. Roemer, a servant of the Lord, said: "When Jesus hung on the cross to redeem us from the curse of the law, all the sins of the world in every age and generation assaulted Him with all their currents and waves, washing over His head, `deep calling unto deep!' This wrenched out the cry from the depths of His being, `My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?'"

We dare not inquire what went on between Jesus and the heavenly Father during those hours when the light of the sun was veiled. Nevertheless, when we ponder Christ's redemptive mission, we understand that the Word which was with God became

incarnate to save us from the curse of the law. The Son of God, in keeping with His great love, volunteered to provide divine forgiveness for sinful mankind. He acted as a substitute for all when He died on the cross.

The prophecy in Isaiah 53 and similar echoes in the writings of the Apostle Paul paint a marvellous picture of "the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world." Because sin veils the face of God from the sinner (Isaiah 59:2), it follows that God hid His face from Jesus at that hour.

Philip Melanchthon (AD 1497-1560), the notable reformer, said, "The cry of Jesus, `My God, My God why have You forsaken Me?' is positive proof that Christ bore in His human soul the wrath of God against sin."

A man of God once commented: "If the death of Christ were merely the death of a great celebrity for the sake of truth, then His cry has no meaning. But if He made Himself sin for our sakes, then it is our sins and those of the whole world that drew out that cry from His breast."

Able expositors believe that Jesus uttered this cry loudly in Aramaic, so that many would hear, know assuredly and witness that He was deserted by His Father at that moment. From this cry of anguish, the whole world would know how great the price was which He paid to purchase eternal life for all who believe in Him.

"I thirst." (John 19:28)

The end of the darkness at the ninth hour, about the time when sunlight returned (Matthew 27:45), signalled that Christ's soul-sufferings had ended; yet, His

physical pain increased. The Good Shepherd who leads His flock to the still waters (Psalm 23:2) was afflicted with thirst. The Good Teacher said He thirsted -- He who told the Samaritan woman, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:14). The command to give food and drink to enemies if they hunger and thirst is written in the Old Testament (Proverbs 25:21); yet, the Jews who were recipients of the law denied Jesus even a drop of water to cool His tongue as He hung before them, dying. The Roman soldiers were amused that He had reached such a point of weakness and exhaustion. One of them took a sponge, dipped it in vinegar, raised it on a reed and gave it to Him. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy which says, "They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21).

The thirst of Christ was not slight, but most intense. It was that of one in the throes of death -- not just a natural death, but a death for the sins of others. Jesus at that hour went beyond the limits of suffering normally associated with death, proving by this that He was indeed Immanuel, "God with us."

"It is finished." (John 19:30)

With these words, redemption was completed. Thus, the most important event in all human history was accomplished. With redemption achieved, reconciliation between God and man was also realised. On the cross, the Saviour satisfied the law with all its foreshadowings and

requirements, and ended the Old Covenant with its ordinances, conditions and demands. Jesus abolished the sacrifices, burnt offerings and gifts, because "by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

The sins of the Jews culminated in this ultimate act of rejection. From the start, they had not accepted Jesus; rather, they rejected His teachings, denied His miracles and blasphemed His name. Finally, they took Him captive, led Him to judgement, witnessed against Him falsely, spat in His face and delivered Him to His enemies who scourged Him, mocked Him, put a crown of thorns upon His head, pierced His hands and feet, lifted Him up between two thieves, stripped Him, divided His clothes among themselves and made a dreadful spectacle of Him with utmost cruelty! But Jesus fulfilled every detail of God's will, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. He fulfilled the Scriptures with their prophecies. No longer was the blood of animals needed; neither the Passover, the Jews' feast of feasts: "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).

The atonement is complete. Christ has rested from His work. Now we are redeemed by the merit of His work on the cross on our behalf. We are to rejoice over the work of Christ for us:

God demonstrates His own love toward us,

in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation (Romans 5:8-11).

"Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." (Luke 23:46)

With this seventh and final utterance, Christ bade farewell to His earthly ministry and descended for a short while to the grave, that place of death which He illuminated by making it a doorway into eternal life and a point of departure to the Heavenly Jerusalem which is the habitation of God with man. This last utterance of Christ has also been quoted by many a dying believer.

John the Evangelist writes that after this last utterance, Jesus bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30). He gave it up willingly, in accordance with His own words:

As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore My father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father (John

10:15-18).

Jesus died on a cross during the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, on the same day when thousands of lambs were being slain to atone for the sins of the people. As these were being slaughtered, the Lamb of God, bearing the sin of the world, shed His own precious blood to wash away every stain of iniquity and transgression.

Jesus the Lord died. No wonder the veil of the temple was torn in two! The rocks also split, the graves were opened, and many bodies of saints who had died were raised (Matthew 27:51-53).

My dear brother, it is not enough to regard the cross of Christ as merely a touching historical event. It is also a divine transaction. The Lord of Glory undertook this act to purchase a holy possession for Himself -- a people to proclaim the virtues of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9). These respond to the cross of their Redeemer by crucifying their own whims and passions, as the apostolic saying puts it: "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:5,6).

3.11. Prophetic Evidence

"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins." (Acts 10:43)

In the Holy Scriptures, we can find the

following prophecies with their fulfilment:

1. Jesus would be sold for thirty pieces of silver:
 - The prophecy: "Then I said to them, 'If it is agreeable to you, give me my wages; and if not, refrain.' So they weighed out for my wages thirty pieces of silver" (Zechariah 11:12).
 - The fulfilment: "Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, 'What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?' And they counted out to him thirty pieces of silver" (Matthew 26:14,15).
2. A field called "the potter" would be purchased for a price:
 - The prophecy: "And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter' -- that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter" (Zechariah 11:13).
 - The fulfilment: "Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' And they said, 'What is that to us? You see to it!' Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.' And they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day" (Matthew 27:3-8).
3. Christ would be mistreated and crucified:
 - The prophecy: "For dogs have surrounded Me; the assembly of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet. I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me" (Psalm 22:16,17).
 - The fulfilment: "Then the soldiers led Him away into the hall called Praetorium, and they called together the whole garrison. And they clothed Him with purple; and they twisted a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and began to salute Him, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshipped Him. And when they had mocked Him, they took the purple off Him, put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him" (Mark 15:16-20).
4. He would be weakened by wounds:
 - The prophecy: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).
 - The fulfilment: "Now the men who held Jesus mocked Him and beat Him. And having blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, 'Prophecy! Who is it that struck You?'" (Luke

22:63,64).

5. He would endure sufferings silently:

- The prophecy: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isaiah 53:7).
- The fulfilment: "[He] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness -- by whose stripes you were healed"(1 Peter 2:24).

6. He would be beaten and spat upon:

- The prophecy: "I gave My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6).
- The fulfilment: "Then they struck Him on the head with a reed and spat on Him; and bowing the knee, they worshipped Him" (Mark 15:19). Also: "Then they spat in His face and beat Him; and others struck Him with the palms of their hands" (Matthew 26:67).

7. He would be mocked:

- The prophecy: "Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at me with their mouths, as a raging and roaring lion" (Psalm 22:12,13).
- The fulfilment: "And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying,

'You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.' Likewise the chief priests, also mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 'He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him'" (Matthew 27:39-42).

8. He would be forsaken by the Father:

- The prophecy: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?" (Psalm 22:1).
- The fulfilment: "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matthew 27:46).

9. He would be given vinegar to drink:

- The prophecy: "They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink" (Psalm 69:21).
- The fulfilment: "Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth" (John 19:29).

10. Soldiers would draw lots for His clothes:

- The prophecy: "They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots" (Psalm 22:18).

- The fulfilment: "Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took His garments and made four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven from the top in one piece. They said therefore among themselves, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be...'" (John 19:23,24).
11. None of His bones would be broken:
- The prophecy: "He guards all his bones; not one of them is broken" (Psalm 34:20).
 - The fulfilment: "But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break His legs" (John 19:33).
12. His side would be pierced with a spear:
- The prophecy: "...Then they will look on Me whom they have pierced..." (Zechariah 12:10).
 - The fulfilment: "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:34).
13. He would die with the wicked, but be with the honoured at His death:
- The prophecy: "And they made His grave with the wicked -- But with the rich at His death..." (Isaiah 53:9).
 - The fulfilment: "Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given

to him. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed" (Matthew 27:57-60).

3.12. Sensory Evidence

"...We were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)

Consider the following physical proofs which confirm the crucifixion of Christ:

1. A mother's recognition. The blessed mother of Christ had followed her son to Golgotha and stood near the cross with a group of women (John 19:25). She had received His instructions about staying with John, her nephew. Even if it were possible that all had been mistaken as to the true identity of the crucified, surely Mary would not have been, for she was His mother. I hope you do not doubt the perceptions of this mother who saw and heard everything concerning her son. The heart of a mother is not deceived as to the identity of her own son, be it by fancy or misrepresentation.
2. The sign of the cross. The symbol of the cross is a tangible proof as to its historic reality; this no one can deny! Every religion has its sign or emblem, such as the Jewish star of David, the Buddhist lotus flower, or the Islamic crescent. Likewise, the Christians have their cross.

How did the cross become a symbol of honour, blessing, mercy and hope after being a sign of offence, shame, cursing, crime and ridicule? How did a

crude wooden cross, upon which the basest criminals were crucified, become the hallmark of glory and an indication of grandeur, adorning the crowns of kings, the flags of nations and the roofs of church buildings? What transformed this means of execution into an ornament worn by ladies and a badge decorating the chests of the noble and courageous? There is only one answer: Jesus Christ. He is the One who exalted the cross by being raised on it, accomplishing His work of redemption. David proclaimed the following words about this momentous act: "Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psalm 85:10).

There is another important matter to consider regarding the historic authenticity of the cross: How can one explain the sign of the cross engraved on the tombs of Christians since earliest times and in the Roman catacombs where they assembled during times of persecution? Are not these inscriptions undeniable proof in stone that Christ died on a cross?

3. The witness of John the Beloved. This disciple loved Jesus and Jesus loved him; hence the title, "John the Beloved." From what we can ascertain in the Scriptures, this disciple never left his Master from the time of the Last Supper until He had been laid in the tomb. The Gospel informs us that John was known to the high priest, which enabled him to accompany Jesus throughout His various trials. He recorded his testimony for us with great confidence (John 19:35).
4. The witness of the tomb. In the Gospel, we have full details of how

Jesus was buried. I shall narrate them to you from the writings of eyewitnesses who touched the Lord with their hands, heard His words with their ears and accepted the facts in their hearts:

"Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him... And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus... (Matthew 27:57,58 and John 19:39-42; see also Mark 15:42-47 and Luke 23:50-56)."

If there were even the slightest doubt as to the identity of the Crucified One, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus would not have honoured His body, for they were prominent men.

5. The sealing of the tomb. No sooner had the enemies of Jesus heard of Pilate's consent to Jesus' burial than they hurried to him and said:

"Sir, we remember, while He was still alive, how that deceiver said, 'After three days I will rise.' Therefore command that the tomb be made secure until the third day, lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away, and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' So the last deception will be worse than the first"... Pilate answered and said: "You have a guard; go your way, make it as secure as you know how" (Matthew 27:63-65).

Thus, we have decisive proof that the

body of Christ was buried in the tomb and that the tomb was sealed and guarded.

6. The doubt of Thomas. After His resurrection from the dead on the third day, Christ appeared to some of His disciples. But since Thomas did not see Him personally, he did not believe the resurrection, despite the sure testimonies of the other disciples. John tells us about "Doubting Thomas" to eliminate any possible uncertainty regarding the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ:

"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you!"... But Thomas, called Didymus, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:19-21; 24-29).

3.13. Verbal Evidence

"Then He said to them, "Thus it is written,

and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day."'' (Luke 24:46)

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus delivered a parting address to His disciples. It is rightly considered the gem of the Gospel. In it, He reveals His concern as teacher, His compassion as friend, His love as redeemer and His grace as saviour. As shepherd, He also shows His pity towards His little flock of simple disciples who had set their hopes on Him and left all to follow Him. Since He knew what the future would hold for them of painful sorrows, severe hardships, bitter disappointments and tribulations, He prepared them spiritually and psychologically to face the troubles that would confront them. He also instructed them concerning how to accomplish the second phase of the proclamation of the Gospel.

The Master began His magnificent discourse with some words of encouragement and comfort: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:1-3). Then He added: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you... 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. Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John

14:18,26,27).

Like a faithful father, knowing that His last hour had come, He gave them His last will and testament: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34,35)... You are My friends if you do whatever I command you (John 15:14)... If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you (John 15:18)... They will put you out of the synagogue; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service And these things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go away to Him who sent Me"... (John 16:2,4-5).

From the context of this magnificent address, we understand that Christ did not hide His end from His disciples. If we compare what is in this discourse with what He said earlier, it is evident that the main purpose of His coming to earth was to lay down His life as a ransom for many.

The apostles of Christ wrote their works by inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our edification. Allow me to quote to you some of Jesus' own declarations concerning His redemptive death, which they recorded for us:

- From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21).
- Now while they were staying in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men, and they will kill Him, and the third day He will be raised up..." (Matthew 17:22,23).
- Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be delivered to the Gentiles and will be mocked and insulted and spit upon. And they will scourge Him and put Him to death. And the third day He will rise again" (Luke 18:31-33).
- "Now it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, that He said to His disciples, "You know that after two days is the Passover, and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified" (Matthew 26:1,2).
- And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31).
- "For He taught His disciples and said to them, "The Son of Man is being delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him. And after He is killed, He will rise the third day" (Mark 9:31).
- Now they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was going before them; and they were amazed. And as they followed they were afraid. Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and to the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver

Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again" (Mark 10:32-34).

- Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. But after I have been raised, I will go before you to Galilee" (Mark 14:27,28).
- And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:21,22).
- Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).
- "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).
- On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You." And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem" (Luke 13:31-33).

3.14. More Verbal Evidence

"... [Righteousness] shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification." (Romans 4:24,25)

Those who read the book of Acts and the various epistles of Paul, Peter, John, James and Jude, will note that the teachings expounded therein were preached world-wide, proclaiming a crucified Christ whose blood had been shed for sinners. The Apostle Paul summarised the Gospel in these words: "Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the Gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which you also are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you -- unless you believed in vain. 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).

The following is a selection of sayings that were documented and in which the death of Christ was expounded. These, in turn, circulated through the inspired, sacred writings of the apostles:

1. *Regarding the cross and death of Christ:*

"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 counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be held by it." (Acts 2:22-24).

Please ponder the words, "being delivered by the determined counsel and foreknowledge of God." Engrave them on your mind, so that whenever you recall them, you will remember that the redemption of mankind through the death of Christ was ordained of God, being in His mind from the very beginning. Consider also the following:

- "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).
- "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin" (Romans 6:5,6).
- "However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:6-8).

The Apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, was careful to show the world that the redemption of man through the cross has, from eternity, been one of

the mysteries of God's wisdom. This Apostle agrees with the Apostle Peter who, writing to the believers scattered throughout the earth, said:

- "Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of your souls. Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven -- things which angels desire to look into" (1 Peter 1:8-12).
- "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).
- "For Christ did not send me to baptise, but to preach the Gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:17,18).
- "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).

- "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).
- "You seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you. For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you" (2 Corinthians 13:3,4).
- "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).
- "As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these try to compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may glory in your flesh. But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world

has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:12-14).

- "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" (Galatians 3:1).
 - "And I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then the offence of the cross has ceased" (Galatians 5:11).
- "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8).
- "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2).
 - "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him" (Romans 5:8,9).

2. *Regarding the atonement, the shed blood of Christ, redemption and reconciliation:*

- "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness..." (Romans 3:23-25).
- "...He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:4-7).
- "But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:30,31).
- "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree")..." (Galatians 3:13).
- "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4,5).
- "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time..." (1 Timothy 2:5,6).
- "...We should live soberly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:12-14).
- "But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:11,12).
- "But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).
- "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Corinthians 10:16,17).
- "...Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the

dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood..." (Revelation 1:4-6).

- "And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth"" (Revelation 5:9,10).
- "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:1,2).
- "For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:16,17).
- "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans 5:10,11).
- "Now all things are of God, who

has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

- "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross" (Colossians 1:19,20).
- "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity" (Ephesians 2:13-16).

My dear Hassan, I have spent days preparing this letter. From the ample Biblical texts I have provided, you will be able to form a clear idea of the nature of the redemption which Christ accomplished on the cross. As a result, you can establish a faith in atonement, thereby obtaining complete cleansing for your sins: "Blessed is he whose

transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile" (Psalm 32:1,2). Now is the day of reconciliation between God and man through the blood of Christ, shed on the cross.

It is to your best interest not to linger any more on the shore of the knowledge of salvation, but to plunge into the ocean of redeeming love and aspire to the ultimate fulfilment. Then you can glory in God through the Lord Jesus Christ through whom we obtain reconciliation.

It may be that you are offended by the shame associated with death by crucifixion. You may even find the cross to be degrading, crude or repulsive. You may be prevented from applying its virtues, owing to the many notions that discredit it. However, as a seeker of truth you must reconsider this subject in light of your newly-acquired insight.

I understand that the cross may be an offence to you, because at one time it was an affront to me. For a long time, I believed that the doctrine of the cross was promoted through the stubbornness of the ignorant who upheld it. I could not accept the idea that God could be flogged and crucified, or that He could die and descend to the grave as we do. The words of the poet, Abu Al Ala' Al Maari come to mind:

"I was amazed at Chosros and his followers,
And the washing of faces in the urine of
cows;

And Christians saying that God is wronged,
Then unjustly killed, and not prevailing."

In His love and mercy, God met me at my point of need and willed to lead me to the fountain of His salvation, not abandoning me in ignorance, a victim of falsehood. One day, He declared to me in His wisdom that the cross is indeed the manifestation of His love in "Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:24-26). Therefore, in the light of God's revelation, I received Jesus as Saviour -- the unique One who was both God and man. As perfect God, he raised the dead, opened the eyes of the blind, healed the sick and lame, forgave sin and granted to all who would receive Him the privilege of becoming His children. As perfect Man, He appropriated a body in order to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the sin of the world; and although the cross put that body to death, it left His perfect deity unscathed.

The story of the death of Lazarus is an instance where the perfect humanity and deity of Jesus is displayed. His manhood is evident when He wept with deep grief while consoling Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus who had died. But as God Almighty, He stood at the grave of His dead friend and shouted, "Lazarus, come forth!"

That very instant, the spirit of the dead Lazarus returned, and he walked out of his grave after having been dead for four days.

Now my brother, I beg you not to approach the crucifixion of Christ in a rigid intellectual manner. You see, your salvation depends on your faith in Christ being crucified in your place. Logic and intellect are the fruit of human thought, but God tells mankind: "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

I implore you by the mercies of God to exercise a heart faith, not a head faith, "for with the heart one believes to righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made to salvation" (Romans 10:10). You yourself know that Islam acknowledges the death and resurrection of Christ, even though the majority of Muslims oppose the idea of the cross. That is because they are encumbered with some texts on which expositors hold more than one view. Maybe in a later discourse, I will accompany you through the Qur'an to find out what it says on this important subject.

Before closing this letter, I would like to urge you to study this subject for yourself if you are sincerely seeking after truth. Let your motto be what the Apostle Paul advised: "Test all things; hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). I am sending you a copy of the Bible which I hope you will use in your study and research. In this precious Book is the inspired record of the incarnation, life,

teachings, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

Do not accept the opinions of amateurs who believe that God's Book has been corrupted; that is not a truthful saying, but a lie which Satan has put in the mouths of some, in order to bar them from the Holy Scriptures where they can find life. The Scriptures witness of Jesus, apart from whom there is no salvation. Just as preposterous as the claim of corruption is that of abrogation. But this is a subject I shall discuss with you in a future letter, Lord willing.

My brother, you know that in the past I have tried hard to find peace in my heart. My painstaking quest after God has led me to conclude that there is no peace except in Him. My search was strenuous and it led me up long and torturous paths. I explored a variety of teachings, became religious and improved my behaviour, but this did not quiet my conscience, because it was just a veneer, expressed in the form of piety. Indeed, it was an attractive show which impressed all who happened to meet me. I appeared a refined young man of sensitive disposition and smooth speech, highly cultured, very knowledgeable and offering pleasant company. However, I must admit that I was deceiving myself and those around me. My piety was mere paint, a vain attempt to hide the restless spirit within me. I had no peace because I had no holiness.

I confess to you that all my efforts to raise my spiritual standards failed, for I remained captive to my passions which made me a prisoner to the law of sin

and death. My conscience did not cease troubling me, but I had no difficulty in numbing it; there were many diversions with which to ease the feelings of regret in my soul. How soon the conscience sickens as a result of continual numbing and a sick conscience gives rise to strange thoughts. I also began to legitimise what the law of God had forbidden. For instance, my depraved conscience told me that the law was for the people of its time, who lived long ago. The world had evolved since then, and I thought it permissible to brush away the commands it contains. For example, I used to tell myself that God is the giver of life's pleasures, and since He had given me senses, I reasoned that it was perfectly all right to indulge them. I agreed to do my duty as a human being: giving to the poor, offering counsel to the wicked and supporting the weak as far as I could. As for certain practices which I allowed myself, there was nothing in them to mar my conduct as a man and a believer. I possibly imbibed these ideas from Omar Khayyam whose philosophy I had studied as a youth in many of his famous Rubaiyat.

But God, who had chosen me from birth by His great compassion, set me on the path toward righteousness. No sooner did His light shine in my heart than I saw myself in my true condition, drowned in the mire of iniquity. My self-righteousness collapsed and my self-acceptance fled. All that was left of this creature named Taufiq was his "body of death" which the Apostle Paul described as the old corrupt man that lives according to his own

deceitful desires.

Jesus, who had come into the world to seek and save the lost, quickly saw my hungry soul in need of His salvation. I was a lost sheep needing to be found. To my delight, He carried me on His shoulders and brought me into the fold of His elect.

The years have passed since then. But every time I recall that encounter, I find it strange that He received me, even though I expended no effort to look for Him! He did this because He loved me on account of His grace, His favour.

Yes, my esteemed brother, I searched earnestly among the teachings of men for the path of peace, but to no avail. The quest wearied me, and the attempts bored me. I despaired of my own existence. What I had read of ancient philosophies and modern teachings did not satisfy my spirit. I was like a child trying to catch bubbles of foam. These attempts accord with the saying of the wise Solomon: "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity...I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:2,14).

However, what the wisdom of the wise and the philosophies of the sages failed to effect in me, the "foolishness of God" accomplished through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:21). The cross alone delivered me from the chains of self which always tend toward evil. Jesus emptied me of pride and filled me with the fullness of

His mercy through redemption and forgiveness. I was glad and filled with bliss. My wretched life became a preparation for travel to the house of immortality.

In my ecstasy and contentment with the joy of God's peace, I thought of my loved ones, of whom you are the dearest, my brother. I knelt down and pleaded for you all the riches in Jesus that I had found. My great desire is that you need not suffer the persecutions which I endured at the hands of my friends.

Taufiq

3.15. Puzzling Questions

"For I said in my haste, "I am cut off from before Your eyes"; Nevertheless You heard the voice of my supplications when I cried out to You." (Psalm 31:22)

I suspect my brother spent much time studying the contents of my last letter. He kept silent for several months, during which my patience was tested. However, when he did reply, he sent me his comments, as well as a list of questions:

April 9, 1954

My dear Taufiq,

Affectionate greetings. I wish you and all members of your family happiness and prosperity. I received your letter at a time when I was thinking of you and remembering our times together. I was happy to learn that you are doing well. Accept my thanks for the good wishes, tenderness and love you directed at me. You are my favourite and the dearest of all. As I write you now, it is with thanks to

the inspiration of your noble expressions and engaging ideas. Obviously, your topic regarding the crucifixion of Christ, the Master, has aroused my interest as much as my admiration. In it, I sense a genuine desire on your part and a clear attempt to expose the facts with plenty of undeniable proofs as support. I feel proud to have a brother with such broad knowledge and the ability to deal with inquiry from every aspect.

I have no objection to your narrating events, because I found them clear and plain. However, I believe that every event has a visible aspect which corresponds to an invisible one. For instance, when we see a man turn pale and tremble, we know that this response is due to a corresponding internal stimulus, and we describe the condition as fear. In the case of the Qur'anic statement on the crucifixion, "...Yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them" (Sura al-Nisa' 4:155), some are satisfied with thinking that it was really Christ who was crucified, while others doubt that it actually was Him.

Why was Christ crucified? You say it was to atone for the sin of Adam which has been passed on to the entire human race, because his offence resulted in spiritual death. The one who sins will die, and death carries the sense of divine wrath and also spiritual death. I agree with you that Adam represented mankind. How apt are the words of a certain poet on this subject:

"Nothing is far-fetched for God,
To combine the whole world in one."

If Adam's sin was not forgiven, then he died deserving God's wrath and was sent

to hell for his deeds. Likewise, all his offspring, whose sins have not been forgiven, have also gone to hell. This means that everyone from Adam to Christ, whose sins have not been forgiven, is in the fires of hell. On the other hand, since Christ has atoned for the sins of Adam, He has also atoned for those of his offspring. Sin has overtaken all mankind, and this requires the forgiveness of Adam's sin for all who came after Christ. But the offence of Adam was not forgiven those who lived before Christ. Those living after Christ are fortunate, whereas those living prior to Him are unfortunate. If it is suggested that those before the time of Christ were forgiven, I would ask why they lived in sin and died in it, after it was forgiven them. Can a man be forgiven after death, when no longer alive and active?

It occurred to me that the murderers of Isa (Jesus) were also tainted with the sin of Adam. How can it be that the Lord was killed and that the murderers received forgiveness for their deed? Also, why did those before the death of Isa not receive atonement, whereas those after Isa did? Why was Isa not slain earlier, as soon as Adam sinned; then forgiveness could have been granted to all equally? In that way, all the offspring of Adam would be equal in the matter of forgiveness. As long as God is almighty and nothing impossible for Him, why could He not have forgiven Adam and his descendants without needing to have the Son killed, allowing Him to be spat upon and crucified? Where is the wisdom in having this affair delayed until the time of Christ?

Also, why is Adam held accountable for sin? Is Satan not the cause? Should the Lord be humiliated and killed for Satan's sake? God could have forgiven many sins

without hardship and without needing to make Isa pay the price for the redemption of Adam and his offspring. We have seen that the Redeemer is superior to the redeemed, logically speaking. How then could the sin of Adam receive such emphasis in the sight of God, being preferred to Isa?

It also occurred to me that since Satan incriminated Adam, he was worthy of death, because he, not Isa, was the cause of the problem. If God wanted to punish justly, would it not have been more equitable to make Satan suffer and be killed for his own disobedience and for seducing Adam, instead of having Christ, the innocent Lord, punished for the offence of Satan?

Reasoning in this way, I find it no problem to believe that the crucified one merely took on the likeness of Isa. The Father could create a likeness of the Son, so that even His mother and friends would have mistaken him to be the real Christ. In this way, the Father would have rescued Him from degradation and death. It may be that the Qur'anic words, "...Yet they did not slay him, neither crucify him...", reflect this idea. Thus, Isa's murderers targeted Him but killed another who resembled Him, and they thought it really was Him.

Redemption was foreordained by God when He instructed Abraham to slay his son, Ishmael. But when Abraham was ready to kill him, God sent him an angel which provided a ram to be killed in the place of Ishmael. Naturally, you will agree that the redeemed one, Ishmael, was of greater consequence and more value than the ram with which he was redeemed. How can it be that God would redeem Ishmael, who was to be slain by the hand

of his father, and not redeem Christ, the Favoured One, in order to save Him from the wicked hands of His foes who were intent on killing Him unjustly? Could not God have spared Christ by transferring His likeness onto someone else, making the beholders think that He was the victim, even as He saved Ishmael with a ram? I see nothing to exclude such an option.

Since this discourse is an involved one, and long at that, I shall be content with these comments, hoping that you will provide answers to my questions. The facts I have provided are so strong that they cannot be brushed aside, even in part. I ask God to help you and to bring you every happiness and success. I wish you health and contentment.

Hassan

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I read Hassan's letter and pondered the questions he raised which indicated some degree of concentration and depth. My brother did not mean to entrap me through his many questions. Rather, he hoped that I might be able to shed some light on the close of Christ's earthly life. He had not yet been emancipated from the ideas of the Batiniya sect. The followers of this school of thought do not believe in the death of the prophets. Instead, they speak of the end of their earthly lives as ghaiba which in Arabic means "becoming invisible". Therefore, I was not surprised to have to return to the subject of the cross once more. It was my pleasure to reply to his inquiries in the following letter:

My dear brother,

Your letter reached me at a time when my soul was longing for tender consolations.

Despite my lowly estate and modest educational accomplishments, you have insisted on elevating my humble status. I thank the Lord my God for choosing to employ a wonderful means to guide me to the way, the truth and the life: our Lord Jesus Christ. He has covered my shortcomings and washed my sins with the blood of redemption. Witness how He is using this vessel of clay, one of shame, for honour. He has given me favour in your eyes and has made me the object of your confidence in a matter as grave as this.

My precious one, you have raised ten very important issues in your letter. These have driven me to investigation and inquiry, with a view of furnishing you with replies.

Since the matters under discussion pertain to God's benevolent plans for man, which He has declared in His inspired Word by the Holy Spirit, I implore you to draw near with me to what God has said. Let us do so, having taken off our sandals in His holy presence and with heads bowed before His glory. Let us be content with what He has revealed to us of His kingdom's mysteries and His blessed plans in redemption.

Let us approach these declarations of truth without contentious thoughts or intellectual quibbling, for the Word of God is loftier and nobler than to submit to human scrutiny. It is higher and holier than to be weighed in the scales of logic by earthly wisdom which is always subject to human factors, influenced by passions and environment. Let us keep away from every thought designed to make the truth of God agree with our own inclinations, tastes or any erroneous inherited beliefs which we have accepted as absolute, without inquiry. Let us implore the source of heavenly truth

to grant us grace and a spirit of understanding, so that we can pull down every thought which sets itself up above the knowledge of God. Assessing the truth of God with human knowledge or wisdom is an assault against God by fallen human hearts, darkened by sin. The Apostle Paul said: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements and His ways past finding out! `For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counsellor?' For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Romans 11:33-36).

Reading your letter, I am convinced that you are familiar with the reasons necessitating redemption. However, your viewpoint is influenced by some doctrinal considerations that cling to human reason. Although I esteem this faculty in you, I feel bound by sincerity to chide you for hesitating before the truth of redemption. The mercy of God and my witness for the truth that liberates prompts me to ask you to avoid every intellectual explanation in your desire to verify the divine truths revealed in God's precious Book. These truths, according to the Word of God, "never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:21).

And now, I shall present to you some replies to the subjects you raised in your last letter:

1. *"Every event has a visible aspect which corresponds to an invisible one, etc."*

This is logical reasoning in the portrayal of phenomena, assuming that they possess the external and internal

aspect that you have suggested. It is true that man is subject to imaginations and appearances, and sometimes he comes under the influence of inspiration. However, these have no bearing on God's revelations regarding redemption. The latter have been given with such clarity that they need no interpretation. They were fulfilled precisely, and the events recorded in the Gospel are a fulfilment of the predictions which came in the prophetic writings and the Psalms.

You will agree with me that God is loftier than to distort or deceive; He is holy, perfect, righteous and true. He performs all His deeds with simplicity and clarity, like the rays of the sun at midday. When, at the beginning of Creation, He said, "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3), it was inevitable that light would follow. And when He separated light from darkness (Genesis 1:4), the distinction between both was and always would be plain. Likewise, God's declarations are clear, having neither secret nor mysterious aspects and requiring no explanation, because God's purposes for man are revealed in them. Man's hope for eternal life rests on the teachings they enshrine.

You are aware that in the Old Testament God revealed Himself and expressed His will for man by way of inspiration. He made His announcements plain, in order not to confront us with riddles that are hard to comprehend, lest we should resort to guessing or speculation. In the New Testament, God revealed Himself through the Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, in whom all the prophecies are fulfilled and the visions, substantiated.

Through His faithful apostles, He communicated to us the reality of the law being fulfilled: "God, who at various times and in different ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds..." (Hebrews 1:1,2).

In Christ, God was very clear in His revelation, leaving no ambiguity or obscurity, nothing esoteric or concealed. In fact, everyone who follows God's revelations from Creation until the time the Holy Scriptures were sealed will realise that those pertaining to redemption were fulfilled in visible events, not hidden ones. Thus, the shadows of the real in the Old Testament became actual in the New, because God is light and in Him is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5).

In the incident of the crucifixion, the proponents of the impersonation theory resort to mere rationalisation, but what we need are realities. These realities are found in the Gospel and are based on prophecies which fill the divine pages in the writings of the prophets and the Psalms.

2. *"The Father could create a likeness of the Son, so that even His mother and friends would have mistaken Him to be the real Christ. In this way, the Father would have rescued Him from degradation and death. It may be that the Qur'anic words, '...Yet they did not slay him, neither crucify him...', reflect this idea."*

Forgive me, my dear brother, if I express to you my dissatisfaction with

your interpretation of the incident of the cross, using mere argumentation and assumption. Argumentation belongs to those whom obscure texts and conflicting statements plunge into uncertainty. As for Jesus, who brought light and immortality to life, He made sure that there would be no ground for doubts which lead to controversies and suppositions. While in the flesh, He clearly proclaimed to His disciples and the world at large that He had come to die on a cross as a sacrifice for sin and to redeem man from the curse of the law. Furthermore, the death of Christ on the cross was in fulfilment of the prophecies revealed hundreds of years before the incarnation of Christ (refer to my last letter). We are not obliged to depend on Qur'anic texts in our inquiry as long as we have the Gospel which contains the testimony of those who accompanied Christ, were disciplined by Him, witnessed His crucifixion, proclaimed it and occupied important positions in teaching and preaching.

The Qur'an, my dear brother, does not contain the words of eyewitnesses regarding the death of Christ, but mentions this event only briefly. From the Qur'anic account, we cannot trace the event and visualise it as we do in the Gospel. In Sura Al Imran 3:47, it says, "Jesus, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me...." Thus, if Jesus is now in heaven, it implies that he has died; so, according to this verse, Christ died before He was raised to heaven. However, in Sura al-Nisa' 4:155, it says, "...Yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown them." If we take this Qur'anic text literally, then we are

faced with the startling conclusion that Christ did not die; and if He did not die, then He is not in heaven, but must be on the earth. If He is on earth, I would ask you to tell me where He is.

As long as you adhere to rational explanation, why not accept the view of some who try to reconcile the Biblical and Qur'anic texts? Those of this persuasion say that Sura al-Nisa' 4:155 does not deny the reality of the cross. They claim that the aim of the Jews in killing the teacher was to prevent the spread of His teachings. But since His teachings did indeed spread, it appears that the Jews failed in their attempt. We could then logically say that they did not slay Him.

Permit me now to touch on the word likeness in the above-mentioned verse. The incident of the cross was not contrived by God to make people merely imagine that Christ was crucified and that His likeness descended upon someone else who died in His place. Rather, it is a reality which took place according to God's immutable counsel and foreknowledge. It was something that people actually saw. Denying it is equal to accusing the inspired prophets of lying; it is a blatant attack on the honesty and integrity of God. It also charges Him of retreating from His plan which He had prepared from the beginning of time and which He had announced to mankind.

It is best for you to cease from arguing about this subject and to turn instead to the plain Gospel narratives, comparing them with the prophecies in the Old

Testament, for these are worthy of discussion. As the Qur'an does not mention how Christ died, it is necessary to turn to the Gospel, the annals of history and the Christian Church which was founded on the reality of Christ crucified.

Although I have already provided you with a number of proofs substantiating the crucifixion of Christ, I shall not let this opportunity pass without mentioning some things that further confirm its reality:

A. *The miracles.* Matthew tells us that when Jesus gave up His spirit it was six o'clock and that a darkness covered the whole earth until the ninth hour. The veil of the temple was also torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the graves were opened, many of the saints arose after His resurrection, entered the Holy City and appeared to others (Matthew 27:50-54). The miracles surrounding the crucifixion were strange phenomena that affected nature and stirred up its elements, just as they filled the people with awe. Even the heathen centurion and those with him believed in the crucified Christ, saying, "Truly this was the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:54). This occurrence was unique, not happening prior to or after the death of any other man in history.

B. *The Resurrection.* In fulfilment of His words to the scribes and Pharisees, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19), Christ arose from the grave and appeared to His disciples:

a.) *To the women:*

"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. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you." So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, "Rejoice!" And they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me" (Matthew 28:1-10).

This is an incident in the precious Book, recorded for us through divine inspiration just as it happened. No believer in the Word of God dares refute it. If anyone does so, he alleges that God taught the angels to deceive mankind. Do you believe that?

b.) To the two disciples of Emmaus:

"Now behold, two of them were travelling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was about seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation is this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him,

"Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" And they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:13-31).

Notice that Jesus reminded His two disciples of the facts regarding His death on the cross and His resurrection, as recorded in the prophets. Then He went on to explain to them the goal of these prophecies, confirming that they had been fulfilled in a clear and unmistakable manner.

c.) To the eleven:

"Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you." Now when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord. Then Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:19-23).

I do not think, brother, that you believe an ordinary person is able to enter closed doors. It had to be Christ Himself, for He showed His disciples the wounds in His hands and feet and let them touch Him. Thus, He offered sufficient proof to silence any doubts -- like those which occupy your thoughts. Now you can see with me how clear this issue is. It is as bright as day, with no concealed aspects at all. None other than Christ could have risen from the dead. Every person that has died has been held prisoner by the grave, except the Holy One of God who had been crucified and rose from the dead.

Perhaps you think that the disciples of Christ fell prey to a hoax. But far be it from the Faithful Witness to act out a deceptive farce, to exploit the simplicity of those who had put their trust in Him. This would have produced a religion based on wily deception! The Lord of heaven had said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Luke 4:8). How could He then allow His disciple, Thomas, to kneel at His feet and say, "My Lord and my God,"

when He was merely an actor, performing a delusive comedy?

The Apostle Paul uttered an important principle when he said, "...No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). When Thomas heard the Master's invitation to reach his hand out and touch Him, and to stop doubting and believe, he said through the Holy Spirit, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28).

Ah, my brother, I wish all my energies could be transformed into pleas, so that I could implore you by the mercies of God to adopt a positive attitude towards heaven's announcements and to stop clinging to views advanced by worldly teachers, which are stumbling blocks to truth. I long for you to reject their thoughts which are assaults against reality. In light of God's revelation, we need to abandon those ideas handed to us from our forefathers, which have become doctrinal shackles difficult to shake off.

In my previous letter, I quoted to you many verses of God's Word from the mouths of His prophets and apostles on the subject of the redemption which God prepared in Christ. I also mentioned to you a selection of sayings from Jesus Himself, in which He affirms that He came to the world to give Himself as a ransom for many. I am convinced that your knowledge of God's purposes in redemption and your thoughtful acceptance of these truths will not allow you to remain neutral or to hide behind sophistic ideas and intellectual excuses, as do the

followers of Immanentism and Esotericism. I do not think that you can afford to treat such a grave subject in this fashion.

The argument that someone impersonated Christ on the cross lacks strength, for no evidence supports it. It is mere conjecture, providing no proof upon which to base such a serious charge. You mentioned in your letter that if the Father had intended to rescue the Son, it would have been better for Him to wipe out the enemies of Christ with a miracle, as He did when He rescued Moses, His prophet and spokesman, from Pharaoh and his army. Likewise, instead of resorting to a devious trick, unworthy of His majesty and holiness, He could have raised Him to Himself, as he did with Enoch and Elijah. Our great poet, Badawy El Jabal has said:

God does not deceive those who believe in Him;

Such is the deception of a man to a man.

Jesus did not shun the cross. It was not imposed upon Him. Rather, He accepted it lovingly and willingly as a means of redeeming mankind. Note His words: "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." (John 10:17,18)

By comparing this text with a passage in the book of Acts, the truth of redemption shines before our eyes; namely, that Christ, obeying divine

counsel, came to earth and redeemed mankind, fulfilling the will of God out of eternal love: "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 counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:22-24).

This redemption was also in fulfilment of a prophecy by Isaiah:

"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:10-12).

Permit me to tell you that you have not come up with anything new in your arguments and interpretations. The impersonation theory has been circulating for some time. It charges that God miraculously cast the likeness of Christ onto Judas, making Christ invisible when the Jews tried to seize Him. It then purports that the Jews laid hold of Judas and crucified him

instead. In other words, Jesus is accused of exploiting God's alleged hoax on mankind by fleeing from the garden of Gethsemane and going to a faraway country where His life ended like that of other men.

Do you believe this story, Hassan? Is it reasonable that Judas would be seized without protesting in front of those whom he had led to arrest Christ? It is indeed a poor tale, woven from threads of fantasy which are feebler than the web of a spider! In reality, I do not expect that you could make this miserable lie a basis for discussion in your quest for truth. It is not only absurd but also impossible, for the following reasons:

A. From a practical standpoint. Judas, according to the Gospel, fell under conviction after he had betrayed Jesus. This may have been due to the tender rebuke of Christ: "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:48). This censure was too much for him. He went back to the priests and returned their money, but they refused to accept it. They left him to suffer the consequences of his deed, and he went out and hanged himself. If Judas were the one upon whom the likeness of Christ had descended, and if he were the one arrested and dragged to trial with his hands bound, he would not have been able to go to the temple to return the money, because the rulers and soldiers never left a prisoner alone from the time he was taken until he died.

B. From a moral position. Supposing we accept your argument, we would have to assume that the person who

returned the money was not Judas, but Christ Himself. And in order to conclude the drama which He had contrived with God, He, bearing the image of Judas, would then have hanged Himself, or He would have needed to create another person who looked like Judas, and then have him hanged. I do not think for a moment that you could attribute to the Holy One a farce so base as this.

C. From an intellectual viewpoint. It is impossible to believe that he who hung on the cross was one other than Christ Himself, because the seven last utterances from the cross were full of love, purity and mercy -- something which a cowardly traitor as Judas would have been incapable of producing.

Surely, if you examine the historic records and review the cases of those who were executed on a cross, you would find that they breathed out the ugliest blasphemies and most wicked curses. However, this was not the case with Christ, for He started with words of forgiveness and ended with "It is finished," meaning that the work of redemption was completed. This was the noblest expression of love.

D. From an historical perspective. Investigators of the crucifixion of Christ, whether Roman, Jewish, or other, have not come up with any evidence that challenges the original account of the eyewitnesses at Golgotha or the record of the apostles and Christians. On the contrary, reliable historians have confirmed that it was none other than Jesus Christ who died on the cross.

My dear Hassan, your reluctance to accept these truths suggests to me that you also may be doubting Christ's actual, literal death on the cross. This question may be looming large with you, but it will appear insignificant when placed in the light of the actual events which are mentioned in the Bible and supported by history:

a.) *The testimony of the Gospel accounts.* The accounts of the Gospel by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John constitute historic evidence that cannot be proven false. These contain the testimony of a group of eyewitnesses, concerning what they had seen, touched and heard. From a legal perspective, it is recognised that the most important evidence is that by eyewitnesses. The evidence is further enhanced if the eyewitnesses are of good reputation -- and this is true in our present case; the men whose accounts were recorded in the Gospel were among the disciples of Christ who were characterised by honesty and noble stature. This makes any attempt to dispute or cast doubt on their accounts an attack against truth. These disciples and followers of Christ devoted the rest of their lives to preaching the Gospel among men. They bore this truth to the ends of the earth, undeterred by labours, persecutions and even the pain of death. No one can deny this.

b.) *The testimony of other New Testament books.* In the other New Testament Books that were inspired by God, we find a comprehensive presentation of the teachings and preaching of the apostles who proclaimed to the world the crucified

Christ. The Apostle Paul said: "But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

c.) *The testimony of prophecy.* The Old Testament prophets spoke of the death of Christ, stating that the purpose of His incarnation was to offer Himself as a sacrifice to redeem mankind. Jesus, after His resurrection, referred to these prophecies in His discourses with His disciples. Moses, David, Isaiah, Daniel and Zechariah prophesied about the death of Christ, either explicitly or symbolically. We find the fulfilment of all these prophecies in the New Testament. They constitute a body of evidence which no one can deny, except of course the ignorant or prejudiced.

d.) *The testimony of history.* We have already reviewed the testimonies of the ancient historians who have unanimously upheld the reliability of the Biblical records of the death of Christ. Since we are on this subject, I would like to draw your attention to the words of Christ which He directed to His disciples: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

The disciples obeyed the orders of their Master, and the Gospel spread far and wide in six hundred years -- that is, before the coming of Islam. The Gospel which they proclaimed can be summarised in one statement: Christ died for our sins and rose for our justification (Romans 4:25). How then could anyone -- no matter how skilled

in logical argumentation -- have lied to entire nations believing in this vital, witnessed event which was communicated through Christ's apostles and translated uniformly, despite differences in language? Can anyone rightly discredit the testimonies of those witnesses who wrote with certainty -- those whose eyes saw and hands felt the truth -- especially since none had attacked the reliability of the evidence throughout the first six centuries! Neither the Christians who welcomed the message of the cross and preached it as a tiding of salvation, nor the Jews who prided themselves with killing Christ ("We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God" [Sura al-Nisa' 4:155], the testimony of the Jews down the generations to our own day), nor even the Gentiles who schemed with them in history's ugliest crime, had challenged the veracity of the evidence of the witnesses.

And now, if we examine the Qur'anic texts, will we find any denial of the death of Christ? No! On the contrary, we find at least five passages that support it:

- "Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive!" (Sura Maryam 19:34).

(In this text, there is a clear testimony to the reality of the death and resurrection of Christ. It is in the form of a prophecy, based on a miracle. Any other interpretation claiming that the death referred to here does not mean in the present but at a distant time is unsuccessful

quibbling, lacking contextual validity.)

- "And We gave to Moses the Book, and after him sent succeeding Messengers; and We gave Jesus son of Mary the 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 2:81).

(The word slay contradicts the idea that God raised Christ to heaven before His death.)

- Those same men said, "God has made covenant with us, that we believe not any Messenger until he brings to 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 3:179-180).

(Who was a messenger that was killed after bringing with him a corban, "a table from heaven" according to the Qur'anic account, if not Isa, son of Mary?)

- When God said, "Jesus, I will take thee to Me and will raise thee to Me, and I will purify thee of those who believe not. I will set thy followers above the unbelievers till the Resurrection Day..." (Sura Al Imran 3:49).

(Al-Razi, after Ibn Abbas and Muhammad Ibn Ishaq, said that "take thee" here means death.

Wahab said, "Isa was dead for three hours; then God raised Him to heaven." Muhammad Ibn Ishaq said, "Isa was dead for seven hours; then God raised Him." Al-Baidawi said, "God left Isa dead for seven hours, then raised Him to heaven." Rabee Ibn Anas stated that God caused Him to die when He raised Him to heaven.)

- And when God said, "O Jesus son of Mary, didst thou say unto men, 'Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God?'" He said, "To Thee be glory!... I only said to them what Thou didst command me: 'Serve God, my Lord and your Lord.' And I was a witness over them, while I remained among them; but when Thou didst take me to Thyself, Thou wast Thyself the watcher over them; Thou Thyself art witness of everything" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:116,117).

These texts attest to the fact that Christ died, making the efforts of some expositors, who explain away His death, merely feeble attempts. This was the case with al-Zamakhshari, when he tried to reconcile some divergent Qur'anic texts.

My dear brother, as long as we are trying to remove doubts, allow us to return once more to the impersonation theory which has spread widely among Muslims, suggesting that another person was crucified instead of Christ. This view has been based on another one which holds that God would not permit Christ to be killed in a shameful, humiliating manner that resembles a revenge killing more than

a simple submission to death. The adherents of this idea cite the words of Sura al-Nisa' 4:155: "...And for [the Jews] saying, 'We slew the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God' -- yet they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them. Those who are at variance concerning him surely are in doubt regarding him; they have no knowledge of him, except the following of surmise; and they slew him not of a certainty -- no indeed; God raised him up to Him; God is All-mighty, All-wise."

The phrase, "only a likeness of that was shown to them," is at the root of all the accounts recorded by the expositors, raising arguments and differing opinions. The Imam al-Razi has remarked on this subject, saying, "These aspects are conflicting and self-defeating, and God knows best." In any case, the impersonation theory raises the following problems:

A. If it is permitted to say that the Almighty would cast the likeness of Isa on another, this would open the door to doubt, and the testimony of tradition would be defamed. Opening such a door would end in the annulment of all prophecies.

B. God had confirmed Christ with the Holy Spirit; did He fail to confirm Him in this instance? Also, Christ was able to raise the dead; could He therefore not have protected Himself, without needing any help from God?

C. God could have rescued Christ by raising Him to heaven. What purpose would then have been served by His

casting the likeness of Christ on another? Such an action would have only condemned an unfortunate man to death.

D. The casting of Christ's likeness on another would have given the impression that it was Isa who died, when it really was not. Such a deception does not befit a perfect God.

E. A great number of Christians, with their love for and intense attachment to the cause of Christ, affirm having seen Him die through crucifixion on the cross. If we deny this truth, it is an attack against what has been confessed and upheld down the ages. Such an attack would open the possibility of denying the prophecies of the prophets, of Isa, and even of Muhammad.

F. Could not the person upon whom the likeness of Christ was cast have defended himself? The record does not indicate this. Had this been mentioned, it would have become famous among the opposing school. But since it does not exist, we can conclude that it did not happen.

In the light of these points, we must reject the impersonation theory, honoured by some Muslims, and banish it forever. Doing so does not change anything of the Qur'anic position, nor does it discredit the sura, al-Nisa'. This is the opinion of al-Razi. We do not think that such a scholar, noted for his uprightness and integrity, wanted to create conflicts between verses in the Qur'an or between the Qur'an and the Gospel. The correct way to understand verse 155 of Sura al-Nisa' is to study it in-depth, in the light of comparable texts. One should

also compare it with the Gospel narrative which reveals the motives of the Jews in killing Jesus.

In the first part of my letter, I spoke briefly about the reason the Jews killed Christ. To do the subject justice, I should revert to what the Gospel according to John says about this subject:

"Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad. Then from that day on they plotted to put Him to death" (John 11:47-53).

When they nailed Him to the cross and laid Him in the tomb, they thought they had got rid of Him and His miracles. However, since the crucifixion quickly drew thousands to Christ -- indeed, it was the miracle of miracles -- we can say that they were not able to blot Him out. Luke, in the book of Acts, tells us that within a short period after the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, people embraced Christianity by the thousands as a result of a sermon by the Apostle Peter. He addressed a crowd of Jews, criticising their leaders who had conspired against Jesus and put Him to death (Acts 2:14-41).

The Jews, therefore, did not achieve their end in disposing of Christ, but it only appeared to them as such. They did not really kill Him, even though they thought they had; the tomb could not hold Him. He rose from the dead on the third day, and after forty days He ascended into heaven. Thus, even the Qur'anic saying was fulfilled: "Peace be upon me, the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive!" (Sura Maryam 19:34).

Likewise, the ascension of Christ, the Word, to where He had been from the beginning, did not put an end to His miracles. He promised that His power would continue through His apostles and chosen ones: "And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover" (Mark 16:17,18).

Thus, Jesus is a sign to all the world -- in His birth, His life, His teachings, His death, His ascension and the spread of His kingdom.

Before concluding the discussion on this subject, I find it necessary to deal with another allegation that is no less absurd than the impersonation theory. This is the view which, while admitting that Jesus was actually nailed to a cross, claims that He did not die but merely swooned or fainted, causing the Jews to think He had died. Thus, after He was taken down and buried in a rock-hewn tomb, He is believed to have regained consciousness, sneaked out of the tomb

secretly and fled to a far country where He eventually died like any other man. This argument is based on the belief that the blood of the dead coagulates as soon as death occurs, not flowing as it did when Christ's side was pierced by the sword of a Roman soldier (John 19:34). This theory was examined by the Scottish physician, Sir James Simpson, who achieved fame for his revolutionary use of chloroform in surgery. This learned man wrote a pamphlet in which he promoted his position that Christ died of what is called "blood infiltration". He confirmed that those who die of this malady experience swelling in their arms, and they often scream from the pain, owing to their heart rupturing and the blood flowing freely from it. The blood remains for a while in the membranes; some of it then changes into a fluid resembling water. This is exactly how John the Beloved describes the last moments of Christ, even though he had no knowledge of medicine. He was accurate in his observation and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, described what he saw precisely.

Let us now compare what John wrote with what medicine confirms. In his Gospel account, John says that Christ's arms were outstretched horizontally and His palms were nailed to a wooden crosspiece. He remained in that position for six hours, and then He shouted with a loud voice and gave up His spirit:

"Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they

might be taken away. Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe" (John 19:31-35).

Among common people, this kind of death was known as that "of a broken heart," confirming the saying of David when he prophesied: "Reproach has broken my heart..." (Psalm 69:20).

Let us now return to the allegation that Christ fainted. Those who advance this theory say that Jesus, while in a state of weakness and despair, began to lose consciousness progressively and that He uttered His cry of despair before He swooned. John mentions that Jesus said, "It is finished," on drinking some vinegar that was offered to Him (John 19:28-30). In the language of the Gospel, these are words that were used when an account was settled; they were not the despairing cry of one who sought to arouse the sympathy of others. This utterance was the shout of victory that Jesus voiced when He finished the work of salvation and defeated the forces of Satan. Now everyone who believes in Him can be saved from the bondage of sin. When He had cried, "It is finished," He died. He was satisfied, because He had finished the divine plan of redemption in accordance with the proclamations of heaven and the relevant prophecies.

3. *"Why was Christ crucified... Could God not have forgiven Adam and his children without needing to have the*

Son killed?"

I had thought that from all the Bible verses in my last letter you would have been informed as to why Christ was crucified. However, now that you are requesting additional clarification, I find myself having to return to the subject, enlarging on what I had written about the fall of Adam through disobedience, resulting in his expulsion from Paradise. He was banished from the garden of Eden and entered the outside world that had been cursed. He fathered offspring void of goodness, as is shown by their instinctive leanings toward evil. And so the world was filled with wickedness. Of this, the Scriptures say: "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Because of the wretched condition of all that dwelled on the earth, the judgement of God fell by way of a flood, in which all mankind and animals were destroyed, for He was grieved that He had made them (Genesis 6:7). How right is the Apostle Paul in his assessment of the condition of man: "...Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned..." (Romans 5:12).

God is characterised by justice, the basis of His righteousness; He is also characterised by mercy, the index of His love. He is perfect in both justice and love. But God's justice and love have to somehow be reconciled, and one cannot operate at the expense of the other. In order for God to be

altogether perfect, the Word, which was in the beginning with God, interposed, taking a human body to redeem man from destruction. Thus, the poles of justice and mercy were reconciled at the cross.

Throughout the ages, divine providence has revealed to man that God judges sin; it was never shown that God overlooks it. Through the law of Moses, mankind was taught to be holy, for God is holy (Leviticus 11:44), and through the prophets they were told that the soul which sins shall die (Ezekiel 18:20). However, both the law and the prophets never got beyond their roles of instruction and warning, for neither could heal the wounded conscience nor remove the root of sin in the soul. The Old Testament displayed the moral perfection of God partially, in the framework of His divine glory. Redemption, however, reveals the perfection of God's moral nature in its totality, since it also proclaims mercy and the emotions of a heart full of love.

My brother, it is impossible for material offerings to redeem the immortal soul, created in the image of God. Also, mere repentance cannot make a sinful man righteous. A man might be able to repent outside the scope of redemption, but he will remain beset by weakness and fall into sin again and again. Thus, for the sake of his peace, he must be redeemed. We know from the Gospel and from experience that those with whom God has made peace through redemption by the blood of Jesus are justified and freed from the power of sin: "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for

you are not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:14).

The plan of redemption has always been in the mind of God, and the Jews of old were instructed to offer sacrifices in expectation of it; this became the cornerstone of the Mosaic law. Even before the law was given, patriarchs such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Job and others made sacrifices symbolically. The understanding of this theme increased generation by generation. All were awaiting the coming of the Messiah and were living in the hope of atonement for their sins through sacrifices which pointed to Him. These men obtained salvation through faith in the redemption which the Messiah was to accomplish in latter days.

When God gave the law, He distinguished between clean and unclean animals, with regards to sacrifices for sin. He taught the nation that there could be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. He demanded the sinner to offer sacrifices, insisting that they be of the clean animals, free from any blemish, because they would be representing Jesus, the New Testament Sacrifice who is holy and undefiled.

3.16. Appointing a Mediator

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...." (1 Timothy 2:5)

In order to expound the subject of mediation, there is no need for me to return once more to the themes of the Fall, justice, condemnation and mercy. I will

therefore call your attention to man's nature which constrains him to contemplate the future. His conscience tells him that all his deeds will be tried by a righteous Judge. He feels guilt when he does wrong and fears punishment in the future world; this mars his happiness in the present. All the heavenly religions have unanimously upheld that man is corrupt, a slave of his passions. Thus, he is incapable of facing God, because he has lived according to his fleshly lusts and the desires of his conceited mind. He has loved his carnal nature which is against God.

The fact that man is alienated from God by his love of carnal and worldly things does not mean that he hates every attribute of God. Even the worst evildoers do not hate the mercy of God. Rather, they covet it and hope that it will secure His forgiveness for them and make them acceptable to Him. Consider the following two verses from the New Testament, in reference to man's sinful nature:

- For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:5).
- But there shall by no means enter [the New Jerusalem] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27).

These verses remind us of the words of Christ to a religious leader of the Jews: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

From these verses, we understand that man is fallen. If he is to inherit eternal life, God's image of righteousness, holiness and truth must be restored to him; this is the image which Adam had borne before his tragic fall. However, this transformation is as impossible for him as it would be to raise himself from death. But what is impossible with men is possible with God, for He "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). The psalmist has said: "...Hope in the Lord; for with the Lord there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption" (Psalm 130:7).

God redeems those who take refuge in Him and turn from their sins: "The Lord is long-suffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Numbers 14:18). He is willing to receive the sinner if he returns to Him: "Say to them: '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. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'" (Ezekiel 33:11). However, if God forgives a sinner, there has to be ample justification for so great a pardon. The work of a mediator is therefore necessary -- one, who by virtue of His standing with God, can quicken our dead spirits and clothe us in His righteousness, so that we can appear before God sanctified and blameless. This unique mediator has to be:

A. Human. It is written that the reason Jesus took on our nature and not that of angels was in order to come down to our world and redeem us. It was essential that He should be born under the law which we had broken. He had to fulfil all righteousness, suffer and die as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. He had to become a

partaker of our humanity and experience our weaknesses, as it is written:

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Hebrews 2:14-18).

B. Without sin. According to the law of Moses, the sacrifice of atonement had to be without blemish. Likewise, the One who would lay down His life for the sin of the world had to be blameless. It is impossible that the Saviour of sinners would Himself be a sinner, because He would not then be able to enter the presence of God and present Himself as an offering for sin. Moreover, He could not be a source of holiness and eternal life for His people unless He Himself was righteous and holy. In the letter to the Hebrews, we read:

"For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever" (Hebrews 7:26-28).

C. God. Man is incapable of overriding the authority of Satan. The Bible calls the devil "the god of this age," "the ruler of

this world," and "the prince of the power of the air" (2 Corinthians 4:4, John 12:31, Ephesians 2:2). Thus, only a divine person could rescue mankind whom the enemy of righteousness had taken captive. The only one who could undertake the great work of redemption had to be the Almighty who alone possesses infinite wisdom and knowledge. Only He could become the head of the church and the judge of all. In order to be the source of spiritual life for the multitude of the redeemed, He had to have "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9). He was a link between God and man, because He was God appearing in human flesh.

From a Biblical perspective all the qualities demanded of such a mediator were combined in Jesus. He alone manifested all the necessary attributes of such a one. His mediation of peace between heaven and earth encompasses all He has accomplished and is still accomplishing for the salvation of man. All His actions were those of a divine person, whether His vicarious sufferings on the cross or His intercession as High Priest at the right hand of the Majesty on high. He is the Lord of Glory who emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant, being obedient unto death.

If you require proof that Christ is the only mediator between God and man, here are some rich pointers:

- a.) The text of the Bible bears a clear witness: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).
- b.) Jesus alone, while on earth, undertook all that mediation entailed, pertaining to redemption. In heaven, He is undertaking all that is required in terms of intercession

on our behalf: "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). The following verse also bears witness to this: "Therefore, He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

c.) Jesus fulfilled all His mediatorial work to a perfect degree; so there is no need of another: "For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

d.) Christ is the only Saviour: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

e.) There is no room for another mediator between us and God, because Christ has become like a brother to us: "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren... Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:11,17).

f.) He invites us to Himself by the Holy Spirit who operates in the heart of man, helping him, convincing him, renewing him and leading him by the light of divine revelation. There is no doubt that Christ is our only Mediator: "For through Him we... have access by one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).

3.17. Back to the Sacrifice

"For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews

10:14)

In my previous letter, under the title "Redemption," I offered you a brief exposition on the role of sacrifice in sacred history. Your questions, however, have led me to return to this subject.

The Bible tells us that some of the offerings in the Old Testament were with blood, while others were not. Some of the blood offerings were called blood sacrifices, of which the most significant were those offered on the great Day of Atonement. These were meant:

1. *To draw out the forgiveness, pity and propitiation of God through means of an offering worthy of His attributes.*
2. *To cover the sins of those who had already obtained God's favour through a prior atoning sacrifice, so that God would no longer view them as deserving of additional punishment.* The psalmist was referring to this truth when he said: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" (Psalm 32:1).
3. *To declare that redemption was accomplished through substitutionary punishment.* In other words, the slain animal took the place of an offender, appropriating his sin and bearing the punishment which he deserved. This is supported by a number of proofs, of which the most important are:

a.) *The fact that the sin offerings in the Old Testament were for atonement.* It was understood that these offerings carried away sin and expiated it. Their purpose was to obtain forgiveness which could not be earned through repentance or reform -- although these were required -- before the sacrifice

was offered and the blood, shed. Thus, the payment demanded was a soul for a soul and a life for a life, in accordance with the apostolic principle: "And according to the law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22).

Furthermore, the book of Leviticus tells us that blood was forbidden as food, because it was set apart for atonement: "And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among you, who eats any blood, I (God) will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people" (Leviticus 17:10,11).

The requirement for the acceptance of the sacrifice was that it had to be from among the clean animals without blemish, because it pointed forward to Christ, the holy and perfect one who was to become a substitute for sinners. By his sacrifice, the sinner openly confessed that he deserved the punishment for his sin. He had to place his hands upon the head of the sacrificial animal to indicate identification with it. Figuratively and symbolically, he was placing his sin upon the head of the animal. The high priest then carried the blood into the Holy of Holies in the temple and sprinkled it on the ark of the covenant. This indicated that the service towards God was completed, His justice, satisfied and His forgiveness, granted.

On the great Day of Atonement, two male goats were selected. The first served as a sin offering and the second was set loose in the wilderness. Before

freeing the second goat, the high priest would lay his hands upon its head and confess the offences, sins and iniquities of all the people. Thus, the goat would carry all the transgressions of the people to a place in the wilderness (Leviticus 16:21,22). In an inspired explanation of this symbol, the prophet Isaiah refers to the Lamb of God who carried our sins to the cross in His own body: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all... He shall see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge my righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:6,11).

In the New Testament, the word of prophecy teaches that the Old Testament, with its sacrifices, was only a foreshadowing of the priesthood and sacrifice of Christ. Comparing the two testaments and sacrifices, the writer of the book of Hebrews declares:

"Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another -- He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgement, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation"

(Hebrews 9:23-26).

If the limited sacrifices of the Old Testament covered punishment by substitution, just imagine how much more the sacrifice of Christ, in its unlimited scope, atones and saves completely!

b.) *The prophecy of Isaiah.* This prophecy declares that this grand theme was not only confined to the symbolism of the Old Testament but that it would also effect a complete restitution. Isaiah not only foretold that Christ would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, despised, mocked and killed shamefully. He also declared that Christ would bear our sins: "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

You might be asking why God did not maintain the Old Testament ceremonials and sacrifices instead of yielding His own Son to satisfy divine justice and atone for the sins of mankind. I would answer by saying that this would have been possible if God did not include the Gentiles in the promise of salvation, for Christ indeed is the "Desire of All Nations" (Haggai 2:7). Because the promises of the Old Testament were restricted mainly to the Jews, it was necessary to usher in a better bond that would include all nations, tribes and tongues -- one that would be stronger than the one based on rituals and ceremonies, which the Apostle Paul described as being founded on "weak and beggarly elements" (Galatians 4:9). This former

dispensation also could not make the consciences of the worshipers perfect (Hebrews 9:9). The writer of the book of Hebrews described the limitations of the old dispensation in the following way:

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purged, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 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 10:1-9).

From this teaching, we understand that a time came when God grew tired of material offerings which could not free the worshipers from the dominion of sin. This was revealed in the book of Isaiah, where God says: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?... 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" (Isaiah 1:11). Because of the insufficiency of the sacrifices, God abolished them, as we discover through the following verses:

- "For on the one hand there is an annulling of the former commandment because of its weakness and unprofitableness, for the law made nothing perfect; on the other hand, there is the bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God" (Hebrews 7:18,19).
- "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second" (Hebrews 8:7).

Among the things which paved the way for the Gospel dispensation was the discarding of many Old Testament ceremonies following the Babylonian Exile. Among them are the following:

- A.** The destruction of the temple and the removal of its furnishings. It is only logical that, when the time came for the coming of the Truth (of which the temple was only a foreshadowing), the glory of the earthly temple would disappear.
 - B.** The loss of the two stone tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were written and which had been given to Moses by God.
 - C.** The absence of the "shekinah glory" which covered the ark of the covenant and signified the presence of God's majesty there.
 - D.** The loss of the holy fire that had been preserved in the temple since it had descended from heaven, devouring the first sacrifice (2 Chronicles 7:1).
4. *"If Adam's sin was not forgiven, then he died deserving God's wrath and was sent to hell for his deeds...This means*

that everyone from Adam to Christ, whose sins have not been forgiven, is in the fires of hell."

No, my brother, not all who preceded Christ are in the fire, because those who repented and sacrificed in faith obtained forgiveness for their sins. As for Adam and his wife, they were included in God's salvation when they heard of the Saviour who would come from the seed of a woman to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). When they felt ashamed of their nakedness, God clothed them with garments made of animal skin, thus indicating the forgiveness of their offence and the covering of their sin. From God's covering their nakedness with animal skin, we can conclude that He redeemed them through a blood sacrifice.

5. *"Sin has overtaken all mankind, and this requires the forgiveness of Adam's sin for all who came after Christ. Those living after Christ are fortunate, whereas those living before are unfortunate."*

No, my brother, not all who have lived after Christ are forgiven, but God, in Christ, has opened wide the door of reconciliation, for He said: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him" (Matthew 17:5). With this statement, God has laid the condition for salvation; namely, that we listen to the words of His Son. It is mankind's good fortune that the words of God's Son are a call to salvation:

- "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).
- "All that the Father gives Me will

come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

- "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18).

All who heard the words of Christ and came to Him were saved. God, who is loving and full of mercy, did not close the door of reconciliation but left it open so that all may come to Him and obtain forgiveness through His name. He says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Revelation 3:20). It follows then that there is neither a fortunate nor unfortunate group of people, because God saves without distinction, as it is written: "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 3:21-24).

6. *"It occurred to me that the murderers of Isa (Jesus) were also tainted with the sin of Adam. How can it be that the Lord was killed and that the murderers received forgiveness for their deed?"*

It is obvious that Christ, who taught people to love their enemies and to pray for those who persecuted them,

would also pray for those who mistreated Him. He interceded for those who crucified Him, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34). These words came as a fulfilment of a prophecy in Isaiah: "...He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

The forgiveness He requested for His enemies applied only to those who repented and believed in Him, living their lives worthy of His Gospel in righteousness, holiness and truth.

7. *"Why was Isa not slain much earlier, as soon as Adam sinned?... Where is the wisdom in having this event delayed until the time of Christ?"*

It is obvious that Christ could not have been killed before His incarnation, when He came into the world. This coming was at a moment which God had determined from eternity. The Apostle Paul called it "the fullness of time." Prior to this time in history, the world was not ready for His coming, because, according to the Apostle, "as long as [an heir] is a child, [he] does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world" (Galatians 4:1-3). The Apostle goes on to say, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4,5).

It is true that the world fell under a

curse as a result of Adam's sin. But God, in His wisdom, decreed that the curse would run its course, and then all things would be restored by Christ. There would be a general destruction changing the face of the world in order to fully display the terrible results of the Fall before the advent of the Restoration.

It may be that Christ's incarnation was set for the time after the great Flood, because God wanted the earth to be filled with people. His kingdom would therefore be more populous and His victory over Satan, more spectacular.

His coming prior to the Babylonian Exile would not have been appropriate, because the kingdom of Satan would not yet have reached its peak. The heathen states were small at that time. So it pleased God to send Christ at the time of the largest empire history has ever known, the Roman Empire. This entity was Satan's visible kingdom on earth. Thus, by triumphing over it, He conquered the kingdom of Satan at its zenith.

The important thing to remember is that the Word, which was in the beginning with God and equal to Him (John 1:1-5), came in the fullness of time, was seen by eyes and touched by hands. People saw His glory, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Christ was the fullest revelation that God had ever shown to man. Not only was His power and greatness revealed in Christ, but His compassionate Father-heart was also displayed, full of mercy, pity and love.

It is true that this miserable world had

to wait some time for the light of God's revelation to dawn. But God was nonetheless deeply concerned with this wretched earth, even before the incarnation. During the period in history before Christ, we can see that there were three peoples in the world who had influence: the Greeks, the Romans and the Jews. The Greek was the cultured and refined man; the Roman, powerful and dominant; and the Jew, despised and subjected. These three nations collaborated, unwittingly, to pave the way for the coming of Christ. This leads us to believe that such a co-operation could only have come from God, in expectation of Him who came in the name of the Lord.

We see that God used the Romans to pave the way by unifying the various parts of the world and spreading security throughout a vast area which had previously fallen prey to plunderers spreading chaos everywhere. Before the Romans stabilised the area, it was impossible for any message from the Holy Land to leave the confines of its borders.

The Greeks likewise contributed, unknowingly, in preparing the way for Christ. They did this by spreading their beautiful language, which became the official language in the vast Roman Empire. Greek was a fine medium for spreading the message of the Gospel throughout the empire.

As for the Jews, scattered throughout the many countries, they had carried their holy books with them and they read them every Sabbath, according to the instructions of Moses. A most important fact is that the Scriptures had

been translated into Greek some 200 years before the incarnation of Christ. This allowed the heathen world to read the prophecies of a coming Messiah and thus be prepared to receive Him.

It is very interesting how these nations co-operated in preparing the way of the Lord, albeit unknowingly. These facts make plain the hand of God in the events of history.

One of the most arresting factors in connection with the Jews was their intense longing for the arrival of their Messiah, just prior to the coming of Christ. Scholars attribute this to the cessation of prophetic utterances for roughly four centuries. One would think that, after such a long time, people's memories would fade and their expectancies, falter. But this was not the case, for the people's longing for the arrival of the Desire of the Nations increased daily. No doubt, those nations that had access to the contents of the Holy Scriptures shared in the Jews' anticipation. We have proof of this in the arrival of the Magi from the East to the Holy Land, to worship Christ when He was a child.

It is worth noting that when the Word became incarnate in Bethlehem's manger, some very momentous events transpired, helping to rekindle hope in the hearts of those waiting for the Lord:

A. The return of the spirit of prophecy which had ceased after the prophet Malachi. Now it suddenly reappeared and manifested itself through Zacharias, the priest; Elizabeth, his wife; the Virgin Mary and Joseph, her

husband; the aged Simeon; Anna, the prophetess; and John the Baptist.

B. The triumphant song, sung in the heavens by the angelic host: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!" (Luke 2:14). The citizens of heaven and earth were waiting expectantly for the Word to become flesh, for they had discovered that the promises of God pointed to the redemption which He had prepared.

C. The entry of the child Jesus into the temple, in fulfilment of what the prophet Haggai had said: "...I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory," says the Lord of hosts. "The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine," says the Lord of hosts. "The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former," says the Lord of hosts. "And in this place I will give peace," says the Lord of hosts" (Haggai 2:7-9).

8. *"We have seen that the Redeemer is superior to the redeemed, logically speaking. How then could the sin of Adam receive such emphasis in the sight of God, being preferred to Isa?"*

My brother, it seems from your inquiry that you wish to question the wisdom of God by human reasoning, the very thing which the apostles and prophets avoided. The prophet Isaiah said: "The Lord stands up to plead, and stands to judge the people. The Lord will enter into judgement with the elders of His people and His princes..." (Isaiah 3:13,14). Likewise, the Apostle Paul said: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements

and His ways past finding out!"
(Romans 11:33).

In all truth, man is not permitted to object to what God has ordained for his salvation; neither should he question the ways of God with his finite reason, for when God's rich and merciful love acts in grace to pay all that was demanded of him, there is no room left for human argumentation. Who is man, the weak and inadequate creature that he is, to allow himself the scrutiny of God's thoughts or the weighing of His love! Does it not suffice that the thrice-holy God should even care for us fallen creatures and ordain our salvation?

My brother, the sin of Adam is not worthy of more emphasis, being preferred to Jesus, as you put it. Rather, God's love to man is excelling in that He prepared a salvation for creatures that had been made in His image. He redeemed us with something of incalculable value.

During Old Testament times, man's sin was expiated by sacrifices, the value of which was less than that of a man. However, God did not accept these on the basis of their material value; rather, they symbolised the Saviour who is of infinite worth. Consider paper money for a moment. Its value is not in the quality of the paper but in the seal of the state which it bears. Likewise, all the Old Testament sacrifices were stamped with the image of Christ.

9. *"Since Satan incriminated Adam, he was worthy of death, because he, not Isa, was the cause of the problem."*

God's purpose in redemption was not

to punish Satan but to show His great love in rescuing man from the abyss into which he had thrown himself, through disobedience. Since God's mercy cannot override His justice, a sacrifice worthy of His holiness became necessary. Satan, being vile and base, could not -- under any circumstances -- be an atoning sacrifice capable of raising a sweet-smelling aroma to the throne of God. Because God is holy, the mediator had to be a divine person and not a deceitful devil. Satan, since his fall, has been the object of divine wrath. God forbid that you should even entertain the thought that he could have been offered on the altar of God in place of the Holy and True One -- our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ -- in order to accomplish so divine an act as the Atonement!

Jesus described Satan as a liar and the father of lies. Would God allow us to base our hope of salvation on a liar who, since the beginning, has been a murderer in whom is no truth? (John 8:44).

I know that the idea of inflicting death on Satan has occurred in some of the teachings of the Batiniya who borrowed their ideas from the ancient Greeks and Persians. I warn you against dabbling in these absurd philosophies which have no basis in the heavenly religions.

10. *"The redeemed one, Ishmael, was of greater consequence and more value than the ram with which he was redeemed. How can it be that God should redeem Ishmael, who was to be slain by the hand of his father, and not*

*redeem Christ, the Favoured One...
Could not God have spared Christ by
transferring His likeness on someone
else, making the beholders think that
He was the victim, even as He saved
Ishmael with a ram?"*

My brother, we know that one cannot serve the truth unless he calls things by their real name. This being understood, we have to state the truth: The son whom Abraham redeemed with a ram was not Ishmael but Isaac, and the place where this happened was not Mt. Arafat but Mt. Moriah. Moses, the prophet and spokesman of God, was careful to record this in detail:

"Now it came to pass after these things that God tested Abraham, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you"... And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me." Then Abraham lifted his eyes and looked, and there behind him was a ram caught in a thicket by its horns. So Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham called the name of the place, The-Lord-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, "In the Mount of the Lord it shall be provided" (Genesis 22:1,2; 10-14).

Certainly, my brother, Isaac was the son whom Abraham was asked to sacrifice, because Isaac was the heir of his father and the subject of God's promise when He said, "...In your seed

all the nations of the earth shall be blessed..." (Genesis 26:4). The blessing here intended is that of redemption for all peoples and nations through Christ Jesus who is descended from Isaac. As for Ishmael, he was the son of the bondwoman, Hagar, whom Abraham had sent away a few years prior to the incident on Mt. Moriah. In the Book of Galatians, we read: "For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise..." (Galatians 4:22,23).

God knew that Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. But despite this, He said to Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac..." (Genesis 22:2), distinguishing this child who was appointed by God to be an heir of promise. As for Ishmael, God said that He would make out of him a great nation (Genesis 21:18).

As for your question, "Could God not have spared Christ by transferring His likeness onto someone else?" I have already written you enough on this weak inference which no rational person can accept, for it constitutes an attack on God's integrity and is an insult to His wisdom. I trust that you will find ample proofs in what I have quoted to you from the Scriptures. Hopefully, you will reconsider the impersonation theory which so many Muslims uphold, for it has no legitimate historical basis and is void of substantial proof. All that has been said of it is pure conjecture which does not satisfy the mind that seeks after truth. The Qur'anic saying, "...Only a

likeness of that was shown to them..." (Sura al-Nisa' 4:155), lacks substance and is too vague, confusing, and contradictory, when compared to the straightforward account in the Gospel.

Before concluding this discussion, I would like you to realise that Christ is truly wonderful! This is how the prophet Isaiah described him under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 9:6). You can spend your life trying to probe and analyse the profound personality of Christ, and you can continue to ask how it could be possible for God to offer His only Son for sinners who have trampled His laws and incurred His displeasure. But there is only one way to truly understand these weighty themes: through simple faith and response to His invitation. He said: "Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28,29).

And so, I would draw your attention again to this wonderful person who is the Lord of heaven and who revealed the Father by His miraculous deeds and superlative love. Only in Him will you find true knowledge, even as Paul the apostle experienced when he trusted Him on the Damascus road. May you come to know Him "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

I testify to you that my faith in Him and His Holy Spirit, and the power of His cross and resurrection, have changed and regenerated my life,

transporting me from death to life and from the darkness of sin to the light of forgiveness and righteousness. I tell you truly that the cross is a reality without doubt, and it is the only means that has assured me of God's love, despite the sins in which I wallowed for so long.

Taufiq

3.18. The Alleged Corruption

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away." (Matthew 24:35)

May 15, 1954

My dear brother,

Grace to you and peace from God. Holding true to my promise, I am submitting to you the answers to the allegation that the Holy Bible has been corrupted. Those who hold this view even oppose well-educated Muslims who believe that divine providence has preserved the precious Book from any tampering or corruption by human hands. These Muslims believe that this charge is the worst slander against God's Book, for it lacks scientific and historic substantiation. Through Moses, God ordered the Jews not to add to or subtract from what He had commanded them (Deuteronomy 4:2). Solomon the Wise also testified in a similar manner: "Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest he reprove you, and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5,6).

In the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we have the following stern warning: "For I testify to everyone who

hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Revelation 22:18-20).

After reading these stern warnings, is it possible that any believer could corrupt the words of God? As for evil men, they would not have been able to corrupt the Holy Scriptures either, because it would have been impossible for them to collect the thousands of copies scattered throughout the world and alter them!

It is truly sad that some have accused Christ's apostles of corrupting the Gospel; this, by the way, also constitutes an attack on the Qur'an itself, for the Qur'an witnesses to the nobility of the blessed apostles, calling them hawariyin ("friends") and the fellowship of Christ and God. The Qur'an also attests to the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures.

Everyone who studies the Qur'an seriously will be amazed at its clear witness to the inerrancy of the Bible. This is a true testimony, found in many suras, requiring no explanation or interpretation:

- "So let the People of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein. Whosoever judges not according to what God has sent down -- they are the ungodly" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:51).
- That is God's guidance; He guides by it whom He will of His servants; had they been idolaters, it would have failed them, the things they did. 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 (Sura al-An`am 6:88,89).

(These two verses exhort the people of the Book to walk according to the precepts of the Bible.)

- Say: "People of the Book, you do not stand on anything, until you perform the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to you from your Lord" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:72).

(This verse enjoins Muhammad to take the light given to the people of the Book as his example, for they had received wisdom and prophecy.)

- "...[God] sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, as guidance to the people, and He sent down the Salvation..." (Sura Al Imran 3:1).

(This verse tells us that God sent down the precious Book for the guidance of mankind.)

- "And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him; and We gave to him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:50).

(This verse testifies to the accuracy of the Torah and requests all to follow its guidance.)

- "Then We sent, following in their footsteps, Our Messengers; and We sent, following, Jesus son of Mary, and gave unto him the Gospel. And We set in the hearts of those who followed him tenderness and mercy" (Sura

al-Hadid 57:27).

(This verse upholds that the Gospel was sent down from God and that Muhammad had to submit to its precepts.)

- "O believers, believe in God and His Messenger and the Book He has sent down on His Messenger and the Book which He sent down before. Whoso disbelieves in God and His angels and His Books, and His Messengers, and the Last Day, has surely gone astray into far error" (Sura al-Nisa' 4:135).

(This verse judges that the Muslim who does not believe in the Bible has strayed.)

- Say: "Bring a Book from God that gives better guidance than these, and follow it, if you speak truly" (Sura al-Qasas 28:50).

(This verse compels Muhammad to accept the integrity of the Bible and puts it on the same level as the Qur'an.)

- "Yet how will they make thee their judge seeing they have the Torah, wherein is God's judgement? (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:46).

(This verse shows that he who follows the Bible needs no other Book as arbiter. Not only is this true, but the Qur'an asks Muhammad to adopt the Bible as a means for removing doubts and suspicions, for it says: So, if thou art in doubt regarding what We have sent down to thee, ask those who recite the Book before thee" [Sura Yunis 10:94].)

Undoubtedly, whoever meditates deeply on these Qur'anic texts will find clear proof for the honesty of the early apostles

and Christians who zealously cared for their Book. These verses are also plain witnesses that the Bible is inspired by God. This agrees with the attestation of Christ's apostles as to the accuracy and inspiration of the Book.

The apostle Paul said: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16,17). The apostle Peter said: "...No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (2 Peter 1:20,21).

On the basis of these verses, Christians accept the Old Testament books, from Genesis to Malachi, which the early church received through the Jews. They also affirm the New Testament books, from the Gospel according to Matthew to the book of Revelation, which the church acquired from the apostles.

In defence of the integrity of the Bible, I shall now proceed to mention the evidence I was able to collect, proving the accuracy of the Holy Scriptures and their freedom from tampering, corruption or alteration:

1. *Historical Evidence:*

A. *The structure of the Bible.* If the Word of God is a shining light, increasing in brightness until the perfect day, it means that God has watched over the unfolding of the Holy Scriptures with all wisdom and diligence. When one traces the development of the Old Testament systematically, one sees that the sacred

writings evolved in three stages:

a.) *The first stage: Adam to Moses.*

Because the Book does not reveal to us how God spoke to man, we are tempted to quickly resort to our limited intellectual abilities and to pass judgement on sacred history. But by doing this, we forget that many thousands of years separate us from the recorded events in the first chapter of the book of Genesis.

Prior to the entry of sin into the world, the relationship between God and man was totally different from what it became afterwards. Likewise, we cannot visualise how Adam and Eve were created in God's image, nor do we know how God spoke to them; but we do believe that He did. Also, the sacred writings do not determine for us the time when God began to announce His declarations to man. But we are able to make certain conclusions from Scripture, and this is helpful. For example, Enoch is mentioned in Genesis 5:21-24. We are told by Jude that he was a prophet and the seventh from Adam (Jude 14). This prophet, no doubt, had some knowledge of the past because, according to the genealogies of the Bible, he lived during the time of Adam and could have known and spoken with him. Likewise, Methuselah, son of Enoch, was a contemporary of Noah who preached righteousness and declared the truth. Noah then was able to communicate the sacred tidings to the post-Flood generations (2 Peter 2:5). Shem, the son of Noah, was the father of the Hebrews and lived until the time of Abraham (Genesis 10:21; 11:10-26).

In the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, we understand that the sacred account was passed on to Abraham: "And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith, preached the Gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, `In you all the nations shall be blessed'" (Galatians 3:8). This text confirms to us that Abraham obtained certain reliable records of earlier events. He, in turn, transmitted the information to his children. In Genesis, we read the following words of God about Abraham: "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him" (Genesis 18:19). From this text of Scripture, we see that the link from Abraham to Moses was not hard to achieve.

b.) *The second stage: The Mosaic era.* Beginning with the book of Exodus, the recording of events in the Holy Scriptures became more and more precise as a result of God's instructions to Moses: "Then the Lord said to Moses, `Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua...'" (Exodus 17:14). Holy Writ informs us that Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people (Exodus 24:7). God also said to Moses: "Write these words, for according to the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel" (Exodus 34:27).

At the Lord's command, Moses recorded the starting points of the journeys of Israel (Numbers 33:2).

Also, after he had finished writing the Book of the law from beginning to end, he gave the following command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord: "Take this Book of the law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you" (Deuteronomy 31:26).

c.) The third stage: from Joshua to Malachi:

- "This Book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it" (Joshua 1:8).
- "Then Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the law of God" (Joshua 24:26).
- "Then Samuel explained to the people the behaviour of royalty, and wrote it in a book and laid it up before the Lord" (1 Samuel 10:25).
- "Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1).
- "Then Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, "I have found the Book of the law in the house of the Lord." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it" (2 Kings 22:8; see also verses 9-13).

In this text, the finding of the Book resulted in a spiritual revival. In chapters 28 and 29 of the book of Isaiah, the corruption of the priesthood

and the degeneration of Scriptural knowledge is recorded: "The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is literate, saying, 'Read this, please': and he says, 'I cannot, for it is sealed'" (Isaiah 29:11). Isaiah, the godly prophet, exhorted the people to return to and read the Word of God, saying: "Search from the book of the Lord, and read: Not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them..." (Isaiah 34:16).

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, the following word from the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Take a scroll of a book and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel, against Judah, and against all the nations..." (Jeremiah 36:2).

After reading the words of God through Jeremiah in the Scriptures, the prophet Daniel said, "...I, Daniel, understood... that [God] would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem" (Daniel 9:2). Consider also the following words to Daniel from one having the likeness of the sons of men: "But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth" (Daniel 10:21).

In the days of Cyrus, King of Persia, Ezra and Nehemiah applied themselves to the law of Moses which the Lord had given. Ezra wrote: "Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra... came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the law of Moses, which the Lord God

of Israel had given. The king granted him all his request, according to the hand of the Lord his God upon him For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord..." (Ezra 7:1-10).

Nehemiah wrote: "When the seventh month came, the children of Israel were in their cities. Now all the people gathered together as one man in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate; and they told Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded Israel. So Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation, of men and women and all who could hear with understanding Then he read it in the open square that was in front of the Water Gate..." (Nehemiah 8:1-3).

Zechariah summarised the behaviour of the people when the Word of the Lord was proclaimed: "Then the word of the Lord came to Zechariah, saying, `Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother.'" But they refused to heed, shrugged their shoulders and stopped their ears so that they could not hear. Yes, they made their hearts like flint, refusing to hear the law and the words which the Lord of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets" (Zechariah 7:8-12).

The prophet Malachi spoke of the Word of the Lord which he called the book of remembrance: "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one

another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name" (Malachi 3:16).

My brother, from the foregoing you will notice that God watched over the formation of His Holy Bible through the years, inspiring His servants with its content. This Living Lord, watching over the development of His Scriptures, was able to preserve them from the tampering of corrupters.

2. Internal Evidence:

A. *The witness of the Book regarding the truth of its inspiration:*

a.) David said: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue" (2 Samuel 23:2).

b.) The Lord told Jeremiah: "...Do not be afraid of their faces, for I am with you to deliver you... Behold, I have put My words in your mouth" (Jeremiah 1:8,9).

c.) God said to Ezekiel: "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you... I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation... do not be afraid of them... though they are a rebellious house... you shall speak My words to them..." (Ezekiel 2:1-7).

d.) He said to Hosea: "I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets" (Hosea 12:10).

e.) He said to Isaiah: "'As for Me,' says the Lord, `this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and

My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants,' says the Lord, 'from this time and forevermore'" (Isaiah 59:21).

f.) Jesus told His disciples: "...It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you" (Matthew 10:20).

g.) Paul the Apostle said: "These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches..." (1 Corinthians 2:13).

B. *Its lasting endurance.* In the Bible, we have a number of texts that affirm how God's Word is steadfast, unmovable and that it will not pass away:

- "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8).
- "For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matthew 5:18).
- "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matthew 24:35).
- "The Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

C. *Its other titles:*

a.) A scroll: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it...'" (Exodus

17:14; NIV). Also, "Then I said, 'Behold, I come; In the scroll of the Book it is written of me'" (Psalm 40:7).

b.) The book of the law: "If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD IS YOUR GOD, then the Lord will bring upon you and your descendants extraordinary plagues..." (Deuteronomy 28:58,59).

c.) The book of the Lord: "Search from the book of the Lord, and read: Not one of these shall fail; not one shall lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded it, and His Spirit has gathered them" (Isaiah 34:16).

d.) The Scripture of Truth: "But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth" (Daniel 10:21).

e.) The writing of God: "Now the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets" (Exodus 32:16).

f.) The word of the Lord: "And the boy Samuel ministered to the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days; there was no widespread revelation" (1 Samuel 3:1).

g.) The law of the Lord: "It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the Lord's law may be in your mouth..." (Exodus 13:9).

h.) The testimonies of God: "Your testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors" (Psalm 119:24).

i.) The word of God's lips:
"Concerning the works of men, by the word of Your lips, I have kept myself from the paths of the destroyer" (Psalm 17:4).

j.) The law of truth: "The law of truth was in his mouth, and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, and turned many away from iniquity" (Malachi 2:6).

k.) The Holy Scriptures: "...From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 3:15).

l.) The Scriptures: "You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me" (John 5:39).

m.) The law: "The people answered Him, `We have heard from the law that the Christ remains forever; and how can You say, "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this Son of Man?" (John 12:34).

n.) The Law and prophets: "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

o.) The word of truth: "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (James 1:18).

These titles confirm that God is bound to keep His word from corruption.

3. External Evidence:

A. *The testimony of ancient manuscripts (codices):*

a.) The Alexandrine Codex. This manuscript, named after the city where it was written, occupies first place among the uncial manuscripts. Brought by patriarch Cyrillus Lukarus of Alexandria to Constantinople and presented to King Charles I of Britain in 1628, it is a beautiful Greek copy containing all the books of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. This manuscript is carefully kept in the British Museum. On the first page, there is a marginal note that it was written by Teqla, an Egyptian woman and martyr, about the time of the Council of Nicaea in AD 325; scholars fix the year at AD 350. It is written on exquisite parchment, with its pages divided into columns, each containing fifty lines in the old uncial script.

b.) The Codex Vaticanus. This manuscript is named after the Vatican Library where it is kept. It contains both Old and New Testaments in Greek. Historians believe it to be written twenty to twenty-five years after the Alexandrine Manuscript. It also is written on fine parchment, with each page divided into three columns of forty-two lines each.

c.) The Codex Sinaiticus. This manuscript is named after Mount Sinai where it was found at the Monastery of St. Catherine by the German scholar, Tischendorf. He found the first part in 1844 and the rest in 1859. It is written on fine parchment with a clear uncial script and has all the appearances of great age. Each page has four columns. Tischendorf presented it to Czar Alexander of Russia. After the Bolshevik Revolution, it was sold to the British Museum in London where

it is still kept.

d.) The Ephraim Codex. This manuscript, consisting of the Holy Scriptures in Greek, is kept in the Paris Museum. It is written on vellum, in beautiful script. Most likely, it dates back to the first half of the fifth century AD and is considered very valuable for comparison of the main themes in Scripture. The scholar, Tregelles, has ranked it next to the Codex Vaticanus in importance.

e.) The Sinai scrolls. Recently, a copy of the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was discovered in the Monastery of St. Catherine at Sinai. It is written in Syriac and dates back to the fifth century AD, being a translation done by Christians in the second century. There is no difference between these texts and that which is now in circulation.

In addition to these four famous Greek manuscripts, there are numerous other ones of lesser importance. These have been published, and they have helped scholars in their translation of the Bible into most of the world's languages. All of these confirm the Bible which we now have in our hands. Thanks be to God for His care in transmitting these texts to us! We can find conclusive proof in them to silence the allegations of prejudiced persons who regard the Bible as having been corrupted or forged.

B. *The testimony of archaeology.* Scripture has been and still is under attack from atheistic and agnostic critics, because it condemns their passions and opposes their inclinations. Many of them have

sought out ancient inscriptions in the archaeological finds of Palestine, Babylon, Assyria and Egypt, in order to refute the sacred writings. God, however, has scorned these attempts. The inscriptions have agreed with the records in the Scriptures and have led many critics to faith. The testimony of archaeological discoveries has convinced them of the accuracy of the books of the Bible.

It used to be believed that writing was unknown, or at least seldom used, before the Babylonian Exile (ca. 600 B.C.). Some scholars did not accept the fact that Moses and others wrote what has commonly been attributed to them. They also thought that the writers of the Bible greatly exaggerated in their descriptions of the events and civilisations of the Orient, because they believed that the Biblical accounts did not coincide with the sayings of ancient historians. Recent discoveries, however, have refuted their views, putting the stamp of approval on the integrity of the sacred writings in their descriptions of Egyptian, Babylonian and Assyrian civilisations. Everything mentioned about Sennacherib, Tiglath-pileser, Nebuchadnezzar and others in the Scriptures has been confirmed.

We are pleased that these discoveries enable us to see and feel the letters which Moses, Isaiah and Jeremiah used. The findings have proven that writing existed in the days of Abraham, Moses and Ezekiel. Thus, the present-day unearthed inscriptions have fulfilled the saying of Christ: "The stones will cry out" (Luke 19:40).

Indeed the stones do speak through the inscriptions from the period in which most of the important events in the Bible are recorded:

a.) The story of Genesis: When we compare the Creation account in the Bible to that which is recorded in Babylonian and Assyrian inscriptions, we find striking similarities, for all mention a time when everything was void and without form.

The Bible says that God made two great lights, the greater one to rule the day and the lesser one to rule the night; He also made the stars (Genesis 1:16). Babylonian records say that God made the nebulae and the stars.

In the Bible, it is God who makes the beasts, cattle and creeping things according to their kind (Genesis 1:24). In the Babylonian account, a council of the gods creates them.

In the Bible, God creates man from the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). In the Babylonian story, Marduk creates him from flesh and bone.

The Bible goes on to relate the events and how man renounced his faith in the living God, turning to polytheism. This is what prompted the prophets to try to restore mankind to the worship of the one God. It also contradicts the idea, common among scholars, that man originally believed in many gods.

Dr. S. Herbert, an authority on archaeology and professor of Assyrian Studies at Oxford University, wrote: "I support unreservedly the idea that belief in one God in the Semitic and Sumerian religions preceded belief in

many gods." This opinion is also held by Sir Peter Reito who translated *The Book of the Dead* by the ancient Egyptians.

Furthermore, recent findings have refuted the view held in some learned circles that monotheism in the Hebrew religion evolved as a result of the teachings of prophets in the seventh or eighth century B.C. Scholars have established the fact that Moses proclaimed monotheism before the Hebrews entered the land of Canaan.

b.) The age of the Flood and the patriarchs: Based on Babylonian findings, archaeology has offered an account of the Flood that agrees with the Genesis account in several points. It is mentioned in the two texts that the Flood occurred by divine ordinance. In each of the two accounts, the hero of the story warns of an impending global catastrophe, leading him to build an ark for himself and his family. He brings animals with him into the ark. When the storm subsides, the ark rests on a mountaintop. The hero of the story sends out birds to explore the area, which fail to return. When the water subsides, he offers a sacrifice to God who guarantees his safety in the future.

Recently, Sir C. L. Woolley, the antiquarian, discovered a thick deposit of clay, full of the remains of an ancient city, under Ur of the Chaldees. He concluded that this layer dates back to the time of the Flood.

c.) Ur of the Chaldees: Before diggings began in the land of Iraq, Biblical scholars knew nothing of Ur, the

birthplace of Abraham, or of the extent of its civilisation. However, the efforts of archaeologists have established the fact that this barren land was once lush, watered by rivers and that it was the capital of a great nation with an advanced degree of civilisation. As for religion, the inhabitants were polytheists, and each family had its own idol. The Bible mentions that Rachel stole the family idols when she fled from the house of her father, Laban (Genesis 31:26-32).

Excavations have confirmed that Abraham was not merely a Bedouin chieftain, dwelling in tents. On the contrary, he belonged to a highly-civilised people whose culture had attained its peak centuries before his birth. The finds have shown the Biblical details to be correct; namely, that Abraham resided in Haran (Genesis 11:28-31).

If we trace Abraham's journey, we discover that he passed through Dothan, Bethel and Shekem, which are places that have been discovered in archaeological digs. Excavations have also proven the Biblical record that the area lying south of the Dead Sea, where Abraham spent a long time, was flourishing and densely populated at this period.

d.) The account of Joseph: Among the most exciting stories in the Bible is that of Joseph. He was the victim of a cruel plot by his brothers and was sold to Egypt as a slave. But God made "all things work together for good" for his sake. It was not long before he was made a minister of the treasury in the Egypt. This story has been confirmed by the discovery of a cemetery of an

Egyptian nobleman called Alkab who was a contemporary of Joseph. On his tomb is an inscription that tells of a terrible famine during his days. Also, there is mention that the government distributed the crops which the minister of the treasury had stored during the years of plenty. Because of this, the people's properties were transferred to the state. This is confirmed in the Bible, for in Genesis 47:18-22 we read that, when the people had spent all their money in exchange for food, they were forced to sell their lands to the pharaoh as well.

e.) The captivity and exodus of the Hebrews: The discovery of an inscribed tablet, dating from the reign of Thutmose III, tells us much about the times and conditions of the Hebrews when they were slaves in Egypt. It portrays the Semites as they were building a temple for the pharaoh. Also, the ruins of Pithom were discovered by the scholar, Edouard Naville. In this city, walls were found with a thickness of eight feet, made of sun-baked mud, mixed with straw. This discovery supports the account in Exodus 5:7.

As for the Hebrew Exodus from Egypt, we have confirmation of this event from a tablet, inscribed in cuneiform writing around 1888 B.C., found in Tel-el-Amarna. It was sent to the pharaoh of Egypt by the rulers of Palestine who sought his help when invaded by a dangerous nation called Habiru.

f.) Moses and the law: Although the Bible tells us how and when the Mosaic law reached us, some scholars

have believed that it was enacted after the time of Moses. But excavations in 1884, under the leadership of de Morgan at the Palace of Shushan, confirmed the Biblical record.

g.) The Ras Shamra excavations: In 1928, at Ras Shamra, ten miles north of Latakia, the remains of the city of Ugarit, founded in 2000 B.C., were unearthed. Hundreds of tablets were discovered, confirming the Biblical account of the Perrizites, the Hivites and the Hittites. In one of these inscriptions, God is referred to as El. This agrees with the name in Genesis for the God of Jacob, when he was a fugitive in the wilderness.

h.) The remains of Jericho: These are considered among the strongest archaeological evidences proving the authenticity of the Bible. All the specifications coincide fully with the account in the book of Joshua. The city was encircled by walls, and there was one gate through which entry was possible. Excavations of the ruins indicate that the city was not plundered prior to its destruction by fire, for in the clay storehouses, supplies of corn, lentils, dates and flour were found; Joshua had forbidden that anything should be taken from the city (Joshua 6:17,18). Its destruction was estimated to have occurred around 1500 B.C., which agrees with the Biblical record.

i.) The Hittites. Among the great proofs for the integrity of the Bible is the archaeological discovery of the existence of the Hittite nation. In Genesis, we are told that Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite (Genesis 23:7-11);

and yet, until recently, scholars doubted that such a race even existed. We also read that Esau, son of Isaac, took wives from among the Hittites (Genesis 26:34).

In the book of Exodus, the Hittites are mentioned among the nations against whom the Hebrews fought. The Hittites are also mentioned in the books of Joshua, Judges and I Samuel. They are referred to in Egyptian tablets as well, one of which reports a battle between them and the armies of Ramses II near Qadesh in 1287 B.C.

C. The testimony of buried writings:

a.) The book of Isaiah: Among the treasures discovered in the caves of Qumran in 1948 is a complete copy of the book of the prophet Isaiah. It is written in Hebrew on parchment and is sewn together in the form of a scroll. From the form of the script and the language used, one can conclude that this manuscript was written in the second century B.C. It agrees with what is found in the existing Old Testament. This reinforces the confidence of Biblical scholars as to the accuracy of the sacred books in circulation.

b.) A commentary by Habakkuk: Also found in Qumran was an exposition of the prophet Habakkuk. It was noted that the texts are in accord with those in our hands. The archaeologists also uncovered a copy of Leviticus, Job and the Psalms, as well as a list of the Old Testament writings which includes all those we have now, except Esther.

c.) The Gospel according to John. Some have claimed that this book was

not written until the third century AD, even though the Church Fathers held the view that it was finished just before the Evangelist's death. This view persisted until 1877 when thousands of papyrus documents were found buried in the sands of Egypt near Arsinoe, eighty miles south of Cairo. One of the most important documents found was the Gospel according to John which scholars have dated as being written before AD 125.

d.) Other documents. In 1931, an Englishman, Chester Beatty, discovered collections of papyri at an Egyptian market. He bought some of them, and the rest were purchased for the University of Michigan. This collection consists of eleven volumes containing excerpts of the Old and New Testaments, dating back to AD 200.

e.) The Diatessaron. This important manuscript was discovered in 1881. It was written in Syriac by Tatian, one of the Fathers of the Syrian Church. In it, he combined the four accounts of the Gospel, making them one account. This composition held sway for a while, until the Church decreed its abolition, fearing that it might displace the Gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Recently, several copies of The Diatessaron in various languages have been found at the ruins at Dora in Iraq. As a result, we know that this volume, which does not differ in essence from the Gospel texts, was in vogue in the second century AD. It has also confirmed that the Gospel according to John was in circulation before AD 175.

It is true that archaeology has affirmed the Bible in an amazing way. Prior to the discoveries, no one had imagined that the Holy Scriptures would agree with history to such an extent. Dr. Glueck, a scholar who spent long years digging in the Holy Land, said:

"Among the amazing facts is that not one single modern discovery has refuted the facts recorded in the Bible. Each discovery supports in its minutest detail all that has been communicated to us in the precious Book." There are still vast possibilities for new discoveries. However, all the evidence would indicate that there is no room left for a critic or objector to question the books of the New Testament or their traditional dates. The agreement between archaeological discoveries and the text of the precious Book is the strongest testimony to the authenticity of divine inspiration and the integrity of those who documented it. And so, my dear brother, we can rest assured that the Scriptures are most reliable sources, even though they were not intended solely as historical narratives. Thanks to the modern discoveries, we can be absolutely certain that no tampering hand has touched them. God has preserved them to be a light and guidance to mankind.

The archaeologist, Dr. Albright, has stated that it is because of the discoveries at Qumran that we can be sure of the New Testament being written from firsthand contemporary knowledge. There are allusions found in the New Testament texts that are set against a background similar to what is found in the Qumran documents. Thus, we can be sure that the New Testament

contains the actual teachings of Christ and His apostles, penned between AD 25 and 80. How thankful we should be to God for the discoveries that show us the great antiquity of the Gospel according to John, revealed through its content, for no one writing at a later date could have described in such detail the many sites of Jerusalem before its fall and destruction. Naturally, the nearer the historian is to the events he describes, the more accurate his narrative will be.

My brother, if my humble discourse ends at this point, just think how many pages have been written by specialists. Indeed, several large volumes exist. The Holy Land comprises numerous historic cities which are now in ruins, but they still survive through the historic records. These await the day when they will yield up their treasures of ancient stories, among which is that of Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind and Prince of peace.

How I wish from the depth of my heart that, through the evidence I have collected, you will find something to help your burning intellect form your own opinion of the writers of the inspired record. I pray to God that you will become one of the host of believers, for "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16).

3.19. The Qur'anic Testimony

Earlier, I mentioned that among the

treasures of Christendom are manuscripts of the Bible, written on parchments, three hundred years before the coming of Islam; the Qur'an refers to these writings by various names:

1. The Book of God:

- "When there has come to them a Messenger from God confirming what was with them, a party of them that were given the Book reject the Book of God behind their backs, as though they knew not..." (Sura al-Baqara 2:95).
- "Hast thou not regarded those who were given a portion of the Book, being called to the Book of God, that it might decide between them, and then a party of them turned away, swerving aside?" (Sura Al Imran 3:21).

2. The signs of God:

- "People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve in God's signs, which you yourselves witness?" (Sura Al Imran 3:64).

(Al-Zamakhshari, commenting on this verse, said, "God's signs are the Torah and the Gospel." Thus, if these had been corrupted, the Qur'an would not have called them "God's signs".)

3. The Remembrance:

- "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 16:45).

4. That which was sent down:

- "All food was lawful to the Children of Israel save what Israel forbade for himself before the Torah was sent down" (Sura Al Imran 3:88).

(Had the Torah been corrupted, the Qur'an would not mention it. In fact, the Qur'an affirms the integrity of the Bible.)

5. That which is confirmed:

- "This Koran could not have been forged apart from God; but it is a confirmation of what is before it, and a distinguishing of the Book, wherein is no doubt, from the Lord of all being" (Sura Yunis 10:39).
- "And believe in that I have sent down, confirming that which is with you, and be not the first to disbelieve in it" (Sura al-Baqara 2:38).
- "When there came to them a Book from God, confirming what was with them -- and they aforesometimes prayed for victory over the unbelievers -- when there came to them that they recognised, they disbelieved in it..." (Sura al-Baqara 2:83).
- "And We have sent down to thee the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:52).

My brother, reason has settled the matter! Had the Bible been corrupted, the Qur'an's attestation of it would be false. Consequently, it would not be fit to confirm or assure it. In fact, there are other statements in the Qur'an that establish the truth of the Bible and its

efficacy to guide mankind in every generation and age.

6. A guidance to the people:

- "...He sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforesometimes, as guidance to the people, and He sent down the Salvation" (Sura Al Imran 3:1).

(This is a clear witness to the inspired nature of the Book and its efficacy to guide people.)

7. That which is to be judged accordingly:

- "So let the People of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein. Whosoever judges not according to what God has sent down -- they are the ungodly" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:51).

8. That which is to be believed in:

- "Dispute not with the People of the Book save in the fairer manner, except for those of them that do wrong; and say, "We believe in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to you; our God and your God is One, and to Him we have surrendered" (Sura al-`Ankabut 29:45).
- "O believers, believe in God and His Messenger and the Book He has sent down on His Messenger and the Book which He sent down before" (Sura al-Nisa' 4:135).

9. A Book of illumination:

- "But if they cry lies to thee, lies were cried to Messengers before thee, who came bearing clear signs, and the Psalms, and the Book Illuminating" (Sura Al Imran

3:180).

10. A Book of salvation and radiance:

- "We gave Moses and Aaron the Salvation and a Radiance, and a Remembrance for the godfearing..." (Sura al-Anbiya' 21:49).

Now that you have seen these Qur'anic texts for yourself, I am returning to the basic subject; namely, the allegation that the Bible has been corrupted. The following question is of foremost importance: Does the Qur'an say anything of the Bible having been corrupted?

When we study the Qur'an carefully and impartially, we find that there is reference to a group of Jews that twisted some of the meanings -- not texts -- in the Bible, in order to hide the intent. However, we never find any Qur'anic text that accuses the Christians of corrupting the Gospel. As for those verses that accuse the Jews of textual distortion, they are:

- "Are you then so eager that they should believe you, seeing there is a party of them that heard God's word, and then tampered with it, and that after they had comprehended it, wittingly?" (Sura al-Baqara 2:70).

(Al-Razi has said, "What is meant by tampering is `confusing the exposition or concealing the truth.'" He accused them of fragmenting the Book, revealing what they fancied and concealing other portions. This conduct, even though worthy of contempt, cannot

be regarded as corruption of Scriptural texts, especially since it was attributed to only one party among the Jews.)

- "Some of the Jews pervert words from their meanings saying, "We have heard and obey" and "Hear, and be thou not given to hear" and "Observe us," twisting with their tongues and traducing religion" (Sura al-Nisa' 4:48).

(The word some does not mean all. Some expositors have said that this group "twisted their tongues" in the words observe us, which would mean a curse directed at the prophet Muhammad. Corruption would thus concern interpretation and not the text itself; and it is something of which the Jews were guilty, not the Christians.)

(Other scholars, notably al-Baidawi, have said that the Jews twisted by putting certain words in the wrong context. In short, they used to say the word raina to Muhammad, which in Arabic means "Listen to us"; but in their own language it is used as a curse. It is said that this term was directed at Muhammad in jest. One day, Saad Ibn Maath heard it, and he knew their language. Noticing it, he warned the Jews that he would break the neck of whoever said such a thing to Muhammad. The Qur'an warns Muslims not to use this term, for it says: "O believers, do not say, `Observe us,' but say, `Regard us'; and give ear; for unbelievers awaits a painful chastisement" [Sura al-Baqara

2:98].)

- "...The Jews who listen to falsehood, listen to other folk, who have not come to thee, perverting words from their meanings" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:45).
- "People of the Book, now there has come to you Our Messenger, making clear to you many things you have been concealing of the Book, and effacing many things. There has come to you from God a light, and a Book Manifest..." (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:18).
- "And there is a sect of them twist their tongues with the Book, that you may suppose it part of the Book, yet it is not part of the Book; and they say, 'It is from God,' yet it is not from God, and they speak falsehood against God, and that wittingly" (Sura Al Imran 3:72).

When Muslim scholars in India examined the allegation of scriptural corruption, they came to the conclusion that neither the Old nor the New Testament texts have been changed, replaced, or corrupted in any way. They found reassurance in al-Razi's exposition of Sura Al Imran 3:72, where he asks, "How can corruption of the Bible take place in view of its widespread fame among people?" In fact, it becomes clear to anyone who honestly investigates and reviews the facts behind the Qur'anic statements on the subject that the corruption theory cannot be substantiated. Rather, he will find clear statements in the Qur'an regarding the total reliability and authenticity of the Bible in both its testaments:

- "Those who conceal the clear signs and the guidance that We have sent down, after We have shown them clearly in the Book -- they shall be cursed by God and the cursers" (Sura al-Baqara 2:154).
- "God took compact with the Children of Israel; and We raised up from among them twelve chieftains... So for their breaking their compact We cursed them and made their hearts hard, they perverting words from their meanings; and they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of; and thou wilt never cease to light upon some act of treachery on their part, except a few of them" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:15,16).

(The commentary of al-Jalalan explains this verse as follows: "This verse was said about a party of the Khaibar Jews who did not want to impose the sentence of stoning for adultery upon two of their married folk. They sent a delegation from Quaraiza to question Muhammad about the judgement concerning the two, as found in the verse on stoning from the Torah. The distortion of which they were accused is that the Khaibar Jews told the dispatched delegation: 'If Muhammad gives a verdict of lashing, accept it. But if he gives a verdict of stoning, beware of accepting it.' The speech, then, is about some of the Jews and it refers to one instance of the Torah's judgements which they tried to distort, not to replace.")

- "And with those who say 'We are

Christians' We took compact; and they have forgotten a portion of that they were reminded of. So We have stirred up among them enmity and hatred..." (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:17).

(Al-Razi has stated: "Here the subject concerns those who falsify and distort the truth by using verbal tricks as is done by the false sects, in our own day, who twist passages which disagree with their position." He added, "Tampering with words is prohibited, because the Torah and the Gospel were so renowned and backed by a continuous chain of tradition that this would be impossible.")

It is worth noting that the Qur'an attacked the Christians of Najran who were considered heretics for trying to mix their teachings with traditional ones from the earliest times. They were successful in spreading their cult in the Arabian Peninsula and had teachings and interpretations closer to atheism and infidelity than the "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). I challenge anyone to find one plain Qur'anic text that attacks the Christians or accuses them of falsifying the Gospel.

There is an important fact one must keep in mind, namely, that the Qur'an addressed the heathen to believe in one God. It reproached the Jews for rejecting Christ and persisting in refusing Him and defaming the name of His blessed mother. It also directs blame and reproach on heretical sects of Christianity. It is a pity that some superficial, prejudiced interpreters

have exploited the Qur'an's condemnation of these false groups in order to accuse the Christians of having corrupted their Scriptures. This is something which never happened -- and never could -- for a very simple reason: God will not permit anyone to tamper with His law or defy His power to safeguard it. This constitutes an attack on the faithfulness of His promises which are affirmed even by the Qur'an:

- "It is We who have sent down the Remembrance, and We watch over it" (Sura al-Hijr 15:9).
- "No man can change the words of God..." (Sura al-An`am 6:34).
- "There is no changing the words of God; that is the mighty triumph" (Sura Yunis 65).
- "... No man can change His words; He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing" (Sura al-An`am 6:115).

Before concluding this subject, and as a service to the Truth which we are seeking, I would like to present the following questions to those who raise the objection of Scriptural corruption:

1. What are your reasons for claiming that the Bible has been distorted or its texts, tampered with?
2. Are you able to direct us to one copy of the Bible, either old or new, which differs in its texts from the Book which has been handed down to us from generation to generation?
3. Can anyone offer any proof which shows the nature of the alleged alteration and its extent?

4. Can anyone name the time when the alleged corruption took place? If it was before Islam, then why does the Qur'an appeal to the Book and confirm its contents? If it happened after the coming of Islam, I would answer by stating that we have the manuscripts, preserved in museums, which predate Islam by at least three centuries. Their texts do not differ from those volumes available to us today.
5. If the Qur'an attests that the Book is immune from falsification and that it was sent down from God as "a guidance and a mercy," how can one allege that it has been altered?
6. Which verses have been altered, and what is the advantage of their being changed?
7. What is the position of the protesters in the face of the reality which excludes further argument in this matter? It is unreasonable to believe that the Jews altered the Torah prior to Christ, because He attested to it and quoted from it; thereafter, it applied equally to the Christians and Jews. It is also unreasonable to assume that the Jews altered it after Christ, for if they had, the Christians would have opposed them. Equally impossible is the claim that the Jews and the Christians conspired together to change the texts of the Holy Book, because they were antagonistic towards one another. One should also not forget that the Bible had already spread into many parts of the world in many languages. It would have been

impossible for anyone to collect all the copies in order to corrupt their contents.

It is unreasonable to think that the Bible was corrupted during the days of Muhammad, for the Qur'an testifies to its authenticity, as we have already seen. It is preposterous to assume that the Bible was falsified after Islam, owing to its extensive spread among nations and peoples that had embraced Christianity.

If we grant that the impossible happened -- namely, a conspiracy taking place between the Christians and Jews to corrupt their sacred books -- would not the Jews have removed those passages which incriminate them? In return for this favour, would not the Christians have demanded that they confess Jesus as their Messiah?

3.20. The Alleged Abrogation

"The voice said, "Cry out!" And he said, "What shall I cry?" "All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the Lord blows upon it; surely the people are grass...." (Isaiah 40:6,7)

In the book, Uyun al-Akhbar by al-Razi, it is written: "All prophets who came during Moses' time and after followed the same canon until the time of Isa; all prophets who came during Jesus' time and after followed his canon until the time of Muhammad. But the canon of Muhammad will not be abrogated until the Day of Resurrection."

In the book, Hidayat Al Talibeen Ila Usul al-Deen by Muhammad Taqi al-Kashani, it is written: "Muslim scholars have decided

that Muhammad is the Prophet of this age, and his religion abrogates the religions of all earlier prophets."

In reply to these sayings, I would declare that nowhere in the Qur'an or Hadeeth is there any mention of such abrogation. This allegation is just as ridiculous as the claim of corruption. Such a claim confuses the teachings of the Qur'an, making it say things that are not there. In fact, the only book to which any abrogation applies is the Qur'an itself, as the following verses testify:

- "And for whatever verse We abrogate or cast into oblivion, We bring a better or the like of it..." (Sura al-Baqara 2:100).
- "We sent not ever any Messenger or Prophet before thee, but that Satan cast into his fancy, when he was fancying" (Sura al-Hajj 22:52).

Neither of these texts state in any way that the Qur'an came to abrogate the Bible, but rather, that some Qur'anic verses abrogate others. It has been claimed that there are 225 abrogated verses in the Qur'an.

Al-Baidawi has made an exhaustive exposition of the verse in Sura al-Hajj, showing how some of the following words from Sura al-Najm 53 have been abrogated: "The intercession of those cranes above is desired." You can look up his interpretation on this topic. Several other scholars have mentioned this subject, such as al-Jalalan and al-Tabari. Ibn Hatem, after Ibn Abbas, said: "Possibly, the inspiration descended on Muhammad at night and he forgot it the next day. Thus, the verse was given: `And for whatever verse we abrogate or cast into oblivion, We bring a better or the like of

it" (Sura al-Baqara 2:100). Al-Baidawi said that it was given when the polytheists or the Jews said, "Do you not see that Muhammad commands his followers to do something, then forbids them and commands something opposite?" The purpose of this verse was to describe the doubts of the people of the Book and the Muslims regarding such changing of texts. Al-Suyuti said that abrogation was the speciality of this nation.

According to the conclusions of the scholars, we see that these passages refute the claim that the Psalms abrogate the Torah, and that the Gospel abrogates the Psalms, and that the Qur'an abrogates the Gospel. Indeed, the Qur'an very clearly states: "Say: `Bring a Book from God that gives better guidance than these, and follow it, if you speak truly" (Sura al-Qasas 28:50).

In his book, Izhar Ul Haqq, Rahmat Ul-Lah al-Hindi says, "The talk of abrogation of the Torah by the Psalms and the Psalms by the Gospel and the Gospel by the Qur'an has no basis either in the Qur'an or the Hadeeth." Well has this scholar spoken, for the Qur'an contradicts the claims of the abrogationists totally. It says: "He has laid down for you as religion that He charged Noah with, and that We have revealed to thee, and that We charged Abraham with, Moses and Jesus: `Perform the religion, and scatter not regarding it" (Sura al-Shura 42:11).

From this, can we not see that it is ridiculous to say that the Qur'an has abrogated the Bible? How dare any Muslim go beyond the teaching of the Qur'an which says that it is a guidance to the precepts of the People of the Book: "God desires to make clear to you, and to

guide you in the institutions of those before you, and to turn towards you; God is All-knowing, All-wise" (Sura Woman 4:31).

The Qur'an also enjoins the People of the Book to act according to the precepts therein, for it says: "Whoso judges not according to what God has sent down -- they are the evildoers" (Sura al-Ma'ida 5:49).

My brother, whoever reads the Bible seriously will find its teachings to be totally consistent, having one direction: the revelation of the purposes of God to mankind. There is no such thing as abrogator or abrogated among its lucid passages.

In the books of the Old Testament, we learn how God created the world, made mankind and how sin entered the scene. Further along, we read about the divine promise of a Saviour who would come in the fullness of time from the seed of a woman. In the meantime, God made a covenant with Abraham, promising him that the Saviour would come through the line of Isaac. This covenant was renewed with Isaac and Jacob and was a subject on people's tongues throughout the succeeding generations. When Moses came, he was given the law which included those great and precious promises. The prophets who followed him were given clearer visions of that Saviour who was to come in the name of the Lord. Likewise, the books they wrote were in harmony with what Moses had described; some even foretold the way in which He would come, the town where He would be born, His miracles, teachings and atoning death.

The Torah reveals the purposes of God which were given to Moses. The Gospel presents an account of the life of the Saviour, His teachings, death, resurrection and ascension; and these are in fulfilment of the prophecies in the Torah and Psalms. Those who acknowledged God, inclined towards Him, worshipped Him and believed in the coming Saviour, found in Him contentment for their hearts. The writer of the book of Hebrews refers to this when he says: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Hebrews 11:13).

In the psalms and the prophets, the news of the Saviour became clearer. From the beginning, God separated for Himself a people whom He nurtured gradually, bearing their evil deeds and stubbornness. We are told that the symbolic rituals and religious observances He taught them were designed as a temporary arrangement, creating a distinctive separation between Judaism and heathenism until the advent of the promised Saviour who was to be a blessing to all nations. They were taught that these rituals, although God-ordained, were of no avail unless coupled with a dedicated and consecrated life.

This truth was revealed to the prophet Micah when he wondered about the efficacy of endless sacrifices and offerings in God's sight:

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin

of my soul? He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:6-8).

All the Jewish ceremonial laws, whether sacrifices, burnt offerings, incense or washings, were merely symbolic. They were realised in the fullness of the New Testament spirit which Christ guarantees to all who believe in Him, whatever their race, sex, language or colour. We read in the book of Isaiah: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isaiah 11:9).

The New Testament does not abrogate the Old; rather, it expounds it and brings out its spiritual content, satisfying people in all times and places.

What I dearly wish you would keep in mind is that the law in the Torah is twofold, having both ceremonial and moral components. The first was given to the Jews temporarily to separate them from the heathen nations and to preserve them from falling into the abominations of polytheism; this was in preparation for the Age of Grace. In the book of Hebrews it is written: "Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. 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 -- concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation" (Hebrews 9:1-10).

In his prophecies about the Lamb of God, which all these sacrifices foreshadowed,

the prophet Isaiah disclosed the intent of the animal sacrifices (compare Isaiah 53 and Revelation 5). Since Christ, the great sacrifice to which all other sacrifices pointed, was offered in the fullness of time, it follows that Christians no longer have to offer them. Amazingly, the Jews also stopped their animal sacrifices out of necessity, because their temple had been destroyed. The Torah forbids them to sacrifice anywhere except in Jerusalem, within the walls of the temple.

The moral law, however, is eternal. It is to be enforced at all times, because the commandments in it relate to God; breaking them is an affront to Him. These commandments were not annulled by the gospel of Christ, but expounded and reinforced. For example: "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).

The significance of the matter is that all the teachings of the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, are fixed and admit no abrogation; they represent God's good and perfect will for man. This proves to us that the way of salvation in every day and age is the same, and those who have not believed in Christ will be judged.

Abraham rejoiced to see His day: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). Christ said: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

My dear Hassan, I send you these contributions, not knowing how they will affect your noble spirit. I do not think for a

moment that you will find in them the sort of material to satisfy your hunger for lofty themes, the depths of which my modest knowledge cannot plumb. However, I hope the excerpts from the Word of God in my letter will create in you a yearning for righteousness which is of God by faith. Your hunger will then be filled, and your thirst, quenched, according to the words of Christ: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Matthew 5:6).

David, son of Jesse, recognised this fact when he said: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (Psalm 23:1). The prophet Isaiah knew it as well, for he said: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance" (Isaiah 55:1,2).

My brother, mere things do not satisfy, whether bread, learning or money. Jesus said: "It is written, 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). However great their quantity or quality, things cannot satisfy or sustain the spiritual man, because he is a living being and not merely a machine of flesh, blood and bones. If he were only that, material food would satisfy him, and it would be suitable for him to devote all his strength to secure it. Likewise, man is not just mind that thinks and invents, for if this were the case, he would find his sustenance in the spheres of knowledge, literature and the arts. But who is content with being merely an eating and drinking

organism or a repository of learning? I do not think any intelligent person would want this. But sad as it may be, there are "not many wise, not many learned." For this reason, most people seek after matter, measuring themselves against one another in material terms. Remember the saying which Abu Ghassan used to repeat: "If you have a piaster, you are worth a piaster!" What a miserable appraisal of man, created in the image and likeness of God who purchased him with the most costly commodity in the universe: the blood of Christ!

Truly, man is satisfied neither by material things nor learning, culture or the arts. Experience has proven to us that many have amassed fortunes, and yet their souls have not been satisfied. Instead, they have become even more consumed with greed. Many have filled their minds with much learning, philosophy, literature and arts; yet, they have remained spiritually thirsty. How true is the saying: "Two things there be that never are satiated -- the seeker after knowledge and the seeker after wealth." And so, I would point you to the Word of God. There is no difference between the incarnate Word which shows the path of life and the inspired Word of God which judges for salvation. Christ said: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life... If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you ... You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life..." (John 6:63; 15:7; 5:39,40).

Sincerely, Taufiq

I sent this letter to Hassan some years ago. Until now, he has not requested more information, and it appears that he found that for which he was seeking: more details about the death of the Lord Jesus. It may be that our discussion drove him to study the Holy Scriptures.

We met four times during those long years. Each time he declined to be drawn into a discussion, owing to the presence of those before whom he preferred to remain silent. However, I sensed a change in his life and a transformation of his goals. Also, his dealings with people took on an earnest, gentle tenor. There is evidence in all his words that he has been through some sort of experience -- one that has left him more interested in spiritual things. I have heard that he has become a model husband and father. After speaking with him, how pleased I was to sense the presence of faith in his life, coupled with hope and love. I was overjoyed to learn that he would rise to my defence whenever my name was slandered.

Finally, if there is something I could leave with you, it is my deepest gratitude to the One who had mercy on me, accepting my repentance and showering me with His bounty, until He produced:

"Out of the eater... something to eat, and out of the strong... something sweet."
(Judges 14:14)

3.21. Quiz

Dear Reader, if you have read both parts of this book carefully, you will be able to answer the following questions easily. If you want to test your knowledge please mail them to us.

1. What slanderous accusations were

hurled at Taufiq when he left home?

2. What was the real reason behind Taufiq's change of life?
3. What was the role of A. M. When Taufiq first began to change the course of his life?
4. Why did a pastor refuse to baptize Taufiq in March 1929?
5. For what reason did Taufiq decide to join the army?
6. Why was Taufiq's wedding joyful despite his poverty?
7. What happened when Taufiq's faith in Christ was no longer a secret?
8. How did a sermon on Galatians 2:20 affect Taufiq?
9. What was God's purpose in hindering Taufiq's plans to travel to Europe?
10. What did Taufiq experience in the business world?
11. What difficulties did Taufiq encounter with other Christians?
12. How did Taufiq learn to carry the yoke of Christ?
13. How did Taufiq and his family attain victory over his financial losses?
14. What led Taufiq into religious service?
15. How did Taufiq's relationship to his brother Hassan deepen?
16. Which qualities in Taufiq pleased Hassan?
17. What are the wages of sin, and how did God's love intervene to deal with the consequences?
18. Write a summary of how Taufiq explained the incarnation of Christ to Hassan.
19. What is the intellectual evidence showing the necessity of the

- Redemption?
20. What is the legal, canonical reason for the necessity of the Redemption?
 21. How dose the Redemption agree with the man's moral nature?
 22. How did God arrange Redemption by atonement?
 23. What is the testimony of history to the reality of Christ's crucifixion?
 24. How dose the Lord's Supper testify to the historical validity of Christ's crucifixion?
 25. What is the testimony of the first Christians to the truth of Christ's crucifixion?
 26. How many times was Christ tried? Who was the judge at every session?
 27. What was the Jews' verdict concerning Christ, according to Roman law, and why were they issued?
 28. Why was this verdict issued?
 29. What were the first and last verdicts against Christ, according to Roman law, and why were they issued?
 30. What were the seven last utterances of Christ on the Cross? List the Bible reference with the quotations?
 31. From the seven last utterances of Christ on the Cross, how can we know that the crucified one really was Christ?
 32. List five Old Testament prophecies about the crucifixion of Christ. Explain how Christ fulfilled them on the Cross.
 33. How did Mary, the mother of Christ, testify to the reality of the Crucifixion?
 34. How dose the fact of the empty tomb rule the Impersonation Theory?
 35. What do the miracles and wonders during the Crucifixion testify about the crucified one?
 36. Write down the Qur'anic verses (with references) which claim that Christ died.
 37. Al-Razi said six things which cast doubt on the Impersonation Theory. What are they?
 38. Why can God not forgive Adam and his descendants except through the death of Christ?
 39. What are the necessary qualities of a mediator between God and man, and how are these realized in Christ?
 40. If God could redeem Isaac with a ram of far less importance than Isaac, why could He not redeem mankind with someone other than Christ?
 41. List five Qur'anic verses which uphold the authenticity of the Bible. Include the references.
 42. When were the Alexandrian and Vatican edition of the Holy Bible written? What is the significance of these dates in relation to Islam?
 43. Mention a fact from archaeology that testifies to the truth of the Bible.
 44. Write down two Qur'anic verses that speak about abrogation. About which books do these verse speak?
 45. To what level of faith do you think Hassan aspired, after all he learned through his correspondence with Taufiq?
- Copy and paste the above-mentioned questions into the contact form and write the answer below each question.
- [Please use our Email-Form to contact us or write to:](#)

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3.22. Epilogue

Iskander Jadeed devoted his life to Christ as a fatherly pastor. Reverend Jadeed passed away into God's mercy on December 19, 1989, in Los Angeles, California, at the age of 80. He was stricken during the last ten years of his life with Parkinson's Disease. Despite the weakening of his body, he remained sound and alert in spirit. Although he could not write his thoughts any longer, his books spoke clearly on all continents. They continue to speak today, according to the promise of Jesus: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Reverend Jadeed is living with his Saviour and Lord today, according to his faith. He explained the secret of his effectiveness with the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:7-8: "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens': I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name." Above all Biblical texts, he preferred the testimony of the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 1:15-16: "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief... for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all

long-suffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life." However, he disagreed with the Apostle Paul as to the identity of the chief of sinners; he was convinced that this position was his own. Through his life of self-denial, Reverend Jadeed experienced the promise contained in this profound Biblical passage as an apt description of his life:

Christ Jesus Came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

1 Timothy 1:15,16