



ISLAM AS I CAME TO KNOW IT A RELIGION OF MERCY AND PEACE

NASRI SALHAB

A Former Lebanese Ambassador
To the Holy See

Translated by :
Ali Azeriah

2nd Edition

Publications of the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
-ISESCO- 1430H/2009

Legal deposit: 1387/2001

ISBN: 9981-26-288-9

**Photocomposition, typesetting and
printing: ISESCO**

Rabat - Kingdom of Morocco

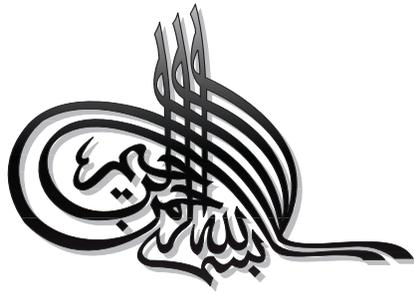


Table of Contents

	Page
Foreword	5
Introduction	7
Chapter One: Allah Most Gracious, Most Merciful	11
Chapter Two: The Jews of Arabia ... The Christians	21
Chapter Three: The Quran is the Book of both the Christian and the Muslim	23
Chapter Four: Between the Two Religions there Are Differences ...	33
Chapter Five: The Christian's Place in Islam	39
Chapter Six: <i>Al-Buruj</i>	43
Chapter Seven: Equality	49
Chapter Eight: The Virtues: Forbearance and Forgiveness	55
Chapter Nine: A Religion of Persuasion not Compulsion	59
Chapter Ten: The Human Being is Body and Soul	63
Chapter Eleven: Polygamy	69
Chapter Twelve: Marriage and Divorce	73
Chapter Thirteen: Islam is a School of Kindness	77
Chapter Fourteen: The War	85
Chapter Fifteen: <i>Jihad</i> (Holy War)	93
Chapter Sixteen: <i>Jiziya</i> (Tribute)	103
Chapter Seventeen: <i>Aman</i> (Protection)	109
Chapter Eighteen: Woman in Islam	113
Chapter Nineteen: <i>Hijab</i> (The Veil)	121
Chapter Twenty: Stealing	127
Chapter Twenty-One: Paradise in Islam	135
Chapter twenty-Two: Islam Is the Prop of Christianity	143

FOREWORD

The Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation has been endeavouring, ever since its inception, to highlight with the means falling under its competence the Islamic view of human issues in various walks of life. It has also sought to study, from an Islamic perspective and in an objective, rigorous and comprehensive way, the contemporary issues in order to illustrate the genuine image of Islam, and to disprove the specious arguments put forward in the writings of biased researchers who disregard the truths of this magnanimous religion. In this respect, ISESCO has issued a series of studies aiming at rectifying the errors occurring in the entries dealing with the Quran, the Islamic faith and the biography of the Prophet in the Islamic Encyclopedia published by Brill House, Leiden, Holland.

The present book (*Islam as I Came to Know it, A Religion of Mercy and Peace*) is a new kind of writings issued among the publications of ISESCO, as it reflects the viewpoint of an Arab Christian scholar and thinker from Lebanon, who worked as an Ambassador to the Holy See, and who has profoundly studied Islam and spared no effort towards bringing out its truths and equity.

In the beginning of his book, he focused on the inimitability of the Quran in such issues as the *Basmala*, its authority as the revelation of God and the holy book of Muslims, and finally, the position of women in Islam.

The book deals, likewise, with the issues of judgement and punishment, the rights of the body and soul in Islam, the system of head tax and security for free non-Muslims under Muslim rule, the principle of good neighbourliness, in addition to other topics in which the perspective of Islam is compatible with the universal human values.

Being conscious of the importance of dialogue among civilisations, cultures and religions, ISESCO publishes this book in order to emphasise the civilisational role played by Muslims throughout history in terms of elevating the human civilisation, and participating effectively in scientific fields by means of translation, documentation and innovation, which is

confirmed by the author through a scientific methodology. ISESCO attests to the worthiness of the efforts made by Ambassador Nasri Salhab, in the field of objective study of the Islamic civilisation in the light of Islamic teachings. The Organisation is grateful to him for his scientific trustworthiness and his excellent discernment of the purposes of the Holy Quran demonstrated in his explanation of its teachings in a clear, methodic and coherent language.

May Almighty Allah help us achieve the well-being of the Muslim Ummah and humanity at large.

Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri

*Director General of the Islamic
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization (ISESCO)*

INTRODUCTION

I saw Islam and I became attached to it.

Before I saw it, I had heard about it. What I saw was the opposite of what I had heard. Only then did I grasp the meaning of the adage: "*Between truth and falsehood there are only four digits*⁽¹⁾. *Seeing is truth, hearing is falsehood*". I also understood the false charges the West had unjustly imputed to Islam, thus turning its beauty into ugliness, its purity into squalor, its courage into terror, its faith into atheism, and its mercy into cruelty. In this way, Islam's virtues became short-comings, and its prophesy turned into blasphemy of God.

Islam has been the target of defamation and fabrication for many centuries.

With the passage of time, however, things changed, generally speaking, for the situation is no longer the same as before. True Islam has gradually begun to reveal itself to Westerners, especially in France, where the number of Muslims is about three million, the scholars and thinkers of whom have greatly contributed to re"storing to Islam its former glory".

However, the radical movement which has emerged in some Arab-Islamic countries has prompted the West to raise many questions about a religion that was once revealed as a guidance and a mercy for the Worlds. Due to this radical movement, Islam, which is an example of tolerance and kindness, appears to Westerners as a religion of fanaticism and terrorism.

In its essence and origin, Islam is a religion of mercy and peace, of kindness and tolerance, and of knowledge and enlightenment; it is **not** a religion of violence, fanaticism and ignorance.

My goal in writing this book, *Islam as I Came to Know it*, is to cast light on the true nature of this religion which I loved and still love.

May Allah grant us success.

Nasri Salha

(1) The digit being a unit of length based on the breath of a finger and equal in English measure to 3/4 inch.

Chapter One

Allah "Most Gracious, Most Merciful"

What has attracted my attention from the very first moment, or the very first glance, is the fact that all the chapters of the Quran begin with four words which became the essence and the basis of Islam, or rather its address and the door leading to it. They are: *"In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful"*.

In their meaning and form, letter and spirit, these four words are, without doubt, the most beautiful utterance the human ear has ever perceived. The words and deeds of a person who says: *"In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful"* and who acts accordingly must be full of mercy, the greatest virtue with which a person's soul can be embellished.

If in Christianity God is Love, as one famous Jesuit has summed Him up, in Islam Allah - The Great and Almighty - is "Mercy." Therefore, the real Muslim, one who is true to his faith, can only be merciful.

Christ, said: *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"*.

Mohammed, the Arab Prophet - God's blessing and peace be upon him - said: *"Be merciful to those on earth, He Who is in Heaven will be merciful to you"*.

Together with Christ and Mohammed, I will say: *"Blessed is every Muslim who follows that which is in God's Book"*, or rather: *"Blessed are the most gracious and most merciful Muslims who follow along the path of their Prophet and who do exactly what their Lord and Creator has commanded them"*.

Being the very essence of Islam, as we have already said, that mercy is closely followed by the humanness and universality of this religion. Islam is the religion of the human being, in every sense of the word, and in every age and place; it is not just for the Arabs and Muslims.

"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may

know each other. Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you", [The Private Apartments: 13].

"O mankind!" means "all the peoples of the earth," **you**, the people of today and those of tomorrow, Arabs or non-Arabs, Muslims or non-Muslims. Piety is your guide to Allah, your Creator, the Lord of the Worlds.

With its humanness and universality, Islam is an open religion which receives everyone with open arms. The person feels confident that he will find in it a nourishment for the soul, provisions for the Hereafter, and a spiritual ladder to lift him up closer to Allah - Most Gracious, Most Merciful- and to elevate him to the Heaven which Allah - the Great and Almighty - has prepared for the God-fearing.

It is within this context that the following verse fits in perfectly well, and where its meaning becomes clearer: "***Nor your desires, nor those of the People of the Book (can prevail): whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly. Nor will he find, besides Allah, any protector or helper"***", [Women: 123].

Indeed, it is not your fancies, O Muslims! Nor yours, O Christians! If a Muslim works evil, he will receive a penalty for it; so will the Christian should he do likewise. Islam has absolutely nothing to do with race, fanaticism, and sectarianism. It is a religion for all humankind.

Many are the verses in the Holy Quran which state that Allah - the Great and Almighty - sent Mohammed to all the people, not just to the Arabs. Of such verses we will mention the following:

"We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin)", [Saba: 28].

"Blessed is He Who sent down the Criterion to his servant, that it may be an admonition to all creatures", [The Criterion: 1].

"Say: 'O men! I am sent unto you, as the Messenger of Allah", [The Heights: 158].

This is why the person feels that he is not concerned with stock, race and color. Whether he belongs to the North or the South, to the West or the

East, the individual is concerned with Islam and its principles, with its spiritual, moral, educational and social values intended for all humankind and at every stage of its history, from the moment mankind came into existence to the day it will transit from the state of extinction to that of eternal existence.

Allah - the Great and Almighty - has made clear that Islamic holy places - particularly Makkah al-Mokarrama with its Kaaba al-Sharifa - are the starting point, not the end, and that they are a meeting point in time for the pilgrims who travel to them from everywhere to get to know and bless one another, and to pray to Allah - Most Gracious and Most Merciful - seeking His forgiveness and blessings. They all return to their countries after they have purified their souls and hearts from the abominations they had committed throughout the days and years.

Allah will accept the Muslim's prayer even if the latter fails to turn his face toward the *Kiblah* on account of his not being certain of its direction, for Allah is concerned with what fills the hearts and the minds, and not with the direction to which the faces and the eyes are turned. "***To Allah belong the East and the West: whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah's countenance***", [The Cow: 115].

Also: "***It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards East or West(*)***; ***but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for those who ask and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer, and practise regular charity, to fulfil the contracts which ye have made***", [The Cow: 177].

These two verses - they are not the only ones - have elevated Islam to the pinnacle of humanness and universality, freed it from every constraint, and epitomized the religion of God, thus making it the religion of the "humane human being", so to speak.

(*) The Holy Quran abounds in verses which command Muslims to turn their faces to the Sacred Mosque. Examples of such verses are: Verses 144, 148, and 149 of "The Cow". No doubt, this is a wise arrangement, the purpose of which is to make all Muslims of the world, wherever they are, turn their eyes, hearts and minds to one direction while praying. The prayer, however, is accepted even if the worshiper is not certain of the direction: the *Kiblah*: "***To Allah belong the East and the West: whithersoever ye turn, ...***"

Prayer, as is already known, is one pillar of Islam. Allah has enjoined it upon Muslims in more than one verse, of these we will mention the following:

“Set up regular Prayers: for such Prayers are enjoined on Believers at stated times”, [Women: 103].

“... and establish regular Prayers: for Prayer restrains from shameful and unjust deeds”, [The Spider: 45].

“O ye who believe! Seek help with patient Perseverance and Prayer”, [The Cow: 153].

“What led you into Hell-Fire? They will say, ‘We were not of those who prayed”, [The Enshrouded One: 42-43].

“Truly man was created very impatient, fretful when evil touches him and niggardly when good reaches him. Not so those devoted to Prayer”, [The Ascending Stairways: 19-22].

Allah does not want a prayer from the lips, as if praying were a tedious chore that does not emanate from the bottom of the heart. He wants a prayer that invokes His presence, and frees the soul from everything that fetters it at the time of praying to enable the worshiper to live every word he utters and appreciate its meaning:

“So woe to the worshipers who are neglectful of their Prayers”, [Small Kindness: 4-5].

Islam's humanness and universality are most apparent in *al-Fatiha*, (the opening *Surah* of the Holy Quran, which must be read in every prayer), particularly in the words "Lord of the Worlds". Through these two words, the Muslim feels and believes that he belongs, by way of his Lord - the Lord of the Worlds - to the human family in which every race, color and, for that matter, all the people are dissolved.

It is worth pointing out that *al-Fatiha* (The Opening), which counts only seven verses, has repeated the two words "Most Gracious, Most Merciful" twice to remind the faithful that Allah - to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty, Holder of the Ninety-nine Names - has chosen these two attributes, preferring them to all other names.

As we have said earlier, this is the reason why all the chapters of the Holy Quran begin with *Basmala* (invocation): *"In the Name of Allah, Most*

Gracious, Most Merciful". That is, they start with the great and eternal Mercy. Also worth mentioning in this connection is the fact that *Basmala*, which is the opening verse of *al-Fatiha*, is a separate invocation uttered at the beginning of each chapter, without being part of it. This means that Mercy, with its humanness and universality, is the principal attribute of Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

* * *

By virtue of its universality, Islam looks with great deference and respect at all the Prophets and Messengers whom God had chosen to guide people, before the Holy Quran was sent down to the Prophet, and before He chose Mohammed Ibn Abdullah as Prophet and Messenger:

"Say ye: 'We believe in Allah and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them: and we bow to Allah (in Islam)'", [The Cow: 136].

And:

"O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger and the Scripture which He hath sent to His Messenger and the scripture which He hath sent to those before (him). Any who denieth Allah, His Angels, His Books, His Messengers, and the Day of Judgement, hath gone far, far astray", [Women: 136].

Also:

"Those who deny Allah and His Messengers, and (those who) wish to separate Allah from His Messengers, saying: 'We believe in some but reject others': and (those who) wish to take a course midway, they are in truth (equally) unbelievers; and we prepared for Unbelievers a humiliating punishment", [Women: 150-51].

These and other verses of the same import were, no doubt, among the reasons which had made me feel quite comfortable, intellectually, and spiritually speaking with Islam - this religion which receives the believers,

or rather all the people, with open arms and invites them to walk farther along the road which eventually takes them to the Great Truth.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Tribes (in the Jewish Tradition, the Tribes are the children of Jacob and the leaders of the Twelve Tribes) and Moses, to mention but the Old Testament, are in the Islamic Tradition Prophets and Messengers whom Allah had chosen and upon whom He had bestowed His prophesy and guidance. From Islam's point of view, they are not Jews, as historians would often like to call them, nor are they Arabs; they do not belong to any particular stock, race or color. Rather, they are the prophets and messengers of humanity, with a universal mission, which makes them the property of the human conscience, that of yesterday, of today, and of tomorrow in God's vast realm.

Allah - the Great and Almighty - commands "those who believe", that is, Muslims, to believe in the Books which were revealed before: The Torah and the New Testament, as firmly as they believe in the Holy Quran, the Book Allah sent down to His Messenger.

The Messengers are all equal before Allah in terms of essence and identity, and in terms of the origin and originality of the mission. The source is one: Allah, The One and Only.

Where the Torah and the New Testament are concerned, God's words are clear:

"It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth the Book, confirming what went before; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind and he sent down the Criterion (of judgement between right and wrong)", [The Family of Imran: 3-4].

And also:

"And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him: a guidance and an admonition to those who fear Allah", [The Table Spread: 46].

This means, among other things, that Islam looks with great respect at Judaism and Christianity as two religions revealed by Allah - the Great

and Almighty - as it regards the Prophets who, within the framework of these religions, worked for elevating and spreading God's Word and good in the worlds.

Worth pointing out is the fact that Islam does not shut the door in the face of a Christian who wishes to know it and learn from it. In fact, the Christian in general - with some exceptions which we will mention in due course - feels as he skims through the Holy Quran as one of the believers with whom he is united in the bonds of love and friendliness which emanate from that which God has sent down to Jesus, his Mother Mary, the Christians and the anchorites.

A case in point is the verse which says: "***And dispute ye not with the people of the Book, except with means better (than mere disputation), unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury); but say 'We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us and that which came down to you; our God and your God is one; and it is to Him we bow (in Islam)'***", [The Spider: 46].

If the words "People of the Book" include the Jews and the Christians in general, the prevailing spirit in the Koranic verses and the affectionate atmosphere of the Holy Quran permit us to give preponderance to the fact that what is meant by these words is the Christians, not the Jews, whenever the verse expresses "friendliness" and "appreciation", for both of these words are related to "mercy" which is patent in Christianity in general and in the person of Christ, and in the friendly relationships that began to grow and develop between the Christians of Arabia and the Prophet in person. Characterized by mutual love and acknowledgement, these relationships were a far cry from those between the Jews of Arabia and the Muslims in general, and between the Jews and the Prophet in particular.

The following verse expresses this point very clearly:

"Strongest among those in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and the Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say 'We are Christians': because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant", [The Table Spread: 82].

In this verse, The Holy Quran draws a clear distinction between the Jews and the Christians, even though both are "People of the Book". We also find this meaning in the verse from the *Surah "Women"*: "***The People of the Book ask thee to cause a book to descend to them from heaven: indeed they asked Moses for an even greater (miracle), for they said: 'Show us Allah in public,' but they were dazed for punishment***", [Women: 153].

From this verse, it becomes clear that the "People of the Book" are the Jews, who asked Moses - who lived a little over ten centuries before the advent of Christianity - to show them God in public.

Also: "***O ye who believe! Take not for friends and protectors those who take your religion for a mockery or sport, whether among those who received the Scripture before you, or among those who reject faith; but fear Allah if ye have faith (indeed)***", [The Table Spread: 57]. And: "***Curses were pronounced on those among the children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of David and Jesus, the son of Mary, because they disobeyed and persisted in Excess***", [The Table Spread: 78].

Thus it becomes clear that Jesus, Son of Mary, pronounced curses on those from among the Children of Israel who rejected faith, because they disobeyed God and persisted in excess. Before him, David, who was one of their prophets, had also cursed them for the same reasons.

It is worth pointing out that in the Holy Quran Allah has prepared a most grievous penalty for the Jews, and has pronounced curses on them for their slaying of the Messengers in defiance of the Truth, for their serious slandering of Mary, and for claiming that they had slain the Messenger of God, Christ Jesus, Son of Mary, whom He had raised up unto Himself, as is explained in the verses 152-161 of the *Surah "Women"*.

But Allah - to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty, He is Exalted in power, Wise - holds a different view of those amongst the Jews who are well-grounded in knowledge, who believe in that which was revealed to Mohammed and in that which went before him, and who establish regular prayer, give regular charity, and believe in the Last Day, "***To them shall We soon give a great reward***".

Therefore, Islam is free from racial discrimination, preference of one race over another, or prejudice against a people, for that would go against its

humanness and universality. Islam judges people by their deeds, whether individually or as a group: "***Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it. And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it***", [The Earthquake: 7-8].

Islam's position with regard to Jews is: a grievous penalty for the unbelievers amongst them, the disobedient and the transgressors, and a great reward for those Jews who are well-grounded in knowledge, believe in God's revelations, establish regular prayer and practise regular charity.

Chapter Two

The Jews of Arabia ... The Christians

Generally speaking, the Jews of Arabia took an inimical stand vis-à-vis the Prophet. Of the Jewish tribes which joined the camp of the unbelievers and fought the believers in the Battle of Uhud were Banu-Nadhir who tried, even after Uhud, to assassinate the Prophet in Yathrib by dropping a huge rock on him from a high wall near which he was sitting. The Prophet's response to this wicked attempt was an order to evacuate their homes in Medina. When they disobeyed him, he besieged them for six days, preventing help from reaching them. Only when they surrendered did he spare their blood, allowing them to come out with all the riches and belongings their camels could carry. They left Medina; most of them went to Khaybar, but a few headed for Sham (Syria).

Once in Khaybar, they resumed their conspiracy and, along with Banu Quraydha (another Jewish tribe), they joined the armies of the pagans whose number exceeded ten thousand men under the command of Abu-Sufyan. Having laid siege to Yathrib for twenty days, Abu-Sufyan gave up his unsuccessful attempt, frustrated by a moat which the Prophet had ordered dug around the city, to protect it from enemy attacks, and deterred by the unleashed elements.

After the Battle of Khandaq, the Prophet attacked Banu Quraydha, and besieged them for twenty-five days until they surrendered.

When the Jewish alliance with the pagans failed, the Jews concluded a pact amongst themselves. The alliance, which by now had become one-hundred percent Jewish, comprised those tribes around, but not too far away from, Medina. An important component, the Jews of Khaybar (Banu Nadhir) constituted the backbone of this alliance. When the news of their planning to attack Medina reached the Prophet, he marched on them with his Muslim army. That was to be the Battle of Khaybar which took place in 629 A.D., and in which Allah had willed it that victory be on the side of the Mujahidin who were fighting for His Cause.

As for the Christians, theirs was an amicable and deferential attitude towards the Prophet. Trustworthy narrators tell us that when a party of the Christians of Arabia paid the Prophet a visit in Medina, he spread his mantle for them to sit on, a token of his love and appreciation for them. The narrators also inform us that Cuqba the Christian - also known as sahib-Ayla (the Stag-man) - went to the Muslims to make peace with them, and that the Prophet sent the Christians letters in which he assured them of his protection, care and attention (Hatta, *An Extended History of the Arabs*, 1949, Vol. I, p. 164). We believe that the following Hadith is authentic: "*He who wrongs a zimmi, I am his adversary on the Day of Judgement*".

When the pressure on the part of the pagans and their allies became heavier on the Muslims who found themselves in a critical situation, some of them, including Jaafar Ibn Abi-Talib, emigrated to Abyssinia on the Prophet's advice. He told them on this occasion that in Abyssinia, there was a king in whose kingdom injustice befell no one.

In a letter which Omar Ibn Umayyah al-Dhamiri delivered to Negus, the Prophet said: "... *I bear witness that Jesus, the Son of Mary and the Spirit and Word of God, which He had breathed into the Virgin Mary, the kind and the chaste; then she bore Jesus, whom God had created from His Spirit and Breath, as He had created Adam and breathed in him the breath of life ...*".

In reply to a question addressed by Negus to those who went to him seeking his protection, Jaafar Ibn Abi-Talib said: "*We say about Christ that which our Prophet has spoken: 'that Christ is the servant of Allah, His Messenger, His Word and His Spirit which He breathed into the Virgin Mary, the chaste'*". Negus answered: "*By God! What you have said has not wronged Jesus, the son of Mary*". Tabari relates that the Prophet lamented the death of Negus. Ibn-Hisham also told Aicha that Negus's tomb had been glowing for some time after his burial.

Chapter Three

The Quran

A book for both the Christian and the Muslim

Islam's attitude of love, respect and commendation for the Christians is another reason behind my being attracted to this religion intellectually and spiritually. It is this friendly attitude that prompted me to delve into it and to drink my fill from its fresh, pure waters.

In any case, Islam did not concern itself only with generalities; it also devoted many beautiful, clear verses to Christ, Mary and the anchorites, about whom it spoke highly. The Holy Quran elevated Mary in particular to a position no other woman has ever reached in history.

For the Christians, Christ is the beginning and the end; this is why they call themselves "Christians," to express that close, or rather organic, relationship holding between them and Christ in person from the very beginning.

Unlike the Muslims, who rightly refuse to be called "Mohammedan," the Christians consider their name a fundamental condition for their religious affiliation.

The Christian is positively affected by any written commendation of Jesus. In this particular context, and in other general contexts, the Holy Quran is not a book for Muslims only, but for Christians, too.

As I came to know the Holy Quran, in general, and as I became acquainted with what is said in it about the Christians, Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the anchorites, in particular, I began to feel that there is a morsel for me in this Book of God, and that it is not unfamiliar to me, nor am I alien to it.

The Quran is as much my book as it is the Muslim's; through my share in it - a big one, indeed - I feel that this Book is addressed to every human being who believes in God and the Last Day.

Worth noticing in this connection is the fact that Islam respects the Christian doctrine - a fundamental tenet which succinctly holds that Christ

had no human or earthly father - and consequently, it treats the Christian belief known as the "Immaculate Conception" particular to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with deference, albeit in an indirect but clear manner.

Known in the Quran as ^CIssa (Jesus), and also as al-Masih (Christ), Christ is always, and forever, the Son of Mary, not because his father is unknown - no, Allah knows all things. Had Christ had a father, Allah would have mentioned him by name in His Book, but Christ did not have a human father. Mary, unlike all the women of the world, did not conceive from a human being, because "no man has touched her". She conceived through divine intervention "The Holy Spirit," as will be explained later.

The verses in which Christ is referred to as "Son of Mary" abound; here are some of them:

"And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary ...", [The Table Spread : 46].

"That they said (in boast): 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary ...'", [Women: 157].

"O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary ...", [The Family of Imran: 45].

"Curses were pronounced on those among the children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of David and of Jesus, the son of Mary ...", [The Table Spread: 78].

From the point of view of its essence and in terms of its direct relation to God, Christ's birth is the same in the Quran and in the New Testament: it goes back to Mary whom Allah has chosen for such an event.

This is why the Quran places great emphasis time and again on Mary's chastity, for Mary is indeed a precious gem in the Book of Allah.

Let us listen to Allah as He says:

"Behold! The Angels said : 'Oh Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee, chosen thee above all the women of all nations'", [The Family of Imran: 42].

This verse makes clear that Allah - the Great and Almighty - chose Mary and purified her, and after he had purified her, he chose her again. This is

not lexical redundancy; it is a spiritual emphasis upon her being chosen above the women of all nations.

The double occurrence of the words "hath chosen thee" - the first referring to Mary alone, and the second to Mary being "chosen above the women of all nations" - prompts us to stress that the meaning in the first instance is different from that in the second. For Allah - to Whom we ascribe all perfection and majesty - does not speak in vain, if we may say so.

In the first instance, the words "hath chosen thee" mean that Allah had chosen Mary from the beginning, even before the Original Sin was committed: Adam and Eve disobeying Allah's command, for which act God punished them by expelling them from Heaven^(*).

Therefore, the Original Sin did not involve Mary, because Allah had purified her from inception. Why did He purify her from the beginning? The answer is clear: to choose her later above the women of all nations. And why did He choose her above all the women of all nations? The answer is clear here, too: Allah - the Great and Almighty - had prepared her to be the Mother of Jesus Christ.

In the Quran, Mary is the daughter of Imran; her mother is "a woman of Imran". Allah has devoted to the Family of Imran a whole chapter that carries its name:

"Allah did choose Adam and Noah, the Family of Abraham and the Family of Imran above all the people, offspring one of the other, and Allah heareth and knoweth all things", [The Family of Imran: 33-34].

Therefore, Mary's lineage goes back all the way to Adam, through Imran, Abraham, Noah, and all of the others - from Adam all the way to Imran - whom Allah has chosen above all the families of other nations.

It is to Allah that "a woman of Imran", the Mother of Mary, turns when she says: *"Behold! A woman of Imran said: O my Lord! I do dedicate unto Thee what is in my womb for Thy special service: so accept this of me: for Thou hearest and knoweth all things I have named her*

(*) Muslims believe that the first instance of "hath chosen thee" means "chosen you, Mary, to give birth to Jesus," and the second instance means "preferred, you Mary;" or the first "hath chosen thee" is "a choice for custodianship," the second for "giving birth to Jesus."

Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the Evil One, the Rejected. Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty", [The Family of Imran: 35-37].

Explicators and commentators have reported the following brief statement: "*Except Mary and her son, every infant is touched by Satan at birth, which is why it cries. This means that Satan tempts every child, and tries to influence it, except Mary and her son because Allah - be He exalted - had safeguarded them through the blessing of the protection*"^(*).

Mary grew up and blossomed, reaching the age of marriage. Then the angels brought her a grave piece of news, unique in its kind ever since a human existed on earth - since Adam. These tidings made Mary and her son two very special human beings, very different from all other creatures:

'Behold! The angels said: 'O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah; he shall speak to people in childhood and in maturity, and he shall be (of the company) of the righteous.' She said: 'O Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me?' He said: 'Even so: Allah createth what he willeth: when He hath decreed a Plan, He but saith to it: 'Be' and it is!'", [The Family of Imran: 45-47].

In other manifest verses, the glad tidings reach the acme of beauty:

'Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her Our Angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said: 'I seek refuge from thee to (Allah) Most Gracious. Come not near me if thou dost fear Allah.' He said: 'nay, I am only a messenger from thy Lord (to announce) to thee the gift of a holy son.' She said: 'How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?' he said: 'So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, that is easy for Me: (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a mercy

(*) "She spoke when she was a baby, just like Jesus - peace be upon him; she had never sucked at a breast, and her sustenance would come down to her from Heaven".

from Us': it is matter (so) decreed! So she conceived him and retired with him to a remote place. And the pains of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a palm tree: she cried (in her anguish) 'Ah would that I had died before this! Would I had been a thing forgotten and out of sight! But (a voice) cried to her from beneath (the palm tree); Grieve not! For thy Lord hath provided a rivulet beneath the tree; and shake towards thyself the trunk of the palm tree; it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon thee. So eat and drink and cool (thine) eye. And if thou dost see any man, say 'I have vowed a fast to Allah, Most Gracious, and this day will I enter into no talk with any human being.' At length she brought the babe to her people, carrying him (in her arms). They said: 'O Mary! Truly an amazing thing hast thou brought! O sister of Aaron! Thy father was not a man of evil, nor thy mother a woman unchaste!' But she pointed to the babe; they said: 'How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?' He said: 'I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet. And He had blessed me wheresoever I be, and enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live. He hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable. So peace is on me the day I was born and the day that I will die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again)'", [Mary: 16-33].

In this verse, as in those mentioned earlier, there is confirmation that Mary was not touched by a human being, yet she conceived and gave birth to her son Christ, Jesus - peace be upon him. She became pregnant from the Spirit of God; that is why her son is the "Word of God". This, in essence, is the Christian belief with regard to Mary.

In this respect, the Quran went even further, for nowhere is the surrealism, which the West discovered only in the twentieth century, more apparent than in Allah's words about Mary, as He says: "***And (remember) her who guarded her chastity We breathed into her Our Spirit and We made her and her son a Sign for all peoples***", [The Prophets: 91].

Can a Christian who hears such words from Allah - the Great and Almighty - see himself as a stranger in the world of Islam and Muslims? Cannot the Quran be his Book, too, just like the New Testament, at least in what concerns Mary?

What does the Christian read in the New Testament regarding this very point? Let us listen to what Luke has to say about the Glad Tidings:

"And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the Angel came in unto her and said: 'Hail! Thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women.' And when she saw him she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the Angel said unto her: 'Fear not, Mary: for thou hast favor with God. And behold! Thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest ...'. Then said Mary unto the Angel: 'How shall this be, seeing that I know not a man?' And the Angel said unto her: 'The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee ... For with God nothing shall be impossible'", [Luke 1: 26-35].

The New Testament says: "*How shall this be, seeing that I know not a man ?*".

The Quran says: "***How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me?***".

The New Testament says: "*The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee*".

The Quran says: "***Then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects***".

The New Testament says: "*For with God nothing shall be impossible*".

The Quran says: "***So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, 'That is easy for me ...'***".

My love for Islam grows stronger when I realize that it honors Mary and holds her in high esteem while some Christian denominations show no respect at all for the Mother of Christ, nor do they refrain from disparaging her; they even vilify her at times.

Worth mentioning is the fact that Islam has condemned the Jews and even called them infidels; it considered what they said about Mary a most

serious slander. ***"That they rejected Faith; that they uttered against Mary a grave false charge"***, [Women: 156].

In addition to what has already been said about Mary's chastity and her being chosen by Allah Who had set her and her son as a Sign for the Worlds, we also find in the Quran verses which say that Allah looked after her when she was a crawling little girl, secured her sustenance, and made her aware - while still less than one year old - that she was chosen and called upon to assume an extraordinary role.

This is why we hear her in the Quran speak and utter, even as a little girl, things that only a mature adult can say.

"Right graciously did her Lord accept her: He made her grow in purity and beauty; to the care of Zakariya was she assigned. Every time that he entered (her) chamber to see her, he found her supplied with sustenance. He said: 'O Mary! Whence (comes) this to you ?' She said: 'From Allah: for Allah provides sustenance to whom he pleases, without measure'" [The Family of Imran: 37].

It is all too beautiful that Allah assigns Mary to the care of Zakariya or any other human being. Equally beautiful is the fact that she spoke while still a little girl; but what is even more extraordinary and marvelous is the fact that she said, when still a little girl, what only the seasoned and wise men amongst humans could speak: ***"Allah provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure"***.

Not only did Mary, the little girl, speak, she uttered wise words, and was conscious of Allah's intervention in her birth, upbringing and destiny. Since her childhood - and this is not given to any other human being but to her and her son - Mary understood that Allah alone gives and takes, elevates and humiliates, and gives life and gives death.

After Mary, Christ - the child - spoke while still in "the cradle" to say what grown-ups would say: ***"He said: 'I am indeed a servant of Allah: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet; and He hath made me blessed wheresoever I be, and hath enjoined on me Prayer and Charity as long as I live: (He) hath made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable. So Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life'"***, [Mary: 30-33].

Thus - by the power of Allah, who has power over all things- Christ knew, since his childhood, that Allah had given him the Book and made him a prophet blessed wherever he was.

Islam continues to honor Christ even further, and acknowledges his power to perform wonders, acknowledging that Allah had conferred this power upon him: "***And (appoint) him a Messenger to the children of Israel, (with this message): 'I Have come to you with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird, by Allah's leave: and I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave ... Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe'***", [The Family of Imran: 49].

The Christian who reads in the Quran these verses about the Christians, Christ, and Mary must do a little bit of reckoning with himself or a little self-criticism to see if his stands with regard to Islam over the generations are fair and objective, and compatible with the fiducial truth that is clearly apparent in these verses; or if, on the contrary, they are replete with false accusations and alien to that truth.

One of the virtues of Islam is that it honors and exalts all the messengers and prophets, without exception, from Abraham all the way to Christ and Mohammed, considering them Prophets of humanity, and Messengers of Allah - The Great and Almighty; Most Gracious, Most Merciful, Lord of the Worlds.

As we have said earlier, Christ occupies a special place in that blessed chain of missions and prophesies, about all of whose links Islam holds a friendly, amiable and deferential view.

* * *

Likewise, the Quran holds a deferential view of a party of Christians especially, speaks highly of them, and glorifies them, as in the following verse:

"Of the People of the Book are a portion that stand (for the right); they rehearse the Signs of Allah all night long, and then prostrate themselves in adoration. They believe in Allah and the

Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works: they are in the ranks of the righteous. Of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them; for Allah knoweth well those that do right",
[The Family of Imran: 113-115].

These verses - the best about the Christians in the Quran - contain a description of a party of them who devoted themselves to worship, prayer, piety, and asceticism. They withdrew from the world to lead a life of piety and poverty, enduring all kinds of suffering, and giving in to the Will of Allah. They gave up this world to gain the Hereafter.

Those were the anchorites whose "nation" was well known in the early Christian era - their golden period - and whose spiritual radiance was unparalleled in those times.

The Maronite sect, of which the Lebanese Maronite family is a descendent, goes back to Maroun, one of the anchorites.

The Christian, in general, and the Maronite, in particular, are positively affected by everything related to the anchorites. In Lebanon, the numerous monasteries are but one proof of that strong bond between the Maronite and their origin.

This is why the verses quoted above seem to the Maronite as part of their own heritage which, in essence, is the property of his own conscience, or rather the property of his own history.

Chapter Four

Between the Two Religions ... There Are Differences

We owe it to the truth to say that there are differences between the two religions. These differences may seem fundamental at first sight, but in reality they are not. Of these, we will mention the following:

- Islam is a religion of absolute Oneness of Allah: "***There is no god but Allah***". Therefore, unlike in Christianity, there is no room for the Holy Trinity in Islam.
- In Islam, Christ is a prophet; he did not have a human father. Mary conceived him from the Spirit of God. Christ was given birth and created; he is the Word of God.
- In Christianity, Christ is the second person in the Holy Trinity. He is a God in whose person two natures have come together: deity and humanness. He is equal to God, the Father, in essence; he was begotten, not created.
- In Islam, "***No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another***", and "***Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good see it; and anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it***". There is no such thing as the mystery of redemption in Islam.
- In Christianity, Christ was crucified, and he died for the salvation of the human beings.
- In Islam, there is nothing of the kind. Christ was not crucified^(*), nor did he die for the sake of the people.

In Islam, there is no such thing as intercession generally speaking; there are no saints or temples consecrated to them, and union with Allah is direct. The world of Christianity is full of saints to whom the believers resort, seeking intercession for them with God.

(*) The Holy Quran holds that Christ is above crucifixion, for this kind of punishment is inflicted upon vile criminals. The Jews were determined to kill and crucify Christ, but they failed: "***That they said (in boast) 'We killed Christ the son of Mary. The messenger of Allah'; but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them***", [Women: 157].

In spite of everything that has been said, Koranic verses on the tolerance of Islam are many and marvelous, so are the Prophet's positions - and those of the Orthodox Caliphs - vis-à-vis Christianity and the Christians.

The chapter "*al-Buruj*"^(*) - to mention but this one - amply demonstrates the fact that Allah - the Great and Almighty - considers the Christians believers. Allah had pronounced curses on the Jews - the makers of the pit (of fire), who threw the Christians of Najran into it and set fire to them.

If Islam does not recognize the divinity of Christ, it is not to belittle the son of Mary, but to glorify Allah as the One and Only, for "***There is none like unto Him***".

It would not be logical on the part of Islam to reject the divinity of Mohammed Ibn Abdu-Allah and to accept that of the son of Mary; for as the saying goes: "*He who considers you his equal has not wronged you*", which no doubt fits in very well here.

In His Book, Allah commanded Mohammed to remove all ambiguity and confusion and to settle the matter once and for all: "***Say: I am but a human like you***".

From Islam's viewpoint, Christ is, as has been said earlier, a holy prophet, whose mother conceived him from the Holy Ghost. He does not have a human father, and he spoke in childhood and worked miracles. In the Holy Quran, he is always and forever called "Jesus son of Mary", the woman whom Allah had purified, and chosen over the women of the worlds.

Apart from the two exceptions mentioned above, it may be said that Islam's view of the Gospel is no different from its view of the Holy Quran; it considers the Gospel a revealed Book, too, as this verse shows: "***It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus). Before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the Criterion (of Judgment between right and wrong)***".

We would not be honest to ourselves and to the reader if we did not say that the Quran accuses the Christians of having forgotten some of that which Allah has revealed; that is, some of the Gospel:

(*) We will have more to say about this in Chapter 6. (*Al-Buruj*: The Mansions of the Stars).

"From those, too, who call themselves Christians, We did take a Covenant, but they forgot a good part of the message that was sent to them: so We estranged them, with enmity and hatred between the one and the other", [The Table Spread: 14].

Known as the Canonical Gospels and acknowledged by the Church, the Four Gospels - Mathew, Marcus, Luke, and John respectively - are in the Christian faith revealed books, written by these four evangelists on the basis of revelation.

In addition to these four gospels, there are other apocryphal ones which the Church does not acknowledge.

Islam believes that there was only one Gospel which Allah had sent down to Christ Jesus the son of Mary, His Prophet and His Messenger, and that it is not exactly the same as the gospels which were written later.

It is to this Revealed Gospel that the following verse alludes: ***"And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him: We sent him the Gospel: therein was guidance and light"***, [The Table Spread: 46]. So do 3rd and 4th verses of the chapter "The Family of Imran" quoted earlier.

Islam holds that the revealed Gospel - the only one - speaks of neither the divinity of Christ nor of his being the son of God, two points which are mentioned in the Four Gospels referred to earlier. The Holy Quran says:

"They do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary", [The Table Spread: 72].

"Say not: 'Trinity'; desist, it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: Glory be to Him: Far exalted is He above having a son", [Women: 171].

"And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men: worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?' He will say: 'Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I have no right (to say)'", [The Table Spread: 116].

* * *

The purpose of this brief survey of the Koranic verses is to help us form a general opinion on the position of Islam with regard to the Christian faith, the Christians, the anchorites, Christ himself, and his Mother Mary.

There are, therefore, disparities between Islam and Christianity; however, as we have already said, they are not as fundamental as they appear to be at first glance. That is because both Christianity and Islam view Christ as the Word of God:

"O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus the son of Mary", [The Family of Imran: 45].

"Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers", [Women: 171].

John's Gospel - the Gospel of the Holy Spirit- begins as follows: *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"*.

Our purpose is not to conduct a theological research here. That would be beyond our scope anyway, in terms of both our personal abilities and our qualifications for discussing such matters.

However, for the sake of reconciling the two views (Islamic and Christian) and of conciliating the hearts and the minds, we will say the following:

In Islam, Allah revealed His Word to Man; in Christianity, God's revelation is Man.

Lastly, we must honestly and courageously acknowledge that Christian beliefs and mysteries are beyond the scope of the human mind which has, on many occasions, clashed with Christianity and gone amiss in its mysterious worlds.

This explains why all the heresies - which, in their essence, were nothing more than intellectual theological battles waged by the Christian mind against those beliefs and mysteries - emerged beginning from the fourth century; that is, ever since the Roman Empire acknowledged Christianity as an acceptable religion among other religions.

Arianism, nestorianism and Jacobinism - the most important and the most dangerous heresies in the history of Christianity - which concerned themselves with the person of Christ as a god with two natures, rejecting one or the other - are proofs from within Christianity that the mystery of incarnation was like a sledge hammer that fell upon the Christian minds with blows during 4th, 5th, and 6th centuries, thus impairing them.

Whatever the case, the two religions (Christianity and Islam) need not be similar and in agreement in letter and spirit to coexist and cooperate with each other.

The beauty of the universe lies in its diversity, and the universe is the creation of Allah - The Great and Almighty - "***If thy Lord had so willed, He could have made mankind one people***".

Both Christianity and Islam call for the worship of God, enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, and believe in the Last Day and the Last Judgement.

Allah is One in Christianity and in Islam, but the paths leading to Him are many. Like the mosque, the church is a place for worship, prayer and piety. Let the Muslim live his Islam, and the Christian his Christianity. In such a situation, the world will be an inkling as to what Heaven would be like, and the Lebanon will turn into a paradise on God's vast earth.

The misfortunes of the Lebanon emanate from the fact that the Christian does not behave in accordance with the teachings of Christ, and the Muslim does not act according to the tenets of the Holy Quran and the Prophet's *Sunna*.

Generally speaking, the Muslim does not have a good grasp of Islam; the same statement also applies to the Christian: he is just not well-grounded in Christianity. Likewise, the Muslim is unacquainted with Christianity, and the Christian has no knowledge of Islam. We are all victims of ignorance; and as the poet said: "*Ignorance destroys the mansion of glory and noble-mindedness*". That is why we have destroyed the Lebanon.

Chapter Five

The Christian's Place in Islam

Our question is: What place does the Christian occupy in Islam?

Here are some answers:

1. The seventy-second verse of the *Surah* "The Table Spread", which we have cited earlier, says: "***They do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is Christ the son of Mary'***".

There is a group of Christians, whom the Church considered heretics, who said in the fifth century: "*God is Christ*", thus denying the human nature in the person of the son of Mary and rejecting the idea that "*the Word of God and the Holy Spirit*" were incarnated in the human body. Worth noting is the fact that Allah - the Great and Almighty - did not call the Christians by their name *nasara* in the seventy-second verse above, for He said: "***They do blaspheme who say ...***", which implies that the reference here is to a particular group, not to all the Christians.

Whether for the Christians or the Muslims, Allah is the same: the Creator of the Heavens and the earth, and of things seen and unseen. Those who say that Christ is God are heretics in Christianity, and unbelievers in Islam. They are rejected by both Christianity and Islam.

2. The seventy-third verse of the same *Surah* says this: "***They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a trinity ...***".

Our brief remark is that the Christians say that God is the first of three, not their third. The group of theologians who say that God is one of three in a trinity are, in the view of the Christian orthodoxy, heretics; that is, unbelievers.

The Third in a Trinity is the Holy Ghost which the Holy Quran has mentioned more than once: "***We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, Clear (Signs) and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit***", [The Cow: 87], and "***Then will Allah say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favor to thee and to thy mother, Behold! I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit'***", [The Table Spread: 110].

What makes us say with certainty that Islam does not regard the Christians in general as unbelievers are the Koranic verses which consider them believers. Of such verses we will quote the following:

1. ***"Those who believe (in the Quran), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians and the Sabians, any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve"***, [The Cow: 62]. This verse needs no further comment. The Christians are regarded as believers.

2. ***"Of the People of the Book are a portion that stand (for the right); they rehearse the Signs of Allah all night long, and prostrate themselves in adoration. They believe in Allah and the Last Day"***, [The Family of Imran: 113]. We have already cited these two verses when dealing with the anchorites.

3. In Arab culture and traditions, food is a token of friendship and socialization: ***"This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful to you and yours is lawful to them"***, [The Table Spread: 5]. It would not be logical for the believers to eat the food of the unbelievers, and vice-versa.

4. The Quran permits the Muslim to marry a Christian woman: ***"Lawful unto you in marriage are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book"***, [The Table Spread: 5].

However, marriage with an unbelieving woman is not lawful:

"Do not marry unbelieving women until they believe", [The Cow: 221].

If the Christian woman is an unbeliever, the Quran will treat her the same way it treats an unbelieving woman; that is, she will have to believe (to embrace Islam) so that the Muslim can marry her.

While we notice that in Verse 57 of the *Surah* "The Table Spread", the Quran forbids the believers from taking the Jews and the unbelievers as friends and protectors, we find that in Verse 78 of the same *Surah*, it praises (albeit indirectly, but clearly) Christ Jesus, the son of Mary who pronounced curses upon them:

"O Ye believers! Take no friends and protectors those who take your religion for a mockery or sport whether among those who received the Scripture before you, or those who reject faith".

- and :

"Curses are pronounced on those among the Children of Israel who rejected faith, by the tongue of David and Jesus, the son of Mary, because they disobeyed and persisted in excess".

These two verses make clear: abundantly that the Jews and the unbelievers are in one camp, and that the believers and the Christians are in another. ***"Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and the Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say 'We are Christians': because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant"***, [The Table Spread: 82]. As in the two previous verses, the prevalent meaning in this verse is also very clear: Christians are believers.

The *Surah* of "*Al-Buruj*" (The Mansions of the Stars), which we will discuss immediately in Chapter 6, proves that the Christians **are** "believers".

Chapter Six

Al-Buruj^(*) Surah

- Dhu-Nu'as

"Woe to the makers of the pit (of fire). Fire supplied (abundantly) with fuel. Behold! They sat over against the fire, and they witnessed all that they were doing against the Believers. And they ill-treated them for no other reason than that they believed in Allah, Exalted in Power, Worthy of Praise", [Al-Buruj: 4-8].

The *Surah "Al-Buruj"* is concerned with the Christians of Nejran, in particular and, in general, with the believers who suffered torture and were put to death because of their devotion and attachment to their religion, especially the early Muslims who endured a great deal of suffering and were put to death in Makkah at the hands of the unbelievers.

Dhu-Nu'as, the king of Himyar, was Jewish. During his reign (6th century A.D.), Christianity was very widespread in Nejran, which did not please him very much. His fanaticism was such that he raised an army from Himyar and the tribes of Yemen and marched on Nejran, where he rounded up the Christians and ordered them to choose between Judaism or death. They chose to remain Christian, preferring death to abandoning their faith which was that of their ancestors, too.

Dhu-Nu'as's response was very harrowing; he ordered his soldiers to dig a long, wide pit into which they threw thousands of those Christians, and set fire to them; thousands of other Christians were slain, their bodies mutilated. The number of victims reached 20,000.

It is to those Christians who died as martyrs of their faith that Allah consecrated "*Al-Buruj*" in His Holy Book, commending them for upholding their faith in spite of all the tribulations they had encountered. At the same time, He pronounced curses on those who persecuted, killed and tortured those Christians to force them to renounce their faith.

(*) Revealed in Mecca, and counts 22 verses.

Apart from their belief in God, those who were persecuted committed no sin; however, Allah - the Great and Almighty - warned the persecutors of those believers that Hell would be their abode, and that hellfire would burn their skin in retribution for their fanaticism and injustice.

Regarding the believers whom the oppressors had tortured, killed and burnt, their reward was Paradise: "***Gardens beneath which rivers flow***".

"*Al-Buruj*" *Surah* is of great interest to us for two reasons:

1. It is a frank condemnation of any kind of religious compulsion; it is also an irrevocable sentence Islam has pronounced against the oppressors and the fanatics who resort to tyranny and violence to force the believers to abandon their faith.
2. It contains a commendation of the Christians - those of Nejran - praising them and their religious steadfastness in the face of the tyrants and oppressors who used means of coercion and torture to spread their beliefs.

With regard to the matter that is of concern to us, if "*Al-Buruj*" were the only *Surah* in the Holy Quran, it would be enough to prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Islam strongly condemns compulsion in religion; that it praises the believers who remain unshaken in their faith and who do not give in to force and tyranny; and that it announces hellfire to the oppressors and the fanatics, and promises gardens and rivers to the victims and the oppressed.

It is only natural that Islam take such a stand; that is so because religious persecution accompanied the Dacwa since its inception. Bilal Ibn Rabbah, Ammar Ibn Yasir and his parents and many others were among the first victims of this religious persecution.

One of the closest believers to the Prophet's heart, Bilal, who was later to become the first mu'dhin in Islam, was a slave owned by Umayya Ibn Khalaf^(*), one of the unbelievers. Displeased with his slave's embracing Islam and his becoming one of Mohammed's followers, Umayya Ibn Khalaf afflicted Bilal with the worst punishments. He would make his

(*) When Abu Bakar saw Bilal being tortured, he bought him and set him free.

rebellious slave lay down on his back in the desert of Makkah when the sun rose to its zenith, hot as fire, and order that a huge rock be put on Bilal to bring pressure to bear on his chest and make his breathing difficult; then he would say to him: *"You will remain in this state until you die or disbelieve Mohammed and worship Lat and 'Uzza"*. Agonizing, thirsty and famished, Bilal would reply: *"Allah is One and Only! Allah is One and Only!"* reaffirming the Oneness of Allah - the Almighty, the Powerful.

Ammar Ibn Yasir and his parents suffered a similar fate at the hands of Bani Makhzoum, but they remained steadfast in their faith until his mother breathed her last under torture.

The list of the believers who suffered torture, subjugation and deprivation at the hands of the unbelievers is very long. Those believers needed solace and encouragement to persevere in their stand.

It was also necessary that the unbelievers be warned of the punishment awaiting them in the Hereafter, so that they may desist from committing wrong and violent acts.

But Allah - to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty - was as Merciful to the believers as He was a Warner to the tyrant unbelievers. The *"al-Buruj"* Surah, which came as a consolation to the former and a warning to the latter, promises the believers Paradise and warns the tyrant, fanatic king of hellfire:

- "Those who persecute (or draw into temptation) the Believers, men and women, and do not turn in repentance will have the penalty of Hell: they will have the penalty of Burning Fire". (This concerns Dhu-Nu'as and the unbelievers after him.)

- "For those who believe and do righteous deeds will be Gardens, beneath which Rivers flow. That is the great salvation, (the fulfillment of all desires)". (This is for the Christians of Nejrán and those who came after them: Ammar Ibn Yasir and his parents, Bilal, and the early believers.)

The following verse stresses repentance and penalty:

- "Truly strong is the Grip (and Power) of thy Lord. It is He Who creates from the beginning, and He can restore (life). And He is

the Oft-forgiving, full of loving-kindness. Lord of the Throne of Glory, Doer (without let) of all that He intends".

* * *

The "*al-Buruj*" *Surah* has a universal human import which goes beyond the Christians of Nejran and the Muslims of Makkah to embrace the human being at every age and place, regardless of creed, race or color.

This *Surah* sprang from a particular event to establish a general principle which is compatible with the spirit of Islam: "***Let there be no compulsion in religion***". Every human is entitled to live their faith freely and to observe its rituals in a calm and peaceful atmosphere.

In this very context, the grandeur of Islam lies in the fact that it guarantees for both the Muslim and the non-Muslim the freedom of worship, leaving the door open for the latter to embrace Islam if he is convinced of its teachings and precepts, and if he finds them compatible with his own convictions, hopes and aspirations.

Faith is an inner, affective conviction that radiates outwardly. If faith is forcibly imposed from the outside towards the inside, Allah will not accept it; it will be rejected, just like all of Dhu-Nu'as's attempts in Nejran and those of the unbelievers in Makkah.

Islam endeavors to spread out and seeks to spur as many people as possible to embrace the precepts and commandments which Allah has proclaimed in His Holy Book and ordered His Prophet to propagate as far as possible; but at the same time Islam rejects compulsion in religion and forcible conversion, along with any other means which affect the individual's conviction and determination.

With its Quran and the *Sunna* of its Prophet, Islam is a collection of rare, attractive and sparkling gems. It is enough for the owner of this collection to proudly display it publicly so that people may bless their sight with its radiance and sparkle, and to explain to them in very simple terms the characteristics and essence of this collection, and what it represents in terms of values and objectives and in terms of the happiness and joy it gives the person who acquires it and graces himself with it. Fine gems

such as these need no one to impose them on anyone; they go freely towards people, so to speak.

All Islam needs is an information campaign, to make itself known to those who are not too familiar with it; this is definitely the duty of every responsible Muslim. That is because Allah - the Great and Almighty - made it clear from the start that Mohammed was sent to all peoples and nations, not only to Quraysh and the people of Makkah and Arabia, and the Arabs.

The verses which express this abound, and are found in more than one Surah of the Holy Quran. Of these we will mention the following:

"We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin)"
[Saba': 28].

"Blessed is He Who sent down the Criterion to His servant that it may be an admonition", [The Criterion: 1].

"Say: 'O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah'", [The Heights: 158].

Quoted in a previous chapter of this work, along with others with the same import, these verses make it the duty of every responsible Muslim, especially if he is a man of religion, to help spread Islam to all people.

From the time he received the Revelation to the last day of his life, Mohammed sought to carry out the divine command: ***"O Apostle! Proclaim the Message which hath been sent to thee from thy Lord"***. The message spread far and wide through the ambassadors whom he had sent and the letters he had addressed to the kings of Persia, those of Byzantium and Abyssinia and other rulers in Egypt, Bahrain, Bilad al-Yamamah⁽¹⁾, and Bani Ghassan, calling upon them to embrace Islam.

That was not the case with all the prophets and messengers. In the Gospel, for example, Christ - peace be upon him - confined his mission to the Children of Israel; that is, to the Jews who, in his days, lived in great numbers in Judea, and with varying numbers in Galilee, Samaria, and Udoumiya, all of which became parts of Palestine later.

(1) Region East of Hijaz in the West of Arabia, on the Red Sea Coast.

In Matthew (15:24), we read the following: "*I was sent only to the wandering sheep of the House of Israel*".

It is clear from these words that Christ confined his mission to the House of Israel; that is, the Jews.

This is not the case with the Twelve Apostles, for Christ commanded them to spread his teachings amongst the pagans: "*Go then, and make disciples of all the nations giving them Baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit: teaching them to keep all the rules which I have given you*", [Matthew 28:19]; and also: "*Go into all the world, and give the good tidings to everyone*", [Marcus 16:15].

Chapter Seven

Equality

One of Islam's remarkable and extraordinary achievements is that, a long time before the revolutions which broke out in late eighteenth century, it had laid down the foundations for equality, and made them one of the principles of Islamic faith, considering equality a gift from Allah - the Great and Almighty.

Since the early days of his mission, the Prophet sought to make the faithful understand that *"all people stand equal, like the teeth of a comb; no advantage shall an Arab have over a non-Arab, except in righteousness"*.

As for Bani Hachim, the elite of Quraysh - and Quraysh was the elite of the Arabs - the Prophet said to them one day: *"O Bani Hachim! You're related to me through lineage; others through (righteous) deeds"*.

While racial discrimination still exists even today in some parts of America and Africa, we notice that, as early as the seventh century, the Prophet appointed Bilal - the black slave from Abyssinia - the first Mu'zin in Islam, proclaiming him one of the closest believers to his heart. Furthermore, hundreds of years before the advent of the "civilized" humanity, we hear the Prophet say: *"No authority will the child of a white woman have over the child of a black woman, save for just ends"*.

In this context, it is worth noting that the United States of America, the Statute of Liberty with its torch that lights up the world notwithstanding, had been practising racial discrimination up to the twentieth century, and slavery until the end of the nineteenth century.

The War of Secession, or the Civil War, which broke out between the north and the south from 1860 to 1865 and from which the north emerged victorious, did not eradicate racial discrimination whether in the north or in the south.

When Uncle Tom's Cabin, in which the author, Harriet Beecher Stow (1811-1896), took a clear stand against slavery (1850-1852), came out, it

sent shock waves across the American states, which prompted Lincoln to say about the author: "*This little woman has started a big war*".

Regarding the revolt known as the American Revolution against Great Britain - the occupying power - and the war which the Thirteen States had fought from 1775 to 1783, its reasons were purely economic and had nothing to do with any tendency towards political independence.

That "revolution" ended with the victory of the Thirteen States which undoubtedly received help from outside, particularly from France - at both state and individual levels.

A quick glance at Article I, Paragraphs 2 and 9 and Article IV, Paragraph 2 of the American Constitution of 1787 will clearly reveal that slavery was legal and permissible.

In the wake of the War of Session, the Thirteenth Amendment of the American Constitution introduced on 31/1/1865 decreed that slavery be abolished in all American states. Indeed, slavery was eradicated legally speaking, but racial discrimination was still going on, especially in the south, in such ways as to shame the human being whom the two revolutions of 1789 and 1840 and other revolutions had produced.

To give an idea about the sort of the delirious impulses and violent propensities of the American character, suffice it to mention in this connection the Los Angeles events of 1992. I cannot imagine that the world has forgotten that shameful scene, aired by the various satellite TV stations around the world, in which four white US police officers were beating with their sticks a black man who was lying on the ground, his head and face bleeding as he was trying to ward off their blows.

Those police officers were taken to court, but the members of the grand jury, all of whom white, pronounced their "colleagues" Not Guilty, in spite of their seeing the tape during the hearings^(*).

Racially motivated, that acquittal set Los Angeles afire and was about to set the whole of the United States ablaze; it also reveals that a large number of Americans are still "racist" - slogans, announcements, and statutes notwithstanding.

(*) The four police officers were retried by a mixed jury of whites and blacks; three of them were sentenced to prison; the fourth was acquitted.

Such racism is non-existent in Islam wherein the exact opposite is found since the Prophet's days and those of the Orthodox Caliphs all the way to modern times.

Since its beginning in Makkah, Islam was a staunch supporter of the poor, the weak, and the needy against the powerful, and the rich from among the notables of Quraysh. Even when still in the cradle, it emerged as the religion of equality between all the people; one that defends the individual's right and freedom, and raises the humble person, without discrediting the powerful individual, except in such limits as Allah may permit.

When the Prophet pronounced his two famous *Hadiths* mentioned earlier: "*all people stand equal, like the teeth of a comb, ...*" and "*No authority will the child of a white woman have over the child of a black woman, save for just ends*", he declared a revolution - with all the meaning this word can express - against the social conditions that were prevailing then in Arabia, especially in Makkah where the powerful tribe of Quraysh held sway over all other Arab tribes.

For him to have said that and to appoint Bilal, the slave from Abyssinia, Mu'azin on an equal footing with Abu-Sufiyan, the leader of Quraysh, the Prophet must have been very brave and audacious indeed; for a person has no merit over another, except in piety.

Eleven centuries before the advent of the French Revolution, Islam proclaimed equality among all people. The virtues of this same equality were, and still are, sung even today by the "revolutionaries" who do not know, or pretend not to know, that the spark of the real and original revolution was ignited by Islam, and that it was Islam which established this revolution on eternal, indestructible bases, because it sprang from both divine and worldly principles.

As for the Americans - the makers of the Revolution and architects of the 1787 Constitution - they only brushed past this equality, so to speak. Being uncultivated in this equality, their constitutional texts only aggravated social differences and class discrimination.

Many are the events which establish the respect of Islam and Muslims for this principle; suffice it to mention here this one incident from which many lessons can be learned:

On the day when he went to Al-Qods (Jerusalem) to receive the key to the city from Patriarch Severinus, upon the latter's request, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab entered the city on foot - he, the Prophet's successor and the Commander of the Faithful - while his assistant was mounting a she-camel. Abu Ubayda Ibn al-Jarrah's attempts to convince the Caliph to ride failed, because it was not Omar's turn; it was his assistant's. Since they set out from Yathrib, the Caliph and his assistant agreed that they would not only take turns in riding the she-camel - the only one available - but that they would do so for an equal distance. Just before they reached Al-Qods, fate had willed it that the turn be the assistant's. Thus all the inhabitants of Al-Qods witnessed, from the top of the high city wall, a scene they had never seen before, and will never see again: they saw Omar - the Muslim Caliph and the commander in chief of the Muslim armies - walking and leading the she-camel by the halter while his assistant was comfortably seated on the saddle.

It was also Omar who said his famous sentence that reverberated across the world: "*Since when did you enslave people whilst their mothers brought them free into this world?*"

It so happened that the son of Amr Ibn al-cAs hit a young Copt. The latter threatened to report him to Omar Ibn al-Khattab, the Commander of the Faithful. Amr's son said to the young Copt, "I have nothing to fear from your grievance, for I am Ibn-al-Akramain"⁽²⁾. Time passed and one day the young Copt ran into Omar Ibn al-Khattab, Amru Ibn al-cAs and his son in al-Hadj (Makkah), and he said to Omar: "*O Commander of the Faithful! This man hit me wrongfully; he is too emboldened by his being Ibn-al-Akramain*". Omar glanced at Amru, and said: "*Since when did you enslave people whilst their mothers brought them free into this world*". Then Omar gave the plaintiff his own whip and said to him: "*Hit Ibn-al-Akramain with this as he hit you*".

Regarding Ali - may Allah be pleased with him - the story has it that a Jew lodged a complaint against him to the same Caliph - Omar Ibn al-Khattab. When Ali stood before the Caliph, the latter said to him: "*Stand up Abu-Hassan, and sit opposite your opponent*". Feeling a little uneasy, Ali did

(2) Ibn-Al-Akramain: One who has carried out the two duties of Jihad and Hadj (pilgrimage).

as told. After the hearing, Omar said to Ali: "*Were you loathe to sit in front of your adversary, Ali?*" Ali replied, "*No! I resented the fact that you did not treat us both on an equal footing when you called me 'Abu-Hassan'*". Ali's point was that his being called by his nickname, 'Abu-Hassan', gave him a privileged status over his opponent.

These and other incidents were - still are, and will be - among the reasons which have made me become attached to Islam and which have opened my heart to it.

Chapter Eight

The Virtues: Forbearance and Forgiveness

Islam is a school of morals, the teachings of which are manifest in the Book of Allah and the *Sunna* of His Prophet, both of which are a vast receptacle of virtues.

Allah has praised all virtues and commanded the believers to acquire every one of them. Two of these virtues are of particular interest to us: forbearance and forgiveness. In the Holy Quran, these two virtues enjoy a high status, unparalleled in any other Book.

In this world of ours that is fraught with misfortunes and difficulties, the individual cannot resist and go on living unless he finds in Allah, his Creator, a helper and a supporter.

Allah knows all things; He knows that life "makes one face smile and another cry". It is for this reason that He has placed in the hands of the believers an effective weapon to fend off the vicissitudes of time and to ward off the wrongful acts of the tyrants. That is the only way for the believers not to lose hope and to stand as strong as a mountain in the face of storms and hurricanes.

One such weapon is patience in which the believer finds solace and a cure. In the Holy Book, Allah mentioned the virtue of Patience about seventy times; no other virtue has had such an honor.

The mere reading of the verses which enjoin patience calms down the aggrieved, and gives them peace of mind because, through their reading of these verses, they feel that they are under the protection of Allah, very close to Him - He Who is exalted in Might and has Power:

"Those who patiently persevere will truly receive a reward without measure", [The Troops: 10].

"And We will certainly bestow on those who patiently persevere, their reward according to the best of their actions", [The Bee: 96].

"And because they were patient and constant, He will reward them with a Garden and (garments of) silk", [Mankind: 12].

"And be patient and persevering; for Allah is with those who patiently persevere", [Spoils of War: 46].

"But if ye persevere patiently, and guard against evil, then that will be a determining factor in all actions", [The Family of Imran: 186].

"And if ye do catch them out, catch them out no worse than they catch you out; but if ye show patients, that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient", [The Bee: 126].

"But give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say, when afflicted with calamity: 'To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return'", [The Cow: 155-156].

These verses are but a drop from the ocean.

We ought to mention in this context the *Surah* entitled "The Declining Day", the shortest in the Holy Quran in terms of the number of verses, yet the most important in terms of significance and import because, according to some, it encapsulates the whole of Islam. To remind the reader of this chapter, we quote it in full:

"By (the token of) Time (through the ages), Verily Man is in loss. Except such as have faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of Truth, and of patience and constancy".

Commenting on this *Surah*, which is about Patience and Constancy - in addition to Faith, Righteousness and Good - and stressing the importance of Patience in the making of faith, Imam Shafi^ci is reported to have said: "If people pondered over the meaning of this *Surah*, it would encompass them all". What he means is that it epitomizes Islam, both in spirit and essence.

It is worth pointing out in this connection that as an Islamic concept, Patience is one of the conditions of Faith. This opinion may seem a little exaggerated; in reality, however, it is compatible with the spiritual climate that is prevalent in the verses on Patience, regardless of their difference and variety in terms of form and structure and of their agreement in terms of essence and meaning.

This means that the Muslim who is not patient, and who does not believe that patience is a means to salvation and to gaining entrance to Heaven, is, in a way, like the Muslim who does not establish regular prayer, believing it to be of little avail. Therefore, Patience lies at the heart of Islam of which it is part and parcel.

Those who join together in the mutual teaching of Patience and Constancy are like those who join together in the teaching of Truth and Righteous deeds. They will lose nothing; they are not in loss. On the contrary, Heaven is their abode, and they will meet their Lord.

Allah did not command patience; He left it up to the believers to be patient, if they so wish, and to fly into a rage, when they feel like it. This is exactly what distinguishes Islam from all other revealed and Eastern religions. Therefore, Patience is a solace, a cure, and the road to Heaven.

As He has recommended patience, Allah has also sanctioned forgiveness, with one little difference: Patience is an edict while Forgiveness is a choice. The following verse illustrates this point: "***The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for (Allah) loveth not those who do wrong***", [Counsel: 40].

Allah did not enjoin Forgiveness. He left it as a choice; for if the believer is forced to forgive, he reaps no benefit because he is forced to do so, in which case the right of choice will be absent, as will the volition.

Chapter Nine

A Religion of Persuasion not Compulsion

Another thing that has attracted me to Islam is its being a religion of persuasion, not compulsion. Islam does not want believers who only pay lip service to their religion; it wants true worshipers who believe from the bottom of their hearts. It wants its followers to open their eyes and see light willingly and favorably, and to be guided by their own minds and conviction; it does not want them to be compelled to embrace the religion of Allah, against their will for fear of death or punishment:

"If it had been thy Lord's will, they would have all believed, all who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!", [Jonah: 99].

In Islam, compulsion is almost equated with sin, because it runs against the spirit of this religion which carries within it the components of its eternity. Islam is not in want of a drawn sword or any other means of material or moral violence.

"Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching", [The Bee: 125].

That is yet another command, with the same import, from Allah to Mohammed. These and other commands rest on one fundamental principle, or rather they all emanate from one basic source represented here by three words which have made Islam so famous throughout history: "***Let there be no compulsion in religion***", [The Cow: 256].

It is from this source that the early believers quaffed, *Muhajirin*⁽³⁾ and *Ansar*⁽⁴⁾ who became the companions of the Prophet and who lived with him. They heard him and saw him handling the daily business of his people with a spirit of tolerance that was his hallmark.

(3) Those Meccans who emigrated to Medina in the early period of Islam.

(4) The Medina followers of the Prophet who granted him refuge after the Hegira.

From this same source quaffed al-Faruq⁽⁵⁾, the second Orthodox Caliph - may Allah be pleased with him. During his visit to the Church of Resurrection in Al-Qods, he remembered the Word of Allah and the *Sunna* of His Prophet, and he desisted from praying in that church which was very dear to the hearts of the Christians to preserve it for them, so that it would not be turned into a mosque after him. He granted them his protection - the Covenant of Omar which is a unique gem in the history of religions.

Omar - may Allah be pleased with him - was acting in accordance with the Book of Allah and the *Sunna* of His Prophet, and in harmony with the spirit of Islam. In no case was he "cutting a political deal", as do the conquerors in such a situation.

The Covenant of Omar was not an opportunist measure to please the Christians of Al-Qods and to win them over with a view to estranging them intellectually, socially, and religiously from Bizantium as claimed by a group - or rather a large number - of Western historians.

The people in Syria and Egypt - mostly Christians^(*) - were Monophysite and in religious and nationalistic disagreement with Bizantium which had terribly persecuted them for this very reason. Bizantium was also engaged in all kinds of harassment, such as confiscating churches and destroying a number of them, deporting or imprisoning many bishops and priests, thus striking terror in the hearts of the Syrians and Egyptians who had adopted the doctrine - or the heresy - of Christ as being of one nature. For all these reasons, those people who were known in Syria as "Jacobites" said: "*The God of Revenge has sent the Arabs to us to deliver us from the Romans*".(**)

A great many Christian historians have confirmed that the Jacobites of Syria and the Copts of Egypt felt safe amidst the Muslim Arabs amongst whom they found allies and protectors.

The Covenant of Omar was not the only important historical event of its time, nor was it the first Islamic measure of tolerance in the wake of the Islamic conquests.

(5) Epithet of the second Caliph, Omar Ibn al-Khattab; it means: "*He who distinguishes truth from falsehood*".

(*) In spite of a Jewish minority.

(**) Nasri Salhab, *In the Steps of Mohammed*, Dar al-kitab al-lubnani, 1971, p. 216.

Khalid Ibn al-Walid concluded pacts with the people of Damascus, Homs and Hama that guaranteed them the same rights as those secured for the Christians of Al-Qods by the Covenant of Omar. Khalid was the first to have done this^(***). The Islamic position is one and the same, because it emanates from one source: the religion of Allah which He revealed to His Prophet as a guide and a mercy to the Worlds.

In 614, The armies of Persia led by Khosrau II scored many victories in their wars against Byzantium, which paved the way for them to Al-Qods. When the Persian armies entered it, *"they set out to plunder and destroy the city; then they conquered Damascus whose inhabitants they killed and imprisoned, which struck terror in their hearts. Even the Church of Resurrection in Al-Qods was not spared; its riches and masterpieces, including the real cross, were all stolen"*^(****).

Later in 628, Hercules, the Byzantine emperor, was able to erase the traces of that defeat when he crushed the Persian armies and retrieved the wood of the Cross. Christians still celebrate this event under the name of "Eid el-salib" (Cross Holy Day).

To appreciate Islam, to give it due respect and to realize the extent to which it is a tolerant and noble religion, a comparison must be drawn between the act of the Persians and what the Muslims did twenty years later.

Had the Crusaders remembered in 1099 Omar's position with regard to the Church of Resurrection - to mention but this one stand - they would not have soiled their hands, conscience and the reputation of Christianity by breaking into the Mosque of Al-Aqsa, killing hundreds of unarmed Muslims - men, women and children - who sought refuge in it to save their lives. Their only weapon to defend themselves was the Book of the Holy Quran in which the **"Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful"** is mentioned hundreds of times.

Yet the best manifestations of Islamic tolerance are to be found in Al-Andalus (Arab Spain) the inhabitants of which were of Christian faith when the Muslims conquered Spain. Hundreds of years into Arab-Islamic

(***) Al-Qods was conquered in 638, Damascus in 635.

(****) Dr. Philip Hatta. *The History of Syria, Lebanon, And Palestine*. Vol. Two, Dar al-thaqafa.

rule, the inhabitants of Al-Andalus were mostly Christian, among whom lived a Jewish minority. It is again clear that Muslim rulers granted their subjects the freedom of worship and belief.

W. Durant wrote the following: "*Throughout history, al-Andalus had enjoyed no just and merciful rule as during the period of Arab rulers: their laws were based on justice and mercy. Minority members used to be tried according to their own laws and by clerks of theirs. Muslim rulers of al-Andalus granted their non-Muslim subjects, whatever their religion, freedom of worship*"^(*).

The year 1492 witnessed the fall of the last Islamic emirate in Al-Andalus, signaling the end of Islamic rule in Arab Spain, after about eight hundred years during which time Cordoba, Toledo, Grenada, and other cities, held the torch of one of the greatest civilizations that had deeply affected the conscience of time.

Suddenly, Queen Elizabeth of Castile, a Catholic, and the wife of Ferdinand, King of Aragon, issued that horrible decree which stipulated that the Muslims and the Jews - that is, non-Christians - make one of three choices:

1. Convert to Christianity
2. Leave Al-Andalus
3. Face prison or death

The hardships of the Muslims and the Jews began when the blind Spanish fanaticism forced them to make the best of the three worst choices.

Deep down in their souls, the Jews of those days must surely have drawn a comparison between Arab-Islamic tolerance and Christian-Spanish fanaticism, and seen the great difference between the two.

If, throughout history, some Muslim rulers had taken a number of discriminatory and coercive measures against "The People of the Book," they had unknowingly acted in contradiction to the spirit of Islam and in denial of its tolerant traditions, ignoring, or feigning ignorance of, what Allah has enjoined and what He has forbidden, forgetting, or pretending to forget, the *Sunna* of the Messenger of Allah, and the conduct of the Orthodox Caliphs.

Chapter Ten

The Human Being is Body and Soul

One other thing that I like about Islam is the equilibrium that exists between spirit and matter, or soul and body; that is, what the soul, which is a burning brand from Allah - Exalted is His Majesty unto Whom it shall return - needs and what the body needs.

The human being is body and soul, two closely related components which assist and counterbalance each other. It is not permissible for the human being to disdain and neglect his body, because the vessel must be worthy of its content. That is why we notice that most, if not all, churches purchase beautiful goblets made of pure gold and adorned with precious stones, or of gold-coated silver engraved and filigreed and ornamented with colorful enamel to be used in what Christians call "Divine Sacrifice". We also notice that Islamic art appeared and reached its apogee in mosques that are master-pieces in architecture, sculpture, decorations, inscriptions, abstract drawings, marble and mosaic, all of which plated with gold and silver and decked with gems. This is so because in those mosques the praises of Allah are celebrated and His Name is glorified. Because the mosque is the House of Allah, those in charge of it have given free reign to their imagination to make it a place worthy of celebrating the Name and Glory of Allah.

This Christian view, which existed before and after the advent of Islam, produced many churches and cathedrals considered as masterpieces in architecture, and in all the minor fields of arts which we have mentioned above because, like the mosque, the church is also a House of God. Therefore, the body, being the house of the soul, must be worthy of it.

But Allah - the Great and Almighty - sought, in His Holy Book, to teach the believers that the Hereafter is better than this world, for the latter is the temporal world and the former is the eternal abode.

If a balance between the needs of the body and those of the soul is necessary for the stability and equilibrium of the human being, the soul, in

its essence, enjoys a higher status and greater importance than the body. If the body is a creation of Allah, the soul is from His essence and a burning brand from Him - the Great and Almighty - unto Whom it will return after the utter destruction of the body.

The Hereafter is the Muslim's fundamental goal which he seeks to reach through a world in which he lives and which he enjoys in moderation. But one is not to forget his share of it, for depriving oneself of the beautiful things in life is not a precondition for entering Heaven. Nor is the mortification of the flesh a precondition for reviving the soul:

"But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on thee, the Home of the Hereafter, nor forget thy portion of this world: but do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee", [The Story: 77].

"And verily, the Hereafter will be better for thee than the present", [The Morning Hours: 4].

If "wealth and sons are allurements of the life of this world", there is what is even higher more sublime:

"But the things that endure, Good Deeds, are best in the sight of thy Lord, as rewards, and best as (the foundation for) hopes", [The Cave: 46].

"What is the life of this world but amusement and play? But verily the Home in the Hereafter, that is life indeed, if they but knew", [The Spider: 64].

"To the righteous (when) is said: 'What is it that your Lord has revealed?' They say: 'All that is good.' To those who do good, there is good in this world, and the Home of the Hereafter is even better and excellent indeed is the Home of the righteous", [The Bee: 30].

"But the Mercy of thy Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass", [The Ornaments of Gold: 32].

There is, therefore, a constant reminder that the Hereafter is a better home than this world, and that entering it can only be through good deeds and working righteousness:

"Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness ...", [The Cave: 110].

Islam is the religion of realism; it enjoins upon the human being only what he can bear within the limits permitted by Allah. Allah knows all things; He knows man's ability and endurance; that is why Allah calls man to account and holds him responsible for his deeds.

We believe it would be a good idea to draw a comparison, though brief, between the responsibilities that both religions, Christianity and Islam, place on the believer.

Christ came with religious and moral tenets and principles which weigh the believer down because of his inability as a human being to abide by them.

Of the tenets of the Son of Mary, we will select admirable examples to give the reader an opinion of the veracity of what we are saying:

Matthew 5:44: *(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: 5:39: *But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.*

Matthew 5:28: *(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 5:40: *If anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have [your] cloak also.*

Matthew 5:41: *And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two.*

Today, the Christians count more than one billion. We do not think that there is one among them who, if slapped on his right cheek, would turn the other to the person who slapped him.

With regard to loving the enemy, blessing those who curse and praying for the persecutors, these are beautiful and marvelous tenets, but their idealism surpasses human limits. If loving one's friends is not always guaranteed and definite, how can it be so for enemies?

What we have witnessed on the international and Arab scenes and all the successive events which mankind has witnessed since ancient times to date brings us to say that the history of peoples and nations - particularly in the Europe of before the Second World War - is in reality nothing but a record of wars.

Even as late as 1940 wars were still raging in Christian Europe, especially between Germany and France, or between France and Spain, or between Austria and Italy, or between Russia and Poland. No one can claim that wars are an expression of love, pardon and forgiveness.

This is where the "religious wars," which set Europe aflame for many centuries, come into play. In France, for example, suffice it to mention the St. Barthélemy massacre^(*) - St. Barthélemy was one of the apostles and Messengers of Christ. On this terrible day, the Catholics attacked the Protestants -both Christians - and killed in one night 3,000 of them in Paris while the sound of the bells of the Abbaye de Saint Germain rang out like the wailing of bereaved mothers.

As for the wars which were either led by the Popes or waged with their blessings throughout the years against the Ottoman Muslims, these are too well-known to dwell on here. If the Supreme Pontiff - the Head of the Church and its caretaker - is unable to "love his enemies," how can the ordinary Christian do so?

Since they were revealed, those great Commandments remained mere ink on paper, and most of the time an ink that was reddened by the blood of the enemies - those who cursed and persecuted others.

From love we turn to another matter: adultery. Christ - Peace be upon him - said: "*Whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*". That is, anyone who looks lustfully at a woman is an adulterer. From this we can easily estimate the number of adulterers.

These examples give the reader an idea about the teachings of Christ; those which surpass human ability and endurance and peoples' ability to abide by them. This is because human nature has its own limits which only

(*) The night of 23 August 1572.

Allah knows; that is why Allah says in the Quran: "***On no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear***".

Furthermore, we notice that Islam permits the believer to look after his own body through eating from the food which Allah has made lawful for him; for the believer must not forget his "portion of this world", but he should commit no excess. He must remain within the limits of logic, and act moderately so that his deeds will not contradict the general Islamic code of conduct and morals. On this point, Allah says:

"O ye who believe! Make not unlawful the good things which Allah hath made lawful for you, but commit no excess, for Allah loveth not those given to excess. Eat of things which Allah hath provided for you, lawful and good; but fear Allah, in Whom ye believe", [The Table Spread: 87-88].

Chapter Eleven

Polygamy

Many a time I read and heard more than one criticism, both open and veiled - as the case may be - from well-informed and very learned Christian Western sources. The gist of this criticism is that Islam, which came after Judaism and Christianity, that is, in relatively modern times, lawfully permits polygamy : up to four wives. In this respect, Islam is viewed as a "reactionary and backward" religion which takes the human being back to primitive times and societies.

This is an opportunity for me to draw attention to the verse which allows polygamy up to four wives. It is the third verse of the *Surah "Women"*. When cited, this verse is never quoted in full, which results in erroneous interpretations, for the conditional clause is always missing. The verse is:

"If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two, or three, or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable to prevent you from doing injustice",
[Women: 3].

This verse proclaims that polygamy is an objective set by Allah - to Whom belongs Might and Majesty. It is the realization of justice, dealing justly with the orphans whom Allah has surrounded with His unfailing Love and Mercy in more than one verse; He commanded the believers to be kind to them. It is extremely important to point out that the aforementioned verse was revealed after the Battle of Uhud, in which, as we know, many Muslims fell, leaving behind widows and orphans with no one to provide for them.

This is why Allah has permitted Muslims - those with financial capabilities, who wish to do good, who are impartial and do a righteous deed, and who fear they might not be able to establish justice - to marry the mothers of the fatherless children, so that they would not have to beg for food and lead a life of wretchedness and ignominy.

It is evident that polygamy is a sacrifice and a righteous deed, not an enjoyment, a pleasure and a satisfaction of carnal appetites.

That is the verse in letter and spirit. Like all the verses of the Holy Quran, it sticks together with its coherent sentences, and it cannot be broken up into independent units of meaning; nor can the context in which it was revealed be ignored in its application.

Also worth pointing out is the fact that Allah - the Great, Almighty - has embedded in the verse another condition when He says: "***but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one***".

If a man - who is the best judge of himself and of his possessions - knows that he will not be able to deal justly with his wives, he must desist and marry only one.

If the main objective of polygamy is to achieve justice, this objective becomes nonexistent when justice has not been achieved.

Based on the text of the verse mentioned earlier, it seems to us that polygamy in Islam is an exception imposed by unusual circumstances attributed to the aftereffects of the Battle of Uhud, as we have already said. The rule, therefore, is monogamy, not polygamy.

Muslim writers are almost agreed that "*Islam has established the principle of polygamy because it aims very high in social reform: among men there are those whose carnal appetites cannot be curbed; Islam has allowed these men to have more than one wife, not only as a way out for their guilt, but also as a protection for woman from so widespread an evil.*"

In Western societies, where polygamy is not allowed, men of such carnal appetites have mistresses who are denied their rights.

"The injustice done to women through such a common practice knows no limits", says Afif Tabrah (1979), "The goal of Islam is, therefore, to protect the woman from finding herself in a situation of wretchedness wherein she has no social guarantees, in which case she ends up amongst women of evil repute. Islam wants the woman to be treated in all cases on the basis of her being a legitimate wife who has her rights. Which of the two situations is better and more honorable for the woman: to be a second wife of a man who must provide for her and her children, and whom she

and her children can inherit when he dies, or to be just a mistress, a girlfriend, who has no right over her boyfriend, and does not inherit him - nor do her children - in which case she and her children become a burden on people?"^().*

With all due respect to the author of this analysis, and by way of information, we must point out that the third verse of the chapter "Women" does not, whether implicitly or explicitly, include such considerations. By citing this verse, the author did not seek to shed light on the purpose of allowing polygamy, but to list its benefits and positive sides.

Having become aware of the spirit of the verse [Women: 3] mentioned previously, the author said: *"From this it becomes evident, and without abuse in the interpretation, that the Koranic text has greatly narrowed the scope of polygamy, because it made the mere fear of not being able to be just and equitable a prohibitive factor against polygamy and a compulsory factor for having one wife only"*^(**).

Islam allows polygamy, but only as an exception; it has allowed it for the good of society and for doing the righteous deed.

(*) Afif Tabarah, *Ruhu al-Dine al-Islami* (The Spirit of the Religion of Islam), 1979, pp. 372-373.

(**) Ibid., p. 375.

Chapter Twelve

Marriage and Divorce in Islam

During the seventh century A.D., Islam realized what the West learned hundreds of years later when it established that marriage was a pact and an alliance between the married couple; that is, a contract, like any other contract, between a man and a woman through which they express their mutual understanding and acceptance of each other. It is not conditional that this contract be concluded in a formal ceremony or in the presence of religious officials.

This contract is concluded in the presence of a *Ma'zun* and two witnesses in the manner of what is being done today in most of the Christian countries of the West, with differences and details that do not really affect the essence of the enterprise.

In France, for example, a civil marriage is contracted in the presence of the head of the municipality, or one of his assistants, and two witnesses, in accordance with the terms of a contract acceptable to the couple and signed by the husband and the wife and the two witnesses, and authenticated by the civil servant officer mentioned earlier.

It is this kind of contract - civil marriage - that is acknowledged both legally and lawfully, and from which emanate all other legal acts.

Marriage in Islam, however, has its bases in religion - Quran and *Sunna*, whereas civil marriage in the West has its bases in positive law proper to each country, and which emanates from the competent legislative authorities.

In the West, marriage used to be contracted in the presence of a member of the clergy, or through him, on the basis of its being primarily a sacrament in its traditional sense.

In the Lebanon, marriage is still considered among Christian factions primarily as a sacrament that can be contracted only in the presence of clergymen. This was the case in Europe for many centuries.

One effect of the religious marriage, especially among Catholics and some Protestant sects, is that its bonds are severed by death only, because divorce

is not allowed, for "*that which God has joined together cannot be broken off by the human being*".

Suffice it to mention that England broke up with the Roman Church and established in 1534 a church of its own, the Anglican Church, because Pope Clement VII (1523-1534) had refused to ratify the divorce of Henry VIII from his Spanish wife, Catherine d'Aragon, from whom he wanted to separate so that he could marry the Irish Anne Boleyn.

But time, in its inevitable evolution, had made Europe shift from one legislation to another, thus permitting divorce which was initially forbidden in Catholic law, and which later became in civil legislation a routine, considering the easy conditions which must be met in seeking divorce by one spouse or both.

If Islamic *Sharia* permits the husband to divorce his wife, it also guarantees the wife material rights that protect her against the hardships of life and the slings and arrows of time.

Islam enjoins upon the husband paying the wife a dowry or a "dower," as the Holy Quran calls it: "***And give the women (on marriage) their dower as a free gift, but if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take and enjoy it with right good cheer***", [Women: 4].

This dowry is the property of the wife, and neither a testamentary guardian nor the husband may make personal use of it, except with the wife's own accord.

Whatever the case, while Islam allows divorce, it does not encourage it; on the contrary, as the Prophet, who commanded husbands to be good to their wives in more than one *Hadith*, said, "*Divorce is the most abhorrent lawful act to Allah*". Likewise, the Quran, in more than one verse, urges the believers to treat their wives kindly and generously:

"Live with them on a footing of kindness and equality", [Women: 19].

"... either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms", [The Cow: 231].

"Let the man of means spend according to his means, and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to

what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him", [Divorce: 7].

The reality, however, is that divorce is not absolutely dependent on the will of the husband, as Westerners seem to think it is. Islam forbids the believer from behaving with his wife as if he were the master and she the servant. In fact, in Verse 35 of the chapter "Women", the Holy Quran has, in a particular circumstance, put the husband and the wife on an equal footing.

In Islam divorce is permissible, maybe even compulsory, when estrangement between the husband and the wife reaches a level where they can no longer live peacefully together as husband and wife, and when their married life is turned into hell when Allah had initially willed that it be a bliss.

When such a situation, which the Quran has called "*Shiqaq*" (breach), has been reached, divorce takes place but only after serious attempts have been made to remove that breach:

"If you fear a breach between them twain, appoint (two) arbiters, one from his family, and the other from hers; if they wish for peace, Allah will cause their reconciliation: for Allah hath full knowledge", [Women: 35].

Thus we see that, in this case, the Quran puts the man and the woman on an equal footing, as we have said earlier, and if the two "arbiters" make an effort to mend fences between the husband and the wife, Allah "causes their reconciliation". This means that what Allah can do, the human being cannot do.

If Islam has entrusted the husband, not the wife, with the right of divorce - that is, the decision to declare and request divorce rests with him - it has, on the other hand, allowed the wife to request divorce from the judge in special conditions and circumstances which, for lack of space, cannot be mentioned and discussed in detail here.

With regard to the husband's right to divorce, Allah has warned him against hastening to divorce, and commanded him to be patient and judicious when He said: ***"Live with them on a footing of kindness and equality; if ye take a dislike to them it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good"***, [Women: 19].

Likewise, Allah has decreed that the husband produce the testimony of two people before acknowledging the divorce: "*and take for witness two persons from among you, endued with justice, and establish the evidence (as) before Allah*", [Divorce: 2].

The presence of two witness arbiters may make the husband want to reconsider, or at least give himself some time during which he can handle the situation properly and gently.

In conclusion, we say that Islam allows divorce with the consent of the couple: if it is divorce that they want, let them have it.

After more than one-thousand and two-hundred years, and only after having traveled a long and bumpy road, the West (Europe and America) has at last come to a conclusion which Islam reached in the seventh century.

Chapter Thirteen

Islam is a School of Kindness

I also felt drawn towards Islam because I found it to be a school of kindness. Islam encourages doing good with all its universal, humane sense, and commands kindness in all its forms and purposes, thus making it a most wonderful virtue.

Kindness is doing good, but this virtue has taken on the meaning of "Benevolence"; that is, the "charity" which a person gives to the poor and the needy as a consolation for their poverty and neediness.

In its essence and ultimate goal, kindness is when the well-doer alleviates the suffering of the person to whom he gives charity, and palliates his defeat and misery. It is the solidarity of one human being with another, to make the person who is suffering and disadvantaged feel that he is not lonely in this world, and that he has brethren who share his distress and happiness.

Kindness makes the Muslim - who follows the teachings of his religion - a partner of every sufferer in this world.

But the Most Kind is Allah -the Great and Almighty - to Whom all the hearts turn whenever misfortune befalls people and adversity overwhelms them.

Allah has established kindness and commanded it, not only for the sake of the person to whom one is being kind but also for the doer of good as well:

"But do thou good, as Allah has been good to thee", [The Story: 77].

"If ye did well, ye did well for yourselves, if ye did evil, (ye did it) against yourselves", [The Night Journey: 7].

Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and he forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion (The Bee: 90).

Also worth pointing out is the fact that the Holy Quran has made kindness one of the greatest virtues with which a believer's soul can be endued:

"Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to Allah, does good and follows the way of Abraham the true in faith?" [Women: 125].

The Muslim who does good ranks top on the ladder which brings the Righteous a degree closer to Allah and to the gates of Heaven. The following verse came to reinforce the previous one:

"Whoever submits his whole self to Allah, and is a doer of good, has grasped indeed the most trustworthy hand-hold", [Luqma: 22].

The "trustworthy hand-hold" is the bond that binds the created to the Creator, thus earning His Mercy and His good pleasure.

To awaken in the believers the desire to do good, Allah says:

"He that doeth good shall have ten times as much to his credit", [Cattle: 160].

The Almighty promised the doers of good something even better when He said:

"If any do good, good will (accrue) to them therefrom; and they will be secure from terror that day", [The Ant: 89].

Ten times as much in this world, and security from terror and reward in the Hereafter, that is the compensation Allah has promised the doers of good. What Muslim would not hasten to do good when he hears this promise coming from Allah Himself?

In deference to those who do good, the Holy Quran, naming their attributes, also declares them the most pious and the most virtuous:

"As the Righteous, they will be in the midst of the Gardens and Springs, Taking joy in the things which their Lord gives them, because, before then, they lived a good life. They were in the habit of sleeping but little by night. And in the hours of early dawn, they (were found) praying for forgiveness. And in their wealth and possessions (was remembered) the right of the (needy), him who asked, and him who (for some reason) was prevented (from Asking)", [The Winnowing Winds: 15-19].

As we have said at the beginning of this chapter, Kindness, or doing good, has a broad and comprehensive sense that far exceeds its familiar and common meaning. For example, striving in the cause of Allah is doing good:

"And those who strive in Our (cause) We will certainly guide them to Our paths: for verily Allah is with those who do right",
[The Spider: 69].

So, a person who strives to exalt the Word of Allah to the heights and to uphold His religion, and makes kindness, justice, right, and mercy prevail, this person is considered one of the doers of good. He will receive from Allah the recompense He has promised others in this world and in the Hereafter.

That will also be the case with those who follow in the path initiated by the Prophet and Messenger of Allah:

"And he who brings the Truth and he who confirms (and supports) it, such are the men who do right. They shall have all that they wish for, in the presence of their Lord: such is the reward of those who do good", [The Troops: 33-34].

Forgiveness is also Kindness and doing good:

"But forgive them, and overlook (their misdeeds: for Allah loveth those who are kind", [The Table Spread: 13].

So is patience:

"And be steadfast in patience; for verily Allah will not suffer the reward of the righteous to perish", [Hud: 115].

The recurrence of such words as "***Verily Allah is with those who do right***", "***They shall have all that they wish for, in the presence of their Lord***", and "***for verily Allah will not suffer the reward of the righteous to perish***" is no doubt a basic incentive to encourage the believers to do good and to be kind in return for which they will earn the good pleasure of Allah; that is, the greatest compensation a believer can dream of.

As is clear from the contexts of the verses, the good pleasure of Allah covers both this world and the Hereafter, because He - the Great and Almighty - is the Lord of the Worlds, Master of the Day of Judgment, Lord of this world and the Hereafter, to Whom is the return.

The Quran has named the categories of people who deserve kindness more than anyone else, and commanded the faithful to be kind to them. Of these parents come first, which is natural because they are the origin. Children

are the branches which feed on the sap of the root, or rather on its last spark of life; then they grow up, blossom, put forth leaves, and bear fruit, drawing their strength from the root which penetrates deeply into the soil, clinging to it. There can be no branches without roots, just as children cannot grow up without parental sacrifices; for parents are the source, the shield and the light. Allah says in His Holy Book:

"Thy Lord hath decreed that ye worship none but Him, and that ye be kind to parents. Whether one or both of them attain old age in thy life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor. And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them thy Mercy, even as they cherish me in childhood'", [The Night Journey: 23-24].

It becomes clear, therefore, that kindness to parents ranks immediately below the worship of Allah - the One and Only; it perhaps comes with it at the same time.

I do not think that there is nowadays a state or a nation in the world that has honored parents with such beautiful words and in the same way Islam has been honoring them for one-thousand and three-hundred years.

In the Ten Commandments which God sent down to Moses - peace be upon him - on Mount Sinai, one Commandment - the Fourth or Fifth - says verbatim:

"Give honor to your father and mother, so that your life may be longer in the land which the Lord God is giving you", [Exodus 20:13].

We must note the following: a) the brevity of the Commandment; that is, it contains no details or explication; b) it enjoins honor, not kindness.

The Holy Quran has humanized honor, turning it into kindness which comes from the heart, the conscience and from the faith of the believer who is avid for the Mercy of Allah and who is anxious about his own fate after his death.

In the Torah, reward is limited to this world: the long life on earth which the "*Lord God is giving you*".

In the Quran, reward is granted in both this world and the Hereafter; or better still, the good pleasure of Allah takes up a large part of the recompense.

Concerning the details which are absent in the Torah but present in the Quran, suffice it to mention the following:

It is not permissible for the Muslim to let his parents hear a word in which they may sense a complaint; for he cannot utter even the word "ugh!" which is the least grumbling expression in the language. Similarly, the Muslim cannot say a word of contempt to them; on the contrary, Allah has commanded him to "*address them in terms of honor*".

The highest beauty and the peak of humaneness are yet to be found in these words: "*And out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them thy Mercy even as they cherished me in childhood'*".

Any explanation of these words, no matter how eloquent, would only make the verse lose the beauty of its expressiveness and effulgence. Humility is not permissible in Islam, except towards one's parents, because in this case it reaches the pinnacle of mercy. The more one lowers and humiliates oneself as an expression of mercy towards one's parent, the higher one climbs on the ladder of loftiness.

Along the chain of people whom Allah commanded that they be treated kindly are: "*kinsfolks, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near neighbors who are strangers, the companion by your side, the way-farer (ye meet) and what your right-hand possesses*", [Women: 36].

In this chain, we will stop to consider the orphans, the needy, the way-farer, and the slaves.

The Orphans

Whether in the Holy Quran or in the *Sunna*, Orphans occupy a notable place in Islam; for being kind to the orphan and treating him with compassion is almost one of the pillars of Islam. This is so because, in its essence and spirit, Islam is a religion of mercy which emanates from Allah - Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

An orphan is a child who, having lost his father, remains in the custody of his mother who raises him and provides for him. If the mother is not a woman of means, capable of discharging her obligations towards her fatherless children, and should she be incapable of assuming these educational and social duties, kindness towards her orphan children becomes the duty of Muslims.

Kindness here goes beyond material handouts to doing good deeds in all fields so as to alleviate the suffering of the orphan children who find consolation in the sympathy of the believers towards them and in their material and moral support and social assistance.

This will prevent orphans from straying away from the straight path and will keep them from sinking deeply into the quagmire of ignorance and debauchery and from becoming a burden on society, trouble-makers and a threat to security.

The verses which enjoin kindness towards orphans abound, of these we will quote the following:

"To orphans restore their property (when they reach their age), nor substitute (your) worthless things for (their) good ones; and devour not their substance (by mixing it up with your own)", [Women: 2].

"Those who unjustly eat up the property of orphans, eat up a fire into their own bodies; they will soon be enduring a blazing fire", [Women: 10].

"Did he not find thee an orphan and give thee shelter (and care)? ... Therefore treat not the orphan with harshness", [The Morning Hours: 6 and 9].

The Needy and the Way-farer

Like the orphans, the needy, those people to whom life has not been too kind, do deserve the sympathy of the faithful. Kindness towards them is a duty that springs from the essence and spirit of Islam, as is the case with the way-farer and the slave.

The way-farer, this stranger for whom the road is a shelter and a sanctuary, acquires the status of a relative or kinsman when he loses his money, or

runs out of it. In this case, kindness towards him is one of the duties of the Muslim.

When the way-farer finds that people are kind to him and sympathetic, he will not resort to such actions as those that Allah has proscribed, i.e. burglary, trickery, stealing, or threatening people's life; on the contrary, he will thank those who have been kind to him, and he will continue his traveling, praising his Lord and Creator.

The Slave

Regarding the slave, the best good deed one can do for him is to set him free. In the context of slavery, there are degrees of kindness all of which revolve around one and the same axis: being kind to a slave and respecting his humanity of which he is indebted to Allah alone - Most Gracious, Most Merciful - and not to any other human being, no matter how high his social status and goal are.

If in the Holy Quran there is no clear text that proscribes slavery; the verses which deal with it and enjoin kindness and compassion towards the slaves and freeing them, will allow us to confirm that in Islam there is no slave and master; there are the believers, all of whom are brothers. They all stand equal, the most honored amongst them are the most pious.

Concerning the Prophet, words such as "slave" or "bondsmen" used to hurt him; that was why his words and deeds were aimed at freeing the slaves:

"If a person slaps or strikes his slave, his expiation is to free him."

"Fear Allah in that which your right hand possesses; give them from the food you eat. Clothe them from the clothes you wear, and do not ask them to do work which they are physically unable to do; do not torture people. Allah has made you their owners; but had He willed, He would have made them your owners."

These words, which do sink under the burden of mercy, are pregnant with wisdom: ***"had He willed, He would have made them your owners"***.

One day a man went to see the Prophet, and he said to him: ***"O Messenger of Allah! Tell me of a deed that would bring me closer to Heaven, and take me far away from Hell"***. The Prophet replied: ***"Help the human"***

being and free the bondman". This Hadith needs no further explanation or commentary.

Some of the many verses which enjoin kindness towards the bondman and freeing him are:

"Allah will not call you to account for what is futile in your oaths, but He will call you to account for your deliberate oaths : for expiation, ten indigent persons, on a scale of the average for the food of your families; or clothe them or give a slave his freedom", [The Table Spread: 89].

"If one kills a believer, it is ordained that he should free a believing slave, and pay compensation for the deceased's family", [Women: 92].

Usama Ibn Zayd, who was the son of the Prophet's slave, demonstrated great skills and qualifications. The Prophet appointed him commander of one of the armies in which Abu Bakr and Omar served as soldiers under Usama's command.

That is the spirit of Islam!

Chapter Fourteen

The War

In the near and distant past Islam was - in fact, it still is albeit indirectly most of the time - the object of attack from both its avowed and undeclared enemies. These focused their direct and veiled attacks on one single idea which may be summed up as follows: Islam is a religion of violence and hatred, and spreading it by the sword is the duty of all Muslims.

They based their campaign on a few Koranic verses and on events that accompanied and followed the Islamic Da^cwa. They found all kinds of far-fetched interpretations of the Koranic verses and distorted the facts which they explained as they pleased, thus suppressing the truth and spreading fabricated lies.

Today there emerged in the Islamic world religious movements and trends known in the West by such labels as "fundamentalism". There is no doubt that the stands and views of these movements and trends are characterized by extremism and violence unknown in traditional Islam which the believers inherited from the Prophet, the Orthodox Caliphs and the Prophet's Companions, and from Muslim scholars and jurists throughout the ages.

It was essential for the enemies of Islam, who belong to different religions and denominations, to exploit this reality: fundamentalism and extremism. So, they launched a disinformation campaign against Islam through their crusade against the "terrorist" acts carried out by the militia, the organizations or the trends that adhere to "fundamentalism".

The campaign against "fundamentalist terrorism" aims to achieve a clear and specific goal which a clever mind cannot fail to see: to distort Islam, and to present it as a religion of extremism, fanaticism and "terrorism".

We are not defending "fundamentalism" and "extremism", nor are we criticizing them; we are merely defending the truth and impartiality.

Regardless of the fact that Israel occupies other peoples' countries by force - as is acknowledged by the whole world represented in the United Nations -

and irrespective of the fact that the "terrorist activities" carried out by fundamentalists are most of the time a reaction to injustice, and to say nothing of the Middle Eastern problem which hardly needs any comment and of the displacement of the Palestinian people, the occupation of the Golan heights, as well as a strip in the South of Lebanon - irrespective of all this, we believe that we owe it to the truth and impartiality to clarify the following:

The successively revealed religions are in the number of three: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Torah, which is originally the Book of the Jews, is revealed by God, like the New Testament and the Quran.

The wars which the Jews or the Hebrews waged after they had left Egypt on their way to settle in the land of Kanaan - that is, Palestine - did take place and are all documented in detail in some Books of the Torah, such as the Exodus, the Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

Like the New Testament and the Quran, the Torah is so widely spread among the Jews and the Christians, as well as non-Jews and non-Christians; it has appeared in many languages and in millions of copies.

From the Books mentioned above, we learn about some amazing issues and events about which historians and researchers raise a number of questions in wonder.

The most bewildering of all is the fact that Jehovah, the God of the Jews, who was to become Lord of the worlds later, is the one who leads them on to fight, makes victory easy for them, and paves the way for them to commit a genocide, as we will find out from the course of events. The following are some examples:

"And the Lord said to Joshua: See, I have given Jericho into your hand, its king and mighty men of valor. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both men and women, young and old, ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword. And they burned the city and all that was in it with fire. ... Then Joshua charged them at that time, saying: Cursed be the man before the Lord who rises up and builds this city Jericho ... So the Lord was with Joshua", [Jos 6:1-27].

Also:

"Now the Lord said to Joshua : Take all the people of war with you, and arise, go up to Ai. See, I have given into your hand the king of Ai, his people, his city and his land - And it will be when you have taken the city, that you shall set it on fire. According to the Commandment of the Lord you shall do. ... Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai... so it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand - all the people of Ai. So Joshua burned it and made it a heap forever, a desolation to this day". [Jos 8].

That is exactly what happened: genocide and many burning cities by a command from the God of Israel and His assistant:

"And they did so, and brought out from the cave the five kings of the Amorites: the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, and the king of Eglon. Joshua said to the Captains of the men of war who went with him: Come men, put your feet on the necks of these kings. Do not be afraid, nor be dismayed; be strong and of good courage; for thus the Lord will do to all your enemies against whom you fight. And afterwards, Joshua struck them and killed them all, and hang them on five trees ... On that day Joshua, took Makkedah, and struck it and its king with the edge of the sword. He utterly destroyed them - all the people who were in it. Then Joshua passed from Makkedah to Libnah, and they fought against Libnah. And the Lord also delivered it and its king into the hand of Israel; he struck it and all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword. He let none remain in it. Then Joshua passed from Libnah, and all Israel with him, to Lachish. And the Lord delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel and struck it all and the people who were in it with the edge of his sword", [Jos 10].

That is what Joshua did to such cities as Jazer, Eglon, Hebron and Debir
... .

"So Joshua conquered all the land: the mountain country, and the South and the lowland and the wilderness slopes, and all their

kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord of Israel commanded. All these kings and their land Joshua took at one time, because the Lord God of Israel fought for Israel", [Jos.: 10].

"Then the Lord said to Mose: Do not fear him^(), for I have delivered him into your hand, with all his people and his land So they defeated him. His sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left him, and they took possession of his land", [Numbers 21:27].*

"And they warred against the Midianites, just as the Lord commanded Moses, and they killed all the males. They killed the Kings of Midian, with their little ones, and took as spoil all their cattle, all their flocks, and their goods. They also burnt with fire all the cities where they dwelt and all their forts", [Numbers 31].

"Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately", [Numbers 31].

"Speak to the Children of Israel, and say to them: When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you you shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land and dwell in it, for I have given you the land to possess", [Numbers 33].

"And the Lord our God also delivered him (Sihon) over to us; so we defeated him, his sons, and all his people. We took all his cities at that time, and we utterly destroyed the men, women and little ones of every city, we left none remaining", [Deuteronomy 2].

"So the Lord our God also delivered into our hands Og king of Bashan, with all his people, and we took all his cities at that time; there was not a city we did not take from them: sixty cities And we utterly destroyed them, as we did to Sihon king of Hebron, utterly destroying the men, women, and children of every city", [Deuteronomy 3].

These verses which we have quoted verbatim here prove, until further notice, that the Hebrews who left Egypt did not only kill people, and burn

(*) King of Basham.

and destroy cities, they also committed utter genocide against whole peoples. It also becomes clear to us that the cities which the Hebrews took, destroyed and burned up, killing every one in them, are numerous and are mentioned by name. They are: Jericho, Al-Qods, Hebron, and Eglon, all of which are well-known, because they still bear the same names and are all in Palestine.

As the years went by, the Islamic Armies reached Al-Qods and laid siege to it in the year 638, as we have said earlier (Chapter 9). Al-Qods, whose inhabitants were mostly Christian, opened its gates to Omar Ibn al-Khattab -may Allah be pleased with him - because the city trusted Omar's probity. Omar entered Al-Qods and received the key to the city from Patriarch Severinus who accompanied him on a tour around the city. When praying time overtook him while in the Church of Resurrection, the Caliph got out of the Church to pray in a distant place, *"so that Muslims would not come after him and say: 'Omar prayed here,' and build a mosque in the place where the Church stood. Omar made a covenant with the Christians of Al-Qods that safeguarded their churches, crosses, religious rites and freedom of worship"*. This stands in opposition to what the Hebrews did when they conquered Al-Qods and other cities, as we have already said: *"They were cautious to establish a covenant with the inhabitants of the cities, and they had no pity on them; they destroyed their altars, demolished their statues, and cut down their wooden images ..."*. *"They killed them and exterminated them until there was none remaining ..."*.

As is already known, and as we have said earlier, the Hebrews left Egypt and, like voracious beasts, they descended upon peaceful nations and peoples who did not fight or wrong them, nor did they drive the Hebrews out of their land, or wage war against them. These people's only crime was that they had been living peacefully in those lands for hundreds of years, without ever attacking any one. But, as the aforementioned texts confirm, the *"Lord God of the Jews had delivered these nations and peoples into the hands of the Children of Israel and given them the land to possess. He commanded them to obliterate this land and to wipe it out of the face of the earth, along with the people who dwelled in it"*.

If, in the context of war, a comparison is drawn between these Torah texts and the Koranic verses, it will no doubt become clear to us that Islam is

the most tolerant, merciful and peaceful of all revealed religions and those of the East. The following are some examples of these Koranic verses:

"Allah forbids you not with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loveth those who are just", [She That Is To Be Examined: 8].

"Therefore if they withdraw from you but fight you not, and (instead) send you (guarantees of) peace, then Allah opened no way for you (to war against them)", [Women: 90].

"O ye who believe! Enter into Islam wholeheartedly", [The Cow: 208].

"And if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace", [Spoils of War: 61].

It is our duty to speak the truth and say that Islam does not recommend war; except in cases of dire need: to repel aggression and to defend the faith and the faithful, for all of the wars which the Prophet had waged were defensive in nature; even the offensive wars were triggered off by a defensive motive.

For many years, the Prophet was spreading the Dacwa, which Allah had commanded him to spread, without ever resorting to fighting in spite of the fact that Quraysh in Makkah and the Jews in Yathrib had inflicted great suffering on the first believers and persecuted them. They even tried to nip the Dacwa in the bud.

Many a time, the faithful went to him, complaining and repining, and expressed their willingness to fight their enemy so as to put an end to the injustices done to them. The Prophet would say to them: *"Persevere in patience, for I was not commanded to fight"*.

The Prophet's trip from Makkah to Medina was an attempt on his part to save his life and to save the Mission from the perfidy of the traitors and the injustice of the oppressors.

When the pressure of the Jews and the unbelievers intensified around the Muslims, Allah permitted them to fight: ***"Those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged; and***

verily, Allah is Most Powerful for their aid; They are those who have been expelled from their homes in defiance of right (for no cause) except that they say, 'Our Lord is Allah'", [The Pilgrimage: 39-40].

When the Muslims obtained victory, they did not resort to killing, burning, destroying, or violating the sanctity of the churches, unlike the Hebrews. On the contrary, they spread good and righteousness: "*(They are) those who, if we establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong : with Allah rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs*", [The Pilgrimage: 41].

Furthermore, the command of Allah to the Prophet is very clear : war is an obligation to repel aggression: "*Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for Allah loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out ... But if they cease, Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful*", [The Cow: 190-192].

There is no text in the Quran that is in the least similar to those Torah texts which we have quoted, in which the God of the Jews said that He had delivered into their hands cities, peoples and nations to conquer, burn, and exterminate them all without exception, and to put their feet on the necks of their kings. In the Quran, we hear words that are replete with forgiveness and mercy, such as the following: "*Allah is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful*", [The Cow], "*They enjoin the right and forbid wrong*", [The Pilgrimage], "*To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged*", [The Pilgrimage], "*But do not transgress, for Allah loveth not transgressors*", [The Cow].

As his army was getting ready for the Battle of Mu'tah, the Prophet gave his men these commands: "*You shall not slay a woman, an offspring or a very old man, nor shall you burn a palm tree, uproot a tree or destroy a house*".

But in Torah Books we read: "*And they burned the city and all that was in it with fire*", "*They struck it and all the people who were in it with the edge of the sword*", "*so it was that all who fell that day, both men and women, were twelve thousand*", "*he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord of Israel commanded*", "*They also burnt with fire all the cities where they dwelt and all their forts*", "*Now therefore kill every*

male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man intimately", and "We took all his cities at that time, and we utterly destroyed the men, women and little ones of every city, we left none remaining".

While Allah appears to Muslims as a source of forgiveness and mercy, the Lord of the Hebrews manifests himself to the latter as a god of vengeance, revenge and killing: *"If I whet My glittering sword, and My hand takes hold on judgment, I will render revenge to My enemies, and repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword shall devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the heads of the leaders of the enemy", [Deuteronomy 32].*

Among the orders which the Prophet gave to the captains of his armies we find: *"Attack in the Name of Allah and in His cause. Fight the unbelievers. Attack, but you shall not be filled with hatred, nor act treacherously, mutilate, or slay a newborn".*

If the enemy mutilate Muslims, these have the right to reciprocate in kind. However, Islam prefers patience to vengeance: *"**And if you do catch them out. Catch them out no worse than they catch you out, but if you show patience that is indeed the best (course) for those who are patient. And do thou be patient, for thy patience is but from Allah**", [The Bee: 126-127].*

These two verses were sent down after the Battle of Uhud, in which the unbelievers mutilated the body of Hamza Ibn Abdulmuttalib, the Prophet's uncle, and those of other Muslims. The Prophet, who was extremely upset by this, resolved to take revenge on the unbelievers and to do to them exactly what they had done to his uncle and the believers. But Allah commanded him to be patient, as we have seen, because in Islam patience is better than vengeance.

One of Abu-Bakr's commandments to Usama was: *"Do not betray, hate, double-cross, or mutilate, and do not kill a small child, an old man, or a woman; do not wound or burn a palm tree, or cut down a fruit tree, slaughter a ewe, a cow or a camel, except for food".*

Regarding the captives of war, Allah decreed that they be treated kindly, like the needy and the orphans: *"**And they feed for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan and the captive. (Saying), 'We feed you for the sake of Allah alone, no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks'**", [Mankind: 8-9].*

Chapter Fifteen

Jihad (Holy War)

Jihad is fighting in the cause of Allah; that is defending the religion of Allah along with everything it represents, especially justice among people. Defending justice enjoins combating injustice and oppression. *Jihad* does not aim to impose Islam on people through force and coercion; it seeks to repel injustice and oppression against Muslims:

"Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for Allah loveth not transgressors".

This verse was quoted earlier.

From this we realize that fighting in the cause of Allah is not aggression; it is repelling aggression. Therefore, *Jihad* is defense, not offense. Islam sanctions war, it even enjoins it:

"Then fight in the cause of Allah, and know that Allah heareth and knoweth all things", [The Cow: 244],

and

"And strive in His cause as ye ought to strive", [The Pilgrimage: 78].

This *Jihad* has one and only goal: exalting the Word of Allah; that is, upholding lawfulness and repelling injustice.

The verses which call for *Jihad* in the cause of Allah, and exhort the believers to take heed of the Hereafter abound in the Quran; of these we will mention the following:

"Let those fight in the cause of Allah who sell the fight of this world for the Hereafter, to him who fighteth in the cause of Allah - whether he is slain or gets victory - soon shall we give him a reward of great (value)", [Women: 74].

Furthermore, Islam forbids fighting for the sake of upholding injustice and oppression:

"Those who fight in the cause of Allah and those who reject faith fight in the cause of Evil: so fight ye against the friends of Satan : feeble indeed is the cunning of Satan" [Women: 76].

Evil is oppression, and every evil deed brings forth yet more evil, tyranny, corruption and injustice.

As we have said earlier, the Prophet had sent letters to a number of kings, princes and potentates, calling upon them to embrace Islam. Through this action, he was expounding openly the message which Allah - the Great and Almighty - had commanded him to propagate; so he chose peaceful means to do it.

War in Christianity

Researchers and religion experts agreed that Christianity, or the Christian religion, does not sanction war; on the contrary, it strictly forbids it. They base their opinion on some of the sayings of Christ - Prayer and peace be upon him - and his Commandments to the disciples, apostles and followers.

In reality, Christ neither forbade war nor sanctioned it; he had never made mention of it, whether positively or negatively. The son of Mary was widely known as the Messenger of love, kindness and forgiveness.

Among the sayings of Christ on the issue of war, which is of interest to us here, we will mention the following (in fact most of these verses have already been quoted in previous chapters):

Jesus said to Peter, the High Priest: *"Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you think I cannot now pray to My Father and He will provide Me with twelve legions of Angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus"*, [Mat 26].

"But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak too", [Mat 5].

"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", (Ibid.).

These words make it clear that Christ did tackle the relationships between people as members of the human society, and as single individuals responsible for what concerns them individually, and not for what concerns society as a whole, or the people or the nation to which they belong.

The person who takes a slap on his right cheek has been exposed to an offense; it is up to him to return the offense or to forgive the offender. He may even be as much forgiving as he wishes to be, since the matter concerns him only, and since it has nothing to do with his religion, belief and principles, all of which belong to his nation, not to him alone.

So is the case with the man in what concerns his tunic and cloak, for these and all other items of this kind have nothing to do with religion, belief and creed.

Regarding Peter and his sword, it is important that the reader know that Christ was determined to give himself up, of his own accord, to those who had come to arrest him, and that any resistance - whatever its importance and source - was bound to be counter productive, resulting in the opposite of what he had intended to do.

Proof of what we are saying is to be found in the words of Christ himself: "*How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?*" That is, he must be arrested, taken to court and be sentenced to death.

Christ took other stands, quite different from those mentioned above, whenever the matter concerned faith, morals, and the spiritual values which involved the whole of society. The following are some examples:

- One day before Easter, Christ entered the Temple, and he was terrified by what he saw and heard: shouting, arguing, and quibbling amid the pilgrims, money-changers, merchants and vendors, who were surrounded by cattle, sheep, doves and all kinds of money-laden tables. Competition between the merchants who wanted to sell at the highest bid and the buyers who wanted to buy at the lowest price grew so fierce that the Temple was turned into a "bazaar" and a market place for selling, buying and bargaining.

Bursting with anger in front of this disgraceful, shocking scene, the son of Mary "*drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of*

those who sold doves", and said to them: "*It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer;' but you have made it a den of thieves"*. When He sensed some lagging on their part, He assailed them with a whip, and they turned tail.

- Jesus noticed that the scribes and the Pharisees were up to their ears in hypocrisy and falsehood. They would say things which they did not do; they would tie up onerous heavy loads and, without touching the loads themselves, they would have them put on people's shoulders. Jesus did not forgive them their excessive misleading and deceiving of people, their harming the spirit of religion and its inherited truths, and their distorting of facts, values and morals. So, he became very angry with them, and he showered those hypocrites with misfortunes which time has preserved for us, and in which there was no hope for forgiveness, mercy, peace and reconciliation; on the contrary, these misfortunes ooze with anger, rage, vengeance, and the threat to inflict upon them the most severe punishment:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves; nor do you allow those who are entering to go in^()."*

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much the son of hell as yourselves."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of law: justice and mercy and faith."

"Blind guides, who strain out on a gnat and swallow a camel."

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence."

(*) Worth mentioning here are the Words of Allah addressed to the Children of Israel: "***And cover not Truth with falsehood, nor conceal the Truth when ye know (what it is). ... Do ye enjoin right conduct on the people, and forget (to practise it) yourselves. And yet ye study the Scripture? Will ye not understand?***" [The Cow: 42-44].

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

"Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?", [Mat 23].

In fact, Jesus did declare an all-out war on those scribes and Pharisees and such other hypocrites. Whether the weapon used in that war was a sword - like Peter's - or harsh insulting words - such as the aforementioned misfortunes - what is important is not the means, but the intentions, the goals and the spirit which was apparent in those means which came as a clear expression of the wrath of the Son of Mary and his rage at those who had harmed the religion, the faith and the values of right and goodness.

- On yet another occasion, Christ said, addressing his words to the disciples and the followers: *"I came to send fire on earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! ... Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but division", [Luke 12].*

Like the life of Mohammed who came after Jesus, Christ's life was a *Jihad* in the cause of Allah; that is, a war waged against evil in its many facets, such as lying, hypocrisy, injustice, exploiting the weak, the poor and the needy, rejecting faith and all the values it represents, and the tyranny of the oppressors who always seek to stab Truth in the heart.

If, as we have already seen, Christ has commanded forgiveness and pardon, Islam - both Quran and *Sunna* - has also enjoined them and encouraged the believers to make use of them in more than one verse and *Hadith*.

The wars of faith or "religious wars", as historians have called them, which Christianity had waged offensively or defensively were numerous throughout history.

The Crusades were offensive wars from the start; that is, the first Crusade (1095-1099) was waged from Europe in response to a call launched by Pope Urbain II in Clermont, France, in 1095.

The main objective of these "offensive" wars was the "defense" of the holy land in Palestine, the most famous of which was the Church of Resurrection.

Since its advent to date, Islam has never fought a war of such magnitude, nature, scale and expansion.

If the Crusades were directed against Islam, or Muslim rulers (the Fatimids, the Seljuks, the Ayubites) who ruled those lands successively, other religious wars were also fought by Christians against other Christians. Most famous of these are the French wars which took place in the sixteenth century (1562-1598) between the Catholics and the Protestants. Known as "Religious Wars", they were so fierce that the violence with which they were fought defies all imagination.

"Never in its history has that sapient nation ever displayed a violence and a savagery of this kind. One could witness mass executions on both sides, the killing of the wounded, and the slaying of the inhabitants whose towns and cities were occupied. Where the Calvin was the master, he would destroy all the paintings and lay waste to the graves and steal all of the holy monies. Against him, there was the Catholic who killed, tortured, and drowned anyone he knew was a follower of this heresy; the dead were so many that streams overflowed with bodies"()*.

If the Gospel contains no texts that permit or enjoin war, the church issued no decision that bans it; on the contrary, we find that the Church did encourage wars at times, and sometimes it supervised their organization and led the alliances which waged them against Islam and Muslims or against a Christian state sometimes.

Pope Julius II (1503-1515) led the League of Cambrai against Venice (1508), then the Saint League against France (1511-1512).

Pope Pius V (1566-1572) gave his blessings and sponsored the war against the Ottoman Empire which ended with the sea Battle of Lépante in October 1571, when the Alliance fleet scored a decisive victory against the Ottoman fleet.

A group of historians have confirmed that the Ottoman Sultan, King Said who was ruling in those days, declared three days of festivities to celebrate the death of Pope Pius V mentioned earlier.

(*) Daniel Robs, "The History of the Church". Vol. 6, pp. 161-621.

Jihad in the cause of Allah is not confined to Islam; Christianity practised it many times, too, against Muslims and Christians.

If Christianity waged the Crusades against Islam and Muslim rulers, there were two wars at least which it fought against Christians with a violence rarely seen in history.

The first of these two wars occurred in 1204 when the Crusaders invaded a Byzantine city, the capital of the eastern empire, laying waste to it. They entered the Church of Hagia Sophia (Santa Sophia), one - if not the -most important Christian churches of the time, and defiled it. Not only did they destroy its altars, icons, crosses and holy relics, they also plundered its invaluable masterpieces, committed adultery with pretty girls and harlots, killed people and imprisoned many others, and made others homeless. All this because those Crusaders belonged to the Latin Roman Church, and because the emperor of Byzantine, its Patriarch, bishops, priests and people were all Orthodox Romans who "broke away" from Rome.

The second "crusade," which Christianity waged by order from Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) and led by him, took place in 1209. It was declared against a Christian sect known as the "Cathares" or the "Albigensis" whom the Church viewed as heretics, and therefore exterminated them all.

If we draw a comparison between Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the field of religious wars or *Jihad*, we will find that, in reality, practice and in holy texts, Islam was more moderate, more tolerant and more merciful than the other two religions.

Suffice it here to remind the reader of the opinion of a renowned Christian historian whom we have cited in Chapter 9, p. 45; we invite the reader to go back to it.

If we carefully examine the events that took place in Al-Andalus (Arab Spain), we will arrive at the following truth acknowledged by all historians, whatever their creed, sect or nationality:

During Arab-Muslim rule, there reigned in Al-Andalus an atmosphere of tolerance, freedom and justice which turned that land into a paradise on earth. In the wake of the collapse of Muslim rule, following the fall of Gharnata (Granada) in 1492, the situation was turned upside down,

unleashing blind fanaticism. Christianity, which was supposed to be a religion of love and mercy and which preached the love of the enemy, played its worst role in its history.

If Islam had sanctioned war, approved and sometimes enjoined it, it was not with the intention of forcing the defeated peoples to embrace Islam or to prevent them from practising their faith or to deny them the freedom of worship. Proof of this is found in Dr. Philip Hatta's **A Detailed History of the Arabs**, where he says: "*It was not until before the second and third centuries that most of the peoples of Syria, Iraq and Persia converted into Islam. The number of Muslims in Syria during the first century after the conquest was probably no more than two-hundred thousand souls out of a total population estimated at three and a half million people*"(*).

Furthermore, how can the Muslims be accused of seeking to impose Islam by the sword through their wars, if we remember that, immediately after al-Qods had opened its gates to him, Omar Ibn al-Khattab made a covenant with the Christians which guaranteed for them their churches and freedom of worship; that Khalid Ibn al-Walid did likewise with the inhabitants of Syrian cities which he had conquered; and that in the wake of the conquest of Egypt, Amar Ibn al-Aas struck a deal with the Copt Patriarch of Alexandria, Benjamin, whereby the Patriarch recovered all the wealth of the Monophysitic Church, which was expropriated by the Byzantines, in return for his support of the Muslims and that of the Christians who were under his spiritual authority?(**)

In fact, for a large group from among the Syrian and Egyptian peoples - especially among the Jacobites of Syria - the Arab conquerors were salvagers who saved them from the Byzantines. The statement made by Barr Abraus, their spokesman, bears witness to this; he says: "*The God of Revenge has sent us the Arabs to save us from the Romans*". We have already quoted this statement in a previous chapter of this book (Chapter 9, p. 45).

It must be acknowledged that, throughout history, some Muslim rulers were characterized by religious fanaticism, which runs against the spirit of Islam, the tenets of the Quran and the recommendations of the Prophet and

(*) Edition 1949, Vol. II, p. 96.

(**) Daniel Robs, Vol. 3, Ibid., p. 284

the Orthodox Caliphs. Those rulers, especially during the Abbasid rule and also during that of the Fatimid ruler al-Hakim bi-Amari-Allah, behaved contrary to the spirit of Islam and the *Sunna* of the Prophet. Their conduct was no different from that of some Christian kings, princes and potentates who forgot or pretended to forget the teachings of Christ who, time and again, preached love, forgiveness and mercy and commanded the disciples and the followers to love their enemies, bless those who cursed them and pray for those who persecuted them.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find in Islamic history a bloodcurdling battle such as the one fought by the Crusaders in the Mosque of al-Aqsa in the aftermath of their invasion of al-Qods in 1099, and to which we have alluded in Chapter 9 (p. 45).

Christian historians themselves could not contain their condemnation of that butchery committed in the name of the Cross, or rather in the name of Christ, by those fanatic Christians inside the house of prayer and worship in which Muslims - old men, women, children and unarmed men - took refuge.

The Crusaders pounced upon those poor Muslims with swords and daggers and slew them all. Christian historians who witnessed what had happened confirm that the courtyard of the Mosque was swamped with blood which reached the ankles of the crusaders.

The dissimilitude becomes clear when we remember that the Mosque of al-Aqsa is not too far away from the Church of Resurrection in which Omar Ibn al-Khattab declined to pray so that the Muslims would not turn it into a mosque after him.

Likewise, if we remember what the Crusaders did in 1204 in the Church of Santa Sophia, the horrible battle of which we have already mentioned in a previous chapter, we will conclude that Christian fanaticism in those days was not directed only against Islam and Muslims, but also against Christians themselves, or rather against Christianity itself when its religious doctrines were in disagreement with those of its opponents.

Our reaction is exactly the same when we remember the wars waged by the Church against the Cathares in the south of France - as we have already said.

Numerous are the wars and the painful misfortunes which took place among Muslims, of which we will mention the wars between Ali and Moucaouyya, the battles between the Fourth Caliph and the Kharijites and the Battle of Karbala' - a bloody event in a dark period.

Also worth mentioning are the wars between TalHa and Zubayr, the raids on Makkah and the storming of the Kaaba whose sanctity was violated by Muslims themselves.

The history of Christian Europe, throughout many centuries, is but a record of its wars fought by Christians against Christians from different sects and denominations.

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Muslim world witnessed many shocks and convulsions, all of which were rejected and condemned by both Christianity and Islam.

Impartiality and respect for the truth and fairness compel us to condemn and denounce everything that some Christian and Zionist pens, in good or bad faith, have attributed to Islam, branding it as a religion of violence, and of the sword and coercion, and claiming that Islam has always sought to impose itself on people by force. This, we strongly condemn because it shuns the truth; in fact, the truth is, generally speaking, exactly the opposite of what those pens have written about Islam.

In its spirit and essence, Islam is the religion of mercy and peace. This is what is clearly seen everyday in the Muslim's greeting of people, whatever their religion, when he hastens to say: "*as-salamu ^calaykum*" or when he returns the greeting saying: "*wa-^calaykumu as-salam wa rahmatu allahi wa barakatuh*".

Chapter Sixteen

Jizya (Tribute)

Regarding *Jizya*, we feel we must say a word about it, because of the many commentaries it has drawn - some of which are usually marred with ignorance, albeit in good faith, and others which are often impaired with falsehood and are written out in bad faith.

In accordance with the tenets of their religion which prohibits compulsion, Muslims used to permit the inhabitants of the country they had conquered to remain on their religion provided that they paid *Jizya* in return for Muslim protection against any aggression.

But some might say: Isn't *Jizya* a compulsory means to convert the Christian into Islam to avoid paying it?

The answer to this question is both simple and easy: it would be illogical on the part of Omar and Khalid, for example, to harbor the intention of using *Jizya* as a means to force the Christians of al-Qods and those of Damascus to embrace Islam and, at the same time, to conclude with them a security pact which protected their possessions, crosses and churches, and to bind the covenant of protection to the Covenant of Allah, to the protection of His Messenger, and to that of the Orthodox Caliphs and the believers.

Suffice it to quote the words of Dr. Philip Hatta from his book entitled **The History of Syria, The Lebanon and Palestine**, Vol. II, p. 3, dar al-thaqafa, 1959 (some paragraphs of which have already been quoted in Chapter 9, p. 45), as he says:

"After six years of a war that was permeated by many setbacks, Hercules managed in 628 to recover Syria and the city of Raha, the homeland of his ancestors, which fell into the hands of the Persians after Khosrau II had overrun it (600-614), laying waste to it. He had invaded Damascus, terrorized its inhabitants, killing and imprisoning them, and destroyed the Church of Resurrection after looting its treasures and masterpieces among which was the real cross."

It is evident that where religious tolerance is concerned, there is a great difference between Muslim conquerors and other conquerors during the same period of time; that is, in the first half of the seventh century.

Omar abstained from praying in the Church of Resurrection so that Muslims would not turn it into a mosque after him. He established with the Christians of al-Qods the Covenant of Protection which guaranteed them the safety of their churches and crosses, whereas Khosrau II reduced the same church to rubble after he had plundered everything in it.

Therefore, the Christians acquire the protection of the Islamic state in return for *Jizya* which takes the place of *Zakat* (alms tax) for Muslims. Christians are *dhimis* (the free non Muslims enjoying Muslim protection), because the protection and safety they enjoy is, as has been said earlier, supported by the protection of the Prophet and that of the Orthodox Caliphs.

Like *Zakat*, *Jizya* is a tax. It is worth pointing out that it is not levied on the poor or on those who have no income; nor is it imposed on women and children, or on the blind who have no trade or job, or on an infirm who is in financial straits, or on monastery monks, except if wealthy.

With regard to the value of *Jizya*, it has been established that it had never exceeded the tax amount Christians used to pay to their own government before the advent of Islam.

Jizya was lawfully permitted only in return for the actual protection provided by the Muslims for the Christians who were under their rule. No Protection, no *Jizya*.

In his book, **Al-Kharaj** (The Tax), Abu Yousef says: "*In the wake of his reconciliation with the people of Sham (present day Syria) and after he had collected Jizya and taxes from them, it came to Abu ^cUbayda's ear that the Romans had assembled to fight him, which put him and the Muslims in a difficult situation. Abu ^cUbayda then wrote to every one of his governors on the cities whose inhabitants he had made peace with commanding them (his governors) to return the Jizya and taxes levied from the people. He wrote to his governors asking them to tell the inhabitants of those cities: 'We are giving you your money back because of the Roman troop concentrations, and because you have stated as a*

condition that we provide protection for you, which we are unable to do. We are, therefore, returning to you what we have taken from you; we will, however, honor every security commitment we have made to you and every written word between us if Allah grant us victory over them.' When the governors said this to the inhabitants of those cities. They said: 'May Allah appoint you our rulers, and may He grant you victory over them'()".*

There is ample evidence in the history of the Muslims that their Islamic laws permit a non-Muslim to take legal action against the noblest of Muslims and demand justice from him.

We have, in this very context, cited two incidents in the chapter on "Equality", one between Ali - may God be pleased with him - and a Jew, and the other between a Copt and the son of ^cAmr Ibn al-^cAas. It was Omar Ibn al-Khattab - may God be pleased with him - who ruled in both cases (Chapter 7, pp. 39-40).

Throughout history, Islam has been the most tolerant of all religions, a fact which most Western historians have acknowledged.

There is ample evidence of this, suffice it to mention the following:

- *"Throughout history, never has al-Andalus (Arab Spain) enjoyed so merciful and just a rule as in the days of the Arab conquerors Their laws were based on justice and mercy. The Maghribi inhabitants were judged in accordance with their laws and by employees from amongst them The rulers of al-Andalus granted non-Muslims, whatever their religion, freedom of worship.(**)"*

- *"Salah ad-Dine al-Ayyoubi expelled every Muslim who did not observe the Sunna, but his tolerance and leniency towards the Christians and the Jews were such that they drew forth the admiration of the Byzantine historians", (Ibid., p.322).*

- *"... with regard to Bibris himself (1263-1277), he was described by a contemporary Christian historian as being 'a moderate peace-maker, incorruptible, fair among his people, and merciful towards his Christian subjects themselves'" (Ibid., p. 323).*

(*) Afif Tabarah, Ibid., p. 406.

(**) We have cited this passage in Chapter 9 of this book, p. 45. We are quoting it again here because of its relevance.

It is to this firmly established, noble Islam, which springs from the line of conduct of the Prophet and that of the Orthodox Caliphs and from the Book of Allah - Most Gracious, Most merciful - that we hope all of us, Muslims and Christians, will return and from which we are pleased to quench our thirst.

Those early Muslims and those Orthodox Caliphs - especially Omar and Ali - may God be pleased with them - drank straight from the source, and bestowed lavishly upon humanity kind acts which will remain forever the epitome of tolerance, nobleness and high moral standards.

Likewise, early Muslim scholars did not neglect the rights of the Dhimmis. They stipulated that the Dhimmis be treated with utmost kindness and care, and that they be protected from harmful acts. In his famous book, **The Parties**, Shihab al-Qarafi, a prominent Imam of *Sharia*, said: "*The Covenant of Protection stipulates that we have rights to fulfill towards them [the Dhimmis], because they are in our neighborhood and in our guard, and in the Covenant of Allah - to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty - in the protection of his Messenger - God's blessing and peace be upon him - and in that of Islam*".

In **Maratib al-Ijma^c** (The Degrees of Consensus), Imam Ibn Hazm says: "*If the warriors come to our land seeking to harm a Dhimmi, it is our duty to fight them, and to die in his defense, for handing him over to them is negligence of the Covenant of Protection*", (Tabara, p. 287).

If Muslim rulers, especially the Orthodox Caliphs and the early Ommiad rulers, treated Christians well, showing cordiality and kindness towards them, the Christians, for their part, were no less cordial towards their Muslim rulers, whom they served loyally.

In this context, suffice it to mention the following two incidents:

1. A large number of Christians from the Bani Taghlib tribe volunteered to fight in the army which Yazid Ibn Mou^cauyia (680-683) had sent against Ibn-Zubayr. Carrying the cross and the flag of Serjius, these volunteers fought most bravely^(*).

(*) J.J. Tharaud, **Les Cavaliers d'Allah**. Plon, 1953.

2. In 696, Abdulmalik (685-705) sent a military fleet against the port of Carthage, the captains and mariners of which were Syrian Christians^(*).

From the Prophet's position, that of the Orthodox Caliphs and the Prophet's companions, and from the perspective of the texts - especially their spirit - we can say that, generally speaking, Islam did not hold a hostile view of the Christians, nor did it deny them the rights which were acknowledged for Muslims themselves. However, some caliphs and kings did impose some restrictions on the Christians, which restrained their freedoms and rights. In reality, the conditions of the Christians differed according to Muslim rulers.

In addition to everything that has been said, we would like to point out that *Jizya* was not an Islamic invention; it is as old as the Torah, if not older (in the following verse, the words are addressed to Moses - peace be upon him):

"When you go near a city to fight against it, then proclaim an offer of peace to it. And it shall be that if they accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people who are found in it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you", [Deuteronomy 20].

Nevertheless, the difference between the two *Jiziyas* is immense: here it is tribute (*Jizya*) and compulsion in religion. In fact, it is more than just compulsion; it is subjugation and enslavement ("*it shall be placed under tribute to you, and serve you*"). This means that the defeated nation upon which *Jizya* was imposed also had to give up its religion and worship Moses.

Omar - may God be pleased with him - imposed *Jiziyas* on the Christians of al-Qods in return for his protection of their freedom and guaranty of their beliefs. In his speech to them he said:

*"O People of Aelia^(**)! You and we have the same rights and obligations."*

Throughout history, never have such words been said by a vanquisher to a vanquished.

(*) Ibid., p. 111.

(**) Aelia was the name of al-Qods in those days. It was given to it by the Romans in the wake of the rebellion launched by Bar Kokhba, the Jew, and which ended in a bloodbath in 135 A.D.

Those Christians found great satisfaction in the Covenant of Omar, and were reassured about their future and destiny in terms of their entity and faith, because there was between them and the Caliph the Covenant of Allah and that of His Messenger.

The Hebrews, on the other hand, took the opposite stand altogether:

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land which you go to possess, and has cast out many nations before you ... and when the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them nor show mercy to them but demolish their altars and break their statues", [Deuteronomy 7].

"Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Havite and the Jebusite. Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images", [Exodus 34:11].

While Omar Ibn al-Khattab said to the Christian inhabitants of al-Qods that they had the same rights and obligations, the God of the Jews told his nation: *"And you shall destroy all the peoples whom the Lord your God delivers over to you, your eye shall have no pity on them", [Deuteronomy 7]* and also: *"You shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you", [Deuteronomy 15].*

Chapter Seventeen

Aman (Protection)

In the context of research in wars, mention must be made of what is known in Islam as *aman* (protection or security; asylum).

The word *aman* was widely used in Islamic societies, as well as in those Christian societies which lived in the land of Islam and among Muslims, or under Muslim rule during some periods of their history.

In the various accounts of Arab or Islamic origin, we often hear a man saying to a Muslim king: "*Grant me aman, my Lord!*" and the king answers: "*Aman granted*". What this means is that this man's life, freedom and possessions are "protected". Therefore, neither the king, nor anybody else can harm him.

The origin of the term *aman* is found in the following Quranic verse: "***If anyone amongst the pagans ask thee for asylum, grant it to him, so that he may hear the word of Allah; and escort him to where he can be secure***", [Repentance: 6].

It is clear that the words of Allah are addressed to His Messenger, the import of which allows for no ambiguity or confusion. If one of the idolaters seeks the Prophet's *aman* (protection), the Prophet must grant it to him. He must also let him hear the Word of Allah; that is, explain to him what the *Da^owa* is all about, enlighten him and make him understand the message of Islam. If the idolater receives guidance and if he is convinced of what he has heard, then that is good; if he is not, the Prophet must convey him to his place of security.

Those people who seek the protection of Muslims come under the protection of Islam; it therefore becomes incumbent upon the Muslims to guarantee their security and safety, so long as they are in the land of Islam.

With the passage of time, *aman* became a tradition of Islam which had left the door wide open for all protection-seekers to come in through. In this way Muslims were able to spread the *Da^owa* slowly among the protection-

seekers, without recourse to coercion. This was quite in line with the spirit of Islam, as Allah says: ***"Invite to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching"***.

As time passed, every Muslim had the right to grant protection to an individual or a group of people; this covenant became binding on all Muslims, because, as the Prophet said, ***"the Muslims' aman is one and the same, it must be fulfilled by even the most inferior of them"***.

In Islam, "covenant" or "engagement" has a certain holiness to it, the praises of which Westerners had frequently sung, admiring, and acclaiming it because it was a rare virtue in people, especially in the Christian society of the dark Middle Ages.

Aman is a covenant or an engagement; and Allah has commanded Muslims to fulfil it: ***"And fulfil (every) engagement, for (every) engagement, will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning)"***, [The Night Journey: 34].

One cannot be a true Muslim unless one has faithfully observed the covenant he has made:

"Those who faithfully observe their trusts and their covenants", [The Believers: 8].

And those who do break their covenant rank among the evil-doers:

"For the worst of beasts in the sight of Allah are those who reject Him: they will not believe. They are those with whom thou didst make a covenant, but they break their covenant every time, and they have not the fear (of Allah)", [The Spoils: 55-56].

The observance of the covenant in Islam reaches a holiness that puts it above Islamic solidarity itself. Even though Islam considers Muslims - whatever their nationality and country of origin - one Ummah, and that aggression against any one of those countries is seen as aggression against the whole Ummah, it places the fulfillment of an engagement above the duty of solidarity and assistance:

"As to those who believed but came not into exile, ye owe no duty of protection to them until they come into exile; but if they seek your aid in religion, it is your duty to help them, except against a people with whom ye have a treaty of mutual alliance", [The Spoils: 72].

Mentioned here by way of example, these verses invalidate all the charges brought against Islam, those which attempt to project Islam as a religion of coercion and oppression, and to portray Muslims as a people who have spread Islam by the sword.

Even if he spends long years searching, a historian will not find in the history of Muslims such crimes against humanity as those perpetrated by the Spaniards in the days of such men as Columbus, CortÈs and Pissarro in the Americas which they had discovered, occupied and exploited. They transferred all the riches of these newly found lands to Spain, having massacred, with their canons and firearms, the peoples of those regions, who were armed with spears and swords only, killing tens of thousands of them, capturing and humiliating thousands, and treating them like beasts.

If a large number of historians and researchers have sought to machinate against Islam and project it as the opposite of what it really is, some of them have given Islam its due in full and spoke highly of it.

It is within the context of those impartial scholars that we would like to refer the reader to our book: **In the Footsteps of Mohammed** (pp. 413-465).

Chapter Eighteen

Woman in Islam

Many a Western author took it upon himself to criticize Islam and to attack it through its view of the woman and her role in society, and through the rights she has been granted in comparison to those of man and to the rights of other women in other non-Muslim societies.

Therefore, what is the real image of the woman in Islam? If we turn to the Quranic texts, we will find that:

- Like the man, the woman is entitled to recompense in the Hereafter for the good she does in this world: ***"If any do deeds of righteousness, - be they male or female - and have faith, they will enter Heaven, and not the least injustice will be done to them"***, [Women: 124]. Likewise, the repetition of the words "male" and "female" in the following verse is there for a good reason: ***"For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward"***, [The Clans: 35].
- The woman, like the man, is entitled to the right of fealty (to enter into a covenant with the Prophet). The Prophet used to make a covenant with men, as well as women, whereby they pledged to listen and obey him and observe the *Sharia*: ***"O Prophet! When believing women come to thee to take the oath of fealty to thee, that they will not associate in worship any other thing whatsoever with Allah, that they will not steal, that they will not commit adultery (or fornication) that they will not kill their children, that they will not utter slander ... then do thou receive their fealty, and pray to Allah for the forgiveness (of their sins): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful"***, [She That Is To Be Examined: 12].

- Like the man, the woman participates in social activities: "***The Believers men and women, are protectors, one of the other, they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practise regular charity and obey Allah and His Messenger. On them will Allah pour His Mercy***", [Repentance: 71].

Therefore, the man and the woman assist each other in realizing their own good and that of society. Like the man, the woman has the right to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil, which means that she can run and manage peoples' affairs, so that they may continue along the straight path and do good deeds. The woman is not a neglected individual or a low member of society; she is at the core of society, and, like the man, she is also present in the arena.

Before the advent of Islam, and for more than one reason, some Arab tribes used to bury girls alive, as if the female had no right to live like the male. Islam came to ban such a criminal act:

"When news is brought to one of them, of (the birth of) a female (child), his face darkens, and he is filled with grief. With shame does he hide himself from his people, because of the bad news he has had! Shall he retain it (on the sufferance and) contempt, or bury it in the dust? Ah! What an evil (choice) they decided on?", [The Bee: 58-59].

Sometimes, poverty was the reason behind burying girls alive, for parents were unable to feed their children, if these were too many. Islam came to remind those parents that it is Allah Who provides sustenance for their children:

"Kill not your children for fear of want: we shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you; verily the killing of them is a great sin", [The Night Journey: 31].

- The Arabs did not bequeath women personal property. When Islam came, it did not only decree that the woman had a share of the inheritance, it determined her part in it, as a wife, a mother, a sister and a daughter: "***From what is left by parents and those nearest related there is a share for men and a share for women, whether the property be small or large, a determinate share***", [Women: 7].

- The Arabs used to inherit from women by force. The inheritor would inherit the wife of a testator as he would his own wealth, for she was his property which he "managed" as he pleased: he would marry her if he so wished or marry her off to someone else and keep the dowry for himself; or he would prevent her from marrying, *"in the hope that she would free herself in exchange for a ransom or that he would inherit her if she passed away"*.

Islam proscribed all this as the following verse shows: ***"O ye who believe! Ye are forbidden to inherit women against their will. Nor should ye treat them with harshness, that ye may take away part of the dower ye have given them"***, (Women: 19).

- Some Arabs used to inherit the wives of their fathers as part of the effects. These women would then become their wives. When Islam came, it prohibited this abominable practice altogether: ***"And marry not women whom your fathers married - except what is past: it was shameful and odious - an abominable custom indeed"***, [Women: 22].
- Islam's view of the husband and the wife is one of equality before Allah Who has put love and mercy between them: ***"And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are signs for those who reflect"***, [The Romans: 21].

In Islam, the relationship holding between the married couple emanates not from worldly and materialistic interests or from carnal desires - all of which fade away with time - but from love and mercy which make this relationship grow stronger throughout the years, exactly like any thing that is precious and valuable.

The greatness of this love and mercy lies in the fact that they are a gift from Allah - the Gracious, the Merciful - Who ***"has put love and mercy between your (hearts)"***, not from the mortal humans.

Allah - to Whom be ascribed all perfection and glory - has created for the man, of himself, a spouse so that he may repose in her; that is, he finds in her peace of the mind, and serenity of the soul and the heart. She is for him a safe ground on which he stands when the tempest unleashes its wrath and the storm lets out its ire.

In Verse 187 of The Cow, Allah puts the husband and the wife on an equal footing, using simple but beautiful symbolic language, as He says: "***They are your garments and ye are their garments***". A garment covers and protects the body, and bestows on it beauty and embellishment, in addition to staving off all kinds of sufferable pains.

The word "garment" has a wide and profound meaning, indeed; for it also represents a shield, or armor, on which the arrows of time and those of man go to pieces.

The view that is commonly held in human societies is that man is the woman's shield and protector. However, in this and other contexts, Islam has put the woman on an equal footing with the man.

In Islam, the overriding principle is equality between the spouses in terms of obligations and duties but at the same time, Islam acknowledges the husband as the head of the family, which is only natural: "***And women shall have rights similar to those against them, according to what is equitable; but men have a degree (of advantage) over them***", [The Cow: 228].

It is clear that the woman has her own rights, as does the man, and that she has the same obligations as he; therefore, he cannot impose on her something that is advantageous for him, and which he himself cannot do for her.

With regard to the "degree" (of advantage) that the husband has over the wife, that is so because he is *rabu al-caila* "paterfamilias," as is customary to call him, because, being the provider for his household, he is responsible for raising his family. As the provider for his family, he is entitled to supervision and management: "***Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means***", [Women: 34].

Furthermore, the woman's physiological constitution is different from the man's: she bears, delivers, and suckles children, all of which takes up some of her time; there is also the physiological disorder she experiences every month during the menstruation period and until a relatively advanced age.

From an Islamic perspective, the man is not superior to the woman mentally, intellectually or physically. But social realities the world over, or rather throughout history - ever since man became conscious of history and began

to record it - are proof that there are tasks which only the man - not the woman - can do, with some exceptions which do not really affect the validity of the principle.

A look at the most developed countries in the world, such as those of Europe and North America, for example, where women and men are equal in number, will reveal the following:

- Parliaments and congresses count more men, the number of whom sometimes exceeds 90% of the total number. In the last French parliament which was elected in April 1993, there were 35 women members of a total of 577; that is, 7%.
- In the army, 90% at least of the military are men, from the top to the bottom of the pyramid.
- So is the case with the forces of national security, the police force, the gendarmes and the fire-fighters.
- So is the case with the judiciary and public administration^(*).
- The number of women is growing; it even far exceeds that of men - in the relatively easy jobs which do not require great physical effort, such as supermarket and department-store vendors, company and institution secretaries, bank clerks, typists and telephone operators.

This is an indirect recognition on the part of those "developed" countries of the woman's being not so competent as the man in many matters and fields, such as those we have mentioned earlier by way of example.

Islam, both Quran and *Sunna*, enjoins kindness and equity towards women: "***Live with them on an equal footing of kindness and equity***", (Women: 19).

Whether in the Quran or in the Sunna, Islam urges men to take good care of women: "***When ye divorce women, and they fulfil their term of (Iddat), either take them back on equitable terms or set them free on equitable terms***", [The Cow: 231].

Islam enjoins upon the Muslim to expend upon his wife and children amply, but not miserly or extravagantly: "***Let the man of means spend***

(*) In June 1993, Clinton nominated a woman member of the US Supreme Court. The matter drew a great deal of attention on the part of information and political circles which spoke of it as though it were something extraordinary. She was the first female Justice in US history to have occupied this office.

according to his means: and the man whose resources are restricted, let him spend according to what Allah has given him. Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him", [Divorce: 7].

In the Holy Quran, there is a verse which permits the husband to beat the wife lightly, but only in exceptional cases: "*As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them lightly; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means of (annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great above ye all", [Women: 34].*

Naturally, this verse raised many a question and drew a great deal of criticism; some went as far as to slander Islam and to portray it as a backward, ossified religion.

Having noted that the legislation of many "developed" countries did permit such beating for a long time, but banned it later in conformity with the social development which had imposed itself by itself, we feel obligated to point out the following:

- The verse began with an admonition. "Admonish them", it says; that is, a man who fears his wife's rebellion must first start with "admonishing" his wife with the idea of convincing her to abandon her rebellion and to return to the straight path.
- Next to admonition comes banishing the woman to her bed apart, which is too severe a punishment for her, seeing that this retribution hurts her in one of the most lethal weapons in her possession, namely her charm, seduction and seducement. Banishing a woman to her couch is not only a sexual retribution which prevents her from enjoying sexual pleasure, it is mostly a psychological and psychical punishment which impacts the woman in her femininity, pride and amour-propre.

After this punishment, which no doubt has a tremendous impact on the woman who still keeps some of her charm powers, comes the punishment of beating.

The woman who is not affected by admonition, or by her husband's banishing her to a bed apart, is surely a burden that weighs heavily upon the husband. He must in this case take a deterrent measure: either he will beat his wife in the hope that their marriage will be saved, because after

all a light beating is better - or at least a lesser evil - than divorce, or he will resort to divorce.

However, the reader must not think that Islam permits beating as a lawful measure. The Prophet censured beating and abhorred it; he had never resorted to it with his wives. He taught Muslims that, like divorce, beating is the most loathsome lawful act for Allah. The Prophet said: "*The cream amongst you will not be beaten. ... Isn't one of you ashamed to beat his wife, as he does a slave; he beats her early in the day and goes to bed with her at the end of it?*"

In early 1993, one specialized institution published the findings of a general study conducted in France over a long period; the objective of this study was to determine approximately the number of women who receive a beating from their husbands one or more times a year. The number was above two million! Officials in this institution hold that this figure is not realistic, and that the real number cannot be less than three million women, because many refuse to acknowledge the fact that their husbands beat them up, either because they are too embarrassed or they want to save face.

The laws in force in France, Europe and America forbid the couple from beating one another, but natural law differs from positive law, because the former takes into consideration human nature and its complexities.

It may be for the wife's own good to know that, in some exceptional cases, the law permits the husband to beat her. If she is aware of this, she will abstain from rebelling and from any act the husband cannot cope with, for fear that he might exercise his right and beat her without her being able to take action against him.

The situation will be different if the wife knows that she is not to be beaten and that if the husband beats her, he is to be punished. If he beats her, she will take legal action against him and have him indicted.

As a counter-argument, it may be said that banning beating will make the husband think twice before he lays his hand on his wife for fear that he might be taken to court and be punished. That is true in theory; in reality, however, the law banning the beating of the wife has not saved the three million women battered every year from their husbands' thong, even though beating in France is forbidden by law.

In *Sharia*, the beating of the wife by the husband is a weapon of deterrence, not repression. The wisdom of Allah - the Wise, Acquainted with all things - lies in permitting beating, as has been said in the above-mentioned verse.

* * *

In Great Britain, only one woman was at the head of the government to date, and that was only once. She is Mrs. Thatcher, who is well-known around the world. Similarly, in France - the land of "equality" - it was only once that a woman headed the government since the Revolution of 1789; she was J. Carson. In Islamic countries, two women were at the head of their governments: one in Pakistan, the other in Turkey.

Chapter Nineteen

Hijab (The Veil)

As they did with the light beating of the wife, denouncing and condemning it, Western zealots also pounced upon *Hijab* which they said was yet another proof, among many others, that Islam was a backward, ossified religion.

The reality is that, in the field of morals, there is a difference and a disparity between the East and the West. With all the means it has at its disposal, the Church itself sought, and is still seeking, to put an end to its followers' giving way to sexual desires and vice, or even to pornography whose danger has increased tremendously with the TV invasion of the great majority of homes.

Showing an erotic or a pornographic movie to an eastern audience of adult and young viewers - be they open or narrow-minded - is from an eastern viewpoint a serious stab aimed at the humanness of the human being, his morals, his self-respect and the respect of others, and at his disdain for animalizing the human.

In some Western societies, morals or social ethics are non-existent; nor is there any respect for the values and the virtues preached by all religions, revealed and those of the East. There is a kind of contest or even competition for profligacy and impudence.

It is enough for a person to appear with disheveled hair, an unshaved face, no tie, a dirty collar, in wrinkled clothes, unpolished shoes, one lit-up cigarette after another between two lips that hide a set of nicotine-stained teeth - it is enough for him to appear in all this, or in some of it, to rattle an unintelligible song, and to walk like a drunkard to be called a great artist, even a genius, or one-of-a-kind of his age, or even a star of his time.

It is, therefore, not surprising that this West should view *Hijab* as a sign of backwardness and ossification.

How can a topless, recumbent woman on the sand of a crowded beach, wearing a G-string only, look with contentment at *Hijab*? In this case, *Hijab* is a slap on her cheek, or rather an angry outburst of modesty at impudence.

We will hasten to say that the *Hijab* which the Quran has commanded is not "*tchador*", which millions of people have seen on television and in newspapers and magazines. Some specific circles, especially international Zionism, have exploited the *tchador*, along with all the measures taken in this context by one Islamic country, to slander Islam.

Islam has enjoined *Hijab* in the following verse:

"And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms ...",
[Light: 31].

Of interest to us here are the words of Allah: "... ***they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof ...***".

In summary and by way of simplification, we say that Islam does not command the woman to cover her face and the palms of her hands.

With the exception of the face and hands, it is strictly forbidden for a woman to display her body to strangers, because the mere gaze at any of the parts of her body is a first step on the way to fornication and debauchery.

Allah - to Whom be ascribed all perfection and majesty - knows that the human being, man or woman, is a weak creature because sexual desire is a natural - so as not to say animalistic - instinct in him. Few are those who remain unresponsive in the experience.

It is not wisdom, nor is it in the interest and stability of society morally and humanly, that women should, directly or indirectly, resort to seducing and tempting men. A wife is *Halal* (lawful) to her husband and to him only.

Generally speaking, the West attaches no importance to such axiomatic principles. A few exceptions apart, Western societies have disintegrated. There are almost as many girlfriends as there are wives; in fact, having a girlfriend has almost become the norm, and free marriage and living together as husband and wife have become the rule.

Other Western countries have endorsed in their laws unnatural sexual relationships, such as those between men, thus putting on the heads of

homosexuals a laurel wreath of which they are proud and boastful. They take to the streets, they demonstrate, and they demand their rights.

In short, we can say, without being counted among the zealots, that through its persistence to preserve the general morals, its effort to protect people's honor - which is sacred - its perseverance at fulfilling the aim of adhering to the minimum of self-respect and the respect of the humanness of the human being, and through its obedience of the Commandments of Allah - which are revealed in His Books - Islam is a school of morals the numbers of whose pupils, students and followers we hope will grow and multiply.

In its spirit - and spirit is better than letter - Islam is a shield against the dissolute person's attacks on morals.

Morals cannot be preserved without any measures that restrain the woman's seductive powers. If she is naked in the presence of others, what benefits can society reap from her nakedness? What benefit can she herself realize? The only gain she obtains is arousing men's sexual desires and their animalistic instincts. The problem begins here; for it is here that the first seeds of the harm done to the woman's dignity and to her husband's honor, to the invulnerability of marriage, and to the stability of society are to be found eventually.

If the woman's nakedness is proof of civilization, progress and development, and if it is a sign of freedom, as Westerners often say it is, Islam sees civilization, development and progress in acknowledging the woman's familial, social and political rights which she exercises within the bounds of decency and decorum, her own self-respect, the respect of her husband and that of society in which she lives, as well as in not giving in to her own sexual desires.

Islam has never commanded extremism, violence, fanaticism, fossilization and backwardness. It has absolutely nothing to do with all these things.

Islam does not know what terrorism is, for Islam and terrorism are two opposites that do not meet. However, Islam acts in self-defense, to ward off the attacks of the aggressors who trifle with Human Rights and the rights of the people in Palestine, the Golan Heights and South Lebanon.

Had it not been for the injustice and tyranny of Israel, for the oppression and despotism of Zionism, and for Israel's disdain for UN Resolutions and

scorn for international legitimacy, there would have been no "terrorists" to attack Israel.

But international Zionism is very powerful in the field of information; it controls a large number of the news media in America and in some parts of Europe. Therefore, the adage "*The rogue ran away with merchant's money*"⁽⁶⁾ holds true in the case of international Zionism, because it has managed to turn the situation upside down, turning the executioner into a victim and the victim into an executioner.

It is in this context that international Zionism launches one attack after another, indirectly and in covert ways, against Islam, in general, and against what is happening in some Arab and Islamic countries in the name of Islam.

Therefore, the natural ally of Islam is conservative Christianity represented by the Roman Church and other churches which refuse to bargain over the essential constants and principles which must not be touched or amended.

I was my country's ambassador to the Holy See, or the Vatican. When the accredited ambassadors attended a meeting or a reception with the Pope or the cardinals or the bishops and other men of religion, our wives had to be dressed in long black garments, to cover their heads with black scarves, and to display no parts of their bodies, except their faces and hands.

During the three years I had spent there, I did not see one woman, for even once, with her head or any other part of her body uncovered, except her face and hands.

On this point, Islam meets the Vatican - or better still - with the Church: the woman must show her face and hands only. There is no display of charms or any thing of the kind - Propriety, Decency, and Self-respect are the order of the day.

Everything the Christian society has done later in the name of progress and development runs against the spirit of Christianity itself and the teachings of the Church. With the passage of time, the Church found itself incapable of imposing its will which emanates from the ordinances of religion.

(6) It roughly means: an honest deal is always undone and the knave gets the advantage.

Christianity and Islam see eye to eye on this very issue and on many other matters. They both seek to preserve the morals of society and to restrain the believers from running after debauchery and profligacy.

In any case, Islam is a realistic religion; it knows that the human being, with his physiological and natural constitution, male or female, is weak, and that sometimes it is just impossible for him to resist temptation; for this reason, the Prophet exhorted the believers against sins saying: "*He who is afflicted with these impurities ought to take cover under the mantle of Allah*". (reported in Imam Malik's al-Muwatta') That is why the woman must be chaste, and so must the man, for neither of them must indulge in debauchery and profligacy.

Regarding "fundamentalism" as we see and hear it and as it is practised by some Arab and Islamic states, as well as by some parties, Islam is free from it all. That is so because Islam is a religion of mercy, peace, perseverance, pardon, forgiveness, openness, and progress; it is a religion that seeks to preserve the humanness of the human being, morality, values and virtues, without which society will turn into a jungle and an emporium for harlotry.

Chapter Twenty

Stealing

"As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands: a punishment by way of example, from Allah, for their crime", [The Table Spread: 38].

It is this verse which has prompted many critics to say, with their pens dipped in the gall, that Islam is a religion of "Stone-Age primitivism," claiming that it resists progress and development, and that it is incapable of keeping pace with the human society in "humanizing" its legislation. Some critics even went as far as to characterize Islam as a "barbaric" religion.

We would like to begin our commentary by clarifying the following point: the cutting of the hand is contingent upon the fulfillment of a number of conditions; they are:

- The thief must be in full possession of his mental faculties and of legal age;
- The thief must steal the property belonging to someone else, and in which he owns no share;
- The thief must steal the stolen property from a place where it is safely kept;
- The stealing must not be prompted by dire need, such as stinging hunger.

For many centuries, the West had inflicted severe, indeed barbaric, punishments on many hordes of criminals; of such punishments we will mention, by way of example only, one known as the "wheel" which consisted of cutting off the prisoner's limbs and breaking his bones alive while he was screaming from pain. He would breathe his last only when he was a chunk of flesh kneaded with bones and blood.

Another form of punishment consisted of burning the convict alive. They would bind him to a stake, and then they would set fire to a pile of wood and hay that had been put under and around him. The flames would then melt his body like fat on fire. That was the destiny of Joan of Arc in France, Savonarola in Italy, and Bruno in Spain.

Capital punishment is still in use in many European and American countries. Opinion polls have confirmed that the French would like to see capital punishment back in their country. That would also be the case in other Western countries.

As for Inquisition Courts, especially in Spain, France and Italy, which were made up of men of religion and whose measures and provisions emanated from religion, there is a great deal to be said about them on the issue of torture and injustice which spring from fanaticism and intolerance, such as burning people alive, dismembering them, and breaking their bones while they howled from pain.

Before tackling the issue of cutting off the hand, let us first review briefly Islam's initial position concerning crime and punishment.

When the Quran was revealed in 7th century A.D., the world was generally speaking very different from what it is like today in terms of its laws on crime and punishment.

If we go back to Roman law, the source from which the most advanced European countries had drawn their legislation, we will find out that it had adopted class discrimination, dividing people into two classes: "Patricians" and "Plebeians", in addition to the class of slaves who had no rights whatsoever. The Patricians enjoyed rights which were denied to the Plebeians.

As for penal law, there was no equality between the Patricians and the Plebeians. If, for example, a Patrician attacked a virgin, his punishment was the confiscation of half his wealth; but if a Plebeian assaulted her, he was whipped and exiled.

Likewise, the punishment for murder differed according to the perpetrator. If he was a Patrician, he was exiled; if he was a Plebeian, he was decapitated with a sword, and if he was from the lowest social class, he was crucified first, then hanged.

That was the case in France before 1789 Revolution which, as we all know, had adopted the slogan of: Liberty - Equality - Fraternity.

The word "Equality" here is clear evidence that ancient law, prior to the revolution, had acknowledged and practised class discrimination which is the opposite of "Equality".

Parliament, whose prerogatives were very limited, was made up of three groups, each of which was a council in its own right. There were the Nobles, the Clergy, and the Third Estate. When the three groups met in one council, it was called "General Parliament".

Furthermore, not all the people took part in electing the members of the councils; the right to vote was limited to some groups, to the exclusion of others.

The equality which Islam established and acknowledged in the 7th century was not known to the most advanced countries until the end of 18th century and early 19th century beginning from the French Revolution which spread to other peoples and nations.

At the dawn of Islam and when the Prophet set out to spread the message which Allah had revealed to him, the Arabs of Arabia were living in Jahilia (pre-Islamic paganism). If someone committed murder, he was killed. If the tribe of which the victim was a member was a powerful one, and if the victim was one of its leaders or a very powerful member, the tribe would not kill the murderer if he was a commoner; as was customary in those days, it would kill the tribe member who held the same social status as the slain, or kill the murderer and anyone else it wished to slay along with the perpetrator, to quench its thirst for vengeance and to exercise what it considered its right.

That was how innocent people paid the price with their own lives while the criminals escaped unscathed sometimes, if not all the time. It is clear that such measures were not quite in tune with the principles of equality and justice.

When Islam came, it brought along a new law concerning murder, prescribing the following: "***O ye who believe! The law of Equality is prescribed to you in cases of murder: the free for the free, the slave for the slave, the woman for the woman. But if any remission is made by the brother of the slain, then grant any reasonable demand, and compensate him with handsome gratitude. This is a concession and a Mercy from your Lord. After this, whoever exceeds the limits shall be in grave penalty. In the Law of equality there is (saving of) life to ye, O men of understanding; that ye may restrain yourselves***", [The Cow: 178-179].

Islam has left it up to the family of the slain to pardon the murderer, if they so wish, in which case the blood money is on the murderer who pays it to the family of the slain, and the case is closed.

We notice that Islam does not seek to nurture in the heart of the relative of the slain a feeling of hatred and vengeance, nor does it nourish in him the urge for revenge; on the contrary, Islam exhorts him to pardon and forgive, albeit indirectly.

The most beautiful thing about those two verses is the reference to the forgiver as a "brother", a reminder of the humane brotherhood which prompted him to pardon the murderer, who is originally his "brother" because both the murderer and the relative of the slain belong to the large human family.

Regarding the words "***This is a concession and a Mercy from your Lord***", they mean that Islam is a religion of mercy before it is one of vengeance and rancor. Pardon seeks to lighten the murderer's burden and tries to save him from punishment by paying blood money to the family of the slain. It is also a mercy for the slain's relative who has pardoned the murderer, thus extinguishing in his own heart the fire of vengeance and rancor and rekindling within him the glow of the great happiness which Allah has bestowed upon the most righteous of his people.

Of all the religious laws, *Sharia* is the only law that prescribes treatment in kind, and then urges the offended person to forgive his offender: "***The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree)***", [Counsel: 40]. However, this principle is not absolutely unavoidable, for not abiding by it is dearer to Allah: "***But if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah***", [Counsel: 40].

The purpose of *Qasas* (retaliation, or punishment) in Islam is not to punish the criminal as much as it is to discourage him from committing a crime and to thwart his resolve, warning him that if he kills someone, he will be punished for it. Therefore, *Qasas* is saving life, because if a person knows that he will be killed if he murders someone, he will not kill. In this way the individual who harbors the intention of killing someone will be saving his own life - because there will be no retaliation against him - and that of the person he intends to murder.

Let us now turn to the crime of stealing and the cutting off of the hand about which we have quoted a verse from the Quran above. The cutting off of the hand is no doubt a severe punishment, or so it seems at first glance.

But are not most, if not all, punishments severe, if we take into consideration the fact that this world of ours which we call "civilized" is always trying to "humanize" punishments and to make them less and less painful for the convicts? Forced labor is done away with, generally speaking, and capital punishment is on its way to abolition. Prison is all that is left. Reformers and those who try to "humanize" punishment are competing among themselves to make prison a "comfy" place for prisoners. Thus in their view a criminal who is doing time because he has killed children after torturing and raping them, held hostages and killed them, robbed banks and attacked institutions - shooting their employees dead with a machine gun and explosives - this criminal deserves the sympathy and affection of society represented by the government. Therefore, he should be allowed to live surrounded with care and attention.

This tendency to treat prisoners as if they are the victims, not the butchers, and this competition to grant them attenuating circumstances - which often results in making their sentences lighter and not always commensurate with the nature of the crime they have committed - have, with time, led to a kind of general laxity. This situation has encouraged criminals to go too far in their crimes, because they know beforehand that all the authorities are inclined to feel sympathetic towards the murderer - not the victim and his relatives, towards the thief - not his prey, and towards the felon - not his casualty.

This explains the increase in the number of all sorts of thefts in most countries which have adopted the systems known as "Liberalism - Democracy".

Statistics have shown that La Côte D'Azur in the south of France has become an open theater for stealing: stealing cars parked in front of the houses, breaking into homes and even churches and stealing money, antiques, jewelry, and paintings, after climbing up walls and pulling out doors, in spite of all the security measures taken by the owners to protect their valuables.

This license to steal and this persistence in it has a great deal to do with the fact that the thieves and their accomplices commit their crimes and get away with it, because the authorities are usually unable to arrest them. When they are arrested, they receive "humanized" punishments that take into consideration the thieves' own circumstances more than they do those of the victims whose houses have been burglarized and whose possessions and money, which they spent their whole lives saving, have been stolen from them.

Therefore, it is no surprise that these societies, which are pursuing a path that will eventually and inevitably lead to "arresting the victim and allowing the criminal to be free", should speak vociferously against the punishment of the cutting off of the hand, condemning and denouncing it, and raising Cain about it. These societies, which accuse Islam of being a fossilized and backward religion, branding it as "primitive and barbaric" - not knowing that by adopting this attitude they are actually realizing the wishes of the enemies of Islam whose names need not be mentioned here because they are well-known to everyone - are actually digging their own graves through indirectly encouraging crime and criminals, especially theft and thieves.

It is our duty to face the subject of cutting off the hands of thieves calmly and gently, so that we can objectively express an impartial opinion about it.

We must remember that the implementation of this punishment is contingent upon conditions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Regardless of everything that has been said earlier, experience has proved that imprisonment, which positive law has established, has not yielded any deterrent effects. The number of thefts is increasing in kind and volume. Serious thefts, such as armed robbery and hold-ups are not only very common, they are carried out in highly sophisticated ways that have completely baffled those who are responsible for people's money and possessions.

In this case, society must choose between two positions:

- the "humanized" position which is supported by the advocates of "progressist-liberal-democratic civilizations" as they themselves call it and which stipulates that thieves be imprisoned. This position has failed, for it has proved its inability to curb the spread of this social ill.
- The "extreme" and severe position which prescribes the cutting off of a thief's hand in accordance with the conditions stated above.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for example, which applies *Sharia*, has managed to extirpate this evil through a few cases in which the hands of thieves were cut off; these sentences were enough to deter thieves from stealing.

If we draw a comparison between the situation in Saudi Arabia before and after the application of *Sharia*, we will realize the big difference: the country has moved from a jungle-like situation to a safe haven on earth.

As a price for this rare and exceptional security, the Kingdom has had to apply the cutting off of the hand in a few theft cases. The amputated hands were those of criminals and felons who had appropriated other people's money and possessions. They had thus received the punishment they deserved, and which was - still is - a deterrent to them and to the Saudi society of ten million people who have adopted the morals and values of the Holy Quran, and those of the Prophet and his virtuous companions.

It is a commonly held view that in the area of thefts and burglary, the United States of America gains the day. In some boroughs of New York and Chicago, for example, a person would not dare to walk around at night, because if he did, he would not return home on his feet; and if he did, it would be only after he had been cleaned out, battered, injured and humiliated.

The hands which plunder those boroughs, and for which stealing and robbery are as natural as going for a walk to breath some fresh air, are foul, dirty and criminal hands. They are a disgrace to humanity. Those are not the hands of Picasso, Dali, Miro and the likes of such great painters; nor are they the hands of Abdul-Wahhab, the Rahbanis, Um-Kalthum, Fairuz and other such famed composers and singers; or the hands of Father Piyaar, Mother Teresa; or those of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent workers.

Had America sacrificed ten of those criminal hands that pillage the boroughs of its big cities, she would have saved the whole society, if not the whole country, the number of whose inhabitants exceeds 200 million people, who long for a life of peace and security and who want to keep their property and possessions in a secure place.

Positive law, which the world has adopted to punish thieves and to curb stealing, has failed miserably. In contradistinction, the application of *Sharia* which prescribes that, if the conditions are met, a thief's hand must be cut

off, has yielded very positive results in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for example, wherein justice is taking its course in a way that seeks to strike a balance between mercy and the conscience that is responsible for public safety and people's possessions and rights.

In the New Testament, Christ - peace be upon him - said to the apostles and to the followers one day: "*And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell*", [Matthew 5: 30].

Would it not be better for the human society to have the hands of a few of its members cut off - the hands that sin and do evil - rather than have the whole society go to ruin?

These words which were uttered by the Messenger of mercy and forgiveness can prompt us to reflect on and ponder over the Quranic verse which Allah has revealed regarding the issue of cutting off the hand of a thief. If we go back to the spirit of Islam, we will realize that the punishment of cutting off a hand is in fact a "palliation" from Allah and a "mercy", especially if we remember that Verse 179 of the chapter "The Cow", quoted above, proclaims the following wisdom: "***In the law of Equality there is (saving of) life to you, O ye men of understanding; that ye may restrain yourselves***".

This means that cutting off the hands of thieves will put an end to stealing or at least reduce it to a great extent, because very few people will venture to steal while the large majority of them will not commit such an odious crime. They will live in peace and security under *Sharia* which emanates from Allah - the Great and Almighty - not from the mortal humans who act according to interests and objectives that are, most of the time, alien to the general welfare.

Chapter Twenty-one

Paradise in Islam

In the context of innuendoes about Islam, there was a great deal of talk about "houris, youths, milk and honey," about "bodily pleasures" and about everything related to sensory and materialistic bliss that is too far off from spiritual joy which is the epitome of "Heaven" in Christianity.

In fact, the "Gardens of Bliss" or "paradise" in Islam is quite different from, even the opposite of, everything that has been said.

Let us now turn to the Holy Quran and review briefly what it says about this very matter:

"Enter ye the Garden, ye and your wives, in (beauty and) rejoicing. To them will be passed round, dishes and goblets of gold: there will be there all that the souls could desire, all that the eyes could delight in: and ye shall abide therein (for aye). Such will be the garden of which ye are made heirs for your (good) deeds (in life). Ye shall have therein abundance of fruit, from which ye shall have satisfaction", [Ornaments of Gold: 70-73].

"(Here is) a parable of the Garden which the righteous are promised: in it are rivers of water incorruptible; rivers of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink; and rivers of honey pure and clear. In it there are for them all kinds of fruits; and grace from their Lord", [Mohammed: 15].

"For them will be Gardens of Eternity; beneath them rivers will flow; they will be adorned therein with bracelets of gold, and they will wear green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade; they will recline on raised thrones. How good the recompense! How beautiful a couch to recline on!", [The Cave: 31].

First, we must point out that, contrary to what is widely held, Quran makes no mention of beautiful women, prostitutes or ladies of the night to whom human societies have turned, since time immemorial for sexual pleasures and earthly desires.

As we have said earlier, Quran mentions "married couples"; that is, wives and lawful female companions. Attention must be drawn, however, to the fact that by "wives" it is not meant the wives who lived in this worldly life with their husbands, but new and young wives: "***We have created (their companions) of special creation, and made them virgin-pure (and undefiled). Beloved (by nature), equal in age***", [The Event: 35-37].

This is what the Quran says about houris and youths: "***In Gardens of Bliss. A number of people from those of old, and a few from those of later times. (They will be) on thrones encrusted (with gold and precious stones), Reclining on them, facing each other. Round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness), with goblets, (shining) beakers, and cups (filled) out Clear-flowing fountains: No after-ache will they receive therefrom, nor will they suffer intoxication, and with fruits, any that they may select; and the flesh of fowls, any that they may desire. And (there will be) Companions with beautiful, and big lustrous eyes. Like unto Pearls well-guarded. A reward for the Deeds of the past (Life)***", [The Event: 12-24].

And also: "***Verily, for the Righteous there will be a fulfillment of (the heart's) desires; gardens enclosed, and grape-vines; Companions of Equal Age; and a Cup full (to the brim)***", [The Tiding: 31-34].

Is this sensory bliss (or can it be) proof of a concrete reality that can be perceived through the senses, such as sight, hearing, taste, and touch? Can the soul - after death, and after it has been liberated from the body to return unto its Creator and after it had been admitted into His Paradise - taste and savor materialistic things that are a nourishment for the body, even terrestrial and of the same nature as the body itself?

The answer to this question is not difficult: in its essence, the soul is the same: it does not change according to religions. A firebrand from Allah, the soul draws its eternal existence from the eternity of Allah and its nature from His nature, just like a drop of water owes its existence to the spring.

The exultation of the soul is spiritual, because the soul itself is a spirit, but Allah - He is Exalted in Might, Wise - used double-entendre and metaphor and mentioned things for which the inhabitants of Arabia had a strong desire and a craving, such as: fresh cool water, a gentle breeze, rivers overshadowed by trees, milk and honey, fruits, goblets, pitchers, gold bowls, birds, pearls

well-guarded, and houris and youths, making clear that the last two are a delight to the eye.

In any case, we must not lose sight of the fact that all this serves the same purpose, one that never changes: to motivate the believers and to prompt them to adhere to the Straight Way, to do righteous deeds, to shun evil, and to forbid wrong so that they may obtain, as a reward, entrance to that paradise in which the soul rejoices in great spiritual beatitude. The latter is reminiscent of the pleasure and enjoyment that the body experiences when it drinks fresh cool water and milk of which the taste never changes, eats pure honey and delectable fruits, reclines on raised thrones, wears green garments of fine silk and heavy brocade, when it is bedecked in gold bracelets, and is waited on by youths and houris with beautiful, big, lustrous eyes.

If Christianity, for example, spoke of Hell as a place of the burning fire, it did not mean, nor did it ever think, that after death, the human being would actually writhe with pain on fire as a requital for the sins of his past life. As everyone knows, the body decomposes after death in the darkness of the grave; whether this body is that of a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim, an Indian or a Buddhist, it makes absolutely no difference.

What Christianity means is that once the soul is liberated from the mortal body, it will endure spiritual and moral suffering. The soul will suffer great pains, the kind of which man experiences in his life: he is tormented in his soul, heart and mind when afflicted by a misfortune, or a disaster; he feels a fire inside him, in his heart and conscience, and he screams from pain, even though his suffering is not bodily, but spiritual and moral.

In Islam, Hell is the fire which sears the soul and the body, as grief burns it, as remorse torments and tortures conscience, and as woe burns the heart, all of which are psychical and spiritual burns.

In any case, Islam affirms, time and again, that the great reward is the meeting with Allah, and that this Paradise, some of whose aspects have been mentioned earlier, is but a mirror which reflects, through the details, the integral whole: the return of the soul unto Allah; that is, the return of the drop of water to the spring, and the part to the whole:

"But Allah doth call to the Home of Peace: He doth guide whom he pleaseth to a way that is Straight. To those who do right is a goodly (reward) yea, more (that in measure)! No darkness nor shame shall cover their faces! They are Companions of the Gardens; they will abide therein (for aye)!", [Jonah: 25-26].

The word "more (than in measure)" is used in this verse to mean "more contemplation of the face of God". Verse 72 of the *Surah* "Repentance" is more allusive and very clear:

"Allah hath promised the Believers - men and women Gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in Gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the Good Pleasure of Allah: supreme felicity".

It becomes clear, therefore, that the good pleasure of Allah, that is, His Mercy and forgiveness, is more important and much greater than that Paradise and everything in it; it is to Allah that the believers must turn.

The righteous deed to which Islam calls continuously has its great reward which is way above any other reward: the meeting with Allah.

"Whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness", [The Cave: 110].

"Allah is the protector of those who have faith : from the depth of darkness He will lead them forth into light", [The Cow : 257].

"O ye who believe! Celebrate the praises of Allah, and do so often; and glorify Him morning and evening. He it is Who sends blessings on you, as do His Angels, that He may bring you out forth from the depths of darkness into light: And He is full of Mercy to the believers", [The Clans: 41-43].

"But We leave those who rest not their hope on their meeting with Us, in their trespasses wandering in their distraction to and fro", [Jonah: 11].

"Those who rest not their hope on meeting with us, but are pleased and satisfied with the life of the Present and those who heed not our Signs. Their abode is the Fire because of the (evil) they earned", [Jonah: 7-8].

"And there are men who say: 'Our Lord! Give us good in this world and good in the Hereafter, and defend us from the torment of the Fire!' To those will be allotted what they have earned; and Allah is quick in account", [The Cow: 201-202].

"Then fear Allah, and know that ye will surely be gathered unto Him", [The Cow: 203].

In its essence and at its basis, Islam is, first and foremost, a religion of the Hereafter, wherein the soul of the believer meets with its Lords, and remains eternally in His spiritual bliss. That is why Islam enhances the importance of "Righteous deeds, godliness and spirituality", and abases material things and worldly blessings; it even forbids them most of the time: ***"By men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the Remembrance of Allah, nor from regular Prayer, nor from the practice of regular Charity"***, [Light: 37].

This Verse clearly shows, albeit indirectly, that Islam does not encourage amassing wealth, but tends to strengthen "the remembrance of Allah," and the establishment of regular prayers and regular charity, for these are more important and loftier.

Regarding mischief in the earth, this is what the Quran has to say about it:

"Why were there not, among the generations before you, persons of balanced good sense, prohibiting (men) from mischief in the earth, except a few among them whom we have saved (from harm)? But the wrong-doers pursued the enjoyment of the good things of life which were given them, and persisted in sin" (Hûd: 116).

It is clear from this verse that Allah describes the tyrants from among those who indulge in excessive wealth as criminals.

"When We decide to destroy a population, We (first) send a definite order to those among them who are given the good things of this life and yet transgress; so that the word is proved true against them: then destroy them utterly", [The Night Journey: 16].

Therefore, debauchery and luxury are one of a pair; extravagance leads to destruction - self-destruction - and brings about the wrath of God, but the Mercy of Allah is the greatest wealth:

"But the Mercy of thy Lord is better than the (wealth) which they amass", [Ornaments: 32].

Wealth puts a distance between man and Allah: ***"It is not your wealth nor your sons, that will bring you nearer to Us in degree: but only those who believe and work righteousness, these are the ones for whom there is a multiplied Reward for their deeds, while secure they (reside) in the dwellings on high!", [Saba: 37].***

Belief and working righteousness is better than wealth and sons. A person who hopes to receive the reward of Allah, must do good and eschew evil. He must not spend all his time running after wealth, because it does not bring him nearer to Allah in degree; nor does it reserve a place for him in Heaven. The believers who work righteousness reside secure "in the dwellings on high"; that is, their place is secure in Heaven - "in the dwellings."

Within the same context, we read these clear and unequivocal words: ***"Fair in the eyes of men is the love of things they covet: women and sons; heaped-up hordes of gold and silver, horses branded (for blood and excellence); and (wealth of) cattle and well-tilled land. Such are the possessions of this world's life; but in the nearness to Allah is the best of the goals (to return to)", [The Family of Imran: 14].***

This means that the hordes of gold and silver are possessions of this world's life which is ephemeral, and that this wealth does not open the gates of Heaven to those who have it; the wealth that is everlasting and immutable, however, is earning the Pleasure and Mercy of Allah, returning unto Him and remaining in His Eternity.

Also: ***"Say: Shall I give you glad tidings of things far better than those? For the righteous are Gardens in nearness to their Lord, with rivers flowing beneath; therein is their eternal home; with companions pure (and holy) and the good pleasure of Allah. For in Allah's sight are (all) His servants", [The Family of Imran: 15].***

Piety to Allah is far better than all the gold, the silver and the horses, and more valuable than all the temporary conveniences. If a person wishes to have Heaven his resting place, he must not content himself with amassing

gold and silver, and raising horses; he must spend his substance in the cause of Allah and be pious, and god-fearing; he must do good, work righteousness, and establish regular prayer and regular charity; he must not say a word of contempt to a beggar, or treat an orphan with harshness; and he must proclaim the bounty of Allah.

Wealth is a spur to tyranny and obstinacy: "***Nay but man doth transgress all bounds, In that he looketh at himself as self-sufficient***", [The Clot: 6-7].

This is why Allah reminds the believers that everything in this world is ephemeral, and that to Him is their return: "***Verily, to thy Lord is the return***", [The Clot: 8].

"To the righteous (when) it is said: 'What is it that your Lord has revealed?' They say: 'All that is good.' To those who do good, there is good in this world and the Home of the Hereafter is even better and excellent indeed is the Home of the righteous", [The Bee: 30].

From beginning to end, the Quran continuously calls on the believers to be pious and to work righteousness, so much so that we may say that "working righteousness" is a, if not the, fundamental condition for earning the Mercy of Allah and gaining admittance to His Paradise. We invite the reader to ponder over these words:

"As to those who believe and work righteousness, verily We shall not suffer to perish the reward of any who do a (single) righteous deed", [The Cave: 30].

"And adore your Lord; and do good, that ye may prosper", [The Pilgrimage: 77].

"Then those who have believed and worked righteous deeds, shall be made happy in a Mead of delight", [The Romans: 15].

"For those who believe and work righteous deeds, there will be Gardens of Bliss", [Luqman: 8].

"For those who believe and do righteous deeds are Gardens as hospitable homes, for their (good) deeds", [The Prostration: 19].

"Then, as those who believed and did righteous deeds, their Lord will admit them to His Mercy: that will be the Achievements for all to see", [Crouching: 30].

"And those who believe in Allah and work righteousness, He will admit to the Gardens beneath which rivers flow", [Divorce: 11].

This bouquet of verses is redolent with good deeds, the kind of which the Quran is replete with.

Islam is the religion of piety and goodness, of spiritual, not materialistic, wealth.

"The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it groweth seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. Allah giveth manifold increase to whom He pleaseth", [The Cow: 261].

It is difficult, if not impossible, to find in any other religion - revealed or of the East- such an emphasis on piety, doing good and on abstinence from the good things in life and renouncing worldly pleasures as is clearly shown by these verses which are but a drop in the ocean.

A religion such as Islam, which has reached such a spiritual dimension, cannot be characterized as a religion of "houris, youths, milk and honey" all of which are, as we have said earlier, a double-entendre and a metaphor.

Chapter Twenty-two

Islam is the Prop of Christianity

There are indications and signs which show that, in the field of morals, human society is heading for decadence and deterioration, even disintegration. In this study, we will focus on those sexual relationships which are in conflict with human nature, as God has created it and wanted it to be.

In Christian countries, or those with a Christian majority, such as Great Britain, France, the Scandinavian countries, and the United States of America, for example, we notice a clear, even brazen, tendency for homosexual relationships which we will call here "perversion" or "sexual deviation".

Of old, homosexual men kept a low profile, to avoid being unmasked and humiliated, and to eschew criticism and slander and, most of the time, scorn and severance of relations.

With the passage of time, the viewpoint of Western society on this evil began to develop, so much so that it turned things upside down: homosexuals began to feel proud of themselves, and the high society welcomed them with great admiration and respect, giving them hearty receptions.

Year in year out, homosexuals began to grow in number and set up leagues and societies; they organized demonstrations and demanded their rights and prerogatives which they considered legal and legitimate.

In the past homosexuality was a heinous crime punishable by law. Today, however, it has become a sort of normal behavior, and a way of life in which homosexuals take great pride. Only when large numbers of homosexuals had been taken by AIDS did the homosexual community begin to think about its own future and that of humanity.

The Christian Church stood up firmly against this moral decline; it condemned it unequivocally, and sought to put an end to it, or at least to contain it, with all the means at its disposal.

In the last few centuries, however, the Church began to lose some of that influence it had in the past; it also lost the means which helped it in the past to impose its stands and penalties on homosexual, sinning believers who indulged in depravities and imperfections which constituted a threat to faith at its basis.

In the past, the Church had at its disposal a dreadful weapon: if need be, the Pope and the commissioned bishops would excommunicate any believer who had gone astray. The effects of excommunication were terrible. The excommunicate was deprived of the rights of church membership and excluded from fellowship in a group or community of believers, with all the consequences ensuing from such a situation. When he died he was deprived of extreme unction and his sins were not forgiven; because he died a sinner, no funeral service was held for him, and no prayers were said for him.

From the moment the excommunication decision was taken, the excommunicate became a stranger in his own community. If he was from the noble or aristocratic class, his prerogatives and rights over his subjects became null and void, thus losing authority over them. Excommunication was an early death for the excommunicate.

This horrible weapon has had no effect or consequence on the believers for centuries. Apart from preaching, guidance and counseling, nothing is left in the quiver of Christianity today. A person who does not observe the teachings of Christianity is a sinner, but he will be redeemed in the end if his repentance is sincere.

The governments of those countries have become so lenient that they have turned accomplices in this sin. For homosexuality has not only been tolerated, it is permissible both lawfully and legally. One might even say, without exaggeration, that some governments encourage this sexual deviation, thus contributing, unwillingly and unconsciously, to bringing the degradation of the human being to a very low level: wallowing in immoral filth and weltering in a mire of germs.

On Sunday April 26, 1993, thousands of American gays gathered in front of the White House, and demanded that President Clinton join the march they had organized in the streets of Washington, to claim rights owed to them by both the government and society.

Shocking scenes appeared in newspapers and on television: two men hugging and kissing, as if they were a man and a woman. What happened to pudency? Proud and boastful, the gays had thus laid bare their sins and immoral filth to the whole world to see.

In the end, because the President was out of town, he addressed to them a letter of sympathy and compassion that was read on loudspeakers. Can one imagine a demonstration of this kind being organized in an Islamic country? Or can one imagine the Islamic society sinking to such a low level?

We are not claiming that the Muslim is infallible, but we are saying that the moral atmosphere, the religious environment and the human traditions in the Islamic society do not encourage such a deviation; on the contrary, they stand firm against it, thus curbing any homosexual inclination that might emerge among the believers.

Whether *Sharia* or those laws which emanate from it, the Islamic legislation now in force in Muslim countries stands as a forbidding barrier against social and human decadence and as a puissant deterrent in the face of those whose imagination might be haunted by such sordid dreams.

In this context, the difference between Christianity and Islam is that the former has no weapon in its arsenal against this sexual deviation, except preaching, guidance and exhortation while Islam possesses the means of deterrence and penalization. For Islam, homosexuality is a sin, just like adultery or fornication.

This lewdness was very widespread among the people of Lut: hence the revelation of the following verse condemning it: "***And (remember) Lut: Behold, he said to his peopl: you do commit lewdness, such as no people in Creation (ever) committed before you***", [The Spider: 28].

Regarding punishment, we read : "***For we are going to bring down on the people of this township a Punishment from heaven, because they have been wickedly rebellious***", [The Spider: 34].

From Islam's point of view, homosexuals commit abomination : hence the Punishment which Allah had sent down on them for their evildoing. Some scholars hold that in *Sharia*, "*the punishment for homosexuality is the same as that for adultery and fornication*". Whatever the case, the punishment

is inevitable, and is imposed by the *Qadi* (judge) in accordance with the requirements of the commonweal of society which must remain free of such abominations and sins.

This laxity, or rather this moral decadence, that is found in Christian Western societies is also noticeable in other contexts: marriage. Reliable figures have indicated that the percentage of the people who turn away from marriage, preferring concubinage in stead, is rising year in year out.

Thus, concubinage, which was banned legally and which was inadmissible socially, has now become legal, just like marriage.

For sometime now, it has been said - though the news has yet to be independently verified - that some Scandinavian countries, perhaps even Great Britain, have enacted a law allowing men to live together like husband and wife^(*).

This concubinage is condemned by Christianity; however, given the weak position of the Church, to which we have alluded earlier, the latter is unable to take any radical measure against this practice.

Like Christianity, Islam also condemns homosexuality; unlike it, it has the means capable of curbing it and of imposing deterrent penalties on those who practise it.

European and American societies which represent the West - in its wide sense - with its Christian majority, are slowly but surely heading towards total moral decadence. Had it not been for the Church and the men of religion who are scattered about in those societies, the situation would have been very disgusting, indeed.

It may be true that the Christian West has for some centuries now been taking the lead in Human civilization, and appears to be more developed and highly advanced in the scientific field than the Islamic society; however, in the context of moral standards the situation is just the opposite.

The eastern societies which have a Muslim majority did not, and will not, witness the scourge of sexual deviation that has affected the Christian

(*) It has been established that Denmark and Quebec have passed a legislation which allows men to live together like husband and wife.

West, wherein homosexuals have come out of the closet and marched out in the streets, claiming their "legitimate" rights.

This understanding and tolerance on the part of Western governments towards homosexuals, who have soiled human dignity, will one day be the main reason behind the utter disintegration of the Christian Western societies. Should that happen, Islam will emerge as the only religious, social and educational reference to salvage what little morals will be left and to help the Church, if it so wishes, to shoulder its responsibilities. If these had been assumed from the start, the Christian Church would have prevented the disintegration of the Christian society and saved it from falling into that abyss towards which it is inevitably heading.