

Chapter 8 – Emergence of The Muslim Community

In the beginning [wrote Snouck Hurgronje], Muhammad was convinced of bringing to the Arabs the same [message] which the Christians had received from Jesus and the Jews from Moses, etc., and against the [Arab] pagans, he confidently appealed to "the people of knowledge". . .whom one has simply to ask in order to obtain a confirmation of the truth of his teaching. [But] in Madina came the disillusionment; the "People of the Book" will not recognize him. He must, therefore, seek an authority for himself beyond their control, which at the same time does not contradict his own earlier Revelations. He, therefore, seizes upon the ancient Prophets whose communities cannot offer him opposition [i.e., whose communities are not there or no longer there: like Abraham, Noah, etc.].¹

Passages like this constitute the classic formulation, at the hands of a great leader of modern Western Islamic studies, of a view of the emergence as a separate entity from the Jewish and the Christian communities of the Muslim community in Madina. The statement, quoted approvingly in the *Geschichte des Qorans of Nöldeke-Schwally*,² seems to have become a permanent part of the patriarchal legacy for many Western Islamicists who have elaborated it further. The theory invites us to accept (1) that when, in Madina, Jews and Christians (particularly the former) refused to accept him as Prophet, he began appealing to the image of Abraham, whom he disassociated from Judaism and Christianity, claiming him exclusively for Islam and linking the Muslim community directly with him; and (2) that in Mecca, the Prophet was convinced that he was giving the same teaching *to the Arabs* which earlier prophets had given to their communities. Further elaborations of the theory followed which depict this development as a major, indeed basic, diversion from the Prophet's original stance, culminating in the "nationalization" or "Arabization"³ of Islam through the change in the direction of prayer from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba at Mecca and the installation of the pilgrimage to the Ka'ba as a cardinal duty of Islam. These latter dissertations will not be treated *per se* in this paper but it will be seen where they are affected by our main argument.

Let it be stated at the outset that the *facts* upon which the classic theory seeks to rest are not wrong; our contention will be that these are not all the facts relevant to our problem and, further, that because they are not all the material facts, they have been distorted and misconstrued. Thus., whereas it is true that the Qur'ān was convinced that its message was identical with those of earlier prophets, it is neither true that its message was only for the Arabs and the earlier prophets' messages only for their communities, nor that when Islam was later linked with Abraham (which happened in Mecca, not Madina), the Qur'ān gave up Moses to the Jews and Jesus to the Christians as their properties because of Jewish (and Christian) opposition.

Nor is it correct to say that the change of Qibla represents either a *rupture* in the Prophet's religious orientation, or its nationalization! One basic trouble lies with viewing the career of the Prophet and the Qur'ān in two neatly discrete and separate "periods"—the Madinan and the Meccan—to which most modern scholars have become addicted. A closer study of the Qur'ān reveals, rather, a gradual development,

¹ Quoted in *Geschichte des Qorans* (New York, 1970), Part 1, pp. 146-147.

² See n. 1.

³ For example, F. Buhl, article *Muhammad*, in *The Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam*.

a smooth transition where the later Meccan phase has basic affinities with the earlier Madinan phase; indeed, one can "see" the latter in the former.

It is clear from the Qur'ān that some Meccans were already desirous of a new religion of the Judeo-Christian type: "Although these people used to say, If only we had a Reminder from the ancients, we would be God's sincere servants, but they disbelieved in it [when it came]" (37.aṣ-Ṣāffāt:168-170). This situation was in part the result of the penetration of Judeo-Christian ideas into the Arab milieu; it testifies to the existence of a religious ferment among more enlightened individuals and possibly groups. Although there is little historical evidence for the existence of any sizable population of Jews or Christians in Mecca, it is certain that some individuals had come to an idea of monotheism and some had actually become Christians. But what the Qur'ān points to frequently is the existence of some kind of Messianism, a desire for a new Arab prophet: "And they swore with all their strength that if a warner should come to them, they would certainly be better guided than any other community; but when a warner did come to them, it increased them only in aversion" (35.Fāṭir:42).

That the Meccans did not want to accept either Jesus or Moses (presumably because they wanted "to do better" than the other two communities; cf. also 6.al-An'ām:157-158) is also stated in the Qur'ān: "And when the son of Mary was cited as an example, lo! your people resisted him, and they said, Are our gods better or he? They did not say this except as a [point of] disputation—they are, indeed, a disputatious people" (43.az-Zukhruf:57-58); again:

But for the fact that a calamity should befall them for what their hands have sent forth and then they should say, Our Lord! Why did You not send us a Messenger so we would have followed Your signs and been among the believers. But when the Truth came to them from Us, they said, Why has he [Muḥammad] not been given the like of what Moses was given? But did they not reject what Moses had been given before, saying, Those are a pair of sorceries mutually supporting each other [and adding], We reject both of them. [cf. also 34.Saba':31, "And those who disbelieve [in the Qur'ān] said, We shall never believe in this Qur'ān nor in that [Revelation] which came before it."] Say to them [O Muḥammad], Then you bring another Book from Allah which would give better guidance than these two [the Bible and the Qur'ān] and I will follow that one, if you are speaking the truth. (28.al-Qaṣaṣ:47-49)

Since these passages date from different contexts during a prolonged and bitter controversy of the Meccans with the Prophet, it would be difficult to fully assess the stance of the Meccans on the issue for the period immediately preceding the advent of the Prophet's mission, for, as the Qur'ān itself says, they said certain things only for the sake of controversy. (Indeed, later in Madina, when Jewish-Muslim enmity became solidified, even the Madinese Jews, at the instance of the pagans, declared the pagan Arab religion to be superior to Islam! [4.an-Nisā':51]). Nevertheless, this much is clear; at least some Meccan Arabs were looking for a new religion and a new Scripture which should bestow a certain distinction upon them vis-à-vis the old communities, and they were generally disinclined to accept the earlier Scriptures: "If We had sent it [the Qur'ān] down upon some non-Arab and he had recited it to them, they would not have believed in it" (26.ash-Shu'arā':198); again, "If we had made it a non-Arab Qur'ān, they would have said, Why are its verses not clearly set forth? What, non-Arab and Arab? Say, 'It is a guidance and cure for those who believe'" (41.Fuṣṣilat:43-44). In the phrase "the Arab Qur'ān," we should, I think, see

something more than language and nationalism, but *what* is not easy to say; the Arabs themselves probably had only the vaguest ideas of what they wanted, although on the negative side they were much more precise. From the persistent demands of the Meccan leaders during their controversy with the Prophet (10.Yūnus:15; 17.al-Isrā':73 ff.) that he change the Qur'ānic teaching, it is also clear that they wanted him to give some place between God and man in his system to their gods. This will make intelligible why they rejected the Mosaic religion, and also why they would not consider Jesus to be superior to their gods.

Let us now consider the position of the Prophet himself. From the times when the earlier prophets begin to be referred to in the Qur'ān, the Prophet is convinced of the identity of his message with theirs: "This is in the earlier scrolls—the scrolls of Abraham and Moses" (87.al-A'lā:18-19). These "scrolls," i.e., written revelations, are again referred to in 53.an-Najm:33-37: "Did you see the one who turned his back? He gave a little [of his wealth] and then ran dry. Does he possess a knowledge of the unseen, so he can see? Or, has he not been told of what is in the scrolls of Moses and of Abraham who fulfilled [his undertaking]?" These passages do not, of course, imply that the Prophet knew these scrolls, nor even that he had seen them. (These two are among the very few passages [which probably indicates that there was already a native Arab prophetology] where the term "scrolls" has been used for revealed documents; elsewhere it is applied to the "Heavenly Archetype" of all Revelation or to the deed-sheets of men which will be presented to them on the Last Day.) Later the word "Book" is used and is applied almost exclusively throughout the Meccan period to the "Book of Moses" as a forerunner of the Qur'ān. Also, from the first references to earlier prophets, the Qur'ān uses certain purely Arab figures—the prophets of the tribes 'Ād and Thamūd—in addition to Biblical figures. Jesus (19.Maryam:30) and other New Testament personalities do not seem to be referred to in the first Meccan period but appear from the second period onward, while the gospel is mentioned only once in Mecca. (Why the Gospel hardly appears in Meccan period while the "Book of Moses" appears very frequently is a problem for which there is no satisfactory explanation so far, given the fact that Christianity was widespread in Arabia.) These facts also corroborate our statement that the Prophet had little or no acquaintance with earlier Scriptures in the first four years of his Prophetic career.

When opposition starts against the Prophet's theses—that God is one, that the poor of society must not be allowed to flounder, and that there is a final Day of Judgment—numerous detailed stories about the earlier prophets are repeated in the Qur'ān. There can be little doubt that the Prophet heard these stories during discussions with certain unidentified people, and the Meccans themselves were not slow to point this out (25.al-Furqān:4-5; 16.an-Nahl:103). Muḥammad (PBUH) insisted, nevertheless, that they were revealed to him.

He was, of course, right. For, under the impact of his direct religious experience, these stories became *revelations* and were no longer mere tales. Through this experience, he cultivated a direct community with earlier prophets and became their direct witness: "You were not [O Muḥammad!] upon the western side when we decreed to Moses the Commandment, nor were you of those witnessing [at the time]. But We raised up [many] generations [afterwards] who have lived too long [to keep the original experiences alive]. Neither were you a dweller among the Midianites" (28.al-Qaṣaṣ:45). Not only were the points and lessons of those stories transformed through revelation but often their content as well. Shu'aib is represented as admonishing his people against fraudulent forms of commerce—which was Muḥammad's (PBUH) problem at Mecca; Noah is seen rejecting the demands of the

powerful in his community that he dissociate himself from his socioeconomically weak followers before the powerful would join his religion—a situation which, of course, Muḥammad (PBUH) himself was facing in Mecca. And so on.

Because of this spiritual community with earlier prophets through his revelatory experience, Muḥammad (PBUH) was absolutely convinced of the identity of the Messages of all prophets. All Scriptures stem from and are parts of a single Source, the Heavenly Archetype called "The Mother of Books" and "The Hidden Book." This being the case, it is necessary to believe in all revealed books and Muḥammad (PBUH) is made to declare in the Qur'ān: "Say: I believe in any and every Book that God has revealed" (42.ash-Shūrā:15). Indeed, the term "the Book" is often used in the Qur'ān not to denote any specific scripture but as a generic term for the totality of revealed scriptures. It was, then, absolutely natural for Muhammad (PBUH) to expect that all communities should believe in the Qur'ān, just as he and his followers believed in all the Books. It is true that the Qur'ān repeatedly emphasizes (16.an-Naḥl:103; 26.ash-Shu'arā':195; 39.az-Zumar:28; 41.Fuṣṣilat:3, etc.) that the Qur'ān is revealed in "clear Arabic," but this emphasis is addressed especially to the Arab Meccans; otherwise, the truth of a scripture is not circumscribed by being revealed in any particular language.

Let us now consider a different dimension of this issue. From the Qur'ān it is abundantly clear that there were, among the followers of Judaism and (whether orthodox or not) of Christianity, some who affirmed the truth of the Prophet's mission and, in fact, encouraged him in the face of Meccan opposition. History tells us next to nothing about them⁴; nor do we know whether these are the same persons with whom the Prophet held discussions. The Qur'ānic references to them, however, are clear evidence of the presence of Messianism in these circles. In 26.ash-Shu'arā':192 ff., we have, "Truly it [the Qur'ān] is Revelation from the Lord of the world, brought down by the Trusted Spirit upon your heart, that you may be one of the warners, in a clear Arabic tongue. It is, indeed, in the Scriptures of the ancients. Was it not a sign for them [the Meccans] that it is known to the learned of the children of Israel?" They are invoked again and again by the Qur'ān as witnesses to the truth of Muḥammad's (PBUH) prophethood, being "people whom We had already given the Book," "people to whom the Book or Knowledge had already been given," "people of Knowledge" and "people of Admonition," through the second and third Meccan periods. Even when the Prophet himself, during periods of intense pressure and trial because of opposition, seemed occasionally to lose hope and wonder whether, after all, he should go ahead with his movement, the Qur'ān asks him to seek solace and support from "the people who recite the [previous] Book" (10.Yūnus:94) and not to become a party to the polytheists after "clear signs" and the divine teaching have come to him, which he had never anticipated before his Call (28.al-Qaṣaṣ:85-89).

If God is one and His Message is also one and fundamentally indivisible, surely mankind should be one community. And, particularly in view of the affirmation of his mission by followers of earlier religions, the Prophet hoped to unify the multiplicity of these religions into one single community, *under his teaching and on his terms*; but

⁴ The Muslim tradition usually refers to a delegation of Christians who came from Abyssinia and accepted Islam, but the basis of these reports is uncertain. These verses are for the most part Meccan, but some seem to be early Madinan. In Madina, the tradition refers to certain Jewish converts, the most prominent being 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām, who, however, is often brought in by Muslim commentators in contexts which are clearly Meccan. This whole matter is shrouded in obscurity since the Qur'ān never mentions any names. See Ibn Ishaq, *Sīra*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥy al-Dīn 'Abd al-Hamīd, (Cairo, 1356/1937), vol. I, p. 320, lines 15 ff.

as his knowledge about differences among earlier religions and sects gradually increased, he soon realized that this was not to be. This undoubtedly set him a theological problem of the first order, which the Qur'ān continued to treat until deep into the Madinan period when the Muslim community was formally established as the "median" and "ideal" community. We are not here concerned with the purely theological aspect of the phenomenon of the diversity of religions in the Qur'ān, but rather with the effect upon the development of the Muslim community of the Prophet's perception of this diversity.

The jolt to the Prophet's idea of a single religious community did not come so much in Madina, as Hurgronje states, as well back in Mecca. We again know very little about who the precise agents were, for the Qur'ān, as usual, names no persons. According to Ibn Ishāq's biography of the prophet, Meccan leaders had once sent a team of two men to solicit the help of the Jews of Madina in their controversies with the Prophet and this team had returned with three questions to be put to him.⁵ The Qur'ānic accounts, however, assume much more than this and strongly suggest something like direct controversies between the Prophet and representatives of earlier religions. In these controversies, which evidently demonstrated differences not only with Muslims but also within the earlier religions, the followers of these religions are called *al-aḥzāb* (pi. of *ḥizb*, partisans, sectarians), i.e., those who split up the community of religion. This term had earlier been employed by the Qur'ān on three occasions⁶ to refer to ancient nations or peoples who had rejected their messengers and were consequently destroyed by God. In one of these passages (38.Ṣād:11-13), Meccans are invited to ascend to the heavens and witness "there a host of destroyed *aḥzāb*," which are identified as the peoples of Noah, 'Ād, Pharaoh, Thamūd, Lot, and the "people of the thicket," the Midianites. The underlying sense in this usage seems to be of "counter-groups" who oppose the divine message, but then are themselves destroyed.

Every prophet's message, then, acts like a watershed upon people to whom it is addressed; it has the effect of dividing them into the categories of truth and falsehood. But in a later use of *aḥzāb*, it means the splitting up into sects of an originally unitary truth. In 19.Maryam:37, it refers to sectarian differences among the followers of Jesus and his message, differences which distorted his teaching, and the idea grows strong in the Qur'ān, about Jews and Christians in particular but also in general, that "people come to differ only after clear knowledge has come to them" (10.Yūnus:19, 93; 45.al-Jāthiyah:17; 2.al-Baqarah:213; 30.ar-Rūm:9; 98.al-Bayyinah:4, etc.). Indeed, the original message gets lost over a long passage of time and the sentence, "too long a period has lapsed over them" is repeated (21.al-Anbiyā':44; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:45; 57.al-Ḥadeed:16). It becomes an unusually tormenting thought in the Qur'ān and the Muslims are repeatedly warned—in both Madina and Mecca—against such division, where "every sect rejoices in what it has" (30.ar-Rūm:32; also 3.Āli 'Imrān:103, 105; 6.al-An'ām:159). In this connection, the words *aḥzāb* and *shiya'* (pi. of *shī'a*, also meaning a party or a sect) are used in the same sense.

When (in the third Meccan period) *aḥzāb* is applied to the earlier communities contemporary with Muḥammad (PBUH), it probably has both meanings discussed above: of sects which resulted from splits over the earlier messages, and also (perhaps because of) the splits of counter-groups against the message of Muḥammad (PBUH).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11, n. 3.

⁶ For reference to these earlier passages I am indebted to Rudi Paret's *Der Koran* (Stuttgart, 1971), p. 233, lines 23 ff.

In three passages both are sharply distinguished from “those We had given the Book,” who believe in the Qur’ān as well. The first passage, where the term *aḥzāb* is not applied, states, "And even thus have We sent down the Book to you [O Muḥammad!]; so those to whom We had [already] given the Book believe in it and some among these people also believe in it" (29.al-‘Ankabūt:47). The second passage is more explicit, "Those to whom We had [already] given the Book rejoice at what is being sent down to you, but among the sectarians [*al-aḥzāb*] there are those who reject part of it" (13.ar-Ra‘d:36).⁷ This verse suggests that the "sectarians" did not object to the whole Qur’ān but to a part of it. In the third passage we are told, "And what of him who stands on [the basis of] a firm conviction from his Lord, and then a Witness from Him [the Angel of Revelation] recites it and [already] before it is the Book of Moses as an example and a mercy. It is those [i.e., who have the Book of Moses] who believe in it [the Qur’ān]; but whosoever among the sectarians disbelieves in it, Fire shall be his destiny" (11.Hūd:17).

The term *aḥzāb* is used once more, but much later, in the middle of the Madinan period (33.al-Aḥzāb:20-22), to mean the various parties and tribes (the Quraysh and Bedouin tribes and Jews) which had formed a confederacy to war on Madina in the "Battle of the Ditch." But although the Qur’ān no longer uses this term to mean the earlier communities who rejected the Prophet, it continues to speak to them, now as supporting the Prophet and believing in him, now as rejecting or opposing him—in both the Meccan and the Madinan periods. In 17.al-Isrā’:107, referring to the Meccans, the Qur’ān declares: "Say to them (O Muḥammad!), Whether you believe in it [the Qur’ān] or not, those who have been given the Knowledge [Revelation] before it, when it [the Qur’ān] is recited to them, fall upon their faces in prostration. And they say, Glory be to our Lord! Our Lord's Promise has been fulfilled [in Muḥammad]. And they fall upon their faces weeping and it increases them in God-fearingness." We have it again in 6.al-An‘ām:114: "Those to whom We have [already] given the Book know that it [the Qur’ān] has been sent down from your Lord in truth—so be not one of the doubters." On the other hand, we are also told, in 6.al-An‘ām:20, "Those to whom We have [already] given the Book, know it as they know their own sons—those who have lost their own souls because they would not believe [in the Qur’ān]." Both these assertions are repeated in Madina (e.g., 2.al-Baqarah:121, 144-46, particularly the latter), where a protracted religious and political controversy is waged against the Jews, many of whom are accused of unbelief in the Qur’ān and infidelity to their own scriptures as well.

Just as Muḥammad (PBUH) follows upon and inherits the missions of earlier prophets and the Qur’ān receives the legacy of earlier Revelations, so does the Muslim community now inherit the place of earlier communities. This development, too, takes place in Mecca. In 6.al-An‘ām:88-92, after enumerating eighteen earlier prophets from Noah and Abraham to New Testament personalities, the Qur’ān says:

That is God's guidance; He guides therewith whomsoever He wills of His servants, and if they [the earlier Prophets] had been idolaters their deeds would have come to naught. They are those whom We gave the Book, the Decision, and Prophethood; so if these people disbelieve in it, We have already commissioned it to a people [i.e., Muslims in general, particularly those who already had an earlier Revelation] who do not disbelieve in it. They [the earlier prophets] are those whom God has guided; so

⁷ These verses are mostly, if not wholly, Meccan: Nöldeke-Schwally thinks that all mentions of "those to whom we had given the Book" who are said to believe in the Qur’ān as well are Meccan passages (*op. cit.*, p. 155).

follow their guidance. . . They have not measured God with His true measure when they said, God has not sent down anything on any mortal. Say, Who sent down the Book that Moses brought as a light and a guidance to mankind? You [or they] write it out into parchments, revealing them, yet hiding much [thereof] and you were taught that which neither you nor your fathers had known. . . And this [the Qur'ān] is a Book We have sent down, blessed and confirming that which was before it, that you may warn the Mother of Towns [Mecca] and its environs.⁸

⁸ This passage, as its context indicates, is Meccan and is basically directed against the pagans, but certain points have raised difficulties for commentators, both Muslims and Westerners. Who are meant by the words "If these people disbelieve in it" and "We have already commissioned it to a people who do not disbelieve in it"? According to the traditional Muslim view, the "people who disbelieve" are Meccans, which may well be correct since the context is Meccan; but "the people to which it has been commissioned" cannot be either Madinese Muslims or the earlier prophets themselves, as the traditional view holds. Richard Bell thought that the "disbelieving people" were Madinese Jews and the "people to whom it is entrusted [or commissioned]" were Muslims, and that the verse is not Meccan but Madinese. R. Paret notes that the first and the last parts of the verse fit Meccan pagans while the middle fits Jews; but regards the entire verse as a well-connected whole. This interpretation in itself appears plausible, but the verse is obviously not Madinese but Meccan. In the light of our argument on the meaning of *ahzāb* and the Meccan—Jewish communications on the subject of Muhammad's (PBUH) mission, the most natural way to understand the verse is that it is addressed to the pagan Meccans who were supported by Jews and hence the passage hits at the Jews as well. On this basis 6.al-An'ām:92, which has given considerable trouble to commentators and scholars, also becomes intelligible. It makes three related points: that those Meccans who deny the possibility of Revelation to a human have misconceived God's power; that several Meccans themselves have learnt much from the Mosaic Revelation which neither they nor their fathers had known before; and that Jews who copy down the Mosaic Revelation hide a large part of it (the vulgate has "which *you* write down . . . making it public but hiding much" in the second person plural, but there is a variant reading in the third person plural, adopted by al-Ṭabarī, which might be an attempt to smooth out the text).

Bell (*The Qur'ān Translated*, Edinburgh, I, 124) believes this passage to be Madinan—in spite of the fact that its first and last parts are obviously Meccan and could have been addressed only to the Meccan pagans—and regards the words which accuse the Jews of copying down Scriptures in such a manner that they hide part of the Scriptures as being an even later insertion by the Prophet. Whereas it is true that in its controversies with Jews at Madina the Qur'ān repeatedly accuses them of not representing their Scriptures faithfully, this accusation is by no means limited to Madina. Earlier We drew attention to the fact that some Meccans had heard stories of earlier prophets from the "People of the Book" and had wished for a revealed Book of their own, and that they had not accepted the Mosaic teaching. This is precisely what the latter part of 6.al-An'ām:92 is pointing to by saying "And you have been taught [by the People of the Book] what neither you nor your fathers knew." Further, when the Prophet became aware of the differences among the "People of the Book" themselves, he became convinced that whereas the Scriptures were true, these were being manipulated and misrepresented by their votaries. In 29.al-'Ankabūt:48 the Qur'ān states, "Before it [the Qur'ān], you [O Muhammad!] did not use to recite a Book *nor were copying it down with your right hand*, for then those who do not accept you would have been suspicious." This verse has three ideas, the most prominent of which is the reply to the Meccans' charges that the Prophet was being taught the stories of older prophets. The reply is that, had the Prophet been reciting these stories or writing them before his Call, there might have existed some ground for such suspicion. The second idea, also repeated in the Qur'ān (28.al-Qaṣaṣ:86; 42.ash-Shūrā:52), is that Muḥammad (PBUH) had never anticipated or made any deliberate effort at being a Prophet, but was called to it suddenly. But, thirdly, there is in the words "nor were you copying it down with your right hand" an obvious sarcasm against the scribes who wrote the old Scriptures and did not represent them faithfully. This idea is, however, squarely Meccan. Also, the verses that follow are clearly Meccan. In order to keep consistent his view that this entire passage is Madinan, Bell takes the phrase "the Mother of the Towns," which the Prophet is exhorted to warn, to refer to Madina, against the weight of all traditional Muslim authorities, who take it to refer to Mecca. Still, this particular substitution of Madina for Mecca is one of the lesser eccentricities of Richard Bell!

At the point where Muḥammad (PBUH) clearly realizes that his position is in the direct line of prophetic succession to earlier prophets and that the pagan Arabs are wrong in their idolatry and other communities are wrong in their schismatic character, the Qurʾān describes Muḥammad (PBUH) as a *ḥanīf*, a true monotheist, and his religion as the "straight religion [*ad-dīn al-qayyim*]" from which paganism and sectarianism are represented as deviations: "So set your face [O Muḥammad!] to the straight religion" (30.ar-Rūm:43); "So set your face to the religion as a *ḥanīf*; this is the primordial religion on which God has originated mankind... . This is the straight religion ... and do not be [O Muslims!] among those who associate [partners with God], nor among those who split up their religion into sects, each sect rejoicing in what it has" (30.ar-Rūm:30-32).

That this religion of pure monotheism which is pre-eminently attributed to Abraham was primarily developed against the cult of pagan deities is obvious from 12.Yūsuf:37-40, where Joseph declares to his two prison companions, "I have abandoned the religion of a people who do not believe in [one] God and disbelieve in the Last Day and now follow the religion [*milla*] of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is not ours to associate anything with God O my prison companions! are several lords better or one all-powerful God?... He has commanded that you not serve except Him alone: this is the straight religion." The image of Abraham as the arch-monotheist is asserted against the Meccan pagans toward the end of the Meccan period where (*suras* 6.al-Anʿām and 12.Yūsuf) the stories of earlier prophets except Abraham have ceased and where, in 6.al-Anʿām:74 ff., after detailing how Abraham arrived at the idea of monotheism after eliminating astral gods one by one, Abraham says:

O my people! I am quit of what you associate [with God]; I have set my face as a *ḥanīf* unto Him who created the heavens and the earth and I am not one of those who associate [partners with God]. And [when] his people argued with him, he said, Do you argue with me concerning God when He has already guided me? I do not fear what you associate with Him Why should I fear what you associate [with Him] while you do not fear that you have associated [others] with God without any authority that God may have sent upon you—which of the two parties is, then, more deserving of security, if you only knew? (6.al-Anʿām:78-81)

This is followed by a list of seventeen prophets, including Moses and Jesus, in a passage which states that if these men had committed *shirk*, all their deeds would have come to nothing.

It is, then, in a solidly Meccan context with pagans as its addressees that the Qurʾān develops its image of Abraham as the super-prophet and arch-monotheist; and not in Madina as a consequence of controversies with Jews, as Hurgronje and Schwally say. But the line of monotheistic succession having come from Abraham, through earlier prophets, to Muḥammad (PBUH), must be kept straight *without any deviation*. The earlier monotheistic communities—"the People of the Book"—have apparently not been able to keep this line straight; otherwise, there would not have been sectarian splits.

In the light of this, it is possible to understand afresh the meaning of the much-debated term *ḥanīf*. In the Qurʾān it probably means not just a monotheist, but a straight, non-deviant monotheist. Neither the pagans nor the "People of the Book" were *ḥanīfs* in this sense, and hence it is on the basis of this straight, Abrahamic monotheism (running, of course, through other prophets to Muḥammad (PBUH)) that

the Qur'ān criticizes not only pagans but the earlier communities as well. Towards the end of *sura* 6, we read:

Those people who have split up their religion and become sects, you have nothing to do with them; their affair is up to God and He will tell them what they had been doing... . Say [O Muhammad]: As for me, my Lord has guided me to a straight path, an upright religion, the religion of Abraham who was a straight monotheist [*ḥanīf*] and he was no associationist [or idolater]. Say: My prayer, my religious exercises, my living, and my dying are for God, the Lord of all creation. He has no associate; with this I have been commanded and I am the first of those who surrender themselves. (6.al-An'ām:159-163)

Important developments do take place in Madina but they do not consist in the Qur'ān abandoning Moses and Jesus to Jews and Christians and linking the Muslim community directly and exclusively with Abraham. This would have destroyed the whole idea of the straight line of prophetic succession as *ḥanīfism*, and the basic unity of religion. Indeed, Moses and Jesus loom large in Madina, just as in Mecca. Also, the earlier Revelation continues to figure and the Qur'ān upholds itself both as its confirmer and preserver. In *sura* 5, after talking about the Mosaic Revelation and the Gospel, the Qur'ān says:

And to you [O Muhammad!] We have sent down the Book in truth as a confirmer of the Books [i.e., all Revelations] that have come before it and as a protector over them...For each one of you [Jews, Christians, Muslims], We have appointed a path and a way, and if God had so willed, He would have made you but one community but [He has not done so in order] that He try [all of] you in what He has given you; wherefore compete with one another in good deeds... . (5.al-Mā'idah:48)

One important development in Madina, then, is that earlier Revelations, the Torah and the Gospel, are mentioned by name, whereas in Mecca the Gospel is hardly referred to (although, of course, Jesus and other New Testament personalities are certainly there), while the Mosaic Revelation is always called "the Book of Moses," which repeatedly appears as the forerunner of the Qur'ānic Revelation.

A second major development—as is also apparent from 5.al-Mā'idah:48—is the recognition of three separate communities: Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The Meccan terms "sects" and "parties" (*aḥzāb* and *shiya'*), used for the earlier communities, disappear in Madina and are replaced with the term *Umma* or the collective term "the People of the Book" (*ahl al-kitāb*), and each *Umma* is recognized as having its own laws. Far from seeking refuge in Abraham in order to validate the Muslim community, the Qur'ān now recognizes in some fashion the validity of the Jewish and the Christian communities. Still, the Muslim community remains the "ideal" or "best" community (*khair ummatin*), the "Median community [*Umma wasat*]," which, over against the "tendentiousness" of the others, is the true descendant of the Abrahamic line. The "People of the Book" are still invited to Islam, however: "O People of the Book! Our Messenger has come to you now, making matters clear to you, after a long interval between messengers, lest you should say, There has not come to us any bearer of good tidings nor a warner; now a bearer of good tidings and a warner has come" (5.al-Mā'idah:19).

We should like to end by discussing briefly the position of the Ka'ba or the *Haram*, with which both the pilgrimage and the direction of prayer are concerned.

I find puzzling the statement of Nöldeke-Schwally⁹ that the Ka‘ba is not mentioned in the Qur’ān at all in Mecca after the very early *sura* 106. The word Ka‘ba itself is, of course, not used in Mecca at all and appears in the Qur’ān fairly late in Madina (5.al-Mā’idah:2, 95). But if the statement implies, as it apparently does, that the Sanctuary as such went out of the Prophet's attention until the pilgrimage was installed as a Muslim's duty, it is obviously wrong. In 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:57, commenting upon the expressed fears of some Meccans that if they accepted the Prophet's teaching, they would be kidnapped from their homes by his opponents, the Qur’ān says that the territory had been recognized as secure, with the consequence that people were not only secure from attack but traded freely there, resulting in prosperity and abundance. This statement tallies exactly with what had been said earlier in *sura* 106.Quraysh. This statement about the sacred character of Mecca—thanks to the Sanctuary—is repeated in 29.al-‘Ankabūt:67, and the Qur’ān complains that, despite its sanctity, people were being kidnapped all around it. Finally, in 7.al-A‘rāf:29 ff., dating from the last years of the Prophet in Mecca, the Qur’ān criticizes the practices of certain pagan Arabs (including some Meccans) who performed the circumambulation of the Ka‘ba naked and fasted during the pilgrimage. Nöldeke-Schwally also affirms this,¹⁰ following the overwhelming reports of Muslim Qur’ān-commentators.

This evidence shows that the Prophet not only had never given up belief in the sanctity of the Ka‘ba but was involved in the pilgrimage ritual till late in Mecca and was, indeed, interested in certain reforms of the ritual. Reform of the pilgrimage and other religious and social reforms, however, required political control of the Meccan situation, and Meccan opposition to him was in no small measure based on the political implications of his message.

Nor is there the slightest hint that after his arrival in Madina the Prophet had given up the Ka‘ba in favor of any other shrine.¹¹ Indeed, all the evidence is to the contrary. That the Prophet had decided to emigrate to Madina to coerce Mecca to accept Islam is clear from the pact he made with the Madinese in order to come to Madina, which was called the "Pact of War [i.e., with Mecca]." All his political actions after his arrival in Madina—harassment and waylaying of the Meccan trade caravans—are really intelligible only in the light of his over-riding concern to take Mecca—if not through peaceful means, then through economic pressure or, if necessary, war. And within one year of the Prophet's arrival in Madina the Ka‘ba was formally declared the pilgrimage shrine of Islam. This concern for Mecca and the Ka‘ba can be understood only in the light of the religious, economic, and political ascendancy over the Arabs exercised by the shrine and the tribe of Quraysh. What, then, it may be asked, could the Prophet and Islam have gained by placating a handful of Madinese Jews—no matter how important they may have been locally—at the expense of Mecca and the rest of the Arabs?

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹¹ That the Ka‘ba had been built by Abraham was believed by some Arabs even before Islam. Nöldeke-Schwally (p. 147, n. 3) states, without any specific evidence, that this belief was probably the creation of Arab Jews and Christians, and Christians are even said to have taken part in the pilgrimage to the shrine. In any case, in view of this and the evidence we have given of the continued central place of the Ka‘ba in the Qur’ān, the view of Hurgronje and Schwally that 16.an-Nahl:36-38 are Madinan must be rejected.

There was a gap of nearly six months between the ordaining of pilgrimage to the Ka‘ba and the change of the direction of prayer (*qibla*) there from Jerusalem, which occurred just before what Western scholars call "the break with the Jews." Now, if the break with the Jews was so important, as many Western scholars believe, so fraught with ideological implications for Islam and changing its very orientation, how to explain this gap of six months between the two events? The logic of such an Islam-shaking break would require that both occur simultaneously, or at least nearly so. On the view I am propounding, the pilgrimage ordinance had nothing to do with Jews or any break with them; there was a continuity between the Meccan and Madinan periods of Islam and the association of Islam with the Ka‘ba was made official in Madina because the Muslim community was now no longer in Mecca but in Madina, even though due to the hostility of the Meccans the Muslims had to wait several years to actually perform pilgrimage.

On the question of the *qibla*, however, the continuity was on Jerusalem, not on the Ka‘ba. The Prophet had chosen Jerusalem as the *qibla*, not in Madina, but many years before in Mecca itself, as Ibn Ishāq tells us.¹² He adds, though, that the Prophet faced Jerusalem in prayer in such a way that he simultaneously faced the Ka‘ba as well. It is obvious from this that the Madinan Jews had nothing to do with the Prophet's choice of Jerusalem as the *qibla* in the first place. It is possible that the choice had something to do with the great sanctity attached to the Mosaic teaching in the Qur‘ān, but it seems to me more probable that this choice was made as a protest against Meccan persecution of Muslims, who were not allowed to pray in the Sacred Mosque in the early years. Ibn Ishāq also tells us that when congregational prayers were first introduced into Islam, Muslims used to pray in a hiding place outside Mecca for fear of persecution and that once, when a party of Meccans discovered the Muslims praying there, they jeered at them, upon which a fight ensued wherein Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqās seriously wounded a Meccan with a camel's shoulder-blade: "This was the first blood ever shed after the promulgation of Islam."¹³ Muslims could not pray in the Sacred Mosque until well after the Abyssinian Emigration, when ‘Umar became Muslim and successfully fought for his right to pray there.¹⁴ Even after that Muslims normally prayed in a private house for fear of trouble, although the Prophet himself did pray sometimes in the Sanctuary.

After the Hijra to Madina, Jerusalem continued to be the *qibla* in Muslim prayers. The change from Jerusalem to the Ka‘ba, therefore, meant a break in practice—unlike the pilgrimage—and had to wait until the official place of the Ka‘ba as the central Islamic shrine was well settled in the Islamic system. After this official act made it clear where the Islamic center of gravity lay, the change in the *qibla* was effected. It is to be noted that, as the Qur‘ān tells us (beginning at 2.al-Baqarah:142: "The stupid ones among the people will ask what has diverted them from the *qibla* they have been used to"), trouble over this change was expected not so much from the Jews as from the "hypocrites," who would seize this opportunity to sew dissension among the ranks of the Muslims. We do not wish to deny the importance of the troubled Muslim-Jewish relations but do want to emphasize that the source of the change in the *qibla* lies elsewhere. Muslim-Jewish relations were troubled from the very beginning of the

¹² Ibn Ishāq, *op. cit.*, I:318, line 12 ff.; also II:47, line 3 ff., where it is stated that when the Madinese went to Mecca to conclude with the Prophet the agreement concerning his Emigration to Madina, their leader al-Barā’ ibn Ma‘rūr, refused to face Jerusalem instead of the Ka‘ba when the party prayed on their way to Mecca, while the rest, following the Prophet's practice at Mecca, faced Jerusalem.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I:275, lines 8 ff.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I:364, lines 14 ff.

Prophet's arrival in Madina, but these troubled relations by themselves need not have affected the *qibla* question; the Prophet could have kept Jerusalem as the *qibla* while disowning the Jews, just as he kept his Prophetic link with the Biblical prophetic tradition but disowned the Jews as true representatives of that tradition. We must, therefore, seek the real answer in something else, and that is the centrality of the Meccan shrine in the religion of Islam.

Finally, one must question the validity of the concept of the "break with the Jews" itself. There is no single special event or declaration or measure on the part of the Prophet or the Jews that can be taken as the unique referent of this hallowed phrase. We are sometimes told that the change of the *qibla* itself represents "the break with the Jews,"¹⁵ and that obviously begs the question. There were certainly protracted controversies with and criticisms of the Jews of Madina; when the Jews refused to become Muslims, they were recognized as a separate religious community but were asked not to aid the Muslims' opponents in wars—indeed, to help defend Madina against attacks—and they accepted the obligation. When this did not work out, they were expelled and, in the final phase, exterminated. But criticism of the Jews, their recognition as a community, and invitations to them to become Muslims ran concurrently and one cannot assign to them successive periods of time. Which of these phenomena constitutes "the break with the Jews"? Long after the removal of the Jews from Madina, the Qur'ān continues to criticize them on religious grounds, along with the Christians (e.g., 9.al-Tawbah:30).

¹⁵ Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh, 1970), p. 12, lines 22 ff.