PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAM IN THE CHRISTENDOMS

A Historical Survey

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Contents

Contents ..... **ii**

Acknowledgements ..... **vi**

Preface ..... **viii**

Abbreviations ..... **xiii**

Chapter 1. The rise of Christianity **1**

Sources for the historical Jesus 2

The New Testament documents 6

The Epistles of Paul 20

The non-Christian sources 22

Historical uncertainty 26

The Jerusalem Church 28

Paul and the rise of Gentile Christianity 30

Chapter 2. Challenges to the Christian faith: heresies and schisms **38**

Gnosticism 38

Mani and Manichaeism 46

The expansion of Christian faith and power 49

The Arian controversy 52

Apollinarianism 58

Nestorianism 59

Eutychianism 62

Chapter 3. The pre-Islamic Middle East **67**

The Persian empires 67

The Romans and the Middle East 69

The Arabs 77

The religious situation in Arabia 80

Christian and Jewish communities in Arabia 86

Chapter 4. The preaching of Islam 89

The Prophet Muhammad 89
The Qur'an 98
The marriages of the Prophet and Christian critics 100
Islamic expansion 107

Chapter 5. The Qur'anic view of Christian dogmas 111

Jesus and Christianity 111
The corruption of the Injil 119
The divinity of Christ and the Sonship issue 124
The Trinity 127
The question of Jesus' death 132

Chapter 6. Polemical encounters with Islam 139

Introductory remarks 139
The Oriental Christian polemic 143
John of Damascus 147
The dialogue of Patriarch Timothy I with Caliph Mahdi 156
The Person and the Incarnation of Christ 158
The incorruptibility of the Gospel 161
The status of Muhammad 162
The Apology of al-Kindi 166
The reply of al-Kindi 170
Muslim reactions to the Oriental Christian polemic 179

Chapter 7. Polemic in Byzantium, Muslim Spain and the Catholic West 184

The Byzantine polemic 184
Nicetas of Byzantium 186
The Holosphyros Controversy 190
Muslim Spain (Andalusia) and Christians 195
The martyrs of Cordova 197
The Catholic West and Islam 208

Chapter 8. The Christian counter-attack 212

The Reconquista 212
The Crusades 218

The First Crusade 224
The Second Crusade and Muslim counter-offensive 233

Chapter 9. The impact of the Crusades on Christian-Muslim relations 243

The perception of Islam during and after the Crusades 245
Peter the Venerable 257

Chapter 10. Attack from the East: the Mongols 265

The Christendoms and Islam on the eve of the Mongol conquests 265
The Mongol era of conquests 266
The Mongol Ilkhans and Western Christendom 280

Chapter 11.The changing perspectives on Islam 289

Ramon Lull 289
Roger Bacon 292
St Thomas Aquinas 296
William of Tripoli 302
Ricoldo da Monte Croce 303
John Wycliffe 306

Chapter 12. The Ottomans and the European response 309

A vision of peace between rival faiths 313
Christian Europe's perceptions of the Turkish threat 317
The image of Turks and Islam 319
The Lutheran impact 320
John Calvin and the Turks 325
The nature of the Turkish threat 329

Chapter 13. The Enlightenment and Islam 339

Some writers on Islam: Reland to Gibbon 342

Chapter 14. European colonialism and Islam 364

Christian missionaries and Muslims 374
Islam in serious studies 378

Chapter 15. Political changes in the twentieth century and Islam 398

Western perceptions of an Islamic threat 406

A positive change of attitude in Catholic and Protestant thought 410

Louis Massignon 410

The dialogical approach 413

The Vatican Council 413

The World Council of Churches 417

Concluding remarks 424

Notes 428

Bibliography 459

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to all those who have helped make the research for this book possible. First on my list is Knut Midgaard, Professor of Political Science at the University of Oslo, who a decade ago encouraged me to take up research that would contribute to a better understanding of the Muslim world of today. His inspiring and friendly contact led me to address a theme that I thought needed some in-depth work. He read and showed keen interest in the manuscript and contacted Dr Oddbjörn Leirvik in the Faculty of Theology (the University of Oslo) for his assessment of the draft manuscript. Dr Leirvik, a Christian theologian and an eminent scholar on Islamic philosophy and history, has been a pioneer in inter-faith dialogue in Norway. He read the entire manuscript and offered his valuable insights and comments, which I found to be of enormous significance in revising the text. I am profoundly indebted to him. However, Dr Leirvik bears no responsibility for any error of opinion, judgement or formulation; I alone am responsible for the contents.

To the eminent philosopher and sociologist Dag Österberg, who supervised my doctoral thesis in 1980s, I am indebted for his friendship and interest in my work. He read the manuscript at a difficult time when his spouse Maria Monsen's demise was imminent. I deeply cherish the memory of our departed friend. Professor Österberg, known to be a demanding and stern academic critic, came up with a laudatory assessment and recommended the book for publication. I am most grateful to him.

My Canadian friend, Dr Richard Daly, has corrected my punctuation and also substantially contributed to improving the text. I heartily thank him for his comradeship and encouragement to get the book published. My son, Kabir, also read parts of the manuscript and occasionally offered his advice and practical help. I thank him.

During my research I received excellent help from the librarians of the Norwegian Lutheran School of Theology, the Nobel Institute, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and the University Library, Oslo. I offer all of them my heartfelt thanks. I also thank Dr Katharina Brett (Cambridge), Mr Alex Wright

(London) and Mr Tore Gustavsson (NUPI) for their interest in the manuscript and their suggestions about its publications.

I am highly thankful to the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers and Translators Association for a stipend to support my research and the Research Council of Norway for the financial support to publish this book. I offer my personal thanks to Marit Ausland and Ruth Jenssen for their cordiality and helpfulness.

There are numerous friends whose social contact has meant a lot to me. I would like to specially mention Guttorm Flöistad, Liv Mjelde, Muhammad Ikram, Marjorie and Eyvin Lund, Liv and Knut Sparre, Hilde Lidén, Rolf Larsen, Anna and Iwo Gajda. I thank them all.

Preface

This book is a historical survey of the views and perceptions of Islam that emerged in the Christendoms from the eight-century to the present time. My main purpose has been to investigate the historical role of the polemical writings of Christian writers who confronted Islam as a religious and political enemy of Christianity on the basis of their own theological pre-commitments. Consequently, they succeeded in creating and reinforcing a distorted picture of Islam that became deeply rooted in the culture and psyche of the West, and had far reaching consequences for the relations between the power-blocs of Christianity and Islam since the Middle Ages.

During my research-work on this theme over a number of years, I became aware that, although, some prominent Western scholars and historians such as Sir Richard Southern, William Montgomery Watt, Albert Hourani, Norman Daniel, Bernard Lewis and Maxime Rodinson, have made enormous contribution to our understanding of the Western attitudes towards Islam in the Middle Ages, there was a need for a full survey of such views and perceptions over the thirteen-centuries of Christian-Muslim encounters. To meet this need, I undertook this historical survey, and have broadened both the subject matter and the time span for this book. In order to cover a wide range of issues within the compass of a single volume I also had to delimit the number of polemicists and other writers who wrote on Islam. However, instead of a cursory mention of some of the leading Christian apologists of the early centuries, I have given them more space within the following major geographical divisions and specific polemical tradition: (a) the Oriental Christians under Muslim rule, (b) the Byzantine Empire, (c) Catholic Spain under the Muslim rule, and (d) the Catholic West and Protestant countries. I have used original texts, wherever possible, for the exposition of these writers' views. In this way, these writers speak for themselves. My reason for following this approach was the conviction that we can best comprehend the history of Christian-Muslim encounters from the early times by examining concrete circumstances and particular writers whose views became influential in shaping the attitude of one religious tradition towards the other.

I have made frequent use of direct quotations from both the primary sources and the secondary literature. Moreover, I have tried to place anti-Islamic polemic within the context of major historical events and movements. On the other hand, I have not thought it appropriate to refer to all the vulgar calumnies of the apologists directed against the Prophet Muhammad and Islam, specific charges that might shock the sensibilities of a reader, no matter what his or her own orientation towards religion or the founders of religions. Still, it is possible that some may feel offended. But historical facts have to be faced as they stand. If I had omitted all such horrid views, I would have missed the whole point of explaining how the distorted images of Islam took shape.

Every writer is a product of the social and cultural matrix of his age. The polemical writers against Islam had their own theological presuppositions, convictions and concerns. In a like manner, such pre-commitments do not disappear in modern writers either. For instance, Professor Montgomery Watt, a priest of the Episcopal Church of Scotland, and Dr Norman Daniel, a committed Catholic, who have written with great sympathy and understanding a number of scholarly works on Islam, are also believers in the ultimate truth of Christianity, that is, its fundamental dogmas. As a result, when it comes to the question of judging the fundamental Islamic belief in the unity of Godhead, they measure it against the doctrine of the Trinity. Since the two theological doctrines seem to be at variance with each other, they uphold and justify the Trinity to be the truth about One God. It can readily be admitted that such a perspective, deeply subjective as it inevitably is, is difficult to avoid or overcome.

At the same time, I am aware that any attempt to answer questions about the truth or falsity of a belief or religious doctrine falls beyond the scope of historical analyses. But this does not mean that a historian should also avoid the question of how and why some belief arose and in what ways it has influenced society. What, to a believer, may be an unquestionable and sacrosanct truth is very often shaped and conditioned by social and cultural traditions. In the final analysis, such phenomena are a matter of belief, opinion and perspective, very often seconded by an appeal to authority in one shape or the other. I make no attempt to adjudicate between any opposing theological formulations, interpretations or claims. My approach to such controversial issues is primarily historical. Apart from pointing to some obvious

logical inconsistencies that I have come across in the arguments of polemicists, I have not analysed the rationale of their religious or theological presuppositions, nor have offered any alternate solutions. I have also intentionally avoided any discussion or critique of religious propositions in their various forms, which nevertheless can meaningfully be subjected to a rational scrutiny in analytic philosophy.

But the question of Christian theological presuppositions has an important bearing on historiography. Some modern Christian historians, who, in the last few decades have looked at the history of the misperceptions of Islam in the West, have been and are committed to the truth of Christian dogmas. Apart from giving traditional explanations about how these sacred dogmas have roots in the New Testament, and were given definitive formulations and shape by the Fathers of the Church, they simply gloss over modern research in the history of early Christianity that has thrown new light on how Christian dogmas came into existence. As such important bodies of research have remained confined only to a small community of specialists and academics, most readers are unaware of their existence. I find laudable the historical inquiries, approach and concerns that have solely focused on the theme of the Western attitudes to Islam. Nevertheless they fall short of presenting a full picture. My own view is that to understand Christian-Muslim encounters in the theological sphere, of which the polemical writings of the Christians form only a part, the reader should also have a clear historical picture of how the Christian dogmas evolved, because these became the theological presuppositions of Christian belief and the criteria for repudiating Islam and the prophetic mission of Muhammad. This also enables us to compare the standpoints of two religious traditions towards each other, and thus we can situate the polemical views in their proper place and settings. In this light, I have presented the history of the rise of Christianity and the conflicts in the early Church in the first two chapters of this book. These form an essential part of the present book for understanding the subsequent attitudes in the Christendoms towards other faiths. But they can also be read on their own. They deal with an immensely exciting area for study and reflection. Due to the shortage of space, I have presented only in a summary form the views and results of the research of some leading scholars on the history of the early Church. I believe that this information will enable readers to form their own opinion on how Christianity's doctrines evolved and assess their role as essential presuppositions that played a major part in shaping the outlook of

Christian apologists towards Islam in a wider historical perspective. It also shows how religious doctrines about the realm beyond the material world are conceived and shaped by human agency.

What are the Qur'anic views of Jesus and the Christian dogmas? Unfortunately, even some of those Western writers who have approached Islam with greater sympathy have hesitated to bring forth openly what the Qur'an says on the matter, while some others have offered their interpretation of the Qur'an with a view to defending Christian dogmas for which one finds little support in the Qur'an. Obviously, such views are motivated to defend and preserve what one believes to be the true dogmas. In Chapter 5, I have outlined the Qur'anic views of Jesus and some of the Christian dogmas. Whether or not one agrees with these views is the least of my concerns, but the Qur'anic texts are quite explicit on these points, and it is only fair that the Qur'anic perspective as an expression and culmination of pure monotheism should be judged on the basis of what it clearly proclaims.

It is commonly assumed that one's religious beliefs are not subject to any objective scrutiny or assessment, but that does not mean that common sense and basic principles of logic presupposed in all human thought and discourse should be discarded to uphold what to a believer may be a 'religious truth'. Neither am I advocating that the dogmas of one religious tradition in some esoteric way are superior to or better than the other. Intellectual honesty requires that a proposition that is logically inconsistent and contradictory should not be passed on as logically valid. In the case of both Christianity and Islam, an old monotheistic tradition is their common root and denominator. But how did the concept of One God and his attributes come to be looked at and interpreted in two religions, and set them up at odds against each other? Obviously, the emphasis had shifted to highlighting their differences, not their many similarities and agreements.

I have used biblical quotations from the Good News Bible and the Qur'anic quotations from the translations of the Qur'an by Muhammad Asad, Malik Ghulam Farid and Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall.

The spellings of Arabic names and words in English literature, both old and new, vary considerably. I have used the spelling Qur'an, but Muhammad and Muslim without diacritics. Italics are employed when Arabic words are considered technical, such as *Hijra*, *umma*, *dhimmi* and *Dār al-Islam*, or when used by other writers whom I have quoted. All dates are CE unless otherwise stated.

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Oslo, Norway
2005

Abbreviations

CCC	*Creeds, Councils and Controversies: documents illustrative of the history of the Church A.D. 337--461,* ed. J. Stevenson. London, 1973.
CDS	*The Crusades: A Documentary Survey*. James A. Brundage. Milwaukee, 1962.
CoC	*Chronicles of the Crusades: Eye-witness accounts of the wars between Christianity and Islam,* ed. E. Hallam. Surrey, 1997.
ECMD	*The Early Christian-Muslim Dialogue: A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries (632--900 A.D.),* ed. N.A. Newman. Hatfield, Pennsylvania, 1993.
MPG	Migne, *Patrologia Graeca-Latina*.
MPL	Migne, *Patrologia Latina.*
NE	*A New Eusebius: Documents illustrative of the history of the Church to A.D. 337,* ed. J. Stevenson. London, 1963.
Q.	The Qur'an

Chapter 1. The rise of Christianity

When Islam emerged as a major world-religion in the seventh century, Christianity, which had arisen six centuries earlier, had already spread far and wide. The rise and expansion of each was marked by the dynamic contents of its message, its promise and appeal to the people. Even though they shared a common cultural-religious heritage within the orbit of Oriental-Hellenistic civilisation, they also had mutually exclusive beliefs, which could not easily accommodate some of the fundamental beliefs of the other. During the religious and political struggles between them over the course of thirteen centuries, they developed their own perceptions and images of each other, and this historical interaction and bipolarity has heavily influenced their historical relations. But they also enjoyed good-neighbourly relations during periods of peace and tranquillity when their political and economic relations grew, and their social and cultural contacts resulted in mutual benefits and understanding.

How Islam has been perceived and portrayed by some leading Christian polemicists and writers in the Christendoms over a thousand-year span of history, and for what kind of reasons, are the focal concerns of this book. The image of Islam since its early days among the Christians was that of a rival and hostile religion because it did not acknowledge the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. Some theological presuppositions such as the unquestionable truth of Christian dogmas formed the basis of such a perspective. According to such views, how could Islam be a true religion when it refused to accept the God who had revealed himself in human form as Jesus Christ? Therefore, the conclusion drawn was that Islam was necessarily a false religion and its prophet an impostor. It was on the basis of such theological assumptions that Islam and the Prophet of Islam came to be portrayed. In this regard, the vilification of the Prophet Muhammad that the Christian polemicists unleashed still continues to astound any person who reads such material out of historical interest. The other predicament for the Christians in early encounters with Islam was how they could come to terms with the fact that within a short period a nascent faith had also carved out a huge empire that included the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire. This meant that Islam was not merely a rival and false religion, it was also a political enemy of Christian power. It was under these impulses that Christian writers gave

shape to the polemical images of Islam which have long marked the relationships between the two major religions and their civilisations. As far as Muslims were concerned, they had their image of Christianity and Jesus within the strict confines of the teachings of the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, which I discuss in Chapter 5. To achieve a balanced assessment of the issues, a preliminary understanding of the formation of the Christian faith is essential. A study of the perceptions of Islam in the Christendoms will be meaningful when we become aware how Christians have regarded their own religion, because it was on the basis of such presuppositions and underlying impulses that they formed the images of Islam. In this chapter I present a brief historical survey of the rise of Christianity in the light of modern research.

Sources for the historical Jesus

The central figure for Christians world over, and across Western culture, is Jesus of Nazareth. The biblical account of his life recounts that he was born in Bethlehem (Galilee) about 6 B.C. and lived in Nazareth until 27 when his public career began when he was baptised by John the Baptist. After his preaching for a year in Galilee, he went to Judaea. He was bitterly opposed by the Pharisees and also by the Sadducees. The Jewish religious establishment regarded him a social and religious rebel. His opponents, the chief Jewish priests and elders under the leadership of Judas, arrested him and brought him before the Roman governor of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, on charges of being a rebel. It would be more appropriate to say that in the eyes of the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, Jesus was looked upon as a political rebel, whereas for the Jews he was a social and religious rebel. He was tried and sentenced to crucifixion on the hill of Golgotha in Jerusalem. This tragic execution probably took place in 33, but many researchers do not rule out 29 or 30 either. Shortly after his death, some of his disciples believed that he had risen from the dead and that they had seen him. The belief in his resurrection soon spread among his followers.

This outline of Jesus' life is fairly well known. It is commonly believed by Christians to be a true account of his life because the evangelists under God's inspiration recorded these events in the Gospels of the New Testament. But from a historian's point of view, it is far from being a satisfactory biographical sketch

because the nature of the available sources does not permit us to present the life of Jesus in a sufficient empirical rigour. The task of a rational inquiry in the early history of Christianity, as Edward Gibbon pointed out, is one of great difficulty: 'The theologian may indulge the pleasing task of describing Religion as she descended from Heaven, arrayed in her native purity. A more melancholy duty is imposed on the historian. He must discover the mixture of error and corruption which she contracted in a long residence upon earth, among a weak and degenerate race of beings.'[1]

Most of the researchers during the past few generations have tried to sift whatever facts they could to construct the 'historical Jesus' from the legendary and miraculous material contained in the Gospels. The trans-historical events of the Resurrection and Ascension, if interpreted in a literal and not a figurative sense, proved to be of little historical value in writing his life-story. During the last three decades, many scholars have pursued the quest for the historical Jesus with great vigour, but comparatively little of their inquiries and conclusions have reached those holding traditional beliefs. However when they did, they deeply shocked the believers. The fact remains that by using a critical historical approach to the study of the Gospels, researchers are left with the minimum material to sketch out the historical Jesus. For instance, Professor Günther Bornkamm voicing this problem begins his well-known book *Jesus of Nazareth* with these words:

> No one is any longer in the position to write a life of Jesus. This is the scarcely questioned and surprising result of enquiry which for almost two hundred years has devoted prodigious and by no means fruitless effort to regain and expound the life of historical Jesus, freed from all embellishment of dogma and doctrine. At the end of this research on the life of Jesus stands the recognition of its own failure.[2]

The question as how to disentangle the historical record of events from what has become a part of religious confession is a highly problematic matter in Christology. Günther Bornkamm points out:

> We possess no single word of Jesus and no single story of Jesus, no matter how incontestably genuine they may be, which do not contain at the same time the

> confession of the believing congregation or at least are embedded therein. This makes the search after the bare facts of history difficult and to a large extent futile.[3]

It may come as a surprise to some that the question of a historical life of Jesus did not become an issue in historical research until the second-half of the eighteenth century. The matter first caught the attention of biblical scholarship after the Reformation. This change can be attributed to the growing specialisation of knowledge, a stricter historiographical approach to the use of sources in historical research, and also by the widespread empirically-oriented rebellion of the academic disciplines against the theological control exercised by the Church.[4] Before this period, however, the critical questions about the sources and authenticity of the Gospels were hardly raised. The normal practice of Christians to understand Jesus and the ancient world depicted in the Gospels hitherto was to follow naturalistic literalism. Naturalistic literalism is the practice of reading the Scriptures and accepting the events that are described there as the literal truth. This point is aptly taken up by the eminent Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner in his book *Jesus of Nazareth:*

> Neither the question 'What is the historical value of the Gospels?' nor its corollary 'What was the historical character of Jesus?' (as we understand the problem) were raised in the Middle Ages or in the time of the Reformation. Sochin (1525--1562) and Michael Servet (burnt at the instance of Calvin in 1553) both denied the divinity of Jesus and regarded him only as a prophet and the founder of a religion, but they found no problem in the actual life of Jesus, nor had they learnt how to apply method of historical criticism to the Gospels.[5]

The quest for the historical Jesus, which began over 200 years ago, is generally divided into four periods. The first quest began in the late eighteenth century and ended in the early years of the twentieth century. The major drive of it was to look beyond the New Testament portraits of Jesus and the traditions of the Church in order to discover the true identity and message of Jesus. The initial impetus to uncover the historical figure of Jesus rose on the wings of the anticlericalism inherent in Enlightenment thinking. This is evident in the work of German professor Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694--1768), whose 4,000-page manuscript *'Von dem Zweck Jesu*

und seiner Jünger' was published by Gotthold Lessing in 1778 after the author's death because Reimarus had feared the consequences of its publication during his life. Reimarus argued that there was a real distinction between all the writings of the disciples and apostles, and what Jesus might have said. In his view, the portrait of Jesus we find in the Gospels could not represent Jesus as he really was. He maintained that Jesus spoke as a Jew, reaffirming Judaism and its Law, having no intention of starting a new religion. He discarded the belief in any supernatural powers and miracles that were attributed to Jesus in the Gospels. Reimarus argued that Jesus looked upon himself as a political Messiah within the Jewish tradition. After the death of Jesus his disciples hatched a scheme to preserve his movement by stealing his body and proclaiming his resurrection. Reimarus's work caused turmoil, but it also ignited interest in the critical study of the New Testament which had far-reaching consequences.

Many other biblical scholars, such as K.F. Bahrdt and K.H. Venturini, who followed the rationalistic tradition of the post-Enlightenment era, were strongly motivated to overcome the supernatural and mythological interpretations of the Gospels in search for the historical Jesus. But all of them were hindered by the lack of sources. Professor Thomas W. Manson underlines the paucity of credible information that could throw some light on the person whose name has been taken by the largest religion in the world. He writes:

> Not a single chronological point can be fixed with certainty. The life of Jesus lasted probably between thirty and forty years: concerning at least twenty-eight of them we know precisely nothing at all. What information we have is mostly concerned with the public career of Jesus, that is, with the last period of his life, a period whose length is uncertain, but probably not less than one year nor more than about three. But there is not enough material for a full account of the Ministry.[6]

The English theologian and New Testament scholar Burnett Hillman Streeter concluded that apart from the forty days and nights which Jesus spent in the wilderness, of which we are told virtually nothing, all that is reported to have been said and done by him in the four gospels could not have taken more time than three

weeks.[7] In the following four sub-sections of this chapter, I outline the documentary sources and the evidence they provide us about Jesus as historical personage.

The New Testament documents

We start with the New Testament. Most of our information about Jesus comes from the four Gospels of the New Testament (the canonical Gospels) written several decades after his death. Their authors were not biographers and they did not aim to write history as we understand it. These were documents of a missionary character written with a view to proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, who was the Saviour of all. In fact, the time of the Gospels' composition has important connotations because it was a period when important developments had already taken place within the Christian movement. By the end of the second century unanimity had been reached in the Christian church that the four Gospels that are now in the New Testament were normative presentations of Jesus life. It was assumed that two of the evangelists, Matthew and John had been original disciples of Jesus and that their writings were their eyewitness accounts of the ministry of Jesus Christ. The other two were thought to have been close companions of the early disciples: Mark was an aid to Peter, and Luke the physician was a travelling companion of Paul. It was commonly believed that the four evangelists wrote independently of one another. The authenticity of the Scriptures as a true record of the life of Jesus was well recognised. 'But historical questions were subordinated to theological and devotional interests, and they were further blurred by the emergence of the four-fold view of Scripture, i.e., the belief that any given passage might have four meanings: the literal or historical plus the three symbolic meanings (tropological, or moral, allegorical, anagogical).'[8]

In the rationalistic intellectual climate of the nineteenth century, it was recognised that the four Gospels, and not the letters of Paul in the New Testament or the Creeds, should be used to reconstruct the life of Jesus. Afterwards the scope was further curtailed; only the synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke) were to be considered to provide us the primary sources but not the Gospel of John. By the end of the nineteenth century, there was agreement that Mark was the earliest of the three, which both Matthew and Luke used as a source. Since Mark was not a disciple, what was the source of his Gospel? It has been suggested that Mark, and afterwards

Matthew and Luke had used an earlier document called 'Q', which presumably stands for the German word *Quelle*, i.e. 'source'.

The German theologian David Friedrich Strauss of Tübingen University (1808--74) made a significant contribution to biblical studies with his book *Life of Jesus*, first published in 1835, which still continues to arouse great admiration. Albert Schweitzer calls it 'one of the most perfect things in the whole range of learned literature.'[9] He argued that the Gospels, on the basis of their supernatural elements and numerous contradictions, were unreliable. He saw the attempts to explain miracles rationally as mistaken, and suggested that they were to be regarded as mythical creations. His explanation of the role of myth in the miraculous narratives of the Gospels is important. In Schweitzer's words: 'The myth formed . . . the lofty gateways at the entrance to and at the exit from, the Gospel history; between these two lofty gateways lay the narrow and crooked streets of naturalistic explanation.'[10] For Strauss myth was not just simply the implication of nonreality, but rather a vehicle for the symbolic expression of a lofty truth. Joseph Klausner writes that Strauss 'regards the Gospel discrepancies as proofs that Gospels are not historical works, but rather historico-religious documents written by men with a deep sense of faith unable to describe actual events without letting their own and their contemporaries' religious feelings and ideas colour their statements.'[11] Strauss had arrived at the following conclusions:

First, none of the Gospel-writers was a witness of the events he narrated; these narratives were based on hearsay.

Second, all the stories about Jesus prior to his baptism are myths.

Third, the miracles did not take place. 'We must regard the Gospel miracles in the same way as we regard the miracles described in the historico-religious documents of the Greeks or Romans or Jews. In this age, belief in miracles was quite common. The Gospel miracles had their origin in the "legend-creating faith" (*mythenbildender Glaube*) of the first Christians, and in the natural desire to find in the doings of Jesus a fulfilment of the Hebrew Scripture prophecies, and to rank him higher than the prophets of Israel by showing how he both equalled and surpassed them.'[12]

Fourth, the Gospel of John, dominated by theological and apologetic interests, is inferior to the synoptic Gospels as a historical source.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, Protestant scholars wrote biographies of Jesus. The conservatives and liberals took different positions. Many of the conservatives practically ignored the nineteenth-century scholarship. They strongly advocated that historical Jesus was identical with the ecclesiastical image of the Christ. The liberals on the other held that the historical Jesus was totally different from that image. They also minimised the role of the miracles in the Gospels' narratives.

The twentieth century has seen some important developments and shifts in Christology. Following the work of Karl Lachmann and Johannes Weiss, it was widely accepted that of the synoptics, Mark's Gospel was written first, and that it was the primary source for constructing a chronology of Jesus' life. Wilhelm Wrede challenged this. He argued that even the earliest Gospel was not a simple historical narrative that recorded the events in the life of Jesus in chronological order but rather a collection of episodes affected by employment of his dogmatic device, the 'messianic secret'. Wrede also challenged the commonly held view of the messiahship of Jesus as represented in Mark. According to him, Jesus was a rabbi, a teacher and an eschatological prophet who expected the imminent end of the world. He was not a messiah; he never claimed to be one in his life. Charles C. Anderson elucidates:

> According to Mark, Jesus held an open and public messiahship after his resurrection. As Wrede came to evaluate this presentation, he concluded that it was a purely dogmatic device on the part of Mark and was devoid of any historical validity. Not only was it dogmatic as far as the device itself was concerned, but the device affected the portrayal of Jesus' life by Mark to such an extent that we are left with a thoroughly unhistorical and unreliable account of the life of Jesus.[13]

The first quest began to decline by the beginning of the twentieth century. Albert Schweitzer's famous book *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* was published in 1906. He pointed out that the first questers were not looking for the historical Jesus at all, but for an ethical teacher who could easily fit in their rationalistic liberal portrait of Jesus. He argued that scholars had been more concerned with writing the lives of

Jesus that reflected their own values. In his view, Jesus ought to be understood in his proper religious-historical context, as an apocalyptic prophet who sacrificed himself in order to bring about the Kingdom of God. The years from the early twentieth century to the end of the Second World War are generally regarded as the period of 'no quest'. During this period, it was generally believed that the first quest was 'illegitimate' because it was not possible to disentangle the Jesus of the Gospels from the historical Jesus.

Some well-known scholars, soon after the First World War, began to investigate the gospel tradition of the New Testament Gospels with a new tool called 'form criticism' (*Formgeschichte)* to methodically deconstruct the Gospel narratives in order to discover the authentic saying of Jesus from later Church additions. Martin Dibelius first systematically applied this approach in a book in 1919. However, its most influential and radical exponent was Professor Rudolf Bultmann. He saw the quest for historical Jesus as methodologically impossible due to the unreliability of the sources for reconstructing his biography. According to him, we cannot get behind the faith of the authors of the Gospels to know anything about the life of Jesus. He concluded that the early Christians had little interest in the historical Jesus and that Jesus was forever buried under the mythology of Pauline Christianity. The form critics while accepting the previously established conclusions about the synoptic Gospels also pointed out that before the written tradition there was a 'tunnel period,' the period when the Gospel passed through the stage of oral transmission. Harvey K. McArthur summarises the position of the form critics who agree

> a. that during the first Christian generation the stories about Jesus circulated in oral form,
> b. that during this period there was no continuous narrative but instead single, isolated stories (the Passion Narrative was the earliest portion of the tradition to acquire consecutive form),
> c. that the stories were repeated in response to the various needs of the community, e.g., preaching, teaching, controversy, ethical guidance,
> d. that as the stories were told they tended to fall into certain stereotyped patterns, or forms, characteristic of oral tradition.[14]

The conclusion is that before the Gospel stories were written down, their transmission by oral tradition may have profoundly changed the contents, and also added new material so as to meet the various needs of the early Christian community. As Bultmann says: 'What the sources offer us is first of all the message of the early Christian community, which for the most part the church freely attributed to Jesus. This naturally gives no proof that all the words that are put into his mouth were actually spoken by him. As can be easily proved, many sayings originated in the church itself; others were modified by the church.'[15]

When Professor Bultmann wrote a book about Jesus under the title *Jesus and the Word,* which was published in English in 1934, he did not aim at reconstructing a biography of Jesus; he was exclusively concerned with the kerygma, the message of the Christ of faith in an existentialist perspective. He writes:

> Critical investigation shows that the whole tradition about Jesus which appears in the three synoptic gospels is composed of a series of layers which can on the whole be clearly distinguished, although the separation of some points is difficult and doubtful. (The Gospel of John cannot be taken into account at all as a source book for the teachings of Jesus, and it is not referred to in this book). The separating of these layers depends on the knowledge that these gospels were composed in Greek within the Hellenistic Christian community, while Jesus and the oldest Christian group lived in Palestine and spoke Aramaic.[16]

Shortly after the Second World War, a new school of scholarship known as 'redaction criticism' emerged, which investigates the way in which each Gospel writer put together his narrative from various written and oral sources. The scholars of this school emphasise the creative contribution of the evangelists themselves. The evangelists are said to have shaped both the content as well as the stories in order to communicate a distinct theology.[17] Form criticism and redaction criticism became the basis of the 'new quest' that began after the Second World War and continued until around 1970. The focus of the new quest was to reconstruct the original message of Jesus and compare this with the proclamations of the early Church to establish in which ways they were the same.

During the late 1970s, after the demise of the existentialism as the dominant ideology in Western culture, and therefore kerygmatic theology, the third quest for the historical Jesus emerged that continues to this day. This interdisciplinary quest uses new archaeological, historical, and textual sources from the first century. The third questers apply the findings of sociology and anthropology in their work. They have used the documents of the early Christianity that were discovered at Nag Hammadi in the last century. Their critical historical research has brought into question the Weiss-Schweitzer hypothesis that Jesus was an apocalyptic preacher. The third quest movement reflects a great number of viewpoints, but the overriding drift seems to be to see Jesus as a non-apocalyptic wisdom teacher within the context of first-century Judaism. The work of the movement became relatively prominent mainly due to the (controversial) Jesus Seminar, founded in 1985 by Robert Funk, with its membership well over one hundred scholars, who met twice yearly for multiple-day seminars. At the end of 1993, the results of the first project were published as *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*, a new translation of canonical Gospels including the Gospel of Thomas. The group has also published a new translation of canonical and non-canonical gospels known as *The Complete Gospels*. The members of the Seminar do not regard that Jesus thought of himself as God. Critics have resolutely condemned the Seminar's portrait of Jesus as unbiblical and heretical that seeks to bring down the Christ of faith.

The well-known American researcher E.P. Sanders, author of a number of historical books on Judaism and Christianity in the Greco-Roman world, argues that Jesus who became a great figure in world history was, in his own lifetime, of no great significance. He writes:

> We have very little information about him apart from the works written to glorify him. Today we do not have good documentation for such out-of-the-way places as Palestine; nor did the authors of our sources. They had no archives and no official record of any kind. They did not even have access to good maps. These limitations, which were common in the ancient world, result in a good deal of uncertainty.[18]

Sanders carefully investigates the problems of the primary sources and provides material in support of the following points:

1 The earliest Christians did not write a narrative of Jesus' life, but rather made use of, and thus preserved, individual units—short passages about his words and deeds. These units were later moved and arranged by editors and authors. This means that we can never be sure of the immediate context of Jesus' sayings and actions.
2 Some material has been revised and some created by early Christians.
3 The Gospels were written anonymously.
4 The Gospel of John is quite different from the other three gospels, and it is primarily in the latter that we must seek information about Jesus.
5 The gospels lack many characteristics of biography, and we should especially distinguish them from modern biographies.[19]

Sanders argues that the Gospels we have in their present form were not written by eyewitnesses on the basis of firsthand knowledge of Jesus. Besides, the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and Mark, (which are called 'synoptic' because their authors based their narratives on a common text) differ radically from the Gospel of John.[20] The synoptic Gospels show a marked similarity of viewpoint in their narratives, as mentioned earlier, but they also contain important differences.

It is important to remember that the composition of the Gospels took place several decades after the death of Jesus and that during this period the Christian society had witnessed important developments. Don Cupitt and Peter Armstrong argue that the dating of the Gospels is problematic: 'Whether we see the Gospels as mainly community products, like folktales, or as works of individual creative imagination, does not help much with the dating, because we don't know who the Gospel-writers were and we don't know how rapidly religious doctrine develops in the very rare situation in which a great religion is taking shape.'[21] There is general agreement among scholars that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest, written about 65--70. Little is known about its writer. The Gospel of John was the latest, possibly written towards the end of the first century. In John's account, we find a move away from regarding Jesus as a man; he is identified more with Platonic-Stoic Logos. His

account of Jesus' life is more about interpreting the meaning of his life and death rather than in recording the events of his life. For instance he starts his account of Jesus (whom he identifies and names 'the Word') in his Gospel that clearly shows his ideas on God and Jesus' relationship in the origin of the universe (John 1:4): 'Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God. From the very beginning the Word was with God. Through him God made all things; not one thing in all creation was made without him.' It is clear that this account of Jesus, and the source of information it reveals, is far removed from historical issues and concerns.

Sanders, like many other researchers, raises questions about the authors of the Gospels as follows:

> We do not know who wrote the gospels. They presently have headings: 'according to Matthew', 'according to Mark', 'according to Luke' and 'according to John'. The Matthew and John who are meant were two of the original disciples of Jesus. Mark was a follower of Paul, and possibly also of Peter; Luke was one of Paul's converts. These men -- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John -- really lived, but we do not know that they wrote the gospels. Present evidence indicates that the gospels remained untitled until the second half of the second century . . . The gospels as we have them were quoted in the first half of the second century, but always anonymously (as far as we can tell from surviving evidence). Names suddenly appear about the year 180. By then there were a lot of gospels, not just our four, and the Christians had to decide which ones were authoritative. This was a major issue, on which there were many substantial differences of opinion. We know who won: those Christians who thought that four gospels, no more and no fewer, were the authoritative records of Jesus.[22]

For a modern reader the problem with Christian sources, i.e. the documents of the New Testament and the apocryphal gospels, is the difficulty to ascertain the historical facts contained in them. One can ask: what allowances must we make for the editorial activities of the evangelists and the compilers of early sources? How far has the material been affected and even created to meet the practical needs of the early

Church? The records of the life of Jesus in the Gospels, as Benjamin Walker comments, 'are confused, and Bible critics are left with scores of unresolved problems, which have been the source of heresies that have racked Christendom from its beginnings. Scholars have been perplexed by the contradictions, inconsistencies and improbabilities in the canonical gospels alone, which they have never been able to reconcile.'[23]

In relation to the four Gospels there are numerous instances of disagreement on substance and detail. The four evangelists are believed to tell the story of one person, Jesus Christ, but a cursory glance at the genealogies of Jesus presented by Luke and Matthew reveal major discrepancies. In Matthew the genealogy is traced from David up through Joseph, the husband of Mary, to Jesus, thus enlisting twenty-eight generations. Luke presents the genealogy from Jesus, through Joseph, the husband of Mary, to David, and he calculates forty-three generations. What is striking is the fact that the two genealogies that cover a period of a thousand years contain only three names that are common (apart from David's and Joseph's) while the rest of the names are totally different. Can both Matthew and Luke be right when both give different names of the ancestors of Jesus? The other instance is the story of the angelic annunciation of the immaculate conception of Mary. There is no mention of it in Mark and John, whereas it is described differently in Matthew and Luke. In Matthew, it is to Joseph that the Angel of God appeared in a dream informing him that Mary had been impregnated by the Holy Ghost and therefore he should not be afraid to take her as his wife. But in Luke, the Angel Gabriel came to Mary to inform her of the pregnancy.

The earliest documents of the New Testament were Paul's letters and the Gospel of Mark. None of them had anything to say about Jesus' birth, or any miracles surrounding it. There is also the story of Herod who ordered the killing of all children who were under two years of age. Surprisingly, an infanticide of this enormity finds mention only in Matthew, and is not found in the other three gospels or any other document of the New Testament. Another instance is the account of the Last Supper in Matthew and John. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says to his disciples (26:18): 'Go to a certain man in the city and tell him that the Teacher says, "My hour has come; my disciples and I will celebrate the Passover at your house." ' This means that the Last

Supper was a Passover meal held on Thursday evening before the Crucifixion. But in John's Gospel, the day of Crucifixion was the day before the Passover (19:14): 'It was then almost noon of the day before the Passover.' Thus according to John's account of the Last Supper could not have been a Passover meal since the Passover did not begin until after Jesus had died.

Over two centuries ago Thomas Paine (1739--1809), English writer and political activist, emigrated to America where he championed the cause of American Independence from British colonial rule and came to France during the French Revolution to give his active support. Paine also wrote his highly readable book *The Age of Reason,* in which he investigated the foundations of Christian theology and presented his findings in a clear manner. In the following passage he uses a common sense approach to assess whether or not the canonical Gospels, as reported descriptions of the life of Jesus, could be considered revelatory documents:

> The four books . . . Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are altogether anecdotal. They relate events after they had taken place. They tell us what Jesus Christ did and said, and what other did and said to him; and in several instances they relate the same event differently. Revelation is necessarily out of the question with respect to those books; not only because of the disagreement of the writers, but because revelations cannot be applied to the relating of events by the person who saw them done, nor to the relating or recording of any discourse or conversation by those who heard it. The book called the Acts of the Apostles (an anonymous work) belongs also to the anecdotal part.[24]

In my view, Thomas Paine has summed up concisely what the four Gospels contain and how they should be regarded. This is obviously not the standpoint of those who, for over the past two thousand years, have believed and continue to believe the Gospels to be the word of God. How far can they be regarded as credible historical records of the events surrounding the central figure of the story? According to the British historian J.M. Roberts, the Gospels are not by themselves satisfactory evidence on the life of Jesus because they were primarily written to 'demonstrate the supernatural authority of Jesus and the confirmation provided by the events of his life for the prophecies which had long announced the coming of Messiah . . . There is no

reason to be more austere or rigorous in our canons of acceptability for early Christian records than for, say, the evidence in Homer which illuminates Mycenae. Nevertheless, it is very hard to find corroborative evidence of the facts stated in the Gospels in other records.'[25]

Apart from the four Gospels of the New Testament, there were large numbers of apocryphal gospels in the Christian literature filled with legends, especially about the childhood of Jesus. Down through the ages, these gospels have fascinated people for their legendary contents, despite their lack of acceptable historical corroboration. A number of gospels were also rejected from the Christian Canon. Some of them may even have dated from the first century, and have survived in fragments such as the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Egyptians and the Gospel of the Hebrews.

The discoveries and publications of some of the old texts in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries have increased our understanding of the religious significance of Gnosticism and the great diversity existing in the Christian literature about Jesus and his teachings. In 1884, during the archaeological excavations in Egypt, a small parchment of codex was found which contained fragments of apocryphal and Gnostic texts, among them were the Apocalypse of Peter, the Gospel of Peter and the Book of Enoch. In 1896, an ancient manuscript of the Gospel of Mary Magdalene came into the hands of a German Egyptologist. The most startling discovery occurred in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt when two Egyptian brothers found an earthen jar containing thirteen leather-bound papyrus codices, comprising some fifty-two Coptic documents of the fourth century. Some of the texts are almost fully intact. They contain secret gospels, the mystical teachings of various Gnostic schools, philosophical writings, cosmology and poems. The Gospel of Thomas from the first century, containing original sayings and parables of Jesus, was found in its entirety. In these sayings, the place to find the kingdom of God is said to be found within oneself, and in no other realm. One passage reads:

Jesus said,
'If those who lead you say to you,
"See, the kingdom is in the sky,"
then the birds of the sky will precede you.

If they say to you, “It is in the sea,”
then the fish will precede you.
Rather the kingdom is inside of you,
and it is outside of you.
‘When you come to know yourselves,
then you will become known,
and you will realise that it is you
who are the sons of the Living Father.
But if you will not know yourselves,
you dwell in (spiritual) poverty
and it is you who are that poverty.’[26]

However, in certain respects it is not possible to make a clean division between the canonical Gospels, and the uncanonical and apocryphal gospels on the assumption that the latter are legendary and mythological while the former are historical. It is evident that just as in the apocryphal gospels, the Gospels in the New Testament have many legendary and supernatural traits. Nonetheless, most scholars seem to regard the four Gospels of the New Testament to be the most important source of information for the life of Jesus. The reason is simple. There is no other source that provides even this much information.

Jesus spoke Aramaic, but his teachings have not been preserved in his original language. Regarding his sayings and his early biographies, Benjamin Walker explains:

> His sayings, or *logia,* delivered with great authority, were memorised, arranged under subject headings, and translated by Greek-speaking Jewish and Gentile converts. Certain sayings, called *agrapha,* or ‘unwritten’ pieces, were transmitted orally, and when finally put down in writing did not form part of the canon. Along with his sayings, certain incidents of his life were also set down, and by the end of the first centuries there were several biographies of Jesus in circulation, some highly coloured, which were being used in the churches of Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and Greece, written in Greek, Syriac and other languages.[27]

As Benjamin Walker points out, modern scholars distinguish between the mythological Jesus, the historical Jesus, and the proclaimed or preached Jesus: 'The beliefs concerning his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are irrational in the sense that they are outside the scope of reason and inexplicable in terms of ordinary human understanding.'[28] Like Christianity, other major religions also have varying degrees of beliefs in supernatural and fantastic beings, and miracles. It is, however, a fact, that in this respect, the creative imagination of those who shaped the Christian dogmas of Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension as *historically true facts,* is something that lies beyond rational human faculties.

The question of Jesus' divinity has become deeply ingrained in Christian orthodoxy over the course of centuries. In Christology, the discussions have revolved around the various titles of Jesus, such as Messiah, Lord, Logos, Son of God and Son of Man, or simply, Son. From the large number of studies undertaken to explore and discuss these titles, a number of conclusions emerge, which Professor Frances Young enumerates thus:

> (a) that the titles and concepts were there to be used before the early Christians adopted them--that is, they can be found in non-Christian documents and with non-Christian interpretations; (b) that by their application to Jesus they were filled with new content, and new interpretations became inevitable as a new combination of once distinct concepts was made; (c) the combination was probably the result of believers searching for categories in which to express their response to Jesus, rather than Jesus claiming to be these particular figures; and (d) each block of writings in the New Testament has its own emphases and combinations, that is, its own christological picture.[29]

In the New Testament Gospels we find three titles--Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man--applied to Jesus. The four Gospels and Acts use all three in different ways at different times.[30] There is no evidence in the New Testament documents that Jesus ever thought himself or claimed to be the Son of God, nor that he was an incarnation of God. Jesus was a Jew, who was born and bred in the Jewish tradition of monotheism. It is highly unlikely that he would have asserted himself to be a partaker

in the divinity of God in any shape or manner. Sometimes he calls God by the affectionate term 'Father' (Aramaic 'Abba'), but that does not mean that he saw himself as the Son of God. The title that he persistently is reported to have claimed for himself was 'Son of Man'. What it really means, as A.W. Argyle argues, is quite difficult to interpret:

> Behind the phrase lies the Aramaic *bar nasha* which means simply 'man', which could also be used as a special title. In the Old Testament 'son of man' (Hebrew: *ben adam*) is often a poetical synonym for man . . . In Ezekiel, where it occurs more than ninety times, the phrase describes the prophet himself as the lowly, insignificant person whom God nevertheless condescends to address. Some scholars believe that Jesus took the title from the book of Ezekiel. But it is more likely that he derived it from the book of Daniel.[31]

In Christianity, which is aptly described as an incarnational faith, Jesus is believed to be the incarnation of God. However, this central belief of Christianity is controversial; some Christian scholars do not accede to it. For instance, the renowned nineteenth-century French scholar of religion Ernest Renan in his book *The Life of Jesus* (first published in 1863) presents Jesus as entirely human and rejects any claims about his incarnation and supernatural powers. He writes:

> That Jesus never dreamt of making himself pass for an incarnation of God is a matter about which there can be no doubt. Such an idea was entirely foreign to the Jewish mind; and there is no trace of it in the Synoptical Gospels: we only find it indicated in portions of the Gospel of John, which cannot be accepted as expressing the thoughts of Jesus. Sometimes Jesus even seems to take precautions to put down such a doctrine. The accusation that he made himself God, or the equal to God is presented, even in the Gospel of John, as a calumny of the Jews. In this last Gospel he declares himself less than his Father. Elsewhere he avows that the Father has not revealed everything to him. He believes himself to be more than an ordinary man, but separated from God by an infinite distance. He is Son of God; but all men are, or may become so, in diverse degrees. Everyone ought daily to call God his father; all who are raised again will be sons of God. The Divine son-ship was attributed in the Old

> Testament to beings whom it was by no means pretended were equal with God. The word 'son' has the widest meanings in the Semitic language, and in that of the Old Testament.[32]

The question about the existence of the historical Jesus has been a matter of scholarly inquiries over the years. Rudolf Bultmann rejects the views that doubt his existence thus:

> Of course the doubt as to whether Jesus really existed is unfounded and not worth refutation. No sane person can doubt that Jesus stands as founder behind the historical movement whose first distinct stage is represented by the oldest Palestinian community. But how far that community preserved an objectively true picture of him and his message is another question. For those whose interest is in the personality of Jesus, this situation is depressing or destructive; for our purpose it has no particular significance.[33]

Bultmann has made an enormous contribution in a radical approach to the study of the New Testament. He advocates that we should purge the mythical trappings it contains. The question he raises with regard to what Jesus is assumed to have taught and how this message has come to be understood is, no doubt, of enormous significance in the studies of the growth of Christian faith historically.

The Epistles of Paul

In point of time, the earliest of the primary sources are not the Gospels, but rather the Epistles of Paul contained in the New Testament. Paul's writings were in circulation long before the first Gospels appeared. Paul had never met Jesus, nor had he read the Gospels, but he had dealings with Jesus' brother James and some of his close disciples. This fact makes his witness to the existence of Jesus and the great influence he had on his disciples, trustworthy. But, as Joseph Klausner says, 'this witness does not extend *beyond* Jesus' existence and influence. In all Paul's writings we find no reliable historical facts about the life and work of Jesus, beyond the vague hint that he was the "first born of many brethren" (Romans viii. 29), the statement that he was

crucified, the account of the last supper on the night of his arrest (I Corinthians xi. 23-26), and the questionable statements to the effect that Jesus was of the lineage of the House of David.'[34] Contrary to the narratives of the Gospel writers, Paul does not mention the virgin birth of Jesus or his miracles. This fact is all the more important due to the fact that he knew both the brother of Jesus and the close disciples who had seen and known Jesus.

Ernst Fuchs explains that the Gospels are at least twenty years later than Paul and fifty years later than the life of Jesus. In addition, while the Gospels may contain authentic traditions, these traditions are anonymous, whereas what Paul says or asserts is his own.[35] As Joseph Klausner shows, Paul's letters, which contain some sayings of Jesus and a few references to Jesus, do not help us to understand the life of Jesus: 'It therefore follows from the character of Paul's teachings that this earliest historical witness is least valuable for our knowledge of the life of Jesus.' At the same time, the role of St Paul in advancing his view of Jesus as a heavenly being that eventually triumphed is the key to understanding the rise of Christianity and its fundamental dogmas. This fact has been repeated by a number of modern scholars such as Joseph Klausner. Klausner underlines Paul's role and concerns:

> Paul consistently aimed at exalting the spiritual Jesus over the material Jesus, the Jesus who rose from the dead over the Jesus who lived a human life and performed human acts. He could not otherwise lay claim to the title of the 'Apostle': he was not one of Jesus' disciples nor, apparently, had he ever seen him while he was on earth; in the later event he must have been subservient to James, the brother of Jesus, to Peter and the other Apostles.[36]

With regard to the authenticity of Paul's letters and their historical value in constructing the life of Jesus, Thomas Paine writes: 'Whether those epistles were written by the person to whom they are ascribed is a matter of no great importance, since the writer, whoever he was, attempts to prove his doctrine by argument. He does not pretend to have been witness to any of the scenes told of the resurrection and the ascension, and he declares that he had not believed them.'[37] However, all his letters are not regarded as genuine. The letters, such as, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, and Titus, once regarded as genuine are no longer held so by many scholars. Besides, the

'Dutch School' of New Testament criticism also questions the authorship of many others. From some of his letters what emerges is that during the first four decades of the Christian movement, there were two main groups. The small community that grew in Jerusalem was of those disciples who had been closely associated with Jesus during his lifetime. Peter and Jesus' brother, James, were the leaders of this small community. They argued that Christians must be Jews and they should follow the Jewish Law. The other group was made up of the communities living outside Palestine, mainly Gentile, who became Christians under the missionary activity of Paul.

The non-Christian sources

Among the non-Christian sources, some brief references in the works of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger and Josephus can be discussed. Tacitus (*c*. 60--*c*.120) in his '*Annales*' written about 115--17 mentions the great fire in 64, which destroyed much of Rome during the reign of Emperor Nero. The Christians were accused of the arson. Tacitus who wrote about fifty years later did not believe that the Christians were justly accused but he showed no remorse about their executions because they were regarded as an anti-social group. By the time of Tacitus 'the Christians were vulgarly thought to practice incest and cannibalism in their nocturnal meetings.'[38] Tacitus explains the origin of the name 'Christians' thus: 'Christus, from whom their name is derived, was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. Checked for the moment, this pernicious superstition again broke out, not only in Judaea, the source of the evil, but even in Rome, that receptacle for everything that is sordid and degrading from every quarter of the globe.'[39] In any case, by the time Tacitus wrote this, there was a widespread belief that there had been a 'Messiah' or 'Christ' who was executed by Pontius Pilate.

Another important clue, which we find in Roman literature, is a brief note by the second-century Roman historian and imperial biographer Suetonius. Describing the events during the reign of Emperor Claudius (r. 41--54) he writes: '*Judæos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit'* (he banished from Rome the Jews who made great tumult because of Chrestus).[40] Possibly, the tumult he refers to

consisted of the quarrels between Jews and Christians. Many scholars agree that 'Chrestus' mentioned by Suetonius can be identified with 'Christus', but Graetz is of the opinion that 'Chrestus' is not the same as 'Christus'.[41] When writing about the Neronian persecution, Suetonius says that 'in his reign many abuses were severely punished and repressed; . . . punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a set of men adhering to a novel and mischievous superstition.'[42]

The third Roman source is Pliny the Younger (*c.* 62--113), a friend of Tacitus, who about 110 was appointed governor of the province of Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor by Emperor Trajan. In a long letter to Trajan in about 111 he asked for guidance in dealing with the trials of Christians. He wrote how harshly he had dealt with them but still he was not sure about the real nature of their crimes for which they were executed. The letter indicates that Christianity was spreading fast in the areas under his control: 'The contagion of this superstition,' he wrote, 'has spread not only in the cities, but in the villages and rural districts as well; yet it seems capable of being checked and set right.' He did not know about the nature of Christianity except that these Christians said that their only guilt was that 'they had been accustomed to meet before daybreak, and to recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath.'[43] Trajan in his reply outlined a tolerant policy that was to be followed by the officials in dealing with Christians.

This information, no doubt, is historically important for understanding the growing strength of Christianity as a religious movement and also of the deification of Jesus by the Christians in the beginning of the second century, but it does not give us any information about the life or the teachings of Jesus.

Our next significant source is the great Jewish historian Yoseph ben Mattathiah ha-Cohen, who is commonly known as Flavius Josephus. Born in about 39 in a priestly family in Palestine, he was a disciple of the Pharisees for a while; he also was personally involved in the Jewish war of liberation against the Romans. However, after the Roman victory and the destruction of the Temple, he went to the Roman side and became an influential historian at the court of Damatian. He wrote his famous books *Antiquities of the Jews* and the *Wars of the Jews* in the nineties, giving meticulous accounts of all the major political and social events in Judaea from the

time of Herod the First until the destruction of the Temple in 70. He produces important information about the Jews, the Essenes and John the Baptist. One would expect him to give some detailed account of the movement led by Jesus in the time of Pontius Pilate, but there is none. In his *Antiquities*, as Joseph Klausner says, there are 'the fewest possible words, less than are devoted in the same book to John the Baptist; and what is still more unsatisfactory, these few words contain what are manifest additions by Christian copyists.'[44] Jesus is referred to only twice in the *Antiquities*; the first occasion is found in the following passage which Joseph Klausner, Trevor Ling and E.P. Sanders, among many other scholars, hold to have been revised and re-written by the Christian scribes:

> Now there was about this time, (*i.e.*, about the time of the rising against Pilate who wished to extract money from the Temple for the purpose of bringing water to Jerusalem from a distant spring) Jesus a wise man, *if it be lawful to call him a man*, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the Gentiles. *He was the Messiah*; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first ceased not [so to do], for *he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him*; and the race of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct even now.[45]

The italicised parts in the passage are used by Joseph Klausner to indicate the suspected later additions. Other researchers also agree with this view. Josephus, the Jew and Pharisee, was not a convert to Christianity, and he did not think that Jesus was the Messiah. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that he could have written about Jesus as the Messiah. 'Josephus could never have written of Jesus such words as "he was the Messiah;" and Origen twice states that Josephus did not admit that Jesus was the Messiah. Some scholars throw doubt not only on part, but on the entire passage in Josephus: they hold that everything about Jesus in the "Antiquities" is a late addition by Christian copyists, who found it difficult to accept the fact that a writer of the history of the time should make no mention whatever of Jesus.'[46] The second mention

of Jesus by Josephus in the *Antiquities* is an incidental note to the trial and execution by stoning of 'James, the brother of Jesus who is called the Messiah'.[47]

When did the Christian copyists insert the additional material? Klausner, like most modern scholars, holds the view that it was inserted sometime in the third century, because Eusebius who lived in the fourth century knew the whole paragraph, both with and without interpolations, and used both according to need. But Origen, who lived during the first half of the third century, does not mention them at all.[48]

The French philosopher and historian Voltaire (1694--1778), in his article 'Christianity, historical researches into Christianity', writes: 'The Christians, by one of those frauds called pious, grossly falsified a passage in Josephus. They attribute to this Jew, so obstinate in his religion four ridiculously interpolated lines; and at the end of this passage they added: *He was the Christ.*'[49] The Gospels of the New Testament give various accounts of the great events which took place on Jesus' birth, his supernatural deeds and miracles during his life, his death and resurrection, but how could all these momentous events have escaped the attention of the great historian Josephus? Voltaire writes:

> Josephus was of the priestly class, related to Queen Mariamne, Herod's wife. He goes into the most minute details about all the actions of this prince. Nevertheless he does not say a word about the life or the death of Jesus. And this historian, who does not dissimulate a single one of Herod's cruelties, says nothing about the massacre of all the children ordered by him when he received the news that a king of the Jews was born . . . He says nothing about the new star which had appeared in the east after the birth of the saviour, a startling phenomenon which would not have escaped the attention of so enlightened a historian as Josephus. He is also silent about the darkness that covered the whole earth for three hours at midday on the death of the saviour; about the great number of tombs that opened at this moment; and about the crowd of just men who resuscitated.[50]

The Latin and Jewish sources, as we have seen above, are important in our understanding the history of early Christians. They provide some information about

the existence of Jesus, and Christians and their belief in Jesus, but they add little to the life-story of Jesus. Other possible Hebrew sources, for instance, in Talmud and Midrash, are of uncertain interpretation.

Historical uncertainty

So far I have discussed the sources that are related to the question of the 'historical Jesus'. It is essential to bear in mind that the term 'historical Jesus' cannot be simply equated with 'Jesus of Nazareth' or 'Jesus Christ' (i.e. 'Jesus who is Christ') as found in theological literature and believed by Christian believers. The term 'historical' here is used in a technical sense; it is about the method a historian employs to find out about persons and events. Therefore, the expression 'historical Jesus' specifically is related to as to what can be known of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived two thousand years ago, by means of such methods of inquiry. It is not possible to reconstruct the biography of Jesus from the Gospels in a manner that meets the needs of historical objectivity. Charles C. Anderson sums up scholarly assessment of the Gospels:

> They are primarily documents of faith; documents of preaching; primarily kerygmatic in their purpose. It is therefore not legitimate to use them the way the liberal theologians did. In looking for the historical, one must rule out accounts that give evidence of being tampered with for theological reasons; one must realize that the documents are in nature theological and then subsequently investigate the possibility of finding some historical truth in them.[51]

Twentieth century scholarship regarding the Gospels, of which form criticism represented one manifestation, concludes that as devotional literature they are primary sources for the history of the early Church and only secondarily as the sources for the life of Jesus. 'This basic reorientation is to the effect that *all* the tradition about Jesus survived only in so far as it served some function in the life and worship of the primitive Church. History survived only as *kerygma*. It is this insight which reversed our understanding of the scholar's situation with regard to the relation of factual detail and theological interpretations in the gospels.'[52] This point brings us to the importance of Jesus, not the historical figure about whom we know so little but the

focal point of Christian theology and faith. How far can the historian's craft be allowed to investigate what theology regards exclusively as the sphere of faith? A number of positions have been taken on this point. I have mentioned the viewpoint of the form critics. Bultmann, in particular, has underlined that biblical interest must be centred on the kerygma and one's response to it and not on the historical personality of Jesus. He writes:

> I do indeed think that we can now know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not exist. Except for the purely critical research, what has been written in the last hundred and fifty years on the life of Jesus, his personality and the development of his inner life, is fantastic and romantic . . . The same impression is made by a survey of the differing contemporary judgements on the question of the Messianic consciousness of Jesus, the varying opinions as to whether Jesus believed himself to be the Messiah or not, and if so, in what sense, and at what point in his life.[53]

In view of this assessment, the significance of the historical figure of Jesus lies not in the details of his life, but for the legitimacy it confers on the kerygma as carried by the community. In McArthur's words: 'Thus even those who are most dubious about historical certainty usually insist that it is theologically important that there actually was a historical Jesus!'[54]

There are many scholars who are completely indifferent to the question of the historical Jesus. For them the only important thing is that Jesus as the Christ serves as an ethical and religious symbol for the Christians. For instance, the renowned theologian, Professor Paul Tillich, regards the search for historical Jesus as not crucial for a theological understanding of him. 'Christianity was born, not with the birth of the man called "Jesus," but in the moment in which one of his followers was driven to say to him, "Thou art the Christ." And Christianity will live as long as there are people who repeat this assertion.'[55] He explains why he criticises historical research into the Bible:

> It seemed to criticise not only the historical sources but also the revelation contained in these sources. Historical research and rejection of biblical authority were identified. Revelation, it was implied, covered not only the revelatory content but also the historical form in which it had appeared. This seemed to be especially true of the facts concerning the 'historical Jesus'. Since the biblical revelation is essentially historical, it appeared to be impossible to separate the revelatory content from the historical reports as they are given in the biblical records. Historical criticism seemed to undercut faith itself.[56]

There is no doubt that historical criticism presents theology with many problems. Historical research is a process to find out about events and things, etc. by using the scientific method of selecting the source material and analysing it critically. This is the best a historian can do. As Bornkamm says: 'Certainly faith cannot and should not be dependent on the change and uncertainty of historical research. But one should not despise the help of historical research to illumine the truth.'[57] In my view, these words of Bornkamm point to a sound approach when we deal with religious belief and knowledge. In epistemology, what can be regarded as valid knowledge has to fulfil some necessary conditions first, but in the matters of 'religious truths', no such conditions are deemed necessary.

The Jerusalem Church

I have referred to two groups of early Christian movement, the Jerusalem community and the Gentile communities. The early disciples and followers of Jesus were Jews. After the crucifixion of Jesus, they organised the Jerusalem Church, led by Jesus' brother, James the Just, 'the brother of the Lord'. They believed that Jesus was the expected Messiah whose coming was prophesied by the Hebrew prophets. For them the coming of the Messiah did not mean a break with the old covenant God had made with Abraham, or with the Mosaic Law. The new happening was in conformity with God's past revelations, and a continuation of his acts. Neither James nor any of his family or relatives regarded Jesus a divine being or Son of God, as he became known later. To his disciples and followers, he was a human being, a healer, a prophet, and a Jewish Messiah. The mission of Jesus was not to destroy but to fulfil Judaism. They held that their belief in Jesus as Christ did not absolve them of their adhesion to and

the observance of the Law. They took part in the worship of God in the Temple. In this way, they were practically a part of Judaism. The only difference between the Christian Jews and other Jews regarded the significance of Jesus; non-Christian Jews did not share in their belief in Jesus. For his Jewish disciples, he was Christ, the Messiah (Hebrew: *mashiach*, or 'anointed one', which in Greek is *Christos*) sent by God to start the Messianic age for the Jewish people. This, in no sense, implied the divinity of Jesus. To impute divinity to any human being was a violation of the First Commandment because only God has the divine power, and no one else. However, in Paul the term 'Christ' used for Jesus is given a different meaning. For him Jesus Christ is a divine, heavenly being. The Pauline view eventually prevailed in the universal Christianity, and became the central belief of its followers. But what became of Rabbi Joshua, the Teacher as Jesus' family and close disciples had known him? That historical person was eliminated and replaced by a supernatural being.

The Jerusalem Church was led by James the Just, 'the Lord's brother'. James was a remarkable person in his own right. He lived a strictly ascetic life. Eusebius (*c*. 260--*c*. 339), Bishop of Caesarea (Palestine), whose monumental *Church History* is our chief primary source for the history of the early Church down to about 300, quoting Hegesippus (*c*. 120--80), writes about him: 'He was holy from his mother's womb; and he drank no wine nor strong drink, nor did he eat flesh. He did not anoint himself with oil, and he did not use the bath . . . And he was in the habit of entering alone in the temple, and was frequently found upon his knees begging forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like those of a camel, in consequence of his bending them in his service of God, and asking forgiveness for the people.'[58] He, like his illustrious brother before him, met a cruel death. The Jews stoned him to death most probably in 62.[59] After his death, he was immediately succeeded by Symeon, a cousin of Jesus, to lead the Jerusalem Church. Symeon in turn also suffered a cruel death by crucifixion, but the exact date of his martyrdom is uncertain.

The exact relation between the two leading disciples, James and Peter, to whom Jesus is said to have entrusted the Church's mission, is not clear on the basis of the available sources. As Henry Chadwick observes:

> In the Pauline letters and the Acts of the Holy Family and the Apostles appear as distinguished authorities side by side; if there was any tension between them (as Mark iii, 31-5 may imply) it was quickly ironed out. According to one strand of tradition (Matt. xvi, 18) the Lord [Jesus] nominated Peter as the rock on which the Church was to be built; perhaps there were some Christians who believed Peter rather than James to be the supreme authority in the Church after the Ascension. The eirenic account of the earliest Church in Acts, probably written a generation or more later, does not allow us to do more than ask unanswerable questions.[60]

When Paul started evangelising the Gentiles, the Jerusalem community had important differences with him regarding the approach to the Mosaic Law and the significance of Jesus. Despite these differences, they also shared a common devotion to Jesus in their own ways.

Paul and the rise of Gentile Christianity

Paul, originally named Saul, was a Pharisee from a Jewish family from Tarsus in Cilicia (present-day Turkey). Until the age of about thirty he was an outspoken critic of the new cult of rebel Jews who followed the teachings of Jesus. Probably, as a Hellenized Jew of the dispersion, he was conscious of the need to uphold Judaic orthodoxy. He was also a witness to the martyrdom by the Jews of Stephen, a member of the new sect. According to the Acts of the Apostles, (7:57-60) the stoning of Stephen is described thus: 'with a loud cry the members of the Council covered their ears with their hands. Then they all rushed at him at once, threw him out of the city, and stoned him. The witnesses left their cloaks in the care of a young man named Saul. They kept on stoning Stephen as he called out to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!" He knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!" He said this and died. And Saul approved of this murder.' After Stephen's murder, Saul worked actively to destroy the Jerusalem Church (Acts 8:3): 'But Saul tried to destroy the church; going from house to house, he dragged out the believers, both men and women, and threw them into jail.' However on his way to Damascus to hunt down the followers of Jesus, he experienced a religious vision after

having been struck by lightning, from which he had lost his sight for three days, and been unable to eat or drink. Thus afflicted, he was helped by his companions during the rest of the journey. Whatever form his vision took, it was a personal experience; none of his companions saw anything unusual when the lightning struck, or in its aftermath. But the incident proved a turning point in the life of Paul. He converted to the new faith. This event proved to be of enormous significance for the fortunes of the Christian movement.

Paul started to preach in Damascus, but the people were hostile to his teaching. He left the town and went to Jerusalem to preach. Again, here he met opposition at the hands of Jewish Christians. He escaped to Tarsus and started preaching to the non-Jewish communities. Possibly in 47, he began his great missionary travels to places stretching all over the Mediterranean world. Thus started the evangelising career of the founder of Gentile Christianity in Roman cities teeming with displaced war refugees, victims of Roman conquests. His message of hope and salvation in the Lord Christ attracted huge numbers of people. In 49 a general council at Jerusalem took important decisions regarding permitted foods and circumcision. The Gentile converts were not required to undergo circumcision but they were to abstain from eating foodstuffs that had idolatrous associations.

The Jerusalem Church had upheld the continued validity of the Mosaic Law. But for Paul, the power of the Mosaic Law was coercive; it could force obedience to the Law even by imposing the penalty of death. ‘Yet we know that a person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus Christ, never by doing what the Law requires’ (Gal. 2:16). This new attitude is clearly summed up by Professor Trevor Ling:

> In this view it was virtually a demonic power, and it was this power which had been supernaturally conquered in the death of Jesus, so that for those who had faith in him the heavenly Jesus was their vindicator, their Saviour from the power of death and sin. It is this conception of faith in the heavenly Jesus as the way to deliverance from the penalty for transgression of the Law which is at the root of Paul’s attitude to the Law.[61]

The Jerusalem Church operated within the confines of the Mosaic Law, but for Paul no such limits were necessary because he himself was the recipient of direct revelation. In his letter to the Galatians (1:12), Paul says: 'Let me tell you, my brothers, that the gospel I preach is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor did any teach it to me. It was Jesus Christ himself who revealed it to me.' Here obviously, Jesus Christ is the divine being, and not the Jewish preacher and prophet Jesus that Paul has in mind. Paul reveals a little bit more about himself (Gal.1:15-19):

> But God in his grace chose me even before I was born, and called me to serve him. And when he decided to reveal his Son to me, so that I might preach the Good News about him to the Gentiles, I did not go to anyone for advice, nor did I go to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me. Instead, I went at once to Arabia, and then I returned to Damascus. It was three years later that I went to Jerusalem to obtain information from Peter, and I stayed with him for two weeks. I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord's brother.

It is not clear from Paul's letter whether God called Paul to serve him before or after his birth, even though, as he says, God had already chosen him before he was born.

The significance of Jesus for Paul was quite different from that of the Jerusalem community. It is clear from Paul's letters that he fairly soon began to identify Jesus with the Messiah of the Jewish apocalyptic hopes. But his identification of the historical Jesus with God was something unprecedented which can hardly be explained within the context of Jewish faith. Professor S.G.F. Brandon writes:

> Here again we meet an idea which is essentially un-Jewish, for it runs counter to the peculiar genius of Judaism, which placed a gulf of absolute difference between God and man, and it is completely without parallel in all our extant records of Jewish religious thought. The concept of the incarnation of a divine being in human form does, of course, frequently appear in the various pagan cults, Greek, Egyptian, and oriental, which were current in Paul's day in the Near East, and once more we must conclude that it was undoubtedly such

> environmental influences which predisposed the Apostle to think in terms of incarnation in interpreting his new faith to pagan peoples.[62]

For the purposes of his version of Jesus Christ, or just in pursuance of the revelatory tasks, Paul's interest in Jesus relates to his Crucifixion and the Resurrection three days later. This fitted perfectly well with his concept of the divine being which in his view was Jesus. He did have contact with those in the Jerusalem Church who had seen and experienced Jesus when he was alive. But the information and knowledge he gained from them about Jesus was of no direct concern to him for his vision of Christ, the heavenly being. 'In his epistles he makes no allusion to Bethlehem, to Nazareth, to the parents of Jesus, the virgin birth, John the Baptist, or Judas. There is no mention of the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord's Prayer, the miracles, the parable of the kingdom, no reference to the trial before a Roman official, to the denials of Peter, nor so many other significant events in the life and death of Jesus.'[63] His theology was independent of the Jerusalem tradition and was based on his own direct revelations. Since his death Jesus had become, in Paul's view, an exalted, heavenly being; and it would not be before too long 'when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven with his mighty angels, with a flaming fire, to punish those who reject God and who do not obey the Good News about our Lord Jesus' (II Thessalonians, 1:8-9). Professor Brandon comments:

> The traditional interpretation of the Jewish Christians that the death of Jesus was an accident, which had strangely fulfilled Isaiah's curious prophesy, Paul had not accepted before his conversion and after that event he still found it inadequate. To him the reality of the Resurrection had demonstrated the divine nature of Jesus, so that inevitably for him the Death must have a significance consonant with the status of him who suffered it. And here undoubtedly the influence of his earlier Hellenistic environment and his own genius became the determinative factors which led him to see in the Death and Resurrection of Jesus a divine mystery of cosmic significance.[64]

In this way, Jesus of Nazareth, an uncommonly unorthodox Jewish preacher of the coming of the Kingdom of God where the rule of God was to bring justice and equity -- a deep longing and expectation that many sensitive hearts have entertained since the dawn of history -- was said to have been a supernatural, heavenly being, and before

long, this ‘heavenly being’ as Paul had envisioned him, came to be worshipped as God Incarnate.

Paul’s teachings, as the Acts of the Apostles amply show, were a cause of uproar in the Jewish population. The Romans, as a matter of state policy, had a tolerant attitude towards different religions, sects and creeds so long as these did not disturb the public order and also refrained from affronting the state religion. The Romans were quite used to the idea of the God-man in their religious convictions. For instance under Augustus, the dogmas of the God-man and immaculate conception became formulas imposed by the state. Augustus was worshipped as a god. Beside his divinity, he also spread the idea that he was not the son of a human father but that his mother had conceived him of the god Apollo. Around 58 the Roman authorities had rescued Paul when the Jews attacked him for his teachings. During his last visit to Jerusalem, he was arrested and put on trial on a charge of violating the sanctity of the Temple. He successfully appealed to the emperor to have his case transferred from a provincial court to the imperial court in Rome. He was sent to Rome in 59. There he spent two years under house arrest waiting for his turn to appear before the emperor. What happened to him after this is uncertain; tradition says that he was executed near Rome in 67.

How far Paul can be said to represent the teachings and work of Jesus is a theme on which much has been written. For the believers his place in shaping Christianity is beyond reproach, but for many theologians and historians he appears in a different light. The person who provided details about his life was Luke, whose Gospel and The Acts of the Apostles form parts of the New Testament. Luke, it is worth remembering, was not a disciple (apostle) of Jesus. Many scholars of the History of Religions School see Paul developing his Christology from mystery religions and maintain that he had no real connection with Jesus. WilhelmWrede, a member of this school, says: ‘Jesus knows nothing of that for which Paul is everything.’[65] In another place, he says: ‘In comparison with Jesus he is a new phenomenon, as new as is possible with their one great common foundation. He is much further removed from Jesus than Jesus himself is removed from the most noble figures of Jewish piety.’[66] Wrede summarises the views of the scholars of the History of Religions School in these words:

> This picture of Christ did not develop under the impress of the personality of Jesus. It has often been asserted, but never proved . . . There remains only one explanation: Paul already believed in such a heavenly being, in a divine Christ before he believed in Jesus . . . And this view, for Paul the embodiment of religion, the founding support for his piety, the prop without which it would collapse -- was this the continuation or the transformation of the Gospel of Jesus? What remains here of the Gospel which Paul is said to have understood? . . . Unless we deny both figures any historicity, it follows that to call Paul a 'disciple of Jesus' is quite inappropriate if this is meant to describe his relationship to Jesus.[67]

Joseph Klausner views Paul to be the person who wanted 'to make Christianity entirely spiritual and a matter of personal piety--for this reason he was bound to make little of the earthly life of Jesus'. He quotes Paul Wernle approvingly who had said: 'To Paul's mind the centre of interest was not the teacher, the worker of miracles, the companion of publicans and sinners, the opponent of the Pharisees; it was the crucified Son of God raised from the dead, and none other.'[68]

The Jewish Christians who closely followed the Jewish Law remained a small group in Palestine, failing to convert the Jewish people to their side, but there is evidence that they carried on mission work among the Gentiles also.[69] The arrest and removal of Paul from active work created serious problems for the Gentile Christian communities. It virtually meant the defeat of the Pauline movement within the Church that had tried to open the path of salvation through Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Saviour for all, Jews and Gentiles alike. This defeat at the same time was the victory of the original and genuine faith and the tradition which the Church of Jerusalem represented. The success of the Jewish Christianity seemed to have overcome its greatest challenge just before the great Jewish Revolt of 66 and 'the future of the nascent movement appeared to lie irretrievably in the hands of the Jewish Christians.'[70] In 70 the Roman were victorious after a very bitter struggle in which the local population suffered extremely. Josephus recorded in detail the events of the period. Jerusalem suffered terrible destruction; the Temple, the headquarters of the

resistance, was burnt down. The Romans captured Masada, where the Jews, in 73, made their last heroic stand.

One consequence of the revolt and its defeat in 70 that 'dynamically changed the whole constitution of the Church and vitally affected the future development of its organisation, was the complete obliteration of the Church of Jerusalem.'[71] The effect of the fall of Jewish state on the Gentile Christian communities was the opposite. Paul's reputation was rehabilitated among the Gentile communities. The fusion of the Pauline universalist Saviour-God cult and the devotion to the historical person of Jesus as represented by the Jerusalem Church took place which found expression in the canonical Gospels.

The Jewish Christians had a precarious existence after 70 but they did not disappear from the scene. They established their church in the little town of Pella beyond the Jordan within the domains of Herod Agrippa, where they lived in relative obscurity for about 60 years. Under Hadrian a new city Ælia Capitolina was built on Mount Sion which was accorded the status of a colony. Jews were strictly barred from settling there. However, the Jewish Christians overcame the prohibition by electing a Gentile bishop (non-circumcised), Marcus, to preside over them. Edward Gibbon writes: 'At his persuasion the most considerable part of the congregation renounced the Mosaic law, in the practice of which they had persevered above a century. By this sacrifice of their habits and prejudices they purchased a free admission into the colony of Hadrian, and more firmly cemented their union with the Catholic church.'[72]

But those Jewish Christians who did not follow Marcus came under increasing social pressure for their faith. While they were rejected by the orthodox Jews, the dominant Gentile Christians did not accord them the recognition as Christians either. Despite their exclusion from mainstream Judaism, they continued to follow the Jewish Law and customs, observed Sabbath, circumcision and Jewish feasts like the rest of the Jews. For orthodox Jews their position as Christians was irreconcilable with Judaism and Gentile Christians had little sympathy for their continued observance of the Mosaic Law, the traditional Jewish rites and customs. In the fourth century, Jerome translated their *Gospel according to the Hebrews* and magnified the religious role of James, the brother of Jesus, who as represented in the canonical Gospels had

been marginalised. From the time of Irenaeus (*c*. 130--*c*. 200), who became Bishop of Lyons in 177 and provided the first authoritative pronouncement on the Christian doctrine, the creed and a definition of its scriptural canon, the Jewish Christians came to be regarded as a deviationist sect. They were called Ebionites which in Hebrew means 'the poor'. In the following passage, Irenaeus writes about them:

> Those who are called Ebionites agree that God made the world; but their opinions about the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus and Carpocrates [two Gnostic leaders]. They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was apostate from the law. As to the prophetical writings, they endeavour to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practice circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and in their Judaic style of life, and that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God.[73]

Different explanations have been given for the reasons that led to the use of such a name with regard to these Jewish Christians. Eusebius who strongly objected to their beliefs writes: 'The ancients quite properly called these men Ebionites, because they held poor and mean opinions concerning Christ. For they considered him a plain and common man, who was justified only by his superior virtue, and who was the fruit of intercourse of a man with Mary. In their opinion the observance of the ceremonial law was altogether necessary, on the ground that they could not be saved in Christ alone and by a corresponding life.'[74]

The Ebionites denied the virgin birth of Jesus. This denial was regarded a heresy, and Irenaeus classified them as heretics. It was inevitable because the Pauline view of Christ had triumphed and had become Christianity, a position it has held over the last two thousand years. The Gospels of the New Testament represent the Pauline theology. This triumph also meant, as mentioned earlier, that Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, a preacher of the Kingdom of God and a prophet, as his close relatives, disciples and followers of the Jerusalem Church had known him, had no place in the form of Christianity which finally emerged in the early Catholic Church. The Ebionites rejected by Jews as apostates and by Christians as heretics were gradually absorbed by the church and the synagogue.

Chapter 2. Challenges to the Christian faith: heresies and schisms

The social and religious environment under which Christian communities grew in the Near East was polytheistic, where mystery religions and cults were common. Christian missionaries operating in various places came in contact with populations that adhered to pagan syncretism, magic and astrology. It was quite common to elevate to divine status worldly heroes, such as Heracles and Asclepius as a reward for their merits. Mystery cults met the human concerns of their followers, seeking comfort and consolation in this world and salvation in the hereafter. Among these, Isis-worship, Orphism, Mithraism, the Bacchics and the Pythagoreans were fairly spread over the Mediterranean world. In mystery religions a devotee was initiated into occult knowledge centred on a particular god, such as the popular Egyptian Isis or the Indo-Persian Mithras. It was a common practice for the initiated to be offered a chance to identify himself with the divine in a ceremony, which involved a simulated death and resurrection to overcome mortality. However, 'the Christians amazed the world by the extraordinary claim that the divine redeemer of their story had lately been born of a woman in Judaea, had been crucified under Pontius Pilate, had risen again, and at the last (which they believed to be in the near future) would judge the world. It would all have been less startling to the ancient mind if only the story could be cut free of its historical anchorage and interpreted as a cosmic or psychological myth attached to an esoteric mystery-cult.'[1] However, the adherents of this new faith were soon confronted by a rival faith, Gnosticism.

Gnosticism

In the second century, the Christian Church faced the danger that Christianity might itself end up as one of the mystery cults. By this time Gnosticism was one important syncretic and complex movement that was widespread throughout the Mediterranean world. 'Gnosticism was born,' writes Benjamin Walker, 'at the crossroads of many ancient cultures, at a time in history that marked the end of pagan antiquity. It owed its strength to the fusion of past and present, old and new, east and west. It became heir both to the rational tradition of the classical world and the mysticism of the oriental cults of antiquity.'[2]

Many teachers and groups with divergent views are classed together under the term ‘gnosticism’. There were more than fifty sects of Gnostics. Some of their religious ideas and practices came from Hindu, Buddhist and Zoroastrian sources that stressed the dualistic conception of human life, the spiritual versus the material. The Gnostics believed that material world was basically evil whereas the world of the spirit was good. The material world was the creation of a demiurge or inferior god, called Ialdabaoth, who was an opponent of the supreme God of Truth. As the world was in the hands of evil powers, the way to escape from them lay through the special mystic knowledge of a divine saviour who would come from the realm of pure spirit and help the soul to achieve salvation and return to its home in the pure sphere of divine light. Much time was devoted to learning the magic passwords which, after death, allowed the soul to undertake successfully the perilous journey towards the realm of light. For instance, in the *Second Book of Jeu* Jesus instructs his disciples how they should proceed on their celestial journey when they leave the body and come to the First Aeon:

> The Archons of this aeon come before you; they seal you with this seal. Their name is zozeze. They hold the number 1119 in both hands. When they have finished sealing you with this seal and have given their name once only, do you say these words of protection: ‘Away with you, Proteth, Personiphon, Chous, Archons of the First Aeon, for I call upon Eaza, Zeozazz, Zozeoz.’ But when the Archons of the First Aeon have heard these names they will be greatly terrified and will retreat and flee to the west leftwards and you will be able to continue.[3]

In the second century Gnosticism was a worldwide movement. There were Gnostics in southern Gaul, in Rome and Carthage, but their main centres were in Syria and Egypt where the great leaders of the movement lived and taught.[4] Among the various Gnostic schools, about a dozen had associations with Christianity. The result was the emergence of the Gnostic forms of Christianity. Among these were the Ophites, the Basilidians, the Carpocratians and the Valentinians. The idea of redemption was central to the belief system of Gnostic Christians. The cosmological dualism between the spiritual and material in the case of Jesus’ crucifixion was resolved in a number of

ways. The Gnostics did not accept the Christian view that the divine Saviour had suffered and died on the cross. Some regarded Christ as Logos, the Light-Person, a perfect divine being, who could not suffer, and certainly under no conditions could suffer death. Suffering and death are for those who have a material body, impure and evil. Christ had a spiritual body, and he did not have anything that was connected with a material and decaying body. According to Basilides (85--145), Christ could transform himself and make himself invisible at will. Valentinus (110--75) wrote: 'He ate and drank in a peculiar manner, not evacuating his food. So much power of continence was in him that in him food was not corrupted, since he himself had no corruptibility.'[5]

There were some who held the view that Christ was a pure spirit, not a real human being. With regard to his crucifixion they held that he only seemed (the Greek verb *dokein*: 'to seem') to suffer and die on the cross. The followers of this doctrine became known as Docetists. According to one version, the divine Saviour who had inhabited the body of Jesus had returned to heaven before the Passion; the death on the cross was only illusory, meant to deceive the evil spirits of this world. But all Christian Gnostics did not share this view of crucifixion. Some Valentinians held that the suffering of Christ was real; he accepted this suffering and took death upon himself to overcome it. Not all sects of the Christian Gnostics looked upon Jesus as the Saviour. There were many Samaritans who regarded Simon Magus to be the Saviour who was accused by the Church Fathers and Christian thinkers as the founder and source of all doctrines of Gnosticism. The great apologist of the Catholic Church in the second century, Justin Martyr, names him to be the one 'from whom all sorts of heresies derive their origin.' Many miracles are associated with his name. Justin Martyr wrote: 'He was considered a god . . . And almost all the Samaritans, and a few even of other nations, worship him, and acknowledge him as the first god, and a woman, Helena, who went about with him at that time and had formerly been a prostitute, they say is the first idea generated by him.'[6] There were also those who believed the Greek hero Heracles to be the chief redeemer while Jesus had a subordinate role.

The fundamental belief of the Gnostics related to *gnōsis* (knowledge). It was believed to be attainable through a divine saviour who had knowledge of the Supreme

God, superior to Ialdabaoth. This special knowledge about the divine mysteries and human destiny, according to Christian Gnostics, was of a secret, esoteric kind, not revealed to all Christians but only to a chosen few. The Congress of Messina (1966), discussing the theme of the origins of Gnosticism, formulated a terminological proposal for it as follows:

> The Gnosticism of the second-century sects involves a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarised in the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into the world of fate, birth and death, and needed to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally reintegrated. Compared with other conceptions of the 'devolution' of the divine, this idea is based ontologically on the conception of a downward movement of the divine whose periphery (often called Sophia or Ennoia) had to submit to the fate of entering into a crisis and producing, even if only indirectly, this world, upon which it cannot turn its back, since it is necessary for it to recover the pneuma, a dualistic conception of a monistic background, expressed in a double movement.[7]

The anti-Gnostic writings of the period show that Christian bishops and thinkers were seriously alarmed at the prospects of a Gnostic take-over and they condemned the Gnostic version of Christian beliefs as heretical and deviant from the original Christian doctrine. Orthodoxy and heresy were born side by side. The use of the term 'heresy' in the history of Christian Church belongs to the period when the systematisation of Christian doctrine started to take shape under the control of the church. There was no contradiction between the true doctrine and heresy for the first generation of Christians, but it was soon to change. Dr Maurice Goguel observes:

> It was different in the second generation when the relationship between experience and expression was reversed, experience ceased to give birth to doctrinal expression which itself created experience and adhesion to a particular doctrinal truth was held as the condition which must be fulfilled for a man to be able to share in salvation. Doctrine in this way came to exist in its own right as it preceded experience and what differed from it appeared as heresy. The two opposing conceptions of sound doctrine and heresy are closely bound together;

> one defines the other and neither can exist without the other. Heresy in principle is any line of thought which differs from the official expression of the church's faith and yet claims to have the right to exist and develop within the community. For the period under consideration this definition must be treated as flexible, as no rigorously phrased confession of faith yet existed.[8]

In the second century the Christian struggle against Gnosticism led to routinisation of Christian faith. Any party, which did not conform to the officially defined doctrine of the Catholic Church, was regarded false and heretical. The strict rules of the Orthodox Church were binding on all Christians. The great scholar Clement of Alexandria (d. *c*. 214), who was committed to defend the Church, wrote: 'We ought in no way to transgress the rule of the Church. Above all, the confession which deals with the essential articles of the faith is observed by us, but disregarded by the heretics. Those then are to be believed who hold firmly to the truth.'[9] The Church regarded the Christian Gnostic sects heretical. Some viewed Manichaeism, which arose in the third century, to be a Christian heresy. As I discuss later, the Byzantine theologians also considered Islam a Christian heresy.

Let us have a brief look at the basic beliefs of Christian Gnostics. The Gnostic cosmology owed as much to Plato's *Timaeus* as to the first chapters of the Genesis. The story of the Fall of Adam and Eve had deep fascination for Gnostic thought. *The Secret Book of John* found in *The Nag Hammadi Collection* is a key text that tells the story of early Genesis as the Gnostics saw God, Adam, Eve, the serpent and Noah. Willis Barnstone elucidates:

> For the Gnostics the highest deity is the Father of Light. God the Creator, the Yahweh of the Bible, is below him in the divine hierarchy, and he is a 'jealous God' because he knows that he is not the only sole divine power. The Gnostics called Yahweh Ialdabaoth, and they characterised him 'a monstrous abortion of darkness' who has trapped the Light-spirit of man in darkness and matter. Moreover, they believed that sin and evil came about not through Adam and Eve's original disobedience but through God's very act of creation of the world and Adam, which he did with arrogance, vanity, and in ignorance. God took light particles from his mother, Sophia, and trapped them in his human creation,

> but Adam and Eve struggle to return to the Father of Light. They began the process of redemption through their first act of disobedience to the Creator God, by eating from the Tree of Gnosis (knowledge), also called the Tree of the Thought of Light.[10]

The Ophites, so-called because of their use of the symbolism of the serpent (*ophis*), believed that since Adam and Eve came to have knowledge of good and evil through the serpent, he was a good power. Many Gnostic sects had strong leanings towards Ophitism. For instance, according to the Naassenes, the demiurge, the Yahweh of the Old Testament, tried to prevent Adam and Eve from acquiring knowledge and it was the serpent who persuaded them to disobey and thus out-manoeuvred the ill designs of the inferior deity and 'his son Jesus whom the Ophites solemnly cursed in their liturgy.'[11] This was the origin of the gnōsis.

As the Gnostics identified Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, with the creator of an evil, material world, they were fiercely anti-Jewish. They often liked to contrast the God of the Old Testament, the God of justice who stood for a tooth for a tooth and an eye for an eye with the God of the New Testament, the Good God, the loving Father.

These ideas were clearly formulated by Marcion (90--165), one of the most formidable figures who did not adhere to the mainstream Gnosticism. He created his theology, which the Church Fathers, Irenaeus and Tertullian tried to combat. The son of a bishop, Marcion was a rich shipowner in Asia Minor. He came to Rome in 139 or 140, where he came under the influence of a Gnostic teacher Credo (d. 143), and was excommunicated by the Church in 144 when he propounded his doctrines at a synod. He considered himself a true Christian. In his book *Antithesis,* he demonstrated the contradictions between the Old and the New Testaments and the points of opposition between two Gods. One is the God of creation and generation, the ruler of this Aeon; who is known from his real work, this world. The other is the hidden God, unknown and unknowable. The first one is the 'just', jealous and wrathful Yahweh or Jehovah of the Old Testament; the second is the unknown, alien and Good God, whom Jesus calls the Father. Both of them are completely different from each other. Barnstone explains:

> In Marcion's system the biblical God has nothing to do with the alien Good God. The former is a divinity in his own right and his messiah will come to bring earthly salvation to his people, but that salvation of the 'just' God was restricted to the earth. Since the earth is not worth much--indeed, it is a prison--a salvation here only strengthens the cause of the 'just' God whom Marcion completely opposes. As for the earth's inhabitants, they are treated by the biblical God without a spark of Spirit (*pneuma*), and so their eventual salvation by the Good God will not, as in other Gnostic beliefs, continue to be the eventual redemption of the biblical God.[12]

Thus the world created by Jehovah was a wretched miserable place in whose creation God the Father had no part. The only way he affected the cosmos was to send his son to redeem us from the creator God. As the prophets of the New Testament prophesied, a Jewish national Messiah will come to establish his earthly kingdom for the Jewish people only, but Christ had already brought about the total spiritual salvation. Salvation depended on faith in Jesus Christ the Saviour as the emissary of God the Father. As Walker says: 'Marcion made faith and not gnosis the vehicle of redemption. Salvation, he said, was available to all men, and did not involve secrets, secret revelations or knowledge of magical rituals. Moral conduct imposed from without was irrelevant.'[13]

Marcion rejected the Old Testament in the sense that it was meant only for the Jews. But he accepted it to be a revelation of the God who created the material world and gave the Law to Moses and sent other prophets. But he rejected the New Testament, retaining only the Gospel of Luke with some modifications and ten letters of Paul as genuinely representing the gospel. He also rejected the idea that the New Testament continued the message of the Old Testament. In his view, the documents of the New Testament had been greatly corrupted by the sinister methods of its Judaisers. The only gospel he regarded as authentic was Luke's, which, he argued, had also been corrupted by the Judaisers. Chadwick explains Marcion's view of Luke:

> Moreover, the original text, Marcion believed, was the work of Paul himself, and he therefore undertook to establish the authentic part of Paul's Gospel as it

> was before his uncompromising friends and disciples had altered it. Marcion thus became the first person to draw up an exclusive canonical list of Biblical books, which excluded all the Old Testament and large parts of the New, grounded on the basic assumption that the twelve apostles had not possessed the insight to comprehend the true meaning of Jesus.[14]

Marcion was a big challenge to the early Church and as a reaction to his work he is said to have provided the initial impetus for the orthodoxy to establish a New Testament canon. 'It is to him that we owe the terms Old Testament and New Testament. By his study of these scriptures he forced on the Church the problem of establishing a canon, and was indeed the first to assemble a New Testament canon.'[15]

After his expulsion from the Roman Church, Marcion began to teach his doctrines, founded the Marcionite Church, with a hierarchy of bishops, priests and deacons. A passage by Justin Martyr in his *First Apology* (*c*. 155) shows the popular appeal of Marcion's teachings: 'And there is Marcion, a man of Pontus, who is even at this day alive, and teaching his disciples to believe in some other god greater than the Creator. And he, with the aid of the devils, has caused many of every nation to speak blasphemies, and to deny that God is the maker of this universe, and to assert that some other, being greater than He, has done greater works.'[16]

Women were given an important place in the new church; priesthood was open to women and laity. The Marcionite Church was quite successful for a time. It was only after the victory of both Christianity and Manichaeism that the Gnostic schools under internal strife and outside pressure dispersed, but Marcionite churches spread throughout Italy, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Armenia; they flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries.

The Church Fathers met the challenges that Gnostic beliefs posed to the new faith. Their writings, extending from the second to the fourth century in polemical guise, were the only source of information that had been available for many centuries about Gnostic teachings, including some abstracts from the Gnostics texts. Among them may be mentioned Justin Martyr (d. 165), Irenaeus of Lyons (*c*.120--202), Clement of Alexandria (*c*. 140--215), Hippolytus of Rome (*fl*. 210--36), Tertullian (*c*.

150--223), Origen (died *c*. 253), Ephraim Syrus (*c*. 308--73) and Epiphanius of Salamis (*c*. 315--403). They wrote long treatises condemning and refuting Gnostic teachers and their philosophies. Their efforts succeeded to the extent that orthodox Christians destroyed almost every Gnostic writing. As a result of this, all that was known about Gnostics until late in the nineteenth century was built on the accounts of heresiologists. The major breakthrough in our understanding of Gnostic literature belongs to the discoveries of some manuscripts in the late nineteenth century, and the fantastic discovery of the fourth-century manuscripts at Nag Hammadi in Egypt which some far-sighted person or persons had buried for posterity in the ground in earthen jars. These have been edited and translated into German, French and English and are now available. In view of this rich source of information, the role and place of Gnostic movement in theology in general has been re-examined, and important studies have been made of the formative years of the Christian Church.

Mani and Manichaeism

As the danger which the early Church confronted from the Gnostic systems of the second century gradually declined, a more powerful Gnostic religion that had great appeal for people everywhere emerged in the third century. This was the universal religion Manichaeism. It was the final systematisation of the Gnostic belief systems of late antiquity as a universal religion of revelation. Its founder was the semi-legendary Persian prophet Mani (216--77), who became known in the West under the Latin form of his name, Manichaeus. He combined Zoroastrian, Judaeo-Christian and Buddhist elements in his teachings in the spirit of Gnostic dualism. He, like the Zoroastrians, believed in the struggle between two cosmic forces of Light and Darkness, God and Devil. He also believed in heaven and hell and life after death. The way to take part in the cosmic drama of salvation was to practise asceticism and celibacy. He opposed sexual indulgence, the eating of animal food and the consumption of wine. But unlike the Zoroastrians he held the view that matter is evil while the good is embodied in spirit. He identified Jesus more with Mithra and he rejected the four Gospels of the New Testament in favour of a new one, called Erteng, which he claimed, was revealed to him. Among the early biblical figures, he regarded Adam, Seth and Noah as prophets. Besides these, God also sent his two prophets, Zoroaster and Buddha to enlighten the world and Mani was sent as the last in the line of messengers to continue

and to perfect their mission. In the beginning of his book called *Shabuhragan*, Mani says:

> Wisdom and deeds have always from time to time been brought to mankind by the messengers of God. So in one age they have been brought by the messenger called Buddha to India, in another by Zaradusht [Zoroaster] to Persia, in another by Jesus to the West. Thereupon this revelation has come down, this prophecy in its last age, through me, Mani, messenger of the God of truth to Babylonia.[17]

Mani saw himself as surpassing all the prophets but at the same time he was also tolerant enough to acknowledge the contribution of the earlier religions to the formation of his own. Mani says:

> The religion that I, Mani, have chosen is in ten things above and better than the other, previous religions. Firstly: the primeval religions were in one country and one language. But my religion is of that kind that it will be manifest in every country and in all languages, and it will be taught in far away countries.
>
> Secondly: the former religions existed as long as they had the pure leaders, but when the leaders had been led upwards [i.e. had died], then their religions fell into disorder and became negligent in commandments and works . . . But my religion, because of the living books, of the Teachers, the Bishops, the Elect and the Hearers, and of wisdom and works will stay until the End.
>
> Thirdly: those previous souls that in their own religion have not accomplished the works, will come to my religion through metempsychosis, which certainly will be the door of redemption for them.
>
> Fourthly: this revelation of mine of the two principles and my living books, my wisdom and knowledge are above and better than those of the previous religions.[18]

In contrast to the Gnostic cults, which were restricted to approved initiates, Manichaeism was open to all. In his book *Kephalaion*, Mani declares the universality of his religion:

> He who has his Church in the West, he and his church have not reached the East: the choice of him who has chosen his Church in the East has not come to the West . . . But my Hope, mine, will go towards the West, and she will go also to the East. And they shall hear the voice of her message in all languages, and shall proclaim her in all cities. My Church is superior in this first point to previous Churches, for these previous Churches were chosen in particular countries and in particular cities. My Church, mine shall spread in all cities, and my Gospel shall touch every country.[19]

What Mani had said proved true. Mani travelled extensively and preached in the Persian Empire under Shapur I (r. 241--72). However, when Bahram I succeeded to the throne in 274, the situation changed. The Mazdean priests labelled Mani a heretic and with the consent of the king, he was arrested, put in chains and cruelly put to death in 276. There are conflicting accounts of his death. According to some documents he was crucified or flayed alive for his anti-Zoroastrian teachings, while others describe his death by some other cruel methods in prison. He left behind a well-organised church. After his death his fame and his religion spread far and wide.

The proselytising missionaries spread this religion through Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Spain and Rome in the West, gaining a number of Christian converts. It spread towards the East through Persia, Afghanistan, North India, and Central Asia and China. The Western Christians regarded it as a great challenge. Church historian, Eusebius, for instance, in portraying Mani as a dangerous 'madman', wrote:

> At that time also the madman, who gave his name to his devil-possessed heresy, was taking as his armour mental delusion, for the devil, that is Satan himself, the adversary of God, had put the man forward for the destruction of many . . . In short, he stitched together false and godless doctrines that he had collected from the countless, long-extinct, godless heresies, and infected our empire, as it were, a deadly poison that came from the land of the Persians; and from him the profane name of Manichaean is still commonly on men's lips to this day.[20]

Manichaeism was a powerful challenge to European Christianity and the Roman authorities tried to suppress it. The great Christian writer St Augustine of Hippo (354-

-430) was a Manichee for more than nine years before he converted to Christianity, the faith of his mother. After his conversion, he wrote more than a dozen books against his former faith.

In Western China, the Uighur Turks were converted to Manichaeism in the early eighth century and in 762 it was made the state religion there. It continued to enjoy this dominant position till the thirteenth century when it became a victim of Mongol power. Under Muslim rule Manicheans were treated cordially. 'Manicheans were extensively employed by the Muslims, who respected their zeal, their integrity, their knowledge of astronomy, medicine and mathematics, and their proficiency in arts.'[21]

After the sixth century, the influence of Manichaeism started to decline in Europe but it continued to appear as a threat in other guises throughout the Middle Ages. For instance, in the twelfth-century Europe, the Manichaean doctrine of Cathari, that God created the spiritual world but the devil the material world, was quite widespread. There were numerous sects who varied in their beliefs, but they all had certain features in common. They, like the Gnostics, believed in dualism and practised asceticism. They believed that God, being perfect, had created the world only for the world of spirit, which was eternal. The material world, temporal and corruptible, was the work of an evil power, called Satan, Lucifer or Lucibel, who was identifiable with the Jehovah of the Old Testament. They vehemently opposed the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the liturgy and sacraments and rejected the worship of the Virgin Mary, of icons and images. They condemned the profligate lifestyle of church authorities and viewed the established Church as the 'synagogue of Satan'.[22] The Catholic Church used the most effective instrument of power, the Inquisition, to root out the Cathars. Other unorthodox sects, commonly accused of belonging to the Cathars, were subjected to persecution by the Church long after the Cathars had been eliminated.

The expansion of Christian faith and power

Before we survey some of the controversies regarding the nature of Christ, I shall briefly mention how a religious sect of Christians by gaining large numbers of

converts from other pagan cults was eventually made the state religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century.

By the end of the first century, the Christian movement had spread to larger cities of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean world. There were followers of Christianity in Antioch, Caesarea, Alexandria, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi and Rome. In Rome the Christians seemed to have attracted considerable followers, mostly from the lower classes of the society. The Roman authorities were aware of their existence. The governing principle of the Romans to the rise of new sects was that so long as they did not imply disrespect or disobedience to the empire, they were tolerated. From past experience the Romans had learned to be extremely suspicious of secret religious societies. In Rome, Christians were unwilling to celebrate Roman holidays and conform to the state religion. Emperor Nero took repressive measures against them in 65. Despite Nero's persecutions, the Christian community was not destroyed in Rome. In the third century, the persecution of Christians continued during the reigns of Decius, Gallus and Valerian. At the beginning of the fourth century, the religious temper of Roman society deepened. Much more hostility towards the Christians came to be the order of the day. Emperor Diocletian (284--305) and his colleagues shared in the rebirth of devotion to the pagan gods. Christians at this time were in large numbers and they held high positions. They were considered to be not only religious non-conformists but also political revolutionaries. An open and violent anti-Christian campaign began in 303 which lasted about ten years.

However, in 312 and 313 important events took place for the history of Christianity and the Roman Empire. In 312, Emperor Constantine (r. 306--37) emerged victorious by defeating Maxentius, his principal rival in the West, in the battle of Milvian Bridge. It was said that he had seen a cross in the sky and the words *In hoc signo vinces* ('By this symbol conquer'). It is quite likely that he believed the hand of divine power played a part in his victory. The Roman Senate erected the Arch that stands today by the Colosseum in his honour, proclaiming in its inscription that Constantine won a just victory 'by the prompting of the Divinity'.[23] The God referred to here was the Unconquered Sun. Constantine continued to publicly acknowledge the cult of the Sun but he showed important favours to the Christians. Chadwick points out that

> Constantine was not aware of any mutual exclusiveness between Christianity and his faith in the Unconquered Sun. The transition from solar monotheism (the most popular form of contemporary monotheism) to Christianity was not difficult. In Old Testament prophecy Christ was entitled 'the sun of the righteousness'. Clement of Alexandria (*c.* A.D. 200) speaks of Christ driving his chariot across the sky like the Sun-god . . . Moreover, early in the fourth century there begins in the West (where first and by whom is not known) the celebration of 25 December, the birthday of the Sun-god at the winter solstice, as the date for the nativity of Christ.[24]

In 312, Licinius defeated Maximin Daia, leaving Constantine emperor in the West and Licinius in the East. Constantine revoked anti-Christian laws and restored the property to the Christians of which they had been deprived, individually or collectively, during the period of persecution. In 312, both emperors agreed to extend toleration to the Christians by the Edict of Milan (313) that declared:

> Our purpose is to grant both to the Christians and to all others full authority to follow whatever worship each man has desired; whereby whatsoever Divinity dwells in heaven may be benevolent and propitious to us, and to all who are placed under our authority. Therefore we thought it salutary and most proper to establish our purpose that no man whatever should be refused complete toleration, who has given up his mind to the cult of Christians, or to the religion which he personally feels best suited to himself; to the end that the supreme Divinity, to whose worship we devote ourselves under no compulsion, may continue in all things to grant us his wonted favour and beneficence.[25]

Constantine kept his word about the principles of toleration, but his attitude towards paganism became more contemptuous. From this time on, he began to regard himself a Christian whose imperial duty was to keep peace between his large and extensive Christian populations. As controversies between the Christians were growing, one way to achieve peace in the realm was to strengthen the unity of the Church.

In 324, Constantine became the sole emperor after he had defeated Licinius who was a pagan; they had been suspicious of each other's intentions. Constantine formally converted to Christianity in 324, an event which redirected the course of history of both the Church and Europe. It had far-reaching consequences for church and state relations. 'From that time on, church and the state were to be locked in an embrace which no doubt offered benefits to both sides, but which likewise brought serious handicaps. And this would continue until modern times when the doctrine of the separation of church and state would likewise entail both bane and blessing.'[26] The emperor became deeply involved in developing the Church and the Church became a major factor to influence the political affairs. In 325 he called the first ecumenical council, the Council of Nicaea to discuss the Arian heresy, which we discuss below. Constantine himself presided over it. The close association of the Church and the Empire in the highly institutionalised type of government that followed witnessed the rapid spread of Christianity throughout the Empire, and it extended beyond the Roman frontiers along the routes of commerce. In the rising fortunes of Christianity the next major event occurred in 391 when Emperor Theodosius I (*c*. 346--95) proclaimed Christianity the official religion of the Empire. The spread and triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire brought it into the mainstream of Hellenistic thought. Some major doctrinal controversies arose among the Christians around the precise nature of Christ. These controversies had far-reaching consequences for Christian doctrine and the subsequent history of Christianity. The disagreements about Christian dogma became extremely acrimonious at times. During the period from Constantine to the Council of Chalcedon (451) the controversy raged around the central doctrine of the Trinity and then about the doctrine of Incarnation. The teachings of Arius of Alexandria (*c*. 250--*c*. 336) on the nature of the Trinity constituted what has been called 'the Arian heresy'.

The Arian controversy

The Arian controversy arose in 318 due to an abstruse disagreement between Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, and his presbyter Arius. This disagreement roused such great feelings that it involved the whole of the Christian world in a bitter

controversy and doctrinal split, especially the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Arius, a tall, handsome man was a popular and eloquent preacher in a suburb of Alexandria. He disagreed with Bishop Alexander of Alexandria who held that God and Jesus had always existed: 'God is always, the Son is always,' and that the Son 'is the unbegotten begotten.'

Arius was a monotheist who held that God is separate from the world, alone, and unknowable. He defined God as '*agenetos*'--that is, the ultimate source of everything who himself derived from no source. He asserted that the Logos derived his being from God and was therefore not God in the absolute sense. He denied the divinity of Christ and focused on the dissimilarity between the Father and the Son. The Son was a mortal and created being, and thus had a beginning unlike the Father who had no beginning and always existed. In the words of historian Socrates of Constantinople (*c*. 380--439): 'Arius said, "If the Father begat the Son, He that was begotten has a beginning of existence; and from this it is evident, that there was when the Son was not. It therefore necessarily follows that He had his essence from the non-existent." '[27] The Father alone is God while the Son is the first and greatest of created beings. The Son is divine, but he is not God as God is God. God is eternal and unchanging, so we cannot speak of God as suffering, or of the Holy Spirit and the Son as coeternal with him. As God created the Son, he could not be of the same substance as God the Father. In his letter (*c*. 320) to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia (d. 341or 342), Arius wrote:

> I want to tell you that the bishop [Alexander] makes great havoc of us and persecutes us severely, and is in full sail against us: he has driven us out of the city as atheists, because we do not concur in what he publicly preaches, namely, that 'God has always been, and the Son has always been: Father and Son exist together: the Son has his existence unbegotten along with God ever being begotten, without having been begotten: God does not precede the Son by thought or by any interval however small: God has always been, the Son has always been; the Son is from God Himself'.
>
> Eusebius, your brother in Caesarea, Theodotus, Paulinus, Athanasius, Gregory, Aëtius, and all the bishops of the East, have been made anathema because they say that God has existence without beginning prior to His Son:

except Philogonius, Hellanicus, and Macarius, who are heretical fellows, and uncatechized. One of them says that the Son is an effusion, another that He is an emission, another that He is also unbegotten.

These are impieties to which we could not listen, even though the heretics should threaten us with a thousand deaths. But as for us, what do we say, and believe, and what have we taught, and what do we teach? That the Son is not unbegotten, nor in any way part of the unbegotten; nor from some lower essence (i.e. from matter); but that by His own (i.e. the Father's) will and counsel He has subsisted before time, and before ages as God *full of grace and truth* [John I:14], only-begotten, unchangeable.[28]

The distinction that Arius drew between Eternal God and all those who are not eternal was to assert the uniqueness of God in a sense that no other being could be held equal to him. This also implies that God was not always a Father, for once he was alone and afterwards became a Father. This must mean that the Son had an origin, certainly not in time at the outset of creation, but like creation he was born out of nothing. Arius emphasised the difference between God and Jesus because God 'who begat an Only-begotten Son' had not divested Himself of His original powers. In a letter (*c*. 320) to Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, he complains of being unjustly persecuted for the clear truth which he defends. He wrote:

We acknowledge One God, all unbegotten, alone everlasting, alone unbegun, alone true, *alone having immortality*, . . . For the Father did not, in giving to Him [the Son] the inheritance of all things, deprive Himself of what He has ingenerately in Himself; for He is the Fountain of all things. Thus there are Three Subsistences. And God, being the cause of all things, is unbegun and altogether sole but the Son being begotten apart from time by the Father, and being created and found before ages, was not before His generation; but, being begotten apart from time before all things, alone was made to subsist by the Father. For He is not eternal or co-eternal or co-unoriginate with the Father, nor has He His being together with the Father.[29]

Arius had offered an explanation to resolve some of the mysteries of Christian doctrine. His arguments were meant to demonstrate the unique attributes of God that

Jesus did not and could not have possessed. Therefore his conclusion was that Jesus was not wholly God, but lesser than him.

These views caused sharp controversy between Alexander and Arius. Alexander called a synod in Alexandria, which denounced and deposed Arius and his friends. But Arius received powerful support outside Egypt and many important bishops like Church historian Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (Palestine), and Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia opposed Bishop Alexander. The conflict was mostly confined to the eastern part of the empire and the Catholic Church in that region was split into two parties. All classes of society were affected by the controversy. Gregory of Nazianzus describes the commotion it caused in Constantinople:

> Ask a tradesman how many obols he wants for some article in his shop and he replies with a disquisition on generated and ungenerated being. Ask the price of bread today, and the baker tells you 'the son is subordinate to the Father'. Ask your servant if the bath is ready and he makes answer 'the Son arose out of nothing'. 'Great is the only begotten' declare the Catholics, and the Arians reply 'But greater is He that begot'.[30]

Constantine who had united the whole Empire under his rule stepped in to end the split in the Church. He summoned the vast Council of Nicaea, which met in 325 attended by about 300 bishops. He urged the bishops to work for unity and peace. The view that finally prevailed was that the Father and the Son were equal, of the same substance, but two distinct Persons. Under the influence of (*c.* 296--373), a life-long champion of Nicene orthodoxy, Arianism was At+
hanasius condemned as a heresy by the Council of Nicaea. The orthodox party had made sure to use words in the creed to which the Arians would not subscribe, and this they found in the *homoousion* formula:

> We believe in one God, The Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [*ousias*] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [*homoousion*] with the Father, through whom all things came to be, those things

> that are in heaven and those things that are on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down, and was made flesh, and was made man, suffered, rose the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.[31]

It was also declared that the Catholic Church anathematised, namely, cursed, those who say 'there was a time when he [the Son of God] was not,' or that 'he is of other substance or essence from the Father,' or that he was created or mutable or susceptible to change. This part was clearly directed towards Arius and his supporters.

The decisions of the Council were the work of a minority and clearly some of the terms used were not understood in identical sense by many signatories. Henry Chadwick points to this difficulty: ' "Of one substance" (*homoousios*) affirmed identity. It declared that the Father and the Son are "the same". But this was ambiguous. To some it meant a personal or specific identity; to many others it meant a much broader, generic identity. The happy accident enabled Constantine to secure the assent of everyone except two Libyan bishops.'[32]

To enforce the decisions of the Council of Nicaea, Constantine commanded the death penalty for disobedience and the burning of books written by Arius. Arius and his close supporters were banished. Eusebius of Nicomedia and another bishop were deposed from their sees. The general climate created by the doctrinal disputes was tragic. Frances Young comments: 'Rightly or wrongly, deep emotions and profound intolerance stirred up councils, churches and armies of monks into horrific attacks upon one another, and to the excommunication and exile of upright and sincere church leaders. It is a distressing human story.'[33]

Constantine's own attitude to the Arians changed. A few years later, Arius presented a confession of faith to the emperor who found it satisfactory and Arius was allowed to return from exile. Eusebius of Nicomedia was also recalled from exile and he succeeded in having many supporters of Nicaea including the formidable Athanasius, deposed. He baptised Constantine in 337 just before he died.

Numerous attempts were made for about fifty years after 325 to replace the Nicene Creed with a more acceptable formula. At the same time Arianism had gained popularity. Two emperors, Constantinus II (337--61) and Valens (364--78), were supporters of the Arians. After Valens' death, the Arians were greatly weakened by their internal divisions. One extreme group, known as the *anomians* not only rejected the tenet that the Son is like (*homois*) the Father, but also declared that he was fallible and might sin. On the other extreme was the group of semi-Arians. They made a common cause with the Nicene party. They were not willing to say that the Son is *homoousion* with the Father, but instead that the Son was *homoiousion*, namely, of similar 'substance' with the Father. In the middle were those who could be called *homoians.* Due to gradual developments and shifts in theological positions, the Nicene formula became acceptable and convincing for the majority. Emperor Theodosius I summoned the Second Ecumenical Council, which met in Constantinople in 381. It asserted that the faith of the Fathers at Nicaea was to continue and used the Nicene keyword 'identical in essence' (*homoiousios*). However the Nicene Creed declared now was differently worded from that of the Nicaea. The relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Godhead came into question. The Council held that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and added it to the canon. It anathematised heresies, especially those of the Anomeans, Arians, Eudoxians, Semi-Arians, Sabellians, Marcellians, Photinians and Apollinarians.

The Nicene Creed became the universal statement of the Christian faith and used in liturgies of both Eastern and Western churches. From that time onwards, 'by a slow and stormy process the overwhelming majority of Christians had come to believe that the formula which bore the Nicene name contained the correct statement of the Christian faith on the questions which had been at issue.'[34] The final revision of the Creed was made at the Council of Toledo (589) when the term *filioque* (meaning 'and the Son') was added to the previous claim from Constantinople that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. The Council of Toledo also declared that Christians should profess the Nicene Creed at every mass. For Christians the Nicene Creed along with the Apostles' Creed continue to be the authoritative statements of their faith.

Apollinarianism

By the end of the Arian controversy the true divinity and true humanity of Christ became the doctrine of the Catholic Church. Now theological speculation turned to judging the relation of the divine and the human in Jesus Christ. This became the storm centre of a controversy, which started at the end of the fourth century and continued into the seventh. Alexandria and Antioch became two centres representing two different trends. In general, the participants in these controversies accepted the Nicene formula as an authoritative statement of the doctrine. The Alexandrian theologians emphasised the divine element in the Incarnation, while those in Antioch stressed the human element and tended to view the human and divine in Jesus Christ as distinct from each other.

The Apollinarians, as mentioned above, were held to be heretical by the Council of Constantinople in 381. Bishop Apollinarius of Laodicea in Syria (*c*. 310--90) was a vigorous opponent of the Arians. It is difficult to know his ideas in detail because what is known about him has mostly come from fragmentary accounts of his opponents. He maintained that in Christ as one being, two complete and contrasting natures (one human and the other divine) could not exist. Like other human beings, Jesus had a body, soul and mind but what made him different from all other men, according to Apollinarius, was that divine Word or Logos had replaced the natural mind. It meant that the only mind Jesus had was the divine one, 'God enfleshed' (Gk: *theos ensarkos*). Any created human soul was changeable and given to wrong thoughts and passions, but the divine mind was eternal and immune to passion. In a letter to the bishops of Diocaesarea, he wrote:

> We confess that the Word of God has not descended upon a holy man, a thing which happened in the case of the prophets, that the Word himself has become flesh without having assumed a human mind, i.e. a mind changeable and enslaved to filthy thoughts, but existing as a divine mind immutable and heavenly.[35]

The result was that 'all the divine attributes were transferred to the human nature, and all the human attributes to the divine, and the two merged in one nature in Christ.

Thus he could argue that Logos was Crucified. He made Christ a being who was neither all God nor all man. He declared the orthodox view of the union of full divinity with a full humanity to be nonsense; in short he denied the completeness of Christ's humanity, and the existence of a rational human soul in him.'[36] In fact, his views in essence were the same that Christians have held over the centuries, that Jesus was not a man but God the Son with a human body. Apollinarius believed that he had remained true to the Nicene orthodoxy, and that he had resolved the Incarnation riddle successfully. His views caused great commotion and the Church subsequently condemned him. The imperial government of Theodosius I decreed in 388 that 'the Apollinarians and all other followers of diverse heresies shall be prohibited from all places, from the walls of the cities, from the congregation of honourable men, from the communion of the saints. They shall not have the right to ordain clerics; they shall forfeit the privilege of assembling congregations either in public or in private places . . . They shall go to places which will seclude them most effectively, as though by a wall, from human association.'[37]

Nestorianism

In Antioch a group of theologians came under the influence of Diodore who was appointed bishop of Tarsus in 378. An outstanding scholar and teacher, he exerted deep influence on his students like Theodore, Bishop of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, and Nestorius. Nestorius entered a monastery at Antioch and attracted great attention for his great learning, eloquent discourses and effective preaching. In 428 he was called from his monastery to become Bishop of Constantinople. It was the time when the doctrines of Apollinarius were spreading in Constantinople. As bishop, Nestorius was very zealous to stamp out heresy, especially the remnants of Arians. Soon after he was ordained, he is reported to have addressed Emperor Theodosius II (401--50) in a sermon: 'Give me, O Emperor, the earth purged of heretics, and I will give you heaven as a recompense. Assist me in destroying heretics, and I will assist you in vanquishing the Persians.'[38] Without any delay, he attacked the Arians, Novatianists, the Quartodecimens, Macedonians and other sects leading to tumult and disturbance in many places. He saw himself as the defender of the deity of Christ against its Arian and Apollinarian corrupters.

When one of his associates Presbyter Anastasius advanced his views against the cult of the Virgin Mary, whose adherents called her *Theotokos*, 'God-bearing,' or, as commonly translated, 'Mother of God', one of the most bitter theological conflicts in the history of the Church started. In a church sermon Anastasius said: 'Let no one call Mary *Theotokos*: for Mary was but a human being; and it is impossible that God should be born of a human being.' These utterances deeply offended the clergy and laity in Constantinople because people had been taught to acknowledge Christ as God. Nestorius himself in his sermons used the words *Christotokos*, 'Christ-bearing,' or 'Mother of Christ' to refer to Mary, rejecting the term *Theotokos*. He defended the views of Anastasius. The contemporary historian Socrates wrote: 'Thus the controversy on the subject being taken in one spirit by some and in another by others, the discussion which ensued divided the Church, and resembled the struggle of the combatants in the dark, all parties uttering the most confused and contradictory assertions. Nestorius acquired the reputation among the masses of asserting that the Lord was a mere man, and attempting to foist on the Church the doctrine of Paul of Samosata and Photinus.'[39]

This turn of events was seen by Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria (*c.* 375--444), as a golden opportunity to strike against his rival Nestorius and he exploited unfairly the situation in which Nestorius had drifted. Cyril came in favour of *Theotokos*. He vigorously opposed the unorthodox beliefs. A bitter exchange of letters started between him and Nestorius. It seems from the letters written during the controversy, Nestorius was ready to tolerate the term and to Cyril he confided that he had nothing against the term 'only do not make the Virgin a goddess'.[40]

Through various devious methods Cyril was able to gain the support of Pope Celestine. The Pope told Nestorius that the doctrines he propounded amounted to blasphemy. Cyril also was able to gain the support of Emperor Theodosius II. In 430, the Pope in Rome excommunicated Nestorius. By imperial order, a general council was held at Ephesus in 431. Cyril presided over it. And due to his machinations, Nestorius was not heard and in a single day's session Nestorius was condemned and deposed. He was ordered to return to the monastery at Antioch. But this was not the end of the matter. Cyril managed to have Nestorius banished to Egypt in 435 where he

lived the rest of his life in great physical and mental distress. He died in obscurity around 451. In the year of his banishment, the emperor ordered his writings to be burnt. As a result, very few of his writings have survived. One of the books he wrote during his exile was *The Book of Heracleides,* which was discovered in its Syriac version by Dr Goussen; a French translation of this work was published in Paris in 1910 and an English translation at Oxford in 1925. This is how Nestorius describes Cyril's role at the Council of Ephesus:

> Cyril is therefore prosecutor and accuser, and I the defendant: is this the council that has heard and judged my words? Is it the Emperor who summoned it, if Cyril was among the judges? Why do I say 'among the judges'? *He* was the whole tribunal, for whatever he said was immediately repeated by the rest, and his single personality took the place of a tribunal for them. If all the judges had been assembled, and the accusers and accused set in their proper role, all would have had equal liberty of speech, instead of Cyril being everything, accuser, Emperor, and judge. He did everything with arbitrary authority, and after ousting from this authority the Emperor's emissary, set himself up in his place. He assembled those who pleased him from far and near, and made himself the tribunal.[41]

The disappearance of Nestorius from his former position of power and prestige did not result in the demise of the doctrines of Theodore of Mopsuestia, which formed the basis of Nestorian Christianity. Nestorius' supporters continued to spread his doctrine in the East, and in the fifth century a number of them sought refuge in the Persian Empire where they were cordially received and allowed to preach without any fear of persecution. The Nestorian Christians established the Mesopotamian-Persian Church, which had a large following in Persia, Mesopotamia and neighbouring countries. This church came to be known as the Nestorian Church. As the Nestorians were condemned and excommunicated by the Catholic Church, they in return regarded the Catholic Church heretical. The Nestorians, who became successful businessmen, travelled to different places in Asia where they spread Christianity. In the sixth century, they founded churches in Ceylon and India. The Nestorian traders and missionaries in the seventh century were preaching the Gospel in Turkestan, Tartary and remote regions of China. The Nestorian Catholicus of the East who sat at Selucia-

Ctesiphon guided them in their missionary work. Around 751 he removed his throne to Baghdad, the new capital of the Abbasid Caliphate. Under Catholicus Mar Yaballaha III (1281--1317), who was of Uighur origin, Nestorians wielded enormous power in the administration of the Mongol Empire, which I discuss in Chapter 10.

Eutychianism

The precise doctrine of Eutyches (*c*. 378--454), who was the head of a monastery in Constantinople, is obscure but certain features of it are clear. He believed that Christ had two natures before his Incarnation (i.e. before his birth), but after the Incarnation he had only one nature (*physis*), which was solely divine. He was a resolute anti-Nestorian, a supporter of Cyril and a vehement opponent of the Formula of Union of 433.

Eutyches was accused of heresy. Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople condemned his teaching at a synod in Constantinople in 448. But Dioscorus, successor to Cyril in the See of Alexandria, supported Eutyches, because he himself advocated such a theology. Eutyches appealed against the condemnation to Pope Leo, who upheld the decision. The controversy grew and Emperor Theodosius II called a council at Ephesus under the presidency of Dioscorus to review the case of Eutyches. With full imperial support, Dioscorus repeated what Cyril had done with Nestorius and which resulted in violence. Eutyches was acquitted; Flavian was flogged, deposed and banished. Thus Eutyches and Dioscorus won their battle, but not for long. The powerful Leo had not given them his support and things were going to change soon. On the death of Theodosius II in 450, the new emperor Marcian summoned a council that met at Chalcedon in 451. It was a very big council, attended by about 600 bishops, predominantly from the Eastern churches. The deliberations of the Council took fifteen sessions.

The people who upheld the view that Christ had only one divine nature came to be called Monophysites. They ascribed to the doctrine, which held that ‘the divine and human natures of Christ were so founded as to form only one nature yet without any change, confusion, or commixture of the two natures’. In fact, this exposition was not

much different from the one laid down by the Council of Chalcedon (451). The Council of Chalcedon adopted a compromise formula which neither emphasised the humanity of Christ on earth to the extent favoured by the Nestorians, nor submitted it to his divinity as totally as did the extreme Monophysites. It condemned Eutyches and Monophysitism. It asserted the orthodox doctrine of Incarnation, and held that Christ exists in two natures, one human and other divine. One of the paragraphs from the Chalcedonian Definition of Faith reads:

> We all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same consisting of a reasonable soul and a body, of one substance with the Father as touching the Godhead, the same of one substance with us as touching the manhood, . . . one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way abolished because of the union, but rather the characteristic property of each nature being preserved, and concurring into one Person and one subsistence, not if Christ were parted and divided into two persons, but one and the same Son and only-begotten God, Word, Lord, Jesus Christ.[42]

There were many people who refused to accept the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon. A violent and hostile Monophysite reaction followed. The Monophysites like the Nestorians refused to submit and broke off with the main body of Christendom. The harsh policy followed by the imperial government to repress the doctrine did not succeed in its aim and the movement gained a wide following. The majorities of the populations of Egypt and Syria defiantly formed their respective two national churches, the Coptic Church of Egypt, and the Syrian or Jacobite Church named after its founder Jacubus Baradaeus. In the same way the Abyssinian and Armenian Churches also arose. Constantinople and the western areas followed the Chalcedonian formula. Different emperors tried to settle the conflicts between the churches by conciliation and compromise with little success. For instance, Emperor Justinian had tried to reconcile both the Egyptian Church and Monophysites to the Chalcedonian position, but this came to nothing. At last in 630 Emperor Heraclius, struggling to save a weakened empire by a debilitating war against the Persians and

internal religious strife, tried to reconcile Monophysite and Orthodox positions by a new doctrine known as Monoenergism throughout the Byzantine Empire. It attracted a few followers from the courtiers, some from the Armenians and Lebanese, known later as Maronites, but it met opposition from the Monophysites and the Orthodox Christians. Heraclius later amended the doctrine and started Monotheletism. This doctrine maintained that Christ was both perfect God and perfect man, and that in him were two distinct natures so united as to cause no mixture of confusion, but to form by their union only one person. This sect led to more strife and internecine conflict between the Christians. In Western Asia, North Africa and various parts of Europe the scenes of massacres, violence and persecutions in the name of Jesus continued. It was during this period that Arab conquests started, and the political and religious scene in the world was soon to change. I discuss these events and developments in Chapter 4.

Christianity had evolved amid a myriad of conflicts and controversies in its first four centuries. Within the doctrinal sphere, the Church Fathers were against the uphill task of reconciling the irreconcilable and explaining the inscrutable. J.M. Robertson aptly points to the problem:

> The one clue through the chaos is the perception that in every stage the dispute logically went back to the original issue of monotheism and polytheism. The Church, holding by the Hebrew sacred books as well its own, was committed doctrinally to the former, but practically to the latter. Every affirmation of 'one' tended to imperil the divinity of the sacrificed Jesus; and every affirmation of duality made for the polytheism. The one durable solution was, at each crisis, to make both affirmations, and so baffle at once reason and schism.[43]

It is no wonder that the Christian doctrine of God has proved to be an enigma to the monotheists, polytheists, atheists and agnostics. It claims to believe in one God, and to prove this it points to three persons of God. It is common knowledge that the doctrine of the Trinity (God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost) is an essential part of Christian faith that evolved under Pauline influence. But at the same time it should be acknowledged that there is nothing unique about this doctrine because a belief in the threefold nature of the Godhead had also been known to ancient religions of Egypt and India. The Christian dogma of the Trinity has its counterpart in Egyptian

pantheism. There, as Robertson explains, 'the all-comprehending Amun "is at once the Father, the Mother, and the Son of God." But even as the Amunite priests staged the Son-God Khonsu after affirming the oneness of Amun, so the Christian priesthood was forced at every step to distinguish the Son while affirming the oneness of the Trinity.'[44] Another instance was the Egyptian cult of Isis, Serapis and the divine child Horus that closely resembles the Trinity formula of Christianity. In Hinduism, the early trinity of gods was of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, was believed to have been miraculously born. After his birth he was secretly hidden in some cowherd's dwelling to escape an oppressor who had been foretold of his destruction at the hands of Krishna. Krishna's story has some features common with the biblical accounts of the birth and early life of Jesus.

In sum, we have discussed how, during the evolution of Christian dogmas, a Jewish preacher and healer whose close disciples regarded him a prophet and a Jewish Messiah was elevated to the position of the divine Christ and believed to be God Incarnate, by theological patch-work of intricate and abstruse interpretations. However, to transform a human teacher into a divine figure is not unique to Christianity either. It has also happened with the Buddha, the great Indian ascetic philosopher and teacher. Gautama or Sakyamuni was a historic person who lived in India from about 563 BC to about 483 BC. After attaining spiritual enlightenment, he became known as the Buddha ('the Enlightened One'), who explained his deep philosophical insights about human existence and the way to cope with suffering that human life entails. He suggested the eight-fold path that leads to *nirvana.* He showed no interest in questions or discussions relating to the existence or non-existence of supernatural beings such as God or gods because the existence or non-existence of such entity or entities, according to his views, had no bearing on the universal problem of human life as such. Like Jesus, he also did not make any claim to be divine. Neither did he make any claim to possess any supernatural powers. After his death, Buddhism became the religion of a large part of humanity in Asia. However, in Mahayana Buddhism which developed about the same time as Christianity, the emphasis was laid on the supramundane personality of the Buddha as the essence of phenomena. Its doctrine of the Three Bodies (*Trikāya*) is based on the conception of three bodies of the Buddha. These were the earthly or incarnate body of a human being (*Nirmankāya*) who became a Buddha; the divine body, or heavenly Buddha

(*Sambhogakāya*) who was a divine being to whom prayers are addressed; and in the Dharma Body (*Dharmakāya*) all the transcendent Buddhas are one, which is Absolute Reality.[45]

Among the monotheistic religions, Judaism and Islam, the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus and the doctrine of the triune God is not accepted because this belief, according to Jews and Muslims, violates their fundamental belief in one God. A thoroughly consistent monotheism on which Islam is founded seems to be irreconcilable with the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Professor Trevor Ling shows how Muslims and Hindus respond to the doctrine of the Trinity:

> To the Muslim it seems no better than equivocation to say that this is not a doctrine of three gods, and thus a movement towards polytheism. The Hindu, on the other hand, who is much more ready to affirm the existence of divine being in many forms, asks: If the Christian allows that God may exist as *three* persons, why not more? To Christians who held that the doctrine of the triune God was the ultimate truth Islam had to be rejected as a unitarian heresy.[46]

So far we have seen how a great religion originated in the Middle Eastern region. The process of evolution and change was at work from the first century in the formation of early Church's dogmas amidst various heretical trends and internal conflicts. The rise of a rival religion, Islam, in seventh-century Arabia was an unexpected phenomenon for the Christians. Before discussing how they came to perceive Islam, we first turn our attention to the political and religious situation in the region.

Chapter 3. The pre-Islamic Middle East

The Persian empires

When Islam emerged as a great religious and political force in the first-half of the seventh century, the two great military powers that held sway over most of the region now known as 'the Middle East' were the Persian and the Roman Empires. The great expansionist empires that arose from Iran over a thousand-year period before the sixth century AD had fought against rival powers. When Alexander the Great (r. 336--323 BC) launched his astonishing series of conquests, he subjugated the Achaemenid Empire in 334--333 BC, plundering and completely destroying its magnificent capital Istakhar; it was the Greeks who imposed the name of Persepolis -- metropolis of Persia -- which has remained famous throughout the centuries. The vast Persian Empire now became part of his universal empire. He envisioned a new world order in which a genuine fusion of Greek and Iranian cultures and of their peoples was to take place. He encouraged intermarriage. He himself married Roxana, a Persian princess, and in 324 BC he ordered his generals and thousands of his soldiers to marry Persian women. At Susa, a spectacular mass wedding took place.

After Alexander's death, his empire was divided among three of his high-ranking generals. In these Hellenistic kingdoms the Greek language and the elements of Greek intellectual civilisation spread over the urban middle-classes, and trade and commerce reached almost to the limits of the Old World, and this process continued and intensified under the Roman Empire, the inheritor of the Hellenistic civilisation. While the ideas from the Greek world moved eastwards, the religion of the Persian prophet Mani moved westwards. In the same way, many ideas and institutions of the Egyptians and Mesopotamians also expanded and spread in the Mediterranean world. Later on, in the same way various religions and mystery cults that arose in the East and the Middle East spread across the Roman Empire which had brought all the people of the Mediterranean under its suzerainty. Among these were Mithraism which had its origin in Persia and Gentile Christianity which had evolved on the basis of Pauline theology.

The Seleucids ruled Alexander's former eastern empire for about eighty years. Around 250 BC, Arsaces, a local chief rebelled against the Seleucids and established the Arsacid, or Parthian kingdom. The Parthians were a people of nomadic Scythian origin who had lived east of the Caspian Sea. Under its outstanding ruler Mithradates I (171--138 BC) the Parthian expansion continued. The Parthians annexed Media, Fars, Babylonia and Assyria to their empire, which extended from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf. Their further expansion continued during the long reign of Mithradates II (123--87 BC). During the rule of the latter, Parthia first came in contact with China and Rome. It is significant that for the next three centuries the relations between Parthia and Rome became those of two rival imperial powers fighting for the control over Syria, Mesopotamia and Armenia but at the beginning they were friendly. As the Parthians mixed with the native Iranians, they acquired the Middle Persian language, used the Pahlavi script and established an administrative system based on the Achaemenid pattern. The Parthians always remained half-Greek; the Parthian kings referred to themselves on their coins as 'Hellenophiles', but they sought to establish themselves as the direct heirs of the Achaemenid Empire. Ardeshir, who claimed to be a descendant of the legendary hero Sasan, overthrew the last Parthian king in 224. He established the Sasanid monarchy, which was to last four centuries.

The Sasanid period is usually credited for the revival of the Persian national spirit. Between the third and seventh centuries, the Sasanids built up a vast empire that covered roughly the frontiers the Achaemenids had achieved. They made Ctesiphon their capital, slightly south of present-day Baghdad. They introduced a tightly centralised bureaucratic administration, urban planning, and agricultural and technological improvements.

The old teachings associated with Zoroaster were revived and given a new philosophical shape, known as Mazdaism or Zoroastrianism, which became the state church. While Zoroaster, the old monotheist prophet, who probably lived in the sixth century BC, had taught that Ahura Mazda ('Wise Lord') was the sole creator of all that was good in material and spiritual worlds, the founder of moral order who alone was worthy of worship. The 'twin spirit', Ahirman, according to him, represented darkness, disorder and evil forces. In the cosmic struggle between the opposing

forces, Ahura Mazda would win in the end. As man was a part of this struggle, he was under an ethical obligation to contribute to the victory of the Good and Light over Evil and Darkness. By his free will, man could choose between the two opposing forces. Zoroaster taught that man would be judged after death for his actions. He believed in heaven and hell and the resurrection of the body. But in Mazdaism more deities including Mithras and Anahitas also became part of the Mazdean pantheon. The Sasanids' promotion of a state religion was closely connected with strengthening royal power. As a state church, Mazdaism became an immensely powerful hierarchy of priests, the magi, who were given important privileges by Ardeshir. Beside religious functions, the priests performed important judicial duties, and they also supervised the collection of land-tax. They confirmed the divine nature of the kingship whereby the king was regarded as Ahura Mazda's viceroy on earth, and who kept harmony between different classes of society.

Persian scholars were sent to different countries to collect books on various branches of knowledge, which were then translated into Persian. Foreign scholars found Persia an attractive place for research and learning. The University of Jundishapur became a great centre of preserving the humanistic culture of the ancient world, East and West. In matters of religion, the Sasanids followed a tolerant and enlightened policy, at least, in the beginning when the followers of other faiths such as Buddhists, Jews and Christians could freely practice their religions and carry out their proselytising activities. But this changed when in the Roman Empire, which was Persia's rival superpower, Constantine proclaimed Christianity the official religion. This proclamation had political implications for Persia. The loyalties of Christians in Persia became suspect and the persecution of Christians followed. These developments took place against a background of war, which continued for four centuries between the Persian Empire and its rivals to the west. The persecution of the Nestorian Christians at the hands of the Byzantine bigots had forced many of them to seek refuge in Persia. However, in the sixth century, when the Nestorian Church of Iran had no more doctrinal links with Byzantium, persecution of the Christians ceased.

The Romans and the Middle East

Emperor Constantine shifted his capital from Rome to his newly founded city Constantinople in 330, on the ancient site of Byzantium. It became the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire or 'the Byzantine Empire'. The western part of the empire had survived the barbarian invasions in the third and fourth centuries but it finally collapsed in the fifth century when the Visigoths sacked Rome in 410 and the Vandals in 455. By 476 the Roman Empire to the west had ceased to exist. The Byzantine Empire in its shrunken form was Greek, and Byzantine history can be called the history of medieval Hellenism. It existed for over a thousand years over vast areas and unstable frontiers. Its population was composed of various nationalities. The Greek language and culture, together with the Christian Orthodox faith, can be considered the cohesive force that shaped the empire. What had been a pagan Roman empire gradually evolved into a Greek Christian empire. It continued to rule the Balkans, Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria and Palestine. The great cities of the eastern Mediterranean world, Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt became the major centres of Greek culture.

Christianity became the faith of the majority of the population as a result of state patronage and conversions. Many historians have explored how Christianity replaced, and in many cases, transformed the old faiths and practices of the population of the Byzantine Empire. In the Roman Empire mystery religions were popular and they had many converts. Isis, the Egyptian fertility goddess, and Mithraism had wide following. Mithras, originally an Indo-Iranian god, became an immensely popular Roman god from the second to the fifth centuries. Its followers celebrated his birthday on December 25 and they believed it to be the creator and father of all who had come to earth to save man from evil. Those who believed in him would be rewarded with eternal life. The Mithraic cult maintained secrecy and its mysteries were revealed only to the initiated. In Roman temples, a focal relief depicted Mithras slaying a bull, which various scholars have interpreted differently, for instance, as the act of creation, or of salvation, or as having some esoteric significance. Other scenes in the temples included a holy feast shared by Mithras and Sol over the slain bull. Women were excluded from worship in these temples. There are very close parallels between Mithraism and early Christianity. Christians decidedly had the advantage over their rivals in so far as their religious services were not restrictive; women were allowed to join in. In the third and fourth centuries, Mithraism posed a serious challenge to

Christianity and it almost had its victory over Christianity. When in 307 Diocletian, Galerius and Licinius raised a shrine on the Danube dedicated to Mithras, 'protector of their empire' the victory of Mithraism seemed certain.

One reason why mystery religions gained so much popularity in the Roman world was the dislocation and alienation of a millions of people in an insecure and unhappy world. People sought consolation in these religions to cope with their wretched existence. George E. Kirk comments:

> Many of these had, through captivity in war or through commerce, been displaced from their homes and flung together to form a proletariat of the great cities--Rome, Alexandria, Antioch--where their various traditions of thought and belief were fused in a cosmopolitan crucible with the added flux of Greek philosophical speculation. Displacement from one's home meant losing contact with that type of normal religious cult that had fixed local associations, and had caused lonely men to turn for comfort and hope to the unlocalized mystery-religions that had found favour throughout the Mediterranean, offering in this world communion with the divine and the hope of a blessed hereafter.[1]

There might be differences in details, but the essential function of mystery religions was akin to those of the monotheistic or pantheistic religions: to offer consolation and help to the initiated or the believers. As Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, Mithraism was no longer tolerated. However, Christianity had adopted some formal aspects of Mithraism.

The success of Christianity in the Byzantine Empire was due to a number of factors: its ability to adapt and absorb being one major factor. This was a time when the memory of pagan gods and the temples, which were turned into churches, was still fresh in the minds of the people. Albert Hourani points out: 'Christianity gave a new dimension to the loyalty felt towards the emperor and a new framework of unity for the local cultures of those he ruled. Christian ideas and images were expressed in the literary languages of the various regions of the empire as well as in the Greek of the cities: Armenian in eastern Anatolia, Syriac in Syria, and Coptic in Egypt. Tombs of

saints and other places of pilgrimage might preserve, in a Christian form, the immemorial beliefs and practices of a region.'[2]

For the first six or seven centuries of the Christian era and before the rise of Islam in the seventh century, the Perso-Roman and later the Perso-Byzantine relations were of almost constant series of wars or border skirmishes. The long and endless wars, which were occasionally interrupted by short intervals of peace, contributed to the weakening of these two great empires, which in turn were to succumb to the power of Islam.

The major issues that led to rivalry between the two empires were their territorial claims, sometimes based on religious affiliations and their mercantile interests for the control of trade routes from China, India and Southeast Asia. Under the Sasanid King Shapur I (r. 241--72) successful campaigns were led against the Romans. The Persians defeated them in the Battle of Edessa, capturing Emperor Valerian (r. 253--60) and more than seventy thousand Roman soldiers. The capture of the emperor proved to be a heavy blow to Roman resistance. In quick succession, Mesopotamia, Cilicia, Cappadocia and even Syria were conquered. Valerian was subjected to all possible abuse and humiliation in captivity, where he later died.

The long wars between the two hostile empires continued with some intervals between 540 and 629. They were mainly fought in Iraq and Syria. The Romans claimed Armenia and Mesopotamia because Emperor Trajan had conquered these countries. Besides, both countries had large Christian populations, which, according to the Roman view, entitled them to come under the domain of the Christian emperor. The Persians claimed that Syria, Palestine and Egypt, which were under the Byzantine Empire, should revert to the suzerainty of Persia because the Achamenids had conquered them in 525 BC. Between 534 and 628 they repeatedly invaded and occupied Syria, but every time they were thrown back. Whenever the Persian invasions took place they were often ruthless and caused havoc. Those who had suffered under the Byzantine rule, due to religious and political persecution often sided with the Persians.

The climax to the struggle between these two rival empires came at the beginning of the seventh century. The last great Sasanid king, Chosroes II (591--628), had regained his throne from Bahram with the help of Byzantine Emperor Maurice. Maurice was murdered by an incompetent usurper Phocas. Chosroes II used the murder of his benefactor as an excuse to avenge Maurice's death and started a major offensive in 610 against the Romans. The Persian army attacked Syria, captured and destroyed its capital Antioch in 611, and Damascus in 612. The imperial forces had to face the Persians alone; the local populations gave them no help. Another Persian force made a deep thrust into Asia Minor as far as Scutari. To the Byzantines the danger of Constantinople falling in the hands the Persians seemed real. In 614 the Persians captured Jerusalem with the help of the Jews. There followed a massacre of all those who were thought to be loyal to Byzantium. For a long time the Jews had been friendly towards their Persian rulers, while under the Romans they had been victims of religious and political oppression. As Roberts says: 'The Jews, it may be remarked, often welcomed the Persians and seized the chance to carry out pogroms of Christians no doubt all the more delectable because the boot had for so long been on the other foot.'[3]

The estimates of those killed by the invading army range from fifty-seven thousand to ninety thousand. The intolerance and frenzied zeal of the Zoroastrian priests was evident in the destruction of the Christian churches and monuments. The Sepulchre of Christ and the stately churches of Helena and Constantine were damaged by fire. The holiest of relics, the instrument of the Passion and the True Cross were taken to Ctesiphon, the Persian capital. Within the next few years, the occupation of Egypt was accomplished. Nor, however, was the rule of the Persian infidels very welcome in the eyes of the eastern Christians, who had suffered at the hands of the intolerant Orthodox Church. Edward Gibbon writes:

> The Christians of the East were scandalised by the worship of fire and the impious doctrine of two principles: the Magi were not less intolerant than the bishops; and the martyrdom of some native Persians who had deserted the religion of Zoroaster was conceived to be the prelude of a fierce and general persecution. By the oppressive laws of Justinian the adversaries of the church were made the enemies of the state; the alliance of the Jews, Nestorians, and

> Jacobites had contributed to the success of Chosroes, and his partial favour to the sectaries provoked the hatred and fears of the catholic clergy.[4]

However, what seemed to be the final victory by Persia over its centuries-old rival did not last long. The loss of Syria and Egypt, the main source of the Byzantine grain-supply and the presence of the enemy before the defences of Constantinople caused great alarm. But in this period of dire difficulties, the imperial viceroy of Carthage, Heraclius (575--641), became emperor in 610 after having the tyrant Phocas overthrown and killed. He proved to be one of the greatest soldier-emperors who turned the table on the Persians. In 622 he himself took the field against the Persians, in a struggle that now assumed the form of a Christian holy war. After a series of battles, the Persians were decisively routed at Nineveh in 627. Heraclius restored the Empire's former frontiers. The Persian Empire was reduced to anarchy. The Persian army mutinied, Chosroes II was killed and his successor made peace in 629. The Holy Cross was restored with great pomp to Jerusalem. After regaining the provinces of Egypt and Syria, Heraclius ordered the massacre of the Jews in Jerusalem as punishment for their having helped the Persians capture Jerusalem. In the Jewish colonies, which were scattered throughout the Empire, there was a marked increase of victimisation.

The war had far-reaching consequences that neither the Persians nor the Byzantines could ever have anticipated or suspected. The two empires had exhausted each other in the long destructive war and both had to pay a heavy price for it. Within a few years, the political map of the Middle East underwent a radical change and the old divisions and conflicts were swept away by tidal waves of Islamic power. During the victory celebrations in Constantinople in 629, Heraclius is said to have received a letter from an Arab prophet Muhammad inviting him to join Islam. During the last eight years of his reign, the provinces Heraclius had won from the Persians were lost to Muslim Arabs. The change in the East was colossal. The Persian Empire which had stretched from Cyrenaica to Afghanistan in 620, ceased to exist within the next thirty years. It became a part of the Islamic Caliphate. Now a new and much greater power than Persia and Byzantium had risen from Arabia.

One important original source for the major events of the period is the Merovingian *Chronicle of Fredegar*, written in Latin about 658. It opens with an account that

> Heraclius imperator practised astrology, by which art he discovered, God helping him, that his empire would be laid waste by circumcised races. So he sent to the Frankish King Dagobert to request him to have all the Jews of his kingdom baptised--which Dagobert promptly carried out [but this lacks confirmation]. Heraclius ordered that the same should be done throughout all the imperial provinces; for he had no idea whence this scourge would come upon his empire.[5]

This order was not literally followed but at least it had given zealous Christians enough authority to massacre the Jews. The increasing oppression and intolerance fuelled the Jews' resentment of imperial rule. The empire suffered no Jewish onslaught, but rather, another circumcised people, the Arabs, won a victory over the imperial army. The prophecy was not all that untrue after all. A large army under the command of emperor's brother, Theodorus, was beaten by the Arabs in the Battle of Ajnadain, south of Jerusalem, followed by the Battle of the Yarmouk in 636 when the imperial forces were completely routed. This battle marked the end of the Byzantine presence in Syria. The crusading emperor was at Antioch when the news of the defeat reached him. As the *Chronicle of Fredegar* mentions: 'Heraclius felt himself impotent to resist their assault and in his desolation was a prey to inconsolable grief. The unhappy king abandoned the Christian faith for the heresy of Eutyches and married his sister's daughter [Martina, daughter of his sister Mary]. He finished his days in agony, tormented with fever. He was succeeded by his son Constantine, in whose reign the Roman Empire was cruelly ravaged by the Saracens.'[6]

The imperial policy in Egypt and Syria had created only hatred against the Byzantine rule. From the imperial point of view, Christianity was the only force that could unite the diverse elements of the Byzantine Empire, but the Church was in no position to fulfil this task because it was hopelessly divided. The policy of religious persecution of the Monophysites, which the Byzantine rulers had pursued in Syria and Egypt, had made the local populations deeply hostile to the imperial rule. The

Monophysites steadfastly refused to accept the doctrine of two natures in Christ, for which they were ruthlessly treated. 'Bishops were driven from their sees, monks were expelled from their monasteries, ordinary laymen were driven from their home and fled to Persian territory. Those who could not escape were imprisoned and tortured and not allowed to return to their homes. Even women and children were not exempt from these cruel assaults.'[7]

One result of the Christological controversies was that large populations inhabiting the Mediterranean world had become weary of the endless theological disputations and conflicts. In Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt, theological quarrels led to public disorder, mob violence, and persecutions. The Byzantine hold over Egypt and Syria was nominal, because neither the Coptic nor the Syrian Monophysites, who were regarded as heretics by the Byzantine rulers, had any loyalty to their foreign masters. The efforts of Heraclius to introduce first Monoenergism and then Monotheletism with a view to unifying Church badly backfired. It failed to achieve any positive results. It was accepted neither by the royalist Melkite Church nor the Church of Monophysites in Egypt. Heraclius decided to impose the doctrine by force. He appointed Cyrus as viceroy and the patriarch of Alexandria empowering him to persecute all those who would refuse the imperial Church. He proved to be an extremely brutal person. 'His cruelty became legendary. It is said, for example, that when the brother of the Coptic patriarch was captured, he was put to death by drowning, after a period of torture in which lighted torches were held against him "till the fat dropped down from both his sides to the ground".'[8] His reign of terror alienated the vast majority of the population against the Greek rulers. Within a few years, in fact, the coming of Muslim rule in these countries saw an end to this oppression, primarily because the Arabs showed greater tolerance toward the Christians and Jews in the conquered territories. Professor R.H.C. Davis comments:

> It is clear that any community of empire had disappeared in the East even before the Arab invasions. The Semitic peoples of Egypt and Syria did not feel that they belonged to the Empire, and they did not think that they had lost anything when they ceased to be part of it; they thought they had simply exchanged one ruler for another. In Egypt and Syria, the Empire of Heraclius was a chimera like that of Justinian in the West. In these countries the Empire had lost any

> corporate spirit that it had ever possessed. The Muslims did not have to conquer a 'people', for there was no Roman people to conquer. All that they had to do was to defeat the imperial armies in the field.[9]

The people of Egypt and Syria showed hostility towards their rulers even after the heroic war under the able command of Heraclius. The emperor inflicted heavy defeat on the Persians, but the lack of popular support must have disillusioned him. It was obvious that the restitution of these provinces to the Christian Empire did not address the real grievances of the disaffected people. It was, therefore, no wonder that instead of leading the imperial army himself against the nascent Muslim power Heraclius left the task to his subordinates. His life-long effort to keep Syria, Palestine and Egypt as an integral part of Byzantium was coming to a disappointing end. Ostrogorsky consequently describes the effect of the loss of Syria on Heraclius: 'His life's work collapsed before his eyes. The heroic struggle against Persia seemed to be utterly wasted, for his victories here had only prepared the way for the Arab conquest . . . The cruel turn of fortune broke the aged Emperor both in spirit and body.'[10] Soon after these defeats in Syria, he left Syria and travelled to Constantinople. It is said that when he reached the pass known as Cilician Gates, he looked back to the south and said: 'Peace unto thee O Syria, and what an excellent country this is for the enemy.'

The Arabs

The information about the loss of the eastern provinces of Byzantium had reached Western Christendom. But who were these people who had started their offensive against the Empire and what was their image in the West? They are depicted in these terms by the Merovingian chronicler:

> The race of Hagar, who are also called Saracens as the book of Orosius attests--a circumcised people who of old had lived in beneath the Caucasus on the shores of the Caspian in a country known as Ercolia--this race had grown so numerous that at last they took up arms and threw themselves upon the provinces of the Emperor Heraclius, who despatched an army to hold them. In the ensuing battle the Saracens were the victors and cut the vanquished to pieces

> . . . The Saracens proceeded--as was their habit--to lay waste the provinces of the empire that had fallen to them.[11]

Here the description of Arabia or its people is little more than pure conjecture, but his presentation of major events and battles between the imperial forces and the Muslim Arabs are factual and remarkably sound.

The long struggle of the two military empires, the Persian and the Byzantine, for the Middle Eastern region had repercussions for the Arabian Peninsula. The Byzantines had held the Levant lands but had failed to make a lasting conquest of Iraq, which remained an essential part of the Persian Empire, whose capital Ctesiphon was in Iraq. The Persians had maintained their sphere of influence in the Persian Gulf and along the south coast of Arabia. The enormous Arabian Peninsula, an area about six hundred miles wide and over a thousand long was dominated by desert and steppes inhabited by nomadic tribes. The Persians or the Romans did not try to control this area directly, nor had they any big temptation to get involved with these people, because to conquer such neighbours by force would have been perilous, complicated and costly. Instead, the method both empires employed was to cultivate friendly relations with the tribal chiefs by offering various incentives and rewards so that they were in a position to prevent the nomad tribesmen from raiding the settled areas. The increased power and influence of the local chieftains led to the emergence of client principalities on both the Byzantine and the Persian sides. On the Byzantine desert border was the Arab principality of Ghassanids, which was pro-Byzantine. On the Persian side, was the Lakhmid state with its capital at Hira near the Euphrates. The people of these two Arab states were Christians, one politically tied to Byzantium and the other to Persia. As allies of Persia the Lakhmids took part in the Byzantino-Persian wars by their destructive attacks on Ghassanids and the Roman Syria.

In southern Arabia was the Yemen, the ancient land of the Queen of Sheba. Long before Jesus its people had established maritime trade with India and they were the first people to make Indian goods known to the Roman world. When Ethiopia became a Christian state and allied itself with Byzantium, Arabs of the Yemen whose kings had converted to Judaism, found themselves caught in the middle. The Byzantines referred to the Yemen as *Arabia Felix.* The independence of the Yemen

came to an end when Ethiopia invaded the kingdom in the sixth century and made the conquered land one of its provinces. Its viceroy or governor Abraha asserted his own authority, built up a strong state independent of Ethiopia and Persia and ruled it for about thirty years. He was an able ruler and a zealous Christian. He had both religious and economic interests at heart when he erected one of the most magnificent cathedrals of the age at San‘a, hoping to turn the Arabian pilgrimage from the Meccan sanctuary, the Kaaba, to the new church. The change of pilgrimage site to San‘a would also have meant a source of great income, which the Meccans had enjoyed. At the head of a large army, that included a number of war elephants, he set out against Mecca in 570. The use of elephants in warfare was a novelty to the Arabs. To contemporaries as well as to the historians of later generations that year became known as ‘the Year of the Elephant’. Also, in the same year an extraordinary man, Muhammad, is said to have been born, who by his inspiration and example was to reshape the course of human history.

The invasion turned out to be a total disaster for the Ethiopians, the bulk of the invading army perished probably by an extremely virulent pestilence. Abraha died on his return to the Yemen. The Christian hopes of bringing the centre of Arab paganism under direct control ended in a fiasco. The people of the Yemen rose against Ethiopian rule and sought help from Persia. By 575 the Persian army backed by a strong naval force brought the whole of the Yemen under its imperial rule. What Abraha’s success would have meant for the new faith and the new civilisation which were soon to emerge in Arabia is pertinently described by J. J. Saunders:

> The naval power of the Sassanids was extended to the Straits of Bab al-Mandab, with disastrous consequences to Axum [Ethiopia], and Christian hopes of converting all Arabia were blasted. Had Abraha taken Mecca the whole Peninsula would have been thrown open to Christian and Byzantine penetration; the Cross would have been raised on the Kaaba, and Muhammad might have died a priest or a monk. As it was, paganism gained a new lease of life, and Christianity was discredited by Abraha’s defeat and its association with the Axumite enemy.[12]

The sixth century ended with the eviction of Ethiopians from Arabia, and the weakening of Persian power in the Yemen due to religious and dynastic conflicts back home. The imperial powers found the Arab buffer states expensive and unreliable. Byzantium put an end to the Ghassanid rule in 584 followed by Persia's extension of its rule in the Lakhmid Hira in 602. In 628, six years after the *Hijra* (the Emigration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina) the Persian satrap of the Yemen accepted Islam. The centre of interest for South Arabia now had shifted to the north, to Medina, the centre of the new faith.

However, the effect of all these developments on the Arabian Peninsula was considerable. The people of the Arab buffer states had come in close contact with the two imperial powers. They became acquainted with the ideas and religious beliefs of the people of these two great civilisations. Some foreigners, refugees and traders who settled in Arabia brought their old ways and ideas to their new home. During the protracted Perso-Byzantine wars and conflicts, Arabia became important for the movement of merchandise and Arab merchants travelled to and traded with the neighbour powers. One important result of this contact was in the sphere of military and political knowledge. The Arabs learnt the tactics of military organisation of the time. Soon they were to make an effective use of such knowledge and skills. The effect of Byzantine and Persian cultural, religious and military influences on the Arabs was, indeed, significant.

The religious situation in Arabia

Islam arose in seventh-century Arabia. The process of its development can best be appreciated in its social and religious context, both at local as well as wider level of the Middle Eastern region. There were various oasis towns and cities in central Arabia. During periods of peace the Arab merchants carried trade with the Yemen and Syria by camel caravans. By the end of the sixth century the peripheral Arab kingdoms, as mentioned above, had declined and disintegrated. Mecca had stood against the trend of fragmentation and it emerged a major thriving centre of trade and commerce in Arabia. Its caravan traders carried merchandise, which had come from the East and Africa to Syria, and brought money, weapons, corn and wine back to

Arabia. The commercial community became increasingly rich. There were other additional assets, which made Mecca important. A big annual fair at neighbouring Ukaz was the site of great attraction for the Arab tribes. Mecca was a local pagan sanctuary of unknown antiquity. Religious rituals revolved around the Kaaba, a shrine containing the Black Stone that was an object of veneration for all the tribes. Muslims believe it was first built by the patriarch Abraham and his son Ishmael (Q.: Isma'il). By the early seventh century the Kaaba had become the repository of 360 idols of the tribal deities. The most important event was the annual pilgrimage to the Kaaba and the fair at Ukaz.

The pre-Islamic religion of Arabs described as a form of paganism reflected its tribal nature and social structure. The nomads had a primitive form of religion. They worshipped various objects of nature such as trees, streams and stones. Gods and goddesses representing forces of nature were symbolised by idols. Each district had its own idol. The pagan Arabs accepted a supreme and transcendent god, called al-Llah, more familiar to us in the form Allah. Gustav E. von Grunerbaum comments:

> When Mohammed was born, Allah was already known as the Lord of men, and it was realized that his writ went further than that of the idols. Allah enjoyed no cult. It may be that some Meccans held the opinion that the Ka'ba was Allah's sanctuary and such apparently was the view of the Christian poet, 'Adi b. Zaid (*fl. c*. 580), who swears by the Lord of Ka'ba and the Messiah.[13]

Allah was venerated as the creator and supreme provider whom one could implore and beseech for help in times of special peril, but who was remote from the everyday concerns of mortals. The worship of Allah was for definite utilitarian ends. The pagans are chided several times in the Qur'an for praying to Allah when they are in distress, and then, when they are out of danger, for turning back to their idols. It is also apparent from the Qur'an that the Arabs believed in Allah who in a sense was superior to their local deities but they invoked him only in distress. However, they worshipped other gods more fervently than Allah. Even though the name remains the same, the conception and unique attributes of Allah in Muhammad's teachings were radically different from those of the pagan Arabs.

The attitude of the pagans towards their deities was not always driven by the impulse of genuine devotion. This is illustrated by a story attributed to the famous poet and king Imru-ul-Quais (480--*c*. 540) who set out to avenge the death of his father. On his way he stopped at a temple to consult a god and drew lots with arrows to discover an auspicious day for his act of vengeance. When he received the answer 'abandon' three times, he threw the broken arrows at the idol exclaiming: 'Accursed one! Had it been *your* father who was murdered you wouldn't have answered No.'

The Qur'an mentions al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat, the female deities whom the pagan Arabs regarded as the daughters of Allah. Al-Lat was the mother goddess who in the ancient world was worshipped under different names. The centre of her worship was at Taif, a town near Mecca. For the Meccans, the most important deity was al-Uzza, 'the mighty one', to whom they made animal sacrifices. They used her images in battles. Manat was one of the most ancient deities of the Semitic pantheon, and she controlled the fortunes and destiny of the community. She was widely worshipped by the pre-Islamic Arabs; the tribes of the Aws and Khazraj were specially attached to her. The chief deity of the Kaaba was Hubal who was represented in human form. Away from the cities and towns, the pagan Bedouins had no temples or priests. They carried their idols to their tents. They consulted their deities by casting lots with arrows or the soothsayers, the *kahins*, uttered the oracles. They had no religious conception of the life after death; they ridiculed the Prophet Muhammad for preaching the doctrine of resurrection.

In contrast to the religion of the nomadic peoples of Arabia, a higher type of religion developed among the settled population of South Arabia. The worship of heavenly bodies in ornate temples, elaborate rituals and sacrifices in big cities was common. The moon-god was the supreme deity that had been worshipped through the ages under a variety of names. The planet Venus called Athtar and the sun-god Shams were also widely venerated. The temples and shrines at San'a and Najran were famous centres of pilgrimage.

Along with idolatry among the Arabs, there was a small group of people who followed the old Arabian tradition of monotheism, rejected idolatry and believed in one God but were not adherents of any particular faith. In Arabic, such a person was

known as a *hanif*. In the Qur'an, this term appears frequently and refers to those who follow the true religion in contrast to idolaters and associationists. The patriarch Abraham from the olden times is given particular mention as a *hanif*, a believer in the pure worship of one God. There is no historical evidence to uphold the view that the *hanifs* existed as an organised body of monotheists or that they practised any specific form of worship when the Prophet Muhammad started preaching. Some of them became the earliest converts to Islam. As a result of Jewish and Christian colonies in Arabia, the activities of travelling preachers, and trade relations with the Byzantines and Persians, the beliefs of monotheistic religions were known to Arabs. However, in Arab polytheism as compared to monotheistic religions, the views concerning the nature of man, society and universe were fragmented. Ira M. Lapidus observes:

> In ancient Arabic there was no single word meaning the person. *Qalb* (heart), *ruh* (spirit), *nafs* (soul), *wajh* (face) were the several terms in use, none of which correspond with the concept of an integrated personality. The plurality of gods reflected and symbolised a fragmented view of man, of society, and of the forces that governed the cosmos . . . Whereas the polytheists could see only a fragmented world, composed of numerous, disorderly, and arbitrary powers, the monotheists saw the universe as a totality grounded in, and created and governed by, a single being who was the source of both material and spiritual order. Whereas the polytheists envisaged a society in which people were divided by clan and locality, each with its own community and its own gods, the monotheists imagined a society in which common faith made men brothers in the quest for salvation.[14]

The world views of Zoroastrianism, Judaism and Christianity, which centred on the idea of one God, were soon to be joined by the pure and uncompromising monotheism of Islam. But we should keep in mind that the idea of a single, all-powerful deity who appears as Ahura Mazda, Jehovah, God and Allah in these faiths was not the innovation of monotheistic religions. We come across this conception in the hymns of Akhenaton, the pharaoh of Egypt in the fourteenth century BC who was a believer in a single universal God. But such ideas were isolated and temporary, and did not produce any lasting system and practice of monotheism. The people who accomplished this task were the Jews. The Jewish sacred books reveal the evolution

of their beliefs from a local tribal cult to a universal ethical monotheism. In 586 BC the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple of the Jews, and took much of Jerusalem's population to Babylon as captives. It was both before and after this period of captivity that important developments took place in Judaism.

The catalyst for big political changes was Cyrus the Mede, the great conqueror who became the founder of the Achaemenid Empire of Persia. Cyrus besieged and captured Babylon in 538 BC. He freed the Jews from captivity and authorised their return to Palestine. So as to advance religious toleration and eliminate religious oppression, Cyrus re-built the Temple at Jerusalem for the Jews, and did so at the expenses of the state. For these services, the great Persian ruler was elevated to a unique position of great respect and praise in the Old Testament, a distinction not accorded to any other non-Jewish ruler.

It was during this period that Jewish orthodoxy took definite shape. Jehovah (Hebrew: Yahweh) at first was a tribal god who favoured only the Israelites, but the existence of other gods was not denied. At this time the Hebrew prophets pronounced that the worship of pagan gods was a sin. In the Book of Jeremiah the Jews in Egypt are denounced for their worship of idols while the idolatrous practices of the Jews deeply shocked Ezekiel. The Book of Isaiah (44:9-11) says:

> All those who make idols are worthless, and the gods they prize so highly are useless. Those who worship these gods are blind and ignorant--and they will be disgraced. It is no good making a metal image to worship as a god! Everyone who worships it will be humiliated. The people who make idols are human beings and nothing more. Let them come and stand trial--they will be terrified and will suffer disgrace.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel seemed to have taught that all religions except one were false and that idolatry was punishable in the sight of God. The Jews were convinced of the truth of one universal God, something that made a deep mark on their social consciousness. They also became convinced of their special status in relation to God. They were his chosen people to the exclusion of the rest of the human race. No one

questioned why Jehovah, who was by now recognised the universal God, should have shown his favours to only one people. The way Jews saw themselves in this special role is succinctly put by Professor Bernard Lewis:

> Confronted with the extraordinary fact of their uniqueness in knowing the truth about one God, the ancient Jews, unable even to consider the idea that they had chosen God, adopted the more humble belief that God had chosen them. This was a choice that imposed duties, as well as, indeed more than, privileges, and could sometimes be a difficult burden to bear.[15]

While as a monotheistic faith Judaism remained confined to the people of Israel, the messages of Christianity and Islam, through proselytisation, proved to be universal, meant for all people everywhere. Even though both Christianity and Islam had common roots in the culture of the region, they became rival universal religions, deeply affecting the socio-cultural conditions in places where they spread. Their relations in times of war and peace, their political conflicts and territorial ambitions deeply affected the course of history.

Some scholars have discussed the reasons for the emergence of three monotheistic world religions that are of Semitic origin in the geographical confines of Arabia. Professor Richard Bell is of the opinion that an answer to the question why the idea of a single all-powerful God of the universe triumphed over polytheism needs to be sought in historical reason. He writes:

> Some have suggested that the monotony of the desert is conducive to the idea that man and the world are subject to a single divine power. But the desert does not naturally produce Monotheism any more than does the sea, or the steppe, the mountain, or the plain. The real source of the world's great religions is in history, in the reaction of men's spirits to the course of events, or, in other words, to the divine education of the race. These three great faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Muhammadanism, are historically connected, and the root from which they all sprang is to be found in the prophetic impulse which the course of history called forth amongst the people of Israel.[16]

The monotheism of Judaism and Islam needs to be differentiated from that of Christianity. The former faiths are strictly monotheistic whereas in the latter the universal God is believed to have become incarnate in the human form of Jesus. German sociologist Max Weber remarks on this aspect: 'The Hindu and Christian forms of the sole or supreme deity are theological concealments of the fact that an important and unique religious interest, namely in salvation through the incarnation of a divinity, stands in the way of strict monotheism.'[17] In Islam monotheism reached its clear and absolute limits proclaiming only one God and rejecting any notion of a triune God, the three persons of God or the doctrine of incarnation as *shirk* (associationism). In theological terms, one consequence was the irreconcilability of Christian doctrine of a triune God and the Islamic concept of a single unique God whose attributes cannot be shared with and by anyone else.

A belief in a single, universal God in Jewish religion, however, did not lead Judaism to develop into a universal religion. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Judaism remained essentially confined to the Israelites and any conversions to it by missionary activity were minimal.

Christian and Jewish communities in Arabia

Arabian paganism had been exposed to monotheistic ideas long before the rise of Islam. From the fourth century, Christianity, the official religion of Byzantium and Ethiopia, had made substantial inroads in Arabia. There were large communities of Jews and Christians living in various places in the Arabian Peninsula. The missionaries from these two religious communities, as well as the Zoroastrians, were active. Zoroastrians were successful in the northeast and later in the south where the Persians had direct political influence. Among the earliest monotheists were the Jews. The Jewish dispersal and settling in various places occurred at various periods in history. The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC led to their dispersal in Mesopotamia. In the first and second centuries when the Romans ruthlessly suppressed the Jews in Palestine, some Jews possibly fled and found asylum in Arabia.

In the Yemen there was a large Jewish colony dating back to the fourth century. In the Yemen the last Himyarite king Dhu-Nuwas became apprehensive of the spread of Christianity in his realm, and the intentions of the imperial Christian powers. To counter the situation, he embraced Judaism. He took extremely harsh measures against the Christians of Najran in 523. Several hundred of them who refused to apostatise were burned alive. The Ethiopians finally put an end to his regime and brought the South Yemen under their rule. There were Jewish communities in Yathrib (later called Medina after the *Hijra* of the Prophet Muhammad in 622), Khaybar and Taima. There were three Jewish clans in Medina. They had the best agricultural land in the oases of Taima, Fadak and Wadi-ul-Qura. They were prosperous both as farmers and traders. They dominated economic life in central Arabia (the Hijaz). One Jewish tribe controlled the market at Medina. There was general resentment against the Jews who were charged with economic exploitation and enjoying prosperity at the expense of non-Jews. Merchants of the Quraish at Mecca and the non-Jewish tribes of Aus and Khazraj at Medina rivalled the Jews. The Jews of the Hijaz had also made some converts among the Arab tribesmen but the impact of Judaism on Arabs was far weaker than that of Christianity.

The Christian communities were scattered all over the Arabian Peninsula, but their main centres of influence were the Yemen in the south, Syria in the north and Hira in the east. The Ethiopians, like the Egyptians, adhered to the Monophysite Church. The Greek Orthodox churchmen, the Monophysites and the Nestorians all carried on missionary work, making significant conversions to their faiths. The Nestorians, like the Zoroastrians, were active in the areas under Persian protection. In the fifth century they had established their monastery at Hira, which was the Arab satellite of Persia; this became an important centre of the Nestorian Church. From this centre Christianity spread to Bahrain. When the religious bigotry of the Greeks drove Nestorian Christians out of the Byzantine Empire they found shelter in Persia. They were vigorous missionaries and managed to establish their schools and monasteries along the caravan routes of Arabia. Under their mission, the Arabs of Najran embraced Christianity. The church in the East was largely Nestorian, but there were also large numbers of Monophysite Christians.

The most highly active missionaries among the Arabs were the Monophysites. Through their dedicated proselytising and charitable institutions like monasteries that provided food and drink to travellers, they succeeded in converting large numbers of Arabs to Christianity. They had their churches along the main caravan routes as far as the Yemen and the Hadramaut. Some important tribes at the northern end of the desert, such as Banu Ghassan and Banu Taghlib, all became Monophysite Christians.

Obviously the forms of Christianity that had gained ground in Arabia were unorthodox, regarded as heretical by Greek orthodoxy. Their cruel treatment by Christians in the name of an official Christian dogma had made Arab Christians hostile to Greek rule. The ruthless policy of the Greeks, shortsighted and stupid as it was, led to their defeat and their eventual downfall at the hands of Muslims. It was not surprising, then, that when Arab conquests began, the Egyptian, Syrian and other Arab Christians hailed the Muslims as their liberators from foreign oppressors. After the Arab conquest, a Syrian Monophysite Abdul Faraj, wrote:

> When our people complained to Heraclius, he gave no answer. Therefore the God of vengeance delivered us out of the hands of the Romans by means of the Arabs. Then although our churches were not restored to us [the Monophysites], since under Arab rule each Christian community retained its actual possessions, still it profited us not a little to be saved from the cruelty of the Romans.[18]

Arab merchants frequently travelled in caravans with their merchandise. When they visited the cities of Syria, Iraq and Palestine they came in contact with other religions. One such traveller was Muhammad, who in his boyhood accompanied his uncle on journeys to Syria, a practice that he carried on later as an adult merchant.

Chapter 4. The preaching of Islam

The Prophet Muhammad

The description of the pre-Islamic Middle East, the conflicts of the Perso-Byzantine Empires and the Christological controversies outlined above provide the essential background to the age in which Muhammad was born and preached as a prophet. History, legend and Muslim belief all come into play in the portrayal of the life of the founder of Islam. Ernest Renan held the view that Islam was the only religion that grew up in the full light of history. This view has been questioned as a result of critical researches in the early history of Islam and the traditional accounts of the life of Muhammad. But, compared to the sources concerning the founders of other great religions or prophets, such as Gautama Buddha, Moses, Zoroaster, Jesus, Paul and Mani, those providing knowledge of the Prophet's life, from the start of his prophetic mission, are ample. The teachings of the Qur'an as the revealed book and the Traditions (the account of what the Prophet said or did, or of his tacit approval of something said or done in his presence) constitute two primary sources. The third vital source is the *Sirat Rasul Allah*, or Life of the Prophet of God compiled by Ibn Ishaq (d. 768), on the bases of oral tradition and partial written accounts edited and revised by Ibn Hisham (d. 833). Among the other major historians who wrote about the life of the Prophet and the expansion of Islamic rule in the early centuries of Islam are al-Waqidi (d. 823), Ibn Sa'd (d. 845), al-Tabari (d. 923) and al-Baladhuri (d. 892).

Muhammad was born about the year 570. He was born in the clan of Banu Hashim in the tribe of the Quraish. His father died before his birth, and his mother, when he was six. As a boy he lived with his kinsmen. During his boyhood, he appears to have twice visited the Byzantine province of Syria. During one of these journeys in the company of his uncle Abu Talib, a Christian monk Bahira is said to have met Muhammad and sensing the signs of his prophethood, he told Abu Talib that his nephew was destined to be a prophet and advised him to protect his nephew against the Jews who would try to harm him. In the Christian polemical writings against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad some fantastic myths developed and enshrouded Bahira's role.

Muhammad grew up to manhood in the flourishing commercial city of Mecca and became a respected member of Meccan society. As a young man he was respected for his sound judgement and moral decency. For his trustworthiness, his compatriots had nicknamed him *al-Amin*, 'the trusted one'. When he was put in charge of the trade of a rich widow Khadija, his honesty and moral qualities impressed her so greatly that she proposed marriage to him. At the time of their marriage, Muhammad was twenty-five years old and she, as the tradition tells us, was forty. During their fifteen years of marriage, the couple lived a happy family-life and had children. It seems that he lived an ordinary life and no one could have guessed at that time what only the future was soon to reveal about this extraordinary man. The period of Muhammad's life from the early manhood till he started preaching as a prophet in 610, may be the formative stage of a great human soul, about which not much is known. However, it should be kept in mind that the real significance of his historic role can be dated from the year 610 when he started teaching. We have a good deal of factual information about him from that time till his death in 632.

At this time, the prosperous city of Mecca had almost monopolised the entrepôt trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. The Meccans had acquired a good knowledge of men and cities through their commercial and social contact with Arab tribesmen and Roman officials. The vast affluence of the merchant and commercial classes had its negative side also. There were extremes of wealth and poverty in the society. The old tribal structure and nomadic life came under increasing strain due to the transition to an urban and commercial society. The old bond of tribal solidarity, where loyalty and protection of one's own kin was of the utmost importance, was replaced by individualism in Mecca and the old authority of tribal custom and morality had weakened. What mattered most to the successful merchants was to increase their wealth, which had become the new symbol of power and influence. The plight of the weaker members of the society, like orphans, widows and the poor had deteriorated badly under the new and evolving oppressive socio-economic system.

In this period, Muhammad, with his sensitive and perceptive mind, was deeply tormented by the injustices of Meccan society. Having a religious cast of mind he

spent long periods in profound thoughts and reflection. He would withdraw to a solitary cave on Mount Hira, outside Mecca, to contemplate and pray, sometimes with his family, and sometimes alone. Here at the age of forty he underwent a religious experience that overwhelmed and terrified him. Frants Buhl, a critical scholar on the life and work of Muhammad observes:

> While Muhammad was in a state of great spiritual excitement as a result of contact with the religious ideas that had penetrated into Arabia, something happened which suddenly transformed his whole consciousness and filled him with a spiritual strength which decided the whole course of his life: he felt himself called to proclaim to his countrymen as a prophet the revelations which were communicated to him in a mysterious way. When Caetani wishes to see in this the result of a long development and continued reflection, this is certainly not correct. We have much rather every reason to trust the tradition, which tells of a sudden outburst of conviction that he was called to proclaim the word of God. For this view we have the analogy of prophets in general, from the Old Testament prophets down to Joseph Smith; and no long drawn reflections but only an overwhelming spiritual happening could give him the unshatterable conviction of his call.[1]

One night in the year of his Call to mission, he experienced a revelation. Ibn Ishaq described this revelation as follows:

> It was the night on which God honoured him with his mission and showed mercy on His servant thereby, Gabriel brought him the command of God. 'He came to me,' said the apostle of God, 'while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said, "Read!" I said, "What shall I read?" He pressed me with it so tightly that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said, "Read!" I said, "What shall I read?" He pressed me with it again so that I thought it was death; then he let me go and said "Read!" I said, "What shall I read?" He pressed me with it the third time so that I thought it was death and said, "Read!" I said, "What shall I read"—and this I said only to deliver myself from him, lest he should do the same to me again. He said: "Read in the name of thy Lord who created,

Who created man of blood coagulated.
Read! Thy Lord is the most beneficent,
Who taught by the pen,
Taught man what he did not know."

So I read it, and he departed from me. And I woke from my sleep, and it was as though these words were written on my heart. . . . when I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying, "O Muhammad! Thou art the apostle of God and I am Gabriel." I raised my head towards heaven to see (who was speaking) and lo, Gabriel in the form of a man with feet astride the horizon, saying, "O Muhammad! Thou art the apostle of God and I am Gabriel." I stood gazing at him, moving neither forward nor backward; then I began to turn my face away from him, but towards whatever region of the sky I looked, I saw him as before.[2]

Scholars have interpreted Muhammad's experience of vision and of the divine intermediary in a number of different ways. It is important to remember what the Qur'an says regarding the conveyance of the revelation to the Prophet. The Qur'an says (2:97): 'Say [O Muhammad, to mankind]: Who is an enemy to Gabriel! For it is he who has revealed (this Scripture) to your heart by the command of God, confirming that was revealed before it, and guidance and glad tidings to believers.' In another place, the Qur'an says (26:194): 'Verily this Qur'an is a revelation from the Lord of the worlds. The Trusted Spirit has descended with it on your heart, that you may be a warner.' These verses of the Qur'an indicate that the revelations descended on the heart of the Prophet.

In Islam, God is believed to be transcendent and he is not a person having any of the attributes of a physical body. He does not reveal himself to any mortal except through the revelation (*wahy*): 'And it was not (vouchsafed) to any mortal that God speaks to him except by revelation or from behind a veil or by sending a messenger to reveal by His command that which He pleases. Surely, He is Exalted; Wise. Thus We have revealed to thee the Word by Our command' (Q. 42: 51-52). In Christianity, God's revelation, the Word is believed to have become Jesus Christ but in Islam the Qur'an is believed to be the word of God.

The revelations which started in 610 continued for the rest of Muhammad's life. For the first three years of his mission, he communicated his message privately to some of his close relatives and friends who became the first converts to the new faith. But when he received the revelation, which begins with 'O thou shrouded in thy mantle, arise and warn!', he is said to have begun preaching publicly in 613. The basic impulse in his teaching to the Meccans at this stage, as Gustave E. von Grunebaum states, was 'the overwhelming consciousness of the moral accountability of man and of the Judgement, not far off, when the Lord would hold each soul responsible, to reward or condemn according to its deserts. He was to admonish them before it was too late. Their fate in the hereafter was at stake, their moral laxness their danger, their thoughtless idolatry their most awesome failing.'[3] However, this was not a message of doom, but rather one of hope and glad tidings about the mercy of God.

The three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam share a belief in revelation and prophecy, but their doctrines of revelations and prophecy are divergent and the range of opinions about what a revelation is or what it involves is very wide. Is a revelation to be regarded as essentially an external phenomenon where the recipient is merely a means, a conduit, of the divine forces, as the religious orthodoxy believes, or is it a more involved matter in which the mind of the recipient subconsciously objectifies the subjective caused by a deep psychological consciousness or awakening? This raises a number of questions. For instance, two prominent scholars who do not subscribe to the traditional doctrine of revelation in Islam are Professor Tor Andrae, who in his book *Muhammad, the Man and His Faith* (first published in 1932), and Professor Fazlur Rahman (1919--88), in his book *Islam* (1966), tried to shed some light on the theme; the latter was a prominent radical Muslim thinker who had to face a storm of protest at the hands of orthodox clerics and religious parties in Pakistan for his interpretation of doctrine and traditional belief, which to Muslims is sacrosanct and inviolable truth about the Prophet and the Qur'an. In his formulation, Fazlur Rahman questions the traditional Muslim beliefs in the externality of the Angel Gabriel and the Revelation, the relationship between the Prophet and the Qur'an and the Ascension of Muhammad to Heaven. He categorises them as historical fictions developed by the orthodoxy.[4] These are substantially contentious issues and we find that the same types of conceptions and doctrines are also ingrained in Judaism and Christianity. The critical-historical approach has much

to its credit in leading the search for truth and knowledge. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that the domain of theology is covetously guarded by the orthodoxy, and any intrusion in this sacrosanct terrain has never been easy or pleasant for those who in their scholarly pursuits have tried to tread upon it.

The central message of Muhammad was to reassert the oneness of God in the tradition of Abraham. It is quite true as H.A.R. Gibb mentions that 'his impulse was religious through and through. From the beginning of his career as a preacher his outlook and his judgement of persons and events was dominated by his conceptions of God's government and purposes in the world of men.'[5] Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that his message of One God was closely related to the creation of a social and economic system based on justice for humanity. Even though the small group of *hanifs* were monotheists, their concept of God cannot be said to have been akin to that of the Prophet, as proclaimed in his teachings. But in Muhammad's teaching, as Fazlur Rahman underlines, belief in One God and socio-economic welfare of mankind are closely related:

> For Muhammad's monotheism was, from the very beginning, linked up with a humanism and a sense of social and economic justice whose intensity is no less than the intensity of the monotheistic idea, so that whoever carefully reads the early Revelations of the Prophet cannot escape the conclusion that the two must be regarded as expressions of the same experience.[6]

The Prophet's message was clear. There is one God. He is all-powerful. He is the creator of the universe. There is a judgement day and that people will be accountable for their good or bad deeds. There are splendid rewards for those who follow in the path of righteousness and punishment for those who disregard the commands of God. He condemned economic exploitation, usury, and the neglect of the poor orphans and the needy in society.

In the beginning only a few kinsmen heeded to his call. Though fired with the new task as the messenger of God, he did not make much headway. He was vehemently opposed by the merchant-tribe of Mecca, the Quraish. Muhammad had attacked not only the traditional beliefs of Meccans, his teachings which the Quraish

considered a heresy also threatened their economic profits, those that the city derived from annual pan-Arabian pilgrimage to the Kaaba. Thus, the Quraish, as custodians of the Kaaba and the pantheon of deities, were apprehensive of Muhammad's message as a threat to their religious position and economic interests.

After twelve years' ceaseless efforts under enormous difficult conditions, the mission of the Prophet had almost come to a complete standstill at Mecca. There was little progress in the movement. His message, however, was well received by those from Yathrib (Medina) who came to Mecca as pilgrims. They began to spread Islam in their native town and adjacent areas. In 621 among the pilgrims was a group of thirteen men, representing most of the parties or bodies of opinion among the Arabs in Medina, who pledged to accept Muhammad as their prophet, obey him and to avoid sins. In the following year, in 622 a representative party of seventy-five Muslims came, invited the Prophet to make Medina his home by taking a solemn pledge to defend him. For the Medinans the only way to put an end to blood feuds that had been tearing the Arab tribes apart was to seek the help of the Prophet as an arbitrator and peacemaker. After careful deliberation and planning, the Prophet and his followers secretly fled to Medina in 622. This was the famous event of the emigration, the *Hijra*, which proved to be the turning point in the growth and stability of Islam. The year 622 also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

In Medina the primary task before the Prophet was to build a self-contained community, which could uphold the cause of the new faith. This community comprised the Emigrants (*Muhajirun*) and the converts from Medina, the Helpers (*Ansar*). Within a year or two of his arrival there, a formal political agreement was established between the Emigrants, the Helpers and the Jews, commonly known as the Constitution of Medina. It stated that all Muslims, whether Meccans or Medinans, were henceforth to form a single community, the *umma*, whose primary identity was to a common religious faith, and not to the tribal loyalties or political confederacies. Conflicts and disputes arising between them were not to be settled by force but were to be referred to the Prophet for arbitration. A number of Jewish groups belonging to various clans are mentioned in the document. The Jews were recognised as a separate religious community but were to be integrated in the new community; they were guaranteed the same privileges and obligation as the Muslims while following their

own faith. ‘Believers are friends one to the other to the exclusion of outsiders. To the Jew who follows us belongs help and equality. He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided. Conditions must be fair and equitable to all.’[7] Both communities were to co-operate with each other for peace and order.

From now on Medina became the centre of Islamic faith and of the *umma* whose acknowledged leader was the Prophet. There were enormous tasks and struggles ahead for him as he struggled to shape the Islamic state and expand the message of Islam. The prophet proved equal to the task. He showed extraordinary skills as a statesman and a military strategist. As the religious and political head of the *umma* in Medina, he laid the foundation of the Islamic state, consolidated its power by phenomenal achievements in political and military spheres.

The Prophet was fully aware of the vital role Mecca was to play for the expansion of Islam. It was the commercial and religious centre as well as the intellectual and political leader of the Arab world. His own tribe, the Quraish, wielded enormous power and influence there. It was of crucial importance for the *umma* to enlist the support and talents of the Meccans, especially the Quraish, in the service of Islam. The battles and military struggle between the pagan Meccans and the Muslims that had gone on since 622 finally came to an end in 630. The Meccan resistance was finally overcome and the victorious Muslim army entered the city. The Prophet, instead of enacting any vengeance or vendettas against the fiercest enemies of his mission, showed a great spirit of reconciliation and magnanimity. He granted general amnesty and forgave his former enemies. As a result of his policy of generosity and forgiveness, the Meccans soon converted to Islam and became a part of the *umma*.

Within ten years, from the *Hijra* in 622 to his death in 632, the Prophet had established an Islamic state, promulgated laws and established Islamic administrative institutions. His authority extended over the whole of Arabia. Small Jewish and Christian communities of the Hijaz, as well as Arabs from as far as Bahrain, Oman and Southern Arabia recognised him as their suzerain. Even in matters which influenced his decisions about warfare, with respect to safeguarding the *umma* or extending the power of his faith, his fundamental purpose remained religious.

Some scholars have held the view that after the *Hijra* to Medina, the Meccan Prophet receded into the background and the practical man of politics came to the fore. It is true that in Medina the external circumstances were favourable to the Prophet right from the moment of his arrival. He was able to accomplish his prophetic mission successfully there. In both the Meccan and Medinan periods his contemporaries looked to him for his high moral character and qualities and there is no support for the view that his character in Medina had undergone any change. H.A.R. Gibb argues that

> the sharp contrast that is generally drawn between the obscure and persecuted prophet of Mecca and the warrior theocrat of Medina is not historically justified. There was no break in Mohammed's own consciousness and conception of his office. Externally, the Islamic movement assumed a new shape and formed a definite community organized on political lines under a single chief. But it merely gave explicit form to what had hitherto been implicit. In the mind of Mohammed (as in the mind of his opponents) the new religious association had long been conceived of as a community organized on political lines, not as a church within a secular state.[8]

Since his arrival at Medina, the Prophet had hoped to gain friendly support from the Jews; on his part, the provisions of the Constitution of Medina showed what vision he had of forming an integrated community of monotheists, including both Muslims and Jews. He was convinced that his message was a continuation and revival of the earlier prophets, especially the major Hebrew prophets. The Jews were expected to further the cause of monotheism when they became aware of the teachings of Muhammad against idolatry. He adopted certain religious practices, which corresponded to some of the Jewish rites, such as the ashura fast, which were like the Jewish Day of Atonement and the practice of turning to Jerusalem during prayer.

But the Jews rejected his claim to prophethood. From their initial rejection they turned to mockery and intrigues against the Prophet and the Muslim community. While closing all avenues of co-operation with the Muslims, they supported the Prophet's Meccan enemies. According to Islamic sources, the Jews never kept an agreement or pact made with the Muslims. The Qur'an (2:100) accuses the Jewish

tribes of unreliability: 'Why is it that whenever they make pacts, a group among them casts it aside unilaterally?' The Jews were accused of corrupting and perverting the revelations of God and concealing the truth. In 624, Mecca became the *qibla* or direction to be faced in prayers for the Muslims instead of Jerusalem and the fast of the month of Ramadan was made obligatory replacing the Day of the Atonement. The line of spiritual descent of Islam was clearly emphasised in the religion of Abraham, the pure monotheism that Muhammad was to restore. Islam's claim to continue the religious tradition of Abraham is not without justification, as Montgomery Watt points out:

> The modern Westerner ought also to be ready to admit that the conception of the religion of Abraham is not entirely without foundation. Islam may not tally with what objectively we consider the religion of Abraham to have been. But Islam belongs in a sense to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and that tradition may be described as the tradition which begins with Abraham. Islam is thus a form of the religion of Abraham--a form, too, well suited to the outlook of men whose way of life was closer to Abraham than that of the bulk of Jews and Christians.[9]

In every major military battle that took place between the Muslims and the Meccans, the Jews of Medina supported the enemies of the Muslims and conspired against them. Therefore, after every big battle such as, Badr, Uhud and the Ditch, the Prophet ordered military operations against one Jewish tribe or another. Consequently, within a few years, the Jewish tribes were either expelled from Medina or militarily defeated and eliminated. However, during the rule of the caliphs an almost boundless toleration was extended towards the Jews. The lot of the Jews improved wherever the crescent bore rule.

The Qur'an

The revelations continued for twenty-two years. The collection of these revelations forms the Qur'an. Muslims regard the Qur'an to be the word of God, as transmitted through the Prophet Muhammad. Obviously, as a matter of religious faith, most of the followers of the three major monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam,

believe in the existence of a Divine Being, angels, life after death, and paradise and hell. There are also people who do not subscribe to the idea of any divine revelation in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam or for that matter in any religion, but they nevertheless regard the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Qur'an as important records of human thought and spiritual consciousness, whose importance they do not deny or underrate. For historians at least there is neither the expectation nor sufficient qualification to unravel the mysteries of the Divinity and revelation; their task is much more tied up with interpreting the past events on the basis of empirical evidence. This is how the British historian J.M. Roberts offers his opinion on the Qur'an:

> For twenty-two years Muhammad was to recite and the result is one of the great formative books of mankind, the Koran. Its narrowest significance is still enormous and, like that of Luther's Bible or the Authorised Version, it is linguistic; the Koran crystallised a language. But it is much more; it is a visionary's book, passionate in its conviction of divine inspiration; vividly conveying Muhammad's spiritual genius and vigour. Though not collected in his lifetime, it was taken down by his entourage as delivered by him in a series of revelations; Muhammad saw himself as a passive instrument, a mouthpiece of God . . . Through him, Moslems were to believe, God spoke his last message to mankind.[10]

Muhammad in his capacity as a prophet did not claim any divine powers. Neither, did he claim to work miracles. He was content to be human. All he did and achieved was essentially in his human capacity. His achievement both as a prophet and as the eventual ruler of the Islamic state has been the subject of bitter resentment at the hands of the Christian apologists. How and why was Muhammad crowned with success while Jesus, their God Incarnate, had to wear the crown of thorns instead, and suffer a cruel death on the cross? How was it that Muhammad's disciples were always ready to sacrifice their own lives to save him from any danger to his life while Judas Iscariot a disciple of Jesus, as the New Testament depicts him, had conspired with the priests and officers of the Temple to betray his master in return for a few silver coins? And then there is the instance of Peter, who, unlike Paul, was a close follower of Jesus and has been venerated by Christians through the ages as a great Apostle of the

Lord. When Jesus was tried before the High Priest, was it not Peter, who, charged with being a follower of Jesus, had refused to admit that he ever knew Jesus? According to Mathew (26:74): 'Then Peter said, "I swear that I am telling the truth! God punish me if I am not! I do not know that man!" ' However by making such comparisons the polemicists arrived at conclusions they found both bitter and baffling. While the pagan Arabs embraced Islam within the lifetime of his founder, Christianity had remained a minority religion for over three centuries until Emperor Constantine embraced it, as some still maintain, more for reasons of political expediency than from genuine conviction, and made it the official religion.

On their part Christian apologists were aware of the tragic end of Jesus' life; no one could reverse what had already taken place. But to assert and earmark a unique place for him in history (his place being secure as the everlasting God) they took upon themselves the sacred duty to eliminate any real or imaginary figure that rose to prominence in the domain of the holy. And for this, who was better qualified than the Arabian Prophet? Muhammad and his One God were a challenge to Christian apologists' faith and their God (Jesus Christ). Basing their theological stance on such presuppositions, they made the Prophet and his religion prime objects of denigration and distortion right from the early Middle Ages. One special area of their endemic interest related to Muhammad's marriages.

The marriages of the Prophet and Christian critics

In addressing the issue of Muhammad's polygamous marriages, it is important to keep in view the existing social traditions of those times. Through the centuries Christian critics of Islam and the Prophet have relied heavily on Muhammad's marriages to assail and denigrate the man whom they saw as the personification of sensuality and immorality. The motive for such a portrayal was to negate his role as a prophet in absolute terms. Muslims, for their part, have been on the defensive, and have tried to rebut these accusations as historically incorrect and unjustified. Moreover, some Western critics have created the impression that it was Muhammad who had adopted or legalised polygamy, which is historically incorrect. The fact is that polygamy is a very ancient practice found in many societies. Among these, for instance, we can mention ancient Medes, Babylonians, Assyrians, Persians, Chinese, and Hindus and

Israelites as well as very many tribal societies around the world. The Old Testament and Rabbinic writings frequently attest to the legality of polygamy. King Solomon is said to have married seven hundred women, many of them of non-Israelite origin; he also had three hundred concubines (1 Kings 11:3). King David is also said to have married many wives and concubines (2 Samuel 5:13). In the Semitic culture in general and Arab tradition in particular polygamy was permitted.

The patriarchal system was the common social basis on which the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam arose and developed. Despite some minor differences in details, patriarchy, the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, is the common feature of the holy scriptures of the three faiths. The role of the sexes, especially the social position of women in the institution of marriage in the early history of Christianity and Islam, needs to be placed against the historical conditions and context of the times. It is quite obvious that the teachings of the founders of Christianity, Jesus and Paul, as contained in the Bible on family-life, the social and marital status of women, are at odds with our present notions of the equality of the sexes. As a result of political and social struggles women have achieved political rights in general and also economic improvement in the conditions of the middle class, and to some degree among the working class, in the Western countries during the twentieth century. Despite the cumbersome inhibitions of religion, the morbid anti-feminism of the clerics and the scuttling social outlook of the privileged classes, the capitalist mode of production had set in motion new processes of change and domination, and new economic relationships. With the Industrial Revolution the employment of women in industries, mostly in very degrading conditions of labour, brought women out of their homes and led to changes in work and family relationships. Thus the changes brought about by capitalism in the process of production and social organisation of working-class people including women saw the emergence of women's struggles for their rights and emancipation from oppression.

When we turn to the question of marriages in a male-dominated society of pre-Islamic Arabia, we find that the basic family unit was the patriarchal agnatic clan where by custom polygamy was permitted, and was quite common among nobles and

chiefs. Besides, polyandry, though less common than polygamy, also existed. As Professor Lapidus points out:

> However, alongside of the agantic clan, various forms of polyandrous marriage of one woman to several men with varying degrees of permanence and responsibility for paternity, including temporary 'marriages', were also known in Arabia. Polygamous arrangements varied from multiple wives in one residence to arrangements in which a man had several wives living with their own tribes whom he would visit on a rotating basis. No single norm was universal. Less and less could people be held to the ideal obligations regarding the distribution of property, the protection of women, or the guardianship of children.[11]

In general, the status of women in Arabia had sunk very low. The tribes of the Quraish and the Kindah also buried their infant girls alive in the name of tribal honour and pride. Under Islam a radical change in the status and rights of women occurred. The Qur'anic legislation on family-life and divorce, and granting rights to women is common knowledge. The cruel practice of burying infant girls alive was severely denounced and prohibited under rigorous penalties. As women and female children were held in low esteem among the Arabs, the Prophet, with a view to change general attitudes, was emphatic on the proper upbringing and care of girls and on due respect and consideration to be shown to women. The pagan custom, which obliged a man to marry his father's widows except his own mother, was forbidden.

Despite the common practice of polygamy among the Arabs, Muhammad did not take a second wife during the lifetime of his first wife, Khadija. When she died in 619, Muhammad who was about fifty gradually took other wives, possibly as many as ten. Some of his wives were the widows of Muslims killed in battles. He married some of them out of charity and in this way provided helpless widows with subsistence and protection. In other cases, he married the daughters of Arab chieftains or dignitaries who were to prove helpful allies.

One can understand why Christian apologists for so long have criticised the Prophet for his many marriages while they eulogised the celibacy of Jesus. By

comparing them, they drew the conclusion, mildly put, that the former was a licentious person while the latter, by contrast, possessed a high moral character. Even if we were to admit such assumptions for the sake of argument, the premise of such an assumption itself is untenable: the comparison made was of two totally different phenomena, a man and God. It is obvious that human beings marry, not God (all three monotheistic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam agree on this). If Jesus, who is believed to be God Incarnate, did not marry, then the rationale of it is obvious. As far as Muhammad is concerned, he was not a divine being; he was a man, and he viewed himself as only a human being and a prophet.

In Christian apologetic literature, the criticism of Muhammad's marriages also extends to Islamic institution of marriage as such. But what is the biblical view of marriage? We will have a brief look at this question for the sake of clarifying some anomalies involved therein. According to the New Testament (Matthew 19:11-12), when Jesus is asked by his disciples if it is good not to marry, he answers thus: 'This teaching does not apply to everyone, but only to those to whom God has given it. For there are different reasons why men cannot marry: some, because they were born that way; others, because men made them that way; and others do not marry for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. Let him who can accept this teaching do so.' Paul, who transformed a Jewish sect into the universal Christian religion, writes to the Corinthians (I Cor. 7:1, 7:38): 'Now, to deal with matters you wrote about. A man does well not to marry;' and 'so the man who marries does well, but the one who does not marry does even better.' It seems very few Christians have followed his advice.

The equality of the sexes had to await other times and new social conditions; there was no room for it in the patriarchal system of early Christianity. Paul writes to the Ephesians (5:22-23):

> Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. For a husband has authority over his wife as Christ has authority over the church; . . . And so wives must submit completely to their husbands just as the church submits itself to Christ.

Even the very idea of male and female equality in the sight of God is deemed beyond imagination. Paul while teaching about covering the head in worship writes to Corinthians (I Cor. 11:7-10):

> And since it is a shameful thing for a woman to shave her head or cut her hair, she should cover her head. A man has no need to cover his head, because he reflects the image and glory of God. But woman reflects the glory of man; for man was not created from woman, but woman from man. Nor was he created for woman's sake, but woman was created for man's sake.

In this way a man, any man, no matter who he is, is superior to any woman no matter who she is or what her accomplishments may be. She is doomed to be inferior to man. How should women learn or gain education? Paul says (I Tim. 2:11-12): 'Women should learn in all silence and humility. I do not allow them to teach or to have authority over men; they must keep quiet.' If the world had followed this, at least, the job of teachers would have become so easy and the scenes of family-life totally different. The Apostles and the Fathers of Church have looked upon marriage as an evil and woman an unclean being. Tertullian, Origen and Augustine praise celibacy and condemn marriage.

In Islam, by contrast, family is the basic unit of human society. The foundation of family is laid through marriage. In marriage, husband and wife have mutual rights and obligations: By marriage a husband and wife do not become 'one person'; despite a common family-life they share, both of them retain their individual status in personal, social, and legal matters. In its legal aspects, Muslim marriage is held to be a civil contract in which the rights and obligations of the parties are clearly defined. The relationship is intended to be permanent but dissolution is possible under certain conditions. The dissolution of marriage by divorce, however, is not regarded as a favourable option for the parties and, in fact, was strongly disapproved by the Prophet. The status of men and women in marriage is determined by the religious system, aimed at raising the spiritual dimension of human beings. The Qur'an (9:71) says: 'The believers, men and women, are friends of one another. They enjoin good and forbid evil and observe prayer, and pay the Zakat [annual alms tax or tithe levied on wealth and distributed to the poor], and they obey God and His messenger.' The

diversity of respective roles and functions in family-life is acknowledged. Women have rights vis-à-vis men corresponding to those men have vis-à-vis women on a basis of fairness and equity. The women, like men, were given the right to own their property. The Qur'an regulated the share of a widow, and of other relatives, in the property of the deceased husband. A wife was given the same rights over her husband as the man over his wife, except that man being the earning partner, was a degree higher. What will be the gradation when men and women achieve economic equality, and men are no longer the breadwinners of their wives and children? This was a situation that arose in the twentieth century. Women in the Western countries through long struggles have achieved political and economic rights. Beside their jobs, they also do domestic work as they have done through the ages. We might ask: can women be regarded as equal to men also in the sight of God in the changed conditions of modern times? A common sense answer may seem to be in the affirmative; but the believers of various faiths, orthodox or modernists, hold divergent and contradictory opinions and offer different solutions. However, the issue of gender equality is not one of theology; theologies are flexible enough to take into account the present-day social and political developments**.** The oppressive social traditions need to be separated from religious traditions so that religion is not used to justify the bondage and subordination of women to male domination. The principle of gender equality is not directed against men; conversely, it has within itself the potential to liberate them from the shackles of the oppressive system of which they themselves have been an instrument.

The social code of pagan Arabia set no limits on the number of wives one could marry. The Qur'an regulated the unlimited polygamy, limiting the number of wives a man could have to four with some stringent conditions. The Qur'anic injunction about polygamous marriage occurs in connection with the subject of orphans after the Battle of Uhud (March 625) to secure protection and justice for them. Here the legal guardians of orphans holding property during the latter's minority are asked to hand over property to them justly without gaining any personal advantage (Q. 4:3): 'Should you apprehend that you will not be able to deal fairly with orphans, then marry of other women as may be agreeable to you, two or three, or four; but if you feel you will not deal justly between them, then marry only one.'

Muhammad, despite his prophetic mission never claimed to be anything but a human being, and Muslims have regarded him such. The Qur'an (17:93) says: 'Tell them [O Muhammad]: "Holy is my Lord. I am but a mortal being sent as a messenger." ' In addressing the question of his polygamous marriages, it is important to see the matter in the context of the customs and mores of his times. At that time there was no moral or social stigma attached to polygamy in Arabia and Muhammad's marriages were therefore not a novelty in any sense. Therefore it is not surprising that his contemporaries never objected to his marriages.

As we glance at the contemporary world, we witness a big change in family-life in industrialised countries. At least women in Western countries have, within the course of a century, won important political, economic and social rights, and achieved a certain measure of economic independence. All this has led to adjusting to new conditions of gender relationships. Undoubtedly, some old taboos about sex and sexuality no longer command universal veneration or acceptance; and in a number of ways old patterns are changing while more liberal attitudes towards gender equality and relationships have become a social norm.

The practice of polygamy has increasingly been rejected and condemned as an antiquated and anachronistic form of male oppression that should have no place in the lives of men and women but as we know it is still in vogue, though on a diminishing scale, in some old traditional societies and regions of the world. In judging the past, however, we should keep in mind that people are primarily the children of their age, and this applies to the past generations who had their own social norms, systems of beliefs and ideas, which do not always correspond with our present-day outlook. Polygamy as an institution is ancient and has a long history. It has been practised in various cultures and in different periods of history. On the question of the Prophet's multiple wives, the outstanding Indian scholar and jurist Dr Ameer Ali (1849--1928) in his classic work *The Spirit of Islam* (first published in 1890) observes:

> Probably it will be said that *no* necessity should have induced the Prophet either to practice or to allow such an evil custom as polygamy, and that he ought to have forbidden it absolutely, Jesus having overlooked it. But this custom, like many others, is not absolutely evil. Evil is a relative term. An act or usage may

> be primarily quite in accordance with the moral conceptions of societies and individuals; but progress of ideas and changes in the condition of a people may make it evil in its tendency, and in process of time, it may be made by the State, illegal. That ideas are progressive is a truism; but that usages and customs depend on the progress of ideas, and are good and evil according to circumstances, or as they are or are not in accordance with conscience, --'the spirit of the times'--is a fact much ignored by superficial thinkers.[12]

From this it does not follow that polygamy in present times should be defended. The union of men and women in close relationships has taken numerous forms in history, including polyandry, polygyny and monogamy. Fazlur Rahman remarks that 'neither monogamy nor polygamy can be regarded as the unique and divinely ordained order for every society in every season and that either institution may apply according to the social conditions prevailing, although, given the right conditions, monogamy is certainly the ideal form.'[13] This appraisal by a leading rationalist Muslim thinker is appreciable. It represents an enlightened perspective. This does not mean that monogamy becomes more respectable and non-oppressive, the ideal form, of relationship to the sceptics and feminists. In other words, the historical process of change in inter-personal relationships between man and women, as we witness, does not reach a cul-de-sac with monogamy.

Islamic expansion

When the Prophet emigrated in 622 he had only a small group of followers. A decade later when he died he left behind an Islamic state that was mostly confined to the Arabian Peninsula. Under his successors, a great series of conquests over vast areas and countries reshaped the map of the world during the first century of Islam. The speed and far-reaching effects of these conquests still continue to amaze historians.

The security concerns in the Mediterranean underwent a great change from the western point of view. Within the span of a few years after the Prophet's death, the political frontiers of the Near East saw new changes. Why the Byzantine power in Syria and Egypt came to so rapid a collapse was due to a number of causes. First, the long war between the Byzantine and the Persian Empires had weakened both; the

Byzantines had reasserted their shaky control of Syria after defeating the Persians in 629. Second, the policy of religious persecution of Monophysites, which the Byzantine rulers pursued in Syria and Egypt, had made the local populations hostile to imperial rule. The local populations coming from Semitic stock -- Phoenicians, Jews, or Arab -- identified themselves with the Arab invaders more easily than with the Greeks. In any case, the policy of religious toleration, which Muslims followed, soon brought them the political loyalty of the conquered people. The Coptic and Syrian Monophysites and Nestorians who spread in various places had acute grievances against the Greeks. The Greeks followed a policy of persecution to impose the imperial doctrines of the Catholic Church. As mentioned earlier, Heraclius' solution for putting to rest the two nature controversies, by forcing the doctrine of 'one will' of Christ, proved disastrous.

The Byzantine Empire was an orthodox Christian state and it was Greek. The Greek imperial power for Syria and Egypt represented colonial domination and it was bitterly resented. The Greek rulers were regarded as alien masters with an alien civilisation. The local populations were of Semitic stock--Phoenicians, Jews, or Arabs and they had more in common with the Muslim conquerors than the Greeks. Muslims tolerated all religious creeds and gave protection to those who came under their rule on the payment of a poll tax. In Syria and Egypt the Muslims did not face hostile Christian populations; on the contrary, they were welcomed as liberators from political domination and religious persecution of the Byzantine rulers. The Monophysites of Egypt, who formed the bulk of the population, sided with the Arab invaders.

In 634 the Arab armies attacked Syria and Iraq. Damascus capitulated in 635. In 636 a large Byzantine army under the command of Theodorus tried to recover the lost territories, but was decisively defeated at the Battle of the Yarmouk. After this, most of the Syrian cities surrendered to Arabs without much struggle. The Arabs undertook the conquest of the Persian Empire, and the task was accomplished systematically. Arabs defeated the Persian army at Qadisiyah in 637. Ctesiphon was taken without much resistance, followed by the capture of other cities. By the time of Emperor Heraclius' death in 641, the whole of the Aramaic-speaking lowlands and the Jazirah in the north and the Karun valley had come under the Arab rule. Jerusalem and

Antioch fell in 638 and Caesarea (Palestinian seaport) in 640. Between 639 and 642, Egypt and North African coastline areas as far as Cyrenaica were taken. However, the Arabs met fierce resistance from the Berber countries of the Maghreb and it took some time before they were brought under Arab rule. At the end of the century, the Arabs took Carthage. After the end of the Persian Empire, the Arabs conquered Kabul in 644 and Khurasan in 655, and at the beginning of the eighth century Sindh was brought under Arab rule.

Latin Christianity felt the impact of Arab conquests when Sicily was first attacked in 652. But the occupation of the main towns of Sicily occurred in the ninth century. However, the Arab occupation did not last long. The Normans started the reconquest of south Italy and Sicily. By 1091 they gained effective control over Sicily.

The Arab conquest of Spain was a spectacular westward push. The Visigothic king, Roderick, ruled Spain at this time. In 711 an Arab army with Berber allies crossed the Straits of Gibraltar under Tariq and defeated the king, and thus put an end to the Visigothic kingdom. By 715, the main towns of Spain had come under the Muslim rule. In the history of medieval Europe, Muslim rule in Spain wrote one of the most glorious chapters in the advancement of art and culture. The mosques of Cordova and Seville which were converted into cathedrals by the later Catholic rulers are a testimony to this grandeur. The Catholics' reconquest of the kingdoms of Cordova in 1236 and Seville in 1248 left only the small kingdom of Granada in Muslim hands. Here, the superb design and beauty of the architectural monuments of the Alhambra still intrigue and fascinate. Granada continued its independent existence till it was captured in 1492.

In 732, a hundred years after the death of the Prophet an Arab army penetrated deeply into France. The Franks at the Battle of Poitiers defeated them. However, in the coming few years, further expeditions were sent by the Muslims. They reached as far as the upper Rhone in France, but all this came to nothing. J.M. Roberts views the end of westward expansion thus:

> Whatever it brought it to an end (and possibly it was just because the Arabs were not much interested in European conquest, once away from the warm lands of the Mediterranean littoral), the Islamic onslaught in the West remains an astonishing achievement, even if Gibbon's vision of an Oxford teaching the Koran was never remotely near realization.[14]

One of the leading Orientalists in the West, Montgomery Watt observes:

> In whatever way one looks at it, there is something phenomenal about the expansion of Arab political power in the period between 632 and 750. One can mention various factors involved in the expansion--the exhaustion of the Byzantine and Persian empires and the consequent power vacuum; the superior fighting qualities of the Arabs from the desert, and perhaps also of the Berbers; the unification of the Arabs through the Islamic faith; the administrative skills of the merchants from Mecca and elsewhere. Yet, when all this has been said, there remains something mysterious. For instance, how could men with the ability to organize camel caravans adapt themselves so quickly to the much more complex task of organizing a vast empire? How could they maintain communications over enormous distances? How could they place so much trust in subordinates? In a process, which seems so largely secular, had religion an essential part to play? Or was the main thing the qualities of character produced by the experience of life in the desert? The expansion of the Arab empire is certainly something to be pondered.[15]

When Islamic rule spread to Syria, Egypt and North Africa, the spread of Islam among the Christian masses was swift. In the former countries of the Byzantine Empire, the sectarian conflicts and hostility had created favourable conditions for the success of Islam.

Chapter 5. The Qur’anic view of Christian dogmas

Jesus and Christianity

In Christian-Muslim encounters, each side has perceived the Other in the light of its own religious doctrines. The Qur’an emphasises that the message it contains is the continuation, and also the revival of the revelations of the earlier prophets. All the previous prophets delivered the true message from God. Therefore all of them are respected and held in high esteem. This attitude towards the former prophets -- including Abraham, Moses and Jesus as the true messengers of the divine revelation -- is a specific feature of the Qur’an, yet it is important to distinguish this feature from what the Qur’an says about the doctrines and the actual practice of Jews and Christians. When some Christian apologists find that the Qur’an contains such a clear appreciation of Jesus while simultaneously rejecting what to Christians are, no doubt, the fundamental dogmas of Christianity, they conclude that this proves the existence of an obvious contradiction in the Qur’an. But, in reality, the Qur’an draws a clear line of distinction between the two: Jesus the prophet and Jesus the God Incarnate of Christian dogma. We will focus on these issues in this chapter.

It is essential to grasp that the status of Jesus as a prophet has definitively been proclaimed in the Qur’an, and this is not something peripheral that could be glossed over to make room for some alternative view if one chose to do so. The recognition of Jesus as a prophet is ingrained in the Qur’anic teaching and forms an essential part of the Islamic faith. While Jesus, the Hebrew teacher, was ignored or rejected by the Jews, his life or teaching having no influence on the Jewish faith, the Prophet Muhammad accepted him as a great and highly respected prophet. In the Qur’an he is mentioned more than any other prophet, and in highly laudatory terms. There is a credible tradition recorded by Ibn Ishaq in the *Sirat Rasul Allah* and described in detail by the old historian of Mecca, Azraqi (d. 858), that when the Prophet entered Mecca in triumph in 630, there was also a painting of Mary and Jesus, among others, on the inner walls of the shrine of the Kaaba. The Prophet had profound veneration for Jesus and his mother Mary. To cleanse the place of the relics of paganism, he ordered that all the idols kept therein were to be destroyed and all the paintings erased

except that of Jesus and Mary.[1] This painting was seen by an eyewitness as late as 683 when much of the Kaaba was destroyed by fire and rebuilt.

Much of the controversy between Islam and Christianity, however, centres round the doctrine of the Incarnation, the mainstay of the Christian faith but which fundamentally runs counter to the belief in the transcendence and absolute Oneness of God, which is the core of Islamic monotheism. This doctrine divided the two religions historically, but, as we have seen, it has also been the cause of great schism and major Christological controversies within Christianity itself, and so far, no satisfactory solution has emerged amongst the believers. As we have mentioned earlier, Jesus was regarded a human being and a prophet by his small body of Jewish followers who had formed the Jerusalem Church, and later was so regarded by the Ebionites in early Christianity.

The doctrine of Incarnation in the history of Christianity has proved to be the deepest of mysteries. Human ingenuity has yet to convey it successfully in a rational and intelligible form. In addition, it also represents something unique in the annals of Hebrew theology. It negated the Jewish concept of Godhead and the Jewish tradition of monotheism, while it claimed to be nonetheless a part of the same theological tradition. Among the Christians at present a growing number of people question the dogma of Jesus as God Incarnate, others such as the Unitarians believe Jesus was a human being. Yet, for the vast majority of the Christian believers the doctrine of Incarnation is the cornerstone of their faith. Its demands upon us, if we take a common sense view, has ably been described by a leading religious scholar, Maurice Wiles, Professor of Divinity and Canon of Christ Church, who questions whether the exponents of Incarnation present any sensible arguments at all:

> In entering such a demurrer I am not claiming that one ought to be able perfectly to fathom the mystery of Christ's being before one is prepared to believe. We do not after all fully understand the mystery of our own or one another's beings. But when one is asked to believe something which one cannot even spell out at all in intelligible terms, it is right to stop and push the questioning one step further back. Are we sure that the concept of an incarnate

being, one who is both fully God and fully man, is after all an intelligible concept? [2]

The teaching of the Qur'an and the Sunnah (practice) of the Prophet provide the necessary guidance to the believers on the role of Jesus in their doctrine. As the prominent British scholar Professor R.C. Zaehner says:

> The Muhammadan attitude towards Christ is, in fact, the exact reverse of that of the rationalists: for they [Muslims] accept all that is miraculous and 'absurd', the Virgin birth, the miracles, and the Ascension, but deny, out of their very veneration for Jesus, the one fact that is admitted by all historians to be authentic, the Crucifixion. Outside the Christian body itself there is no one who has gone further to meet Christianity half-way: for in the Qur'an itself Jesus is accepted as both Messiah and the Word of God, but not as the Son of God, 'for God neither begat nor was He Begotten'.[3]

For Muslims the rejection of the Incarnation dogma is unavoidable because of the Qur'anic concept of God. But as Professor Zaehner points out, Muslims do not 'accept the historical fact of the Crucifixion which, as for the Gnostics, seemed altogether too degrading a fate for the last and greatest of the prophets before Muhammad. About the Ascension, however, they had no difficulty at all, nor did they deny the second coming.' [4] The question of the 'historical fact of Crucifixion' as Professor Zaehner puts it, is, in fact, again a controversial matter, and on this differing historical views of historians and non-historians have been suggested. Besides, how this tragic incident led to shaping the doctrine of the Crucifixion, not only as an independent historical occurrence but also to support the doctrine of the Incarnation, it becomes a metahistorical event in the history of the early Church. The matter is therefore not one of history only, which can be separated from its theological appendage and dimension. The Qur'anic doctrine of the Crucifixion has also been perceived and interpreted differently amongst Muslim orthodoxy and modernists.

In the early Meccan period as well as some time after the *Hijra*, the references in the Qur'an to Christians are in favourable terms. But after a while since his arrival in Medina, the Prophet was confronted with the hostility of the Jews towards his

message and his followers. In the Qur'anic revelations of the period, the denunciation of the Jews seems to be in sharp contrast to the favourable view of Christians. The Qur'an says (5:78-80): 'Those of the children of Israel, who disbelieved were cursed by David, and by Jesus son of Mary. That was because they disobeyed and were given to transgression. They did not try to restrain one another from the iniquity which they committed. Evil indeed was that which they used to do. You will see many of them taking the disbelievers as their helpers.' And again (Q. 5:82): 'You [Muhammad] shall certainly find the bitterest of people in enmity against the believers to be the Jews and the pagans, and you shall indeed find the closest in friendship towards the believers are those who say: We are Christians. That is because many of them are savants and monks, and they are not arrogant.' This friendly approach towards the Christians was despite a clear distinction that the Qur'an made between the revealed truth through Jesus and the dogmas, which evolved in his name in the history of Christianity.

The Qur'an (Sura 19) confirms the account of the annunciation as in Luke's Gospel but the event of Jesus' birth it presents is quite different from that of the biblical narrative. The Immaculate Conception and the Virgin Birth demonstrate the omnipotence of God, and in no sense can be accepted as a proof of the primacy of Jesus over other prophets, or of his divinity. Jesus was like Adam or any other human being in nature and the material substance of his body (Q. 3:59-60): 'Verily, in the sight of God, the nature of Jesus is as the nature of Adam, whom He created out of dust and then said to him: Be -- and he is. This is the truth from the Sustainer; be not, then, among the doubters!' If the birth of Jesus without an earthly father can be offered as a proof of his superiority or divinity, then, what about Adam who was born without a father and without a mother? At least in this respect, does it not make Adam superior to Jesus? However, it should be kept in mind that some modern Muslim scholars, contrary to the commonly-held belief among Muslims, have rejected the dogma of the Virgin Birth. Among those who do not accept that the Qur'an teaches the Virgin Birth are Sir Sayyid Ahamad Khan, Tawfiq Sidki, Muhammad Ali and Ghulam Ahmad Parvez.[5]

Let us pause here, and see how the story of Jesus' birth and lineage are described in the Gospel according to Mathew (1:18-21, 24-25):

> This was how the birth of Jesus took place. His mother Mary was engaged to Joseph, but before they were married, she found out that she was going to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Joseph was a man, who always did what was right, but he did not want to disgrace Mary publicly; so he made plans to break the engagement privately. While he was thinking about this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, descendant of David, do not be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. For it is by the Holy Spirit that that she has conceived. She will have a son, and you will name him Jesus--because he will save his people from their sins.' . . . So when Joseph woke up, he married Mary, as the angel of the Lord had told him to do. But he had no sexual relations with her before she gave birth to her son. And Joseph named him Jesus.

It is important to notice that this account is preceded in Matthew (1:1-17) by the list of Jesus' ancestors that shows his descent from Abraham and David through Joseph, the husband of Mary. Thus, according to this account of the Gospel, Jesus' line of descent is traced from Abraham to Joseph through David. It clearly implies that Joseph was the father of Jesus. Joseph married Mary, and the couple had a number of children besides Jesus. The 'brothers and sisters' of Jesus are named in Mark's Gospel (3:31-32): 'Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside the house and sent in a message asking for him. A crowd was sitting round Jesus, and they said to him, "Look, your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, and they want you." ' Or again, many people who heard his wise preaching and saw him perform miracles were amazed, and asked (Mark 6:3): 'Isn't he the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters living here with us?'

The question of the virgin birth of Jesus and Mary's status as his virgin mother, who later became the wife of Joseph the carpenter and bore a number of other children in her wedlock did not remain a simple human affair in the life-story of a person; in the early history of Christianity it became the focus of bitter conflicts and controversies, ranging from her deification to her downright abuse and accusations. For instance, the Ebionites in the second and third centuries, as mentioned earlier, had insisted on the strict observance of the Jewish Law and held opinions about Jesus that were not acceptable to the Church. A few fragments of the Gospel of the Ebionites

have been preserved in the writing of Epiphanius (d. 403), who was a Greek scholar and bishop of Constantia, the capital of Cyprus. He records that the Ebionites say

> that Jesus was begotten of the seed of a man, and was chosen; and so by the choice of God he was called the Son of God from the Christ that came into him from above in the likeness of a dove. And they deny that he was begotten of God the Father, but say that he was created as one of the archangels, yet greater.[7]

In the apocryphal Gospel of the Hebrews, Jesus is reported to have said: 'Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away on to the great mountain Tabor.'[8]

However, in the Qur'an, Mary (Maryam) has been given a highly respected status mainly due to the fact of her being the mother to Jesus. She has been referred to thirty-four times in the Qur'an. She was a respectable and pious woman (Q. 21.91): 'And remember her also who safeguarded her chastity, whereupon We breathed into her of Our spirit and caused her, together with her son, to become a symbol [of Our grace] unto all people.' In another place, the Qur'an (66:12) says that Mary 'guarded her chastity, whereupon We breathed of Our spirit into that [which was in her womb], and who accepted the truth of her Sustainer's words -- and [thus,] of His revelations -- and was one of the truly devout.' The Qur'anic expression 'We breathed into her of Our spirit' has meant disparate things to different writers and believers, Muslims as well as Christians. The renowned Austrian statesman and thinker Muhammad Asad (formerly Leopold Weiss, who had converted to Islam), in his erudite work *The Message of the Qur'an* elucidates it thus:

> This allegorical expression, used here with reference to Mary's conception of Jesus, has been widely -- and erroneously -- interpreted as relating specifically to *his* birth. As a matter of fact, the Qur'an uses the same expression in three other places with reference to the creation of *man in general* -- namely in 15:29 and 28:72, 'when I have formed him . . . and breathed into him of My spirit'; and in 32:9, 'and thereupon He forms (lit., 'formed') him fully and breathes (lit., 'breathed') into him of His spirit'. In particular, the passage of which the last-

> quoted phrase is a part (i.e., 32:7-9) makes it abundantly and explicitly clear that God 'breathes of His spirit' into *every* human being. Commenting on the verse under consideration, Zamakhshari states that 'the breathing of the spirit (of God) into a body signifies the endowing it with life': an explanation with which Razi concurs.[9]

Thus, according to this version, accepted by many enlightened Muslim and Christian believers, the formation of Jesus in the womb of his mother and his birth were a natural process that every human child undergoes. However, there are many Christians who do not accede to a natural explanation and instead interpret the whole story as the continuous unfolding of miracles in the conception, gestation, birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Mary, to whom the later Christians out of veneration called the Virgin Mary has not been mentioned as such either in the Bible or the Qur'an. In the Qur'an she is held to be beyond any moral blemish. The Jews who accused her of immorality are severally reprimanded (Q. 4:156) 'for the awesome calumny they utter against Mary.'

In the formation of the Christian faith, a number of positions have been accorded both to Jesus and his mother. If the doctrine of the Trinity, which is believed by Christians, includes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and no one else, then this, according to Christians should also be acceptable to other monotheists. But as usual deep-rooted intricacies of theological rationale do not turn out to be so simple after all. As the history of the Christian Church shows, this has led to numerous controversies and proved to be an inexhaustible source of sectarian differences and heresies. The deification of Jesus and Mary is not something unknown in the history of the Church. From whatever angle the divinity of a human being in relation to God may have been asserted, explained or justified, the Qur'an categorically rejects it. The Qur'an says (4:171):

> O followers of the Gospel! Do not overstep the bounds (of truth) in your religious beliefs, and do not say of God anything but the truth. The Christ Jesus, son of Mary, was but God's Apostle -- (the fulfilment of) His promise that He had conveyed unto Mary -- and a soul created by Him. Believe, then, in God and His apostles, and do not say: (God is) a trinity. Desist (from this assertion)

> for your own good. God is but One God. Holy is He, far above having a son; unto Him belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth; and none is as worthy of trust as God.

The Qur'an emphasises the prophethood of Jesus in numerous passages. How Jesus came to be believed as the Son of God and God Incarnate belongs to the history of the development of Christian dogmas, which we discussed, but the idea of his being a prophet is not something which only the Qur'an announced; we also find him being called a prophet in the Bible. He was regarded a prophet by the people. Luke (7:16) describes how a large crowd responded when they saw Jesus bring a dead man to life: 'They all were filled with fear and praised God. "A great prophet has appeared among us!" they said; "God has come to save his people!" ' Jesus himself calls John the Baptist (Luke 7:27) to be 'much more than a prophet.' Herod, the ruler of Galilee (Luke 9:8) was told that in Jesus, John the Baptist (who had been killed by the orders of Herod) or Elijah had returned, or perhaps 'one of the old prophets.' Thus Jesus is compared with some old prophets such as Moses, Joshua, David and Solomon. According to Matthew (21:11) when Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowds said that he was 'the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.' Luke (24:19) says how after his crucifixion, some disciples said: 'This man was a prophet and was considered by God and by all the people to be powerful in everything he said and did.' John (6:14) speaks of him as 'the prophet who was to come to the world,' and in another place (7:40), as 'really the prophet'. Jesus rebukes the Jews thus (John 5:45-46): 'Do not think, however, that I am the one who will accuse you to my Father. Moses, in whom you have put your hope, is the very one who will accuse you. If you had really believed Moses, you would have believed me, because he wrote about me.' Needless to say that Moses could hardly ever have said that 'the Son of God' would come after him. What clearly emerges from these biblical statements is, that Jesus, who performed many amazing miracles (but sometimes his power to perform big miracles, as Mark 6:5 says, did not work) was a wise man. He was regarded a prophet by those who had seen or heard him preaching. The Qur'an also calls Jesus a prophet and rejects the assumptions of those who subsequently built Christian dogmas in his name and transformed him into a heavenly being and God Incarnate. These are some of the simple facts about the man from Nazareth and his prophetic mission which appear both in the Gospels and the Qur'an.

While insisting on the prophetic mission of Jesus, the Qur'an refutes the assertions or charges that Jesus made any claims to divinity or encouraged anyone else to believe him to be a god or the God, or a sharer in the divine power. The Qur'an (5:116) says: 'And when God said: O Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say unto mankind: Worship my mother and me as deities besides God? [Jesus] answered: Limitless are Thou in Thy glory! It behoves me not to have said that to which I have no right.' The idea that Mary beside God and Jesus was also worshipped is not surprising either. In fact, the Collyridians, a sect from the fourth century had worshipped Mary. Bishop Epiphanius of Constantia had opposed this heresy, arguing that only the Trinity, which excluded Mary, should be worshipped. Arius also, as we have already mentioned, was opposed to the idea of calling Mary *'Theotokos'* ('Mother of God') and had opposed her deification.

The corruption of the Injil

The Qur'an refers to the divine revelations that Jesus received as the Injil. For instance, the Qur'an (5:46) says: And We caused Jesus, the son of Mary, to follow in the footsteps of those [earlier prophets], confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah; and we vouchsafed unto him the Gospel (Injil), wherein there was guidance and light, confirming the truth of whatever there still remained of the Torah, and as a guidance and admonition unto the God-conscious.' In another place (5:66) it says: 'and if they would but truly observe the Torah and the Gospel and all [the revelation] that has been bestowed from on high upon them by their Sustainer, they would indeed partake all the blessings of heaven and earth.'

The later Muslim writers have called the alterations 'corruption' (*tahrif*) which the Jews and Christians made in the Torah and the Injil. Tampering with the text either by making further additions or omitting what it originally contained resulted in the corruption of the Scriptures. The Christians had misunderstood Jesus, the prophet and had transformed him into a god or a person in the Godhead, a partaker in the divinity of God, or being God himself. But, it is worth remembering that in the Qur'anic teaching both Judaism and Christianity were true religions, both having

possessed true revelation once. When the Jews and Christians disagree, they accuse one another of falsehood. But the Qur'an confirms that the Scriptures they profess to believe in were originally true (2:113): 'And the Jews say the Christians follow nothing (true) and the Christians say the Jews follow nothing (true), yet both are readers of the Scriptures. Even thus speak those who know not. God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differ.'

Those who have corrupted or corrupt the Scriptures, by changing, concealing or misinterpreting the text are condemned (Q. 2:79):

> Woe, then, unto those who write down, with their own hands, [something which they claim to be] divine writ, and then say, 'This is from God,' in order to acquire a trifling gain thereby; woe, then, unto them for what their hands have written, and woe unto them for all that they may have gained.

In fact, Christians also admit that the Bible found in the present form has undergone substantial changes. For instance, the Gospel according to Mark, the earliest narrative of the story of Jesus, mentions the Ascension of Jesus, a vital part of Christian faith, very briefly (16:19): 'After the Lord Jesus had talked with them, he was taken up to heaven and sat at the right side of God.' Luke's account (24:51) is even briefer: 'As he was blessing them, he departed from them and was taken up into heaven.' Strangely enough, there is no mention of this most amazing event in the Gospels of Matthew and John.

However, the Good News Bible points out that in the Gospel according to Mark, which mentions the Ascension, 'the two endings to the Gospel [Mark 16: 9-19 and 16: 9-10], are generally regarded as written by someone other than the author of Mark.'[10] It adds further: 'Some manuscripts and ancient translations do not have this ending to the Gospel (16: verses 9-19). Some manuscripts and ancient translations have [a] shorter ending [16: verses 9-10] in addition to the longer ending (16: verses 9-20).'[11]

The additions and deletions, which exist in the present version of the Gospels of the New Testament as compared to some of the old manuscripts, are shown in the Good News Bible. In fact, these matters pertain not only to the numerous minor

changes in words or phrases that are unavoidable in translated versions, but also to the contents of the text substantially by adding or deleting. The story of the Ascension is one such example. We find another example in the opening verse in Mark, which states: 'This is the Good News about Jesus, the Son of God' and in the footnote it is explained that '*some manuscripts do not have* the Son of God.'[12] In Mark, Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of Man ('*Ben Adam'*), but the later editors of Mark altered the text and substituted it with 'the Son of God'. Nevertheless, in the current version of Mark's Gospel, the latter designation or expression is still retained. There is a lot of documentary evidence that scholars have provided about the changes made in the Gospels from the early times. It is clearly pointed out in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*:

> The NT [New Testament] was written by Christians for Christians; it was moreover written in Greek for Greek-speaking communities, and the style of writing (with the exception, possibly, of the Apocalypse) was that of current literary composition. There has been no real break in the continuity of the Greek-speaking Church and we find accordingly that few real blunders of writing are met with in the leading types of the extant texts. This state of things has not prevented variations; but they are not for the most part accidental. An overwhelming majority of the 'various readings' of the MSS [manuscripts] of the NT were from the very first intentional alterations. The NT in very early times had no canonical authority, and alterations and additions were actually made where they seemed improvements.[13]

It is credible that all modifications and changes in the biblical manuscripts were made in good faith and with a view to improve the text. The old Latin translations of the manuscripts from the later Greek manuscripts remained in an utterly confused state until the last two decades of the fourth century, when Saint Jerome produced a revised Latin translation between 382 and 400. This replaced the old Latin version and became the Vulgate of the Roman Catholic Church.

The process under which textual variations and alterations have crept in the New Testament text is concisely expressed in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

> Many of these variations are mere slips of the eye, ear, memory, or judgement on the part of a copyist, who had no intention to do otherwise than follow what lay before him. But transcribers, and especially early transcribers, by no means aimed at that minute accuracy which is expected of a modern critical editor. Corrections were made in the interest of grammar or of style. Slight changes were adopted in order to remove difficulties, additions came in, especially from parallel narratives in the Gospels' citations from the Old Testament were made more exact or more complete. That all this was done in perfect good faith, and simply because no strict conception of the duty of a copyist existed, is especially clear from the almost entire absence of deliberate falsification of the text in the interest of doctrinal controversy. It may suffice to mention, in addition to what has been already said that glosses, or notes originally written in the margin, very often ended by being taken in the text and that the custom of reading the Scriptures in public worship naturally brought in liturgical additions, such as the doxology of the Lord's Prayer; while the commencement of an ecclesiastical lesson torn from its proper context had often to be supplemented by a few explanatory words, which soon came to be regarded as part of the original.[14]

How far can the New Testament be considered as representative of the divine inspiration which the evangelists had recorded? Any answer would possibly be along the lines suggested by the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: 'It appears from what we have already seen, that a considerable portion of the NT [New Testament] is made up of writings not directly apostolic . . . Yet, as a matter of fact, every book in the NT, with the exception of the four great Epistles of St Paul is at present more or less the subject of controversy, and interpolations are asserted even in these.'[15]

In this condition, it is difficult to reconcile opposing views that Muslims and Christians have about the Scriptures, the Injil or the canonical collection of the New Testament documents. While comparing the Qur'an with the Gospels some Christian scholars draw a distinction between the revelation itself and a record of it: the Qur'an comes under the former category and the Gospels under the latter. Professor Wilfred C. Smith, an Islamicist and a proponent of Christian-Muslim understanding, writes:

> The Bible is the record of revelation, not revelation itself. The truth of this remark, which has perhaps been more firmly grasped in Christian thought recently than was always the case, is clarified when one reflects on the Muslim misinterpretation of the Gospels apparent in the view that that God revealed them to Jesus.[16]

The Muslim misinterpretation, which Professor Smith is referring to, is that of equating the Qur'an and the New Testament, while according to Christian view the closest approximation that can be made is between the Qur'an and Jesus. Thus, in Islam the Qur'an is the Word of God; in Christianity Jesus is the Word of God. It is apparent that the theological concept 'Word of God' in both Islam and Christianity has totally different meanings and connotations. Professor Smith being wary of the problem whether different religions give different answers to the same essential questions or not makes a noteworthy observation:

> I would rather hold that rather their distinctiveness lies in considerable part in a tendency to ask different questions. Yet at a still refined level one must learn to recognise that essentially 'religions' do not exist as reified entities at all; but rather man, in his universalist condition, in the variety of religious traditions asks (varying) questions of the same universe, in relation to the transcendent and evidently unitary reality; or, in more theistic terms, that God, who is not plural, deals with man wherever He may find him as best He can, despite or within the limitations of the variety of religious forms.[17]

In short, Christians believe Jesus Christ to be the Word of God, God's revelation in human form; the Bible being merely a narrative about that revelation, i.e. Jesus Christ. In addition, many of them, if not all, also believe the New Testament to have been inspired by God, its text being incorruptible. On the other hand, the Qur'anic view is that the Injil was revealed to Jesus. It is quite obvious that Christian and Muslim believers hold differing views about the divine revelation; such views are deeply rooted in the theological systems of the two faiths. However, a belief in the revelation is a theological matter and the questions about the truth or facticity of such a belief is not a matter for historical inquiry. But it is reasonable to ask questions about a holy

book and find out how it came to be. Our historical description has shown that the text of the New Testament has undergone changes in form as well as content.

The divinity of Christ and the Sonship issue

The titles 'Son' or the 'Son of God' as applied to Jesus in the Gospels have been understood and interpreted variously within Christianity. In the doctrine of the Trinity, the Sonship of Jesus in relation to God, also expressed in terms of the incarnation of God, and the addition of the third person, the Holy Spirit, represent the unity of the Godhead. These formulations of the Christian dogma have been of vital concern in the Qur'an; the latter proclaims the unity of the Godhead in the monotheistic tradition of Abraham and the Hebrew prophets and denies the former for what it embodies. This also means that unless some formula for accommodation is found, the centuries-old theological conflict between Christianity and Islam concerning the two interconnected dogmas of Christianity, the Trinity and the Incarnation, will not cease.

On the question of Sonship, there are a number of passages in the Qur'an where any imputation of offspring to God is categorically refuted. The short Sura 112, *al-Ikhlas*, which is a part of Muslims' daily prayers, declares the perception of God in these words: 'Say: "He is the One God; God the Eternal, the Self-existing and Besought of all (*as-Samad*). He begets not, and neither is He begotten; and there is nothing that could be compared with Him." ' This Sura from the early Meccan period proclaims the perfection and uniqueness of God. It rejects any attribute to God that can be placed in any family context or resemblance. As Muhammad Asad comments:

> The fact that God is one and unique in every respect, without beginning and without end, has its logical correlate in the statement that 'there is nothing that could be compared with him' -- thus precluding any possibility of describing or defining Him . . . Consequently, the *quality* of His Being is beyond the range of human comprehension or imagination: which also explains why any attempt at 'depicting' God by means of figurative representations or even abstract symbols must be qualified as a blasphemous denial of the truth.[18]

The pagan Arabs, as mentioned earlier, worshipped three deities, al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat, whom they regarded the daughters of God. While they looked at the birth of daughters in the family as a shameful happening and took pride in their male issue, their attribution of daughters to God seemed a contradictory and somewhat an odd way to revere God. The Qur'an (53:19-23) addressing them says: 'Have you ever considered [what you are worshipping in] al-Lat and al-Uzza and Manat, the third and the last [of this triad]? What! For you the males and for Him the females? That, indeed, is an unfair division. These are nothing but empty names which you have invented -- you and your forefathers -- for which God has sent no authority.' Thus any imputation of offspring to God, as the pagan Arabs did, is rejected. It does not mean that since this rejection had the pagans in view, therefore the injunction need not be extended to other faiths. It is, in fact, a clarification of the Qur'anic concept of God that is universal, without any exception. According to the Qur'an the question of imputing offspring to God, or God adopting a son for whatever idea, purpose or interpretation one may have in one's mind, leads to contradicting the pure and consistent monotheistic concept of Godhead.

The Christological controversies over the nature of Jesus had raged over many centuries. The bitter conflicts and violence in the name of Jesus continued in Byzantium in the seventh century during the life of the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an at this juncture emphatically asserts the true status of Jesus as a messenger of God. What the Church authorities or heretical sects had made of the true teachings of Jesus is mentioned in Sura Maryam (19:30-32): '[Jesus] said: Behold, I am a servant of God. He has vouchsafed unto me revelation and made me a prophet, and he has made me blessed wherever I may be, and has enjoined upon me prayer and charity as long as I live and [has made me] dutiful towards my mother; and has not made me arrogant or graceless.'

There were various conflicting views held about the nature of Jesus ranging from the Jewish assertion of his illegitimate birth and false prophethood to the Christian belief in his being the Son of God, and God Incarnate. The Qur'an, after mentioning the truth about Jesus and his mission in his own words, says (19:34-37):

> Such was, in the words of truth, Jesus, son of Mary, about whose nature they so deeply disagree. It is not conceivable that God should have taken unto Himself a son: limitless is He in His glory! When He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it: 'Be' -- and it is. And (thus it was that Jesus always said): 'Verily God is my Sustainer as well as your Sustainer; so worship (none but) Him alone. This is the right path.' And yet, the different groups (that follow the Bible) are at variance among themselves (about the nature of Jesus). Woe, then, unto all who deny the truth, because of the meeting of the awesome Day (i.e. the Day of Judgement).

What the term 'the Son of God' really signifies in Christian faith when seen in the biblical context is discussed by a leading German theologian and writer, Hans Küng, in these words: 'Believing in the Son of God means believing in the revelation of the one God in the man Jesus of Nazareth. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ is primarily viewed not as an eternal, intradivine hypostasis, but as a human, historical person concretely related to God: the ambassador, Messiah, word of the eternal God in human form.'[19] Even though this exegesis falls short of the Qur'anic views on Jesus, Hans Küng, without trying to erase the differences that the Bible and the Qur'an represent regarding Jesus, underlines the human and historical importance of Jesus as an important corrective to the divinity problematic.

Some Christian apologists and writers maintain that the Qur'anic rejection of the idea of God's offspring was essentially related to the deities of the pagan Arabs, and not of the Christian belief in Jesus as Son of God. But this is hardly a convincing contention in view of the clear formulations of the concept of God in the Qur'an, which strongly objects to any idea of begetting or having any associates in His divinity.

The views outlined above are in relation to the Christians belief in Jesus as Son of God. Let us turn to the New Testament for information on the question. In the meantime it is essential to keep in mind how different documents written by different people were eventually recognised by the Church as the Canon of the New Testament. I have already mentioned that John's Gospel as compared with the synoptic Gospels (Mark, Matthew, Luke) was of an altogether different character, and some had

questioned it to become the fourth Gospel in the New Testament. As John (20:31) says that this book is written 'in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through your faith in him you may have life.' In John, Jesus is presented as the eternal Word of God and the title 'Son of God' is most frequently used. According to Christian belief what Jesus taught or did is contained in the Gospels. At the same time, many well-informed readers and believers know fully well that these narratives were compiled, written and altered by others in the early history of Christianity.

In Mark, Matthew, and Luke, Jesus does not speak of himself as Son of God at all. On the contrary, we find that 'Son of Man' was the title he used for himself. Strangely enough, the title he always used has been totally glossed over by others, but what he never called himself became, instead, his usual designation in the Christian doctrine.

The Trinity

To defend and justify what one believes in is common to us all. It is more so in the case of religious beliefs and doctrines, where a believer or an apologist feels duty-bound to protect what to him is sacred and beyond doubt. The two fundamental and interconnected doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation in this regard have proved to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration to believers; they have also been the cause of great controversies and bitter conflicts within Christianity. How an eminent Christian scholar, R.C. Zaehner, Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the University of Oxford, interprets the Qur'anic teaching on these doctrines illustrates the point. After a review of the relevant passages of the Qur'an where Jesus is called the Word of Truth, he arrives at a surprising conclusion, for which there is little support in the Qur'an. He writes:

> Christ, then, in the Qur'an, would appear to be both the Word of God and therefore divine, and truly man; but He is not the 'son' of God for reasons we have explained. . . . Muslims, of course, agree in denying the divinity of Christ; but this is the result not of a close and impartial study of the Qur'an but of an

> anti-Christian tradition that can already be discerned in the later Suras of the Qur'an itself. The development of the growing hostility to the Christians is fairly marked in that Book, and it is undeniable that this growing hostility is reflected in the Prophet's Christology.[20]

Thus, according to this formulation the obvious conclusion is that the fundamental doctrine of the sole divinity of One God that characterises the Qur'an is not so absolute after all. Muslims have got the whole thing wrong! Obviously, Professor Zaehner, convinced of the 'truth' of the divinity of Jesus, reads the Qur'anic texts to find support for his theological standpoint, while skipping over the fundamental view of the Qur'an that the divinity belongs only to God, and no one else. When confronted with the Qur'anic denunciation of the Christian dogma that attributes divinity to Jesus, he points to the Muslims for having misunderstood the Qur'an. He does not question the Christian dogmas as mere accretions, as so many other Western scholars of religion and researchers have done, but instead judges the Qur'an and Muslims' misunderstanding of Jesus' divinity it contains with the criterion of unquestionable 'truth' of his faith.

In a similar way, the Qur'anic passages which reject the doctrine of the Trinity are said to be a result of some misunderstanding of the Christian doctrine. It is possible that some of the references take into account various views of Christian doctrines, which the Orthodox as well as numerous heretical sects professed. For instance, the Qur'an (5:72) says: 'Those certainly are disbelievers who say: God is the Messiah, son of Mary, whereas the Messiah himself said: Children of Israel! Worship God alone who is my Lord and Your Lord.' In the New Testament Jesus taught that God alone is to be worshipped (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8; John 20:17). The Qur'an makes it clear that the responsibility or culpability of distorting the teaching of Jesus about God lies on those who came after Jesus and in his name changed the original message.

As we have mentioned earlier, it was the Council of Nicaea that formulated the Nicene Creed, and gave the doctrine of the Trinity its final shape. This doctrine asserts that there are three persons of the Godhead, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who combined make one God yet they remain three. However, the Qur'an unequivocally discards this view of the Godhead. The Qur'an (5:73) says: 'They

certainly are disbelievers who say: God is the third of three. There is no one worthy of worship but the one God. And if they do not desist from what they assert, grievous suffering is surely to befall those of them who disbelieve.'

It has been argued that the Qur'an does not deny the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, that of Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, but that of God, Jesus and Mary which no orthodox Christian has ever professed.[21] It is true that in the early Christian centuries Christological controversies had led to the emergence of heterodox movements such as Modalistic Monarchianism also known as Patripassianism, which so identified Jesus with God the Father as to deny any personal distinction between the two. Its two early exponents Noëtus and Praxeas held that God the Father was born as Jesus Christ, thus becoming the Son himself, and that he died on the cross and raised himself from the dead. To outsiders Christians looked like a group who worshipped Jesus Christ as a cult-god. This is evident in the popular Christian apocrypha *Acts of John* (written not later than the middle of the second century), where Christ is repeatedly spoken of as the only God and worshipped as such. For instance, John nearing his death addresses Jesus in these terms: 'O God Jesu, Father of beings beyond the heavens, Lord of those that are in the heavens, Law of the ethereal beings and Path of those in the air, Guardian of beings upon earth, Terror of those beneath the earth, and Grace of those who are yours, receive also the soul of your John which, it may be, is approved by you.'[22]

The term 'Sabellianism' is also used in the sense of Modalistic Monarchianism, and it came to be used for any doctrine which speaks of Father and Son, or Father, Son and Spirit, as one person in different guises. These views were an attempt to stress monotheism, sometimes, what appears to us, presented in strange formulations, against those who would make Jesus the incarnation of the Logos, i.e. 'Word' which 'was in the beginning with God' and 'was God' and is said to have become flesh in Jesus, the 'Son' of God. Monarchianism met strong opposition from the Orthodox Church. It had followers in Rome, Asia Minor, Syria, Libya and Egypt. Saint Augustine of Hippo had leanings towards Modalistic Monarchianism.

Does the Qur'an deny only the tritheism, i.e. a belief in the divinity of Jesus and Mary in addition to that of one God, but not the doctrine of the Trinity? The Christian

apologists point out that the Qur'an refers to the former but not the latter. We commonly experience that when believers of a religious doctrine or dogma are faced with a counter-argument, their natural tendency is to defend and justify by any and all means what to them appears true and sacrosanct. This can clearly be seen in the doctrine of the Trinity, an enigma, or a marvel of theological creativity that has proved intractable to the Jews and Muslims, but not so to the Christians. In the case of the latter, their strong belief has helped them to overcome any mental reservations and doubts. However, the enormous efforts of Christian writers and exegetes to explain this doctrine have not worked; the numbers of converts to this doctrine among the educated and intellectually alert Muslims and Jews have been insignificant in history. For Hans Küng, as he sees it, the doctrine is easily understandable; and he does not know what hinders others from following it. He puts forth his predicament in these terms:

> Admittedly, the Qur'an labours under the misapprehension possibly based on certain apocalyptic traditions, that the Trinity consists of God the Father, Mary the Mother of God, and Jesus the Son of God. But even well informed Muslims simply cannot follow, as the Jews thus far have likewise failed to grasp, the idea of the Trinity. They do not see why faith in one God, the faith of Abraham, which both Moses and Jesus and, finally, Muhammad, clung so firmly to, is not understood when, along with the one godhead, the one divine nature, Christians simultaneously accept three persons in God. Why, after all, should one differentiate between nature and persons in God? [23]

It is apparent that Hans Küng has no doubts regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. The explanation he offers happens to be a repetition of the traditional theological formula, which is more of an appeal to authority than a convincing proof of its soundness. But it should be pointed out that, aside from Jews and Muslims, there are many Christians who also have difficulty in understanding, if not in believing it. With regard to the last question raised by Hans Küng in the above passage, the simple answer is that making a distinction between nature and persons, two different things, even in the context of and with reference to God, cannot be logically set aside. A person has a nature or a quality, but to pose it in reverse is to make a false proposition or utter a meaningless

sentence. However, Hans Küng rightly points to the confusion of Muslims, and possibly of others as well, when he adds further:

> It is well-known that the *distinctions* made by the doctrine of the Trinity between one God and three hypostases do not satisfy Muslims, who are confused, rather than enlightened, by theological terms derived from Syriac, Greek, and Latin. Muslims find it all a word game. What are they to make of the conglomerate of hypostases, persons, *prosopa*, two processions, and four relations--in the one and only God? What are all the dialectical artifices for? Isn't God absolutely simple, rather than composite in this way or that? What is the meaning of a real difference in God between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that nonetheless does not do away with the real unity of God? What, on the other hand, is a logical difference between the Father and the nature of God that still has a foundation in reality? [24]

Obviously, Hans Küng makes a persistent effort to explain the Christian dogma of the Trinity. But the limitations of this explanation's ability to convince a monotheist are not difficult to comprehend. In fact, the problem is not only that theological terms emanate from different languages, but also the underlying presuppositions of Christian dogma. This perspective brings us face to face with the real dilemma. If the three persons of God represent the three qualities of the God, then one may ask: why should we change the qualities into divine persons? A Muslim might argue that if a quality of God is to be regarded a person in God then why not add more than three persons to him? As God has many attributes or qualities, does it not logically entail that there should be the same number of persons as there are qualities in God? As, in Islam, God has ninety-nine attributes or qualities, what this logically leads to is quite apparent. But we need not pursue the theological implications of the Trinity further. As a Christian who seeks serious dialogue and broad understanding with other religions, Hans Küng finds the belief in one God, and no other doctrine, to be the core of Christian faith. He writes: 'And *so the criterion for being a Christian* is not the doctrine of the Trinity, gradually elaborated by the Church, but belief in the one and only God, the practical imitation of Christ, trusting the power of God's Spirit, that Spirit who in dialogue with non-Christians, as in other matters, works *wherever* he wishes, and will lead us *wherever* he sees fit.'[25]

Thus what the believers regard as the central doctrine of their faith has in reality been a result of the Church authorities' role in formulating it, as we have seen earlier. Hans Küng emphasises the importance of understanding the Qur'an and the Bible for Christians and Muslims:

> The message of the Qur'an could be substantially enriched by taking the Bible seriously. On the other hand, the message of the Bible could be freed from later overlays and exaggerations by taking seriously the warnings of the Qur'an. This one point, in any event, must be conceded to both Islam and Judaism: According to the New Testament, *the principle of unity* is not a single divine nature common to several entities, but *the one God (ho theós*) = *the* God = the Father), from whom all things come and towards whom all things are oriented.[26]

The term 'Father' has specific meaning in the Bible. The Qur'an uses ninety-nine predicates for God, but not this term. If God is to be regarded as 'Father' in the sense of being the Creator, on which all the monotheistic religions agree, then there should be no logical difficulty in asserting that he is the 'Father' of all human beings, not merely of one person.

The question of Jesus' death

Now we turn to the Qur'anic view of the death of Jesus. This question has a long history of disagreement between Muslims and Christians, primarily because the biblical account of his death is not supported in the Qur'an. Referring to those among the Jews who had refused to acknowledge Jesus as the messenger of God, and tried to destroy him, the Qur'an (3:54-55) says:

> And unbelievers schemed [against Jesus]; but God brought their scheming to nought: for God is above all schemers. Lo! God said: O Jesus! Verily, I shall cause you to die, and shall exalt you to Myself, and will cleanse you [of the presence of] of those who are bent on denying the truth, and I shall place those who follow you above those who are bent on denying the truth, until the Day of

> Resurrection. In the end, unto Me you all must return, and I shall judge between you with regard to all on which you were wont to differ.

It means that God is to be the arbiter between those who had differing beliefs regarding Jesus, whom Christians regard the Son of God and God Incarnate and Muslims a prophet as well as those, for instance the Jews, who did not accept him at all. The verb 'to cause you to die' (*mutawaffīka*) shows that the death of Jesus occurs as a result of the natural process, and not by any human action or intervention to bring it about; it also testifies to his true humanity leaving no room for any assertions about his divinity.

In another passage regarding the misdeeds of the Jews, who broke covenants, took to worshipping the golden calf instead of God, and boasted to have killed Jesus by crucifying him, the Qur'an (4:156-158) says:

> And because of their (the Jews') disbelief and of their speaking against Mary an awesome calumny; and because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, God's messenger. However, they slew him not nor crucified him, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! Those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain; nay, God exalted (*rafa´ahu*) him unto Himself.

These verses became the base of the orthodox Muslim belief that Jesus did not die on the cross, but some other person, possibly Judas, was substituted for Jesus. But the idea of a substitute having been crucified was not something new either which Muslim commentators had conceived. As I mentioned earlier, some of the Gnostics in the early centuries of Christianity had held that Christ the Logos was divine and eternal who could not assume material flesh, because matter was inherently evil. According to their beliefs, Christ could not take on any attributes of human nature. Being immortal, he was beyond death, pain or suffering. The docetists believed that Christ who was a pure spirit only 'seemed' to suffer and die on the cross, but all Gnostics did not take the docetic view of the crucifixion. Basilides of Alexandria, a Gnostic Christian of the second century had advanced a sophisticated and complex system of emanations. His ideas have reached us through the writings of his orthodox

opponents. One such account of what Basilides taught is in orthodox Irenaeus; according to this Basilides taught that 'the ungenerated and unnameable Father . . . sent his first born Mind, who is called Christ' and 'he appeared to their peoples on earth a man and performed miracles. Since he was Mind, he did not suffer, but a certain Simon of Cyrene was impressed to carry his cross for him and because of ignorance and error was crucified, transformed by him so that he might be thought to be Jesus. Jesus himself took the form of Simon and stood there deriding them. Since he was the incorporeal Power and Mind of the ungenerated Father, he was transformed as he wished and thus ascended to him who had sent him, deriding them, since he could not be held and was invisible to all.'[27] The orthodox Christians had rejected the docetic idea of a substitute for Jesus, but it survived in Manichaeism and later on some Muslim historians and commentators of the Qur'an, such as al-Baydawi and al-Tabari, also adopted it. Many Muslims still follow this tradition. But in the Qur'anic texts themselves, there is no support for it. The Qur'an does not say that Jesus in his life or in his suffering was someone other than himself, nor does it say that a surrogate suffered in his place.

Among those who reject the idea of surrogate martyr, we can mention the two prominent scholars, Dr Kamel Hussein and Muhammad Asad. Dr Kamel Hussein writes that

> the idea of a substitute for Christ is a very crude way of explaining the Qur'anic text. They had to explain a lot to the masses. No cultured Muslim believes in this nowadays. The text is taken to mean that the Jews thought they had killed Christ but God raised him unto himself in a way we can leave unexplained among the several mysteries which we have taken for granted on faith alone.[28]

This view neatly points to a number of vexed issues that a comparative study of religions involves. The other view is that of Muhammad Asad who objects to traditionally-held views that have no basis in the Qur'an. He remarks:

> Thus, the Qur'an categorically denies the story of the crucifixion of Jesus. There exist, among Muslims, many fanciful legends telling us that at the last moment God substituted for Jesus a person closely resembling him (according to some

> accounts, that person was Judas), who was subsequently crucified in his place. However, none of these legends finds the slightest support in the Qur'an or in authentic Traditions, and the stories produced in this connection by the classical commentators must be summarily rejected. They represent no more than confused attempts at 'harmonising' the Qur'anic statement that Jesus was *not* crucified with the graphic description, in the Gospels, of his crucifixion.[29]

It should be kept in mind that the Qur'an does not deny the crucifixion of Jesus, i.e. that he was hung on the cross; it only denies his death on it, whereas in the Christian doctrine the Crucifixion represents Jesus' death, leading to his Resurrection and the Ascension.

The above-cited verse mentions that Jesus was exalted unto God, which signifies a spiritual elevation and honour, and not a physical transportation to heavens. This verse, as Muhammad Asad explains, 'denotes the elevation of Jesus to the realm of God's special grace -- a blessing in which all the prophets partake, as is evident from 19:57, where the verb *rafa´nāhu* ("We exalted him") is used with regard to the Prophet Idris.'[30]

It has been suggested that the Qur'anic view of Jesus' crucifixion is akin to the docetists' beliefs, but there are substantial differences. A comparison of these divergent views, starting from the basic presuppositions regarding the person of Christ and extending to his activity and mission, shows that these views have little in common. In the Qur'an, Jesus is a human being, a real human being like other human beings, and a prophet, not a spirit or phantom as the docetists believed. There is no indication at all in the Qur'an that Jesus suffered in a false body, which 'seemed' to be his but was not in fact, or that a substitute was crucified in his place.

Unlike the graphic accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus in the four Gospels, the Qur'an does not reveal how and where the event of his death took place. The only indications are that his life came to an end in this world, as it happened in the case of all the previous prophets, and secondly the plots of his enemies to kill him came to nothing: they did not succeed in their premeditated attempts to kill him. The question of Jesus' death has been the subject of many theological controversies and of

conflicting interpretations amongst Muslims. But on one point nearly all Muslims from the time of the Prophet until now have interpreted the Qur'anic verses to mean that Jesus did not die on the cross. For instance, the famous Indian rationalist and religious modernist Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817--98) was of the opinion that 'crucifixion itself does not cause the death of a man, because only the palms of his hands, or the palms of his hands and feet are pierced . . . After three or four hours Christ was taken down from the cross, and it is certain that at that moment he was still alive. Then the disciples concealed him in a very secret place, out of fear of the enmity of the Jews.'[31]

The narratives of the Crucifixion in the four Gospels have led to divergent interpretations among the Christians also. For our present purpose no detail description is needed, but there are surrounding circumstances that make the question of Jesus' death on the cross far from certain. Jesus and other two persons were crucified on Friday. Jesus had remained on the cross for not more than three hours (John 19:14). As the following day was the Sabbath, condemned persons could not be left on the cross after sunset. To meet this religious requirement, the soldiers broke the legs of the other two crucified persons so that they died prior to sundown, and their corpses could be brought down from the cross in time. 'But when they came to Jesus, they saw that he was already dead, so they did not break his legs. One of the soldiers, however, plunged his spear into Jesus' side, and at once blood and water poured out' (John 19:33-34). The person who was given the body of Jesus to take it away was Joseph of Arimathea, a secret follower of Jesus, because he was afraid of the Jewish authorities (John 19:38). There has been a lot of speculation whether Jesus had died on the cross or only fainted. In the case of the Gospel narrative it is important to notice how much is not said. Undoubtedly, Pilate was well informed about the happening, but his expression of surprise on hearing about Jesus' death raises a number of questions about the event and the roles of key individuals in the affair. Mark only briefly refers to it: 'Pilate was surprised to hear that Jesus was already dead. He called the army officer and asked him if Jesus had been dead a long time' (Mark 15:44). As the Catholic writer John R. Willis comments: 'Criminals had been known to last for several days upon the cross; Jesus was dead in less than three hours, so short a time that Pilate was astonished.'[32]

The biblical account of the Crucifixion has been a fertile ground for different views and interpretations among scholars. However, any discussion of these is beyond the scope of the present book. But in this connection, the views of the Ahmadiyya movement in Islam on the question of Jesus' crucifixion and survival need to be taken into account due to its clear standpoint on this matter. Like Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the Ahmadiyya Muslims also believe that Jesus had only fainted on the cross, from which he was taken down alive. His two disciples applied a specially prepared ointment on his wounds, which must have proved effective. Sensing the real danger to his life, once again, at the hands of Jewish religious leaders and the hostile people, whose first attempt to take his life had not succeeded, his disciples kept the secret of his survival confined only to a few trustworthy disciples, without letting anyone else to see him or giving any clue about his whereabouts. Then, in great secrecy, Jesus escaped towards the east, where he preached among the scattered tribes of Israel before continuing on to Kashmir where he died in his old age and was buried.[33]

In this chapter, we have briefly discussed the Islamic view of some central doctrines of Christianity. In the Qur'an, Christians and Jews are recognised as 'the People of the Book', who have the divine revelation through the prophets. It is clear that the historical developments that have shaped central doctrines of the Incarnation, the Trinity and the Crucifixion belong to a view or notion of God differing greatly from that of the Qur'an; even though the believers of both faiths seem to have the same supreme God they believe in. A historian can only compare and contrast diverse religious views to explain how various belief systems have or do emerge in history, but to speculate about the truth or falsity of the religious doctrines and beliefs and about supernatural and metahistorical questions may not be his or her direct concern. In this chapter, we have discussed the Christian doctrines according to the Qur'an and the Islamic tradition. While Islam and Christianity differ on these doctrinal issues, they also share a common religious tradition originating in the Semitic people of the Arabian Peninsula. Geoffrey Parrinder offers an insight on the influence of Islam on Christianity that very often is glossed over by the Christian scholars:

> Although Islam traditionally denied the crucifixion as a fact, whereas orthodox Christianity affirmed it strongly, yet it is curious that Islam insisted firmly on the true humanity of Jesus, while the later church almost forgot this in stressing

> the divinity of Christ. Only in recent times has the full significance of the humanity of Jesus been recognized again, and now Christians realize this more keenly perhaps than any generation since the first century.[34]

In my view, these remarks by a leading scholar of religion justly sum up the contribution Islam made towards a clear understanding of Jesus and his mission. In contrast, how the Prophet Muhammad, Islam, and Muslims have been portrayed by the Christians since the early history of Islam will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 6. Polemical encounters with Islam

Introductory remarks

The phenomenal expansion of Islamic rule, which started soon after the death of the Prophet, continued for about a hundred years. It was a process of political, religious and social change introduced by the new faith in the seventh and early eighth centuries. With all its ups and downs this process has continued now for fourteen centuries. The eastern provinces of Byzantium soon came under Muslim rule and as the subsequent history showed they became a permanent part of the Muslim world order. The Christian hopes of a speedy collapse of Islam did not materialise. Christians had come under Muslim rule and intermingling and interaction at various levels between Christians and Muslims continued. Christian apologists who wrote their polemical works while living under Muslim rule, called the *Dār al-Islam*, concentrated on the life and mission of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an, and the teachings of Islam. The ideas and perceptions they brought forth gradually spread to Byzantium and the Western Catholic countries.

In the twelfth century the Latin writers wrote about the Prophet Muhammad giving free rein to their fantasies with almost total disregard for historical accuracy. The Prophet was abused, reviled and misrepresented in all possible grotesque ways. A Muslim reader or any fair-minded person feels deeply disturbed by the insults heaped on the name of the Prophet and of the distortion of the message of Islam, as portrayed in the writings of the Latin apologists. For Muslim believers the big question, for which they find no satisfactory answer or any justification, is: Why have the Christian writers, whom they regard as 'the People of the Book', insulted and vilified the Prophet Muhammad in the most derogatory terms, a man who himself had great admiration for Jesus and his mother? A partial answer has to be sought in the historical development of Christian dogma, on the one hand, and the message of the Qur'an, on the other hand. For Muslims, respect for Jesus, the prophet of God, as well as for all past prophets, is a binding obligation under the teaching of the Qur'an. This belief stands in sharp contrast to Christian doctrine that God had finally revealed his Word as Jesus, Son of God, or God Incarnate. Thus, according to this view, there was

no further divine revelation or any need for it after Jesus. If that were so, then there is the important instance of St Paul who came after Jesus; his teachings on the basis of his direct revelation became the central pillar of Christian faith. Apparently, the task of vilifying the Prophet Muhammad has nothing to do with Christian doctrine itself, but the apologists resorted to it persistently with a view to defending and justifying their faith. Of course, one can question this approach, and in fact, some Western scholars have done so, showing that instead of some lofty purpose, it was only the spirit of extreme intolerance and bigotry that had been at work. In this book, I do not intend to repeat the utterly horrid and vile utterances of the apologists. At the same time, it is indispensable that an investigation which aims not at recriminations but to present historical source-material accurately, should also present the accounts that contain some monstrous and incredibly crude views of the Prophet and Islam. The underlying assumptions and motives, which were instrumental in shaping a distorted image of Islam between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, had their roots in history. An anti-Islamic tradition had taken firm hold among the Christians. It received added reinforcements in the centuries that followed, and with some modifications, became a part of the European ethos.

The reason why this tradition has had such a long life has been lucidly analysed by the eminent medievalist Norman Daniel:

> The tradition has been continuous and it is still alive. Naturally there has been variety within the wider unity of the tradition, and the European (and American) West has long had its own characteristic view, which was formed in the two centuries or so after 1100, and which has been modified only slowly since. One chief reason for continuity has been, not only the normal passage of ideas from one author to the next, but the constant nature of the problem. The points in which Christianity and Islam differ have not changed, so that the Christians have always tended to make the same criticisms; and even when, in relatively modern times, some authors have self-consciously tried to emancipate themselves from Christian attitudes, they have not generally been as successful as they thought.[1]

Despite their common theological roots, both Christianity and Islam had differing views and interpretations of the attributes of God and the nature of divine revelation. As mentioned before, for Christians, God's Word became Christ, while Muslims regard God's revelation to Muhammad is the Qur'an. The Christian doctrine of three persons in the Godhead was opposed to and proved to be irreconcilable with Islam's fundamental doctrine of the unity of the Godhead. There were other points of disagreement as well. In both religions seemingly common terms were used but in reality these conveyed and signified different meanings that were open to disparate interpretations.

As Islam seemed to negate the central doctrines of Christianity, Christians confronted Islam as a hostile religion that denied the truth of their faith. Even though Christians were aware or became increasingly aware that Muslims believed in one God, this in itself did not lead to any better understanding of Islam. The Christian perspective on Islam and the Prophet Muhammad followed its own logic, with the result that Islam was regarded a false religion per se and Muhammad a false prophet. Muhammad's human character and mission were contrasted with those of Jesus, viewed not a real human being, but rather as a divine being, God Incarnate. The former was seen to have built a kingdom of this world successfully by the use of power and violence whereas the latter spent his life spreading the good news about the coming of the kingdom of heaven. According to this logic, Muhammad's message could not be regarded as completing the Christian tasks. Islam was regarded instead as a form of paganism, or merely a Jewish or Christian heresy, which in any case was not to going to last for long. Albert Hourani summarises the Christian outlook:

> The event to which Old Testament prophecy had pointed, the coming of Christ had already taken place; what need was there for further prophets? The teaching of Muhammad, moreover, was a denial of the central doctrines of Christianity: the Incarnation and Crucifixion, and therefore also the Trinity and the Atonement. Could the Qur'an be regarded in any sense as the word of God? To the few Christians who knew something about it, the Qur'an seemed to contain distorted echoes of biblical stories and themes.[2]

In this chapter, followed by three more, I concentrate on the early period of Christian-Muslim encounters in the context of Christian apologetic literature and its role in shaping the image of Islam in the Christian world, especially in the West. It covers the period before the start of the Crusades in the late eleventh century, when the nature of Islam and its founder became common themes in the West. I present the polemical works and attitudes towards Islam of the Oriental Christians living within the domains of the Caliphate, the Greek Orthodox Byzantines, the Catholic Spaniards under Muslim rule, and of the Catholic Europeans respectively.

The gradual growth and expansion of anti-Islamic tradition can best be discussed with reference to the writings of those who had been engaged in a dialogue with Islam. The need to do this has been eloquently argued by Daniel J. Sahas in his brilliant monograph *John of Damascus on Islam*. He writes:

> The surveys of the Muslim-Christian encounter have ably shown that, in a final analysis,--and this is perhaps true for any inter-religious encounter--one deals, actually, with the case of individual Muslims and individual Christians conversing with, arguing against, provoking, scolding, attacking, cursing, condemning, or proselytising each other! We are now at the moment when we begin to realize that the history of the Muslim-Christian encounter cannot be fully comprehended apart from the concrete circumstances and the concrete persons who have influenced, in one way or another, the formulation of a policy or, most important, the shaping of an attitude of the one religious tradition toward the other.[3]

The concrete circumstances and the concrete persons which Daniel Sahas duly refers to are essential in historiography as such, and in the case of our present theme their absolute necessity is all the more conspicuous because the writings of some individual apologists proved to be of pivotal importance in shaping a distorted image of Islam, an image of Islam that became part of Western culture, and not easily shaken off.

First, we will take a cursory look at the historical juncture and conditions of Islamic expansion when the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire came under Muslim rule and led to the making of a general image of Islam at an early age in the

Christendoms. The rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire and its influence could no longer be interpreted merely as another violent upsurge of wild invaders, because unlike the western barbarian invaders, Muslims in the newly conquered countries established a system of administration and justice based on the principles of their faith, and treated the subject people, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, with equanimity and toleration. Obviously, the Byzantine rulers were not able to forestall the advance of Islam in Syria, Egypt, and North Africa, but, as we have earlier mentioned, the way the disaffected populations torn by sectarian hatreds and imperial persecution had welcomed the new rulers was a lesson that had not been lost on Byzantium or the Catholic West. As J.M. Robertson has pointed out:

> Christian faith availed so little to check the new, that we must infer a partial paralysis on the Christian side as a result of Moslem success. *Success was the theological proof of the divine aid*; and many calamities, such as earthquakes, had previously seemed to tell of divine wrath against the Christian world. Such arguments shook multitudes. Many apostatised at once; and when the Moslem rule was established from Jerusalem to Carthage, the Christian church, tolerated only to be humiliated, dwindled to insignificance on its former soil.[4]

To lay claims to God's exclusive support in one's cause against the enemy -- the 'God is on our side' scenario -- is common to believers of various faiths. When one side is victorious over the 'enemy', the cause of its success is attributed to God's favour and any reverses are attributed to his displeasure. Such explanations or justifications, however, add little to our understanding of the substantial factors that produce such results. From a historian's perspective, causes of success or failure in worldly affairs, including wars and religious conflicts, have to be sought in concrete conditions, and explained accordingly.

The Oriental Christian polemic

The Arab conquest of the eastern provinces of Byzantium brought non-Muslim populations -- the vast majority of these being Christians -- under Muslim rule. The eastern Christians had experienced religious oppression at the hands of their imperial Christian rulers. Now they were faced by the new political and social reality of their

new rulers. The status of non-Muslim subjects was determined in the *Dār al-Islam* according to their religious identity. They could either accept Islam and become part of the Muslim community, or retain their religious affiliations and become *dhimmis*, a status that protected their religious, political, and economic rights, but was a secondary status to that of the Muslims. The Nestorians, the Syrian Monophysites, and the Copts of Egypt experienced less interference from the caliphs than they had during the terrible oppression they suffered under the Byzantine emperors.

How Christians living under Muslim rule viewed and reacted to Islam is documented from the early period of Islam. For instance, Agapius, Bishop of Hierapolis describes that Emperor Heraclius witnessing the advance of the Arab armies, wrote to his commanders in Egypt, Syria, Armenia and Mesopotamia that they were 'not to fight with the Arabs any longer and no more to oppose the will of God. He told them that the Great God had sent his misfortune upon men, who should not oppose the will of God when he had promised to Ishmael the son of Abraham that they would issue from his loins many kings.'[5] This view also indicates that for Heraclius the rise of Islam, and the victories of Arabs, constituted the fulfilment of God's promise. He had chosen a new people to further the historic mission and for this reason any resistance to it was against the divine will.

The history of Muslim-Christian relations during the first three centuries of Islam should be seen against the background of the rapid expansion of Islam, the consolidation of its political power, and the rapid maturity of Islamic civilisation. Under the first Abbasids Arabic had become the language of philosophical thought and culture, science and religion; it was the official language of the Islamic empire. The classical languages of the Christians during the first six centuries of the Christian era were Aramaic (Syriac), Greek, and Coptic. Under the Muslim rule the Christian communities gradually came to adopt Arabic as a language of their everyday use as well as their theology. The first generations of Christians who wrote in Arabic made the most significant contribution to Islamic civilisation. Both the caliphs and the Arab thinkers and writers encouraged a great movement of translations into Arabic from Persian, Greek and Syriac. While the Arabians did not know Greek thought, Syrians who had been in contact with the Greeks for long had already been engaged in translating Greek works into Aramaic. Under the rule of the caliphs, the Aramaic-

speaking Christians made major contribution to Islamic civilisation by translating from the original Greek works, and in many cases translating from the already existing Aramaic translations of Greek works into Arabic.

The process of translations reached its apogee under the liberal rule of Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 813--833). He established in 832 in Baghdad his famous academy and library known as *Bayt al-Hikmah* ('House of Wisdom'), and made it a centre of speculative thought and science. He appointed Hunayn ibn Ishaq (809--873), a Nestorian Christian, to be in charge of the academy to supervise all translations from Greek and Aramaic into Arabic which his colleagues made. Besides being an eminent translator, Hunayn was also a famous physician and philosopher. As a result of the translations into Arabic, a great portion of the works of Hippocrates, Galen, Paul of Aegina, Ptolemy, Euclid, Aristotle, and Plato became available to the people in the Muslim empire. In addition, Arabs, both Muslims and Christians, added their original contributions to them. Subsequently from Arabic they were translated into Latin and reached Europe. Hunayn is also the author of a Letter to Yahya ibn Munaggim, a Muslim, who had asked him to convert to Islam. Hunayn defended his faith. He also wrote another Letter on how to attain to the True Religion in which he explains that Christianity meets the criterion of the true religion.

The early translation movement was dominated by Christian scholars, but it had also Muslims, Sabians, and Persians of the Mazdean religion. Professor Michael Marmura, the author of *The Encyclopaedia of Religion* offers a list of fourteen early translators of which twelve were Christians, including the renowned scholar Hunayn ibn Ishaq, and ibn Yaq'ub al-Dimishq, a Muslim. One translator in the list is Thabit ibn Qurrah, a pagan Sabian of Harran. In fact, he was a central figure to lead a group of Sabian scholars and translators in his home town, which afterwards during the reign of Caliph al-Mutawakkil became a famous centre of a school of philosophy and medicine.

Among the early Christian theologians and apologists we can mention some prominent names such as the Jacobite Patriarch John I (d. 648), St John of Damascus, the Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (d. 823), the Jacobite Habib Abu Ra'itah (early ninth century), Theodore bar Kôni, the Jacobite writer Nonnus of Nisibis, the Melkite

Bishop of Harran Theodore Abu Qurrah (d. *c*. 820), the Nestorian ‘Amar al-Basri (d. 850), the Jacobite Yahya bin ‘Adi (d. 974), the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch Cyriacus (d. 817), Sa’id ibn al-Bitriq the Melkite Patriarch of Alexandria from 933 to 940, and ‘Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi.

Abu Ra’itah wrote a number of books addressed to the Muslims, explaining the mystery of the Trinity with the help of philosophical concepts. In his exegesis, he quotes the Bible and the Qur’an. He was a contemporary and a theological adversary of the Melkite Theodore ibn Qurrah. He wrote four books against the Melkite (i.e. Chalcedonian/Greek Orthodox) theology. Theodore Abu Qurrah was an outstanding scholar who was remembered in the East for his skill in controversy, especially with non-Chalcedonian Christians, but also with the Muslims. He spoke and wrote in Arabic when it was becoming the language of classical Islamic civilisation. He was one of the first Christians to make full use of the apologetic potential of Arabic. He wrote over a dozen substantial treatises in Arabic, and a large numbers of smaller books in Greek. In his treatise on the Death of Christ he fiercely repudiated both Jacobites and Nestorians while upholding that only the Chalcedonian Christology was able to explain that God had died for us. In some of his treatises, he clarifies traditional Christian dogmas using the tools of Muslim theologians, and defends Christian doctrine in the face of Muslim challenges. Another celebrated philosopher, polemicist and theologian, Yahya ibn ‘Adi (d. 974), was a Nestorian. He was also an accomplished translator of Plato and Aristotle. He wrote numerous treatises on philosophy, apologetics, and a refutation of the great Arab philosopher Abu Yusuf Yaq’ub ibn Ishaq al-Kindi’s book entitled *The Refutation of the Christians*. As a philosopher, Yahya followed in the footsteps of al-Farabi. His writings show how Muslim-Christian dialogue in the realm of religion was developing, and how Yahya used the intellectual tools available to him to make the case to Muslim colleagues that fundamental Christian doctrines could be defended in an academically respectful way.

The contact and cooperation between Muslims and Christians in the advancement of philosophical and scientific knowledge highlights the great role Christian played in the development of Islamic civilisation. Within the early history of religious exchanges of ideas between Christian and Muslim intellectuals the emphasis was to understand one another’s holy books as Arabic became the common language

of the two communities. The basis of such conversations, especially during the age of al-Ma'mūn was rationalistic where the thinkers of both religions freely participated in the common intellectual currents of the time to defend and extol their particular beliefs. Theodore Abu Qurrah, Hunayn ibn Ishaq and Yahya ibn 'Adi from the Christian side represented a dialogical approach towards Islam. At the same time, Christians living in the *Dār al-Islam* were aware of the socio-political realities. Islam was spreading fast. Among the Christian communities conversions to Islam had become quite common. Christians who were once in the majority in the conquered provinces found their numbers dwindling fast; many Christians had already converted to Islam. To combat this trend, some Christian writers and theologians produced controversial, apologetical literature with a view to stopping their co-religionists from going over to Islam and in this way tried to safeguard their communities and faith. The purpose of such literature was to reassure Christians of the truth of their faith and refute the claims of Muslim apologists. While the main concern of their controversial theologies was to present to their Muslim audience the truth of Christianity, they also polemicised against their Christian opponents' 'false' theological and dogmatic stand.

For the most part in those early controversial, apologetical and polemical writings and inter-faith debates which have survived, Christian apologists have created scenarios in which a Muslim asks questions and a Christian offers his reasoned response. This technique seems to have been quite common to defend and spread the Christian faith against its Muslim foes. I have selected three apologists, John of Damascus, Timothy I and al-Kindi as the leading representatives of Christian outlook of the period under discussion.

John of Damascus

St John of Damascus belongs to the early period of the rise of Islam. He was born about fifty years after the *Hijra* and died probably about the middle of the eighth century. He was the last of the great Fathers of the Church in the East. He is regarded an important figure in Christian history, not for any originality of his thought, but for his major task of systematising the Christian theology of the earlier centuries. In Professor J.W. Sweetman's words: 'Perhaps no individual Christian thinker is so

important in a comparative study of Islamic and Christian theology than John of Damascus.'[6]

The major disputes in the Byzantine Catholic Church after the seventh century were no longer about the nature of Christ, but broke out over the use of the Holy Icons, the pictures of Christ, his mother, the apostles, saints and scenes from the Old and New Testament, which were kept and venerated in churches and private homes. Some Christians objected to the use of icons as a form of polytheism and idolatry. They came to be known as the Iconoclasts, who demanded the destruction of icons and image worship. Their opponents, the Iconodules, defended staunchly the place of icons in the life of the Church. The Iconoclastic movement and controversy became widespread in the Byzantine Empire in the eighth century. This movement, like Islam, laid more emphasis on monotheism. As Alexander A. Vasiliev in his study of the Umayyad Caliph Yazid II (in office 720--24) writes:

> Inasmuch there is a certain parallelism between the development of iconoclastic ideas in Byzantium, which was relatively slow before the promulgation of the edict of Leo III in 726, and the development of the same ideas in the Islamic world . . . and inasmuch as, according to some scholars, the edict of Leo III may have been inspired by the edict of Yazid of 721, it is important to review the sources relative to Yazid's iconoclasm, and to study certain questions which bring out the political similarity between the Emperor and the Caliph.[7]

The Iconoclastic controversy lasted some 120 years. It started in 726 when Emperor Leo III began his attack on the icons and with some breaks it continued until 843 when the icons were finally reinstated. The final victory of the icons in 843 is known as 'the Triumph of Orthodoxy'. During the early period of the Iconoclastic controversy, St John of Damascus was the chief champion of the icons who opposed Emperor Leo III. He was able to take up a firm position on this matter because he lived safely in the Islamic Empire, away from the reach of the Byzantine rulers. The Iconoclastic Synod, which was called by Emperor Constantine V, convened in 754 in order to condemn officially the worship of icons which was quite widespread among Orthodox Christians and formed an essential part of devotional rituals. The Synod also condemned by anathematising three major defenders of icons. One of them was

St John of Damascus. He became an object of open hostility from the official Byzantine Church and the State. St John, despite the anathema, remained a staunch supporter of icons and 'mysteries' of ritual, which he regarded as an integral part of the Orthodox Church. He had grown up in the environment of early Islam. He was a very learned person and had profound knowledge in theological and secular disciplines. He was familiar with the Qur'anic doctrines concerning Christianity and Jesus, but his knowledge of the *Hadith* (the Traditions of the Prophet) and Islamic history does not seem to have been very profound. Whatever he knew of Islam, he used it mainly for polemical purposes in defence of Orthodoxy. His father, a notable Christian, had held a high administrative office in the court of the Umayyad caliphs at Damascus. St John in his early career also held a similar high official position where he began his literary activity before he became a monk at the monastery of St Saba where he was ordained a priest and spent the rest of his life.

The social and political climate of this early period deserves mention. In Damascus, the capital of the Caliphate, the Umayyad rulers showed a large measure of tolerance towards the Christians in Syria. Christians had access to high positions in various capacities such as administrative advisors, marine officials, tutors of princes and artists. The Umayyad caliphs were generally tolerant and well disposed towards their Christian subjects. Daniel Sahas observes:

> The Muslims were, primarily, concerned with establishing themselves as rulers in these new territories with a Christian majority. They were, therefore, little interested in the theological divergence among the Chalcedonians, Monophysites and Monothelites. The Syrians were not forced to convert to Islam after the conquest; and although, according to the decree of 'Umar, they were not permitted to build new churches, this measure seemed less painful to them than the bitter persecution which they suffered after the triumph of Heraclius. [8]

Christians openly showed their Christian insignia and had positive attitudes towards their Muslim rulers. However, they were less certain about the nature of Islam, and many Christians regarded it one more Judaeo-Christian heresy with Arian and Monophysite leanings.

St John wrote a number of books in Greek. Among these De *Haeresibus* and his dialogue *Disputatio Christiani et Saraceni*, in two versions, are relevant to his views on Islam. The *De Haerisibus* deals with one hundred Christian heresies. Among these is an account of Islam, the 'heresy of the Ishmaelites' in Chapter 101. Some researchers have questioned its authenticity and proposed that someone added it later. However, Daniel Sahas considers it genuine.

St John mentions Muslims by the names of 'Ishmaelites', the descendants of Ishmael or 'Hagarenes', derived from Hagar, the mother of Ishmael and 'Saracens'. He explains the etymology of their name 'Saracen' as 'they call themselves', because 'they were sent away empty by Sara', by referring to the incident of Genesis 16:7-8 when the angel of the Lord asked Hagar: 'Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going? She answered: 'I am running away from my mistress.'[9] This is hardly a satisfactory or adequate explanation but the name 'Saracens', instead of Muslims, became common from now on among Christians. St John describes the religion of pre-Islamic Arabs and the advent of Islam thus:

> These [the Ishmaelites] then, served idols and worshipped the morning star and Aphrodite, whom they also named in their tongue 'Chabar' which indeed signifies 'great'. Accordingly until the time of Heraclius they openly served idols. From that time until now a false prophet arose for them surnamed Mamed, who . . . in all likelihood through association with an Arian monk, organised his own sect. And when by a pretence of godliness he had gained the favour of the people, he declared that a scripture had been brought down to him from heaven. Wherefore he had inscribed in his book certain things worthy of ridicule, he gave it to them as an object to be reverenced.[10]

St John's reference to the 'Arian monk' is obviously to the Syrian monk Bahira who had predicted the prophetic career of Muhammad. In the opening sentence, he introduces Islam as 'prevailing unto now, the deceptive error of the Ishmaelites, a forerunner to the anti-Christ'. In the later Byzantine polemics Muhammad was caricatured and depicted as an epileptic, who was said to have made erroneous claims for receiving revelations under this condition, or the allegation that Khadija who to

overcome her remorse in marrying an illiterate and sickly husband, encouraged Muhammad to proclaim prophethood. In contrast, John does not make any such charges. His view of the Qur'anic doctrine of one God and teaching about Jesus based on the Qur'anic text are correctly represented here. He writes:

> He says there is one God, maker of all things, not begotten nor begetting (Qur'an 112:3). He says that Christ is a Word of God and His Spirit (Qur'an 4:169), but created (Qur'an 3:5) and a servant (Qur'an 43:59) and that He was born without seed from Mary . . . (Qur'an 19:29); . . . and that the Jews tried unlawfully determined to crucify Him, and when they seized Him, they crucified Him in appearance only (Qur'an 4:156); but the Christ Himself was not crucified, nor did he die, for God took Him into Heaven unto Himself (Qur'an 4:156), because He loved Him.[11]

Next, he ridicules the idea that the Qur'an was revealed by God to Muhammad. 'But then we say, "Who is the witness that God gave a scripture to him? Who of the prophets foretold that such a prophet would arise?" '[12] Obviously the answers to these questions, from the point of view of the author, were in the negative; these issues were employed to substantiate his assertion that Muhammad was a 'false prophet'.

Christians were aware that Muslims called them 'associationists' (*mushrikūn*) because they associated Jesus as a divine partner with God. St John in reply accuses Muslims of being 'mutilators':

> And they call us '*Hetairiastai*' (Associators) because they say we set beside God an associate when we say that Christ is Son of God and God. To whom we say that the prophets and the Scripture transmitted this, and you receive the prophets as you stoutly insist. If then we say wrongly that Christ is the Son of God, it is they who taught and delivered this to us . . . It were better for you to say that He has an associate than to mutilate Him and to treat Him as stone or wood or some insensible thing. Wherefore you speak falsely of us when you call us '*Hetairiastai*'; but we call you '*Koptai*' (Mutilators) of God.[13]

It is apparent that St John was aware that Muslims have a number of objections to Christianity based on the Qur'anic teachings, such as the alteration of the Scriptures by the Jews and Christians. He points to such objections thus: 'And some of them say that we have read such things into the prophets, we then attribute such things to them. Others say that the Hebrews, because they hated us, deceived us by writing those things as though they had been written by the prophets in order that we might get lost.'[14] However, these objections, as we have discussed earlier, have not been so easy for Christians to eliminate satisfactorily. For his part, St John simply leaves them aside without any comment or explanation.

For St John of Damascus an appeal to the authority of the Scriptures and the prophets, no doubt, is quite legitimate in defence of his faith, but he does not allow Muslims to do the same. He fulminates against the Muslims because they blame the Christians for bowing before the cross when they, the Muslims, attach such significance to the black stone in Kaaba that they kiss it. This is followed by an attack on the character of Muhammad that was repeated by later apologists, and some selective criticism of a few suras of the Qur'an concerning marriage and divorce without taking into account the original purpose and intention of this legislation. The explanations of St John add little to one's understanding of Islam but, at the same time, it should be borne in mind that he had no such objective to pursue. His ideas to refute Islamic doctrine and his attack on the character and prophetic mission of Muhammad became the principal source of later Christian polemic against Islam. Daniel Sahas comments that Chapter 101 of the *De Haeresibus* on Islam

> is an early systematic introduction to Islam written by a Christian writer. Its purpose was to inform the Christians of the newly-appeared 'heresy' and to provide some preliminary answers to its 'heretical' elements. . . . This essay was written by a Christian writer for the Christian readers, who although geared to contrast what is 'heretical' to what is 'Orthodox', are with the author ultimately interested in an instruction on the Christian orthodox theology.[15]

The *Disputatio* of St John appears to be a manual for the guidance of Christians in their disputations with the Muslims in a situation where a Muslim raises some doctrinal questions about Christianity and a Christian replies and explains the truth of

Christian beliefs. The whole tone of description shows that the Christian response to any such altercation is vigorous. Christian answers reflect the doctrinal position of their writer. The fact that such a work was composed during the early period of Islam also indicates that such arguments between Muslims and Christians were fairly frequent.

The *Disputatio* deals with two main questions: the freedom of human will and the divinity of Jesus. In the opening paragraph, St John instructs the Christian in the method he should use and the arguments he should advance if a Saracen asks him questions about Christ, the Word and the Spirit. After replying that Christ is the Word of God, the Christian should ask in return about what his Scripture (the Qur'an) says about Christ:

> Then he will be too eager to ask you another question, seeking thus to escape you. But by no means do you reply to him until indeed he has answered that which you will have asked him. For necessity will compel him to answer to you by saying, 'By my Scripture he is called the Spirit and the Word of God.' Then again ask him, 'By your scripture is the word said to be created or uncreated?' if he will say, 'Uncreated,' say to him, 'Behold, you agree with me. For everything not created, but (existing) uncreated, is God.' If, however, he will have said that the Word and the Spirit is created, then inquire, 'Who created the Word of God and the Spirit?' For if compelled by necessity he will reply, 'God Himself created (the Word and the Spirit),' then do you again say, 'Therefore before God created the Word and the Spirit, He had neither Spirit nor Word.' When he hears this, he will flee from you since he has no answer.[16]

St John adds that in case the Saracen shifts the question whether the 'words' of God are created or uncreated, the answer should be that the Christian believes in one Word. This would also involve explaining to the Saracen the literal and figurative meanings intended here, thus removing any linguistic puzzles he might encounter! John instructs further about Jesus which is worth quoting:

> If the Saracen [assuming he has not already fled] asks: 'If God was Christ, how did He eat, drink and sleep, and (how) was He crucified, and (how) did He die,

> and such things?' The Christian should say to him that God 'created from the body of the Holy Virgin a complete, living and intelligent human being; that one ate, drank and slept; (He was) indeed the Word, that is the Word of God; but the Word of God did not eat, drink or sleep, nor was he crucified, nor did He die; but the flesh which He assumed from the Holy Virgin, that (flesh) was crucified. For you know that Christ was two-fold [in nature], but one in person.'[17]

This view of Christ has a close analogy with a common belief, which we find in many religious traditions and also in idealist philosophy concerning the concept of soul-body duality. According to the religious formulation of this view, the soul enters the human body when it takes shape in the womb and stays in it as long as body lives. The physical composition of elements disintegrates upon the death of the mortal body, but the immortal soul remains intact, and then goes to, or returns to, an unknown realm, given different names and interpreted in various ways. One way of understanding the Christian belief in the human body of Christ, on the one hand, and the Immortal Divinity he is believed to embody and represent on the other hand, as St John in the passage above explains, is to apply the solution of classical soul-body duality in this case. It offers a 'solution' to a difficult mystery; however, it may fall short of convincing those who find it irrational *ab initio,* by arguing that if Christ, the Word of God, who is regarded eternal may be equated with the immortal soul, then what is there to stop us from concluding that every soul which has inhabited a human body so far in human history is also a Word of God. It apparently will extend the presumptive claimants to unaccountable numbers, a proposition that is hardly tenable in Christian dogma. In one passage St John indicates that he is aware of Muslim objections to Christianity, such as the Qur'anic teaching that the Bible has been altered, but he safely leaves this question aside without any comment or explanation to refute the accusation.

The *Disputatio* shows that St John was conscious of the Muslim theological standpoint at this early stage of Muslim-Christian dialogue; this manual in a summary form was his serious effort to provide ready-made answers to Christians with the help of the scriptural exegesis for confronting Muslims in religious debates. 'Yet he was also unrealistic or inexperienced enough to imagine that a Muslim might argue on the

basis of the Christian Scriptural canon, and might even quote Jeremias. This delusion remained with the Christians across the centuries.'[18] St John was earnest in his belief that Islam, the 'heresy of the Ishmaelites', would not last for long and therefore to stop the harm it was causing to Christianity at that time he set out to contain it by refuting its 'false' theological foundations. As an Orthodox Christian, he was adamantly opposed to all Christian heresies and he included Islam among the Christian heresies. His views on Muslims, Islam and the Prophet Muhammad were formed in the light of the fundamentals of Orthodox Christianity, with little respect or regard to what Muslims believed about their religion and the Prophet Muhammad.

The text of a ritual of abjuration for those who return to Christianity from Islam is produced by the Byzantine historian and theologian Nicetas Choniates in his composition *Thesaurus of Orthodoxy*. This was a collection of tracts to be used as source material for responding to contemporary heresies and to documents arising from the twelfth-century Byzantine philosophical movement. It seems to have certain similarities with Chapter 100/101 of the *De Haeresibus* and the *Disputatio* of St John of Damascus. There has been scholarly disagreement about the date of this text. Despite the resemblance of views we find in the Byzantine polemic and St John's writings, the former includes additional material, which the latter does not have. On balance, it seems that St John was not the author of the abjuration formula, about which Sahas comments:

> Although the formula of abjuration shows similarities with Chapter 101 as the later Byzantine anti-Islamic texts do, it seems to us that it is a product of a later stage of Muslim-Christian relations which reflect a mentality and an attitude towards Islam markedly different from the one that the writings of John of Damascus demonstrate . . . The fact that various early treatises with an explicit or implicit reference to Islam have been, or even falsely, attributed to John of Damascus, is a kind of recognition of, and reference to an 'authority' on the subject! [19]

St John was the first systematic Christian writer whose ideas became widely disseminated throughout the Greek-speaking world, and provided the basic material for all future polemical writings about Islam and the Prophet.

The dialogue of Patriarch Timothy I with Caliph Mahdi

St John of Damascus had used the device of imaginary characters in the *Disputatio* to refute Islam and to defend the Christian dogmas. Now we turn to an actual dialogue between the Nestorian patriarch, Timothy I, and the Abbasid caliph, Mahdi (in office 775--85), that took place towards the end of 781 or at the latest 782. The circumstances of this dialogue need to be seen against the political background and the status of the Christians under Muslim rule at that time. The Abbasids had supplanted the Umayyad rulers in 750 and taken firm control of the Islamic Empire. In 762, they transferred the capital from Damascus to Baghdad. As long as Damascus remained the capital, the Orthodox and Jacobite Christians had considerable influence in the court of the caliphs, but in the new capital Baghdad the Nestorian Christians of the East had extended their sphere of influence. They conducted their vigorous missionary activities directed against regions inhabited by pagans, not against the Muslims. N.A. Newman in his Preface to *The Dialogue of Patriarch Timothy I with Caliph Mahdi* writes:

> Traditionally, it was the Nestorians who took the message of the Gospel to the people of the East, and it appears that what little direct contact Muhammad may have had with Christianity was also with the members of this group. In general the Nestorians were looked upon as being doctrinally nearer Islam than either of the Melkites or Jacobites, . . . they seem to have been valued all the more by their Muslims rulers for their aversion for the Byzantines.[20]

The Nestorian patriarch appears to have been recognised as head of the whole Christian community, and his religious status was greatly respected by the caliphs. Nestorian Christians now flourished under Muslim rule. The Nestorian Patriarch Timothy I (*c*. 728--823; in office 780--823) was an energetic organiser of missions to distant lands. His apology in the form of a theological discussion with the third Abbasid Caliph Mahdi lasted two days. Timothy wrote an account of it in Syriac, which was also translated into Arabic. This important work did not emerge in the West until Alphonse Mingana brought a Syriac manuscript written in the thirteenth

century to England in the 1920s. He translated and published it in 1928. In the following pages, all references to Timothy's Apology are from Mingana's translation.

In general, the caliph asks questions and Timothy offers the answers. The questions in the discussion cover a number of issues: some questions seem to be of minor significance, but others show a deeper understanding of doctrinal differences of Christianity and Islam. It appears that both Mahdi and Timothy knew a good deal about their respective religions, but neither had a comprehensive grasp of the other's theology. Mingana in his introduction to the dialogue points out that Timothy's knowledge of the Qur'an was second-hand, derived from his own co-religionists. Besides, he shows little familiarity with the *Hadith* or Islamic history. In the same way, Mahdi's knowledge of the Old Testament and the Bible seems to have been derived from other sources, which he uses as evidence that these had prophesied the coming of the Paraclete. Traditionally, Muslims have interpreted such prophecies as referring to the Prophet Muhammad.

The dialogue shows that Timothy does his utmost to put forth all possible argument in defence of Christian dogmas, and that there is nothing to detract him from his theological standpoint. In fact, it adds little to our knowledge of Christian doctrines as it mostly covers the well-trodden path of theological formulations, but at the same time it certainly shows the vigorous and spirited apology of Christian faith, which Timothy undertakes in a masterly fashion. His view of the Prophet, in contrast to that of St John as we have seen above, is remarkable from the Christian theological standpoint. In reply to a question by the caliph about the Prophet Muhammad, he said that Muhammad walked in the path of the prophets, taught the unity of God, led men away from bad deeds and brought them closer to good works, separated men from idolatry and polytheism and taught about 'one God, His Word and His Spirit'. This conciliatory attitude of the apology did not have any direct bearing on shaping the image of Islam, the theme of the present work; however, it does shed some light on the state of relations that existed between the two communities.

The audience with the caliph took place in a friendly atmosphere. Timothy describes the scene:

> Such audiences had constantly taken place previously, sometimes for the affairs of the State, and some other times for the love of wisdom and learning which was burning in the soul of his Majesty. He is a lovable man, and loves also learning when he finds it in other people, and on this account he directed against me the weight of his objections, whenever necessary. After I had paid to him my usual respects as King of kings, he began to address me and converse with me not in a harsh and haughty manner, since harshness and haughtiness are remote from his soul, but in a sweet and benevolent way.[21]

As the dialogue deals with a number of issues in somewhat irregular form, I present the main points under separate headings below so as to provide some order.

The Person and the Incarnation of Christ

Mahdi asks at the start of the conversation whether Timothy believes that God married a woman from whom He begat a son. Timothy replies that no one had uttered such a blasphemy concerning God. The caliph also wants to know how begetting a son is possible without genital organs. To this Timothy replies that God is incorporeal and that He begets without physical organs. When asked how and in what sense is Christ the Son of God, Timothy replies:

> Christ is the Son of God, and I confess Him and worship Him as such. This I learned from Christ Himself in the Gospel and from the books of the Torah, and the prophets, which know Him and call Him by the name of 'Son of God,' but not a son in the flesh as children born in the carnal way, but an admirable and wonderful Son. . . . that He is a Son and one that is born, we learn it and believe in it, but dare not investigate how He was born before the times, and we are not able to understand the fact at all, as God is incomprehensible and inexplicable in all things, but we say in an imperfect simile that as light is born of the sun and the word of the soul, so also Christ who is Word, is born of God, high above the times and before all the worlds.[22]

Christ, Timothy explains, is the Word-God, who appeared in flesh for the salvation of the world. The caliph referring to the Qur'an says that it mentions the birth of Jesus from Mary without marital intercourse, and asks whether he is born without the seals of virginity being broken. Timothy replies that these two facts seem impossible in the light of natural law, 'but if we consider not nature, but God, the Lord of nature, as the virgin was able to conceive without marital relations, so was she able to be delivered of her child without any break in her virginal seals. There is nothing impossible with God, who can do everything.'[23] He gives the examples of Eve who was born from Adam without fracture, and fruits are born of the trees without breaking or tearing them. The caliph asks: 'How was that Eternal One [Jesus] born in time?' Timothy replies that it was not in his eternity but in his temporalness and humanity that Christ was born of Mary. This, to the caliph, meant that there were two distinct beings in Christ, one eternal and the other temporal. Timothy responds: 'Christ is not two beings; . . . but in Him are two natures, one of which belongs to the Word and the other one which is from Mary, clothed itself with the Word-God.' When the caliph remarks: 'If He is one, He is not two; and if He is two, He is not one,' Timothy in reply gives an illustration of a man who is one, who consists of a body and soul in his composition and individuality, and is therefore two, yet he is one individual and one composite: 'In the same way the Word of God, together with the clothings of humanity which He put on from Mary, is one and the same Christ, and not two, although there is in Him the natural difference between the Word-God and His humanity; and the fact that he is *one* does not preclude the possibility that He is also *two.*'[24] Timothy upholds the well-known Christian formula of the duality of the divine and human in Christ, but an easy union of the divine, the Perfect Being, with human, imperfect and mortal, has not been without theoretical difficulties even in theology. Sweetman comments:

> There is here a very stumbling attempt to explain the union, and throughout these arguments we find a similar failure to realize in what consists the true union of human and the divine in Christ and a most imperfect conception of human nature. Too often the idea emerges that the humanity is rather an appearance than a reality; [as was] the naïve idea of Gregory of Nyssa that Christ by assuming a human form deceived the Devil into thinking he had only a human being to deal with, whereas this was not so. . . . Behind this is an idea

> that human nature is such a low and mean thing that the Son of God could not have been contaminated by any connection with it except in some manner which suppressed the humanity or, it may be, elevated it into something beyond humanity.[25]

Another question raised was about worship and praying. As Muslims understand it, people offer their prayers to God, but God does not pray. If Christ was divine, he need not have worshipped or prayed. In response to these points, Timothy answers:

> He did not worship and pray as God, because as such He is the receiver of the worship and prayer of both the celestial and terrestrial beings, in conjunction with the Father and the Spirit, but He worshipped and prayed as a man, son of our human kind. It has been made manifest by our previous words that the very same Jesus Christ is Word-God and man, as God He is born of the Father, and as man of Mary. He further prayed and worshipped for our sake, because He Himself was in no need of worship and prayer.[26]

In this discussion Timothy is constantly on the defensive. He also makes a few mistakes, for instance, when he maintains that Jesus abolished the Law of the Torah by the Gospel whereas, Jesus himself said (Matthew 5:17): 'Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true.' In another place Timothy says that prophecy ended with Jesus, but later mentions that the prophet Elijah is to return.[27] There are some long arguments about the divinity and power of Christ, his crucifixion, the doctrine of the Trinity and objections to the use of anthropomorphic terms in respect of God by the other party while defending one's own use of them, whose details I leave out and deal with the question whether the Gospel was genuine or corrupted by the Christians as Muslims maintain. If the Gospel was not corrupted, then what became of the prophecies about the coming of the Paraclete, who according to the Muslims, referred to the Prophet Muhammad? Now we turn to these questions.

The incorruptibility of the Gospel

Many Christian apologists of the period took the accusation that the Gospel was altered and corrupted seriously and strove to refute it. Timothy is well aware of the problem. He explains rhetorically and at length that Christians could not have corrupted the Bible. According to Muslim belief, the Bible was revealed to Jesus, but Christians, as the Jews had done with the revealed scriptures before, had altered it. When the caliph asks Timothy: 'Who gave you this book [the Bible] and was it given before the Ascension?' The implication is that if the Gospel was given before the Ascension, then the Gospel that Christians have, written later by four evangelists, cannot be genuine. Timothy replies that the Gospel is given to them by the Word of God and it was written by the four apostles not out of their heads but out of what they had heard and learned from the Word-God; 'if then the Gospel was written by the apostles, and if the apostles simply wrote what they heard and learned from the Word-God, the Gospel has, therefore, been given in reality by the Word-God.'[28]

The caliph explains that if the Torah and the Gospel had not been corrupted, they would have retained the prophecies of the coming of the Prophet Muhammad. Timothy refutes this view by asking, if that was the case, then where was the uncorrupted copy, which may tell that the Gospel that Christians possess is corrupted? What could the Christians have gained by doing such a thing? As the whole corpus of the Christian doctrine is in the Torah and the Gospel, for what purpose or reason could they have corrupted the living witnesses to their faith? Even if the Christians had been able to corrupt the Gospel, how could they have tampered with the books held by the Jews with whom they were in conflict? As Jews and Christians have been deadly enemies, how is it that the Jews have not corrupted those passages through which the Christian religion is established? Finally, Timothy argues that if Christians had made any alterations to the Gospel it would have been about 'those things which according to some people are somewhat undignified in our faith'. When questioned what those 'undignified things' are, Timothy offers an amazing reply:

> Things such as the growth of Christ in stature and wisdom; His food, drink and fatigue; His ire and omniscience; His prayer, passion, crucifixion and burial and all such things held by some people to be mean and debasing. We might have

> changed these and similar things held by some people to be mean and undignified; we might also have changed things that are believed by some other people to be contradictory.[29]

This formulation need not represent Timothy's own views; possibly he was speaking on behalf of those who believed Christ to be no other than the eternal God. Therefore, any imputation of humanity to him or to attribute a union of the Godhead and humanity in him was regarded undignified and unworthy of God. In Sweetman's words, 'it almost seems as if he thought that it would have been much better if the object of his advocacy had been someone who did not eat and drink and had not suffered fatigue and death. It does seem as if these early writers and theologians found the true humanity of Christ an embarrassment to them.'[30]

The status of Muhammad

Timothy denies that there is any testimony from Jesus or from the Gospel that refers to Muhammad or his mission. Muslims have interpreted the Paraclete as referring to Muhammad, which the Christian apologists have persistently rejected. Muslims find support for their interpretation in the Qur'an and the Bible. The Qur'an (61:6) says: 'And [this happened, too] when Jesus, son of Mary, said: "O children of Israel, I am a messenger of God unto you [sent], to confirm that which was [revealed] before me in the Torah, and bringing glad tidings of a messenger who will come after me, his name shall be the Praised One (Arabic: '*Ahmad*'). And when he [the Prophet whose coming Jesus had foretold] came to them with clear proofs, they said: "This is manifest sorcery." ' It is pointed out by different religious scholars that several references in the Gospel of St John (14:16, 15:26, 16:7) predict the coming of the Paraclete (*Paraklētos*, usually rendered as 'Comforter' or 'Helper' and sometimes 'the Spirit of Truth') after the Ascension of Jesus. For instance, in John 16:7, Jesus says: 'But I am telling you the truth: it is better for you that I go away, because if I do not go, the Comforter will not come to you. But if I do go away, then I will send him to you.' The original term for the Comforter in the Gospel of St John in Aramaic is *menahhemana* and in Greek *paraklētos*. Another Greek word is *períklytos*, which means 'highly praised'. According to Muhammad Asad, the designation Paráklētos used in the

Gospel of St John is a corruption of *periklytos*, an exact translation of the Aramaic term (or name) *menahhemana* as both Greek *periklytos* and Aramaic *menahhemana* 'have the same meaning as the two names of the Last Prophet, *Muhammad* and *Ahmad*, both of which are derived from the [Arabic] verb *hamida* ("he praised") and the noun *hamd* ("praise").'[31] The earliest record of identifying the Paraclete to have referred to the Prophet Muhammad is in Ibn Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah*, where he cites the passage 15:23 from the Gospel of St John (as in the Palestinian Syriac Lectionary), transliterating Aramaic term *menahhemana* (or *munahhemana*) as the Comforter and identifies it with Muhammad: 'The Munahhemana (God bless and preserve him!) in Syriac is Muhammad; in Greek he is the Paraclete.'[32]

The Qur'anic reference to Jesus who foretells the coming of a messenger after him, 'whose name shall be the Praise One (*Ahmad/ ahmad*)' is clear, but the question whether the Paraclete or the Helper (either Aramaic *menahhemana* or Greek *parákletos*) as found in the Gospel of John can be extended to the Prophet Muhammad has been contentious. Sweetman reminds us that 'though the word "paraclete" has become a proper name for the Holy Spirit in Christian usage, it is actually an attributive and not a proper name, and is used as such not only for the Holy Spirit, but also for Jesus Christ for Himself, in 1 John ii. 1.'[33] Similarly, the Qur'anic word *ahmad* ('the Praised One'), in all likelihood, originally meant an elative adjective that later on began to be used as a proper name. In fact, there is no evidence that Arabs had used it as a proper name during the life of the Prophet.

In the first century of the Abbasid rule, Christian apologists denied that Muhammad could be the Paraclete. They argued that there was no ground for such a claim by the Muslims simply because none of the Jewish or Christian Scriptures mentioned him. It shows that this topic was already controversial in Christian-Muslim encounters. Timothy's account of it in his discussion with the caliph shows the respective positions of the parties at the time.

For Timothy, the Paraclete is 'the Spirit of God' that is 'God by nature; one who proceeds, by attribute' about whom Jesus Christ spoke to his disciples that when he goes to Heaven, he will send unto them the Spirit-Paraclete who proceeds from the Father, whom the world cannot receive, who dwells with them and is among them,

who searches all things, even the deep things of God. The caliph says that these refer to Muhammad, but Timothy disagrees:

> If Muhammad were the Paraclete, since the Paraclete is the Spirit of God, Muhammad would therefore be the Spirit of God; and the Spirit of God being uncircumcised like God, Muhammad would also be uncircumcised like God; and he who is uncircumcised being invisible, Muhammad would also be invisible and without a human body. . . . The Paraclete is from Heaven and of the nature of the Father, and Muhammad is from the earth and of the nature of Adam. Since Heaven is not the same thing as earth, nor is God the Father identical with Adam, the Paraclete is not, therefore, Muhammad.[34]

In this exposition, Timothy's theological logic follows its chartered course and reaches the inevitable conclusion. The caliph must have felt enlightened when the patriarch unfolded the mysteries of his faith so eloquently. On a minor note one may ask: If God is uncircumcised, then one wonders why was Christ, the eternal God, as Timothy calls him, circumcised? Obviously, the attributes that Timothy applies to the Paraclete cannot be applied to the Prophet Muhammad, who was only human, not divine. Timothy explains that the Paraclete is the Spirit of God that created the celestial and terrestrial beings; it was not Muhammad who created them, therefore, he draws the obvious conclusion: 'Now since Muhammad is not the creator of Heaven and earth, and since he who is not the Spirit of God, Muhammad is, therefore not the Spirit of God; and since the one who is not the Spirit of God is by inference not the Paraclete, Muhammad is not the Paraclete.'[35]

There are additional reasons that Timothy reveals to disqualify Muhammad, such as his rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity and his lack of personal power to perform miracles: 'And Jesus taught the disciples that the Paraclete is one God in three persons, and since Muhammad does not believe in the doctrine of three persons in one Godhead, he cannot be the Paraclete. And the Paraclete wrought all sorts of prodigies and miracles through the disciples, and since Muhammad did not work a single miracle through his followers and his disciples, he is not the Paraclete.[36]

Christian apologists of the early centuries of Christian-Muslim encounters or dialogues constantly placed much stress on miracles worked by the prophets in the name of God, or by Jesus in his own name, to be the proof of the truth of Christianity, and hence the reason for converting to it. The reason for this insistence is to argue that since Muhammad performed no miracles, this proved the incredibility of his apostleship and of his religion, therefore the lack of miracles was a proof that Islam was a false religion vis-à-vis Christianity. We should keep in mind that in Islam any miracles or signs are not a criterion for the truth or credibility of a religion. All apologists ignored the Qur'anic view that signs are from God, and not due to the personal power of anyone else. Timothy frequently brings the issue of miracles into the discussion.

When the caliph asks if the patriarch believes that the Qur'an is from God, he replies: 'It is not my business to decide whether it is from God or not. But I will say something of which your Majesty is well aware and that is all the words of God found in the Torah and the prophets and those of them found in the Gospel and in the writings of the Apostles, have been confirmed by signs and miracles; as to the words of your Book they have not been corroborated by a single sign or miracle.'[37] Thus Timothy does not openly reject the Qur'an as a revealed book, but his criterion of signs and miracles implies so.

From the first century of the Muslim era, an important issue for Christian apologists was to determine whether Muhammad was a genuine prophet or not. St John of Damascus, as we have seen, had called him a 'false prophet', *pseudoprophētēs*. Timothy had said that there was to be no prophet after Jesus except Elijah, but when he was asked what he thought about Muhammad, he expressed views that highlight the historical significance of the Prophet. He says:

> Muhammad is worthy of all praise by all reasonable people. He walked in the path of the prophets and trod in the track of the lovers of God. All the prophets taught the doctrine of one God, and since Muhammad taught the doctrine of the unity of God, he walked therefore, in the path of the prophets. Further, all the prophets drove men away from bad works and brought them nearer to the good

ones, and since Muhammad drove his people away from bad works and brought them nearer to the good ones, he walked therefore in the path of the prophets.[38]

Timothy also mentions some other deeds of Muhammad, such as, turning people away from idolatry and polytheism, and attaching them to the cult of one God, teaching about God, His word and His Spirit that bring Muhammad 'in the path of all the prophets.[39]

In the early centuries of Islamic rule, personal contacts between Muslims and Christians in the daily business of life were common. Due to social interaction between the two communities, they became familiar with one another's beliefs and traditions. For Christians, Muslims were regarded as their religious rivals, but this did not lead to their social isolation. The Apology of Timothy represents the Christian views of Islam, the Qur'an, and the Prophet, presented before the caliph in an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance.

Now we turn to a work of very different kind. It is the Arabic *Risálah* or Apology attributed to an anonymous writer al-Kindi that has proved to be the most influential anti-Islam polemic through the centuries, and is still regarded a powerful weapon in the hands of Christian missionaries who are out to combat Islam.

The Apology of al-Kindi

Amongst the early apologies, the most famous is 'The Apology of al-Kindi'. The present English translation of it is based on an Arabic text of two unidentified manuscripts, one rediscovered in Egypt and the other in Turkey by Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. The Arabic *Risálah*, or Apology, is in the form of two letters, where a Muslim character named 'Abd Allah ibn Ismail al-Hashimi outlines the fundamental Islamic beliefs to his learned Christian friend, 'Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi and invites him to embrace Islam. In reply, al-Kindi offers a lengthy treatise to refute the fundamental beliefs of Islam, attack the character and prophethood of Muhammad and reject the credentials of the Qur'an as a revealed book. He proclaims the truth of Christianity in most uncompromising terms, inviting al-Hashimi to embrace the Christian faith. Evidently, his main concern seems to be

'far more in the nature of an attack on Islam than a defence of Christianity.'[40] The two letters had formed part of a single work and the two correspondents are presented as important persons in the court of Caliph al-Ma'mūn. (This al-Kindi should not be confused with Abu Yusuf Yaq'ub al-Kindi (*c.* 801--66), the famous Arab Muslim philosopher and a companion of the Abbasid caliphs, al-Ma'mūn and al-Mut'asim.)

A Latin translation of the *Risálah* seems to have been made by Peter of Toledo in 1141, which formed an important part of the Cluniac Collection under the supervision of Peter the Venerable, and Bibliander published the text in 1543. It had a considerable impact on later Catholic writers in their anti-Islamic polemic, whereas Timothy's dialogue where the Prophet was viewed in positive light remained unknown until its publication by Mingana in 1928. Dr Anton Tien translated the complete text of the Apology in a manuscript in English between 1882--85 that was re-edited and published by N.A. Newman in *The Early Christian Muslim Dialogue. A Collection of Documents from the First Three Islamic Centuries* (1993). Sir William Muir's booklet *The Apology of Al Kindy* was in a summary form with large selected portions from the original text that was published in 1882 with the primary objective, as he says in the 'Preface to the First Edition', to put this book 'in the hands of those who will use it in the interests of Christian faith.'[41] Its publication in the nineteenth century was deeply offensive to Muslims, but it was at a time when the British Empire was at its zenith and Western Christian missionaries operated under the British colonial rulers to propagate their faith. Muir (1819--1905) was a strong anti-Islam and anti-Muslim evangelist and scholar. With great pride, he mentions the favourable political situation under the imperial rule for the publication of the Apology:

> The treatment of Islam is so trenchant that the circulation of the Apology could hardly be tolerated in any of the effete and bigoted Mahometan States of the present day. And, indeed, excepting the Motázelite Caliphs, and perhaps the great Akbar, I suppose there has been hardly a Mahometan government in any age, which would not have considered it necessary to suppress a work so dangerous to Islam, by the severest pains and penalties. But as regards our own territories, the case is different. And certainly the appearance of an Apology written and circulated at the court of the Abbasside Caliph could hardly be objected to in the dominions of the Defender of the Christian faith.[42]

What Muir calls ‘our own territories’, at that time also included the Indian Sub-Continent where he had been a high colonial official.

When was the Apology written? Who was its author and what was his religious persuasion? On these questions, there is a considerable amount of scholarly controversy. Muir and Mingana regard the work to be an authentic composition of the early ninth century, and some others, such as Louis Assignor, trace it to the tenth century. However, there is no compelling reason to doubt that the work was composed during the rule of al-Mamūn. In any case, the work was in existence by the beginning of the eleventh century, for the great scholar and historian al-Biruni (*c.* 973--*c.* 1050) refers to it in his *The Chronology of Ancient Nations.*[43]

The author of the Apology is completely anonymous. As said earlier, the device of advancing one’s apologetical and polemical views in literature in a dialogical form between two disputants was quite common in the early Middle Ages. There is little evidence to support the claim that the names of al-Hashimi and al-Kindi used in the letter exchange are authentic. It is most likely that the same person who appears to be a Nestorian Christian was the author of both letters. For instance, the supposedly Muslim writer al-Hashimi is quite familiar with the tenets of the Melkites, Jacobites and Nestorians. He says that Nestorians, as opposed to Melkites and Jacobites, are more respectable and their truthful beliefs are acceptable to all Christians. Besides, they are also more favourably disposed towards Muslims. He denounces the Jacobites who are ‘the most heretical of all, wanton and mischievous and surely, furthest from the truth; who assent to the teachings of Cyril the Alexandrian, Jacob Baradaeus and Severus, bishop of Antioch.’[44] He gives a lengthy description in favour of the Nestorians. He recounts how the Prophet Muhammad spoke highly of them and granted them special conditions and protection. Their monks, he argues, famous for their abstinence and great learning had helped the Prophet when he started his prophetic mission, by supporting his claims to the Divine revelations, and saving him from the Jews and the pagan Meccans. There is every reason to believe that the writer was a Nestorian. His suggestion of the help of monks to Muhammad during the early phase of his mission in Mecca can be an indirect reference to the monk Bahira, who in the hands of Christian apologists became the legendary secret mentor of Muhammad.

In the main body of letter the 'Muslim' writer expounds the ordinances and duties of Islam, such as prayers, fasting, pilgrimage, and *jihad*, requesting his Christian friend to renounce the errors of his faith and embrace the grand faith of Abraham, their common ancestor, 'who also was an orthodox Muslim' and 'confess the prophetic rank of my master, the lord of mankind, friend of the Lord of the universe, seal of the prophetic order, Muhammad, son of 'Abdullah the Hashimite, of Quraysh descent, an Arab of the country and town of Mecca, master of the rod and the pool and the camel who intercedes for us, friend of the Lord of power, companion of Gabriel the faithful spirit.'[45] He extends his invitation to his Christian friend to carry out *jihad*, by quoting a passage from the Qur'an in its support, but without explaining or mentioning its historical background and context. It is a verbal gimmick that will enable the Christian to attack the Islamic concept of *jihad* in reply. He writes: 'Then I summon you to wage war in the ways of God, i.e., to raid the hypocrites and to slay the unbelievers and idolaters with the edge of the sword, to capture and plunder till they embrace the faith and witness that there is no god but God and that Muhammad is His servant and Apostle, or else pay the tribute and accept humiliation.'[46] All his friend had to do was to embrace Islam and the door to the pleasures of this and of the next world would be open to him. About half of the letter is taken up to explain the carnal pleasures of paradise and the torments of hell by way of the Qur'an. Among the worldly gains he mentions to his friend, is the privilege of marrying four wives whom he can easily divorce if he dislikes them or grows tired of them. Then, there is the additional benefit--one can have any number of slave-girls for sexual delights.

In fact, al-Hashimi's letter was no more than a 'straw man' Islam for a Christian polemicist to knock down. There is no doubt that the writer was well acquainted with the Qur'an, which he quotes copiously for his selective goal. His objections to Christianity are very mild and he refrains from repeating the traditional charges on the corruption of the Scriptures by the Jews and Christians, neither does he attempt to show that the coming of the Prophet Muhammad was foretold in the Bible. As a ploy to hide his identity, he does not quote from the Bible even though he demonstrates that he knew the Old and New Testament so well.[47]

Sidney H. Griffith in a well-researched lengthy article on the Christian apologies in the first Abbasid century concludes that the author of al-Hashimi and al-Kindi correspondence is the same anonymous person. It is quite unlikely that any Muslim scholar, even in the court of al-Ma'mūn, could have presented Islam the way al-Hashimi does, and which al-Kindi can easily rebut on every point. Griffith writes:

> In fact, the al-Hašimi letter is virtually a mere table of contents for the refutations that are the subject matter of the much longer al-Kindi letter. The author of the al-Hašimi letter shows no interest at all in the topics that concern the authors of the few authentic Muslim apologies that we have from the first Abbasid century. It is undoubtedly, then, the work of the Christian author of the whole correspondence, and an integral part of his apology for Christianity.[48]

Al-Hashimi asks his friend to give up his Christian faith, an error, which forces him to an ascetic life of privations and continuous penance and, instead, embrace 'the easy religion' of Islam. But if he still adamantly wants to hold on to his creed, then, at least, he should let him know his views on the issues he had raised. He finishes his letter with an affectionate appeal, urging his friend to reply 'without fear and restraint, and do not hold back anything that is in your heart, as if you were afraid of me. I only wish to hear what you have to say. I shall be patient, submissive, responsive, as the case may require; ready to yield without dispute or demur. I have no fear. Only let us compare what you have to say with what I have already advanced.'[49] In response to this, al-Kindi offers his famous treatise, consisting of 165 pages (as shown in Muir's book) to his esteemed 'Muslim friend'.

The reply of al-Kindi

After greeting his friend and praising the caliph, the Amir of the Faithful, al-Kindi gets down to his main concern, to refute Islam. His intention right from the start is bluntly clear. He undertakes his task with great zeal and single-mindedness. He attempts to show by citing the narratives from the Old Testament that 'the orthodox faith of Abraham' as described in the Qur'an was in fact the paganism of the Sabians at Harran: 'Abraham dwelt in Haran for 75 years, worshipping the idol called al-

'Uzza, known in Haran as the moon god, according to the custom of the people there . . . This idol was worshipped by Abraham with his father and forefathers and the people of the land.'[50] He concludes that the 'orthodoxy' attributed to Abraham or he being called an orthodox Muslim is unfounded. Al-Kindi's claim lacks any credible evidence on this point, and shows that his aim to discredit Islam by all means overrides any concern for historical evidence.

In the first section of the Apology, he defends the Trinitarian doctrine of God in very much same way as did Patriarch Timothy I and other apologists of the period. He asserts that the Trinity and the Sonship of the Messiah as represented in the Qur'an are gross profanities and blasphemies against the Christians and the notion of a female element in the Trinity, i.e. Mary being regarded as one of the three, was created by the Jews from whom it had been borrowed by Muhammad:

> We do not say that God has a wife, or has gotten a son; we do not impute to the Deity such puerilities and vanities, predicating of God of what is true of man. You credit us with these gross anthropomorphisms on the authority of the Jews, who sought to deceive you in this way, patching up idle tales which they tell at the corners of the streets and in the market places.[51]

He denies that Christians believe that 'God is one of three' or, that 'there are three gods', any such accusations rests on the heretical dogmas of the followers of 'that worthless cur, Marcion, an ignorant fellow who says there are three gods.'[52] He rejects the Marcionites to be Christians, or who deserve to be called Christians.

In the second section of the letter, he deals with Muhammad's life and mission. He frequently refers to Muhammad as 'your master' (Arabic: *sāhibuka*), or 'this man', and does not commit himself to using any other title for him, which may have any positive religious association. He picks up incidents from his life with a view to portraying him as a pretender to apostleship. After a brief summary of Muhammad's early life, and his marriage to Khadija, al-Kindi discusses the circumstances and motives that led him to claim prophethood:

> Backed by her fortune he conceived the idea of claiming power and headship over his tribesmen, but they were not well disposed to him, nor did they follow him except a handful of men whom he swept off their feet by his artifices [*muwarabath*] . . . And when he despaired of what he really desired, then he claimed to be a prophet and an apostle. The first step in this direction was taken so warily that men scarcely saw what he was aiming at. They did not know how to test an adventurer like him; nor did they realize the calamities he was bringing on them. They were Arabs, men of the desert, and did not know the conditions of apostleship or the signs of a prophet. How should they, to whom a prophet was never sent? In taking these initial steps, he was prompted by one who constituted himself his director, one whose name and story I will relate later on.[53]

This description amply demonstrates the drift of al-Kindi's polemical tone.

Al-Kindi recounts the military raids and expeditions of Muslims after the *Hijra* of the Prophet to paint the Prophet as a brigand and a false and opportunistic prophet. In the Battle of Uhud (625) the pagan Meccans avenged their earlier defeat at Badr (624). Muslim losses were considerable and the Prophet himself was badly wounded. It is interesting to see how al-Kindi draws his conclusions of the events:

> Your master's front tooth, the right side [of his] lower jaw, was broken, his lip slit, his cheek and forehead gashed by the hand of 'Utaba. Ibn Qami'a struck at him with his sword while Talha defending him had his fingers broken. How different is all this from our Lord, the Saviour of the world. When one drew sword in His presence against another and smote his ear and cut it off, Christ replaced the ear and made it whole as the other. Now, when the hand of Talha was injured while he defended his master at the risk of his own life, if the Prophet had prayed to God and restored the hand whole as before, that would have been a sign that he was a prophet. Why was his front tooth broken, his lip slit and his cheek gashed? Where was the angel to help and protect him, the friend and messenger of God? Earlier prophets were protected. Was not Elijah protected from the minions of King Ahab, and Daniel from the lions of Darius,

> and Abin Hananiah and his brethren from the furnace of Nebuchadnezzar and others of the prophets and saints of God in the same way? [54]

Here al-Kindi raises questions about the Prophet's inability to perform miracles by his own power or with divine help by restoring the fingers of his follower or of warding off the wounds he himself received. If an opponent were to ask him: Jesus Christ, whom you call 'the Saviour of the world', was put to an agonising death on the cross according to the biblical narratives. Was he able to save himself? Did he not ask God for help with cries of 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Did he receive any divine help in his agony or did anyone rescue him? And don't you believe that he died on the cross? No doubt, such questions would have puzzled the apologist, but it is most likely that he would have resorted to some alternative explanation, permissible in the eyes of the Christians, but not of the Muslims. In any case, it is understandable that an apologist of any creed or faith argues on premises that suit his purpose and directs his rhetoric against his opponent, all the while oblivious of the fact that he, too, may be standing on shaky ground.

Next, the writer takes up the personal life of the Prophet and his marriages. What Muhammad stood for, preached and achieved is bluntly reduced to his lust for women and crime: 'We assert that this action of your master proves the opposite of what you say, that he was sent in goodwill to all men. Indeed he was a man who had no thought or care save for beautiful women whom he might marry, or men whom he might plunder, shedding their blood, taking their property and marrying their wives.'[55]

He disapproves the marriages of the Prophet with his remarks on some of his wives, referring specially an episode surrounding Ayesha, and his marriage to Zainab. Then, he scrutinises Muhammad's married life in the light of the teachings of St Paul and Jesus:

> St Paul, a true apostle, has said (I Cor.7:32-3): 'If a man has a wife, his utmost efforts are directed to please her, but if he has no wife he aims at pleasing his Lord.' A true word and well said! For a man must contrive to please his wife, and as the Lord has said (Matt. 6:24): 'A man cannot please two masters.' There is no help for it, he must cling to the one and despise the other. Now if a man

> cannot serve one wife and please her without forgetting his Maker, how much less can he bend all his energies to please 15 wives and two concubines? Besides he was, as you know, absorbed in other pursuits; I mean the management of wares, plans for taking the lives of his enemies, the capture of women, plunder of property and the dispatch of scouts. There were troops to be handled, roads to be infested and raiding parties to be sent out. Now, while he gave due attention to such constant claims, how could he find time to fast and pray, to collect his thoughts and to turn himself to other matters which were involved in his sacred duties? Certainly we have here a novel and original conception of the prophetic office.[56]

In the passage cited above al-Kindi articulates his criticism of the Prophet with the help of what St Paul and Jesus are reported to have said, and in doing this he not only contradicts himself but also wrongly applies and misinterprets the biblical references. Let us have a few general comments on his formulations and see where their logic leads us.

St Paul's remarks are relevant to situations: first, when a man is married and his total dedication is to please his wife, which in al-Kindi's formulation leaves no room for a married man to please God; and in the second place, when a man pleases the Lord because he has not a wife to please. Does it not mean in view of the first situation that a man cannot please God because he has a wife to please? and that he turns to pleasing God only because he does not have a wife to please? The reply to al-Kindi's implication is certainly in the affirmative. From the biblical narratives, Jesus does not seem to have been married (but some scholars such as Michael Goulder are of the view that he probably was married). However, St Paul is said to have been married. In any case, it is beyond doubt that both of them devoted their considerable energies to the service of God in their respective ways. Besides, all the prophets mentioned in the Old Testament were dedicated to God while most of them had been married, some having more than one wife? If their monogamous or polygamous status did not disqualify them from their prophetic mission, why should Muhammad's marriages be regarded as a disqualification to his prophethood? The apologist, of course, did not consider these points. Is there any justification to apply the saying of Jesus that a man cannot serve two masters as a directive to a person about his wife

whom he should regard a master? Assuming it does so, then, how would he attend to his other master, God? Finally, the Prophet Muhammad like other prophets of the olden times led, organised and participated actively in the tasks at hand. As the prophetic office extends beyond the pulpit, any assumption that it entails a rejection of the activities of practical life is frolicsome fantasy.

Next, al-Kindi takes up the question of what constitutes evidence for a divine commission. Prophecy is one and it consists of revelation of the past accredited by miracles, and revelation of the future accredited by the fulfilment, either immediately in the life of the prophet, for instance, Isaiah's prediction of the destruction of the army of King Senneacherib of Nineva who had besieged King Hezekiah, when 'that night God sent an angel and slew the army of Sennacherib, 185,000 men, and when he arose in the morning and saw what had befallen his people, he turned and fled.'[57] This seems rather an odd way of punishing the wrong-doers, with God's angel slaying a big army single-handedly in one night, while allowing the main culprit, Senneacherib, to get away safely!

Al-Kindi then mentions a number of prophecies from the Old Testament which came true, such as the recovery of Hezekiah from sickness as prophesied by Isaiah, and the fulfilment of a prophecy at some future time, such as Daniel's prediction of the coming of the Messiah, 'the Saviour of the world, exalted above all the prophets', and of his death.[58] He goes on to recount a number of prophecies of Jesus and then asks: 'What prophecies of future events did Muhammad make?' He quite furiously lashes out:

> How does he prove himself to you and others like you to deserve a prophet's name? Have you any evidence to give in support of his claims? If you say that he gives us information about the prophets who were before him, e.g., Noah, Abraham, Moses and Christ; all I have to say is this . . . that he told us what we already know. Our young people, even children learn it at school. If you instance the story of the Aad, the Thamud and the camel, the master of the elephant and such like, we can only describe it as poor stuff, idle tales of bearded dotards with which they while away their days and nights . . . He never claimed to have this faculty of foreknowledge, and thus the second of the

> guarantees of his prophetic office is gone. He has taught us nothing either of the past or of the future, while the signs and wonders by which a true prophet is verified were denied him.[59]

The writer repeats the common arguments used by other Christian apologists of those times that prophethood must be confirmed by signs and miracles. He cites the Qur'an (17:60) that 'Nothing hindered Us from sending you portents, except that folk of old times denied them' to show that they were lacking in the case of Muhammad and rejects as forgeries any later traditions to his miracles.

The writer discusses the Qur'an, which Muslims regard as the proof of the divinely guided mission of the Prophet. He reminds his friend that this is 'a false claim that cannot abide the truth or stand examination' because 'you are content to rest your case on very frail foundation, a crazy substructure, a rotten bottom . . . It appears, however, that I must open this whole question. If in the process we occasion pain, if festering wounds must be reopened, the patient must brace himself to bear it like a man.'[60] It is quite true that the writer keeps his word; he delivers what he had promised with no reservations.

He launches himself into a lengthy discussion of the origin and the collection of the text of the Qur'an as well as its style and the allegedly contradictory statements it contains. By this time, the Bahira legend had fully grown and taken many twists and turns in the Christian apologetic literature. In al-Kindi's account, a Christian monk named Sergius who had held some heretical views was ostracised by his own church and community. To repent what he had done and atone for his offence, he went to Mecca, where he introduced himself to the future prophet Muhammad, using the assumed name Nestorius, and skilfully won Muhammad's heart. Thus Sergius/Nestorius became Muhammad's secret instructor in the revelations that make the Qur'an. According to al-Kindi, it was as a result of this monk's powerful influence that Muhammad mentions the Messiah and Christian faith in favourable terms in the Qur'an, for instance, (Q.5:85) that nearest to Muslims in affection are 'those who say: We are Christians', this is 'because among them are priests and monks and they are not proud.' But before Muhammad could become a Nestorian Christian, Nestorius died. According to al-Kindi, at this time two influential and crafty Jews, Abdullah bin

Salam and Ka'b al-Ahbar, who were well-known among the Jewish doctors of their community, tricked Muhammad into believing that they accepted his teachings. They found an opportunity to carry out their hidden designs when Muhammad died, for they urged Ali to assert his claim to office against Abu Bakr; but Abu Bakr got the upper hand and assumed power. During Abu Bakr's rule, the people revolted against Islam. In this period of conflict and instability, the two Jews altered the Qur'an. They 'introduced passages from their own Law and material from the literature of their own country. In this way they corrupted the whole, taking from it and adding to it as they chose, insinuating their own blasphemies into it.'[61]

The followers of Muhammad also stand accused of corrupting the Qur'an. Al-Kindi writes: 'You have read the Qur'an and know how the material has been put together, and the text corrupted, a sure sign that many hands had been busy on it, and that it has suffered additions and losses. Indeed each one wrote and read as he chose, omitting what he did not like. Now by the grace of God, are these what you consider to be the marks of an inspired book?' [62] He accuses Hajjaj bin Yusuf, the famous general and a ruthless governor of the Umayyads, to have corrupted the Qur'anic text by omitting a number of verses concerning the House of Umayya and of Abbas. This charge, needless to say, is totally groundless.

Then he points to the use of certain foreign words in the Qur'an as being incompatible with its claims to have been revealed in Arabic, and lists them as 'istabrik' (brocade), 'sindas' (linen), 'abarik' (jars), 'namarik' (saddle-cloths) which are of Persian origin, and an Abyssinian word 'mishkat', which means window. According to al-Kindi, it means that there is either a defect in the messenger or in the message. If the Arabic lexicon does not have words to express the ideas, then the medium is defective; if otherwise, the messenger. These arguments may seem rather bizarre to a present-day reader but for the apologist their usefulness was beyond question. In fact, any possible objection, no matter how misplaced or trivial, was thought to be in the service of a higher cause and therefore justified.

In the last part of the Apology, the writer turns to Islamic rites, customs and regulations concerning women. In response to al-Hashimi's alleged invitation to him to embrace Islam, al-Kindi directs his lengthy criticism to the issues of circumcision,

the prohibition of pork, female circumcision, divorce and re-marriage regulations, the pagan origin of the Kaaba and the Hajj. His relentless attack on Islam seems ferocious right to the end and he backs up his objections with appropriate citations from the Old and the New Testament. With regard to Muslim prayers that involve cleaning the body and prostrations as well the common practice of washing hands before eating food, he presents a thought-provoking Christian perspective:

> You invite me to prostrations, purifications and to circumcision with a view to establish the ordinances of our father Abraham. Here I answer you in the words of Christ our Lord. When the Jews asked Him why do not Your disciples wash their hands before meals, He replied (Luke 11:38-40): 'What profit is there to a dark house, if a lamp is burning outside? So is the inner light of the heart that must be cleansed from impure thoughts and sinful passions. As for the surface of the body, what is the use of laboriously cleansing it? Hypocrites pay attention to the surface which is like a grave with a marble front, enshrining the corruption of death, as ye do when ye wash your bodies while your hearts are defiled by sin.' [63]

With regard to the Christian rejection of circumcision, he offers explanations which even Sir William Muir finds 'both childish and indelicate' and omits several passages in his summarised version of the *Apology*.[64] Al-Kindi asks his friend why he invites others to circumcision when Muhammad himself was not circumcised. If he affirms that Christ was circumcised, then the answer is 'that He was circumcised to confirm the precepts of the Law, lest it should be thought that He despised it or sought to discredit it.'[65] This must have cooled down the missionary zeal of his 'Muslim friend', but on the positive side, here is a good lesson in understanding the secrets of polemical logic and argumentation.

In the final part, al-Kindi replies to Muslims' objections to the corruption of the Bible and the doctrine of the Trinity. He defends the incorruptibility of the Bible by showing a belief in its alteration to be incompatible with the Qur'anic pronouncements. He gives an account of the Christian doctrines regarding Christ and his ministry, attacking Islam as 'an easy religion' that offers temporal inducements. Any idea of comparing Christ with Muhammad, in his view, is quite unthinkable (but

Muslims, in any case, do not compare them). He dwells upon the miracles of Jesus. He writes that in contrast to the wonderful works of the Jewish prophets, Jesus performed his miracles with his inherent power and never failed as Moses failed at the waters of Meriba, or Jeremiah whose prayer God refused to hear. If one asks why the power of working miracles, allegedly a quality possessed by the apostles of Christ was no longer exercised by the holy men, al-Kindi offers an interesting insight:

> You must remember that if miracles were a matter of daily occurrence, as in the time of the holy elders, men would have no praise for their faith and obedience beyond such as you give to the beast whom you compel to move backwards and forward by the use of a bridle and stick. But God, blessed be His name, has distinguished us from the beasts in that He has given us reason and imposed on us the task of guarding these evidences of religion which otherwise might be lost. So that we no longer need to see miracles in confirmation of faith, unless indeed we have lost the use of reason and have degraded ourselves to the level of beasts.[66]

Undoubtedly, this explanation cannot but impress upon us the astounding marvels which human ingenuity is capable of producing, and evoke our deep sense of wonder.

Muslim reactions to the Oriental Christian polemic

So far we have discussed the views of three apologists who wrote before the first-half of the ninth century. During the first century of the Abbasid rule, the caliphs of Baghdad followed a fairly tolerant policy towards the non-Muslim subjects. The Christian apologetic literature of the period in Syriac and Arabic proved of permanent value in shaping the image of Islam as ‘a false religion’ founded by ‘a false prophet’. It had laid the foundations and set the tone of the standard topics of Christian-Muslim controversies. A number of famous Christian writers in the tenth and eleventh centuries who wrote in Arabic on theological matters were influenced by the writings of the early apologists.

The appearance of strong anti-Islamic polemic in the first Abbasid century can be seen in a social climate when Christians were embracing Islam in large numbers.

This development was viewed with apprehension by the Christians as their ranks diminished. To stem the tide of conversions, the Christian community produced apologetic literature against the religious claims of Islam. In Griffith's view these apologies may appear to be addressed to the Muslims, but they were really intended for the Christians audience, to stop them from converting to Islam because they were adherents of the only true faith whose doctrines were worthy of credence.[67]

It was at this time that certain objections raised by Christian apologists met a counterblast from the Muslim side. Muslim writers like Ali Tabari and al-Jahiz wrote their polemical works against Christians. Under Caliph al-Mutawakkil (in office 847--61) the policy of religious tolerance changed, and the *dhimmis* came under stricter regulations than before. Ali Tabari, a Nestorian Christian who had converted to Islam, wrote his work *Kitāb ad-din wa d-dawla* (The Book of Religion and Empire) in the court of al-Mutawakkil in which he defends Islam, refutes the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, and rebuts the claims that Christianity is the only true religion. The next important work of the period was by the renowned Mut'azilite scholar and radical theologian al-Jahiz (d. 869). Caliph al-Mutawakkil asked him to reply to the Christian critics, which he did in his polemical essay entitled *A Reply to Christians*. Christian apologists were in the forefront of all those who maligned Islam, and their constant hostility to Islam led to the hardening of Muslim attitude towards Christians. Al-Jahiz delineates the polemical methods of Christians with remarkable accuracy and penetrating insight. He writes:

> Our nation has not been afflicted by Jews, Magians or Sabeans as much as by the Christians; for in the polemic with us, they choose contradictory statements in Muslim traditions (as the targets of their attacks). They select for disputations the equivocal verses in the Qur'an and (hold us responsible) for the *Hadiths* [the Traditions of the Prophet], the chains of transmitters (*isnad*) of which are defective. Then they enter into private conversation with our weakminded, and question them concerning the texts which they have chosen to assail. They finally insert into the debate the arguments that they have learned from the Manichaeans. And notwithstanding such malicious discourse they often appear innocent before our own men of influence and people of learning; and thus they succeed in throwing dust in the eyes of the staunch believers and in bewildering

> the minds of those who are weak in faith. And how unfortunate that every Muslim looks upon himself as a theologian and thinks that everyone is fit to lead a discussion with an atheist! [68]

Al-Jahiz's reference to the use of weak Traditions by polemicists is evident in the *Apology* of al-Kindi for a selective purpose. It was common knowledge that Christians objected to Muslim-style marriages whereas they claimed for themselves the religious virtues of celibacy. Al-Jahiz retorts satirically:

> And how marvellous is this! We know that the Christian bishops as well as all inmates of monasteries, whether Jacobites or Nestorians, in fact monks of every description, both male and female, one and all practice celibacy. When we next consider how great is the number of monks and that most of the clergy adhere to their practices and when we finally take into account the numerous wars of the Christians, their sterile men and women, their prohibition against divorce, polygamy and concubinage--is it not strange that, is spite of all this, they have filled the earth and exceeded all others in numbers and fecundity? [69]

The status of the *dhimmis* living in the *Dār al-Islam* was determined by a covenant under which the Muslim community accorded hospitality and protection to members of other revealed religions for their acknowledgement of Muslim rule. Originally only Jews and Christians were given this status that was later extended to Zoroastrians and other minor faiths in central Asia which had come under Muslim rule. By the middle of the eighth century, under one of the conditions of the covenant, if any of the protected persons said anything derogatory or unfitting about the Prophet, of the Holy Book, or Islam, he was to be barred from the protection of the Amir of the Faithful and of all Muslims. The apologetic literature produced by Christians often violated this provision. During the period al-Jahiz lived, the situation had worsened. He complains that when a Christian slanders the mother of the Prophet and accuses her of immorality, he justifies his actions by saying that he had not breached the covenant because the mother of the Prophet was not Muslim. These types of insults, no doubt, could not have but exacerbated the negative attitude towards the Christians. He castigates Christians for their nefarious practice and gravest sin by practicing

castration of men and of children; the latter were castrated in order to devote them to the Church.

His view of Christianity as an inscrutable faith, a view held by many scholars ever since Christian doctrines were formulated and sanctified, is clear and direct. He writes:

> Even if one were to exert all his zeal and summon all his intellectual resources with a view to learn the Christians' teachings about Jesus, he would still fail to comprehend the nature of Christianity, especially its doctrine concerning the Divinity. How in the world can one succeed in grasping this doctrine, for were you to question concerning it to two Nestorians, individually, sons of the same father and mother, the answer of one brother would be the reverse of that of the other. This holds true also for the Melkites and Jacobites. As a result, we cannot comprehend the essence of Christianity to the extent that we know the other faiths. Moreover, they contend that the method of analogy should not be applied to religion, nor should the validity of faith be maintained by overcoming objections, nor should the verity of a dogma be made subject to the test of intellectual scrutiny. Faith must be based on the unqualified submission to the authority of the book and on following blindly the traditions of old. And, by my life, any man who would profess a faith like Christianity would of necessity have to offer blind submission as an excuse! [70]

The general picture that emerges from all the polemical and apologetic literature during the first three centuries of Islam is that of two religious communities who are at cross-purposes with one another. Islamic rule was firmly established over vast areas. The Muslim Empire was at the height of its political power. Christian communities belonging to a number of separate churches, between which there were acrimonious relations, now lived under Muslim rule. While they had accepted Arab rule, they staunchly opposed the religion of their rulers. Gradually the dialogical approach towards Islam gave way to a more rigid polemical trend among the Christians during this period, a trend that gave definite shape to the form of relationship that was to prevail between the two faiths afterwards. Newman observes in this connection:

> During this period, Islam proves itself to be a less wayward sect of the 'Hagarenes', from a Christian perspective, and more a separate and antagonistic religion which had sprung up from idolatry. The Muslim perception of Christianity also changed in this time, from the Qur'anic idea of being the group of the *People of the Book* nearest Islam, to the greatest theological and political opponent of the Muslim Empire.[71]

The Arab Christians knew Arabic and they understood the Qur'an and the literature produced by the Muslims. They were well aware of Muslim beliefs and the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad which they used mostly for polemical purposes.

The notion, that Muslim conquests were a temporary punishment that Christians had to endure for their sins, proved to be illusory. Islam was firmly established and it was expanding. The Muslim Empire was stable and its military successes were at their peak. Christians in their vast numbers were entering the fold of Islam, something which alarmed the apologists. It was at this time that the Arabic-speaking Christians produced apocalyptic literature that sought to undercut the phenomenal success of Islam by employing prophecies of its end. However, this was no more than wishful thinking on their part, and not a realistic appraisal of Islamic rule. In this literature, they attacked the character and mission of the Prophet in uncompromising terms. Some favourite themes emerged that dealt with the Prophet's polygamous marriages, sexual indulgence, use of the sword to impose his religion and his false claims to prophethood and revelation. These ideas spread and affected the Christian attitudes towards Islam in the Byzantine Empire, whereas Spain and afterwards the rest of Catholic West developed their own images of Islam.

Chapter 7. Polemic in Byzantium, Muslim Spain and the Catholic West

The Byzantine polemic

We have seen how Egypt and Syria, the eastern provinces of the Byzantine Empire were treated by the imperial government and the official Greek Orthodox (Melkite) Church, and how the Arabs finally replaced the much-hated Greek rule in that part of the Empire. Despite the loss of the eastern provinces and the independence of the western states, the Byzantines still claimed to be the *de jure* inheritors of all those parts of the world which at any time had been included within the Roman Empire. If the Byzantine Empire was the inheritor of the political and cultural legacy of the ancient Greek and Roman world, it was also the champion and defender of orthodox Christianity. As explained earlier, it was none other than the Byzantine emperors who elevated a religious cult to the status of a state religion. The Greek state and Christianity had merged into one composite whole. Under the imperial direction of Constantine, the Council of Nicaea in 325 had affirmed that Christ was 'true God of true God' being of one substance with the Father, a perspective that dominated the ensuing theological discussions. The ecumenical councils that were to follow later reaffirmed this view. Within the domes of many shrines and their magnificent churches, the Byzantines enthroned Christ the Pantocrator as Lord of the Universe.

Unlike the pagan Roman emperors who, on gaining the imperial sceptre, also became gods, Christian Byzantine emperors could no longer become gods, nor could they lay claim to direct power as gods, since their new faith admitted no more deities. Instead, they came to look upon themselves as the vicegerents of God surrounded by an imperial entourage that reflected the heavenly hierarchy of angels, prophets, and apostles. Consequently, they believed their empire was a divinely ordained gift. For instance, Basil I (867--86) told his son, 'You received the Empire from God.'[1] Only those who lived within the borders of civilised Byzantium were the people of God; beyond this realm lived barbarians immersed in ignorance and warfare, beings who had not attained full humanity.

The conflict between the two hostile blocs, the Byzantine Empire and the Arab Empire, arose from their geographical proximity and their aspirations to dominate the civilised world. Throughout the Middle Ages both civilisations were convinced of their cultural superiority. Each regarded itself as the repository of Divine Truth which was laid down in a revealed book. Gustave von Grunerbaum explains:

> The Muslim as well as the Latin and the Greek Christian knew himself possessed of the one and only truth. This truth was laid down in a revealed book, to which not a word could be added, from which no syllable could be erased. Thus, in theory at least, man's intellectual effort was mostly expository and interpretative. Cultural and religious border lines coincided. Political power, morally justifiable only as defender of the faith, might conflict with the claims of organised religion but remained coextensive with the area in which the persuasion of the ruler dominated. Arab conquest expanded, Greek or Frankish reconquest shrank, the abode of Islam.[2]

In the eyes of the Byzantines, whose empire had greatly shrunk due to the expansion of Muslim rule, Muslims were the great enemies who had already wrested the eastern provinces away from the empire and were a continuous threat on Byzantium's southern and southeastern borders. They regarded Muslims to be inherently anti-Christian in their mission, bent upon destroying the Christian Church and God's own kingdom on earth. The enemy was not only anti-Christian, but also without God. Christian descriptions of Islam and the Prophet, from relatively early encounters with the Muslims, show that a false and grotesque picture of the Prophet and his religion had already become common. The Saracens were regarded as 'infidels'; their Prophet was usually referred to as the 'Antichrist'.

An early influence on the Byzantines was John of Damascus whose writings were widely read throughout the Greek-speaking world. Without doubt these texts paved the way for subsequent Greek writings about Islam. Still it is important to bear in mind that John of Damascus' account of Islam was written primarily to refute what he regarded a theological heresy and to expose its falsity. But in the hands of the Byzantine writers, anti-Muslim polemics were at one and the same time religious and part of on-going political struggle against Islamic power, which despite all

apocalyptic prophecies and expectations of its demise, showed little sign of disappearing.

Among modern scholars, Professor Adel-Theodore Khoury's researches into the polemical writings of Byzantine theologians, against Islam from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries, have made a significant contribution to our understanding of the image of Islam in the Byzantine Empire.[3] Here we see that Islam is not depicted simply as a Christian heresy in the fashion of John of Damascus but also as a false idolatrous faith. The Prophet is not merely a false prophet as the early polemicist had maintained but the Antichrist, a servant of the devil, inspired by the 'father of lies'. The implication is that Satan himself was the moving force behind Islam. The Qur'an in a like manner was regarded as a false scripture that Muhammad composed with the help of a monk. They were said to have used materials from different sources, such as the Old and the New Testament, the Manichaean literature, as well as Muhammad's own inventions. The following representative examples will illustrate such Byzantine attitudes.

Nicetas of Byzantium

Nicetas of Byzantium is famous for his highly influential anti-Islamic work, entitled *The Refutation of the Book Forged by Muhammad the Arab*, thought to date from about 875--86. Nicetas is said to have been commissioned by Emperor Basileios to expose 'the false belief of the Hagarenes which is found in the book of the Arabs'. Nicetas does not undertake any historical criticism of the Qur'an, but rather criticises the Qur'an and the doctrines of Islam on the basis of the Bible. Anything mentioned in the Qur'an that Nicetas finds at variance with the biblical texts is regarded erroneous. For instance, he questions the claim of the Qur'an that Abraham raised the foundations of the House (i.e. the Kaaba) along with Ishmael (Q. 2:121) on the ground that 'the meticulous historian of Genesis 28:18 makes no mention whatever of such a temple being erected by the patriarch'.[4]

He knew the Qur'an, possibly through a Greek translation. In his book, he defends orthodox Christianity without quoting a single verse of the Bible. His defence

of Christianity takes the form of arguments against Islam, and to this end he examines particularly suras 2 to 18 in great detail and goes through the remainder of the Qur'an generally to refute the doctrines of Islam.

In fact most of the inconsistencies Nicetas seems to have detected had already been discussed by earlier Orthodox polemicists, some of which we have seen earlier.[5] But as Newman points out, Nicetas also appears to have found, all by himself, some deficient passages in the Qur'an:

> Among other things, he questions the Qur'an's high opinion of Solomon who later worshipped idols, notices that Muhammad confused the works of Gideon with those of King Saul and placed both (with David) in the time of Joshua, and wonders how Alexander the Great could be mentioned as a Monotheistic. Nicetas also seems to have known that Muslims of his day credited Muhammad with splitting the moon in two. However, in the process of his discussion, the author makes several errors, which not only point to his dependence upon a deficient translation of the Qur'an but also show that he could not have had much contact with Muslims.[6]

The short Qur'anic Sura *al-Tauhid* (the Unity) became the object of all types of misrepresentations at the hands of the Byzantine polemicists. The full text of the Sura (Q. 112:1-5) is as follows:

> In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Merciful
>
> Say: 'He is the One God:
> 'God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All That Exists [*Allah as-Samad*].
> 'He begets not, and neither is He begotten;
> 'and there is nothing that can be compared with Him.'

Newman shows how Nicetas mistranslated the Arabic word *as-samad*: 'In reference to the Qur'an 112: 2, Nicetas says that Muhammad thought of God as a 'solid sphere' an apparent mistranslation of *as-Samadu* (= the Eternal Abode) as *'samm* (solid) and *dawa'ir* (= sphere). With respect to the Qur'an 96: 2, that man was created of 'gum',

where the translator seems to have mistaken *'ilk* (= mastic, gum) for *'alaq* (= blood-clot).[7]

The mistranslation of *as-samad* to which Newman refers appears in chapter 18 of Nicetas' book where his translation of the Sura *al-Tauhid* (Q.112:2) and his comment reads:

> The one hundred and eleventh petty myth reads as follows: 'Say, He is God one, God *holosphyros*. He has neither given birth, nor has he been begotten and no one is like him.' If *holosphyros* does not mean the shape of a sphere, it does mean density and compression which are characteristic of a solid [object].[8]

The word *as-samad* referring to God alone is mentioned only once in the Qur'an. It is a divine attribute of the Supreme Being that, in Muhammad Asad's words, 'comprises the concepts of Primary Cause and eternal independent Being, combined with the idea that everything existing or conceivable goes back to Him as its source and is, therefore, dependent on Him for its beginnings as well as for its continued existence.'[9] In the Byzantine polemical literature this word was rendered as *holosphyros* with a number of variations and synonyms such as *holosphairos* (all spherical), *sphyropectos* (beaten solid to a ball), *sphyrelectos*, *sphyrelatos* (beaten with the hammer) and *holobolos* (beaten to a solid ball) with the aim of deriding the Qur'anic concept of God. Nicetas in his exposition followed the current tradition, but his use of adjective *holosphyros* emphasised a material God, which meant that his worship in Islam was nothing but clear idolatry. In the following passage he explains further:

> The author of this laughable writing who was in no happy position to even make an orderly statement on either one of the two [subjects, i.e., theology and natural sciences], except only to stammer in some way, wandered about. Regarding God he uttered this godless statement, that God is something spherical, or rather, as he said, 'God is holosphyros,' thinking of him as something solid, otherwise he could not have a spherical shape. Being then, according to him, *a material sphere,* he [God] can neither be heard nor seen, mentally; which means that he is unable to act, unless someone else moves him, and he is even carried mindlessly with the face downwards.[10]

Thus Nicetas turns Muslim faith's Primary Cause and Prime Mover of all that exists, into a lifeless and stationary object with his 'face downwards'. His conclusion is that the 'God of Muhammad' as a material entity had a 'solid' and 'spherical' shape, and was incapable of moving himself unless someone helped him. Thus he was portrayed as a caricature of the Divine Being, and he had nothing in common with the Christian God. Daniel Sahas comments: 'Such a pathetic perception of God would, of course, set Christianity and Islam completely apart from and in collision with each other. One has the feeling that, in the narrowness of Nicetas, Byzantine Christianity took its revenge for the Qur'anic and populist distortion of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.'[11]

Nicetas also claims that Muslims worship an idol at Mecca and consequently their religion is fundamentally idolatrous. He attacks the Prophet for having authorised the slaying of those who introduce an associate with God (as Christians seem to do). In fact, the Qur'an contains no such injunction.

In many places, Nicetas explains the Qur'anic text by grossly twisting it. For instance, the Qur'anic injunction (2:168) reads:

> O Mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and wholesome in the earth, and follow not the footsteps of Satan. Lo! He is an enemy for you.

In Nicetas' hands, it receives a novel interpretation. He explains that Muhammad 'clearly calls Satan the one who sets up the distinction between clean and unclean according to the law.' From this he moves to the next stage of his exegesis, and asks his readers the leading question: 'Do you not see how he openly calls Satan the Lord?' [12]

The contribution Nicetas made in presenting the Qur'an should be evaluated on the basis of his prime intention in writing the book. Yet, despite his deficient interpretations and the narrow theological perspective he represented, he was the first Byzantine writer who systematically evaluated the Qur'an. It is true that his

undertaking was not to present Islam and its founder in any positive light, but rather to demolish this adversary of Christianity.

Nicetas of Byzantium was followed closely by Euthymius Zigabenus, who was commissioned by Alexius I Comnenus (1081--1118) to write the *Panoplia Dogmatica* in refutation of heresies for the Council of Constantinople 1110--11. In this book he also dealt at length with the beliefs of Saracens. Following the polemical writings of his predecessors, Bartholomew of Edessa and Nicetas, he also added further scorn to the *holosphyros* version of 'the God of Muhammad'. He writes:

> He [Muhammad] calls God *holosphyros*, that is spherical. Shape implies and it is a characteristic of something solid, dense and compressed. As a material sphere, according to him, God cannot be heard or seen and, as it happens, he is brought forth with [his] face down and rolls down in a disorderly manner.[13]

It can readily be admitted that such a material object, spherical in shape, may roll down in an erratic manner when given a slight push, but the question left unanswered was why such a tangible object, as Zigabenus claims Muhammad's God was, could not be seen or touched by anyone.

While discussing the views of extreme polemicists, we should not assume that all the Byzantine writers shared such views of Islam. When Nicetas of Byzantium and Zigabenus argued against the opinion that Saracens worshipped a true God, they were also probably trying to negate those of their compatriots who held a more conciliatory attitude towards Islam. Towards the end of the reign of Emperor Manuel I Comnenus (1118--80, r. 1143--80) there arose a major controversy around the Byzantine formulations, the conception of *holosphyros* and the ritual for the abjuration of Islam. The emperor wanted to alter the anathema, because he held that the God of Muhammad and the God he believed in were one and the same.

The Holosphyros Controversy

The Byzantine historian and theologian Nicetas Choniates (*c*. 1155--*c*. 1215) was mentioned earlier in Chapter 6. He wrote his monumental *Historia* in twenty-one books, covering the period 1118--1207, which is the most important source on the reign of Manuel I, and on the *holosphyros* controversy. It is evident from his narrative that in the conflict between the emperor and the Church, Nicetas' sympathies lay with the Church hierarchy. He is said to have meant that Book XX, a text of abjuration, in his *Thesaurus of Orthodoxy* was for those who converted from Islam to Christianity. These converts had to renounce publicly their former faith in an elaborate ritual in which they anathematised 'the god of Muhammad'. Thus purified, they were confirmed in the 'pure and true' faith of Christians. The last of the anathemas and the conclusion of the renunciation reads as follows:

> And on top of these, I anathematise the god of Muhammad, about whom he [Muhammad] says that 'this is one God, *holosphyros* [made of solid metal beaten to a spherical shape] who neither begat nor was begotten, and no-one else has been made like him.' Thus, by anathematising everything that I have stated, even Muhammad himself and his *sphyrelaton* [beaten solid] god, and by renouncing them, I am siding with Christ, the only true God; and I believe . . . [14]

Emperor Manuel proposed that the 'anathema to the god of Muhammad' should be deleted from all the catechetical books. He considered that any ritual of anathema where the would-be converts were made to blaspheme God in any manner was a damnation of God. The emperor presented his proposals to Patriarch Theodosius and to those bishops who were members of the synod. The bishops strongly opposed the imperial proposals arguing that the anathema was not directed against the true God, but against 'the holosphyros god who is neither begotten nor did he beget, fabricated by the jocular and demonical Muhammad; for God is believed by Christians to be Father; and this [faith] prohibits completely such absurd and frivolous words of Muhammad.'[15]

On the rejection of his proposal by the Church authorities, Manuel produced a second and more extensive *tomos.* The ailing emperor stood firmly for the removal of anathema while the clerics did their utmost to retain the formula. At one point, he even threatened to bring the matter before the Pope. Eventually, after lengthy

deliberations and imperial pressure, a compromise was reached, by which the anathema against 'the god of Muhammad' was to be deleted and replaced instead by an anathema against 'Muhammad and all his teachings'.

But as the subsequent Byzantine history of anti-Islamic literature shows, the perception of 'the god of Muhammad' had not changed. For instance, Emperor John VI Cantacuzenos (r. 1341--55) who became a monk in his fourth dialogue, *Against Muhammad*, calls the Prophet 'a godless devil' who worships and preaches god as '*holosphairos* and utterly cold, who was not born nor did he give birth, not realizing, the wretched one, that is worshipping a solid thing and not God. Because a sphere is some kind of solid, and coldness is characteristic of solid things.'[16] In a similar way, Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos (1391--1424) drew a sharp distinction between the 'utterly cold' god of Muhammad and the god of Christianity.[17] If one takes away the baseless accusation of *holosphyros* in the Islamic concept of the deity, then the long list of God's distinctive attributes or qualities the emperor produced is not much different from the Islamic view of a transcendent God. The obvious similarities about God in the two religions were set aside and instead contradictions were assumed to exist that were then exaggerated and magnified. In reality, there were no contradictions. The Byzantine polemicists created Islam as a theological enemy on their own assumptions that had little to do with Islam.

However, despite their being convinced of the truth of their own faith, Christians found the impact of Islam overwhelming both as a religion and a political power: inscrutable, foreign, and awe-inspiring. Gustave von Grunebaum sums up the Christian outlook in the Middle Ages:

> When the Christian looked upon Islam, his primary task was not to study this phenomenon of an alien faith that seemed both akin to and apart from his own but rather to explain the unexplainable, to wit, the artful machinations by which Mohammed had won over his people to the acceptance of his absurd confabulations. There is always, even in the most aggressive and contemptuous discussions of Islam, an element of apologetic self-defence in the utterances of the Christian writers, almost a touch of the propaganda for the home front. It is as if only the most derogatory presentation of the despicable but powerful

> enemy could allay the suspicion that his case be stronger than it was wise to admit. It is not surprising, then, that Christianity, Eastern and Western alike, got off to a wrong start in their approach to Islam and its founder.[18]

These remarks by a distinguished historian of Islamic civilisation in the twentieth century admirably sum up the general perspective about Islam, which influenced the medieval writers as well as those of the later centuries.

Among the Byzantine historians, Theophanes (758--817) was the first to write a short account of the life of Muhammad, this appeared in 810 in his *Chronographia.* This account was later translated into Latin by the papal librarian Anastasius between 871 and 874 and included in his *Historia Tripertita*. Theophanes' narrative was widely used by the later writers. He seems to have been aware of some historical facts about the life of the Prophet and Islam, but in his hands the whole thing becomes a strange mixture of fact and fiction. He describes Muhammad as the 'false prophet of the Saracens', also calls him a 'false abbot' and depicts him as an epileptic, something that had become an endemic theme in the Byzantine literature. Let us have a look at two of the passages (the English translation being somewhat archaic) in which he describes Muhammad's marriage to Khadija and the origin of Islam:

> Since the aforementioned Muhammad was poor and an orphan to boot he decided to attach himself to a wealthy woman, a relative of his, Hadîja (*Chadíga*) by name, in the capacity of an agent hired to take charge of her camels and to do business for her in Egypt and Palestine. Shortly afterwards having won the woman, who was a widow, by his open ways he took her for his wife and thus obtained possession of her camels and other property. In Palestine he mixed with Jews and Christians. Through them he got hold of some scriptures. He also contracted the ailment of epilepsy.
>
> When his wife became aware of his condition she was sorely grieved that she, a woman of noble birth, was now tied to one who not only was poor but an epileptic. He undertook to placate her by saying: 'I am having the vision of an angel, Gabriel by name, and as I cannot stand his sight, I lose my strength [in some versions: 'I swoon'] and fall to the ground.' But she had for her lover a monk who lived in these parts having been exiled for miscreancy. She told him

> all and also the name of the angel. And (this monk) wishing to convince her fully said to her: 'He has spoken the truth. For it is this angel who is sent out to all the prophets.' Accepting the word of the false abbot she believed him and announced to the other woman of her clan that (her husband) was a prophet.[19]

Numerous stories passed into circulation about the role of the monk. According to one such account, when the services of the monk were no longer needed, Muhammad murdered him. If the aim was to destroy the enemy by abuse and calumny, then the Byzantine writers used their fantasies freely to distort the life and mission of the Prophet. They targeted Muhammad's marriages for depicting his moral depravity, charged him with having used violence and deception to achieve his aims, whilst what the Prophet had actually taught was simply ignored.

We have to see the shaping of the grossly distorted image of Islam and its founder over the course of the centuries in the Greek world when Byzantium was under pressure from Muslims. The Greek Empire survived Arab invasions in 668, 673--78 and 716--17. The Byzantines lived under the constant threat of attack from the Muslim power. Military confrontations between the Empire and the Caliphate were common along their common borders. The Byzantines' centuries-old great adversary from the East, the Persian Empire, had been replaced by the powerful Muslim Caliphate. Despite the great challenge and danger the Byzantines faced and the misunderstanding they harboured against the rival faith, they also had respect for and even admiration of Muslim adversary. Both empires had cultural exchanges and trade relations. As a result of the expansion of Muslim rule, the large population of Christians, who once lived under Byzantine rule, became the subjects of the Caliphate. They continued to have religious and cultural ties with Byzantium. This led to the flow of information, actual as well as polemical and spurious, into Byzantium. Thus from a safe distance, the Byzantine writers and theologians used their imagination to discredit Islam and heap insults and calumnies on the Prophet. We can see this irrational hatred at work in the writings of many theologians. For instance in the thirteenth century, Bartholomew of Edessa lashes at a Muslim opponent thus:

> Why then do you call him a prophet and a messenger of God, who was but a voluptuary, defiled to the very core, a brigand, a profligate, a murderer and a

> robber? Tell me, pray, what do you mean by prophecy and by apostle! God knows you would not be able to tell had you not been taught by the Christian! O you unblushingly shameless creature! . . . But tell me first, I beseech you, how he came to know God and in what manner. If you assert that God despatched His angel to him and taught him the knowledge of God, then the angel is God's messenger to him and the people, and he nothing but a liar, a deceiver. Since you call him a prophet show me what he foretold and in what words, what it is he commands and what sign and wonder he wrought. I have read all your books and I have found out myself. If he was a prophet as you claim why, when he was about to fall off the horse he rode and to hurt his side and to lose his upper and lower teeth and to suffer bruises owing to the cropper, why did not he foretell, or foresee, the incident? [20]

The views of Bartholomew of Edessa, no matter how trivial and unreasonable to an impartial reader, nonetheless were within the framework of the Christian theological polemic that characterised the Byzantine attitudes towards the Prophet. As the centuries passed and more information about the Prophet and Islam became available, the polemical stereotypes did not change. When finally the Turks captured Constantinople in 1453, the Byzantine rule came to an end, and with it, the Byzantine polemic.

Muslim Spain (Andalusia) and Christians

Under Muslim rule, the Iberian Peninsula witnessed the birth of the first true cosmopolitan culture in Western Europe. In Spain, the three religious communities, Muslims, Christians and Jews came in close contact, and their communal cooperation contributed to making Andalusia a great centre of civilisation, with highly refined culture and grand living. Some Christians living in Andalusia were so deeply influenced by the culture of Arab rulers that they came to be known as *Mozarabs* or 'arabizers'. The Arab culture and language had great fascination for Mozarabs. Many *Mozarab* writers excelled in writing Arabic and neglected Latin. But some of them were also deeply hostile to both Moors and Jews. Paul Alvarus, a famous contemporary Christian zealot and writer deplores this situation in 854 in these words:

> My fellow Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the works of Mohammedan theologians and philosophers, not in order to refute them, but to acquire a correct and elegant Arabic style. Where today can a layman be found who reads the Latin Commentaries on Holy Scriptures? Who is there that studies the Gospels, the Prophets, and the Apostles? Alas! The young Christians who are most conspicuous for their talents have no knowledge of any literature or language save the Arabic; they read and study with avidity Arabian books, they amass whole libraries of them at a vast cost, and they everywhere sing the praises of Arabian lore. On the other hand, at the mention of Christian books they disdainfully protest that such works are unworthy of their notice. The pity of it! Christians have forgotten their own tongue, and scarce one in a thousand can be found able to compose in fair Latin a letter to a friend! But when it comes to writing Arabic, how many there are who can express themselves in that language with the greatest elegance, and even compose verses, which surpass in formal correctness those of the Arabs themselves! [21]

Christians retained their religion but adopted the ways of the Arabs. Many Christians held responsible jobs in the civil administration and the army. Muslim rulers of Spain respected the Christian religion. Christians were free to practice their faith. They had their own civil rule, ecclesiastical hierarchy, monasteries and property. Despite the tolerant religious policy of the emirs of Cordova, there were also some restrictions upon Christians. In accordance with the Sharia, they were given security and protection as citizens on condition of paying the *dhimmi* tax, the *jizya*. Many Christians regarded this as burdensome. The laws of blasphemy regarding the Prophet, his teachings and the Qur'an were strictly enforced and any violations were punishable by death. Besides, there were certain restrictions imposed on public displays of Christianity like bell-ringing and processions, but any violations of these restrictions provoked no official censure and were mostly glossed over by the officials. However, when priests passed through Muslim quarters in their distinctive clerical costumes, according to Eulogius, some vulgar people showed intolerance and laughed at them. Christians also resented decrees of the emirs that declared circumcision obligatory, not only for Muslims but also for Christians. In this

connection, after assessing all the evidence from both the Latin and Arabic sources, Kenneth B. Wolf concludes:

> For the most part the laws designed to keep Christians and Muslims at what the jurists regarded as the proper social distance went unenforced in ninth century Cordoba. Taxation and the proscriptions against blasphemy and apostasy are the only exceptions. Of these only the *jizya* could have served as anything like a perennial reminder of the subordinate status of the Cordoban Christians. The occasions for enforcing the other two were, under normal circumstances, simply too few and far between to underscore the religious divisions.[22]

Foremost among those who held a hostile attitude towards Muslims were the priests. They opposed Muslim domination. Reinhardt Dozy (1820--83), famous Orientalist scholar and historian, describes the attitude of priests:

> They instinctively hated the Mohammedans--and the more, because they held entirely false views with regard to Mohammed and his teaching. Living as they did amongst Arabs, nothing would have been easier for them than to learn the truth upon these matters, but stubbornly refusing to seek it from the fountain-head so close at hand, they preferred to give credence to, and disseminate, every ridiculous fable, whatever its source, concerning the Prophet of Mecca.[23]

The martyrs of Cordova

The group that played the most conspicuous part in slandering the Prophet belongs to the Martyrs Movement, which arose in Cordova between 850 and 860. These martyrs belonged to a small minority of Christians who openly denounced the Prophet in public places, including at mosques during prayer times, as an act of defiance. Thus they courted the harsh penalty of death. These zealots used extremely offensive language against the Prophet and Islam. Their goal was to achieve martyrdom at the hands of infidels. The way to achieve martyrdom was simply to denounce Muhammad and his teachings in the foulest possible way, thereby violating the laws of blasphemy and courting execution. There is no doubt that the zealots followed this

practice audaciously. In Muslim Spain there were no laws against the practice of Christianity nor any official pressure on Christians to demonstrate any loyalty to the Prophet or Islam. As long as Christians did not violate the laws against blasphemy, their security was guaranteed, and they had nothing to fear. They were neither subject to persecution for their faith nor forced to convert to Islam, which Eulogius also attested.

The zealots took the initiative on their own to vilify the Prophet and Islam and incur punishment for the offence of blasphemy. The case of Isaac, for instance, demonstrates how the zealots voluntarily invoked the penalty of death. Isaac was a well-educated young man from a rich and noble family. He knew Arabic very well. He was appointed a *katib* (secretary at the Court) by Emir Abd ar-Rahman II (r. 822--52). But after a while he gave up this career and became a monk in the Convent of Tabanos where he devoted himself to a life of rigorous penitence, fasting, and prayers. In his seclusion, he became a religious fanatic. He became convinced that he was called upon by Christ to immolate himself for what he saw as his cause. Therefore, he went to Cordova and he presented himself to a *qadi* (a Muslim judge) informing him that he was interested to embrace Islam if the *qadi* could instruct him. When the *qadi* started to explain the tenets of Islam, Isaac interrupted him and hurled abuse at him for failing to recognise the errors of Islam and its prophet. Dozy writes:

> Isaac exclaimed: 'Your Prophet hath lied, he hath deceived you; may he be accursed, wretch that he is, who hath dragged so many wretches with him to hell! Why dost not thou, a man of sense, abjure these pestilent doctrines? Is it possible that thou believest in the impostures of Mohammed? Embrace Christianity—therein lies salvation!' . . . 'Unhappy man,' said the Kadi at length, addressing the monk, 'perchance thou art drunk, or hast lost thy reason, and knowest not what thou sayest. Canst thou be ignorant that the immutable law of him thou so recklessly revilest, condemns to death those who dare to speak of him as thou hast spoken?' 'Kadi,' replied the monk quietly, 'I am in my right mind, and I have never tasted wine. Burning with the love of truth, I have dared to speak out to thee and the others here present. Condemn me to death: far from dreading the sentence, I yearn for it; hath not the Lord said:

> "Blessed are they which are persecuted for the truth's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?" '[24]

When the case was referred to Emir Abd ar-Rahman II, he ordered the execution of the monk and also promulgated an edict that reiterated that the death penalty awaited all those who violated the blasphemy laws. After Isaac's execution, he was elevated to sainthood at the request of the zealots, who attributed many miracles to him, that, as Eulogius mentions, he was said to have performed not only during his childhood but even before his birth.[25]

The goal of the martyrs was not to convert Muslims to Christianity, but rather to earn for themselves a place in the kingdom of heaven where Christ reigns. Eulogius mentions in one place that the spontaneity of the martyrs' confessions was due to their search 'for a short cut by which, freed from their bodies, they might come more quickly to their celestial homeland'.[26] This behaviour of the martyrs, considered reckless in the eyes of the majority of Christians was also objectionable on another account: it was motivated by selfishness for their own personal salvation and for their own pride; it did not show concern for the fate of the rest of the Christian community as a whole, a community that was living under Muslim rule. The martyrs' extremist road to salvation, despite the sincerity of their belief, was an emotional outburst of religious frenzy. As Norman Daniel explains:

> They clashed grossly both with Muslim popular devotion to the Prophet and with the official faith of the Qur'an. The 'activists' were compelled by a conviction that between Islam and Christianity there was and must be an unrestricted struggle. Intended to disrupt public order, their persistent denunciation of Islam could only lead in the end, as it was meant to do, to their execution, although the evidence is that the authorities proceeded reluctantly. In these frenetic and apparently infectious suicides for righteousness' sake we cannot avoid an impression of mass hysteria.[27]

A number of Christian militants came under the sway of two friends, Eulogius of Cordova (one of the most learned priests of his day who died a martyr in 859), and Paul Alvarus, a layman. Eulogius' book *Memoriale Sanctorum* is our leading source

on the martyrs of Cordova and a passionate defence of the 'holy' cause he espoused. Alvarus wrote his polemical work the *Indiculus Luminosus* and the *Life of Eulogius*. Their views are quite similar. For both, the rule of Islam meant that the final preparation of the appearance of the Antichrist was drawing near. As Southern mentions, the two friends 'found in the Bible the evidences they needed. Such evidences were not difficult to find. If they had been sceptical men, the very ease with which the search was successful might have warned them that it was futile. But they were not sceptical men, and they have had a long line of successors who were not sceptical men.'[28]

The vast majority of the Andalusian Christian community found no justification for the foolhardy zealots clamouring for martyrdom. The opponents of Eulogius objected that the martyrs 'suffered at the hands of men who venerated both God and a law and were not killed as ones summoned to sacrifice to the idols.'[29] This point, in fact, refuted the views of those who compared the fate of the zealot martyrs with those Christians who perished under pagan Roman rule. But at this time, as Wolf explains,

> the issue was the character of the persecutors, not the victims. The Roman prefects were pagans who implemented sacrificial tests of imperial loyalty, leaving the ancient Christians no choice but to resist and denounce the Roman gods. On the other hand the Muslims as Eulogius' opponents correctly observed, were monotheists who worshipped the same God as they, though living according to their own revealed law. This was, for the assimilated Christians, a very powerful difference. As far as they were concerned the fact that Islam was not a pagan religion served both to legitimate their cooperative attitudes towards the Muslims and to render inappropriate the radical attitude of the confessors.[30]

Socio-political conditions under Muslim rule gave the Andalusian Christians adequate protection and possibilities. As far as they could judge under the existing conditions there was no need to emphasis differences that separated Christianity from Islam. To proclaim the divinity of Christ while hurling abuse at the Prophet of Islam did not advance the cause of Christianity in any manner, nor did this perception have any doctrinal merits for which self-martyrdom could be commended.

The conciliatory attitude towards Islam by both laymen and the vast majority of priests, was in Eulogius' eyes, condemnable: 'Those who assert that these soldiers [both Eulogius and Alvarus frequently speak of the martyrs as "soldiers of God, fighting against an impious enemy"] of our own times were killed by men who worship God and have a law, are distinguished by no prudence with which they might at least give heed to cautious reflection, because if such a cult or law is said to be valid, indeed the strength of the Christian religion must necessarily be impaired.'[31]

Eulogius chastises robustly those who 'with sacrilegious lips dare to revile and blaspheme the Martyrs'.[32] He refutes those who witness the toleration shown by Muslims, and gathers quotations from the Bible and legends of the Saints that it was not only legitimate to seek martyrdom spontaneously, but that it was an act of piety, meritorious, and approved by God.

According to Eulogius, Christianity encompassed all truth, and no subsequent law that changed what Christ had revealed could be divinely inspired. Therefore, those Christians who accorded any recognition to the monotheistic teachings of Islam were to be helped out of their gross error. Eulogius asks: 'What is the purpose of believing that a demoniac full of lies could speak the truth? that one enveloped in fallacies could provide a law? that a perverse grove could produce good fruit? In the meantime, that abominable one brings evil from the terrible treasure of his heart, and offers a wealth of impiety to the foolish crowd, so that both he and they are cast down into the eternal void.'[33]

Eulogius sharply condemns those Christians who were conciliatory to Islam and unleashes his diatribe against Islam by emphasising that any Christological parallels with Islam were Arianism, not Christianity. He holds the Prophet to be at the apex of heretical fallacy and the source of his revelation to be Satan, the eternal mischief-monger:

> Of all the authors of heresy since the Ascension, this unfortunate one, forming a sect of novel superstition at the instigation of devil, diverged most widely from the assembly of the holy church, defaming the ancient authority of the law,

> rejecting the visions of the prophets, trampling the truth of the holy gospel, and detesting the doctrine of the apostles.[34]

He portrays Muhammad as a 'false prophet' by applying the characteristics of a false prophet mentioned in the Bible. The major historical source he used for his polemic was a brief Latin account of the life of Muhammad that he found among other manuscripts during his sojourn in northern Spain in Navarre at the monastery of Leyre near Pampelona. This text had existed in Spain from the late eighth or early ninth century. Diaz y Diaz, the editor of two existing versions of this text, is of the opinion that its writer was a Mozarab.[35] It was a polemical composition, in tone and content, and mixed some bare facts from the life of the Prophet with homespun tales, and in places it presented Muhammad's life to be a parody of the life of Christ. Eulogius, according to Alvarus, was an avid reader. It is quite likely that he also knew a great deal more about the Prophet and Islam as described by Muslim writers, and that he could have used this material to present a balanced portrait of Muhammad and Islamic doctrine. However, in his eyes, this was the least acceptable course for him to follow. The Lyre account served his purpose perfectly well. He incorporated it in his arguments, which Wolf summarises:

> The anonymous author describes Muhammad as an 'avaricious usurer' working for 'a certain widow' whom he later married 'by some barbaric law.' During his business trips, he began to attend Christian church services and memorise the sermons he heard, thus becoming the 'wisest of all among the irrational Arabs.' Subsequently he experienced diabolic visions of a golden-mouthed vulture -- an apparent parody of the dove that traditionally represents the Holy Spirit -- claiming to be Gabriel. The vulture commanded Muhammad to pass himself off as a prophet, which proved an easy thing to do given the lack of sophistication of his pagan audience. And 'he made headway as [the Arabs] began to retreat from the cult of the idols and adore the incorporeal God in heaven.' . . . Acting as a prophet, Muhammad fabricated 'psalms' -- the *suras* of the Qur'an -- about various biblical figures as well as animals, birds and insects. . . . He prophesied that after his death he would rise after three days, but when the time came, he instead lay rotting until his stench attracted a pack of dogs. His followers buried what remained of his body and conspired to conceal the truth concerning his

> demise. 'It was right that a prophet of this kind fill the stomachs of dogs, a prophet who committed not only his own soul, but those of many, to hell.'[36]

This slanderous tale about the Prophet's death was elaborated in various versions in the later centuries. In the hands of Eulogius, and those who followed him, this material mixed together a few commonly known facts from the life of the Prophet, with unrestrained fantasies. The Spanish polemicists were not interested to get the easily available correct information about the Prophet and Islam from Muslim sources, and instead relied upon concocted fables which they found to be of greater use in combating Islam.

Apart from calling the Prophet a 'heresiarch' and a 'false prophet', Eulogius also applies the term *praecursor antichristi* to Muhammad. He mentions his teacher Abbot Spera-in-Deo, a 'great light of the church in our times' who had exerted a powerful influence on him and Alvarus, and instilled ruthless hatred of Islam in the minds of these two students who became famous. The abbot, according to Eulogius, described the Qur'anic heaven as 'not a Paradise, but a brothel, and most obscene of places'.[37] Eulogius had a large stock of insults and false accusations against Muslim beliefs, which were and are deeply offensive and unsavoury to a Muslim. Daniel remarks:

> The claim [made by Eulogius] . . . that Islam teaches that the mother of the Lord would lose her virginity in the future state is a libel on Islam that we shall never come across again. The artificial rhetoric of his exaggerated tirade about it is compatible with a lack of assurance. Yet most of his information, and many of the Gospel texts he uses in argument, stand at the beginning of a long tradition, which he himself claims was already living: 'many of our people . . . have taken up the pen against this shameless diviner (*vates*).'[38]

An impartial inquirer may ask: Why did such absurd views of Islam and the Prophet arise in the first place that continued to dominate the thinking of Christian writers to shape a distorted image of Islam for so long? Part of the answer has to be sought within the Christian tradition which viewed the Bible as the ultimate guide, and also provided authentic information about both past and future events. Any event or

development whose interpretation appeared to be at all at variance with the biblical texts was therefore wrong and out of place from the divine plan. Accordingly, Islam was judged in the light of biblical texts that provided Hispanic Christian writers, as Southern points out, with 'the first and rigidly coherent view of Islam', but this view was a product of ignorance of a particular type:

> They were ignorant of Islam, not because they were far removed from it like the Carolingian scholars, but for the contrary reason that they were in the middle of it. If they saw and understood little of what went on round them, and if they knew nothing of Islam as a religion, it was because they wished to know nothing. The situation of an oppressed and unpopular minority within a minority is not a suitable one for scientific inquiry into the true position of the oppressor. . . . They were fleeing from the embrace of Islam: it is not likely that they would turn to Islam to understand what it was they were fleeing from.[39]

Alvarus devoted the entire second half of his book *Indiculus Luminosus* to the defence and encouragement of the martyrs, and by a close commentary on passages from the Books of Daniel and Job he concluded that the role of Muhammad and Islam in his age had clearly been foretold. According to his interpretation, traditional references to the Antichrist in these books were applicable to Muhammad. For instance, Alvarus starts his description of the fourth beast in the Book of Daniel 7:23-25:

> The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be greater than all the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it into pieces. And the ten horns of the same kingdom shall be ten kings: and another shall rise up after them, and he shall be mightier than the former, and he shall bring down three kings. And he shall speak words against the Most High [Aram. '*Illai'a*'] and shall crush the saints of the Most High; and he shall think himself able to change times and laws, and they shall be given into his hands for a time, and times and a half [or for a season, and seasons and half a season].

Alvarus, following the traditional patristic version of this passage, thought that the fourth beast was the Roman Empire. Thereafter, he uses creative substitution to

complete the list. The ten horns were the barbarian invaders who destroyed the Roman Empire, whereas the eleventh horn 'which everyone throughout history has identified . . . as Antiochus'[40] became a symbol for Muhammad and his followers who vanquished the rulers of Greeks, Visigoths and Franks (why Alvarus included Franks, for which there was no historical ground whatsoever, he does not explain). The words spoken against God, the crushing of saints, changing the time and laws are easily applied to the Prophet, because he spoke of Jesus as only a prophet of God, thus refusing to acknowledge him as God; Muslims introduced their own calendar and their own laws, as in their book. Now Alvarus turned to interpret the obscure phrase 'a time, and times and a half' to guess the time when Islam would come to an end. As Wolf describes it: 'Making use of the reference in Psalm 89, he algebraically substituted seventy years for each of the three and half "times" and calculated that the end would come after 245 years of Islamic rule, that is, as he figured it, in the year 870.'[41] Since he wrote this in 854, it meant there were only a few years left before it happened. To him, the prospects looked bright and sanguine.

In Daniel 11:38-39 the word *Maozim* (god of fortresses), according to Alvarus, was the same whom the Muslim *muezzin* (one who calls to prayers) venerated from the 'fuming towers' of the mosques. He was obviously playing upon the similarities of the words, but the conclusion he drew was misleading. Similarly he interpreted Job 40 and 41which mention the Nehemoth ('hippopotamus') and the Leviathan ('dragon') showing the connection between the beasts and Muhammad. The sins of the Israelites of Jerusalem are condemned in Jeremiah 5:7-8 thus: 'The Lord asked, "Why should I forgive the sins of my people? They have abandoned me and have worshipped gods that are not real. I fed my people until they were full but they committed adultery and spent their time with prostitutes. They were like well-fed stallions wild with desire, each lusting for his neighbour's wife." ' Thus with the support of Jeremiah 5:8, Alvarus enters into a foray of invective against the Prophet's sexuality, transforming him into a libertine. He must have heard the tradition 'that the Prophet had the virile strength of forty, which would seem to many later Christian critics one way in which Islam condemned itself.'[42]

In fact, the question of Muhammad's sexuality and polygamous marriages profoundly fascinated Christian writers throughout the Middle Ages and afterwards.

The priests and monks who were brought up within the puritanical Christian tradition of ascetic ideas, celibacy or monogamy, found the Muslim rules of matrimony immoral and antithetical to that of Christianity; and Muhammad's teaching totally at odds with Christ's teaching. This is evident in the following passage where Alvarus compares the two personages as he saw for his selective purpose, but shows total disregard for any historical facts about the life and mission of the Prophet:

> This enemy of our Saviour has consecrated to feasting and debauchery the sixth day of the week, which, in memory of our Lord's passion, should be a day of mourning and fasting. Christ taught chastity to his disciples; Mohammed, to his, preached gross pleasures, impure delights, even incest. Christ preached marriage; Mohammed divorce. Christ enjoined soberness and fasting; Mohammed, revelry and gluttony. Christ has ordained that on fast-days a man should hold himself aloof from his lawful wife [though, these words he attributes to Jesus cannot be found in the New Testament]; Mohammed has dedicated such days to carnal pleasures.[43]

Spanish apologists eagerly seized on any hint of sexual immorality. Both Eulogius and Alvarus, as Daniel explains, had 'sexual preoccupations that can be recognised as neurotic. Alvarus harps on lubricious accusations against Islam so much as to suggest that he is less than sure of his own innocence. Eulogius, innocently incapable of introspection, was fascinated by the sufferings of another girl convert [Flora] . . . He seems quite unaware of the sexuality threaded through his accounts of young women.'[44]

In the first part of his book, Alvarus complains about the lack of support in the Christian community for martyrs. Like Eulogius, his portrayal of Muhammad and Islam was done in such a way as to justify the suicidal work the martyrs undertook. Even though the whole approach of Alvarus and Eulogius towards Islam was intended to support the martyrs, this may not have much intellectual appeal to present-day readers. But it cannot be denied that both of these writers felt a sense of urgency in their mission and therefore they opposed the complacency of their fellow Christians who had found accommodation with their Muslim rulers.

So far, we have seen some representative examples of the apologetic and polemical works of Christian writers from the Christendoms of the East, Byzantium and Muslim Spain. In all three major geographical areas there emerged some common themes regarding Islam. One of them focused upon Muhammad's character and his false prophethood. He was accused of heinous moral lapses; his polygamous marriages were looked upon as proof of his sexual fixation, a subject around which Christian polemicists wove fanciful fables. Secondly, he was accused of permitting violence to spread his religion, whereas, by contrast, the spread of Christianity was said to have been by peaceful missionary activity. As Norman Daniel elaborates:

> Europeans picked on the most easily understood areas of difference and exaggerated them. Their preoccupations dulled their apprehension of Arab life and grossly distorted the facts of the Prophet's life and of the Arabia of his day. They made inequitable comparisons. They criticised the Prophet for making war against the unbelievers in Mecca and the Jews in Medina who had attacked him; Jesus had fought no war. Yet so slight was the resulting difference between the two religions that that their laws of holy war approximated in great detail, and Muslims tolerated Christians more willingly and persistently than Christians did Muslims.[45]

The question of Muslims' sexuality, a favourite theme of Christian writers, has also more to do with outpourings of their fertile fantasies than with actuality. The laws of marriage and concubinage of the two religions are different, but as Daniel adds further:

> Europeans did appreciate that their practice was much the same as the practice of their Muslim neighbours. . . . As far as public behaviour is concerned we can be sure that the Arab world exacted a much greater degree of decorum in relation to women, and often a less degree of decorum in relation to homosexuality, than did contemporary Europe, but there is no reason to suppose that there was any significant difference in sexual practice of all kinds.[46]

By grounding their work on such assumptions and projections of wickedness in all possible ways on a rival faith and its prophet, the polemicists successfully created a

grossly deformed image of Islam in the Middle Ages, a view that still influences Western attitudes towards Islam and Muslims. Now we turn to the Latin West to see how Islam was perceived there.

The Catholic West and Islam

For Latin Christendom the establishment and consolidation of Muslim rule in Spain and Sicily had brought a rival faith and its political power into its own sphere and territories. Despite this, Northern Europe did not feel that it was under immediate threat from the forces of Islam. Therefore, the situation did not call for any robust response against Muslims. It was only in the eleventh century that a European counter-offensive, the Reconquista, started against the Muslim presence in European lands, while the Crusading movement had even grander designs, to which we will turn later.

At present, we confine our discussion to how Islam was perceived in the West in the period preceding the united Christian thrust against Muslims in Europe and the Middle East. It should be kept in mind that the terms 'Europe' and 'Europeans' were not used in the Middle Ages. At that time the concept of Christendom prevailed to show the identity of Christian countries. The notion of Europe, as we understand it now, is of a much later date. Bernard Lewis writes:

> Europe is a European notion, as is the whole geographical system of continents, of which Europe was the first. Europe conceived and made Europe; Europe discovered, named, and in a sense made America. Centuries earlier, Europe had invented both Asia and Africa, the inhabitants of which, until the age of the European world supremacy in the nineteenth century, were unaware of these names, these identities, even of these classifications which Europeans had devised for them. Even in Europe, the notion of Europe as a cultural and political entity was relatively modern--a postmedieval secularised restatement of what had previously been known as Christendom.[47]

In contrast to the Christendoms of the Orient, Byzantium and Spain, Northern Europe showed little interest in Islam in the early Middle Ages. The reason for this cannot be

attributed to a lack of contact between the West and Islam; there were considerable contacts throughout this period. The Arabs fought against Gaul at Poitiers in 732, and thereafter there were military confrontations in southern Gaul, the coast of Italy and northern Spain. As mentioned earlier, in the early Middle Ages Christian writers' usual method of historical research was within the context of biblical exegesis: the Bible provided the ultimate standard against which the course of historical events, past or present, had to be analysed and judged. One can see how the Anglo-Saxon monk, the Venerable Bede (673--735), a great scholar of the Bible whose influence lasted until the twelfth century, explains the origin of Saracens, for instance. In his Bible commentaries he says that Saracens were descendants of Hager. As Ishmael was regarded the forefather of the Saracens, what could be a more fitting description than to portray him as a wild man of the desert whose hand was against every man's as the Old Testament (Genesis 16:12) had described him. The character of the forefather was enough to explain the nature of his descendants, the Saracens. When Bede wrote, Western Europe was under military pressure from Muslims. In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, written in 731, there is a brief mention of the military struggle in Gaul. He writes: 'At this time, a swarm of Saracens ravaged Gaul with horrible slaughter; but after a brief interval in that country they paid the penalty of their wickedness.'[48] Possibly, this refers to the Battle of Poitiers in 732 in which Charles Martel uprooted the invading Arab forces, but Wallace-Hadrill suggests that it records the victory of Odo of Aquitaine in 721.[49] However, one striking aspect of Bede's writings and of his Carolingian successors is the lack of any hostility towards Muslims at a time when they were threatening Europe.

In Chapter 3 we saw how the Merovingian *Chronicle of Fredegar* gave a factual account of Arab conquests. The Carolingian rulers exchanged embassies with Baghdad and Cordova. Southern Italian city-states like Amalfi had commercial contacts with Muslim counties. The Emirate of Bari existed from 847 to 871. The Muslim armies were on the Garigliano, and the Saracen pirates controlled the base at Fraxinatum (La Garde-Freinet) from the closing years of the ninth century until 939. However, these encounters, commercial, diplomatic or military, evoked no intellectual quest on the part of Catholic writers to understand Islam. They did not follow the example of the Spanish apologists either. It is quite natural that some knowledge of Spanish writers may have reached the Catholic North and may have led

to focusing on the issue of the Antichrist, but in discussing this theological problem the Latin writers paid little attention to the historical role of the Saracens or their religion. However, this does not mean that they were completely ignorant of Islam.

An early Carolingian view of Islam is that of Paschasius Radbertus, one of the most learned theologians of his day in the North, who in his commentary on Matthew, probably written in 850s, seems to have been aware of the monotheism of Islam and its relationship with Judaism and Christianity. He mentions that the Saracens in the past knew about Christianity, but later 'they were wickedly seduced by some pseudo-apostles, disciples of Nicholas so to speak, and composed for themselves a law from the Old as well as the New Testament, and so perverted everything under the cult of one God, unwilling to agree with us or with the Jews in any respect . . . [They] had taken upon themselves, by God's just judgement, the Spirit of Error, perhaps, as many think, Antichrist will be taken up [or: begotten] by them.'[50]

European Christians showed an amazing reluctance to call Muslim Arabs by a name that revealed their religious identity with Islam. They were called at different periods Saracens, Ishmaelites, Hagarenes or Agarnenis, Moors, Tartars and Mohammedans. After the emergence of the Ottoman Empire, Islam was equated with Turks, and a convert to Islam was said to have 'turned Turk'. Muslim writers in the Middle Ages described the rival Christians by different names, such as Romans, Slavs, Franks and Nazarenes depending on where and how they encountered them. In religious matters, Christians called Muslims pagans, heathens, or infidels. Muslims returned the compliments by naming them unbelievers and associationists. But, as Bernard Lewis remarks, 'the most common religious term which each applied to the other was, however, "infidel", and it was in the exchange of this insult that they achieved their fullest and most perfect mutual understanding.'[51] The use of stereotypes perpetuated the negative associations attached to the enemy.

Southern calls the first four centuries of Islam extending to 1100 as an age of ignorance about Islam. He writes:

> Western writers before 1100 were in this situation with regard to Islam. They knew virtually nothing about Islam as a religion. For them Islam was only one

> of a large number of enemies threatening Christendom from every direction and they had no interest in distinguishing the primitive idolatries of Northmen, Slavs, and Magyars from the monotheism of Islam, or the Manichaean heresy from that of Mahomet.[52]

This view has evoked mixed response from other experts. The most prominent among them is Benjamin Kedar who in his well-documented book *Crusade and Mission*, produces enough historical material that challenges Southern's formulation. He shows that a good deal of information about Islam was available to the Catholic North but it was scattered; nobody had thought of bringing it together so that it could be of use to the writers. He writes that 'it is equally evident that the various notices about Islam did not serve as a point of departure for a preoccupation, to say nothing of altercation with it. The available building blocks remained dispersed and unused . . . Thus, lack of interest rather than ignorance characterised the Catholic European stance towards the religion of the Saracens in the period under discussion.'[53]

These attitudes towards Islam should be seen against the political background of the period. By the eleventh century the balance of forces between Islamic world and Latin Christendom underwent remarkable changes that had far-reaching consequences for the political fortunes of Islam in Europe

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Chapter 8. The Christian counter-attack

The Reconquista

Until the eleventh century, the West as compared to Muslim Spain or the Arab Caliphate had been backward and illiterate. Successive waves of barbarian invasions by land and sea had caused great destruction and dislocation. While the Vikings raided all along the Atlantic coasts, the Magyars rampages extended as far west as northern Italy and the Rhineland. It was the period when Islam had enjoyed relative peace and security from outside threats, and built its splendid urban culture. For European Christians the threat of barbarian invasions finally came to an end when the Vikings and Magyars converted to Christianity around 1000. The Normans of Normandy, who were of Viking ancestry, and some of the Slavs had also converted to Christianity. This period was marked by a rapid revival of trade and commerce. New towns and markets grew up to meet the increasing demand for merchandise and handicrafts.

By the middle of the eleventh century, the political situation on the southern frontiers of Europe drastically changed. Southern Italy became a battleground for rival Lombard dukes, the Byzantine Empire and the Muslims. By 1016, the Normans who were originally mercenaries became deeply involved in constant warfare. The Norman knights, efficient and effective in military adventures, began to establish estates and principalities for themselves. By 1071 they had defeated the last Byzantine stronghold in southern Italy. Under Roger, they invaded Sicily and by 1091 they had conquered the whole island from the Muslims. Two of the Norman rulers of Sicily Roger II (1130--54) and Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1215--50) who closely followed the Muslim culture and traditions of regalia have been called ‘the two baptised sultans of Sicily’.

From 1040 onwards the Caliphate of Baghdad and the Byzantine Empire had to face the Seljuk Turks. The Seljuks had extended their empire in Persia and the Arab lands. They captured Jerusalem from the Fatimid Caliphs of Egypt in 1070. Emperor Romanus Diogenes raised a large army; some estimates put it at 100,000 men, to fight

against the Seljuks who were making inroads into Byzantine territory. The Seljuks were led by Sultan Alp Arslan. The battle proved to be the worst military disaster to befall Byzantium. The Byzantine army was totally annihilated in 1071 in the Battle of Manzikert. Romanus was taken prisoner. How the captured emperor was treated by the victorious Sultan is described thus by Nicephorus Bryennius, the son-in-law of the later Byzantine emperor Alexius Comnenus:

> But in the enemy camp, meanwhile, the chief of the Persians, Sultan Alp Arslan, although Emperor Romanus was his prisoner-of-war, did not allow himself to be intoxicated by his victory, but rather showed a moderation in his triumph that no one could have imagined. He comforted the prisoner, admitted him to his table, gave liberty to all the other prisoners in whose favour the emperor interceded, and even gave liberty to the emperor himself.[1]

The Seljuks after 1071 penetrated further and by 1080 most of Asia Minor, the breadbasket and prime recruiting ground for Byzantium, was in their hands. This opened the way to later Ottoman invasions of Europe.

Having secured its frontiers against external invasion and against the Byzantine influence, western Christendom was in a position to prepare for the first counter-offensive against Islam. After the break-up of the Cordovan state, Muslim power in the Iberian Peninsula had diminished. From the middle of the eleventh century, the small Christian states of northern Spain, Castile, Leon, Navarre and Aragon started the Reconquista that developed into a centuries-long programme to recapture all the Spanish territories from the Muslims. The first stage of the Catholic victory in Spain was the capture of Toledo in 1085. The Genoese took the Arab base of Mahdia in Tunisia, the Pisans and their allies took the Italian cities in 1087.

Despite fierce Muslim resistance, by 1072 the Normans under Robert Guiscard and his brother Roger had reached Palermo, the capital of Sicily. Robert had declared a holy war against the Muslims, and made a passionate call to this end. Amatus of Montecassino gives a contemporary account of how the Normans responded to it:

> Everyone crossed themselves, raised their standards on high and began to fight. But God fought for the Norman, Christian host. He was their salvation, overthrowing and destroying the infidels. And the Saracens began to flee, much heartening the Christians who pursued the pagans vigorously. It was a marvellous thing, never heard of before, for there was not a knight or foot-soldier killed or wounded on the Christian side. Yet so many Saracens were killed that no man might tell their number.[2]

By 1091, the whole island of Sicily was in the hands of the Normans. Malta was captured in 1090, which gave the West control of the Mediterranean straits separating Europe from Africa. The Popes gave their blessings to campaigns against the Muslims. In 1063 the Pope had declared the Reconquista to be a holy crusade. Many northern knights heeded to this call and joined the Spaniards in fight against the Muslims. The Popes successfully aroused the warlike passions of European feudal society against the Saracens.

The Christian advance came to a halt when on appeal from some influential Spanish Muslims, the Almoravids, the Berber rulers of the vast northwest African empire, intervened. They ruled Muslim Spain from 1090 to 1145, and then the Almohads, another Berber dynasty, replaced them. The Almohads stabilised the Muslim rule but they had to withdraw from Spain in 1223 due to serious dynastic dissension back home. Thus after a long pause of over a century, the Christian states were in a position to resume their military offensive. They won a number of important victories. They captured Cordova in 1236 and Seville in 1248. Soon all that was left of the former Muslim states was the small kingdom of Granada, famous for the great architectural monuments of the Alhambra. This was captured by the Christians in 1492 and became a part of the united kingdom of Castile and Aragon.

What was the role of the Catholic faith in the Reconquista? A commonly held view among some Spanish historians has been that there was an essential continuity between the Catholic faith of Visigothic times and that of Ferdinand and Isabella and thus the driving force behind the Reconquista lay in religious enthusiasm. The difficulty with this view is that the kingdom of the Asturias from which the Reconquista began was never strongly Catholic and was never properly a part of

Visigothic Spain. Under the Muslim rule the policy of religious toleration extended to all. Montgomery Watt writes:

> Certainly in the Arab state at this period Muslims, Christians and Jews seemed to have mixed freely with one another and to have shared fully in a common culture. The influence of religious differences was further weakened firstly by the fact that many Christians and Muslims had relatives adhering to the other faith, and secondly by the almost universal acceptance, at least in the towns, of the dominant culture. In this culture, too, though it was in certain senses 'Islamic', we find that until the later tenth century Arab secular ideas were more prominent than specifically religious ideas.[3]

In their struggle to gain independence and then to extend their power, the Asturias and other small northerly kingdoms turned more and more to the Catholic faith. They found in the cult of Saint James (Santiago) of Compostela, a source of supernatural power for waging struggle against the Muslims. Saint James was regarded as the brother of the Lord, or even the twin-brother of the Lord; and a pilgrimage to his shrine came to be associated with the old Iberian belief in the Heavenly Twins. As Montgomery Watt says:

> Thus from the ninth century the Galicians were fully convinced that they had divine help in their wars and that, if they persevered, they would eventually be victorious. To believe that one has divine help, however, is not the same as believing that the enemy is anti-Christian; but the more one's own effort was associated with Christianity the more the name of 'Saracens', as the opponents were presumably called, would have a religious connotation. It is not clear, however, at what point the enemy came to be regarded as a religious enemy.[4]

One result of the Reconquest was that instead of local loyalties and identities emerging from military conflict with Muslims, a more definitive and wider sense of identity emerged. There was added emphasis on religious uniformity in the subsequent periods that were dominated by the Inquisition. Jews and Muslims under the Catholic rulers had a cruel fate in store for them. The crusading spirit of the Spanish rulers showed no mercy towards them. Since the fourteenth century anti-

Jewish sentiments grew in the Christian Spain. To escape the reprisals and under social pressure, a large number of Jews converted to Christianity. They were officially known as *conversos* or *nuevos cristianos*, 'new Christians', but old Christians called them *marranos.* The Spanish word *marrano* literally means 'swine' and metaphorically it was used for a person of swinish character and habits. The *marranos* were suspected of following their old faith in secret, but it is equally possible that some became sincere Christians. However, during the fifteenth century, many Christians became obsessed with the fear of the crypto-Jews as a potential threat to their society. In 1483, Ferdinand and Isabella established the Spanish National Inquisition to hunt down these enemies. The inquisitors left the Jews who had not been baptised alone, but the *marranos* could be arrested, tortured and forced to confess their religious deviousness. Within twelve years of the Inquisition some 13,000 people, most of them Jews, were killed. When the Reconquista came to a successful end with the capture of Granada in 1492, the Jews in the same year were banished from Spain. Most of them sought shelter in countries under Islamic rule in the eastern Mediterranean, in Constantinople or in other former Byzantine areas that became part of the Ottoman Empire. In 1523, a Jewish historian belonging to the old Jewish community of Crete named Elihahu Capsali described how the Spanish Jews were received in the Ottoman state:

> Sultan Beyazid, the King of Turkey, heard of all the evil the King of Spain had done to the Jews, and that they were seeking a refuge, and he took pity on them. So he sent emissaries, and he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, that none of the governors of his cities was permitted to reject or expel the Jews, but that they must welcome them. And all of the people in all of the Kingdom welcomed the Jews, protecting them night and day. They were not abused, nor was any hurt done to them. Thousands and tens of thousands of those who had been expelled from Spain came to Turkey, and the land was filled with them.[5]

Within the Ottoman realm Istanbul and Salonika (in Greek: Thessaloniki) became the big centres of Jewish settlement. Salonika for more than four centuries was the economic centre of the Ottoman Europe. By the seventeenth century, Jews as a religious community made up a majority of the total population of Salonika. They

played an important role in the trade and banking system there. When the Nazi forces occupied Greece during the twentieth century's Second World War, they sent the remote descendants of those Salonika Jews to death-camps in Germany where most of them perished.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, after the Reconquest of most of Andalusia, many Muslims came under Christian rule. They came to be known as *mudéjares*, from the Arabic word for 'tributaries' or 'tame and domesticated animals'. The Kingdom of Grenada surrendered in 1492. Under the terms of the treaty with the last emir, Ferdinand and Isabella gave full guarantees for the safety, and religious and civic rights of the Muslims if they chose to remain in the former kingdom. But Ferdinand and Isabella soon broke these promises. In February 1502, on the insistence of Cardinal Cisneros, a decree was passed offering the remaining Muslims of Grenada the same choice that ten years earlier had been given to the Jews--baptism, exile, or death. Having no real choice, many became Christians. In fact, many of them were simply forcibly baptised. These victims of forced conversion, in Granada, Castile or Aragon, were called *moriscos*, and were subject to the Inquisition like the *marranos*. As these converts had received no instruction in Christian faith, they remained true to their religion. Norman Daniel points to their dilemma thus:

> Suspicion of crypto-Islam was aroused in the Inquisition by many curious circumstances. Some related to religion, like washing, particularly at work, refusing to eat pork or animals that had not been killed in the right way, or to drink wine; and others were purely customary, such as using henna, throwing sweets and cakes at a wedding, wrapping a corpse in clean linen. The Moriscos were subjected to different indignities and misfortunes in different areas, but they were universally exploited by the nobles and hated by the poor Christians. . . . The Catholic clergy could force or seduce their women with impunity, because there was no effective redress.[6]

Thus the fate of Jews and Muslims in Spain was sealed. As new Christians of Jewish and Moorish descent, they were suspect and vulnerable to the Inquisition until the seventeenth century. Spain rejected the *moriscos* as part of society, out of intolerance, prejudice and fear. Their final expulsion began in 1606 and was completed in 1614.

The aim of the Reconquista had been realised. The numbers of the *moriscos* at the time of their expulsion has been estimated to be some 320, 000. Most of them went to North Africa and some found shelter in the Ottoman territories.

The Crusades

For more than two centuries and by military means, Western Crusaders pushed the boundaries of Latin Christendom outwards. They showed their strength by conquering Spain, Sicily and Malta from the Muslims. They extended their power eastwards to Byzantium, which was conquered, plundered, and occupied by the Latin armies in 1204. 'The Crusades,' writes James A. Brundage, 'thus constitute one phase of a vast movement of the people of the West to extend their frontiers and to incorporate within the Western European family most of the West's immediate neighbours. The Crusades were, in fact, an integral part of the beginning of European colonialism.'[7] Within the religious sphere, the Crusades were a determined effort on the part of the Latin powers to impose their rule on the holy places of Christianity in the Middle Eastern region, and thus restore the holy places to Christian hands by wresting them from Muslims.

They started their offensive in the heartland of the Muslim world to conquer the Holy Land from Muslims, and to establish their Latin kingdoms. The impact of the Crusades had far-reaching consequences for the image of the Other in the political consciousness of the two communities, and this has extended over the centuries. The legacy of the Crusades, no doubt, still continues to haunt Muslims. Before we discuss what image of Islam emerged during the Crusading movement, we can briefly mention the main course of events, from the start of the First Crusade that led to the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 to the eventual fall of Acre (Akka) to the Muslims in 1291, extending over a period of about two centuries.

The Seljuk Empire that had brought the greater part of the Middle East under its rule soon disintegrated. After 1092, independent Seljuk principalities replaced what was once the mighty Seljuk Empire. The Reconquest had made western Christendom aware of its strength whereas the Muslim world as whole was disunited and fragmented. As the sea routes to the Holy Land were reopened there was a big surge

in the number of Christian pilgrims to Palestine. Since the surrender of Jerusalem to Caliph Omar in 638, Muslim rulers protected the holy places of the Christians. Christian pilgrims visited freely the Holy Sepulchre and other shrines, which were hallowed by the events of the Old and New Testament. Most pilgrims travelled unarmed, bearing only a traditional pilgrim's staff in their hands.

However, from the middle of the eleventh century, warfare between the Seljuks and the Fatimids, the Seljuks' seizure of Anatolia from the Byzantines and then the internal conflicts within the Seljuk Empire that raged over Syria and Palestine, created difficulties for the pilgrims. It was the period when religious enthusiasm was at its peak in the Latin West. The reports of the difficulties which Western pilgrims faced returning from the Holy Land were freely used by the Papacy to stir peoples' passions against the Muslims. The papal intentions in this regard were already clear when Pope Gregory VII in 1074 called for a Crusade in a letter 'to all who are willing to defend the Christian faith', because many pilgrims who returned from Palestine had reported to him that

> a pagan race had overcome the Christians and with horrible cruelty had devastated everything almost to the walls of Constantinople, and were now governing the conquered lands with tyrannical violence, and that they had slain many thousands of Christians as if they were but sheep. If we love God and wish to be recognised as Christians, we should be filled with grief at the misfortune of this great empire [the Greek] and the murder of so many Christians. But simply to grieve is not our whole duty. The example of our Redeemer and our fraternal love demand that we should lay down our lives to liberate them.[8]

Thus Muslims were no longer portrayed as the religious and political enemies of Christianity; they were also said to be pagan idolaters and the enemies of God himself. And what could be more rewarding to a Christian than to fight the enemies of God? The Crusading movement made effective use of anti-Muslim propaganda to arouse the passions and fanaticism of the Christians against the Muslims. The situation in 1095, when Urban II, the successor to Gregory VII, declared the First Crusade, was not much different from that which had prevailed in 1074. The only

difference was that Gregory was not able to carry out his plans because he had became involved in a struggle for the control of the Western Church with the German emperor Henry IV, but Urban II had no such restraint. He had a free hand to mobilise the Latin rulers and armies for his grand objectives.

The eleventh century had seen the emergence of intense religious fervour and the greatest expansion of monasticism in the Latin West. Another aspect of the popular religious consciousness in this century was the widespread belief that the end of the world was imminent. As the world had not ended with the year 1000 as some had expected, it was said to be due to the will of God. Faith gives and sustains the hope of a believer. An argument based on assumptions of the will of God is flexible enough to explain and justify any event or happening. There were also many who believed that a large gathering of Christian pilgrims in Jerusalem could hasten the return of Christ. The most famous of these mass pilgrimages was the one that took place in 1064--65 under Gunther, Bishop of Bamberg, in which a party of seven thousand travelled to Jerusalem from Germany. But the Messiah, as they had expected, did not appear. Nevertheless, there arose new hopes for Doomsday at the end of the eleventh century. Some believed at this time the ‘last emperor’ who was to lead all the faithful to the Holy Land could be identified with the ‘king of the Franks’ and once there, they were to await the Second Coming of Christ.

The immediate cause of the Crusade was an appeal for aid that Pope Urban II had received from the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus against the Seljuk Turks who had taken possession of Anatolia and were threatening Constantinople itself. For the Byzantine emperor an obvious avenue to seek Western support was through the Pope, the spiritual leader of the West. But Urban II used the opportunity to call for not so much to aid the Greek Christians as to liberate Jerusalem from the enemies of Christianity and God. In 1095, at the Council of Clermont in southern France, before a large multitude of clergy and nobles, he delivered one of the most effective and passionate speeches in history that set in motion the First Crusade. Four contemporary chroniclers, Fulcher of Chartres, Baldric of Dol, Robert the Monk and Guibert of Nogent, who were present on the occasion and heard the Pope, have left their accounts of the speech. I quote below three passages from Robert the Monk’s version of Urban’s lengthy speech to ‘the race of Franks . . . chosen and beloved by

God' that had a special task to accomplish for the country, the Catholic faith and the Holy Church:

> The sad news has come from Jerusalem and Constantinople that the people of Persia, [!], an accursed and foreign race, enemies of God, 'a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God' [Ps. 78:8], have invaded the lands of those Christians and devastated them with the sword, rapine, and fire. Some of the Christians they have carried away as slaves, others they have put to death. The churches they have either destroyed or turned into mosques. They desecrate and overthrow the altars. They circumcise the Christians and pour the blood from the circumcision on the altars or in the baptismal fonts. Some they kill in a horrible way by cutting open the abdomen, taking out a part of the entrails and tying them to a stake; they then beat them and compel them to walk until all their entrails are drawn out and they fall to the ground. Some they use as targets for their arrows. They compel some to stretch out their necks and then they try to see whether they can cut off their heads with one stroke of the sword. It is better to say nothing about their horrible treatment of the women. . . .
>
> They have taken from the Greek empire a tract of land so large that it takes more than two months to walk through it. Whose duty is it to avenge this and recover that land, if not yours? For to you more than to other nations the Lord has given the military spirit, courage, agile bodies and the bravery to strike those who resist you. . . . You should be moved specially by the holy grave of our Lord and Saviour which is now held by unclean peoples, and by the holy places which are treated with dishonour and irreverently befouled with their uncleanness. . . .
>
> O bravest of knights, descendants of unconquered ancestors, . . . Let no possessions should keep you back, no solicitude for your property. Your land is shut from all sides by the sea and mountains, and it is too thickly populated. There is not much wealth here, and the soil scarcely yields enough to support you. On this account you kill and devour each other, and carry on war and mutually destroy each other. Let your hatred and quarrels cease, your civil wars come to an end, and all your dissensions stop. Set out on the road to the Holy Sepulchre, take that land from that wicked people, and make it your own . . . Set

> out on this journey and you will obtain the remission of your sins and be sure of the incorruptible glory of the kingdom of heaven.[9]

The impact of this extremely inflammatory and calculatedly misleading speech by the Pontiff was beyond any anyone's belief. The rallying cry in unison from the vast multitude was, 'Deus lo volt,' ('God wills it'). The great enthusiasm to fight the enemies of Christianity had gripped the masses and fired their imagination with the idea of a crusade, a holy war. The general feeling roused by the prospect for a holy war was more than the Pope could have expected. Watt depicts the scene:

> Masses of men were deeply stirred, and in the enthusiasm of the moment often acted recklessly, like the followers of Peter the Hermit. The Crusading movement soon acquired a momentum of its own. Even when the religious idealism evaporated, political leaders still thought there were advantages in using the conception of Crusade. So powerful was the conception for a time that in Western Europe, with a metaphorical interpretation, it still has some vestigial influence.[10]

Urban had adroitly moulded his speech to appeal all sections of Western society. His word was the holy writ, the expression of great religious power the Papacy wielded against the secular system. He promised heavenly rewards to all those who took part in the war against Muslims, aroused the passions against the atrocities of the Seljuk Turks while he flattered the vanity of the Frankish knights, for whom the temptation of heavenly rewards hereafter were supplemented with concrete material gains accessible now. They were assured of the great opportunities open to them to gain wealth and acquire land through their military strength in the East. There is no doubt that Urban had a deep insight into political and social reality of the Latin world. As Philip K. Hitti notes:

> Not all, of course, who took the cross, were actuated by spiritual motives. Several of the leaders, including Bohemond, were intent upon acquiring principalities for themselves. The merchants of Pisa, Venice and Genoa had commercial interests. The romantic, the restless and the adventurous, in addition to the devout, found a new rallying-point and many criminals sought penance

> thereby. To the great masses in France, Lorraine, Italy and Sicily, with their depressed economic and social conditions, taking the cross was a relief rather than a sacrifice.[11]

Besides, his intention to extend help to Constantinople was also motivated to facilitate the submission of the Greek Church to Rome at a time when the Papacy had won enormous prestige and Urban enjoyed friendly relations with Alexius.

The emotional response to Urban's call for a crusade soon spread to Italy, Germany and England. Large armies were raised to fight the enemy. It should be noted that the Pope had proclaimed the First Crusade, but he left the direct control over crusade affairs to the barons when they led their armies to the East. It happened in later Crusades also that were proclaimed by the Popes, their actual planning and execution was carried out by lay lords.[12] Before the main armies set out on their journey, the situation was opportune for those who felt free to plunder and rob and commit all kinds of crimes under the cover of religion. As they had taken the Cross, they felt privileged to commit heinous crimes wherever they went. The first large-scale victims of the Crusades were not the Muslims but the European Jews. The Crusaders massacred the Jews of Spier, Worms, Mainz, Cologne and Trier. These massacres were organised and led by Count Emicho of Leisingen. Before killing the enemies of Christ abroad, they started with the killing of the enemies of Christ at home. Among the other notable zealots were Folkmar and Gotschalk who had gathered large crusader armies and entered into orgies of pillage, plunder and violence in various places.[13]

A fanatical French preacher, Peter the Hermit, also falls under this category. Early in 1096, he had gathered together a motley throng of crusading zealots consisting of peasants, vagabonds and landless knights. Peter and his rabble army arrived in Cologne in 1096. They marched through Hungary where they killed about four thousand Hungarians. Thus pillaging and looting along their route, they finally reached Constantinople. The civilised Byzantines were amazed by the strange sight of these barbarian hordes. Alexius alarmed at the excesses they committed had them ferried across the Bosporus to Asia Minor. Anna Comnena, daughter of Emperor Alexius describes the events:

> [Peter] crossed the Bosporus, and pitched camp at a village called Helenopolis. But as many as ten thousand French crusaders separated from the rest of the army and, with utmost cruelty, plundered the Turkish territory around Nicaea. They dismembered some of the babies, others they put on spits and roasted over a fire; those of advanced years they subjected to every form of torture. When the people inside the city of Nicaea learned what was happening they opened the gates and went out against the crusaders. . . . The race of Latins is generally noted for its love of money; but when it embarks on the invasion of a country, then it becomes totally unbridled, devoid of all reason. Since these men were advancing in no sort of order or discipline, they fell into the Turkish ambushes near Drakon and were miserably wiped out.[14]

This was the ignominious end of an ill-equipped and badly led crusader army of Peter and his associates. The Latins blamed the Byzantine emperor for the destruction of Peter's army.

The First Crusade

By 1096 a hundred and fifty thousand men, mostly Franks and Normans, answered the call and the first of the Crusades was launched. These troops were under the nominal command of Urban's legate, Bishop Adhèmar of Le Puy. The Crusaders started their march from Constantinople. They soon recovered Asia Minor from the Seljuks and restored it to Alexius. After crossing the Taurus Mountains, they captured Edessa, an old historical city, reputed to be the birthplace of Abraham, from the Christian kingdom of Armenia. This was the first Latin settlement and the first Latin state that the Crusaders established over a territory captured from Christians.

During their march across Asia Minor, they resorted to slaughter and destruction. They arrived at Antioch, one of the great cities of the Levant. They held the city under siege for nine months. The atrocities of the Crusaders during this march were without limit. When faced with food shortages, they resorted to cannibalism. 'According to Von Sybel, Mills and many other writers, cannibalism was openly

practised among the lower ranks of the Crusaders, especially the camp followers.'[15] In addition, they mutilated the dead for fun. When two thousand Turks were killed in a sortie in Antioch, their heads were cut off; some of them were exhibited as trophies and others were fixed on stakes around the camp. On another occasion they exhibited the heads of fifteen hundred slain Muslims before the weeping citizens. Antioch fell in June 1098 through the treachery of an Armenian. Shouting 'Dieu le veut', the Crusading army started its savage butchery in which ten thousand people were killed. As Mills says: 'The dignity of age, the helplessness of youth, and the beauty of the weaker sex, were disregarded by the Latin savages. Houses were no sanctuaries, and the sight of a mosque added new virulence to cruelty.'[16] The destruction of the city and its people in the words of a modern writer 'was a scene of blood and fire. Men, women, and children tried to flee through muddy alleyways, but the knights tracked them down easily, and slaughtered them on the spot. The last survivors' cries of horror were gradually extinguished, soon to be replaced by the off-key singing of drunken Frankish plunderers.'[17] Antioch became the capital of the second Crusader state, whose ruler was Bohemond.

After their victory at Antioch, the invaders moved to Ma'arrat al-Nu'man, a prosperous city of Syria. It was famous for being the place of the great Arab poet and rationalist thinker Abu'l-'Alā' al-Ma'arri, who had died in 1057. He once wrote that Muslims, Jews and Christians had all got it wrong; human beings were only of two sorts:

> The inhabitants of earth are of two sorts:
> Those with brains, but no religion,
> And those with religion, but no brains.

Forty years after the poet's death, in 1098, his hometown was surrounded by fanatic savages who had a religion, but little else. They besieged the city that had no army. In sheer desperation, the notables of the besieged city contacted Bohemond. The city capitulated to Bohemond when he promised the safety of the population in return for the surrender. They trusted his word. But his guarantee was soon violated when the Crusaders entered the city at dawn, and for three days they put people to the sword and committed the city to flames. The Crusaders massacred one hundred thousand

people, almost the entire population of the city, sparing some robust boys and beautiful women who were later sold in the slave-market of Antioch. Fulcher of Chartres, a contemporary chronicler, gives an eyewitness account of the course of events following the Crusaders' entry in the city:

> On that day and the next they killed all the Saracens from the greatest to the least and seized all their wealth. When the city had been destroyed in this way, Bohemond returned to Antioch. There he turned out the men of Count Raymond of Toulouse whom the latter had stationed to guard his share. Bohemond thus possessed the city and the whole province.[18]

As in Antioch, the Crusaders at Ma'arra turned to cannibalism. The Frankish chronicler Radulph of Caen reported: 'In Ma'arra our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking pots; they impaled children on spits and devoured them grilled.'[19] Fulcher of Chartres who had witnessed cannibalism of the soldiers of Christ at Ma'arra, wrote:

> But after twenty days [of the siege of Ma'arra], our people suffered a severe famine. I shudder to speak of it: our people were so frenzied by hunger that they tore flesh from the buttocks of the Saracens who had died there, which they cooked and chewed and devoured with savage mouths, even when it had been roasted insufficiently on the fire.[20]

Guibert of Nogent also mentions cannibalism rather defensively:

> When at Ma'arra – and wherever else – scraps of flesh from the pagans' bodies were discovered; when starvation forced our soldiers to the deed of cannibalism (which is known to have been carried out by the Franks only in secret and as rarely as possible), a hideous rumour spread among the infidel: that there were men in the Frankish army who fed very greedily on the bodies of Saracens. When they heard this the Tafurs [who were penniless, barefooted, savage soldiers led by a mythical King Tafur), in order to impress the enemy roasted the bruised body of a Turk over a fire as if it were meat for eating, in full view of the Turkish forces.[21]

The Frankish chroniclers of the period gave numerous accounts of the acts of cannibalism committed by the Crusaders. These facts were fairly covered by the European historians, like Michaud and others till the nineteenth century. However, these events, deeply embarrassing as they were, have been either totally concealed or only casually mentioned by European historians during the last century. For instance, Sir Steven Runciman, who was profoundly committed to the cause of Christian orthodoxy, describes these events briefly in his three-volume *History of the Crusades:* 'While the princes conferred at Rugia, the army at Ma'arrat an-Numan took direct action. It was suffering from starvation. All the supplies of the neighbourhood were exhausted; and cannibalism seemed the only solution.'[22] But Amin Maalouf, a contemporary Arab historian with reservations regarding this perspective, asks instead:

> Did the Western invaders devour the inhabitants of the martyred city simply in order to survive? Their commanders said so in an official letter to the Pope the following year: *A terrible famine racked the army in Ma'arra, and placed it in the cruel necessity of feeding itself upon the bodies of the Saracens.* But the explanation seems unconvincing, for the inhabitants of Ma'arra region witnessed behaviour that sinister winter that could not be accounted for by hunger. They saw, for example, fanatical Franj [Franks], the Tafurs, roam through the countryside openly proclaiming that they would chew the flesh of the Saracens and gathering around their nocturnal camp-fires to devour their prey. Were they cannibals out of necessity? Or out of fanaticism? It all seems unreal, and yet the evidence is overwhelming, not only in the facts described, but also in the morbid atmosphere it reflects. In this respect, one sentence by the Frankish chronicler Albert of Aix, who took part in the battle of Ma'arra, remains unequalled in its horror: *Not only did our troops not shrink from eating dead Turks and Saracens; they also ate dogs*! [23]

The Franks had already pulled the walls of the city down stone by stone. Their final act was to set every house on fire.

In January 1099, a few thousand Franks started to walk to the Holy City as pilgrims. They left Ma'arra burnt and utterly destroyed. The powerful Egyptian vizier

al-Afdal sought an alliance of friendly relations with Alexius. He was absolutely baffled by the savagery of the Franks. He sent an emissary asking the emperor to use his influence with the Franks. Alexius replied that he had not the slightest control over them, and that he did not support their actions. For his part, Alexius added that he would strictly observe the alliance with Cairo. 'Incredible it might seem, these people were acting on their own account, seeking to establish their own states, refusing to hand Antioch back to the [Byzantine] empire, contrary to their sworn promises. They seemed determined to take Jerusalem by any means.'[24]

Now it was the turn of Jerusalem, the Holy City of three religions, which in the medieval world maps was depicted as the navel of the world. The Crusaders arrived outside the walls of Jerusalem and laid siege to it. The city was captured on Friday 15 July 1099. An indiscriminate massacre of the inhabitants, Muslims and Jews followed, which the Frank chronicler of the *Gesta Francorum* describes as follows:

> Our pilgrims entered the city, and chased the Saracens, killing as they went, as far as the Temple of Solomon. There the enemy assembled, and fought a furious battle for the whole day, so that their blood flowed all over the Temple. At last the pagans were overcome, and our men captured a good number of men and women in the Temple; they killed whomsoever they wished, and chose to keep others alive . . .
>
> Soon our army overran the whole city, seizing gold and silver, horses and mules, and houses full of riches of all kinds. All our men came rejoicing and weeping for joy, to worship at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.
>
> In the morning our men climbed cautiously on to the roof of the Temple and attacked the Saracens, both male and female, and beheaded them with unsheathed swords. The other Saracens threw themselves from the Temple. . . .
>
> Then our men held a council, and gave out that everyone should give alms and pray that God would choose whom he wished to reign over the others and the city. They further gave orders that all the dead Saracens should be cast out on account of the terrible stench; because nearly the whole city was crammed with their bodies. The Saracens who were still alive dragged the dead ones out in front of the gates, and made huge piles of them, as big as houses. Such a slaughter of pagans no one has ever seen or heard of; the pyres they made were

> like pyramids. . . . On the eighth day after the city was captured, they chose Godfrey of Bouillon as ruler of the city [advocate of the Holy Sepulchre], to subdue the pagans and protect the Christians.[25]

The news of the victory was communicated to the Pope in a letter in September 1099 by the leaders of the Crusade, Daimbert, the papal legate, Godfrey of Bouillon and Raymond of Toulouse that recounts with pride what became of the inhabitants of Jerusalem:

> If you want to know what was done to the enemies we found in the city, know this: that in the portico of Solomon and in his Temple, our men rode in the blood of the Saracens up to the knees of their horses.[26]

For three days the Crusaders indulged in indiscriminate massacre of people of all ages and both sexes. They slaughtered over 70,000 people. Thousands of Muslims who had gathered for Friday prayers took refuge in the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsa Mosque, but Tancred and his men pursued them. In return for a large ransom, Tancred promised them safety and sealed them in al-Aqsa. Next day they were all slaughtered. An even more horrible end awaited the Jews of Jerusalem. They were driven into their synagogues, which were set alight, and everyone inside was burned alive.

Along with the massacres came the pillage and spoils. They pillaged and looted all they could lay their hands on. The extreme measures they adopted can be illustrated by the eyewitness account of Fulcher of Chartres who wrote:

> This may seem strange to you. Our Squires and footmen . . . split open the bellies of those they had just slain in order to extract from the intestines the gold coins which the Saracens had gulped down their loathsome throats while alive . . . With drawn swords our men ran through the city not sparing anyone, even those begging for mercy . . . They entered the houses of the citizens, seizing whatever they found in them . . . whoever first entered a house, whether he was rich or poor . . . was to occupy and own the house or palace and whatever he found in it as if it were entirely his own . . . in this way many poor people became very wealthy.[27]

The nineteenth-century French historian of the Crusades, J.F. Michaud gives a precise description of the massacre by the Western Christians:

> The Saracens were massacred in the streets and in the houses. Jerusalem had no refuge for the vanquished. Some fled from death by precipitating themselves from the ramparts, others crowded for shelter in the palaces, the towers, and above all in their mosques, where they could not conceal themselves from the pursuit of the Christians. The Crusaders, masters of the Mosque of Omar, where the Saracens defended themselves for some time, renewed there the deplorable scenes which disgraced the conquest of Titus. The infantry and cavalry rushed pell-mell among the fugitives. Amid the most horrid tumult, nothing was heard but the groans and cries of death; the victors trod over heaps of corpses in pursuing those who vainly attempted to escape.[28]

This carnage was in total contrast to the Arab capture of Jerusalem from the Christians four hundred and sixty years earlier under Caliph Omar in 638. He had signed a treaty with Patriarch Sophronius that precisely listed the legal and religious rights of Christians as the protected community: 'This peace . . . guarantees them security for their lives, property, churches, and the crucifixes belonging to those who display and honour them . . . There shall be no compulsion in matters of faith.' When the caliph and the patriarch were on a tour of the Christian holy sites, they were in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre when the Muslims' hour of prayer came. The caliph was invited to perform his prayers in the Church, which he declined, expressing his fear and concern that other Muslims in future might imitate his example and claim their right to pray there and thereby infringe the rights of the Christians. Instead, he prayed at the steps of the Church of Constantine. Since then the three religious communities, Christians, Jews and Muslims lived amicably under the Muslim rulers in Jerusalem, where Christians continued to be in majority. Their religious and civil rights were protected. Ameer Ali explains their condition thus:

> They were allowed to move freely about the empire, to hold communication with princes of their creed in foreign countries, and to acquire lands and property under the same conditions as the Moslems. Public offices (excepting

> under some tyrannical governors) were open to them equally with the Moslems. Christian convents and churches existed everywhere, and Christian pilgrims from the most distant parts were permitted to enter Palestine without hindrance. In fact, pilgrimage to the Holy Land had been stimulated, rather than suppressed, by the conquest of the Arabs, and the Saracens contented themselves with maintaining order among the rival sects of Christianity.[29]

But in the eleventh century it became clear that Christian invaders from the West had a very different notion of dealing with Muslims. Their attitude towards Muslims was totally bereft of any human concerns. At the same time, they blindly believed in the righteousness of their religious cause, and therefore, as Fulcher of Chartres says, 'they desired that this place, so long contaminated by the superstition of the pagan inhabitants, should be cleansed from their contagion.'[30] The killing of Muslims, according to this viewpoint, was not ordinary killings by a conquering army, but rather a sacrosanct ritual slaughter, an act of piety, performed to glorify Christ.

There was a short pause in the work of slaughter when the Crusaders went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre singing the ninth psalm. With corpses strewn all around, they praised God in all humility for the victory and glory they had achieved. After thanksgiving, they recommenced slaughter and plunder.

The fanatical bloodlust of the Crusaders was to become a part of a painful memory of Western Christians' inhumanity towards Muslims. An Arab poet, Mozaffarullah Werdis expressed the suffering and pain of Muslims at that time in these words:

> We have mingled our blood and tears.
> None of us remains who has strength enough to beat off those oppressors.
> The sight of our weapons only brings sorrow to us who must weep while the swords of war spark off the all-consuming flames.
> Ah, sons of Muhammad, what battles still await you, how many heroic heads must lie under the horses' feet!
> Yet all your longing is only for an old age lapped in safety and well-being, for a sweet smiling life, like the flowers of the field.

> Oh that so much blood had to flow, that so many women were left with nothing save their bare hands to protect their modesty!
> Amid the fearful clashing swords and lances, the faces of the children grow white with horror.[31]

Yet, amidst this agony of death, destruction and despair all around, the poet calls his people to resist the invaders.

After the First Crusade, Muslims became fully aware of the true nature of the Western Christians, a lesson they were not to forget. Runciman comments:

> The massacre at Jerusalem . . . emptied Jerusalem of its Moslem and Jewish inhabitants. Many even of the Christians were horrified by what had been done; and amongst the Moslems, who had been ready hitherto to accept the Franks as another factor in the tangled politics of the time, there was henceforward a clear determination that the Franks must be driven out. It was this bloodthirsty proof of Christian fanaticism which recreated the fanaticism of Islam. When, later, wiser Latins in the East sought to find some basis on which Christian and Moslem could work together, the memory of the massacre stood always in their way.[32]

The Holy Sepulchre was now in the hands of the Crusaders. But the instigator and architect of the First Crusade, Urban was not able to see the unfolding of the events for long. He died a fortnight after his soldiers captured Jerusalem. The Crusaders established the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem over the areas of the captured city. They elected Godfrey of Bouillon as their ruler, who out of respect for the Holy Land, did not want to be crowned and called a king because here once Christ the King had worn the crown of thorns. Instead, he took the modest title ‘Advocate of the Holy Sepulchre’. However on his death in the following year, in 1100, his brother Baldwin was summoned from Edessa to Jerusalem, where he was crowned and he assumed the title of king. Thus the dream of a church state, run by ecclesiastics did not materialise, and instead, the feudal Kingdom of Jerusalem was established. Later on, a fourth Latin state was established. This was the work of Count Raymond, who took possession of the coastal areas and towns in the vicinity of Tripoli in Syria, and then

laid siege to the city of Tripoli in 1101, which dragged on for many years. After his death in 1105, the siege was carried on by his successors. Finally the beleaguered city fell in 1109. The new state was called Tripoli. Thus four colonial-settler states of the Latins became part of a new political landscape of the Middle East. Certainly the Muslims had been vanquished. At least, for the time being the Latin rulers of the Middle East were secure; there did not seem to be any immediate challenge from the Muslim side.

The Second Crusade and Muslim counter-offensive

The history of the later Crusades in the twelfth century is one of Muslim reaction to the Latin invaders from Europe. The Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad or the Seljuk Turks, prey to internecine conflicts and disunity, took little interest in response to Muslims' calls for holy war against the Crusaders. It was 'Imad-ud-Din Zangi (1127--46), the *atabeg* (governor) of Mosul and Aleppo, a Muslim neighbour of the Latin states whose rise to power marks the turning of tide in favour of Islam. 'Imad-ud-Din Zangi rose to the occasion in earnest, and under his command the task of driving the enemy out of the captured lands was initiated. The first major breakthrough was the capture of Edessa in 1144 that removed a buffer state between Latin Palestine and Muslim domains. In 1146 a servant stabbed Zangi to death while he was asleep. He was succeeded by his son Nur-ud-Din, who was a devout religious man of ascetic habits. From the very moment Nur-ud-Din came to power, his programme to liberate the Muslim countries from the Latins was conducted under the slogan of 'unity and *jihad*'.

For western Christendom, the news of the loss of Edessa was a great shock. It was also seen as a threat to the existence of the rest of the Frankish states. The most enthusiastic advocate who wanted to recover Edessa and crush the rising power of Muslims was St Bernard, Abbot of Clairvaux (1090--1153). He was one of the most powerful men in Europe at that time. The current Pope, Eugenius III, had been his pupil. When the Pope addressed a bull to the French King Louis VII, proclaiming a new crusade, the king responded with great enthusiasm. To prepare for the crusade, the king sought the advice of St Bernard, who agreed to preach the crusade. A

charismatic orator, his approach towards his religion was to inflame the passions of belief to mass hysteria. As a religious fanatic, St Bernard had no middle way in dealing with Muslims whom he regarded 'the enemies of Christ' and 'pagans'. He became the moving spirit and official preacher of the crusade, and almost single-handedly swung the West in support of it. He travelled extensively to preach in France and Germany. He gained enormous support, and his contemporaries interpreted his success a 'miracle' and a 'divine augury' for a new crusade. The places he could not reach, he sent letters urging the people to participate. The following extract from his letter to the people of England illustrates how enthralling his words were:

> Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of abundant salvation. The earth is shaken because the Lord of heaven is losing his land, the land in which he appeared to men, in which he lived amongst men for more than thirty years; the land made glorious by his miracles, holy by his blood; the land in which the flowers of his resurrection first blossomed. And now, for our sins, the enemy of the cross has begun to lift its sacrilegious head there, and to devastate with the sword that blessed land, that land of promise. Alas, if there should be none to withstand him, he will soon invade the very city of the living God, overrun the arsenal of our redemption, and defile the holy places which have been adorned by the blood of the Immaculate Lamb . . . .
>
> What are you doing, you mighty men of valour? What are you doing, you servants of the Cross? . . . How great a number of sinners have here confessed with tears and obtained pardon for their sins since the time when these holy precincts were cleansed of pagan filth by the swords of our fathers! . . .
>
> But now, O mighty soldiers, O men of war, you have a cause for which you can fight without danger to your souls; a cause in which to conquer is glorious and for which to die is gain.[33]

To the people of eastern France and Bavaria he wrote a similar letter in 1146, exhorting them to 'take up arms for the name of Christ'. How he ignited the flame of religious hatred and fanaticism of the Crusaders can be seen in the following extracts from his letter:

> What are you doing, brave men? What are you doing, servants of the Cross? . . . How many sinners have confessed their sins there [in Jerusalem] with tears and have obtained forgiveness for their sins, once the filth of the pagans had been eliminated by the swords of your fathers! . . . If ever the enemy is by chance able to occupy Jerusalem -- may God prevent it -- he will stir up the vessels of his iniquity, leaving no sign or trace of such piety . . . Therefore, since your land flourishes with brave men and is famous for the strength of its youth, gird yourselves manfully and take up joyful arms for the name of Christ.[34]

St Bernard's fears of the occupation of Jerusalem by the 'pagans' expressed in his sermons and letters came true forty-one years later, in 1187, when Sultan Salah ud-Din's forces took Jerusalem and thus put an end to Frankish rule there. But his foreboding of iniquity at the hands of Muslims, which I discuss later, proved to be untrue. The way Muslim victors treated the vanquished enemy in Jerusalem was completely different from what 'the soldiers of Christ' had done when they had captured it from the Muslims.

To St Bernard the killing of Muslims by a Christian was not a crime, but a meritorious deed. In his book 'Book of praise of the New Army, to the Knights of the Temple', he wrote that the soldier of Christ

> carries a sword not without reason; for he is the minister of Christ for the punishment of evil-doers, as well as for the praise of good men. Clearly when he kills a malefactor he is not a homicide but as I should say a malicide, and he is simply considered the avenger of Christ on those who do evil and the protector of Christians. But when he himself is killed he is known not to perish but to survive. Therefore the death which he proposes is for the profit of Christ, and that which he receives, for his own. The Christian glories in the death of the non-Christian, because Christ is glorified; in the death of the Christian the liberality of the King appears, as the soldier is led to his sword . . . Not indeed that even non-Christians ought to be killed if there were some other way to prevent them from molesting or oppressing the faithful; but now it is better that they should be killed than that the rod of sinners should certainly be left over the fate of the just: lest perchance the just reach out their hands to iniquity.[35]

During this period when the preparations for the Second Crusade were afoot, the Jewish communities in the Rhineland became the first victims of attacks by the Christians, as had happened in the early stages of the First Crusade. Otto, Bishop of Freisingen, who was half-brother of King Conrad III, took part in the expedition, describes the origin of the pogroms organised by a Cistercian monk, Radulf,

> a man of the most devout appearance carefully counterfeiting pious severity . . . entered the regions bordering on the Rhine and inflamed many thousands of people to take up the cross: people from Cologne, Mainz, Worms, Speyer, Strasburg and other neighbouring cities, towns and villages. But he carelessly sowed the idea into his teaching, that the Jews who lived in all these cities and towns should be slaughtered as if they were the enemies of the Christian religion. The seed of this doctrine germinated in many cities and towns of France and Germany, and took roots so firmly that many Jews were killed in violent uprisings. . . .
>
> But the abbot of Clairvaux sent letters or messengers to the peoples of France and Germany, in which he clearly showed that the Jews were not to be killed because of their wickedness, but scattered.[36]

The Jewish rabbi Ephraim of Bonn, a witness to the pogroms, describes the thinking that lay behind Radulf's preaching: 'He went and barked (he was called "the barker") in the name of Christ to go to Jerusalem to fight the Muslims. Everywhere he went he spoke ill of all the Jews of every land, and he incited the serpent and the dogs against us saying: "first avenge Christ, the crucified one, upon his enemies who stand before you; and then only, go to fight against the Muslims." '[37]

St Bernard's 'generosity' towards the Jews was not a result of any human consideration other than in deference to the literal meanings he ascribed to some verses of Psalm 59. In his letter to the people of England he argued to spare the lives of the Jews: 'The Jews are for us the living words of the Scripture, for they remind us always of what our Lord suffered. They are dispersed all over the world so that by expiating their crime they may be everywhere the living witnesses of our redemption . . . If the Jews are completely wiped out, what will become of our hope for their

promised salvation, their eventual conversion?'[38] These words of St Bernard reflect a religious and cultural attitude of long standing in the West towards the Jews that resulted, eight centuries later, in the holocaust carried out by Nazi Germany.

In 1147, the French king, Louis VII, and the German king, Conrad III, led a large united army to help the Latin Christians in Syria and Palestine, but the rivalry between the two leading monarchs of Europe was there from the start. At Jerusalem, the leaders, counsellors and advisors of the Franks, the Germans and the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem met to discuss the military plans for attack. They arrived at a decision, which to this day has surprised historians and military commanders. They decided to attack Damascus, whose Turkish ruler Unur was a rival of Nur-ud-Din and an ally of the Christians! Jones and Ereira sarcastically remark: 'To the newcomers, it must have looked obvious. Aleppo [under Nur-ud-Din's rule] did not mean anything to them, but Damascus was a name they knew from the Bible. It was Moslem, it was strategically important, and it would put Nur-ud-Din on the defensive. But those who had been there longer should have known better.'[39] In July 1148, they laid siege to Damascus. Sensing what was in store for him and his city at the hands of his Latin allies, Unur turned to his rival Nur-ud-Din for help, who soon arrived on the scene. Now the situation took a dramatic turn. The Crusaders were defeated. There was total chaos in their ranks. Those who survived retreated in utter confusion. Conrad and Louis escaped safely and returned to their realms.

The total fiasco in which the Second Crusade ended caused great dismay and bitterness both among the Crusaders and also in the West. But there were many people in the West who were hostile towards the Crusaders and suspicious of their ideas and plans. This can be seen in the contemporary account of the Second Crusade given by the anonymous chronicler of Würzburg:

> God allowed the Western church, on account of its sins, to be cast down. There arose, indeed, certain pseudo prophets, sons of Belial, and witnesses of anti-Christ, who seduced the Christians with empty words. They constrained all sorts of men, by vain preaching, to set out against the Saracens in order to liberate Jerusalem. Not only the ordinary people, but kings, dukes and marquises, and other powerful men of this world as well, believed that they thus showed their

> allegiance to God. The bishops, archbishops, abbots, and other ministers and prelates of the church joined in this error, throwing themselves headlong into it to the great peril of the bodies and souls. . . . The intentions of the various men were different. Some, indeed, lusted after novelties and went in order to learn about new lands. Others there were who were driven by poverty, who were in hard straits at home; these men went to fight, not only against the enemies of Christ's cross, but even against the friends of the Christian name, whenever opportunity appeared. There were others who were oppressed by the debts to other men or who sought to escape the service due to their lords, or who were even awaiting the punishment merited by their shameful deeds. Such men simulated a zeal for God and hastened chiefly in order to escape from such troubles and anxieties.[40]

St Bernard, the instigator and spiritual leader of military mobilisation was blamed for the debacle of the Second Crusade. But he remained defiant and wrote his *apologia* of the Second Crusade addressed to the Pope in which he defended his role as the organiser of the expedition, absolving himself of any charges that were being made against him:

> As you know, we have fallen upon grave times, . . . for the Lord, provoked by our sins, gave the appearance of having judged the world prematurely, with justice, indeed, but forgetful of his mercy. He spared neither his people nor his own name. Do not the heathen say: 'Where is their God?' . . . It might seem, in fact, that we acted rashly in this affair or had 'used lightness [II Cor. 1:17]'. But 'I did not run my course like a man in doubt of his goal [I Cor. 9: 26]' for I acted on your orders, or rather on God's orders given through you.[41]

St Bernard attributed reasons for the failure of the Second Crusade to the will of God, which, according to him, lay beyond human faculties to decipher: 'How, then, does human rashness dare reprove what it can hardly understand?' He asked rhetorically.[42] It is clear that St Bernard was trying to find an answer to a historical event, a military offensive that failed badly, by appealing to theological impulses of the people, a proven method that often works. Could one assume that God, having seen what the soldiers of Christ had done to Muslims and Jews in the First Crusade, decided not to

give them a free hand this time? In any case I doubt that St Bernard would have allowed such a possibility because to do so would have meant to array God on the side of the 'pagans', an un-Christian act that 'on high' could never have contemplated.

In short, Muslims had won a major victory. They had been faced once again with another holocaust, another bloodbath, at the hands of Western religious zealots. They resisted and eventually triumphed over them. The major cause of this success lay in the growing unity of Muslims of the Middle East in the twelfth century. The historic role of a number of able Muslim rulers and generals to defeat the Latin colonial states cannot be underestimated. From now on, a significant change in the attitude towards the Crusades took place in the West. There was a noticeable reduction in religious fervour and more emphasis on the political motivation for military expeditions. Nur-ud-Din emerged as a great Muslim leader with increased power and prestige in the world. He started his career of conquest against the Frankish states. In 1154, he took possession of Damascus using his diplomatic skills and a show of force, but without any bloodshed. He succeeded in gaining control of Egypt from the last Fatimid caliph in 1168, but allowed the caliph to retain his nominal insignia.

Nur-ud-Din's assistant in Egypt was Salah ud-Din Ayyubi or Saladin as he became known in the West. He had acted as a vizier to the last Fatimid caliph of Egypt. On the death of Nur-ud-Din in 1171, he became the ruler, the Sultan of Egypt in the same year. He omitted the name of the Fatimid caliph in the Friday prayers and substituted that of the Abbasid caliph. Three years later he took over Syria. This great Muslim leader, whose name, victories, chivalrous conduct and magnanimity towards the Western invaders became legend in western literature and Islamic history, had by 1187 recaptured the Frankish Kingdom of Jerusalem and reduced the Crusaders' dominion to a small strip of land along the Syrian coast. I will describe only one major event of his reign: the capture of Jerusalem that put an end to the colonial-settler state of Jerusalem.

In the Battle of Hattin in July 1187, the fate of the Frankish existence in Jerusalem was decided. Sultan Salah ud-Din's army virtually wiped out the entire

military force of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. For him the way to Jerusalem was open. However, he was keen to take the Holy City intact, without causing any material damage to it or violating its sanctity if the Franks were to capitulate peacefully. For this reason, he sent a message to the defenders of the city to hand over the city without a fight in return for their safe exit from the city. 'I know, as you do, that Jerusalem is a holy place [lit., 'The House of God']. I do not wish to profane it by the effusion of blood; abandon your ramparts, and I shall give you a part of my treasures and as much land as you can cultivate.'[43] The Franks rejected this offer. After a thirteen-day siege, the city under the command of Balkan of Iselin capitulated. The Sultan agreed to allow the inhabitants to leave the city within forty days whence they could go to either Tyre or Tripoli. Their safety was assured under the protection of the soldiers of the Sultan.

When Muslims entered the city, they did not seek revenge. No massacre took place, no building was looted and no person was harmed. It was a strange spectacle to see, compared to what the Crusaders had done eighty-eight years earlier when they captured the Holy City.

Under the terms of capitulation, a ransom would be paid of ten dinars for each man, five for each woman and one for each child. One who could not pay the sum could be held in bondage. But it was only a nominal provision. The Sultan himself paid the ransom for ten thousand people, and then released all old people, captive husbands of freed wives, widows and orphans. The Latin patriarch paid his ten dinars and departed with carts filled with gold, expensive carpets and other precious goods. This shocked the writer Imad al-Din al-Asfahani, one of the Sultan's advisers. He wrote:

> I said to the Sultan: 'this patriarch is carrying off riches worth at least two hundred thousand dinars. We gave them permission to take their personal property with them, but not the treasures of the churches and convents. You must not let them do it!' But Salah ud-Din answered: 'We must apply the letter of the accords we have signed, so that no one will be able to accuse the believers of having violated their treaties. On the contrary, Christians will remember the kindness we have bestowed upon them.'[44]

The Greek and Syrian Christians within Jerusalem were allowed to live in the Sultan's dominions in the full enjoyment of all civil rights. The Franks and Latins who wished to settle in Palestine under Muslim rule were permitted to do so. Salah ud-Din died in 1193. Franks were able to occupy Jerusalem one again from 1229 to 1244 by a treaty arrangement.

In the aftermath of the Mongol invasions and having defeated the Mongols at Ayn Jalut, whose importance I discuss in Chapter 10, the Mamluk rulers who had succeeded the Ayyubids carried on their battle to oust the Franks from their colonial possessions. The outstanding ruler who accomplished the tasks left over since Salah ud-Din's time was Sultan Baibers. He was born in 1233 and ruled from 1260 to 1277. He delivered the last blows to the Crusading cause. The Frankish towns and their establishment, which had helped the Mongol invaders against the Muslims, had to face the full wrath of the Sultan. Between 1265 and 1268 he wrested from the Franks Jaffa, Caesarea and the great city of Antioch. When he died, only a few cities along the coast remained in the possession of the Franks, surrounded by the Mamluk Empire. He was an able general, but unlike his famous precursor Salah ud-Din, he showed no mercy to the vanquished enemy. Jones and Ereira observe: 'Saladin may have been a model of Islamic moderation, and may have taught the West the meaning of chivalry. Baibers was a model of religious fanaticism and the Franks had been his teacher.'[45] He was vindictive and brutal like the Crusaders. For Muslims he was a great leader and general who had decimated the Mongols and the Crusaders in the Middle East, and as such his memory is still revered by them. Runciman rightly depicts his place in history: 'He was cruel, disloyal and treacherous, rough in his manners and harsh in his speech. His subjects could not love him, but they gave him their admiration, with reason, for he was a brilliant soldier, a subtle politician and a wise administrator, . . . As a man, he was evil, but as a ruler he was among the greatest of his time.'[46]

Under his able successor Sultan Qalawan, the city of Acre was finally reconquered in 1291, precisely after one hundred years from 1191, when the Franks had captured the city and massacred all its Muslim population. The fall of Acre signalled the end of an era. The remaining coastal areas in the hands of the Franks

soon fell. After the military confrontations of two centuries, the Crusader states ceased to exist. Thus the ignominious chapter of the Crusades in the Middle East finally came to an end.

Chapter 9. The impact of the Crusades on Christian-Muslim relations

The whole Crusading movement, both in its original aim and what it achieved, proved to be a big catastrophe. In the name of Christ and Christian religion the Latin Christians committed massive acts of brutality, savagery and inhumanity. There were a number of causes for the Crusading movement to become a torchbearer of Western expansion solely by military means. After two centuries of Latin rule, the Crusader states collapsed. They were artificial contrivances that were kept alive by continuous supplies of men and arms from the West. Of course, Muslim disunity and apathy also helped them to survive. But with the rise of the Muslim counter-offensive under a number of able leaders, the game was almost over. The Crusaders had no chance. 'In the seesaw of attack and counterattack between Christendom and Islam, this venture began with an inconclusive Christian victory and ended with a conclusive Christian defeat.'[1]

In the context of Christian and Muslim relations, the Crusades had a lasting adverse effect. The treatment of Muslim people at the hands of the Crusaders left a bitter and painful legacy. Islam as a religion was based on exclusive revelation and in this capacity it was distinct from those faiths, which were said to have only a partial revelation. What was Islam's attitude towards Jews and Christians in those early days? Runciman aptly remarks:

> Any religion that is based on an exclusive Revelation is bound to show some contempt for the unbeliever. But Islam was not intolerant in its early days. Mahomet himself considered that Jews and Christians had received a partial Revelation and were therefore not to be persecuted. Under the early Caliphs the Christians played an honourable part in Arab history. A remarkably large number of the early thinkers and writers were Christians, who provided a useful intellectual stimulus; for the Moslems with their reliance on the Word of God, given once and for all time in the Koran, tended to remain static and unenterprising in their thought. Nor was the rivalry of the Caliphate with Christian Byzantium entirely unfriendly. Scholars and technicians passed to and

> fro between the two Empires to their mutual benefit. The Holy War begun by the Franks ruined these good relations. The savage intolerance shown by the Crusaders was answered by growing intolerance amongst the Moslems.[2]

Most of the historians and Western scholars of Islam agree that the Crusades had a lasting adverse effect on Muslim society. To Alfred Guillaume 'one lasting result was to embitter for ever, it would seem, the relations between Christians and Muslims.'[3] In the same way, Peter Mansfield remarks that 'Muslims had been fairly tolerant of the Christians and the Jews, . . . [but] the brutal treatment of Muslims by the Crusaders during the two centuries of their occupation made the Muslim leaders, especially the Mamluke sultans and later the Ottoman sultans, much harsher in their attitude towards anyone suspected of collaborating with the infidel invaders.'[4]

Despite the calamity that befell the Muslims at that time of the Crusades 'the Arab world, from Spain to Iraq, was still the intellectual and material repository of the planet's most advanced civilization.'[5] It is true that when the Latin fanatics unleashed the First Crusade, 'the Islamic world had declined from the peak of its golden age but was still superior to medieval Christendom in tolerance and breadth of intellectual interests. By the time the crusaders abandoned their last Syrian castles this was no longer so.'[6] However, the renowned Orientalist William Montgomery Watt challenges the views of those Western historians who make 'exaggerated estimates' of the effects of the Crusades on Christian-Muslim relations. According to him, 'the Crusades had no more importance for the greater part of the Islamic world than the wars on the Northwest Frontier of India had for the British in the nineteenth century, and probably made less impression on the general public consciousness.' Did Muslims' view of Christianity undergo any change as a result of the Crusades? Watt's answer is in the negative because 'in a sense Muslims had from the time of Muhammad a distorted image of Christianity which sufficiently supported their belief in their own superiority.'[7]

Since we have already discussed how the Christian doctrines took shape historically and similarly, the Qur'anic view of these doctrines, therefore, Muslim images of Christianity, which Watt calls 'distorted', do not here require detailed commentary. Obviously, some Christian scholars of Islam, convinced of the truth of

Christian dogma, dismiss the Islamic view of Christianity as erroneous because it is premised on Islamic teachings and not on what Christians believe to be the true Christianity. In any case, Muslims have maintained all along that the teaching of Jesus and the revelations he left were corrupted and distorted by those who came after him. But in Muslim thought there has never been any doubt about the truth and authenticity of the original message of Jesus. That, in sum, is the basis of Islamic understanding of, and theological approach towards, Christianity. The Crusade was an aggressive movement of Western expansion where Christian religion was used to rally support for it as we have outlined above. In the minds of Muslims it was not Christianity *per se* that can be held responsible for the brutal crimes which the Franks committed in the name of their religion at the instigation of the Popes and other ecclesiasts. Neither should we lose sight of the fact that despite all the bloodshed and destruction wrought by the Crusaders, Muslims continued to adhere to the Qur'anic view of Christianity and Jesus as before. The esteemed place of Jesus in Muslim theology and historiography has not been determined by the actions of the Crusaders or the malicious calumnies which Christian writers heaped on the life and mission of the Prophet. The Qur'anic views of Jesus and Christianity hold a permanent place in Islam. At the same time, the acts of ghastly savagery perpetrated by the Crusaders in the Middle East, the heartland of Islam, has also become a part of the historical memory of Muslims. For them it was and continues to be a very bitter memory indeed.

The perception of Islam during and after the Crusades

The Crusading movement made a deep imprint on the minds of those who came to the Holy Land with the idea of liberating it from those whom they regarded as pagans and idolaters. Pope Urban II used his rhetorical skills to rouse the passions of people to fight a Holy War against the 'pagan' Muslims. Without any moral scruples or showing the slightest concern for truth, he painted a picture of Islam that was utterly false and trivial. Muslims, according to him, were the 'enemies of Christ'. He simply ignored the Islamic teaching about Jesus, and his misleading projection of Islam shaped the religious perspective of those who wanted to combat Islam by sword.

In any case, Urban's views of Islam also need to be seen within the broader context of that deep ambivalence which is inherent in Christians' approach to their own faith. They found an outlet for their uncertainties and an escape from what seemed quizzical to some discerning minds by directing their frustration at a rival faith, which in relation to Christianity was seen not only as an upstart religion but also as the Other. It is common knowledge that the foundation of Islam is belief in one God. Islam strictly forbids any figure or picture to represent God and forbids attributing any symbolic meaning of divinity to these objects as associationism (*shirk*) and idolatry. How can we explain that calling Muslims pagans and idolaters was anything other than a theological sleight of hand by the Latins? And while so doing the Latins continued to assume the Trinitarian formula was logically consistent with the monotheistic premises of one God. Jones and Ereira pertinently point to the Latin Christians' doctrinal dilemma: 'On one level, perhaps it was a projection of the Crusaders' own unease about themselves on to their parent faith . . . Similar anxieties were projected on to the Moslems. Praying to a wooden image of Christ could not be idolatry; it was the Moslems who must be the idolaters. Worshipping the Son, the Father and the Holy Ghost could not be the denying the single nature of God; it must be the Moslems who worshipped many gods.'[8]

European struggle against Islam in the eleventh and early twelfth century began to take shape at three different fronts: in Sicily when the Normans started the reconquest of the island in 1060, the reconquest of Toledo by Christians in 1085, and the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 1099. Before this, knowledge about Islam had been seriously flawed; facts and fiction were entwined by storywriters or mythmakers to create a distorted image of Islam. At the same time, the capture of Toledo brought the Christians in contact with the rich accumulation of Hellenic-Arabic learning and a grand culture. The sophisticated urban culture of the Arabs in Sicily was copied by the new conquerors. As a consequence of these contacts, a more sharply defined and differentiated picture of Islam also began to emerge. The establishment of the Frankish states in the Middle East led to an increased contact with Muslims, and there developed a better understanding of a culture that was far superior to their own. During periods of peace, good neighbourly relations and trade increased between peoples of the two faiths.

The Latin settlers gained firsthand knowledge of the social customs and religion of Muslims. The result was that a more correct picture of the Prophet began to emerge, a picture that only a small number of people in the West were willing to accept. The clerics became apprehensive of conversions to Islam under the new conditions in which the contacts with the Muslims had increased. They wanted to arm their co-religionists to fight Islam with effective tools. For the vast majority of the Western Christians the fictional character of the Prophet, which had nothing in common with the actual historical person at all, was found perennially fascinating as an object of ridicule and abuse. The relationship between Christendom and Islam underwent a major political change with the First Crusade and the extension of Latin power in the Middle East. This new political landscape was hardly conducive to producing an image of Islam that was either objective or positive. Southern comments:

> This event did not bring knowledge. Quite the contrary. The first Crusaders and those who immediately followed them to Palestine saw and understood extraordinarily little of the Eastern scene. The early success discouraged any immediate reactions other than those of triumph and contempt . . . But from about 1120 everyone in the West had some picture of what Islam meant, and who Mahomet was. The picture was brilliantly clear, but it was not knowledge, and its details were only accidentally true. Its authors luxuriated in the ignorance of triumphant imagination.[9]

Neither did the proximity to Muslims lead to a better understanding of Islam because the original impulse was one of hostility. This can be seen in the case of Anna Comnena. She was a well-educated and cultured princess whose *Alexiad* is an important source on the reign of her father, Emperor Alexius I Comnenus, who had witnessed the march of the Latin hordes into her land. She, nevertheless, speaks of the Saracens as pagans. To her the barbarians of Egypt and Libya ‘worship Mahumet with mystic rites’ while the ‘Ishmaelites’ worship Chobar, Astarte, and Ashtaoth.[10] Her total lack of knowledge about the religion of Turks, Arabs and other Muslims with whom the Byzantines had contact since the early history of Islam cannot be easily explained.

Among the Latin chroniclers was Fulcher of Chartres who took part in the First Crusade. He wrote an eyewitness account of the events, and lived in Jerusalem for twenty-seven years. Fulcher recounts that Muslims in the Holy City used to worship Muhammad, and that they also had an idol in his likeness to which they used to pray: 'All the Saracens held the Temple of the Lord [the Dome of the Rock] in great veneration. Here rather than elsewhere they preferred to say the prayers of their faith although such prayers were wasted because offered to an idol set up in the name of Muhammad.'[11] Another example is the anonymous *Gesta Francorum*, believed by many scholars to be the earliest of the chronicles, in which Muslims are referred to as 'pagans' and 'Christ's enemies' and the Seljuk leader Corboran (Kerbogha) is reported to be swearing 'by Muhammad and by all the names of other gods,' thus completely ignoring the fundamental doctrine of Islam that there is only one God.[12] This account formed the basis of the popular histories written by various writers in the Catholic West. This type of propaganda was widely used to whip up support for the Crusading movement against a detestable enemy who was a worshipper of false gods and idols. These ideas were also common in serious literature. Benjamin Kedar mentions two scholars, the first, Azo (*c*. 1150--*c*. 1230), a prominent professor of jurisprudence, who in his commentary on the Code of Justinian says that 'the pagans, that is, the Saracens, worship innumerable gods, goddesses, and indeed demons', and, the second, Hostiensis (1200--70) who in his *Summa Aurea*, a commentary on the Decretals, characterises Saracens as 'those who worship innumerable gods, goddesses, and demons, and accept neither the New nor the Old Testament'. Kedar comments: 'Evidently, awareness of Islam's monotheism must have been unevenly distributed among the learned of Catholic Europe if two such central works could so unequivocally define the Saracens as idolaters.'[13] In fact, the belief that Muslims were polytheists worshipping many gods and idols was quite widespread. In 1274, the Dominican Humbert of Romans, one of the most ardent proponents of a crusade and a papal propagandist, wrote that 'there are men not only among laymen but among clerics who know nothing about Muhammad or the Saracens except that they have heard that they are infidels, not believing in Christ, and think the Saracens believe in Muhammad as their god, which nevertheless is false.'[14]

Whenever legends and tales are used to vilify and demonise an enemy in religion or politics, they gain a life of their own. The legendary fabrications about the

Prophet and Muslims who were said to worship idols became greatly popular in the first forty years of the twelfth century. It was the time when the Catholic West had emerged victorious and expanded its territorial gains. Most of the legends were woven together in northern France. These were also tools of propaganda to maintain a hostile image of Muslims and to keep the support for the crusades flowing. The impact of the Crusading movement to shape a distorted picture of Islam is emphasised by Maxime Rodinson:

> The Crusades created a huge market for a comprehensive, integral, entertaining, and satisfying image of the enemy's ideology. When seen from the outside, whole movements are invariably reduced to their bare doctrine, which outsiders take to be the substance of this broad aggregate of people on the move, with all their interests, aspirations and passions. This is a mistake, but this is exactly what the doctrinarians of the movement intend the doctrine to mean to their faithful. But, the general public demanded an image be presented that would show the abhorrent side of Islam by depicting it in the crudest fashion possible so as to satisfy the literary taste for the marvellous so noticeable in all the works of the period.[15]

Along with the legends that Muhammad was a heretic who had come under the influence of Sergius or that he was a disappointed cardinal who having failed to become the Pope, fled from Rome to Arabia to avenge his humiliation, where he announced himself a prophet and set up a new creed; he was also said to have been the god of the Saracens. The theme that Muhammad was a god of the Saracens became quite common in the literature of Medieval Europe. Apparently, the god of the Saracens had to be false, because for Christians only Jesus Christ was the true God.

The Benedictine writers Guibert of Nogent, Hugh of Fleury and Sigebert of Gembloux (d. 1112) who wrote the earliest lives of the Prophet in the Catholic West misrepresented the biographical facts of the Prophet's life. Hugh and Sigebert see the status of the Prophet's early life in feudal terms, where he is regarded as 'poor and an orphan' hence implying that he was of 'low birth'. However, this is a wrong view. Muhammad's family, though, not affluent was a well-respected branch of the tribe of

the Quraish. Sigebert also stated the popular tale that the Saracens worship Muhammad, an assertion that was contrary to the evidence in the sources he had used.[16]

The Latin writers focused on the life of the Prophet for a variety of reasons. If the phenomenal successes of the Saracens were to be explained, a clue to this was said to lie in Muhammad's special skills. The popular writers and storywriters resorted to their wild fantasies and imagination. To them Muhammad was a learned magician and astronomer, who by using his magical skills and deceit destroyed the Christian Church in Africa and the East. He had attracted followers to his depraved religion by authorising sexual promiscuity. Among these stories one finds, in varying versions, a white bull (or cow, or ox) that terrorised the people and by a false miracle carried the Law of the Qur'an between its horns. In one version of the story, Hildebert of Lemans (d. 1133 as Archbishop of Tours) narrated how Muhammad in order to prove his divine mission had secretly trained a terrible bull, that upon his bidding would kneel before him, thus convincing the people of his miracles.[17] But this story also 'exemplifies the shifts to which the Christians were put to explain how the Prophet could have been accepted by the people, and is indeed a sort of back-handed compliment, a grudging admission of his charismatic power.'[18] In Higden's lengthy version, the place of the bull is taken by a camel, which Muhammad used to turn loose in the fields at dawn: 'Enjoying its freedom, the camel "gan to lepe and to sterte, and made grete ioye for he was at large . . . and wolde come nyh no manis bond". But when the camel came to Muhammad, and "likked his hondes", then the people "cride and seide, in þis dede is i-ishewed þe holynesse of Goddis prophete", and they accepted the book as the law of God.'[19]

Another popular tale of the period (replete, like most tales of the time, with the Christian heuristic device of symbolism) was that Muhammad had trained a white dove (or a pigeon), which, while sitting on his shoulder, picked grains of corn from inside his ear and whispered the divine messages to him. Here one finds some resemblance to the Christian idea of a dove symbolising the Holy Ghost, which the Latin writers were well aware of, but such a notion has no place in Islamic monotheism. These fables, no matter how incredibly nonsensical and absurd, circulated for a long time. Their popular appeal catered the religious needs of the

masses, and was directed against the hated enemy. It was only towards the close of the Renaissance period in the middle of the seventeenth century that stories about Muhammad's magical powers became discredited. The bull or camel myths and the dove story vanished during the Renaissance. The stories round Muhammad's death, some utterly disgusting and deeply offensive, were discarded earlier.

Among the earliest biographers of the Prophet in the West the name of Guibert, Abbot of Nogent (1064?--1125), is notable. He completed his history of the First Crusade before 1112, and added to it a short account of the life of the Prophet. He did not know Muhammad's correct name; he calls him 'Mathomus'. He did not know the age in which he lived, but thought it could not be in the olden times because he had not been able to find out anything about his misdeeds in the writings of any Doctor of the Church. He also admitted that he had found no written sources for his account of the life of Muhammad or his conduct, but what he said about him was based upon popular opinion. For him, as Southern observes, 'whether it is true or false he cannot say; but this he can say: "it is safe to speak evil of one whose malignity exceeds whatever ill can be spoken." In a variety of forms, whether for praise or blame, this rule inspired a great deal of writing in the first half of the twelfth century.'[20]

Guibert was one of the earliest writers to popularise the tale that the Law of the Qur'an was carried on the horns of the bull with a view to trivialise both the message and the messenger. He fiercely condemns Islam by painting a totally false picture of its doctrine, and its attitude towards Christianity, while all the while alleging that Muhammad ('this profane man') permitted his followers to indulge in all moral reprehensible vices of the flesh in order to gain their loyalty:

> All the severity of Christianity was condemned and given over to public insults, the teachings of honesty and virtue which had been laid down by the Evangels were accused of being hard, or of being cruel; and on the contrary those that the cow had brought were called the teachings of generosity and were recognized as the only ones in accord with the liberty instituted by God himself. Neither the old Mosaic law, nor the new catholic law could receive any belief; all that had been written before the law, under the regime of grace, was accused of irremediable falseness . . . But since they [Muslims] did not place any

> restraint on the indulgence of the senses, one soon saw them giving themselves up to vices that even the ignorant animals ignore entirely and that are not even decent to mention . . .
>
> Let us now recount the end of this great and marvellous law-giver. I have already said that he was subject to attacks of epilepsy: one day as he was walking alone, he fell attacked by one of his convulsions, and while he was being tormented by it, some hogs, having come upon him, so completely devoured him that only his heels were found as remains. So this excellent lawgiver is given over to the swine and eaten by them, so that his evil rule was terminated as just, by a most vile end. And certainly, while his heels were left, it was without doubt so that he could show those fools whom he had miserably seduced a witness of his perfidiousness and his deceits.[21]

This passage by a learned scholar and influential cleric amply reveals how vicious and crude an image of the Prophet and Islam had taken root. This was written in the period when the Catholic West was basking in the victories of the First Crusade. However, Guibert was much more familiar with Islam than his banal assertions suggest. This can be seen when after a crude joke, he says: 'But joking apart--which is done to deride the followers (of the Prophet)--it must be quietly admitted that they do not consider him to be God, as some people think, but a just man, and that he is the protector through whom the divine law is passed down.'[22] This sort of information by the abbot, however, was for restricted circulation and not meant for the common people, 'the flock'.

The popular legends circulated by the Latin clerics and writers were produced to trivialise the 'pagan' enemy, but for the general population of the Christendom their authenticity was beyond doubt. It helped to fashion the image of Islam that continued to influence the West in the centuries that followed. One striking example of the imaginative literature is the *chansons de geste,* which was enormously popular among large numbers of people. It narrated the heroic deeds of historical figures from the circle of Charlemagne in wars against the Saracens. In these imaginary and fantastic adventures, Muslims are accused of idolatrous worship. The Prophet was given the Devil's synonym, Mahound, whose large statue was worshipped by the pagan Saracens. In the *Chansons de Roland,* the Saracens worship three gods, Mahound,

Tervagant and Apollo, resembling the Holy Trinity of the Christians, but in a distorted and reprehensible manner. In these songs the name of God is never mentioned. Later on other writers added further diabolical creatures, their numbers reaching over thirty in the literature of the period. This pantheon included picturesque names of Jupiter, Juno, Mars, Plato, Margot, Lucifer and Antichrist. In some places Alkoran (the Qur'an) was also made a god. The images of these gods were made of gold and silver, and adorned with precious stones. The Saracens were said to worship them with elaborate pagan rites in their temples, 'synagogues', or in 'mahomeries'. They invoked their support before battle, but 'after defeat the gods are cursed, insulted, dragged in the dust, or even broken to pieces. Defeat is the usual fate of the Saracen. In the only account of a Saracenic victory, when the Sowdone [Sultan] of Babylone [in early fifteenth-century] takes Rome, the Saracens burn frankincense before their gods, blow brass horns, drink the blood of beasts, and feast on milk and honey.'[23]

There was much confusion around the name of the Prophet. The Christian writers and popularisers of legends called him by various names, such as, Mahoun, Mahound, Maphomet and Bafum. The concept of Mahomet as god or idol became part of the English vocabulary with negative attributes. During the Middle Ages, among the words derived from 'Mahomet' were 'mawmet' and 'mammet, to mean 'idol' or 'doll' while 'mahommerie' meant 'superstition'. Byron P. Smith shows that by the time of the Renaissance, 'mammet' took on the figurative meaning of a 'tool' or 'puppet' but 'the concept of Mahomet as god did not cease with the Middle Ages; it persisted through the middle of the seventeenth century, especially in the dramatic literature.'[24] Thus, the Prophet, who proclaimed and preached that there is no other deity but only One God as the basis of Islam's pure monotheism was himself made a god in the Catholic West. As Southern comments:

> At first, however, it is likely that the Latins, who had no experience of religions other than their own, could only imagine error taking the form of extravagance along familiar lines. If Christians worshipped a Trinity, so (they imagined) must Moslems, but an absurd one; if Christians worshipped their Founder, so (they imagined) must Moslems, but with depraved rites suitable to a depraved man and a depraved people. Men inevitably shape the world they do not know in the likeness of the world they do know.[25]

The legendary treatment of Islam as a collection of fanciful oddities in the Catholic West was widespread in the popular literature of the period. But we also come across another tradition, which viewed Islam in a different light. A small group of writers tried to present an objective view of Islam from the tenth century. They evaluated the contribution made by Muslims to preserve and disseminate the knowledge of science (science as dealing with theoretical constructs and experimental inquiry in a wide sense). Some were aware of the Arabic renditions of some important works of classical antiquity that were still in the possession of Muslims. They set out to acquire these. For instance, Gerbert of Aurillac born in about 940 who later become Pope Sylvester II (999--1003) was a talented scholar. During his studies in Spain, he acquired and brought back to Catalonia various important books dealing with scientific, technical and philosophical knowledge. He made use of these sources to write his books on philosophy, arithmetic, and technical subjects. Thus Latin translation of Arabic works of philosophical and scientific knowledge spread to Western Europe. Toledo under Muslim rule had been one of the great centres of intellectual activity and a living representative of artistic achievements of the age. After its fall to the Christians in 1085, it became a centre of translation activity. Numerous scientific books and manuscripts existing in Arabic were translated into Latin in the twelfth century. In this way, the contribution made by Muslims, Christian Arabs, Mozarabs and Jews became known and, to some extent, objective information about the Muslims who had advanced the arts and scientific knowledge also spread in the West.

The Crusades changed the attitude of the Latin Christians who had come to the Holy Land believing in their own superiority against the Muslim enemy. As the contacts between the settler and local communities grew, a better understanding of each other's beliefs and customs also developed. More exact information about Islam also began to reach Europeans. But, this should not lead us to the conclusion, as mentioned before, that the popular image of Islam, culled in the fabulous myths and legends underwent any meaningful reappraisal. Benjamin Kedar rightly points out that 'even though the knowledge about Islam did not spread evenly in the learned of Catholic Europe and proximity to Muslims did not preclude misconceptions, the total amount of interest in and knowledge about the Saracens was undoubtedly larger in the

twelfth century. Catholic Europeans also came to know and appreciate some of the secular literature created in the Muslim realm.'[26] There is no trace of religious prejudice against Arab scientists and scholars whose works the translators of the school of Toledo rendered into Latin. This work was evidence of a spirit of impartiality in scientific knowledge and secular matters. Meanwhile, theologians and polemicists carried on their profane battles in the realm of the sacred and the holy.

The impact of correct information about Islam remained confined to a comparatively small circle of people. For instance, in the *Chronicles of the Archbishops of Salzburg* Bishop Theimo of Salzburg was said to have been captured by 'pagans' in 1101 in the Second Crusade. When the king of the 'pagans' found out that Theimo had also been trained as a goldsmith, he asked him to repair a golden idol. But Theimo, instead of repairing it, smashed it to pieces with his hammer because the demon inhabiting the idol had uttered blasphemies against God. He was accused of sacrilege by the king. Therefore his limbs, as well as those of his followers, were chopped off. The king drank the blood of these Christian martyrs. While the crowd was watching, a choir of angels came down to take the souls of the martyrs away. It was also chronicled that nearby stood an idol called Machmit whom pagans consulted for his oracles. Speaking through a demon, he told them that this incident had been a great victory for the Christians. After his death, Theimo was said to have been buried in a church where miracles started to take place; the blind, deaf and lepers were healed; those possessed were cleansed of demons. Even the pagans respected Saint Theimo, and did not dare to violate his sanctuary.

The story of Theimo shows how the image of chivalrous Crusaders was cultivated--heroes who went to fight the bloodthirsty 'pagan' Saracens. John V. Tolan comments:

> The picture shocks us for its hostility and for its wild inaccuracy. If earlier medieval texts imagined that the Saracens were pagans, none of them developed the caricature in such detail, none portrayed such technicolor horror: a king who worships golden idols, seeks our Christian pilgrims, and delights in ripping their limbs off and drinking their blood. This portrait is pieced together with images

> from the stories of the martyrs of the church, stories very familiar to clerical authors through the daily monastic reading of the martyrologies.[27]

Otto of Freising, in his *Chronicle* written between 1143 and 1146, observed that the events surrounding Bishop Theimo's death as reported were highly improbable because 'it is known that the whole body of the Saracens worship one God and receive the Old Testament law and the rite of circumcision. Nor do they attack Christ or the Apostles. In this one thing alone they are far removed from salvation--in denying that Jesus Christ is God or the Son of God, and in venerating the seducer Mahomet as a great prophet of the supreme God.'[28]

Other Latin chroniclers of the First Crusade may not have gone to such lengths in depicting Saracens so crassly, but they all saw Muslims as pagans, and the Crusaders' task as one of fighting and eradicating paganism according to the will of God. For instance, one participant in the First Crusade, Petrus Tudebodus in his *History* finds the cause of the Christian victory against heavy odds due to God, and not man. It indicated that the victory over pagans that Christ bestowed upon his brave army was part of the divine plan that the end of time was near. As Tolan explains:

> Tudebodus frequently compares the army of God with the Apostles, implicitly and explicitly: both spread the Christian faith, fought paganism, and received the palm of martyrdom. To a modern reader these appear as drastically different behaviours, preaching the Gospel and passively accepting the execution on the one hand, waging war on the other. Tudebodus will present these as essentially similar acts: the crusaders are the new apostles and martyrs, ushering in a new age for Christ and His church.[29]

Tudebodus regards the Crusaders who suffered in Christ's name and fell in the battle as martyrs. Tudebodus's *History* is replete with purely imaginary scenes and episodes that he incorporates into his description of the war against the Muslims.

William of Malmesbury was one of the earliest writers in the early part of the twelfth century who presented Islam as a religion in his imaginative literary works. He made a clear distinction between the paganism and idolatry of the Slavs and the

monotheism of Islam. He emphasised that in Islam Muhammad was not a god, but a prophet of God. Among those who contributed to a more objective view of Islam were translators of the Arabic works in the sciences. Pedro de Alfonso, a Spanish Jew who, four years before his death, had converted to Christianity in 1106, was a remarkable man. He made England his home and served as a physician to King Henry I. He was the first writer to translate the Eastern stories into Latin, stories that became immensely popular. His *Dialogue of a Christian and a Jew* offers one of the best accounts and criticisms of Islam in the twelfth century. In this he describes at length the tenets and rites of Islam. His polemic against Islam was to criticise it without trying to demonise or trivialise it. His views on the life of the Prophet were comparatively accurate on a number of points, even though his intentions were to refute the rival faith. But the influence of this work remained limited, and seemed to have no perceptible effect on the pervading image of Islam at that time.

Peter the Venerable

The person who contributed most to an independent appraisal of Islam, no doubt, was Pierre Maurice de Montboissier, better known as Peter the Venerable, Abbot of the important monastery of Cluny in France from 1122 until his death in 1156. At the turn of the twelfth century, the abbey of Cluny was a centre for the reformation of monasticism. It had great prestige and influence. 'It was, in effect, the capital of a monistic empire comprising ten thousand monks in more than six hundred monasteries located throughout western Christendom. Its monks had become Popes and cardinals, and its abbots were counsellors to emperors and kings.'[30] As some knowledge of the beliefs of Muslims had aroused some interest the West, it was perceived by the Church leaders a dangerous signal from the old enemy in a new form. The solution was seen as the need to neutralise any sympathetic tendency towards Islam, no matter how small or insignificant, in the West. The effective way to fight the enemy at this front was to know him correctly first and then to devise the tools to fight him. The journey that Peter the Venerable made with a large entourage to Spain about 1141 gave him an opportunity to see the splendid achievements under the Saracens. Under his initiative, a team of Spanish translators started to translate a series of Arabic texts including the *Risálah* or Apology of al-Kindi, and compilations

of others. He was keen to know about the contents of the Qur'an with a view to refute its message. He hired three Christian scholars, together with an Arab Muslim to work under the direction of an Englishman, Robert of Ketton, who completed the Latin version of the Qur'an in 1143. However, the translation was more of a paraphrased version, and it was full of mistakes; totally wrong meanings were given and wrong interpretations put to the text of the Qur'an. Some anonymous annotators added marginal notes to Ketton's version, which were absolutely misleading. At the mention of any biblical figure that did not tally with the Bible, the Qur'an is ridiculed, such as, 'how very absurd' (*quanta fabulositas*!), or 'a very stupid fable about Moses'. Oddly enough, Ketton's Qur'an achieved the distinction of a standard work that was widely used in Europe until the end of the seventeenth century.

Among Peter's major works is his summary of Islamic doctrine, *Summa totius haeresis Saracenorum*. He refuted Islamic teachings in his *Liber contra sectam sive haeresim Saracenorum*. These works of Peter and the translations called the Cluniac Collection were marred by abuse, extravagance and irrelevance, written with a profound religious and cultural bias. But at the same time, no matter how defective and lopsided, they were the first serious attempt to understand Islam in the West. They became widely available but were cited selectively in defence of the Church in the literature of the thirteenth and the following centuries. They also did much to perpetuate the false image of the Prophet and Islam. As Rodinson says:

> The collection never served as a foundation for a serious, careful study of Islam, largely due to a total lack of interest in such an enterprise. Because religious polemic was directed toward imaginary Muslims, easily eliminated on paper, a serious study of Islam did not appear to be of use in any real debate of the issues. In fact, it seems more likely the aim was to give Christians good reason to reaffirm their own faith.[31]

Peter had a double purpose in his project on Islam. He was dissatisfied with the European Christians who did not understand Islam, and by their ignorance were not able to put up any resistance. The remedy was to provide accurate information about Islam and then devise weapons for the Christians to fight against this 'heresy'. As the Church was facing intellectual unrest, schisms and dissensions, it was thought vital to

maintain the unity of the Church in face of all the threats. The abbot firmly believed that the Church should forge weapons to defend itself against heresies. In his view, Islam as an ultimate threat to Christianity needed an answer. His project to study Islam was, therefore, motivated by considerations, such as exposing the weaknesses of Islamic doctrine and disarming it as a challenge to Christian faith. He wrote:

> If this work seems superfluous, since the enemy is not vulnerable to such weapons as these, I answer that in the Republic of the Great King some things are for the defence, others for the decoration, and some for both. Solomon the Peaceful made arms for defence, which were not necessary in his own time. David made ornaments for the Temple, though there were no means of using them in his day. . . . So it is with this work. If the Moslems cannot be converted by it, at least it is right for the learned to support the weaker brethren in the Church, who are so easily scandalized by small things.[32]

The abbot perceived the danger of conversions to Islam. But in reality, no large-scale conversions to Islam in Europe ever took place. Islam had posed no threat to the orthodoxy of the Latin Christians. The abbot's fears were groundless.

There is evidence that he supported the cause of the Crusade. However, the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders confirmed the divine sanction of the sword in the minds of Christians. The great authority of his friend and occasional rival St Bernard of Clairvaux was used to set up the Military Order of the Temple as a new form of monasticism. The direction the crusading ideal was taking must have caused some difficulties in the mind of Peter. However, he did not stand opposed to the idea of winning access to the Holy Land, which for him was a legitimate aim. The effective way for the church to wield its sword was by the preaching of the Gospel to the heretics and pagans. James Kritzeck describes his attitude to the Crusade:

> Peter's exception to aspects of the Crusade was not of a nature to take the form of overt or active opposition to it. It was manifestly, predictably, in praise of peace and in persistent exhortation of the crusading leaders to the more upright purposes of their expedition, those to which he felt he could promise 'devotion, prayer, counsel and assistance of such a kind and quality' as a monk could give

> to the ‘militia of the Eternal King.’ There had grown in his mind a strong conviction that the avowed purposes and goals of the Crusade had omitted entirely what should have been the most central Christian concern, namely, the conversion of the Moslems; that it had squandered an opportunity and had sacrificed something in favour of military and political considerations which by its very nature transcended them.[33]

Peter named the Turks, Saracens, Persians and Arabs as the enemies of the cross of Christ, but only insofar as they rejected his salvation. They ceased to be enemies by accepting Christ as the Saviour. His teaching to the Crusaders, in short, was to convert the Muslims instead of exterminating them.

The attempt to eradicate ignorance about Islam had its motives, which precluded its positive assessment. In fact, the views about Islam got even worse. As Southern says: ‘It is not difficult to understand why this should have been so. In the second half of the twelfth century, Europe was riddled with heresies at home, and abroad the situation with regard to Islam took a decided turn for the worse. By the end of the century the high expectations of the First Crusade had been obliterated by a long succession of military reverses. These circumstances did not provide a hopeful background for the study of Islam.’[34]

Peter had two major theses regarding the relationship of Islam to Christian doctrine. The first was that Islam was to be regarded as a summation of all Christian heresies. By raising objections against Islam and then providing an answer to these, he reached no definite conclusion as to whether or not Muslims were to be regarded as heretics or pagans. He wrote:

> I cannot clearly decide whether the Mohammedan error must be called a heresy and its followers heretics, or whether they are to be called pagans. For I see them, now in the manner of heretics, take certain things from the Christian faith and reject other things; then--a thing which no heresy is described as ever having done--acting as well teaching according to pagan custom. For in company with certain heretics (Mohammed writes so in his wicked Koran), they preach that Christ was indeed born of a virgin, and they say that he is greater

> than every other man, not excluding Mohammed; they affirm that he lived a sinless life, preached truths, and worked miracles. They acknowledge that he was the Spirit of God, the Word--but not the Spirit of God or the Word as we either know or expound. They insanely hold that the passion and death of Christ were not mere fantasies (as the Manichaeans had held), but did not actually happen. They hold these and similar things, indeed, in company with heretics. With pagans, however, they reject baptism, do not accept the Christian sacrifice (of the Mass, and) deride penance and all the rest of the sacraments of the Church.[35]

And he left it to his Christian readers to call Muslims heretics or pagans as they saw fit; Peter chose to call them heretics.

The second thesis he advanced was to view Islam as a part of a satanic scheme to destroy the Christian Church, and that Muhammad was to be regarded as a kind of 'mean' between Arius and the Antichrist:

> The highest purpose of this heresy is to have Christ the Lord believed to be neither God nor the Son of God, but (though a great man and one beloved of God) simply a man--a wise man and the greatest prophet. Indeed, that which was conceived by the device of the devil, first propagated through Arius, then advanced by that Satan, namely Mohammed, will be fulfilled completely, according to the diabolical plan, through the Antichrist. For since the Blessed Hilary said that the origin of the Antichrist arose in Arius, then what (Arius) began by denying that Christ was the one true Son of God and calling him a creature, he was not only not God or the Son of God, but not even a good man. This most wicked Mohammed seems to have been appropriately provided and prepared by the devil as the mean between these two, so that he became both a supplement, to a certain extent, to Arius, and the greatest sustenance for the Antichrist, who will allege even worse things before the mind of the unbelievers.[36]

Peter explained that it was really Satan who with intent to destroy the faith in God Incarnate used his subtle skills to mislead the Muslims, 'the most wicked race', to

further his plans as he had done in the beginning of the nascent Church. Peter was able to see clearly the close contact between Satan and his instrument, Muhammad:

> For in no way could anyone of the human race, unless the devil were there helping, devise such fables as the writings which here follow [i.e. the Cluniac Collection]. By means of them, after many ridiculous things and the maddest absurdities, this Satan had as its object particularly and in every way to bring it about that Christ the Lord would not be believed to be the Son of God and true God, the creator and redeemer of the human race. And this is truly what he then attempted to induce through Porphyry, but through the mercy of God was blown away from the Church, which even up to that time was fervent with the first fruits of the Holy Spirit. But finally, employing that most wretched man Mohammed (and, as is said by some, a man possessed [by the devil] and an epileptic), using him as an instrument and tool very suitable for him, alas, he plunged with himself into everlasting damnation a very numerous race, which can be considered to constitute almost one-half of the world.[37]

The notion that Muhammad was 'possessed' who uttered his revelations when under fits of epilepsy also belongs to the prevalent popular Christian view of the rise of Islam. To many readers' chagrin, Peter did not elaborate why God the Father or God the Son who had prevented Arius and Porphyry in their 'diabolical aims', did not hinder Muhammad. The way Satan prevailed over the will and designs of Almighty God to further the mission of Muhammad must have been a matter of acute mental anguish for the medieval Christian writers. The abbot repeated the familiar explanation: 'As to why it was permitted to him, He alone knows to whom no one can say, "Why did you act this way?" and who has also said that "of the many called, few are chosen." On that account I chose rather to tremble than dispute.'[38] In the same way, a recurrent explanation for the success of Islam or the final defeats of the Crusaders at the hands of the Muslims was sought in the divine judgement for the sins of Christians.

Peter's basic motive for the translation of the Qur'an under his patronage was to attack Islam by showing the weaknesses of its holy book. By rejecting Muhammad's prophethood, he also rejected the Qur'an for having its source in divine revelation.

Contrary to what the Muslims had believed so far, and they still do, the abbot found that Satan, and not God, was the force behind it:

> Satan gave success to the error and sent monk Sergius, a follower of the heretical Nestorius who had been expelled from the Church, across to the regions of Arabia, and joined the heretical monk with the pseudo-prophet. And so Sergius, joined with Mohammed, filled in what was lacking to him, and explaining to him also the sacred scriptures, both the Old Testament and the New, (in part) according to the thinking of his master Nestorius, who denied that our Saviour was God, (and) in part according to his own interpretations, and likewise completely infecting him with the fables of the apocryphal writings, he made him a Nestorian Christian.[39]

The abbot having discovered the source of the Qur'an, earnestly exposed what he thought were its weaknesses. He also depicts Muhammad, beside other things, as having turned into a Nestorian Christian under influence of Sergius. Despite all this, the learned abbot was not without charitable feelings towards the enemy. He kept the door to salvation under Christ open to the Muslims. In the *Liber Primus*, his message is 'to the Arabs, the sons of Ishmael, who observe the law of that one who is called Mohammed'. He writes:

> I, a man so very distant from you in place, speaking a different language, . . . that I attack, by my utterances, those whom I have never seen, whom I shall perhaps never see. But I do not attack you, as some of us often do, by arms, but by words; not by force, but by reason; not in hatred, but in love . . . I, of the innumerable ones, and the very least among the numberless servants of Christ, love you; loving you, I write to you; writing, I invite you to salvation.[40]

No doubt, some 'erring' souls must have found the generosity and consolation extended towards them by Peter deeply touching.

Again, the beginning of Arabic scholarship in Europe was also influenced by considerations other than the purely academic. Bernard Lewis succinctly describes the situation: 'In the monasteries of western Europe, studious monks learned Arabic,

translated the Qur'an, and studied other Muslim texts, with a double purpose--first, the immediate aim of saving Christian souls from conversion to Islam and, second, the more distant hope of converting Muslims to Christianity. It took some centuries before they decided that the first was no longer necessary and that the second was impossible.'[41] There are some instances when Muslims in small numbers converted to Christianity in Europe in conditions of war, but whenever the two religious communities met or lived in the same place over a longer period of time, the flow of conversions, even though in small numbers, has been from Christianity to Islam.

Chapter 10. Attack from the East: the Mongols

The Christendoms and Islam on the eve of the Mongol conquests

At the opening of the thirteenth century, there did not seem to be any real danger to Islam from the Christians. After Salah ud-Din's victories Muslims neither feared nor expected any major adventure from the West. However the conflict between the Byzantine Empire and the Latin West had gone on for centuries. The Byzantines were apprehensive from the start about the aggressive intentions of the Crusaders. They thought that the Crusaders' objective was to conquer and plunder Constantinople and occupy Byzantine lands. Even though Muslims had attacked Constantinople many times, it finally became a victim, not of the Muslims, but of the Latin Christians. Constantinople was conquered and decimated by the Fourth Crusade. On their way to Jerusalem, the Crusaders sacked Constantinople. Sir Steven Runciman has called this 'the greatest crime in history'.

Among the prominent French nobles was the chronicler Geoffrey of Villehardouin, who wrote the principal account of the Fourth Crusade. According to him, the sight of Constantinople with hundred of churches, enormous towers, magnificent buildings and great works of art was beyond the imagination of the Western knights. The city was incredibly rich. After a brief siege, the city fell in 1204. Deno J. Geanakoplos describes how the Latin Christians acted towards the Eastern Christians:

> The crusaders were granted by their leaders the customary three-day period of sack, which resulted in an unprecedented looting of the city, raping of women, including nuns, and the destruction of many manuscripts and priceless works of art (including masterpieces of ancient Greek statuary) that had been in Constantinople since its founding. In St. Sophia the crusaders trampled upon the sacred books and icons, drank wine out of the sacred chalices, and even seated a prostitute on the patriarchal throne.[1]

The Crusaders sacked the city and each person took as much loot as he could. Thus the greatest centre of Christianity was reduced to shambles, manifestly beyond recognition after the pillage and destruction. 'More works of art and cultural treasures were destroyed on this occasion than at any other time throughout the Middle Ages, not excepting the Turkish conquest of 1453.'[2] The amount of gold, silver, precious stones and other valuable objects taken by the Crusaders was inestimable. Many works of art, priceless icons and relics were shipped to enrich Venice, Paris, Turin, and other Western centres. The victors established the Latin Empire of Constantinople over the former territories of the Byzantine Empire. The founding of the Latin Empire crippled Byzantium. When, after 57 years, the Greeks recaptured Constantinople and restored the rule of the emperors in 1261, it was a weakened empire that never recovered its former power and prestige. The Turkish conquest of Constantinople in 1453 put an end to the rule of the Greek emperors.

Now we turn to the Muslim world. After the death of Salah ud-Din in 1193, the Ayyubids continued to rule till 1250 and in Muslim Syria for another decade. Strangely enough, they even leased Jerusalem back to the Crusaders in 1229, who also had kept control of the coastal areas of Syria and Palestine. In Persia the Seljuk Empire had disintegrated by the middle of the twelfth century, but its power was inherited by the founding of a new state of Khwarazm (modern Khiva). In North Africa the Berber Almohads had brought the whole of the Maghreb under their empire, and this brought an era of peace and prosperity there that it had not known since the Roman times. The Muslims after the loss of Spain and Sicily and the ravages of the early Crusaders may have felt that the worst was over. But, now at this historical juncture, the Islamic world and its civilisation was on the eve of its greatest disaster. The era of Mongol conquests had begun. I outline below some leading events of the period with a view to provide historical background to judge Christian policy and attitudes towards the Mongols and Muslims during those times.

The Mongol era of conquests

The Mongol attacks were one of the most devastating blows to the civilised world, East and West, in which all the major civilisations, of China, India, Europe, and the Muslim world, suffered. But the biggest loss was to Islamic countries, which were

mercilessly destroyed. The Mongols lived in the steppes of central Asia, north of the Gobi Desert that still bears their name. Towards the east of their areas lived the Tatars and to their west the Keraits and Naimans. While the Mongols and Tatars were in religion shamanists, the Keraits and Naimans had been converted to Nestorian Christianity. The chief of the Keraits had the title of Ong- or Wang-Khan, which in the West probably was the original 'Prester John', the fabled Christian king of a vast empire in the East. Before Nestorian Christians arrived, Manichaean missionaries had been active among these people; they taught them a new religion and introduced a script, based on the Syriac alphabet, for their language. Islam had no influence on these people.

The Mongols were led by their great leader, Genghis Khan (1162--1227), a military genius who after uniting the various Mongol and Turkish tribes of central Asia under his rule, embarked on the conquest of the world. The Mongols were horsemen without equal; they were undeterred by the vast expanses of unchartered terrain that elsewhere could have chilled the spirits of medieval adventurers. History had never seen anything like them in battle before. Genghis Khan forged a mighty army that started the conquests. He used to say: 'All cities must be razed so that the world may once again become a great steppe in which Mongol mothers will suckle free and happy children.' Great cities like Bukhara, Samarkand, and Herat were reduced to rubble and their populations annihilated. Genghis Khan, the Universal Ruler, had created the great Mongol empire. No one in human history had created so large an empire, which stretched from Korea to Persia and from the Indian Ocean to Siberia.

In the execution of his expansionist ambitions, Genghis Khan did not let anything or anyone stand in his way. In Runciman's words: 'He was totally ruthless. He had no regard for human life and no sympathy for human suffering. Millions of innocent townsfolk perished in the course of his wars; millions of innocent peasants saw their fields and orchards destroyed. His empire was founded on human misery.'[3]

Between 1219 and 1224, the Mongols overran and conquered the whole of central Asia from Peking to Lake Balkash, and in 1222 they marched through the Caucasus and invaded southern Russia. In 1227 the 'golden life' (Genghis Khan's

words for his own life) of the World Conqueror came to an end during his last campaign against the Tangut kingdom on the northwest frontier of China. There is controversy among historians about the actual cause of his death and the circumstances surrounding it. In any case, when on his deathbed, he is reported to have ordered the extermination of the Tangut people. On his death, forty 'moonlike virgins' and forty horses were killed to accompany him to the next world. Professor Paul Ratchevsky, a modern biographer of Genghis Khan, writes:

> Dreadful vengeance was exacted by the Mongols for the death of Genghis Khan; in accordance with his orders, not only the Tangut ruler, but the total population of the capital was massacred. The body of the World Conqueror was then placed on a cart and the trip home began. Genghis had ordered that his death was to remain secret and so all living beings encountered by the funeral cortège were massacred.[4]

In 1229, his son Ogodai was elected emperor, the Great Khan. Under the command of Emperor Ogodai's nephew Batu Khan the Mongols completed the conquest of the Eurasian steppe lands. Between 1238 and 1240 they overran the plains of southern Russia, crushing any resistance so ruthlessly that, as a Russian chronicler put it, 'No eye remained open to weep for the dead.' Batu Khan led the main army into the Ukraine, sacked Chernigov and Pereislavl and took Kiev by assault. Most of the population was slaughtered and the precious treasures were destroyed.

In 1241, the Mongols planned a grand strategy to crush western Europe by two separate forces. One army pressed through Poland, destroyed Krakow and invaded Silesia, where the German army was annihilated in the Battle of Liegnitz. They advanced on Moravia. The other army led by Batu Khan attacked Hungary, destroyed the army of King Bela, and by the end of 1241, they reached the shores of Dalmatia. The victory march of the Mongols like a mighty hurricane swept away everything that stood in their way. The Mongols seemed unstoppable. Western Europe was panic-stricken. At this time news came of the death of Emperor Ogodai at Karakorum in December 1241. Batu Khan could not remain absent from Mongolia while a successor was being chosen. He withdrew his army beyond the Volga. It might have seemed a temporary respite for the Mongols but it turned out that they never returned to Europe

again. In fact, in 1241, this sudden change of direction was quite unexpected. It was quite possible that they might return and resume their offensive again. Ogodai's widow, who was born a Naiman Christian princess, took over regency for five years. At the end of her regency, her son Guyuk was elected the Great Khan in 1246, but he died two years later in 1248. Thus by a fortuitous turn of events, Europe was spared the destiny which was in store for the Muslims.

Now we turn to the Muslim lands. While the Middle Eastern countries had been struggling against the Crusaders, the Mongols unleashed their attacks on the Muslim East. The Mongol armies between 1219 and 1224 had overrun Transoxiana, Khwarazm and Khurasan, spreading havoc and destruction wherever they went. The famous cultural centres of the Islamic East were totally wiped out of existence, leaving only burnt cities and ruined structures in places where grand palaces and magnificent libraries formerly stood. Once flourishing and populous cities like Herat, Balkh, Bukhara and Samarkand were reduced to ashes and their populations were either killed or carried into captivity. Khwarazm was totally obliterated. While ravaging Bukhara in 1219, Genghis Khan is reported by a late tradition to have mentioned himself in a speech as 'the scourge of God sent to men as a punishment for their sins'. Arthur Goldschmidt writes:

> The atrocities committed by the Mongol armies defy description: 700,000 inhabitants of Merv were massacred; the dams near Gurganj were broken in order to flood the city *after* it had been taken; a Muslim governor had molten gold poured down his throat; thousands of Muslim artisans were carried to Mongolia as slaves, most of them dying on the way; the heads of the men, women, and children at Nishapur were piled in pyramids and even cats and dogs were murdered in the streets. The Mongol aim was to paralyze the Muslims with such fear that they would never dare to fight back.[5]

During 1231--33 the Khwarazmian power in Persia was destroyed, and the Assassin Order, whose headquarters were at Alamut in the Persian mountains, threatened. It seemed quite likely that Mongols would advance farther to Baghdad and put an end to the Abbasid Caliphate.

When Batu Khan's forces withdrew, Europeans in their hour of relief began to consider that if pagan Mongols could be converted to Christianity then a Christian-Mongol alliance could come into being which by utilising the military power and skills of Mongols would crush Islam forever. As the hopes of any successful outcome of the Crusades had gradually diminished, the new hopes in the minds of Popes and kings to have Mongols as Christian soldiers who could give the final death-blows to Muslims had caught the imagination of many. 'Such is the mental tortuousness of political strategists, especially those dominated by an ideology, that the directors of Christian policy actually conceived the idea of an alliance with these savages against the civilised and treaty-keeping Muslims.'[6]

When Genghis Khan was expanding his empire, Pope Innocent III, disappointed with the outcome of the Fourth Crusade, had eagerly sought since 1213 to launch a new crusade. His successor Honorius III took up the mission. His plan was to strike at the centre of Ayyubid power in Egypt by an attack on Damietta. The Fifth Crusade was effectively directed by the Pope with the papal legate Pelagius of Albano having the leading position among the Christian leaders to conduct the operations as more Crusaders arrived in Egypt from Europe. The capture of Damietta in 1219 raised the hopes of the Crusaders that they could crush Islam by conquering Egypt. But things did not develop as they had expected. During 1220--21 a stalemate ensued; the Crusaders did not make any headway. There were quarrels between Pelagius and John of Brienne, regent of the Latin kingdom. Pelagius thought that as papal legate he alone was in charge. This Crusade proved to be an abject failure.

However in the spring of 1221 the overall situation seemed favourable. The German chronicler Oliver of Paderborn, who participated in the Fifth Crusade and wrote a complete eyewitness account of it, was secretary to Cardinal Pelagius, the papal legate. Oliver shows how the Latin Crusaders now pinned their hopes on a new ally from the East, whom God had chosen to accomplish the task of exterminating Islam. In the beginning of the following passage, it appears that God was speaking which Oliver repeats verbatim, but it clearly indicates Christian expectations when the universal empire of Genghis Khan was expanding:

> I have found David My servant, with My holy oil I have anointed him king of the Indies, whom I have commanded to avenge My wrongs, to rise against the many-headed beast, to whom I have given victory over the king of the Persians; I have placed a great part of Asia under his feet. The King of the Persians, being lifted up unto excessive pride, wished to be the monarch of Asia; against him King David, who they say is the son of Prester John, won the first fruits of victory. Then he subjugated other kings and kingdoms to himself, and, as we learned by a report that reached far and wide, there is no power on earth that can resist him. He is believed to be the executor of divine vengeance, the hammer of Asia.[7]

The Crusaders were aware of the Mongol conquests of Muslim countries. The information about the conquests of the Mongols in Asia was also correct. Pelagius reported the situation to the Pope, who wrote to the Archbishop of Trier. Here is a part of the papal letter:

> The Lord has manifestly begun to judge his cause, mindful of the injuries suffered by his people every day, and of the cries of those who call upon him. For behold, as our venerable brother Pelagius, Bishop of Albano, Legate of the Apostolic See, has informed us, King David, vulgarly called Prester John, a Catholic and God-fearing man, has entered Persia with a powerful army, has defeated the Sultan of Persia in a pitched battle, has penetrated twenty days' march into his kingdom and occupied it. He holds therein many cities and castles. His army is only ten days' march from Baghdad, a great and famous city, and special seat of the Caliph, whom the Saracens call their chief priest and bishop. The fear of these events has caused the Sultan of Aleppo, brother of the Sultan of Damascus and Cairo, to turn his arms, with which he was preparing to attack the Christian army at Damietta, against this king. Our legate, moreover, has sent messengers to the Georgians, themselves Catholic men and powerful in arms, asking and beseeching them to make war on the Saracens on their side. Whence we hope that, if our army at Damietta has the help which it hopes for this summer, it will with God's help easily occupy the land of Egypt, while the forces of the Saracens, which had been gathered from all parts to defend it, are dispersed to defend the frontiers of their land.[8]

This letter speaks abundantly about the European hopes to destroy Islam with the help of known or unknown allies. The Crusaders had experienced their enemy by coming in contact with the Muslims, in battle or in peace. But what strikes us most is that intense hatred and enmity towards Islam and its followers, who again, in battlefield or in peace had treated Christians with respect and generosity. Now, the pious hopes turned towards King David, a Christian, who had come from the East and was attacking the Muslims. But this God-fearing and noble king was none other than Genghis Khan. Runciman aptly describes the situation:

> The legend of Prester John spread an almost apocalyptic belief that salvation was coming from the East, which left too strong a mark. No one paused to reflect that if Wang-Khan the Kerait had really been the mysterious Johannes, this destroyer was unlikely to fulfil the same role. Everyone preferred to remember that the Mongols had fought against the Moslems and that Christian princesses had married into the Imperial family. The Great Khan of the Mongols might not be a Christian himself; he might not actually be Prester John; but it was hopefully assumed that he would be eager to champion Christian ideology against the forces of Islam.[9]

As mentioned before, Batu Khan withdrew his army in 1241. This brought the Mongol offensive against Western Europe to a halt. From this time, Muslim countries became the main target of the Mongol attacks. In 1243, the Seljuks of Rum were defeated. As a result, they were reduced to a vassal status and the Turkish tribes were allowed to carve up petty principalities in Anatolia. Another consequence was to cement a lasting alliance between the Mongols and the Christian kingdom of Little Armenia, which had given steadfast support to the Crusaders against the Muslims.

As the plight of the Muslim world was getting worse, for the West it signalled great expectations for the Christian cause. Some preliminary steps were taken to explore the possibility of converting the pagan Mongol leaders to Christianity and if that could be accomplished then the way would be open for the new Christian soldiers from the East to deliver their final deathblow to the Muslims of western Asia.

In 1245, at the Council of Lyons, Pope Innocent IV decided to send three embassies to the Mongol territory. The first one led by the Franciscan Friar John of Plano Carpini reached the Mongol capital in 1246, in time, to witness the election of Guyuk as the Great Khan. Guyuk, who had many Nestorian Christians as advisers, met the envoy with cordiality. The Pope in his letter, which was both offensive and condescending in tone and content, asked the Great Khan to make peace with Christians, treat Christians living under his rule properly and embrace Christianity. The mission was not able to extract any promises from the Great Khan; however, he sent a letter in reply to Pope Innocent IV. This letter deserves to be quoted in full because it shows the political outlook of the Mongol rulers at that time:

> We, by the power of the eternal heaven,
>
> Khan of the great Ulus
>
> Our command:
>
> This is a version sent to the great Pope, that he may understand it in the (Muslim) tongue, what has been written. The petition of the assembly held in the lands of the Emperor (for our support) has been heard from your emissaries. If he reaches (you) with his own report, Thou, who art the great Pope, together with all the Princes (of the West), come in person to serve us. At that time, I shall make known all the commands of *Yasa*.
>
> You have also said that you have offered supplication and prayer, that I might find a good entry into baptism. This prayer of thine I have not understood. Other words which thou have sent me: 'I am surprised that that thou hast seized all the lands of the Magyar and the Christians. Tell us what their fault is.' These words of thine have I also not understood. The eternal God has slain and annihilated these lands and peoples, because they have neither adhered to Genghis Khan, nor to the Khagan, nor to the command of God. Like thy words, they were proud and they slew our messenger-emissaries. How could anybody seize or kill by his own power contrary to the command of God?
>
> Though thou likewise sayest that I should become a trembling Nestorian Christian, worship God and be an ascetic, how knowest thou whom God absolves, in truth to whom He shows mercy? How dost thou know that such words as thou speakest are with God's sanction?

Now thou should say with a sincere heart: 'I will submit and serve you.' Thou thyself, at the head of all the Princes, come at once to serve and wait upon us! At that time I will recognise your submission.

If you do not observe God's command, and if you ignore my command, I shall know you as my enemy. Likewise I shall make you understand. If you do otherwise, God knows what I know.

At the end of Jumada the second in the Year 644 [November 1246].[10]

No doubt, this letter gave an alarming signal of the unpredictable course that the Mongol strategy could take, even though it was written five years after the withdrawal of Batu Khan from the West. The letter also shows how both the Pope and the Great Khan were alike in claiming to speak on behalf of God, each drawing support from Him and both of them having assumed that their wars were in the service of God. Thus the theological stances represented by the instigator of the Crusade and the Mongol ruler were almost identical. But in secular matters, such as their empire-building, the Mongols followed a very simple rule: any ruler who did not submit to their rule was a rebel, who had to be subjugated or wiped out. And they meant it. There was no room for any third option. They viewed the extension of their empire as a natural process and 'gradually they came to conceive the world as the Mongol empire-in-the-making, whose leaders by Heavenly appointment were Genghis Khan's successors. Even though many nations were still outside the Great Khan's control, they were nevertheless regarded as potential members of this universal Mongol empire.'[11]

Friar John gave a detailed report to the Pope, informing him that the Christian influence in the imperial Mongol Court was quite visible, but there was little interest to convert to Christianity; what the Mongols had their eyes on was only conquest. He warned that they had cruelly enslaved Christian nations and that their object was to overthrow the whole world and reduce it to slavery. He saw the Mongol danger as far more serious to Christianity than any danger from Islam. At the same time, there were also unconfirmed reports circulating that the Great Khan was on the point of converting to Christianity, and this kept the hopes of the Pope alive. He sent another embassy to the Mongols under the Dominican Ascelin of Lombardy. He met the Mongol general Baichu in 1247 in Persia. Baichu was ready to attack Baghdad; it

would suit the Mongols if the Christians could start a new crusade to distract the Syrian Muslims. He sent two envoys to the Rome, one of them a Nestorian Christian. The West viewed the Mongol overtures with renewed hopes. However, nothing concrete was achieved in negotiations and the Mongol envoys returned in 1248 after a year's stay in Rome.

King Louis IX of France, also known as Saint Louis, was quite aware of the reports reaching Europe that the Nestorian Christians due to their ascendancy in the Mongol Court were influencing the policy of the Mongol emperor in anti-Muslim direction. Saint Louis was very delighted by such a development. While Saint Louis was in Cyprus preparing for a new crusade against Egypt, Mongol emissaries consisting of two Nestorian Christians arrived in Nicosia. A Mongol general, who was the Great Khan's commissioner at Mosul, had sent them there. In laudatory terms, the letter mentioned the sympathy in which Mongols held Christianity. The king dispatched a mission of Dominicans under Andrew of Longjumeau to the Mongol capital. On their arrival in Karakorum, they found that the Great Khan Guyuk had died and his widow Ogul Gamish was acting as a regent. She was cordial towards the mission, and regarded the king's gifts as tribute from a vassal to the Supreme Ruler. Her reply to King Louis for his friendly overtures is appreciated with a clear message, which was recorded by chronicler Jean de Joinville (1224--1317), a close friend of the king, in his *Life of St Louis* as follows:

> Peace is good; for when a country is at peace those who go on four feet eat the grass in peace, and those who go on two feet till the ground, from which good things come, in peace.
>
> This we send you for a warning, for you cannot have peace if you are not at peace with us. Prester John rose against us, and such and such kings (giving the names of many) and all we have put to the sword. We bid you, and then, every year to send us of your gold and of your silver so much as may win you our friendship. If you do not do this we shall destroy you and your people, as we have done to those we have named.[12]

King Louis was much disappointed by the response, and is said to have repented for having sent the mission. But he continued to cherish the hope to forge a Christian-

Mongol alliance against Islam whenever the right conditions appeared on the political scene. In addition, Western hopes of Mongols converting to Christianity were not without foundation either. Louis was encouraged by the information he received that there were substantial number of Christians in the Mongol Empire, some holding important and influential positions.

Meanwhile, in 1251, another great and vigorous Mongol ruler to emerge from dynastic quarrels was Mengu (r. 1251--1257). Under him the policy of expansion was accelerated. He launched two major expeditions to round out his great empire: the one under Kublai to subdue southern China, and the other under Helagu to subdue the rest of the lands south and west of the Oxus. At this juncture Karakorum was the diplomatic centre of the world. When King Louis heard about the ascension of Mengu as the Great Khan, he sent a Flemish Franciscan, William of Rubruck on a mission of inquiry among the Mongols in 1253. An interesting religious debate was arranged before the Great Khan in which the representatives of the Nestorian Christians, the Buddhists, the Muslims, and the Latin Christians took part. William represented the Latins and took the side of Nestorianism and Islam against Buddhism.[13]

Mengu had a liberal attitude towards all these religions. He, like his forefathers, followed Shamanism, but he attended Christian, Buddhist and Muslim ceremonies. However, the Nestorian Christians were more influential in the Mongol Court and the principal queen, Kutuktai, and many others of his wives were Nestorians. When compared with the myopic outlook of the Latin Christians, the Mongols had a greater sense for sobriety and toleration in religious matters right from Genghis Khan's rule. The Mongol policy towards religions was one of respect, without interference or favouritism. Mengu received William in audience. William found the Mongol government planning to attack the Muslims of western Asia. If any Western king wanted to discuss any common action, he first had to submit as a vassal to the Great Khan. As Runciman says: 'His foreign policy was fundamentally simple. His friends were already his vassals; his enemies were to be eliminated or reduced to vassaldom. All that William could obtain was the quite sincere promise that the Christians should receive ample aid so long as their rulers came to pay homage to the suzerain of the world.'[14] William's eyewitness record of events and his observations in his diary form

an important source of information about these extraordinary conquerors on the eve of their fateful offensive against Islam.

Among the Christian rulers was King Hethoum of Armenia, who visited Karakorum in 1255 to pay his homage as a vassal. He received a warm and royal welcome. He was treated as the chief Christian advisor to the Great Khan on matters concerning western Asia, and was given guarantees that the boundaries of his kingdom would not be violated and that his kingdom would be safe. He was also said to have been told by Mengu that the Mongols would restore Jerusalem to the Crusaders when they had defeated the remnants of Muslim power. King Hethoum who was to prove a faithful ally of the Mongols returned home with great expectations. His attempts to forge a great Christian alliance to aid the Mongols were welcomed by the native Christians.

Mengu's brother Helagu had already established his rule in Persia, and was preparing to invade Baghdad to exterminate the Caliphate. He was morbidly hostile to Muslims, and this was largely due to the Christian influence on the Mongol leadership. His influential wife Dokuz Khatun, a Kerait princess by birth, and his principal lieutenant, Kitbuka, were Christians. Dokuz Khatun was a devout Nestorian who wielded great influence in the royal corridors of power. While she did her utmost to help Christians of every sect, she was openly hostile to Muslims and their faith.

Helagu at the head of a large Mongol army, including contingents from the Christian kingdoms of Armenia and Georgia, crossed the Oxus. After crushing the Nizari Ismailis known as the Assassins who had terrorised Sunni Muslims for two centuries, the Mongols reached Baghdad in 1258. The Muslim army resisted bravely but Helagu's engineers broke the dykes and flooded the Muslim camp, drowning thousands of soldiers. Baghdad was bombarded with heavy rocks thrown from catapults. The caliph sent his vizier accompanied by the Nestorian patriarch to the Mongol camp to ask for terms of capitulation, but Helagu refused to see them. He ordered the caliph to come in person along with his family and officials to offer his unconditional surrender, which he did. All those who had fought or surrendered were treated alike: they were all killed. The caliph and his family were wrapped in carpets and trampled to death by horses. Christians and Jews were spared. Christians were

asked to take refuge in churches. By the special orders of Dokuz Khatun, they were to be left undisturbed. The slaughter of Muslims lasted forty days. About one million Muslims were killed. The Georgians who were the first to enter the city were particularly fierce in their destruction. The palaces, colleges, libraries, and mosques were first plundered and then burnt. Thus the great centre of Islamic civilisation, of fabulous grandeur and beauty for five centuries, perished in flames.

The destruction of Baghdad was rejoiced by Christians everywhere. Eastern Christians hailed the fall of the Second Babylon and eulogised Helagu and Dokuz Khatun as the new Constantine and Helena, the instruments of God for vengeance on 'the enemies of Christ'. The victorious Mongols moved on to invade Syria in 1259. Aleppo was captured, its Muslim population put to the sword, and the city destroyed. Damascus capitulated without resistance. The inhabitants of the ancient capital saw three Christian victors, the king of Armenia, the Frankish Count Bohemond of Antioch and the Mongol commander Kitbuka riding through the streets of Damascus where Muslims were forced to bow to the cross.

The fall of the three great cities of Baghdad, Aleppo and Damascus virtually meant the end of Muslim power in Asia was at hand. Now it was Egypt's turn, the last centre of Muslim power. Its demise was within the sight of the Mongols and Christians. Helagu sent envoys to the Mamluk rulers of Egypt with this message:

> You have heard how we have conquered a vast empire and have purified the earth of the disorders that tainted it. It is for you to fly and for us to pursue, but whither will you flee, and by what road will you escape us? Our horses are swift, our arrows sharp, our swords like thunderbolts, and our hearts as hard as the mountains, our soldiers as numerous as the sand. Fortresses will not detain us. We mean well by our warning, for now you are the only enemy against whom we have to march.[15]

Helagu at this stage heard the news that his brother, the Great Khan Mengu, had died. He withdrew from Syria with most of his army, and appointed his trusted general Kitbuka as commander of his army. Meanwhile, the Mamluks marched into Palestine. They were led by Sultan Kutuz and his general Baibers. The Mongol army was led by

Kitbuka. In this fateful confrontation the Mongol army was completely defeated at Ain Jalut. After almost sixty years of phenomenal victories in the battlefield, the Mongols suffered their first major defeat. This battle turned out to be one of the most decisive battles in world history and has been seen as a turning point in the history of the Middle East and Islam. The invincible Mongols were decisively defeated by the Mamluks, and their last expansion towards the west stopped. Runciman emphasises the historical significance of the fateful battle:

> The Mameluk victory saved Islam from the most dangerous threat that it has ever had to face. Had the Mongols penetrated into Egypt there would have been no great Moslem state left in the world east of Morocco. The Moslems in Asia were far too numerous ever to be eliminated but they would no longer have been the ruling race. Had Kitbuqa, the Christian, triumphed, the Christian sympathies of the Mongols would have been encouraged, and the Asiatic Christians would have come into power for the first time since the great heresies of the pre-Moslem era. . . . Ain Jalud made the Mameluk Sultanate of Egypt the chief power in the Near East for the next two centuries, till the rise of the Ottoman Empire. It completed the ruin of the native Christians of Asia. By strengthening the Moslem and weakening the Christian element it was soon to induce the Mongols that remained in western Asia to embrace Islam. And it hastened the extinction of the Crusade States.[16]

After Ain Jalut, a new chapter in Islam and West relations evolved. The hopes of a joint Christian-Mongol alliance had not materialised. After Ain Jalut, no major Mongol forces were sent to Syria to avenge the defeat either. The Mamluk sultanate emerged as the leading political and military power in the Muslim world. The ambitious General Baibers murdered Sultan Kutuz and became ruler. Sultan Baibers was free to turn his attention to the Crusaders' remaining colonial possessions in the Middle East. He started his military expeditions and many important Crusader cities and castles rapidly fell to his forces.

The euphoria amongst Christians on the destruction of Baghdad, Aleppo and the occupation of Damascus was due to their extreme hatred and venomous hostility toward Islam. But this gratification was not to last long. Out of the ruins, Islam

asserted itself again. The West had played different cards to win Mongols for Christianity, but to no avail. On the contrary, it was not long before the decimated civilisation of Islam welcomed the Mongols to its fold. Islam had finally conquered its conquerors. The status and culture of the Oriental Christian Church shrank drastically. In the following section, we will see how Christian hopes of drawing Mongols to Christianity proved futile while Mongols in the Ilkhanid kingdom of Persia went over to the side of Islam.

The Mongol Ilkhans and Western Christendom

The Mongol rule under Helagu and his descendants in Persia, the Ilkhanid kings, deserves some brief description because some of them made serious efforts to forge a Mongol and Christian alliance against the Mamluk rulers of Egypt. While the *Kuriltai*, the Assembly of the Mongol Chiefs, met to choose a successor to Mengu, Helagu was empowered to rule over the lands he had conquered. He assumed the title of 'Ilkhan', and declared himself an independent king, even thought prefix *il* attached to his Khanate meant 'dependent', 'subordinate', in short, a vassal status.[17] In this way, he became the founder of the line of the Ilkhanid kings who ruled Persia until 1335. Helagu established his main capital at Tabriz. Events around 1260 show the break-up of the Mongol unity. Helagu died in 1265.

The Ilkhans were faced with the hostility of the Mamluks of Egypt and the Khans of the Golden Horde (who had embraced Islam). These circumstances forced the Ilkhans to seek their allies in the Christian West. Helagu had initiated the policy of making alliance with the Western powers. According to these designs, a crusading force sent from Europe was to co-ordinate with the Ilkhanid army, which would attack Syria. By this joint action and the successful occupation of Syria, the Crusaders would again take possession of Jerusalem. From the European perspective new hopes for capturing Jerusalem once again and the possibility of the Mongols converting to Christianity were indeed tempting.

Contrary to the Mongol policy of toleration towards all faiths, Helagu was extremely hostile to Muslims. No doubt, Muslims were his political enemies. He had carved up his great kingdom by capturing their lands. Another factor, which helps us

to understand his extreme attitude, is the leading role and influence of the Nestorians in the Mongol state. To them Islam was the enemy of Christianity and therefore the destruction of Muslims was seen as the defeat of Islam and the victory of the cross. Their influence on Helagu was real. Helagu himself has also been seen as a Christian engaged in the battle against Islam. One of the original sources on the early Ilkhans was the Jacobite prelate Bar Hebraeus, who wrote his voluminous *Chronicles* under the early Ilkhans. He was well acquainted with the politics of the Nestorian Church and its close relations with the Mongols. Under the Mongols the Nestorian Church saw its greatest prosperity and expansion in Asia. It was the period when the Nestorian Christians were having a real impact on the political affairs of the Mongol domains.

Bar Hebraeus records that Helagu was a Christian and his mother Sarkuthani Bagi was a Christian. He was a fanatical enemy of Muslims and as a Christian he rejoiced when he put an end to the Abbasid Caliphate. His wife Dokuz Khatun, originally a Christian Kerait, as mentioned before, was extremely anti-Muslim. She was a powerful and influential queen who seconded Helagu in helping the Christians. Under her orders many mosques were razed to the ground. Bar Hebraeus describes her as 'the believing queen and a true Christian' who 'raised up the horn of the Christians in all the earth.' She also died in her husband's year of death. At their deaths, 'there was great mourning among the Christians throughout the world at the departure of these two great lights, who made the Christian Faith to triumph.'[18]

However, modern historians do not consider Helagu to have been a believing Christian. David Morgan comments: 'Hülegü's own faith seems to have been little more than his ancestral Shamanism, though he is said to have favoured Buddhism. Since on his death in 1265 his funeral featured human sacrifices (it was the only Ilkhanid funeral to do so), we are entitled to doubt that his adherence to Buddhism went very deep.'[19] Maalouf points to the 'complex personality' of Helagu, who earlier on in his life was interested in philosophy and the sciences, but changed 'in the course of his campaigns into a savage animal thirsting for blood and destruction. His religious attitudes were no less contradictory. Although strongly influenced by Christianity--his mother, his favourite wife, and several of his closest collaborators

were members of the Nestorian Church--he never renounced Shamanism, the traditional religion of his people.'[20]

The victory of the Egyptians over the Mongols and the growing power of the Mamluk sultans alarmed the Crusaders. The Nestorians in Helagu's entourage vigorously worked for a Mongol-West alliance. In 1262, Helagu sent a letter, only recently discovered, to King Louis IX of France with a view to negotiate an alliance.[21] In 1263 or 1264, he sent his first mission to the Pope in Rome that led to a series of diplomatic exchanges between the Ilkhans and the West that lasted over forty years.[22] The Popes and Western kings considered seriously the proposal of an alliance with the Ilkhanid kingdom.

Helagu's successor, the Ilkhan Abaga, died in 1282. His brother Tekuder succeeded him. He converted to Islam, took the Muslim name of Ahmed and assumed the title of Sultan. But his reign did not last long; he was murdered in 1284 and succeeded by Arghun, whose ascension to the throne was greatly rejoiced by the Nestorian Christians. Arghun patronised and favoured the Christians.

During Arghun's reign, his best friend was the Nestorian Catholicus Mar Yaballaha III, who presided over the whole Nestorian Church in Asia from his seat in Iraq. He was originally a monk, named Markos, of Uighur nationality, who was born in the Chinese province of Shan-si. He travelled with another monk, Rabban Sauma, on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. While they were in Iraq in 1281, the reigning Catholicus Mar Denha died, and Markos was elected to the office. This shows how closely the Eastern Church cooperated with the Mongol government. Markos took the title of Mar Yaballaha III and came to exert great influence in the Mongol Kingdom on the strength of his origin and the royal patronage, which he used in the interests of the Nestorian Church. His mentor Rabban Sauma was also assigned important tasks. Arghun sent him as envoy to the West to obtain help from the Christian kings of Europe. An account of his travels, which he wrote, was included in the biography of Mar Yaballaha III. The narrative of Rabban Sauma's experiences is of unique historical value. It offers a fascinating insight in the lives of the Mongol rulers, Western monarchs and relations between the Eastern Christianity and the Catholic Church.

Under Arghun, Catholicus Mar Yaballaha acquired considerable influence. The fortunes of Christianity were on the rise under the patronage of the Mongol King. In 1287, Rabban Sauma was sent to the West as envoy and plenipotentiary of the Ilkhan to obtain help from the Western kings for a joint attack on Egypt to crush the Mamluk power and to capture Syria and Palestine. Palestine was to be returned to the Western Christendom for the military support. His journey took him to Constantinople, Naples, Rome, Genoa, Paris and Gascony and to Rome again. He met the Byzantine Emperor Andronicus II, the cardinals in Rome as on the death of Pope Honorius IV a new Pope had not yet been elected, King Philip IV of France, and King Edward I of England, and on his return to Rome he met the newly-elected Pope Nicholas IV.

The cardinals in Rome were surprised to see a Christian priest whom 'the King of the Tartars' had sent as an envoy to the West. In reply, Rabban Sauma explained the situation of Christianity in the East: 'Know ye, O my Fathers, that many of our fathers have gone into the countries of the Mongols, and Turks, and Chinese and have taught them the Gospel, and at the present time there are many Mongols who are Christians. For many of the sons of the Mongol kings and queens have been baptised and confess Christ. And they have established churches in their military camps, and they pay honour to the Christians, and there are among them many who are believers.'[23]

The kings of France and Britain received the envoy with great honour and formal ceremonial accolade. Regarding Arghun's plans for Jerusalem, King Philip of France told the envoy: 'If it be indeed so that the Mongols, though they are not Christians, are going to fight against the Arabs for the capture of Jerusalem, it is meet especially for us that we should fight [with them], and if our Lord willeth, go forth in full strength.'[24] King Edward I of England was equally enthusiastic about the question of Jerusalem. He said to Rabban Sauma: 'We the kings of these cities bear upon our bodies the sign of the Cross, and we have no subject of thought except this matter. And my mind is relieved on the subject about which I have been thinking, when I hear that King Arghon thinketh as I think.'[25] King Edward asked Rabban Sauma to celebrate the Eucharist, and he performed the Glorious Mysteries. The king and the officials of the state held a great feast in his honour.

Rabban Sauma had lived in and experienced the Mongol society where different faiths existed side by side and where people within the same religion could hold different beliefs. He probably thought that the same kind of diversity of faiths and beliefs also existed in the West. In any case, he got the answer to this when he asked King Edward 'to show us whatever churches and shrines there are in this country, so that when we go back to the Children of the East we may give them descriptions of them.' And the king replied, 'Thus shall ye say to King Arghon and unto all the Orientals: We have seen a thing than which there is nothing more wonderful, that is to say, that in the countries of the Franks there are not two Confessions of Faith, but only one Confession of Faith, namely, that which confesseth Jesus Christ; and all the Christians confess it.'[26]

When Rabban Sauma came to Rome, the Pope received him with great honour. The old theological animosity that had divided the Eastern and Western Christendoms for centuries seemed to have been put aside. Rabban Sauma celebrated the Easter Festival with the Pope. During the course of the week, he celebrated High Mass with him and the cardinals. On this occasion, he received Communion from the hands of the Pope himself. The Pope sent a golden crown for Catholicus MarYaballaha, and a bull authorising him to rule the Eastern Church. He confirmed Rabban Sauma's appointment as Visiting-General, and gave him his blessings.

One of the sons of Arghun was baptised as Nicholas in honour of Pope Nichols IV, who later became Ilkhan Oljeitu. All these developments in Persia under the Ilkhans seemed to indicate that the time was not far off when the Nestorian Christians would see the Mongols converting to Christianity *en masse,* and the rise of a Christian Mongol state in Asia united with the West against the 'pagan' Muslim enemy. Southern writes:

> What a vista of endless and universal peace and unity was opened up by this picture: Islam, either destroyed or, better still, converted by philosophy; the Mongol empire stretching to the confines of China, a Christian state; and Christendom itself enriched by the philosophical tradition handed down from Greece through Moslem philosophers, to provide the one thing necessary for the

> fullness of Christian truth. It was a noble prospect, and one which, if only a fraction of it had come true, would radically have altered the history of the world.[27]

However, Rabban Sauma's mission showed that despite a lot of sympathy for the Ilkhan's plans, the kings of the West had their own distractions and they were not ready to commit themselves to an allied crusade. King Philip IV of France and King Edward I of England could not give any possible date for a Western attack on the Mamluk sultanate. Arghun was quite surprised to learn from Sauma's report that Western Christians who had shown so much enthusiasm for the Holy Land were reluctant to give a positive response to his invitation to take part in a holy war against the Muslims. He had expected concrete action from the Western kings rather than their messages of goodwill and compliments for his noble designs.

In 1289, Arghun sent another envoy, Buscarello Ghisolfi, a Genoese long settled in the Ilkhanate, who had played an important part in Ilkhanid-European relations over a number of years. Arghun wrote letters to the Pope and the kings of France and England. He was quite serious about his plans for a joint military campaign in Palestine in 1291. His letter to King Philip IV of France, written in Mongol language in the Uighur script, has survived and offers adequate proof of the Mongol king's intentions:

> By the power of the Eternal God under the auspices of the Supreme Khan [Kublai], this is our word:
> King of France! By the envoy Mar Bar Sauma you have announced 'when the troops of Ilkhan open the campaign against Egypt, then we will send forth to join him'. Having accepted this message on your part, I say that, trusting in God, we propose to set forth in the last month of the winter in the year of the Panther [January 1291] and to camp before Damascus on about the fifteenth day of the first month of the spring. If you keep your word and send troops at the appointed time and God favours us, when we have taken Jerusalem from this people, we will give it to you. But if you fail to meet us, our troops will have marched in vain. Would that be becoming? And if afterwards you regret it, what use will it be? [28]

This letter includes a note by Buscarello, written in French, with tactful compliments to the French king, informing him that the Ilkhan would bring twenty or even thirty thousand horsemen and provide ample provisions for the Western Crusaders. Besides, the Christian kings of Georgia would accompany the Ilkhan. A similar letter, now lost, was addressed to King Edward, whose reply has survived. Edward highly praised the Ilkhan on his Christian enterprise but he said nothing about an actual date nor did he make any promises.

Despite this negative response, Arghun did not abandon his plans. He sent a third mission to the West, led by two Christian Mongols, Andrew Zagan and Sahadin. They met Pope Nicholas in Rome and then went to see King Edward I of England with urgent letters from the Pope to bolster the Christian cause. They met Edward in 1291 who was deeply involved with Scottish affairs. The envoys returned to Rome empty-handed. The same year saw the end of high expectations. In 1291, the Crusaders' last stronghold of Acre in Syria fell to the forces of the Mamluk Sultan al-Ashraf Khalil. Thus Outremer as a Crusader principality ceased to exist. In the same year (1291) Arghun also died. The biography of Patriarch Mar Yaballaha III describes the death of Arghun in these words: 'God the Lord of the Universe, the Lord of death and of going forth, removed King Arghon to the seats of joys and to the Abrahamic bosom. And at his departure grief fettered the whole Church which is under the heavens, because the things which were badly done before his time and were done badly were rigidly straightened in his time.'[29]

In 1295, Arghun's son Ghazan (r. 1295--1304) became the Ilkhan. He converted to Islam in the same year and became a devout Muslim. The rest of the Mongols of Persia followed his example, including his brother and successor Oljeitu (r. 1304--1316), who had once been Nicholas, converted to Islam. Ghazan severed his ties with the Yuan emperors of China. But the Mongol hostility towards the Mamluk sultanate remained and efforts to seek alliance with the West against the Mamluk power continued. However, this state of affairs came to an end in 1322 when the Ilkhanid-Mamluk peace treaty was signed. From now onwards the Ilkhans of Persia had no more interest in the Christian powers of the West.

Fourteenth-century Europe was torn by internal wars and conflicts as well as by epidemic and famine. The conflicts between the Catholic Church and the kings of Christendom were on the increase. In 1307, the liquidation of the Templars had started in France. European Christendom was on the decline. But despite these conditions in the heartland of Western Christendom, Europeans entertained hopes of extending their faith and power in China and other Asiatic regions. The conversion of the pagan Mongols was still coveted. In this way the crusading dream was kept alive, of a vigorous pincer attack on Muslims unleashed by the Mongols from the East and the Catholics from the West to eradicate Islam. The possibility of an alliance with the Mongols remained an objective of Spanish foreign policy for a long time.

When the Catholic monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, captured the Moorish kingdom of Grenada in 1492, in the same year they are said to have granted permission to Christopher Columbus to sail to India and the Kingdom of the 'Great Khan' in a fleet for his expedition on the expenses of the state. But he ended up 'discovering' the New World, and this event might have overshadowed the intentions of the original undertaking of the explorer. This can be seen in the following text of the *Journal* attributed to Columbus written in the same year as the Jews were expelled from Spain:

> And immediately afterwards (i.e. after the conquest of Grenada), in this same month (January), in consequence of information which I had given Your Highnesses (Ferdinand and Isabella) on the subject of India and the Prince who is called the 'Great Khan', which, in our Roman means the 'King of Kings'--namely, that many times he and his predecessors had sent ambassadors to Rome to seek doctors of our holy faith, to the end that they should teach it in India, and that never has the Holy Father been able so to do, so that accordingly so many people were being lost, through falling into idolatry and receiving sects of perdition among them;
>
> Your Highnesses, as good Christian and Catholic princes, devout and propagators of the Christian faith, as well as the enemies of the sect of Mahomet and of all idolatries and heresies, conceived the plan of sending me, Christopher Columbus, to this country of the Indies, there to see the princes, the peoples, the

> territory, their disposition and all things else, and the way in which one might proceed to convert those regions to our holy faith.[30]

If the aim of this Catholic project was to bring the Mongols and the Latins into an active action against Muslims, 'the enemies of Christ' and the 'enemies of God', then, as A.S. Atiya elaborates, 'this may be regarded as the last medieval attempt to unite the West with the Far East by means of winning the latter to the fold of Roman Catholicism; and in this respect, the holy enterprise was a complete failure, for the New World stood in the way and cut short the fulfilment of the pious hopes and aspirations.'[31] There was a whole new continent open to *conquistadores* and Catholic missionaries for their military and religious exploits. They had much to do with large native populations and their rich countries.

Chapter 11.The changing perspectives on Islam

We have seen how the Western world had pinned its hopes on the Mongols to put an end to Islam. Despite the destruction they inflicted on the major centres of Islamic civilisation and the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate, the Mongols showed no eagerness to embrace Christianity. To all intents and purposes they had their own agenda. They wanted to rule the world. What proved to be no more than wishful thinking was the Latin West's once held rosy prospect of the Mongols converted to Christianity and allied to the Christian West, an alliance that could strike in a two-pronged attack to destroy what was left of the Islamic world. To the contrary, it now seemed that there was a dangerous possibility of the Mongols going over to Islam.

Ramon Lull

The Christian hopes and fears had varying degrees of intensity during the three decades that led up to 1290. The capture of Acre in 1291 by the Mamluks had sealed the fate of the Crusaders in the Middle East. It was a new situation for the Latin Christians. For instance, the Franciscan missionary and poet-philosopher Ramon Lull (*c*. 1232--1315), on hearing the news of the fall of Acre, summed up Christian concerns: 'If the schismatics (the Nestorians) are brought into the fold and the Tartars converted, all the Saracens can easily be destroyed. It is much to be feared lest the Tartars receive the Law of Mahomet, for if they do this, either by their own volition or because the Saracens induce them to do so, the whole of Christendom will be in danger.'[1]

Now, as Lull saw it, the Christian solution to the Muslim problem had to be missionary activity leavened with military force as needed.

Lull was a wealthy Spanish knight who had received a vision of Christ at the age of thirty, an ocular experience that changed his life. From that time on, he devoted his life to evangelising Muslims. He had learnt Arabic from an Arab slave which he used for the sake of his brand of polemic. His literary output of more than two hundred works is a testimony to his astonishing energy and religious zeal. However,

during his lifetime, Lull took up a number of different and contradictory positions with regard to missionary work among the 'unbelievers', especially the Muslims. Benjamin Kedar writes: 'But it is truly exceptional to encounter a man who ran almost the entire gamut of positions, from rejecting the crusade as essentially unchristian and extolling peaceful persuasion, through simultaneously supporting mission and crusade, to advocating the launching of a crusade against infidels who had refused to convert.'[2] This can be seen in one of his early works, the *Book of Contemplation* where he has preference for missionary work over crusading. In the early part of the book, he argues that the failure of the Crusaders to conquer the Holy Land from the Saracens was a sign of God's disapproval:

> I see many knights who go to the Holy Land beyond the sea, wanting to conquer it by force of arms, and in the end they are all brought to naught without obtaining their aim. Therefore it seems to me, O Lord, that the conquest of that Holy Land should not be done but in the manner in which You and Your apostles have conquered it: by love and prayers and shedding of tears and blood.
>
> As it seems, O Lord, that the Holy Sepulchre and the Holy Land beyond the sea should preferably be conquered by preaching than by force of arms . . . So many knights and noble princes had gone to the land beyond the sea, O Lord, to conquer it, that if this manner would have pleased You, surely they would have wrested it from the Saracens who hold it against our will. This indicates, O Lord, to the holy monks that You hope every day that they do out of love for You what You did out of love for them; and they can be sure and certain that they should throw themselves into martyrdom out of love for You, You shall hear them out in all they want to accomplish in this world in order to give praise to you.[3]

In this book, Lull professed that the truth of Christian religion could convincingly be shown to the infidels and to this end, he advocated the study of the languages and habits of the people surrounding Europe, as preparatory to missionary work. The main challenge to Christianity had come from Islam, and one of the ways of combating Islam was a thorough study of its doctrine and the Arabic language. His motives apparently were not to further the cause of knowledge and understanding in the world of Christendom where mostly self-perpetuating ignorance and homespun tales about

Islam and the Prophet had held monopoly, but rather were geared to equip the Christians with knowledge of Islam such that Christians could fight and eradicate Islam more effectively. In a later chapter of the *Book of Contemplation*, he also maintains that Jesus had empowered the Christians to constrain some captive Saracens and Jews and teach them the tenets of Christianity by force. The method of ceaseless preaching and persuasion of the infidel was to suffice, but if need arose, use of force was not to be precluded to bring them to Christianity. He advocates that Catholics should have no fear of preaching the holy faith to the infidels because God can 'confound the false opinions and the errors of the unbelievers'.[4]

In 1305, he wrote the *Liber de Fine* in which he formulated his plans to the Popes, cardinals and kings where he exhorted them to carry out missionary work among the infidels. He underlines the importance of peaceful conversion as well as the use of arms against them. He laments the sad state of the world in which the infidels outweigh the Christians, where the numbers of the former and their territories are extending due to the usurpations of the lands, which by right are Christian. To remedy the situation he offers his various plans for action against the infidels with the aim of bringing the whole world into the enclosure of the Catholic faith. He writes that the leaders of crusade should have some Arabic-speaking friars who could inform the chiefs of the Saracens that they should embrace the Catholic faith ('to revert to the faith') first by demonstrating the truth of Christianity by means of argument. If they accepted it, then they were to be allowed to retain possession of their castles and cities. However, in case they did not heed this appeal to reason, then the friars were to warn them that constant warfare would be waged against them by the Christians. The plan included possible routes leading to Syria and Palestine and strategies for the crusading forces.[5]

In 1311, Lull appeared before the Council of Vienne where he addressed the prelates on his views in a petition containing eight 'Ordinationes'. One of Lull's biographers summed up these proposals as follows:

> He resolved . . . to propose three things for the honour and reverence and increase of the holy Catholic faith: first, that there should be built certain places where certain persons devout and of lofty intelligence should study diverse

> languages to the end that they might preach the holy Gospel to all nations; second, that of all Christian knights there should be made a certain order, which should strive continually for the conquest of the Holy Land; third, that in opposition to the opinion of Averroes, who in many things has endeavoured to oppose the Catholic faith, men of learning should compose works refuting these errors aforementioned and all those that hold the same opinion.[6]

With regard to his first proposal, the Council decided that for the propagation of the faith among the unbelievers, five chairs should be created for the study of Hebrew, Arabic and Chaldean (Syriac) in Rome, Paris, Oxford, Bologna and Salamanca. Lull's pleas for the crusade did not evoke any immediate response but the Council supported his call for increased missionary work, an area where Lull had primary interest as a preacher and writer. In the Far East, a new Catholic see was to be established at Khan Baliq. However, all these efforts to draw Muslims to Christianity produced negligible results. In fact, it was Islam that was spreading while Christianity was making little headway.

Roger Bacon

An important Franciscan philosopher and scientist whose views on Islam are relevant to our discussion was Roger Bacon (*c*. 1214--*c*. 1294). He was called *Doctor Mirabilis* ('the Admirable Doctor'). He believed that philosophy rather than the Scriptures or any miracles could be effective instrument to persuade others of the truth of the Christian faith. To exclude the Scriptures and miracles from a rational discourse with the followers of other sects was well grounded. First, the unbelievers did not believe in the Scriptures that missionaries could use to convince others of the truths of Christianity; and secondly, miracles did not occur either according to our wishes or needs. However, it was only philosophy that could be the effective means to convince and persuade the enemies of Christianity. Bacon declared: 'Philosophy is the special province of the unbelievers: we have it all from them.' Obviously, Bacon had in mind Greek thought that was transmitted to the West by the Arabs.

Within a short time he wrote three books on philosophy for Pope Clement IV in the years 1266--68. In his encyclopaedic *Opus Majus* he urged that in order to make the Catholic Church the leader of human civilisation, knowledge drawn from all the sciences should be used for ecclesiastical reform. In 1278 the Franciscans, whom he had joined about 1250, declared his works heretical, and he was imprisoned until 1292.

Bertrand Russell, summarising the *Majus Opus*, writes:

> His respect for Aristotle is great, but not unbounded. 'Only Aristotle, together with his followers, has been called philosopher in the judgement of all wise men.' Like almost all his contemporaries, he uses the designation, 'The Philosopher', when he speaks of Aristotle, but even the Stagyrite, we are told, did not come to the limit of human knowledge. After him, Avicenna was 'the prince and leader of philosophy', though he did not understand the rainbow, because he did not recognise its final cause, which, according to Genesis, is the dissipation of aqueous vapour . . . Every now and then he says something that has a flavour of orthodoxy, such as that the only perfect wisdom is in the Scriptures, as explained by canon law and philosophy. But he sounds more sincere when he says there is no objection to getting knowledge from the heathen; in addition to Avicenna and Averroes, he quoted Alfarabi very often, and Albumazar [astronomer] and others from time to time. Albumazar is quoted to prove that mathematics was known before the Flood and by Noah and his sons; this, I suppose, is a sample of what we may learn from infidels.[7]

Roger Bacon wrote at a time when the influence of Muslim philosophers and writers on Western theologians had become powerful for the first time. This became possible only due to the fact that the translators in Toledo had already accomplished the translations of the works of al-Kindi, al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, in the third quarter of the twelfth century. These translations were in Latin. By 1230 'the ideas and terminology of these writings made their way into Latin theology, necessarily the most difficult conquest in their victorious career. It would have startled the theologians of an earlier generation to see the name of Avicenna quoted beside that of Augustine; but this is what happened with astonishing rapidity, and modern scholars

are still finding increasingly extensive traces of the influence of Moslem writers in thirteenth century theology.'[8]

No doubt, Islam was still the enemy, but a better understanding of it based on correct information was seen to be in the interests of Christians. The contribution of Muslim philosophers, scientists and writers made itself felt in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For instance, the great Italian poet Dante Alighieri (1265--1321), who wrote his *Divine Comedy* in the beginning of the fourteenth century, accorded Muslim philosophers Avicenna, Averroes and the Muslim general Sultan Salah ud-Din places in Limbo with the heroes of antiquity, and not in Hell. This was an uncommon compliment from a medieval Christian poet. In this 'he was acknowledging a debt of Christendom to Islam which went far beyond anything he could have expressed in words.'[9] But when it comes to the role of the Prophet, his denunciation is absolute; the Prophet along with other 'sowers of scandal, sowers of schism', is placed in the ninth pit of the Inferno, while the imagery he uses in this portrayal is deeply offensive. It has been argued that Dante's *Divine Comedy* itself was inspired and influenced by Muslim interpreters' account of Muhammad's nocturnal journey through the heavens, which had been translated into French and Latin at that time.

The profound influence of Arab scientists and philosophers on pioneer figures, like Roger Bacon, is emphasised by the English anthropologist Robert Briffault:

> Neither Roger Bacon nor his later namesake [Francis Bacon] has any title to be credited with having introduced the experimental method. Roger Bacon was no more than one of the apostles of Muslim science and method to Christian Europe; and he never wearied of declaring that knowledge of Arabic and Arabic science was for his contemporaries the only way to true knowledge. . . . Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilization to the modern world, but its fruits were slow in ripening. Not until long after Moorish culture had sunk back into darkness did the giant to which it had given birth rise in his might. It was not science only which brought Europe back to life. Other and manifold influences from the civilization of Islam communicated its first glow to the European life.[10]

In the *Opus Majus* Roger Bacon is concerned with the problem that Christendom faced. He says that there are few Christians, whereas the infidels, who had none to guide them to the truth, occupy the whole world. The Christians had failed to convert the pagans for a number of reasons. The aims of Christendom have been wrong. War and coercion and the struggle to dominate have been counterproductive, because these failed to convert the pagans. He gives another reason against waging war. War does not always succeed against the infidels because sometimes the Christians also lose in their adventures in foreign counties as had happened with King Louis IX's invasion of Egypt. The victory of Christians in war does not lead to safe occupation either because there are not enough people to defend the occupied territories. He argues that the method of war is ineffective because the infidels

> are not converted in this way, but slain and sent to hell. Those who survive the wars, [and] their sons, are enraged more and more against the Christian faith because of these wars, and are infinitely removed from the faith of Christ, and roused to do Christians all possible harm. For this reason Saracens are becoming impossible to convert in many parts of the world, and especially Beyond-the-Sea . . . Moreover, faith did not enter this world by arms but through the simplicity of preaching, as is evident.[11]

As preaching was the only way to extend Christendom, the necessary tasks at hand were to learn the necessary foreign languages, the types of unbelief which have not been studied and the study of arguments against the beliefs of the infidels.

Roger Bacon discusses how Christians equipped with philosophical knowledge can convince the infidels of their errors. He shows how different arguments can be used in disproving other religions in *Moralis Philosophia*. With regard to Islam, he acknowledges it to be the most difficult of all to refute. His lengthy arguments against Islam are in the form of syllogisms whose premises are taken from the Qur'an or suggested by Muslim writers, but these are by no means convincing.

In his understanding of Islam, Roger Bacon was one of the important philosophers who saw the positive role and contribution of Islam before it withered

away. Instead of interpreting the historical evolution of Islam only through the study of the Bible as many had done before, he relied on Muslim philosophers, historians and travellers who had knowledge of Islam and the Muslim world.

St Thomas Aquinas

The Italian-born Thomas Aquinas (1225--1274) is regarded as the most important figure in scholastic philosophy and venerated as one of the leading Roman Catholic theologians. In Bertrand Russell's words: 'St Thomas, therefore, is not only of historical interest, but is a living influence, like Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel--more, in fact, than the latter two. In most respects, he follows Aristotle so closely that the Stagyrite has, among Catholics, almost the authority of one of the Fathers.'[12] His knowledge of Aristotle was profound.

Early in the thirteenth century the major works of Aristotle became available in a Latin translation, accompanied by the commentaries by Averroes and other Muslim philosophers. Thus far Western philosophical and theological thought had been dominated by the philosophy of St Augustine. But now the growing influence of Aristotle restored confidence in empirical knowledge. Averroes' interpretation of the works of Aristotle and his own philosophical views on the supremacy of reason over revelation and the eternity of the world were at odds with the religious orthodoxies of the medieval period. His influence in Europe was enormous, and it gave rise to a school of philosophers in the University of Paris that became known as Averroists. Under the leadership of Siger de Brabant (1240--1284), Christian Averroists represented the most radical assimilation of Islamic Aristotelianism. The growing popularity of Averroism was a threat to the supremacy of the Catholic doctrine and it had to be stopped.

In 1256 Thomas Aquinas was awarded a doctorate in theology and appointed a professor of philosophy at the University of Paris where he taught for three years. In 1259 the Pope summoned him to Rome to act as adviser and lecturer at the Papal Curia. He returned to Paris in 1268 and became involved in the controversy with Siger de Brabant and other followers of Averroes. He adapted Aristotle to Christian

dogma, upholding the primacy of revelation over reason. He believed that truth was one and it emanated from God. He wrote his treatise *On the Unity of the Intellect against the Averroists* (1270). This work turned the tide against the Averroists, who were condemned by the church. Although in 1270, Bishop Stephen Tempier condemned 13 theses of the Averroists that were being taught in the University of Paris, Averroism continued to flourish in Paris. In 1277, Bishop Tempier decreed a more comprehensive condemnation of 219 theses that also included the views of Aquinas and Avicenna. However, Thomas was canonized by Pope John XXII in 1323 and in 1567 Pope Pius V declared him the Angelic Doctor. In the subsequent centuries his influence remained considerable. In 1879, Pope Leo XIII proclaimed the scholastic system of St Thomas the philosophy of Catholicism, a position which until recently it enjoyed.

The writing career of Thomas Aquinas was about twenty years, but he was an extremely prolific writer and about 80 books are ascribed to him. Among his most important works is the *Summa contra Gentiles*, which is relevant to the present discussion.

St Thomas's aim to write the *Summa contra Gentiles* (hereafter *SCG*) was two-fold: first, to explain the truth of Christianity against the 'errors of unbelievers', especially the Muslim thinkers and their followers; and secondly, to provide a manual of apologetics for missionaries of the Dominican order who were active in Spain and other Muslim countries. He wrote this work at the request of the Master of the Order, St Raymond de Penayfort, who had organised schools of Arabic and Hebrew in a number of places for the Dominican missionaries. Anton C. Pegis writes:

> In a large sense, therefore, the SCG is part of the Christian intellectual reaction against Arabian intellectual culture, and especially against Arabian Aristotelianism. To the Arabs, and especially to Averroes, Aristotle was philosophy, and therefore the cause of Aristotle was the cause of philosophy itself. To Christian thinkers, consequently, who were reading Aristotle across Arabian commentaries, the cause of Aristotle concentrated within itself the basic conflict between Christianity and the Arabs on the nature of philosophy and the philosophical picture of the universe. To Arabs and Christians alike,

> Aristotle was the master of those who know. St Thomas did not create this situation. But the situation did pose for him the great issue of the interpretation of Aristotle, just as it gave him the opportunity to formulate a Christian Aristotelianism that could solve the problem agitating the Christian world since the beginning of the century and especially since the time of Pope Gregory IX.[13]

There is no doubt that St Thomas, through his great intellectual vigour and skill, succeeded in the adaptation of Aristotle to Christian dogma. However, the focal point of the whole exegesis in the *SCG* relates to the truths about God. But how can man come to the knowledge of God? According to St Thomas, certain truths about the existence and nature of God can be shown by natural reason. But natural reason cannot prove every Christian doctrine such as the Trinity. This is because there are other truths, the truths of faith that lie beyond natural reason although not contrary to it and are knowable only through revelation. In his view only the Catholic faith represents the truth of faith. However, reason and faith must agree, and St Thomas asserts that it is impossible for the truth of faith to be contrary to principles known by natural reason. The *SCG* is in part concerned to refute Islam as a revealed faith. Montgomery Watt comments:

> The aim of the *Contra Gentiles* is thus the apologetic one of defending the Christian faith against objections and criticisms, and of doing so on the basis of natural reason without presupposing that the opponents accept the Bible. In this way the form of the work is determined, or at least moulded, by the existence of Islam as a problem for western Europeans; and Christianity is presented as superior not merely to Islam as understood by ordinary Muslims but also to the beliefs of philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes.[14]

St Thomas gives only two explicit references to Islam in the *SCG*, but his exposition of the Christian doctrine shows that many of his arguments were directed to refute Islam and distance Christianity from the Islamic philosophical and theological influence that was being felt in Western Europe. Dr James Waltz has argued that St Thomas knew a good deal about Islam and in a later shorter 10-chapter book, *De rationibus fidei Saracenos, Graecos et Armenos ad Cantorem Antiochinum,* he devoted six chapters in reply to Muslim objections to Christianity.[15]

In the *SCG* St Thomas explains that some divine truth is accessible to human reason and some surpasses it; the latter manifests itself in the supernatural works, miracles and the 'inspiration given to human minds . . . filled with gift of the Holy Spirit' that 'an innumerable throng of people, both simple and most learned, flock to the Christian faith' (I, 6). He then contrasts Christianity and Islam. In Christianity 'pleasures of the flesh are curbed' and worldly gains spurned. Miracles and 'not the violent assault of arms or the promises of pleasures' manifest the work of divine inspiration 'through many pronouncements of the ancient prophets'. St Thomas then gives reasons why Muhammad should be rejected as a prophet; first he worked no miracles, and secondly, he won his followers by force of arms and promises of carnal pleasures in this life and the hereafter. St Thomas in the following compact passage assails Muhammad and Islam.

> On the other hand, those who founded sects committed to erroneous doctrines proceeded in a way that is opposite to this. The point is clear in the case of Mohammed. He seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure to which the concupiscence of the flesh goads us. His teaching also contained precepts that were in conformity with his promises, and he gave free rein to carnal pleasure. In all this, as is not unexpected, he was obeyed by carnal men. As for proofs for the truth of his doctrine, he brought forward only such as could be grasped by the natural ability of anyone with a very modest wisdom. Indeed, the truths that he taught he mingled with many fables and with doctrines of the greatest falsity. He did not bring forth any signs produced in a supernatural way, which alone fittingly gives witness to divine inspiration; for a visible action that can be only divine reveals an invisibly inspired teacher of truth. On the contrary, Mohammed said that he was sent in the power of his arms--which are signs not lacking even to robbers and tyrants. What is more, no wise men, men trained in things divine and human, believe in him from the beginning. Those who believed in him were brutal men and desert wanderers, utterly ignorant of all divine teaching, through whose numbers Mohammed forced others to become his followers by the violence of his arms. Nor do divine pronouncements on the part of preceding prophets offer him any witness. On the contrary, he perverts

> almost all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own, as can be seen by anyone who examines his law (I, 6).

It is clear that St Thomas repeats the same charges against the Prophet which we find in the old polemical writers. Without taking into account the teaching of Muhammad, the contents of the Qur'an, or any shared religious beliefs between Christianity and Islam, St Thomas argues against Islam on the basis of his own religious presuppositions. In fact, none of his charges against Islam can stand the test of historical scrutiny. It is true that many of the early followers of the Prophet were nomads who before the advent of Islam indulged in intertribal conflict and violence, but also many of the other Arabs were city-dwellers who led their lives in an ordinary way. But St Thomas sees the followers of the Prophet as violent, foolish people who coerced others to come into his faith. James Waltz remarks:

> However, the brutality which concerned Thomas was the animal-like addiction to 'carnal pleasure,' abhorrent to those vowed to celibacy yet redolent of the lust and sensuality of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. The alleged ignorance and stupidity of his hearers further discredited Muhammad: 'no wise men . . . believed in him'; instead his hearers were 'utterly ignorant of all divine teaching,' demonstrated his falsity by their stupidity and showed their foolishness by believing in him. Clearly, 'wise Christians' who shunned sensual pleasures were vastly superior to such Muslims.[16]

St Thomas seems to be thinking that some truths Muhammad 'brought forward' were only some simple truths of reason which the Prophet mixed with his own false and confused doctrines. St Thomas argues that, since no preceding prophet had borne witness to Muhammad, his teaching lacked authenticity. In regard to the Qur'an, he suggests that Muhammad 'perverts all the testimonies of the Old and New Testaments by making them into fabrications of his own'. For St Thomas the fundamental condition of a true prophet is confirmed by miracles. As Muhammad did not work any miracles, his prophetic mission was not supported by God; by contrast such proofs existed in the case of the Christian faith. He argues:

> This wonderful conversion of the world to the Christian faith is the clearest witness of the signs given in the past . . . For it would be truly more wonderful than all signs if the world had been led by simple and humble men to believe in such lofty truths, to accomplish such difficult actions, and to have such high hopes. Yet it is also a fact that, even in our own time, God does not cease to work miracles through His saints for the confirmation of the faith (I, 6)

Thus, the spread of Christianity is adduced as the proof of divine support. If this were the case, then one could reply that Islam had spread faster and in a shorter span of time than Christianity. No doubt, St Thomas was aware of this and it is difficult to surmise what stopped him from facing this simple fact. What is regarded as divine support in the case of one faith cannot be arbitrarily denied to the other if ordinary rules of evidence are followed.

St Thomas embodies the polemical and critical attitude towards Islam that so many medieval Christians had towards Islam. Hugh Goddard remarks: 'Aquinas's work therefore enjoys a kind of ambivalent relationship with Islamic thought, but even if Western Christian thought reacted against, as well as absorbed, Islamic ideas, the extent of Islamic influence cannot be denied.'[17]

At the same time, St Thomas remains a towering figure who more than any other theologian and philosopher produced the finest synthesis of faith and intellect in his system. Although Bertrand Russell commends the 'sharpness and clarity with which he distinguishes arguments derived from reason and arguments derived from faith,' he is reluctant to place him on a level with the best philosophers of Greece or of modern times: 'Before he begins to philosophize, he already knows the truth; it is declared in the Catholic faith. If he can find apparently rational arguments for some parts of the faith, so much the better; if he cannot, he need only fall back on revelation.'[18] In contrast to St Thomas, what Averroes represented was not an 'Islamic truth' but rather a clear rationalistic method and ideas, which were vigorously opposed by conservative Muslim theologians as well as the more traditionalist thinkers.

William of Tripoli

William of Tripoli, a Dominican friar at Acre, was a contemporary of Roger Bacon. He was well informed about the beliefs and history of Muslims. In the *Tractatus de statu Saracenorum* that he wrote in 1273 at the Dominican convent at Acre, William gave an account of Islam with a view to facilitate the task of missionaries to Muslims. His description of the rise and expansion of Islam is a curious blend of fact and fiction. His account of the Prophet Muhammad is not historical but he refrains from repeating all the legendary stories which to date had been stock-in-trade of the Christian apologists. He narrates the story of Bahira and says that Muhammad was horrified to find that while inebriated he had killed his teacher. This led him to prohibit the use of wine among his followers. William says that according to Muslim belief the Angel Gabriel transmitted the divine message to Muhammad, which after his death was compiled by learned Muslims with the assistance of Jews and Christians who had converted to Islam. They were said to have taken passages from the Old and the New Testament, mixed them arbitrarily and used them for the Qur'an, thus making it 'to a great extent beautiful'. William discusses the main doctrines of the Qur'an and obviously was much impressed by the deep veneration in which it held Jesus, his teachings and his mother Mary. He so stresses those teachings of the Qur'an where Christian doctrine comes close to Islam. He writes that Muslims 'though their beliefs are wrapped up in many lies and decorated with fictions, yet now it manifestly appears that they are near to the Christian faith and not far from the path of salvation.'[19]

He, like many Christians before and after him, saw Islam as only a temporary phenomenon before the Holy Ghost put all the erring souls in the basket of Christian salvation. Beyond wishful thinking there was little to support the view that Islam was going to disappear or Muslims would turn away from their faith. Strangely enough, William thought exactly along these lines and came to an amazing conclusion; namely, that the Saracens were on the verge of conversion to Christianity. He wrote that the faith of the Saracens, like that of the Jews, was doomed and its collapse was at hand. In these utterances, he was echoing the prophecies of the fall of Islam which long had been in circulation, and the end of the Abbasid Caliphate at the hands of Helagu had reinforced this impression upon both the Western and Eastern worlds. He

was convinced that when the Saracens were told the tenets of Christianity, they would readily follow them and 'thus, through the simple word of God, without philosophic arguments or military arms, they seek, like simple sheep, the baptism of Christ, and cross over into the fold of God. He who said and wrote thus, by the action of God, has now baptised more than a thousand.'[20] His claim to have baptised more than a thousand Muslims should not be taken literally; perhaps it reflected more of a hope than what he actually achieved in his mission. As the problem of Islam was nearing its final stage, Tripoli did not believe that a crusade was any longer necessary. This did not mean that he was opposed to the idea of crusades in principle; he merely regarded them as redundant due to the prevailing circumstances.

Ricoldo da Monte Croce

Christian grand designs to convert Mongols to the side of Christianity and use them to finish off Islam, as mentioned above, did not go according to Christian hopes and plans. During the fall of Acre and the end of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, the Dominican missionary Ricoldo da Monte Croce was in Baghdad, which was a part of the Ilkhanid Mongol Empire. He was a well-informed traveller in the Muslim lands and a keen observer of the situation. In his account of the events, he was clearly of the opinion that the Mongols had little interest in Christianity. They were, according to Ricoldo, turning not towards the Christian faith as the earlier generation had hoped and prayed, but to Islam which they found easier to believe and practice. He notes that the Mongols 'who had at first killed the Saracens without mercy and spared the Christians, had become Moslems *cum invenissent legem largissimam, quae quasi nullam difficultatem tenet nec in credulitate nec in operatione.* He still found traces of the earlier inclination toward Christianity, but he had no illusions about its prospects of success: *videtur eis quod lex Christianorum sit valde difficilis.* He also noted that Arghun, the present Ilkhan of Persia, though a friend to the Christians, was *homo pessimus in omni scelere*, unlike his father and grandfather.'[21] Deeply disappointed at the fall of Acre, Ricoldo composed his epistle to the Lord, complaining that neither Dominic and Francis, nor Louis of France, other kings and barons had succeeded in suppressing the 'beast Muhammad' and that it continues to devour Christians and forces them to deny their faith. He observes that crusades from the Latin West and the

Mongol invasions from the East had greatly weakened Muslim power. In spite of the heaviest losses they had incurred in their history, Muslims did not falter in their religious conviction. It was obvious that neither crusading nor missions had tilted scales in favour of Catholic faith in the Middle East.

Ricoldo had no great faith in the Eastern Christians, i.e. the Nestorians, either. According to his Catholic view, on the central doctrine of Incarnation, they were no better than the Muslims. He writes: 'Their position about Christ, if it be minutely examined, empties the whole mystery of the Incarnation, and they assert the same about Christ as the Muslims do. Whence also I found among old and authentic histories, which the Muslims had, that these very Nestorians were friends and allies of Muhammad.'[22] For his seeing the Nestorians in such a light, he showed little sympathy for the unity of the Eastern and Western Churches.

The Christian hostility to Islam and the Prophet Muhammad in medieval times was so deeply embedded in the Christian consciousness that a realistic understanding of Muslims as people was no easy matter. However, any efforts to this end were mostly shaped by attitudes founded on hostility, downright slander and occasional satire. Ricoldo violently attacked Islam as a religion but he held the social virtues of Muslims in high esteem. This can be seen in the following passage, which he wrote satirically in 1291 from Baghdad:

> They received us indeed like the angels of God, in their schools and colleges and monasteries, and in their churches or synagogues [mosques], and their homes; and we diligently studied their religion and their works; and we were astounded how in so false a religion could be found works of such perfection. We refer here briefly to some of the works of perfection of the Muslims, rather to shame the Christians than to commend the Muslims. Who will not be astounded, if he carefully considers how great is the concern of these very Muslims for study, their devotion to prayer, their pity for the poor, their reverence for the name of God and the prophets and the Holy Places, their sobriety in manners, their hospitality to strangers, their harmony and love for each other? [23]

But writing in another mood, his earlier recognition of qualities of *gravitas* and *concordia* in Muslims disappear and he imputes to Muslims the hypocrisy of pretended virtue calculated to deceive the unwary.[24] Thus the virtues of Muslims in fact were hidden vices; Christians were well advised not to be duped by hypocritical appearances. Obviously, this type of cynicism and cognitive dissonance left little room for these writers to accord Islam and Muslims any recognition at least on the intellectual or human level. Their sole concern was to edify their own faith. In this zero-sum equation, any point conceded to Islam was seen a point lost to the cause of Christianity.

In his *Confutatio Alcorani*, Ricoldo disproves the Qur'anic claim to be the revealed word of God because of its 'incoherence and bad arrangement' as compared to the Bible.[25] He asks who the author of the Qur'an was, and concludes that it was 'the Devil who, by his own malice and by the permission of God, has prevailed to initiate the work of the Antichrist.'[26] In order to carry out his plan the devil used as his tool 'a man of diabolical nature, Mohammad (*Môámeth*) by name, an idolater by religion, of poor means but a keen mind, and a notorious malefactor.'[27] In Ricoldo the story of Bahira, the Nestorian monk appears in a slightly new version: now he becomes one of Muhammad's chief disciples.

The fall of Acre in 1291 had put an end to the gory tale of the crusades. But this end was not quite unforeseen. During this period, the political climate in Europe had changed. France, which had been the bulwark of the crusades, was now involved in serious conflict with England, and both countries drifted into the Hundred Years' War in 1337. Germany and central Europe were rocked by civil turmoil. The Black Death began in 1348 and swept across Europe killing large sections of the population in a short span of time.

The plans of a united front of Western Christendom against Islam were no longer the vital concern to the West. From the middle of the thirteenth century Muslim states posed no danger to the West. Europe had internal dissensions and conflicts that had to be tackled. There did not seem to be any threat from external enemies. Islam was no longer seen to pose a threat to Europe, even though in this

period it was expanding fast in Asia and India. Europeans turned more to their own internal affairs and ideological concerns.

John Wycliffe

The views of English theologian and reformer John Wycliffe (*c*. 1320--84) illustrate these new concerns. Wycliffe was one of the earliest opponents of papal encroachment on secular power. He felt that the Christians should have the Bible in their own languages and he prepared the first complete English biblical translation. He condemned monasticism, attacked medieval orthodoxy by denying the dogma of transubstantiation, from which the clergy derived the basis of its power. After his first inconclusive trial for heresy, he directed his energies to fight against evils within the Church. For his unorthodox views he was tried a second time on charges of heresy. As Bertrand Russell writes: 'In 1372, when his age was fifty or more, he was still orthodox; it was only after this date, apparently, that he became heretical. He seems to have been driven into heresy entirely by the strength of his moral feelings--his sympathy with the poor, and his horror of rich worldly ecclesiastics. At first his attack on the papacy was only political and moral, not doctrinal; it was only gradually that he was driven into wider revolt.'[28] Castigating the friars for their practices, Wycliffe wrote:

> And here men noten many harmes that freris don in the Chirche. They spuyles the puple many weis by iposcrisie and other leesingis [lies], and bi this spuyling thei bilden Caymes Castelis to harme of cuntreis. Thei stelem pore mennis children, that is werse than stele an oxe; and thei stelen gladlich eires, Y leeve to speke of stelyng of wymmen . . . Thei moven londis to bateiles, and pesible persones to plete [plead in the courts]; thei maken many divorsis, and many matrimonies, unleveful [loveless], bothe bi lesingis maad to parties, and bi pryvelegies of the court. Y leeve to speke of fighting that thei done in o lond and other . . . And sith coventis of freris ben shrewis [malicious] for the more part and moche, no woundir if thei envenyme men that comes thus unto hem.[29]

In Wycliffe's writings from about 1378 to 1384, there are a number of comments about the Muslims. Instead of viewing Islam as the antithetical to Christianity in all possible ways as many writers had done, Wycliffe viewed the problem from a different angle. He held that the vices attributed to Islam were not unique only to Islam: the Western Church also had the same vices. As Southern writes:

> The leading characteristics of both Islam and the Western Church, as he saw them, were pride, cupidity, the desire for power, the lust for possession, the gospel of violence, and the preference of human ingenuity to the word of God. These features in the West were the main cause both of the divisions within Christendom and of the division of the West from its neighbours--the division of Avignon from Rome, of Greek from Latin, of Western Christendom from the Nestorians and from the other Christian communities of Asia and India, and finally of Islam from Christianity.[30]

Wycliffe did not regard salvation to be confined only to the Christians while the rest of humanity was to suffer eternal damnation. He wrote:

> Just as some who are in the Church are damned, so others outside the Church are saved. If you object that, if this is so, we cannot call the Jews unbelievers, the Saracens heretics, the Greeks schismatics, and so on, I reply, 'Man can be saved from any sect, even from among the Saracens, if he places no obstacle in the way of salvation. From Islam and other sects, those who at the moment of death believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be judged to be faithful Christians.'[31]

However, it is uncertain that many Muslims willingly would have agreed to this conditional dispensation. It is needless to repeat that to believe in Jesus Christ has different connotations for Christian and Muslim believers. This vital distinction has consistently been unheeded or glossed over by Christian writers. The fact is that Muslims *do* believe in Jesus as they believe in Muhammad and all other prophets who have shown mankind the *way* to salvation, but according to their belief only God has the *power* to grant salvation and no one else. But the question as to who is right or wrong in such beliefs cannot be answered by resorting to legal and historical facts or

explanations. Such questions and beliefs are essentially meta-historical about which historians can deliver no judgement.

Chapter 12. The Ottomans and the European response

Having borne the brunt of the havoc caused by the Crusaders and the Mongols, the Muslims in the Middle East region were able to reassert their power and influence. So far the major conflict between the Christian West and Muslims had been in the Middle East and the Iberian Peninsula. But this was soon to change. One major factor that was to play a decisive role for almost seven centuries in European political scene was the emergence of the Ottoman Empire as a Eurasian power. In this chapter, I present a brief introduction to the rise, expansion, and decline of the Ottoman Empire with a view to provide an essential background to the ongoing discussion.

As a result of the Mongol invasions, the Seljuk sultanate of Rum in Asia Minor collapsed by the middle of the thirteenth century. In its place, a number of Turkish principalities (*beyliks*) arose which were led by their warrior-princes or *ghazis*. Though nominal tributaries of the Mongol rulers, they had become increasingly independent of Mongol control. In one of these small emerging emirates, a Turk named Othman began to expand at the expense of his Turkish and Byzantine neighbours. He was the founder of the dynasty that created the Ottoman Empire, its rule extending from 1281 to 1924. The martial qualities of the Turks, like those of the early Arab conquerors, became proverbial in Europe from the early period. They were also inspired by the two Turkish brotherhoods, the *Akhi*, that emphasised ascetic ideals, which seem to have influenced part of the ruling group, and the *ghazis* who were intrepid warriors of Islam against the infidels.

The early Ottoman sultans were austere and just. They followed the traditional Muslim policy of tolerance towards *dhimmis*, Christians, Jews and others, who believed in the same one God and therefore had the same right to protection of their lives, properties and religion on par with the Muslims as long as they accepted Muslim rule and paid the *jizya*. Some Christians in the Balkans converted to Islam, but at no stage of Ottoman rule we find any official policy to enforce Islam on the non-Muslim subjects. Peter Mansfield observes that the early sultans had ‘a passionate and simple faith with a chivalrous and tolerant attitude towards the mainly Christian inhabitants of the lands they conquered. Some of these Christians converted

to Islam, but even those who did not, frequently welcomed the firm justice of the Ottoman rule in contrast to the archaic misgovernment of the decadent Byzantine Empire.'[1] In the second half of the fourteenth century, the Ottomans began the military occupation of the European side of the Hellespont; Gallipoli was taken in 1357 and Adrianople was occupied in 1362. Adrianople became the European capital of Sultan Murad I. He extended the principle of equality and toleration to all. The non-Muslims had full rights of citizenship. The high offices of the state were open to all. Thus from this early stage, the Ottoman Empire, like the Roman Empire, was multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious.

The Ottoman conquests continued at a rapid pace. A powerful coalition led by the Serbs was defeated by the Turks in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. In 1396 a large crusading army, possibly the largest ever assembled, under the command of King Sigismund set out to halt the advance in Europe of the Turks. In the Battle of Nicopolis they suffered at the hands of Sultan Bayazid I an overwhelming defeat, from which Sigismund barely escaped. Thus the most ambitious military expedition of the later Middle Ages had ended in total disaster. The salvation of Europe came from another quarter. In 1402 the Ottomans were crushed in the Battle of Ankara by the great central Asian conqueror Timur (b. 1336, r. 1370--1404). This defeat almost dissolved their empire. However, the Ottomans recovered from this heavy blow and were able to resume their expansion.

In 1453, Muhammad II, named the Conqueror, conquered Constantinople. Under his rule a new multi-racial and multi-religious policy was initiated. He was, as J.M. Roberts says, 'a man of wide, if volatile, sympathies and later Turks found it hard to understand his forbearance to the infidel . . . He seems to have wanted a multi-religious society. He brought back Greeks to Constantinople from Trebizond and appointed a new patriarch under whom the Greeks were given a kind of self-government. The Turkish record towards Jew and Christian was better than that of Spanish Christians towards Jew and Moslem.'[2]

The Ottoman expansion was a serious military threat to Europe. The Venetians, Hungarians and others had tried to put brakes on the Ottoman advance by forming temporary alliances with the Ottomans' rivals in Asia Minor before the fall of

Constantinople. But after the capture of Constantinople, the Turkish advance continued into the middle of the sixteenth century. In 1517 Syria and Egypt were conquered. Under Sulaiman the Magnificent (r. 1520--66) the Ottoman Empire had reached its zenith of power. In 1526, the Turks inflicted a devastating defeat on the Hungarians, wiping out their army. In this period they captured Belgrade, Rhodes, defeated the Hungarians in 1542, and brought the whole of the North African coast under their control. In 1529, they laid siege to Vienna, but after three weeks they lifted the siege and retreated in an orderly manner, leaving the Ottomans in possession of half of Hungary. From this time onwards a protracted confrontation ensued between the Ottoman and Hapsburg armies for the control of Hungary and ultimately of central Europe. This confrontation lasted until 1683, when a second Turkish siege of Vienna ended in Turkish defeat and the Turkish army retreated in total chaos.

In 1683 the superior arms and tactics of the Europeans saved the Hapsburg capital. The Turkish failure proved to be a turning point in the history of the Ottoman Empire. It signalled the shift in the balance of power in which the Europeans henceforth had the upper hand. However, in one of the most astonishing turnabouts in the history of the Ottomans, the Turks regrouped during 1689--90 and launched a big counteroffensive to throw back the Hapsburgs from the territories they had taken. As a result of this campaign the Hapsburg army was driven all the way back across the Danube. The Turkish successes on the battlefield came to an end with their disastrous defeat at Zeta in 1697. In 1699, the Turks signed the Treaty of Karlowitz. The provisions of the treaty were far-reaching. They ceded control of Hungary to the Hapsburgs. The Treaty of Karlowitz in a broader context of conflict between Christian Europe and Islam happened to be crucial in the subsequent developments and relationships. Bernard Lewis assesses its importance thus:

> This treaty . . . marked a crucial turning point, not only in the relations between the Ottoman and Hapsburg empires, but, more profoundly, between Europe and Islam. For centuries past the Ottoman sultanate had been the leading power of Islam, representing it in the millennial conflict with its Western Christian neighbours. The real power of Islam in relation to Europe had, in many respects, declined. The advance from eastern Europe across the steppes, from western Europe across the oceans, threatened to enclose the Islamic heartlands in a

> pincer grip. The pincers were already in place--they would soon be ready to close. And now at the centre, the war had shown that the Ottoman armies, once the strongest and best in the world were falling behind their European adversaries in weaponry, in military science, even in discipline and skill.[3]

After the signing the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Ottoman relations with Europe stood on a different level. For three hundred years, the Ottoman Empire had posed a big threat to Christian Europe. Now this expansionist power had ceased to be a scourge of Christendom. The collapse of the Ottoman army following its failure to take Vienna clearly revealed the weaknesses of the big empire, and Europe was ready to go on the offensive. As Halil Inalcik says:

> From now on it mainly fought rearguard actions against the overwhelming might of Christian Europe. Yet it survived, its frontiers gradually shrinking, for another two centuries. The reasons for this amazing tenacity were manifold: the rivalry of the great powers, the mutual hostility between the subject peoples of the Balkans and their fear of European domination, the modernisation of the empire, and, last but not least, the martial qualities and religious ethos of the Muslim soldier, especially the Turk.[4]

Thus the year 1683 proved to be the symbolic date when Europe ceased to be on the defensive against Islamic forces. From now on, the weaknesses of the sultanate had become clear and the downward drift of the empire continued. Turkey had ceased to be the main military threat to Europe. The balance of power had shifted in favour of the Christian states of Europe and the decline in the power and prestige of Turkey continued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the nineteenth century, the relationship between Europe and the Ottoman Empire had qualitatively changed. Now, Europe was confronted with the problem of Turkish weakness, and not of its strength. The Ottoman Empire now became ‘the Sick Man of Europe’ and in the history of European politics, the diminishing sultanate and its problems were referred to as the Eastern Question. The threatened fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire had produced rivalry and tensions between the Great Powers and a threat to European peace. After the end of the First World War, all that was left

of this great empire was the immediate hinterland of Constantinople and Anatolia. Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881--1938), the sultanate was abolished in 1922. Atatürk became the founder and first president of the new Turkish Republic.

A vision of peace between rival faiths

The Turkish expansion had roused deep religious feelings among the western Christians. The fall of Constantinople had enhanced the fears of a victorious Islamic power. M.E. Yapp explains the Western concerns:

> Calls for a Christian unity and resistance were led by the papacy, and became a continuing theme for the next three centuries. True, the papacy had also other than purely ideological motives: the desire to discover a way to end the internal wars of Christian princes and to find an issue which would establish papal leadership and fill papal coffers. It is also true that the appeals were directed mainly to the Catholic powers, while Orthodox and Protestants were largely excluded. Moreover suspicion of papal motives diluted the response. But when all that is said, there remained a substratum of religious feeling which determined the manner of the presentation of the call. Even those who evaded the demands were obliged to justify themselves in terms which did not question the ideological argument: no one repudiated a Christian duty.[5]

However, amidst the major political changes a united front against Islam in the old spirit of the Crusades was not possible. It was at this time that some western theologians and thinkers came up with new ideas and solutions. They raised questions about the efficacy of military means in dealing with Islam, because so far it had not produced the sought-after results. They proposed, instead, other options like peaceful missionary work and a clear understanding of Islamic doctrine with a view to find some common ground between two rival faiths for mutual adjustment. If we keep in view that these suggestions were made between 1450 and 1460, the period that saw the fall of Constantinople, and when the fears and passions of Christians were high, then this sober and statesmanlike approach was a big step forward. The names of John

of Segovia, a Spaniard, Nicholas of Cusa, a German, and Aeneas Silvius, an Italian, deserve mention.

John of Segovia (1400--58) was a professor of theology at Salamanca. During the last five years of his life, he undertook a close study of the Islamic question. Instead of following the old arguments denigrating the Prophet like the earlier Christian controversialists had done, John wanted to bring the discussion to what he viewed the central question about Islam, namely, whether the Qur'an was the word of God or not. To decide the issue, a new translation of the Qur'an was needed which avoided the errors of the Cluniac translation where the ideas and terms of Latin Christianity were introduced into the text in such a way that they had distorted the original meanings. It was quite a problem to find someone in Europe in the middle of the fifteenth century who knew Arabic. However, with some difficulty John was able to find a Muslim jurist from Salamanca who helped him in editing a trilingual version of the Qur'an in Arabic, Latin and Castilian. He thought that on the basis of renewed study of Islam Christian intellectuals would have a better chance to engage in peaceful and constructive dialogue with their Muslim counterparts. The forum for exchanges was to be a prolonged academic conference. John's approach to inter-faith dialogue was to search for points of convergence rather than delving on the differences as had been the case so far. In 1454, John suggested holding conferences with Muslim jurists. He regarded such conferences useful even if they did not lead to the conversion of Muslims. He, like Roger Bacon, did not think that war could ever solve the issue between Christendom and Islam. But unlike Bacon and others who advocated missionary work amongst the Muslims, John regarded this approach mistaken and unrealistic. As Southern explains: 'Preaching would never be allowed except in territory already reconquered from Islam, and since he had excluded war he had excluded the possibility of reconquest on a large scale. He was, I think, the first man of peace to grasp that missions to convert Islam were doomed to failure. The first problem to be faced was therefore the problem of a new kind of communication.'[6]

Although the traditional Christian approach to hold discussions with the 'pagan' Muslims had no other objective than to convert them, John saw some other practical advantages. Even if such inter-religious conferences failed to bring about conversions,

they were still les damaging and less costly than the crusades. To this end he entered into correspondence with some leading ecclesiastics.

John of Segovia was able to get the support of Nicholas of Cusa (140I--64), Cardinal Bishop of the Roman Catholic Church, who was a philosopher, a historian, and a theologian of outstanding calibre.[7] Nicholas was a textual critic of profound originality and imagination in historiography. At a time when absurd stories about the Prophet and Islam were fast spreading, he wrote his philological and historical study of the Qur'an in the *Cribratio Alchoran* in 1460, in which he argued that if the Qur'an was intensively studied in a spirit of impartiality, it would be found to be compatible with the teachings of the New Testament. Beneath apparent discrepancies and disagreements there was a common basis of belief. He supported John's idea of holding conference and suggested plans for its preparation. In his brilliant work *De Pace Fidei* he went even further. In it, a dozen characters representing different religions and sects discuss the issue of the One and the Many. It was written when Europeans were seething with rage after the fall of Constantinople and the stories of Turkish atrocities were rife. Nicholas after a scholarly discussion of religious concepts elaborated his ideas to achieve peace. He concluded that peace was possible through the experience of a few wise men who were well acquainted with the diverse practices found in all the religions of the world and find a propitious concordance. Such a process was to lead to perpetual peace in religions. As most people lived in poverty and slavish dependency upon their masters, their concerns of daily life made it difficult for them to lead the search for the Hidden God. Therefore, this task could be accomplished by an assembly of wise men of different religions who entered into meaningful dialogues. After having reached a 'concord of religions . . . described in the heaven of reason', they were to return to their respective nations to lead and assist them to the unity of the true religion. Nicholas differentiated between One Religion and the many rites and traditions which are humanly generated. As human beings participate in the One Absolute Wisdom (The One) they create many rites. When one absolutizes a rite for God, error sets in. In other words, it was a folly to mistake the variety of signs of faith, the variety of religions and cults for the One God. Although Nicholas did not say it in exactly such words, he came close to the view that ways to the cognition of God are not confined to confessional allegiance because all sages

seek The One. The perspectives opened up by such formulations were to influence some of the daring minds of the later epochs.

However, John's plans were not received well by Jean Germain, the conservative Bishop of Chalon. He was a firm advocate of military action against Muslims and he wanted to revive the spirit of the early Crusades. For instance, he made an appeal to King Charles of France exhorting him to unleash a new crusade, where he said:

> Let us revive the spirit of Godfrey of Bouillon, of Philip the Conqueror King of France, of St Louis. If you do this, the whole world will shout 'Honour, glory, and victory to Charles King of France, the Victorious, the new David, the new Constantine, the new Charlemagne, who after all the conquests granted him by God has used them for the relief of the Holy Catholic Faith, and to his own honour and glory and everlasting good name.' Amen.[8]

In some ways, his grandiose plan to inculcate the great virtues of chivalry in Christians to lead a new crusade may have brought him some spiritual consolation, but no ruler in the West heeded to his call; neither he nor anyone else knew how it could have been carried out.

Just before his death, John of Segovia had addressed a letter to Cardinal Aeneas Silvius, the prominent humanist and cleric of the Papal Curia in which he upheld the cause of peace and rejected war in dealing with Muslims, because in essence the message of Christ to the Church was peace, and not war. Silvius was chosen Pope and named Pius II in 1458. In 1460 he wrote a letter to Sultan Muhammad II, the conqueror of Constantinople, inviting him to embrace Christianity. This eloquent letter written in Latin has survived in a number of copies and appears to have been a popular writing of the Pope. Despite the great intellectual vigour shown in its composition, the tone of the whole letter showed a lack of genuine sincerity by its author and at least to a Muslim reader it might have appeared both arrogant and frivolous. In it the Pope deftly takes issue with Islam, its vision of the afterlife, allowing polygamy and divorce, and the prohibition to dispute Muhammad's revelations. He uses most of his letter to expound the Scripture and asserts the truth of

Christianity. His description of the Prophet is disdainful, repeating the same old polemical invective that could hardly have persuaded a believing Muslim to change his faith for Christianity. He asserted the superior level of the Christian civilisation and enumerated the enormous power of various countries of Europe. If the Sultan converted to Christianity, he could reap rich harvest of great worldly power and prestige here and now, and hereafter the salvation. Pope Pius II writes:

> It is a small thing, however, that can make you the greatest and most powerful and most famous man of your time. You ask what it is. It is not difficult to find. Nor have you far to seek. It is to be found all over the world--a little water with which you may be baptised, and turn to the Christian sacraments and believe the gospel. Do this, and there is no prince in the world that will exceed you in glory, or equal you in power. We will call you emperor of the Greeks and of the East. The land which you now occupy by force you will then hold by right, and all Christians will reverence you and will make you their judge. It is impossible for you to succeed while you follow the Muslim law. But only turn to Christianity and you will be the greatest man of your time by universal consent.[9]

In essence, this letter by the Pontiff repeats the same views, mouldy with age, impermeable to any rational discourse or dialogue, that Christians held about their faith. At the same time it showed an amazing resistance to understand the fundamental doctrine of Islam on its own merits. The proposals for holding conferences with Muslims, as desired by John of Segovia and Nicholas of Cusa, came to nothing. At least, in conception, it was a noble project to explore avenues where the followers of two faiths could discuss their doctrinal differences and learn to co-exist in peace.

Christian Europe's perceptions of the Turkish threat

Christian Europe perceived the Turkish threat as twofold: the challenge of Islam to Christianity and the Turkish expansion into Europe. The Ottoman expansion was a threat to the safety of Christian Europe and once more the old fear of early conquests by Muslims resurfaced with greater intensity. The forces of Islam under the Ottomans had made deep inroads into Europe. The level of political consciousness in Europe at

this stage was far greater than it had been in medieval times. Islam was no longer seen merely as a heresy or a parody of Christian faith. Many European ecclesiastics started to acknowledge Islam as a rival faith having its own distinct doctrine, which, like Christianity, had its own universal aspirations. There was still fear of Islam, but it was less trenchant than in the medieval times. By the time of the Reformation a decisive change of attitude towards Islam becomes clear. As Albert Hourani comments:

> The claims and doctrines of Islam were no longer a threat to the Christian faith, now that the faith had come to terms with the Greek philosophy and created intellectual defences; Islam was no longer a heresy which was likely to win supporters nor an intellectual attack against which serious defence was necessary. Christians might be frightened of the Ottoman army, but they could look at the religion whose banner it carried with cool detachment if not with contempt.[10]

In the intellectual climate of Renaissance and post-Renaissance Europe, there was little reason to fear any large-scale conversions to Islam. This attitude was strengthened by the fact that Turks followed a policy of religious toleration in the European lands they had conquered.

During this period, several histories of the Arabs and Turks were published, the most famous being British historian and scholar Richard Knolles's *The Generalle Historie of the Turkes* (1603). Knolles uses diverse literature based on the accounts and descriptions of travellers, diplomats, missionaries and scholars reflecting the attitudes and perceptions of Christian Europe towards the Turks and their religion. Their conquests of European lands and incorporation into, in Knolles's words, 'the glorious Empire of the Turks, the present terror of the world' represents the admiration as well as the fear in which the Europeans held the Turks. The Turkish scare continued in varying degrees in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as far as England. For instance, when the Turkish siege of Malta was lifted in 1565, the Archbishop of Canterbury ordered a 'form of thanksgiving' to be read in all churches every Sunday, Wednesday and Friday. In the special order of service reference was made to 'that wicked monster and damned soul Mahomet' and 'our sworn and most deadly enemies the Turks, Infidels, and Miscreants . . . who by all tyranny and cruelty

labour utterly to root out not only true religion, but also the very name and memory of Christ our only saviour, and all Christianity.'[11] Even though in the sixteenth century, Islam was no longer the primary target the distortion of its message that had been the hallmark of the Middle Ages still continued. The old image of Islam remained in place.

The image of Turks and Islam

The medieval attitudes towards Islam had a long life; in modified form they are still part of the Western cultural arsenal against Islam. As the Ottoman Empire expanded, Europeans started to identify Islam with Turks and their empire. The Turks became the symbols of a frightening power threatening Christian Europe. While some pious Christians prayed for the destruction of Islam, other ecclesiastics sometimes recast biblical texts to forewarn the impending doom of the Turks. Hard pressed by the growing success of the Turks, Italians, Hungarians, Transylvanians, and Germans were consoled by the mendicant preachers that the cross would finally vanquish the crescent. For instance, the Dominican friar Giovanni Nanni da Viterbo in 1480 addressed a *Tractatus de futuris Christianorum triumphis in Turcos et Saracenos* to the Pope, the kings of France, Spain, Sicily, Hungary and the government of Genoa in which he raised the question whether the Prophet Muhammad was really the Antichrist. After citing from the works of the learned writers, he concluded that the answer was in the affirmative. Nanni sought support in the Book of Revelation and astrological calculations for his prophecy, according to which, the lands lost to the Turks would be recovered by the intervention of Christ or by human effort. He believed the Ottoman Empire would come to an end under the seventh Turkish sultan.[12] The prophet of Turkish doom seriously miscalculated about the seventh sultan. As it turned out, the seventh sultan was Muhammad II, the conqueror of Constantinople.

In the sixteenth century, Ottoman pressure was continuously felt, and the polemic against Islam was adapted to serve new purposes within Christendom. The conflict between Catholics and Protestants was curiously combined with the traditional polemic against Islam; each side accused the other of being Turkish in religion. In Albert Hourani's words:

> Islam is no longer a theological problem, since it is not relevant to the great controversies about the nature of Christian revelation and the Church. But since it is still present in the consciousness of western Europe, still feared and still, in general, misunderstood, it can be used for polemical purposes in those controversies. When Christian writers speak about Islam, they do so no longer primarily in order to refute its errors, but as a way of refuting each other's errors.[13]

For instance, in 1597, William Rainolds, an English Catholic exiled to the Continent wrote his book *Calvino-Turcismus*, where he compared Calvinism with Islam. He writes that 'the fundamental principles of Muhammadanism are far better than those of Calvinism. Both seek to destroy the Christian faith, both deny the divinity of Christ, not only is the pseudo-Gospel of Calvin no better than the Qur'an of Muhammad, but in many respects it is wickeder and more repulsive.'[14] In response, the Anglican Matthew Sutcliffe wrote *De Turkopapismo*. The Protestant attitude, starting from the Reformation period regarded the Pope to be the greater evil, the real Antichrist, greater than Islam and its prophet. These attitudes continued well into nineteenth century. We turn now to a short overview of Martin Luther, the catalyst of the Reformation and his legacy with regard to Jews and Muslims.

The Lutheran impact

The Protestant Reformation, which started in the beginning of the sixteenth century, shook western Christianity to the core and brought an end to the medieval unity of the western Church. The dispute related directly to the domain of the religious authority of the Catholic Church. The role of papal authority, which had successfully withstood many challenges so far, came under fire. In the unfolding of the circumstances and the historical developments the dispute was not long confined to ecclesiastical matters. The Reformation also made deep inroads into secular affairs and political developments across Europe.

In 1517, the movement was set in motion by an unwitting act of Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk of Germany. Palmer and Colton write that he was

> a vehement and spiritually uneasy man, with many dark and introspective recesses in his personality, terrified by the thought of the awful omnipotence of God, distressed by his own littleness, apprehensive of the devil, and suffering from the chronic conviction that he was damned. The means offered by the church to allay such spiritual anguish--the sacraments, prayer, attendance at Mass--gave him no satisfaction.[15]

He formulated the principles of Protestantism. Rejecting the teachings of the Catholic Church, he declared that every baptised Christian was a priest; he declared that priests could marry and that divorce was lawful in the eyes of God. The Pope in his view was the Antichrist who had corrupted the teachings of Christianity. In making his complete breach with Rome, Luther wrote to the Pope:

> For your see which is called the Roman Curia, which neither you nor any man can deny to be more corrupt than Babylon and Sodom, I have indeed shown my detestation, and have been indignant that the Christian people should be deluded under your name and under cover of the Catholic Church; and so I have and will continue to resist so long as the spirit of faith lives in me.[16]

His teaching spread all over Germany and by the middle of the sixteenth century Germany was divided into Protestant and Catholic states. Karl Marx in his article *Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law. Introduction (1844)* viewed Germany's historical contribution not in practical, revolutionary solutions to political matters as other major European nations had achieved, but rather only in terms of speculative thought. He assesses succinctly the role played by Luther in German history:

> Even historically, theoretical emancipation has specific practical significance for Germany. For Germany's *revolutionary* past is theoretical, it is the *Reformation*. As the revolution then began in the brain of the *monk*, so now it begins in the brain of the *philosopher*. *Luther*, we grant, overcame bondage out

> of *devotion* by replacing it by bondage out of *conviction*. He shattered faith in authority because he restored the authority of faith. He turned priests into laymen because he turned laymen into priests. He freed man from outer religiosity because he made religiosity the inner man. He freed the body from chains because he enchained the heart.[17]

However, Luther's credentials to represent the humane aspects of Christian faith and deliver the 'last truth' may be less than convincing. Luther's own ideas were revolutionary to the extent that he wanted not only to reform the medieval church but also to overthrow it and replace it with a church founded on principles drawn from the Bible. We can see the nature of his political outlook, which his version of genuine Christianity had inspired in him by examining two examples. First, we can mention the Peasant War. Under the influence of Luther's teachings, German peasants rose in revolt in 1524. Their basic demands included an end to exorbitant taxes, an end to oppression by the manorial landlords and regulation of rents and tenures. In the beginning Luther attacked the governments and supported the cause of the peasants. He said that in view of the peasants' oppression, the governments were to blame for the rebellion; it was not the peasants but God himself, who rose against their oppressors. He called on both parties to seek a peaceful resolution of their conflict. But soon he turned against the peasants. In 1525, at the height of the Peasant War, Luther repudiated all connection with the peasants, calling them 'filthy swine', and urged the princes to suppress them with the sword. He wrote:

> They must be *knocked to pieces, strangled and stabbed, covertly* and *overtly*, by everyone who can, just as one must kill a *mad dog*! Therefore dear sirs, help here, save there, stab, knock, strangle them everyone who can, and should you lose your life, bless you, no better death can you ever attain. There should be no false mercy for the peasant. Whoever hath pity on those whom God pities not, whom He wishes punished and destroyed, belongs among the rebels himself. Later the peasants themselves would learn to thank God when they had to give up one cow in order to enjoy the other in peace, and the princes would learn through the upheaval the spirit of the mob that must be ruled by force only. The wise man says: cibum, onus et virgam asino. ['Food, pack, and lash to the ass.'] The peasant must have nothing but chaff. They do not hearken to the Word, and

> are foolish, so they must hearken to the rod and the gun, and that serves them right. We must pray for them that they obey. Where they do not there should be not much mercy. *Let the guns roar among them*, or else they will do it a thousand times worse.[18]

Luther's instructions were greatly welcomed by the authorities. The peasants were mercilessly put down, but popular unrest continued to stir the country.

Luther was morbidly hostile to Muslims and Jews. He translated into German the anti-Islamic work *Confutatio Alcorani* of Ricoldo da Monte Croce. His vehement denunciation of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad is openly biased and trivial. He regarded the expansion of the Ottoman Turks with alarm. What was the solution to the problem of Islamic faith? Luther, like many Christians before him, also came to the conclusion that the message of Christianity expounded with the help of 'Christian' arguments did not achieve any results. He saw Muslims as irrational and incapable of conversion by intellectual arguments. So far as war was concerned, it could not be a solution as long as Christians in the West remained mired in sin. He also looked at the possibility where Islam dominated the Christian world. Therefore, in Southern's words, Luther

> wrote to strengthen the faith of those Christians who might find themselves in this condition. The success of the Turks and Saracens over so many hundreds of years did not show that they enjoyed the favour of God: they were only fulfilling the prophecy that the blood of Christ may be shed from the beginning of the world to the end. So (he says) we must let the Turks and Saracens work their will, as men on whom the wrath of God has come, provided we stay in God's grace and observe his word and sacraments.[19]

The Book of Daniel was written in Babylon around 536 BC. Besides stories set in the time of the Babylonian and Persian empires, it also includes a series of visions of the old Jewish prophet Daniel. In Daniel's vision of a Ram and Goat, this biblical text recounts (8:23-25):

> In the latter part of their reign, when rebels have become completely wicked, a stern-faced king, a master of intrigue will arise. He will become very strong, but not by his own power. He will cause astounding devastation . . . He will cause deceit to prosper and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet, he will be destroyed, but not by human power.

Luther held that this was a prophecy about the Muslim Turks, who in the sixteenth century were invading Europe.

In his writings, Luther asked whether Muhammad and his followers were the final Antichrist. His answer was in the negative because, in his view, Islam was too crass and irrational to fulfil such a vast role in the ecclesiastical firmament. The final, subtle and sinister Antichrist must come from within the Church; he was none other than the Pope himself. Christianity had been in the grip of an external enemy and even more formidable internal enemy, both working in a vicious alliance against the true Christianity. 'He constantly names the Pope and the Turk together, though rather arbitrarily, since he did not usually insist on specific points of resemblance: *Turca et Papa in forma religionis nihil differunt aut variant, nisi in ceremoniis*. The one corrupted the ritual of the Old, the other of the New Testament.'[20] In his *Table Talk* Luther declared: 'Antichrist is the Pope and the Turk together. A beast full of life must have a body and soul. The spirit or soul of Antichrist is the Pope, his flesh and body the Turk.'[21]

Luther's assertion of an alliance between the Pope and Islam, however, went against all evidence of any connection over the previous centuries, especially the role of various Popes in their hostility towards Islam and their advocacy of war and violence against Muslims during the Crusades. But these matters were of no significance to Luther. Karen Armstrong rightly remarks that 'people could say what they wanted about "Islam" because it was not a reality any more to people like Luther, but part of his inner emotional landscape: a symbol of horror and monstrous evil. It could therefore easily be associated with the other real enemies of the reformed Church who were in a malign conspiracy against the "truth".'[22]

The Lutheran views on the alliance of the papists and the Turks continued to shape the attitude of the Protestants in the subsequent centuries. For instance, when the Ottoman power was fast declining in the nineteenth century, Archibald Mason, a fiery anti-papist 'minister of Gospel', echoed Luther's views with matching vehemence in 1827. He said:

> The fall of the Turkish kingdom will remove a principal defence from the Anti-Christian Kingdom of Rome . . . The European Peninsula, consisting of Spain and Portugal, is Antichrist's western high tower, and the empire of Turkey its Eastern bulwark . . . The heads and supporters, both of Islamism and Popery, are set in opposition to the civil and religious privileges of mankind . . . the Turkish Firman [royal decree] and the Popish Bull . . . breathe the same spirit and speak the same language. The fall of the Turk will therefore render the Pope more insecure. For many years the Mahometans have given the Popish kingdoms no trouble.[23]

The second instance is Luther's attitude towards the Jews. He told the Jews in Germany that he had reformed Christianity in which the Bible had the central place; therefore they should become Christians now. This was a contemptuous attitude towards the Jews and their faith. He was certainly aware of the Jewish and Christian interpretations of what Christians call the 'Old' Testament and as well as the fact that Jews did not accept the New Testament, nor the status of Christ as presented therein because it fundamentally negated the Jewish concept of God. In his pamphlet *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543) he advocated a total segregation of Jews from Christians. He wrote that the houses of Jews should be demolished, and that they must be put under one roof and should be made to do forced labour. All synagogues should be burned to the ground and the Jewish prayer books destroyed. In 1537, Luther had all the Jews expelled from Protestant cities. As we all know, four centuries later, Luther's behest was literally executed in Luther's homeland, under the Nazi rule, in the name not of religion but of a political cult.

John Calvin and the Turks

Reformer John Calvin (1509--64) was the great systematiser of Protestant theology. Protestantism by Calvin's time was well established in Germany and Switzerland. Calvin rejected the Catholic Church in 1532 and openly proclaimed his devotion to the evangelical faith. In 1536, the first Latin edition of his great work the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* was published. This was both an introduction to and instruction in the Christian faith that he found plainly revealed in the Scriptures. It was soon rendered into several European languages and gained enormous popularity. The *Institutes* came to exercise a very wide and diverse influence, with Calvin widely acknowledged as the outstanding theologian and scholar of his age.

Calvin believed that a man was chosen for salvation or damnation by the will of God, and was himself powerless. He appeared to provide a clear statement of faith, leaving no room for disagreement about what he meant. Like Luther, he also preached obedience to the civil power. His Church had a strong organization in which his ministers and laymen played their part. Calvin established his ministry in Geneva, and it was practiced under his authority with partial theocratic tyranny right up to his death in 1564. But the persecution of his followers in France and the Netherlands made Calvinism a revolutionary creed that upheld the principle of resistance to ungodly princes.

Calvin's *Institutes* do not specifically elaborate his views on Turks and Islam except for a few references. However, there are numerous references to Turks and their faith in his sermons and letters. Calvin was a contemporary to the powerful Turkish Sultan Sulaiman the Magnificent (b. 1494, r.1520--66) during whose reign the Ottoman Empire reached its greatest geographical extent and the zenith of its political power. Despite their religious and political hostility towards the Turks, European countries had also come to the conclusion that any hopes of driving the Turks out of Europe, to which earlier generations had aspired, were unrealistic. One major power was France, which under King Francis I concluded an alliance with the Sultan, and once obtained help from the Sultan against the king's enemies. Calvin in a letter to Francis expressed his grave concern over his foreign policy.

In a number of places Calvin included Turks among those whom he thought to be hostile to the evangelical movement. In his commentaries on the Turks, his

criticism very often was directed against the Roman Catholics, whom he often refers as 'the Papists'. When Pope Paul III in 1541 indicated that Protestants were a greater danger to the church than the Turks, Calvin responded with a lengthy riposte. He wrote: 'To leave nothing to imagination as far as shamelessness is concerned, the dirty mouth [of the Pope] dares to call into question which of the two might be more inimical to Christ, the Protestants or the Turks.'[24] However, his view of Turks was not mild by any means. He was apprehensive that perhaps continued Turkish expansion in Europe would lead to an eventual end of Christianity. To avert this, European countries should be defended against the Turks, but he opposed any idea of diverting church funds toward crusade activities.

In Calvin's theology, God as Father had a central role which, according to Calvin, was lacking in the faith of the Turks. He had little positive to say about the Turks' view of God, their prophet and the Qur'an. He finds the biggest mistake to be the Turks' failure to appreciate the centrality of Christ in the true knowledge about God. In the *Institutes* 2:6.4, he writes:

> Faith in God is faith in Christ. John's saying has always been true. He that does not have the Son, does not have the Father (1 John 2:23). For even if many men once boasted that they worshipped the supreme Majesty, the Maker of heaven and earth, yet because they had no mediator it was not possible for them to taste God's mercy and thus be persuaded that he was their Father. Accordingly, because they do not hold Christ as their head, they possess only a fleeting knowledge of God. From this it has also came about that they have lapsed into crass and foul superstitions and betrayed their ignorance. So today the Turks, although they proclaim at the top of their lungs that the Creator of heaven and earth is God, repudiate Christ and substitute an idol in place of the true God.[25]

Calvin in his writings and sermons continued to criticise the Turks and Jews whose concept of the majesty of God was that of an idol, and not of God. For instance, in Sermon 183 on Deuteronomy, he said: 'As when today the Turks boast enough that they worship the God who created heaven and earth. What is their God like? It is but an idol. The Jews say, We want to serve God, but their God is only an idol. And why? Because the divinity which is in Christ is unknown to them.' In his commentary on

Isaiah 25:9, he remarked: 'Although the Jews, the Turks and the unbelievers contend that they worship God the creator of heaven and earth, in fact they worship an imagination [*fictitium*] as their God.' Calvin's views about the Prophet Muhammad are couched in the old medieval tradition. He blames Muhammad for the wrong ideas that the Turks have about God. He even saw the Turks [Muslims] as formerly Christians who had been deceived by Muhammad. In Sermon 11 on 2 Timothy 2:8-13, he said: 'We observe the Turks, how they have so much put up their defences as they have followed the deceptions [*trumperies*] of Muhammad. They are really such fables, that if [the Turks] had not become all dull they could immediately see through the stupidity contained in them. But what happened? God has let loose His vengeance in the sense that He has put them in the wrong direction; this happened because of their ingratitude, because they were Christian bastards just like the Papists.'[26] The Turks' major shortcoming was their refusal to accept the relationship of God and Christ:

> When the Turks put their Muhammad in the place of God's Son, and when they do not recognise that God is manifested in the flesh, which is one of the principle articles of our faith, then they are guilty of perversities and are leading so many people astray that they deserve to be put to death.[27]

Calvin castigates Muhammad for having corrupted the greater part of humanity, because he set the example for other sects to say and invent whatever they wanted, something that went against the true teachings of the Scriptures: 'All sects that exist today have come out of this mud puddle. This happens when one is not content with the pure doctrine of the gospel.'[28]

In the Deuteronomy 13:1-8 Jehovah warned his people: 'If there arises among you a "prophet" or a "dreamer of dreams" . . . you shall not hearken to the words of that "prophet" or that "dreamer of dreams" . . . And that "prophet" or that "dreamer of dreams" shall be put to death.' This, according to Calvin applies to, among others, the founder of Islam whom he regards as a false prophet. He calls Muhammad 'the companion of the Pope who has done very best to seduce those poor people who were enraged and saturated and poisoned by his false doctrine.'[29]

The Calvinistic Congregationalism and Presbyterianism which became influential in the American colonies and Northern Europe had a large store of stereotypes and distorted images of Islam to draw upon. It is true that Calvin did not add anything novel to the images of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad, nor did he try to change them. What he did was to follow and reinforce the traditional anti-Islamic rhetoric in advancing his theology.

The nature of the Turkish threat

One result of Ottoman expansion was a renewed interest by Western intellectuals in Islam. They now began to take a broader view of Islam and Muslim nations. At the political level, the Arabs, 'the Saracens', who had previously been regarded as Muslims *par excellence*, had lost political power and sank into insignificance. As a result, they mattered little in European politics. From now on, it was the Turkish embodiment of Islam that was a new reality for Europeans who now identified Islam with the Ottoman Empire. The imprecise term 'Saracen' also gradually disappeared from the common usage. In European languages anyone who converted to Islam was said to have 'turned Turk'. Now 'the Turk' had become a synonym for 'the Muslim'.

During the expansion of the Turkish domains, the prophecies of Turkish doom were popular; Christian fears of mass conversions to Islam were also common among the Europeans. The anonymous writer of *The Policy of the Turkish Empire* (London, 1597) perceived the Turks hell-bent 'to the enlarging and amplifying of their Empire and religion, with the dayly accesse of new and continuall conquests by the ruine and subversion of such kingdoms, provinces, estates, and professions, as are anyway astraunged from them either in name, nation, or religion.' The author expresses the fear that the Turks were capable of converting the whole world to their faith:

> They doe think . . . that they are bound by all meanes as much as in them lyeth, to amplifie and increase their religion in all partes of the worlde, both by armes and otherwise: And that it is lawfull for them to enforce and compell, to allure, to seduce, and to perswade all men to the embracing of their sect and superstitions: and to prosecute all such with fire and sword, as shall either oppose themselves against their Religion, or shall refuse to conforme and

> submit themselves to their ceremonies and traditions. And this they doe to the intent the name and doctrine of their Prophet Mahomet may bee everywhere, and of all nations, reverenced and embraced. Hence it is that the Turkes doe desire nothing more then to drawe both Christians and others to embrace their Religion and to turne Turke. And they do hold that in so doing they doe God good service, bee it by any meanes good or badde, right or wrong.[30]

The confrontation between Renaissance Europe and Ottoman Turkey was primarily military and political. The Turkish threat was no longer perceived in purely religious terms. The fact is that Christians who came under Ottoman rule were never compelled to convert to Islam, and no large-scale conversion to the faith of the Turks took place. While the notion of toleration was practically unknown in Christian Europe in these times, the Turkish treatment of Christian communities living under their rule was a unique experience in Europe. Bernard Lewis writes:

> Until the eighteenth century tolerance was a quality neither expected nor admired by many Europeans. They reproached the Turk, not because he imposed his doctrines by force . . . but because his doctrines were false, that is, not Christian. In fact, however, the Turk did not impose his doctrines by force but instead allowed his subjects to follow their own religion . . . The result was that in the seventeenth century the Turkish capital was probably the only city in Europe where Christians of all creeds and persuasions could live in reasonable security and argue their various schisms and heresies. Nowhere in Christendom was this possible.[31]

In stark contrast to how the Muslims and the Jews were treated in the wake of Catholic Reconquista, the Turks treated the Christians and the Jews generously, as already mentioned. To avoid death and persecution many Protestants from the Holy Roman Empire (Germany) and Jews from Spain found shelter in the Ottoman Empire. Some Christians did embrace Islam, but their number was surprising low. Norman Daniel observes: 'We get the impression that less was said about the converts to Islam than there was to say; perhaps serious conversion was not uncommon under Ottoman rule, and Europeans adapted to Islam with some ease. We have no right to assume that their reasons were sordidly mercenary or cowardly.'[32]

Christian missionaries in Islamic countries made little headway in winning Muslims to their religion merely because Muslims, as always, viewed Christianity as an outdated and superseded religion. But for the Europeans there were many opportunities of trade in vast markets of the Ottoman Empire. The open commercial policies of the Turks and the favourable treatment they offered to the foreign traders were attractive for the European enterprises. The military establishment of the Ottoman state was in constant need of western weaponry, and the western merchants made sure to deliver the goods and reaped large profits from this trade even though these arms were meant to be used in battles against Christian countries. For European traders, monetary considerations prevailed over their religious affiliations. But there were certain Pontiffs who tried to prevent weapons and material that could be used for the production of weapons from reaching the Turks. For instance, in 1527 Pope Clement VII issued a papal bull declaring excommunication and a curse on 'all those who [took] to the Saracens, Turks and other enemies of the Christian name, horses, weapons, iron, iron wire, tin, copper, bandaraspata, brass, sulphur, saltpetre, and all else suitable for the making of artillery and instruments, arms and machines for offence, with which they fight against the Christians, as also ropes and timber and other nautical supplies and other prohibited wares.'[33]

In the seventeenth century, Pope Urban VIII also issued a similar bull with a longer list of war materials, excommunicating and anathematising those who in any way gave any help or information to the Turks and other enemies of Christianity. But despite these warnings, and the threats of penalties here and in the hereafter, the profitable trade in weapons continued unabated. The attraction of immediate profit and hard cash here and now overweighed the later rewards in the heavenly kingdom. The image of the Turk as trading partner, Bernard Lewis points out, together with that of the Turk as invader and conqueror, appears clearly in European literature. The image of the Turk as the standard-bearer of Islam is relegated to a secondary place.[34]

Gradually there was a realization in the West that the Ottoman Empire, which had penetrated further into Europe than any other Muslim state or power, had to be granted acceptance as a power in its own right within Europe. The growing trade and commercial relations were an aspect of this new relation. Under the circumstances,

the prime factor that determined the foreign policy of the Western states towards the Ottoman Turks was no longer religion but practical considerations of politics and trade. However, the European recognition of the Ottomans had its limits: there was no real willingness to integrate Turks in the wider context of the European political system.

As mentioned above, political considerations were predominant in Western policy towards the Ottomans, but it does not mean that the religious hostility towards Islam had disappeared. In fact, the image of Islam fashioned in the Christian traditional polemic in the Middle Ages continued to dominate western attitudes in the later centuries. The image of Muhammad as an idol had lost ground and now he was portrayed more often as a false prophet who had founded a religion of deceit by violent means. The anti-Islamic polemic meant to discredit Muhammad and the Qur'an can be illustrated by a dialogue written by William Bedwell, a great learned Arabist in England. His tract, which was published in 1615, shows the European attitudes towards Islam. His work bears the title: *Mohammedis Imposturare: That is, A Discovery of the Manifold Forgeries, Falsehood, and horrible impieties of the blasphemous seducer Mohammed: with a demonstration of the insufficiency of his law, contained in the cursed Alkoran*.

When the Turkish advance continued in Europe in the sixteenth century, the medieval images of Islam still dominated the thinking of Christian Europeans and there were many who dreamed of another crusade to drive the Turks out of conquered lands which once belonged to Christians. But there was no great enthusiasm on the part of the European rulers for such a crusade and they instead concentrated on matters of their national interests. King Henry VIII made this point clear to the Venetian ambassador in 1516.[35] There are a number of instances where European rulers entered into or tried to forge military alliances with the Turkish sultans for their political ends. When Sulaiman the Magnificent was busy capturing Hungary and turning the Mediterranean into a Turkish lake, King Francis I (1494--1547) of France established the first alliance with Turkey against King Charles V of Spain in 1535. In 1588 Elizabeth I of England informed Sultan Murad III that Philip II, the Catholic monarch of Spain was the chief idolater against whom the genuine monotheists

should enter into an alliance. Most of the Italian states at one time or another sought Turkish assistance in their inter-state rivalries.[36]

Turkey by diplomatic missions and commerce had links with most of the Western countries. Now Turkey was the most powerful power in Europe. It was also indicative of the fact that the image of Islam had somewhat changed in the Christian countries, and that a call for arms throughout Europe against Islam was no longer seen practicable. Rodinson remarks: 'From then on, to the realists, the Ottoman Empire became a power like any other and even a European power. Still, it had been a long time since any other Muslim power had penetrated this far into Europe and therefore political relations with the Ottomans now became essential. Whether it was going to be an alliance, neutrality, or outright war would depend on political factors quite separate from religion.'[37]

There were numerous and diverse images and perceptions of the Turks among the Europeans of different countries and religious creeds. Traders, missionaries, diplomats and travellers who had direct experience of Turkey have left abundant descriptions of the Turks, their ways of life and traditions. Their qualities of tolerance, honesty and hospitality were generally praised. Among the vices ascribed to the Turks were their sexual depravity and unbridled lust, a theme that had captivated the imagination of westerners. The institution of polygamy, concubinage and the mystery of the harem became standard stereotypes in the European literature. The sexual indulgence of the Turks, however, revolved round the centuries-old Christian perceptions and preoccupations with Muslim sensuality. Norman Daniel in his book *Islam and the West* has ably surveyed the old images of the Lusty Moor that had their origin in the medieval writers. He writes that Islam was said to allow or encourage homosexuality, and indeed, any sexual act for its own sake. Now such promiscuous practices were added to the insatiable sensuality of the Turks.

On their part, the Turks who visited European cities were astounded by the sexual immorality of the Christian West. Halet Effendi was the Turkish ambassador to Paris from 1802 to 1806. In Paris he became aware of the Western accusations of rampant sodomy among the Turks, to which he responded angrily: 'They say: know that as a general rule . . . the Muslims are homosexuals, . . . one would think that all of

us are of that persuasion, as if we had no other concerns.' Then, he describes what he had himself seen in Paris:

> In Paris there is a kind of market called Palais Royal where there are shops of various kinds of goods on all four sides, and above them rooms containing 1500 women and 1500 boys exclusively occupied in sodomy. To go to that place by night is shameful, but since there is no harm going there by day, I went to see this special spectacle. As one enters, from all sides males and females hand out printed cards to anyone who comes, inscribed: 'I have so many women, my room is in such and such place, the price is so much' or 'I have so many boys, their ages are such and such, the official price is so much' all on specially printed cards . . . the women and boys surround a man on every side, parade around and ask, 'Which of us do you like?' What is more, great people here ask proudly, 'Have you visited our Palais Royal? And did you like the women and the boys?'
>
> Thank God, in the lands of Islam there are not that many boys and catamites.[38]

Halet Effendi had seen the prevalent sexual depravity in France which greatly disturbed him: 'I ask you to pray for my safe return from this land of infidels, for I have come as far as Paris but I have not seen this Frankland some people speak of and praise . . . In what Europe these wonderful things are found, I do not know.'[39] He may have been taken aback at the moral wantonness in Paris, but sex-markets in most cities of Europe were widespread. There is little reason to assume that sexual morality in the Christian West stood on a higher level than that of the Turks. Like all stereotypes, the image of the Lustful Turk was more for internal consumption in the West than the depiction of the reality of the Turkish ways. The West was also shaping a new image of Muslims in romantic eroticism in a European context. As Norman Daniel says:

> The change in the treatment of sexual morality was more startling. The supposed Islamic sexuality, which had been a point of particular repugnance to a world under clerical guidance, and remained so to the pious, became a positive attraction to a new public. Much that was imputed to Islam arose in the

> imagination of European writers as they reflected upon their limited knowledge. When they did reprove Islamic sexual morality, it was for its lack of freedom.[40]

However, in the sixteenth century many of the negative stereotypes of Islam were rejected by those Europeans who had seen Turkey. The Ottoman policy of religious tolerance and respect for other faiths was a commendable feature of the Turkish rule. For instance, the French philosopher Jean Bodin wrote:

> The King of the Turks, who rules over a great part of Europe, safeguards the rites of religion as well as any prince in the world. Yet, he constrains no one, but on the contrary permits everyone to live as his conscience dictates. What is more, even in his seraglio at Petra he permits the practice of four diverse religions, that of the Jews, the Christians according to the Roman rite, and according to the Greek rite, and that of Islam.[41]

Among those Europeans who had a firsthand experience of the Ottoman Empire and had seen the harem, was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689--1762), the wife of the English ambassador to the Court of Sultan Ahmed III. She arrived in Istanbul with her husband in 1717. In her letters to her learned and literary friend, Abbé Conti, she offered some rare and interesting observations about the position and role of the Turkish women without mystery or myth and the Turkish society. Her insights were at variance with the image of the Turks widely held in the West. For instance, in one of her letters, she wrote:

> Thus you see, Sir, these people are not so unpolish'd as we represent them. Tis true their magnificence is of a different taste from ours, and perhaps a better one. I am allmost of opinion they have a right notion of Life, while they consume it in Music, Gardens, Wine, and delicate eating, while we are tormenting our brains with some Scheme of Politics or studying some Science to which we can never attain, or if we do, cannot perswade people to set that value upon it we do our selves . . . I allow you to laugh at me for the sensual declaration that I had rather be a rich Effendi with all his ignorance, than Sir Issac Newton with all his knowledge.[42]

There were other travellers in other parts of the Muslim world who supplemented the observations of Lady Montagu.

The legacy of the Middle Ages regarding Islam continued to shape the consciousness of the West. However, with the dwindling of the Turkish fortunes from the later part of the seventeenth century and the rise of the western nations to power also led to the reappraisal of Islam. It was no longer sufficient to treat Islam in absolute negative terms that had previously characterised the European Christian thought on Islam. Now when the balance of power had shifted in favour of the West, it was safe for serious scholars to turn their attention to the historical role of Islam. It was a move away from seeing Islam only within the parameters of religious confrontations between two rival faiths or the theological polemic.

Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries awareness of the Islamic world increased and the way of approaching Islam also underwent some changes. The advancement of navigational skills and extension of European mercantile activity in the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean brought the Europeans in direct contact with Muslim countries. The settlement of European merchant communities in the eastern Mediterranean and the Indian ports increased. A growing number of merchants, travellers and missionaries went to the Eastern countries. The European states had ambassadors and consuls in Ottoman Turkey, but the Ottomans did not open any permanent embassies in the European states until the time of the Napoleonic wars. Europeans' increased trade and growing contacts with the Ottomans paved the way for a new political relationship with the Muslim countries like the Mughal Empire of India and the Safavid Iran. For the Europeans this in turn brought about a better understanding of Islam. There was need for an unbiased and objective appraisal of the East for the European statesmen and merchants for political and commercial reasons. It was no longer sufficient to see the values and traditions of Muslims as the opposite of what were considered to be traditional Christian social and ethical norms. Serious inquiries were made to understand the political, administrative and military system of the Ottoman Empire. The new studies, while critical of the shortcomings of the Turkish system, recognised the many-sided achievements of an advanced civilisation.

However, this awareness of the world of Islam was not universal. The anti-Islamic legacy of the Middle Ages had not vanished. Albert Hourani remarks:

> Among educated people, travel, commerce and literature brought some awareness of the phenomenon, majestic and puzzling, of Islamic civilisation, stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, with Arabic as its *lingua franca*, the most universal language which had ever existed . . . How far did such changes have an effect upon attitudes towards Islam? The spectrum of possible attitudes still existed. At one extreme, there was a total rejection of Islam as a religion.[43]

A total rejection of Islam and the Prophet can be seen in eminent French thinker and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623--62). Pascal was the most brilliant and profound Christian apologist that Europe had known since the Middle Ages. In his *Pensées*, fragments of a projected apology for the Christian faith, he compared the Prophet Muhammad with Christ. In his view, Christ is everything which Muhammad is not. The coming of Muhammad was not foretold, neither did Muhammad work miracles as Jesus did: 'In a word, the difference is so great that, if Mahomet followed the path of success, humanly speaking, Jesus followed that of death, humanly speaking, and, instead of concluding that where Mahomet succeeded Jesus could have done so too, we must say, since Mahomet succeeded, Jesus had to die.'[44] This formulation may not convince anyone in our age, but the apologetic thrust of the argument is clear. For Pascal the authenticity of Christian doctrine is self-evident whereas the Prophet, irrespective of whatever he stood for or accomplished in his lifetime, stands condemned. He is even blamed for having succeeded in his mission; but, had he not succeeded, then he would have been blamed for his failure and this most likely construed as a sure sign of God's disfavour of him.

Alongside such extreme views, we also see a new trend to study Islam and Islamic civilisation in academic literature. The study of Arabic undertaken in some European universities deserves mention. In 1539 the first Arabic chair was created for Guillaume Postel at the new Collège de France. Postel was a great Renaissance scholar. He published some handbooks on Arabic. Some of his students like Joseph Scaliger made substantial contributions to the studies of Arabic and Islam. The advances in printing made Arabic books available to large numbers of scholars in

various countries. In the coming century, in 1613 a chair of Arabic was created at the University of Leiden, whose first holder was the prominent scholar Thomas van Erpe. He and Jacob Golius published the first Arabic grammar by using strict philological methods. In England, a chair was created at Cambridge in 1632, followed by one at Oxford in 1634. From then on, a serious and sustained study of Arabic sources started, from which a human portrayal of the Prophet emerged.

Chapter 13. The Enlightenment and Islam

The changes and the continuity of the Western attitudes towards Islam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can be best understood in the changing perspective and historical context of Enlightenment thought. Before we turn to a few leading scholars who wrote on Islam, we should have a brief look at the Enlightenment which has frequently been called the Age of Reason.

The eighteenth century is associated with the Enlightenment, representing a broad collection of ideas and intellectual tendencies held by the educated people in Europe. The ideas which had their origin in the classical times and the Renaissance were developed in the seventeenth century by leading philosophers and scientists such as René Descartes, John Locke, Pierre Bayle and Isaac Newton. Descartes by his rationalistic approach advocated that systematic doubt was the beginning of firm knowledge. John Locke based his political and social philosophy on observation, whereas Newton demonstrated the powers of observation and experiment by formulating the laws of motion and gravitation. Thus, the basis of knowledge was shown to lie in reason and observation, not on reliance on authorities.

The Cartesian principle of doubt provoked the hostility of the Catholic Church. If rational thinking was allowed to scrutinise the validity of religious beliefs starting from the principle of doubt, then, the Church, which to date had relied on authority, was threatened. The ecclesiastical approach to invoke authority in support of religious dogmas was criticised by Pierre Bayle who himself was a clergyman. He pointed to the unsatisfactory premises of authority, and asked: What authority prescribed the authority? His conclusion was that in the end it was only a matter of opinion and nothing more. He suggested that every dogma of traditional Christianity that did not meet the requirements of natural reason could be refuted. Thus, the authority of the Church or the Scriptures was not deemed sufficient to sustain religious beliefs.

In the eighteenth century, these ideas further developed. The remarkable contribution of the French thinkers affected the whole of Europe. French was the international language of intellectuals across Europe during this time. Montesquieu,

Condillac, Diderot, d'Alembert, Voltaire and Rousseau were prominent thinkers in this varied intellectual landscape.

Most of the thinking and educated Europeans felt that theirs was an age of new ideas, of light as opposed to that of the dark past and its obscurantist ideas. The struggle against 'medieval obscurantism' had continued since the Renaissance but in these times it became a battle against Christianity itself. The sense of progress was universal. Most thinkers of the Enlightenment exalted the power of human reason and optimistically looked towards the future for having indefinite possibilities of human progress. Professor Hans Reiss elucidates:

> A growth of self-consciousness, an increasing awareness of the power of man's mind to subject himself and the world to rational analysis, is perhaps the dominant feature. Reliance on the use of reason was, of course, nothing new, but faith in the power of reason to investigate successfully not only nature, but also man and society, distinguishes the Enlightenment from the period which immediately precedes it. For there is a distinct optimistic streak in the thought of the Enlightenment. It springs from, and promotes, the belief that there is such a thing as intellectual progress. It is also revealed in the increasing and systematic application of scientific method to all areas of life. But there was by no means agreement on what scientific method was.[1]

At the heart of the Enlightenment was submitting the rationality of authority to question. In his essay *What is Enlightenment*? the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant (1724--1804) in whom many of the intellectual strands of the Enlightenment meet, writes:

> *Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-induced immaturity. Immaturity* is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is *self-incurred* if its cause is not a lack of understanding, but rather, a lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of the Enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude*! Have courage to use your *own* understanding![2]

Kant portrays the religious realm to be of central concern to the enlightenment, as the locus of 'man's self-induced immaturity', because 'religious immaturity is the most pernicious and dishonourable variety of all.'[3] He regards the enlightenment not a static condition but rather a continuous process leading to emancipation from self-imposed tutelage, from prejudice and superstition. The age of enlightenment was not an enlightened age yet, but it was in the process of becoming so. Kant explains:

> As things are at present, we still have a long way to go before men as a whole can be in a position (or can even be put into a position) of using their own understanding confidently and well in religious matters, without outside guidance. But we do have distinct indications that the way is now being cleared for them to work freely in this direction, and that the obstacles to universal enlightenment, to man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity, are gradually becoming fewer.[4]

The ability to think for oneself was to break the traditional chains of authority. The critical attitude towards authority in general in the Enlightenment thought also led to questioning all accepted values. The scrutiny of revealed religion in turn led to the secularisation of accepted beliefs and doctrines. There were also rationalist thinkers who did not reject religion in its entirety. They were loosely called 'Deists'; they claimed that the existence of God could be demonstrated by reason but they rejected the traditional dogmas and beliefs in revelation, miracles, providence and immortality. There was a common belief during this period that once ignorance and intolerance perpetuated by irrational beliefs were overcome, human society would enter a new social order of freedom and liberty under rationalism. In a broad sense, as Roberts indicates, the values of the Enlightenment were assumed to be of all civilised men:

> Never, except perhaps in the Middle Ages, has the European élite been more cosmopolitan or shared more of a common language. Its cosmopolitanism was increased by knowledge of other societies, for which the Enlightenment showed an extraordinary appetite. In part this was because of genuine curiosity; travel and discovery brought to men's notice new ideas and institutions and thus made them more aware of social and ethical relativity and provided new grounds for criticism.[5]

Their calmer attitude towards religion had a sobering effect on religious passions, and this in turn led to somewhat less hostility toward Islam. However, Christian orthodoxy fought hard to combat Enlightenment ideas and influence within the church establishment, and their sympathetic approach towards the old enemy, Islam.

The spread of rationalist, progressive and secular ideas challenged the authority of Christianity both in the domain of dogma and its affiliation with the established political powers, especially in the Catholic countries. These ideas had a sobering effect on men's religious passions. The struggle against institutionalised Christianity also opened the way to impartial and sympathetic attitudes towards other cultures and religions. 'In their naive fashion the thinkers of this period often evaluated the outstanding wisdom and virtue of ancient lawgivers and founders of religions, and stressed the reasonableness of alien faiths, praising them at the cost of Christianity.'[6]

The attitude towards Islam also showed a great improvement upon the earlier image it had acquired as a rival religion. Many writers of the period started to look at Islam with impartiality and even sympathy. 'Those who did so were unwittingly looking for (and clearly discovering) in Islam the identical qualities of those new Western ideologies opposed to Christianity. By pointing out the merit and sincerity of Muslim beliefs, many seventeenth-century authors defended Islam against medieval intolerance and polemical disparagement.'[7] Deists and humanists enlisted the support of Islam as a natural religion grounded in reason and simplicity in contrast to Christianity, the religion of blind faith, miracles and mysteries. There was also a trend that emphasised the outstanding human achievements of the Prophet. As a result, a more just estimate of the Prophet as a wise, tolerant and undogmatic ruler emerged during this period.

Some writers on Islam: Reland to Gibbon

Now, we turn to some scholars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even though there were no material incentives for working in Islamic history, the works of such notable men as the elder Pococke, Simon Ockley and George Sale and to some extent also Adrian Reland need to be mentioned. They represent a historical trend to

evaluate the Prophet, the Qur'an and Islam, which was very different from those of theologians and novelists. Based on material available to them, they show the extent of scholarly knowledge on pre-Islamic religions of Arabia, the fundamental tenets of Islam and its creeds. In the historical literature of the period, the use of original sources was gaining ground and thus much more authentic information had become available.

In 1705 Adrian Reland, a Dutch scholar and professor of theology and oriental languages at the University of Utrecht, wrote his book *De religione mohammedica*, which gave an impartial account of Islam drawn mainly from Islamic sources. In Reland's view, no other religion had been more calumniated by its adversaries than Islam. The misrepresentation of a religion by its antagonists is a common occurrence, because 'we are mortals, subject to error; especially where religious matters are concerned, we often allow ourselves to be grossly misled by passion.' He advocated that in religious discussions, opponents should be treated in an honourable way:

> More will be gained for Christianity by friendly intercourse with Mohammedans than by slander; above all Christians who live in the east must not, as is too often the case, give cause to one Turk to say to another who suspects him of lying or deceit: 'Do you take me for a Christian?' In truth, Mohammedans often put us to shame by their virtues; and a better knowledge of Islam can only help to make our irrational pride give place to gratitude to God for the unreserved mercy He bestowed upon us in Christianity.[8]

He repudiated vigorously the accusations that Muslims worship Venus, or all created things, or that they deny the Providence of God. Reland's book did much to put aside old myths and legends and gave historical facts about the life of the Prophet.

Reland's positive contribution to the study of Islam and its history was praised by the Deistic statesman, Bolingbroke, in his *Letters on the Study and Use of History*, which he wrote when he retired from politics after the elections of 1735. In 'Letter IV' he criticises the popular misconceptions concerning Islam as well as the wilful and systematic falsification of its history that had gone on in all ages:

> The charge of corrupting history, in the cause of religion, has been always committed to the most famous champions . . . of each church . . . What accusations of idolatry and superstition have not been brought, and aggravated against the Mahometans? Those wretched Christians who returned from those wars, so improperly called the holy wars, rumored these stories about the West . . . Many such instances may be collected from *Maraccio's* refutation of the koran, and *Relandus* has published a very valuable treatise on purpose . . . to justify the Mahometans. Does not this example incline your lordships to think, that the Heathens, and the Arians, and other heretics, would not appear quite so absurd in their opinions, nor so abominable in their practice, as the orthodox Christians have represented them; if some *Relandus* could arise, with the materials necessary to their justification in his hands? [9]

The views of Reland and Bolingbroke indicate a noticeable shift in emphasis in serious writers who no longer were content to see Islam as an evil religion, the negation of Christianity that dominated the West's literature since medieval times. A more realistic and historically sound approach to Islam and the Prophet was taking shape mainly due to the efforts of some serious writers. Pierre Bayle in his enormous *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697) included an article on the Prophet Muhammad, which was revised according to new information in later editions. He praised the policy of tolerance in the Ottoman Empire towards all kinds of religious minorities. It was at a time when followers of different Christian creeds from European countries sought asylum in Turkey to avoid persecution at home.

In England, the creation of an Arabic chair at Oxford University was a milestone in the professional European Arabism. Its first incumbent was the great Arabist, Edward Pococke. He had spent many years in Aleppo working as a chaplain for English merchants and later at Istanbul. During his stay abroad, he acquired good proficiency in Arabic and firsthand knowledge of Islam. In Aleppo and Istanbul, he collected, translated, copied and edited Arabic manuscripts. At this time some European travellers who visited Turkey popularised a story that Prophet Muhammad's coffin was magnetically suspended in the air, and that some Turks who had personally seen it had told this to them. Pococke informed his readers that there was no truth in

this story, adding that Muslims laughed at this story by recognising it as a Christian invention.

The publications of Pococke had great influence on the future of Arabic and Islamic studies in the West. These include among others, his *Specimen Historiae Arabum,* the *Historia dynastiarum,* which was a long excerpt from the chronicles of the Syrian Christian writer Bar Hebraeus and three hundred pages of learned notes. 'Profoundly erudite in tone and uncontroversial in tone, Pococke's notes show the emergence of the scholarly study of Islam from the distortions of medieval polemic.'[10] His work greatly influenced both directly and indirectly many later writers who relied upon him for historical material. He also discarded the widely accepted story of the white pigeon or dove trained by the Prophet to whisper the revelations in his ears.

In certain areas, a more tolerant attitude towards Islam by the Christian writers did not go unchallenged. The opponents of such an attitude began to exploit the Islamic controversy for polemical purposes. One prominent scholar who tried to situate Islam and Christianity on equal footing among the religions of the world was Henry Stubbe (d. 1676). His book *An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism: With the Life of Mahomet and a vindication of him and his religion from the calumnies of the Christians* circulated in manuscript form only and was finally published in 1911. This book takes a sympathetic attitude towards Islam. In this pleasant work, the historical conditions necessary for the rise of a new religion make interesting reading. According to Stubbe, the preconditions for the rise of Islam were ripe because the 'multitude of Pagan Usages [had] crept in among the Christians.'[11] Stubbe is not troubled by the sensual nature of the Islamic view of Paradise, something that has continued to titillate the imagination of Christian apologists and clergymen over the centuries. According to him if the biblical description of heaven as a cubical city can be interpreted allegorically, then the Muslims should have the same right of interpretation. As far as polygamy is concerned, he argues, it was practised by the biblical patriarchs also, and this had not disturbed Christians.

Stubbe refutes some of the traditional charges made against the Prophet, for instance, that he had spread his religion by the sword. He discards some of the old fables and myths surrounding the life of the Prophet that had their origin in the ninth and tenth centuries, but had survived well into the seventeenth century. Among these were 'the legend that Muhammad was indoctrinated by a Nestorian monk and a Jew, that a tame pigeon was feigned to be the Holy Ghost, that his tomb was suspended between two loadstones, and the rest of the trivia bred by religious hatred and political apprehension.'[12] The theological perspective of Stubbe's book is clearly anti-Trinitarian and in many ways it anticipates the Enlightenment.

However, one outstanding example of a writer who pitched himself against sympathetic views of Muhammad and his religion was Dr Humphrey Prideaux, Dean of Norwich (d. 1724). He wrote a biography of the Prophet that was published in 1697. It became enormously popular and was reprinted in numerous editions. The full title of the book is *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet. With a Discourse annex'd for the Vindication of Christianity from this Charge. Offered to the consideration of the Deist of the present age.* The real aim of the work was to offer a defence of Christian orthodoxy against contemporary Deism. As the Deists had also emphasised some merits in Islam and portrayed Muhammad in a better light, Prideaux set out to fight them as well as the old enemy, Islam, at the same time. The theological controversies of the Eastern Church, in Prideaux's words, had 'wearied the Patience and Long-Suffering of God' so that

> he raised up the Saracens to be the Instruments of his Wrath, . . . who taking Advantage of the Weakness of Power, and the Distractions of Counsels, which these Divisions had caused among them, soon overran with a terrible Devastation all the *Eastern* Provinces of the *Roman* Empire. Have we not Reason to fear, that God may in the same manner raise up some *Mahomet* against us for our utter Confusion . . . And by what the *Socinian*, the *Quaker* and the *Deist* begin to advance in this Land, we may have Reason to fear, that Wrath hath some Time since gone forth from the Lord for the Punishment of these our Iniquities and Gainsayings, and that the Plague is already begun among us.[13]

Prideaux had originally planned to publish a much larger work *The history of the ruin of the Eastern Church*, but owing to the eruption of the Trinitarian Controversy, he feared that the Deists might take advantage of his arguments against the Church Establishment. He therefore selected only those extracts from his work which dealt with the life of Muhammad and published them under the title given above. His malice and virulence against Islam outdoes the medieval polemicists and leaves a reader baffled. 'Prideaux's book,' writes Professor Holt, 'is therefore a two-handed engine of controversy: not only is it intended to expose the errors of Islam (a traditional exercise of Christian apologists), but was more immediately to point the contrast between the origins of Islam and Christianity, and thereby to constitute a defence of Christianity against contemporary Deism. For the Deists were Prideaux's particular obsession. As a controversialist, he does them less than justice, seeing in them merely followers of a fashionable belief that Christianity is an imposture.'[14]

Deism originally was the belief in the existence of one God, as opposed to atheism and polytheism. According to this view, God has not revealed himself in any other way except in the normal course of nature and history. Deists were often accused of rejecting the traditional Christian beliefs, such as belief in revelation, miracles, providence, and immortality. Deism that flourished in the seventeenth and the first-half of the eighteenth centuries did not constitute a coherent movement, except that its various adherents emphasised the need to hold only those religious beliefs that were rationally acceptable. Their rational approach to religion was regarded as a big threat to Christian orthodoxy. Therefore, clerics attempted to combat their views with religious fervour. Prideaux was one such defender of traditional Christianity.

Prideaux's book falls short of a scholarly work. He uses second-hand information from Arabic authors and anti-Muslim controversialists like Ricoldo, and treats both of these as equally valid. His uncritical use of his sources has been criticised by old historians like Gibbon and modern scholars such as P.M. Holt and Norman Daniel. 'The resultant biography is an unskilful combination of Muslim tradition and Christian legend, inspired by a sour animosity towards its subject.'[15]

Prideaux in his treatment of Muhammad does not offer anything new. He sees the Prophet's 'ambition and lust' to be the major traits of his personality. The reasons Prideaux offers for the emergence of Islam also show how closely he followed the traditional Christian views of Islam. According to him, Muhammad planned 'such a religion as he thought might best go down, he [then] drew up a Scheme of that imposture he afterwards deluded them [his followers] with, which being a Medley made up of Judaism, the several Heresies of the Christians then in the East, and the old Pagan Rites of the Arabs, with an Indulgence to all Sensual Delights, it did too well answer his Design in drawing men of all sorts to the embracing of it.'[16]

However, Prideaux's polemical book, despite the influence it exerted on many generations of Christian writers, is not a representative example of the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century scholarship on Islam.

The views of Stubbe and Prideaux present two very different trends towards Islam. Prideaux indubitably true to his theological vocation fought against the ideas of the Enlightenment and in defence of orthodoxy. But the trend to praise Islam with a view to fight the Christian beliefs had taken firm ground. In France a younger contemporary of Stubbe and a man of the Enlightenment, Comte de Boulainvilliers (1658--1722) wrote his *Vie de Mahomet*, which was posthumously published in Paris in 1730 and in London in the following year in an English translation entitled *Life of Mahomet*.

Comte portrays Muhammad as a great legislator and statesman, unequalled in the ancient world. The anonymous English translator does not overtly praise the Prophet for fear of offending English readers. But he points to the distorted picture of Muhammad that had been common so far, which Comte has tried to put right. He writes: 'But the Count of Boulainvilliers has done him Justice, he has wiped off the Aspersions that deformed his fair Character; set him in the fairest point of Light; and described the Heroe, and the Orator, with an Eloquence equal to his own.'[17] The translator has eulogised Muhammad for many qualities, but without mentioning the prime fact that he is the founder of a universal religion.

The Count calls the Prophet 'the impostor' who, nonetheless, with his best intentions was trying to render to God his true glory. Islam was of human origin, and not a revealed religion. The Count accepted such views, but instead of condemning Islam on this count, he admired it for being a natural religion based on reason in contrast to superstitious and irrational Christianity. He regarded Islam in its essentials a true and reasonable religion, which was free from all the reprehensible excesses and unreasonable mysteries of religion. Muhammad did not claim to work miracles and when asked by the Arabs to perform them, he denied any rational need for them. The work of Muhammad, therefore, was praiseworthy, because he used his power and charismatic personality to better the lot of his people: 'He did not more enslave his country, on the contrary, he only desir'd to govern it, in order to make it mistress of the world, and its various riches; of which, both he and his first successors made so disinterested a use, that in this respect they much compel the admiration of their greatest enemies.'[18]

The *Life* gives a popular account of Muhammad and the laws and customs of Muslims. It has a sympathetic attitude towards a much-maligned religion and it aroused interest among readers. This book was 'an anti-clerical romance, the material of which was supplied by a superficial knowledge of Islam drawn from secondary sources.'[19]

The growth of scholarly works on Islamic faith and history with greater objectivity was a welcome sign, no doubt, but attacks on the life and mission of the Prophet did not stop. The negative image of the Prophet had far deeper roots in the European psyche than any positive view of him. But it is fair to say that in most cases the mingling of polemical attitudes with genuine scholarship on Islam had become more evident.

The first major attempt to make historical research available to the general public was made by the Cambridge scholar Simon Ockley (1678--1720). He wrote his *History of the Saracens* in two volumes; the first volume was published in 1708, the second in 1718. He used Arab sources such as al-Waqidi for the history of the early Arab conquests. Though lacking in accuracy in many details, this work by its beautiful simplicity of style was the main source for the history of Islam before

Gibbon.[20] He denied that the Prophet was divinely inspired, but he nonetheless, acknowledged his great achievements at a mundane plane. In his remarks about the Prophet he followed the common practice of stigmatising the Prophet, as 'the great impostor' who 'was a very subtle and crafty man, who put on the appearance of only those good qualities: while the principles of his soul were ambition and lust' but his *History* generally is free from the virulence which Prideaux shows.[21]

Ockley's *History* deals with the period starting from the election of Abu Bakr in 632 as the first caliph and ends with the death of 'Abd al-Malik in 705. The most likely reason why he did not give an account of the life of the Prophet was the current popularity of Prideaux's biography of the Prophet. Despite accepting the main line of Prideaux's narrative, he, in the introduction to his second volume, seems to have some muted criticism of it as well. He writes:

> I mention the Life of MAHOMET because it is the foundation of all our History; and though what hath been written of it by the Reverend and Learned Dr. *Prideaux* is sufficient to give a general *Idea* of the Man and his Pretensions, and admirably accommodated to his principal Design of showing the nature of an Imposture; yet there are a great many very useful Memoirs of him left behind, which would tend very much to the Illustration of the succeeding History, as well as the Customs of those Times wherein he flourished.[22]

The ideas of the Enlightenment influenced even the specialists who worked outside the academic community. In this regard the name of George Sale (1697--1736) stands out. He was an enlightened Christian, an Arabist who worked as a solicitor in London. His English translation of the Qur'an published in 1734 was a landmark in the history of the Qur'anic studies. Equally remarkable, along with the translation, is his 200-page long *Preliminary Discourse*, which forms a compendium of the information then available on Islam. As Sir Edward Denison Ross says in the Introduction:

> For many centuries the acquaintance which the majority of the Europeans possessed of Muhammadanism was based entirely on distorted reports of fanatical Christians which led to the dissemination of a multitude of gross calumnies. What was good in Muhammadanism was entirely ignored, and what

> was not good, in the eyes of Europe, was exaggerated or misinterpreted . . . In spite of the vast number of eminent scholars who have worked in the same field since the days of George Sale, his *Preliminary Discourse* still remains the best Introduction in any European language to the study of the religion promulgated by the Prophet of Arabia.[23]

It is true that modern researches have brought to light much new information on the history of the ancient Arabs which make Sale's account in early paragraphs of his *Preliminary Discourse* outdated, but his description of the life of the Prophet, the origins, doctrines, beliefs, rites and sects of Islam is both objective and enlightening. Unlike many of his Christian contemporaries who undertook Islamic studies with a view to malign the Prophet and distort Islamic faith, Sale was largely free from religious prejudice, but not completely free from the traditional Christian perspective when it came to assessing the life of the Prophet.

In his translation Sale made good use of Ludovici Marracci's translation of the Qur'an in Latin, which was published in Padua in 1698. Marracci, an Italian priest had spent about forty years of his life on Qur'anic studies and was familiar with the chief Muslim commentators. His purpose was clearly polemical. He followed the medieval anti-Islam tradition, to which he wanted to give a new lease of life. In the *Prodromus ad refutationem Alcorani*, he sought to refute Islam and the Prophet with all the arguments which had been known up to his time. His use of Muslim authors was meant to destroy Islam with its own weapons, as he explained in his prefatory note that 'when we act against the enemies of religion, we attack them more happily with their arms than with ours, and (thus) more happily overcome them.'[24]

Sale frequently uses a wide range of Muslim authors and some renowned Qur'anic commentators such as al-Baydawi, Zamakhshari and Jalal ad-Din. Norman Daniel points out that the people who complain about Sale's translation do so not because of its inaccuracy but of its literary and stylistic shortcomings: 'A Muslim who reads him is far from gratified by what appears to be prejudice against Islam; but such a reader does not realise the extent to which Sale reduced the prejudice into which he was born, and made Islamic sources of information easily available, even when he himself shared the traditional Christian view.'[25]

The traditional Christian views held about Islam and the Prophet, which Norman Daniel refers to, no doubt, deeply affect Sale's perspective. Even though he tries to be fair in his judgements, he, like many of his contemporaries, assumes that Muhammad was an impostor and that Islam was a false religion. In the *Preliminary Discourse*, he maintains that Christianity was of divine origin, whereas, by contrast, Islam was no other than a human invention, and that it owed its progress and establishment entirely to the sword. After describing the schisms and corruption of the Roman and Eastern Churches, Sale presents the Prophet as being not inspired by God, but rather argues that God used him for his own ends because the Arabs 'seem to have been raised up on purpose by GOD, to be a scourge to the Christian Church for not living answerably to that most holy religion which they had received.'[26] However, this description was not used to invoke a divine judgement, with a sense of warning and retribution as one of his sources, Prideaux, had done in his book. Thus God, using Muhammad to affect his purpose, as Sale postulated, was also a major improvement in accepting the historic role of the Prophet. It was also admitted that God, in his own mysterious ways, had played some role in the rise of Islam. Sale attributes the success of Islam to the outstanding qualities of Muhammad, the man, who had

> indisputably a very piercing and sagacious wit, and was thoroughly versed in the art of insinuation. The eastern historians describe him to have been a man of an excellent judgement, and a happy memory; and these natural parts were improved by a great experience and knowledge of men, and the observations he had made in his travels. They say he was a person of few words, of an equal, cheerful temper, pleasant and familiar in conversation, of inoffensive behaviour towards his friends, and of great condescension towards his inferiors. To all which were joined a comely, agreeable person, and a polite address; accomplishments of no small service in preventing those in his favour whom he attempted to persuade.[27]

Unlike many Christian writers, both from the past and of his own times, Sale uses language with a certain degree of decorum. While he remained within the Christian framework of his concerns, his scholarship was commendable. This can be seen in the following passage where he describes the early phase of the Prophet's mission:

> After he began by this advantageous match [i.e. his marriage to a rich widow Khadija] at his ease, it was that he formed the scheme of establishing a new religion, or, as he expressed it, of replanting the only true and ancient one, professed by Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and all the prophets, by destroying the gross idolatry into which the generality of his countrymen had fallen, and weeding out the corruptions and superstitions which the latter Jews and Christians had, as he thought, introduced into their religion, and reducing it to its original purity, which consisted chiefly in the worship of only one GOD.[28]

In contrast to the commonly held views among the Christian writers who doubted the sincerity of the Prophet, Sale disowns any such effort to decide the issue. He writes:

> Whether this was the effect of enthusiasm, or only a design to raise himself to the supreme government of his country, I will not pretend to determine. The latter is the general opinion of Christian writers, who agree that ambition, and the desire of satisfying his sensuality, were the motives of his undertaking. It may be so; yet his first views, perhaps, were not so interested. His original design of bringing the pagan Arabs to the knowledge of the true GOD, was certainly noble, and highly to be commended; for I cannot possibly subscribe to the assertion of a late learned writer [Prideaux], that he made that nation exchange their idolatry for another religion altogether as bad.[29]

With regard to the Prophet's wives, for which, 'he is constantly upbraided . . . by the controversial writers,' Sale explains that polygamy, even though forbidden in the Christian religion, was commonly practised in Arabia and other parts of the East; it 'was not counted an immorality, nor was a man worse esteemed on that account.'[30] He pointed out that divorce allowed in Islam was also permitted under Jewish Law. The views of Sale were a great improvement on the Christian view of Islam, but to a modern Muslim his assessment of the Prophet is deeply offensive and laden with anti-Islamic prejudice. Norman Daniel aptly sums up this dilemma:

> This cannot look very friendly or respectful to the Muslim who, when he reads it, comes across the ancient Christian attitude for the first time, but, read in its

> historical context, it represents the diminution of prejudice by scholarship; nor does it, like the works of Savary and Voltaire and others, substitute some new prejudice for the old. Sale grinds no axe.[31]

The history of pre-Islamic Arabia and the origin of Islam presented by Sale are quite inaccurate. The limitations were due to the limited range of sources available to him and the problem of mastering a complex language like classical Arabic also stood in his way. But he made a substantial contribution to Islamic studies. Professor Holt evaluates his role thus:

> Nevertheless his work was of great importance. His freedom from religious prejudice (in which respect he compares favourably with many of his nineteenth- and twentieth-century successors), his obvious conviction that Arabic writers were the best source of Arab history, and Muslim commentators the fittest to expound the Qur'an, marks an enormous advance on the hodgepodge of 'authorities' advanced by Prideaux. His work complements that of Ockley, and for over a century the two played a leading part in creating the notion of the Prophet and the Arabs held by educated Englishmen.[32]

After Sale, Savary's translation of the Qur'an was published in 1752. Savary regards Muhammad as one of those unusual personalities whose impact changes and remakes history. He regards the great achievements of the Prophet as a marvel of what a human genius is capable of accomplishing when the circumstances are favourable. Muhammad had seen the inner strife and hatred among the Christians and the obstinacy of the Jews to their exclusive faith. He sought to establish a universal religion based on a simple doctrine that was acceptable to human reason. Professor Tor Andrae sums up Savary's views while showing clearly his own bias:

> But in order to make men to accept his doctrine, Savary thinks, he had to claim Divine authority. So he demanded that he should be accepted as the Apostle of Allah, this being pious fraud dictated by rational necessity. He retained as much of the moral regulations of the Jews and Christians as was best adapted to the life of nations in a warm climate. His political and military ability and his capacity for governing men were extraordinary. Savary was an enlightened

> Westerner, who, to be sure, justly refused to call Muhammad a prophet, but who was nevertheless forced to recognise him as one of the greatest men who ever lived.[33]

The rational spirit of the Enlightenment had broadened the intellectual horizons of people in many respects. Islam was seen through new spectacles. But old traditions die hard and European anti-Islamic bias for centuries had penetrated deep in the psyche of the people. Islam was still identified with fanaticism, credulousness and superstition although some positive elements it contained were given recognition in so far they served the purpose of the rationalists and Deists in their criticism of orthodox, revealed Christianity, and their struggle against the church establishment. The ambiguous and conflicting attitudes of the Enlightenment thinkers are clearly visible in Voltaire. He showed vacillation between opposing views when it came to evaluating the role and place of the Prophet in history. In his tragedy *Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le prophète* (1742), being not satisfied with the medieval Christian legends because they were not sufficiently lurid for his literary work at hand, Voltaire chose to invent new ones. The play is characterised by a vicious malice and invective against the Prophet without any regard to historical facts. In the preface, he attacks Boulainvilliers and Sale for their portrayal of the Prophet, and declares if Muhammad had been born a prince or had the people installed him to power then one could have honoured him. But Muhammad, an ordinary man, 'a camel-dealer' stirs up a revolt in his town and persuades some to believe that

> he holds conversation with the angel Gabriel; and that he should boast of being rapt to Heaven, and of having received there part of this unintelligible book which affronts common sense at every page; that he should put his own country to fire and the sword, to make this book respected; that he should cut the fathers' throats and ravish the daughters; that he should give the vanquished the choice between his religion and death; this certainly is what no man can excuse.[34]

In the hierarchical social order of the Middle Ages, the rise to prominence of a man of humble, ordinary background was seen as a transgression by an upstart. Voltaire, an iconoclast and a great thinker of the Enlightenment, echoes the sense of shock of the

privileged classes, but he also adds more venom by distorting the historical facts about ‘a camel-dealer’. The passage cited above ‘horrifies its modern reader by its disregard of the better information perfectly familiar to its author.’[35] But Voltaire showed somewhat muted opprobrium in his later historical work *Essai sur les moeurs,* where he analysed Islamic belief and rejected the medieval legend that Muhammad had gained his knowledge from a Christian monk Bahira or ‘Sergius’. He held that, unlike Christianity, Islam tolerated other religions. However, his assessment of the Prophet continued to be in negative terms, even though he acknowledged his greatness and his abilities by comparing him with Cromwell in fanaticism and courage, but crediting him with greater achievements than Cromwell. The Prophet, in his view, established his dogmas by his courage and his arms. He, like most of the Christian polemicists, also accused the Prophet of being an impostor who saw the ignorance and credulity of the fellow Arabs around, enslaved their souls, and successfully set himself up as a prophet.

His *Essai sur les moeurs* also shows that a significant change in appraisal of Islam had taken place. In Christian polemic, Muhammad, ‘the false prophet’ was equated with Islam; therefore any features of Islam were those of its founder. Voltaire tried to separate the two. While he analysed the historical contribution of the Prophet in a negative light, he, at the same time, regarded the evolution of the Islamic system a tolerant force. According to this perspective, as Djaït observes, Islam was moving towards greater tolerance: ‘Jesus was good, but Christians became intolerant, whereas Muslims were tolerant despite their evil prophet. Positive developments in one case, negative in another: this was Voltaire’s way of harmonizing his many contradictory ideas on the subject, of reconciling his prejudice with reason.’[36]

Voltaire’s opinion became quite fashionable and many writers followed his lead. Denis Diderot (1713--84), the encyclopaedist and philosopher, went one step further and claimed that Muhammad was the greatest enemy of sober reason who ever lived. With the exception of a few improbable legends, which he cast aside, Voltaire did not contribute much to bring scholarly research on Islam in line with the new information that was available to him. His approach, as Daniel says, ‘did not disturb the basic line established in the Middle Ages: Muhammad was seen as the inventor of a religion made up of bits and pieces acquired from round about; he was a deliberate

deceiver, or at least a partly culpable deceiver, who established his religion by force. The framework of what Voltaire writes is the classic one of the Enlightenment; but his assessment of Islam as a religion is, in its outline, nearly identical with the medieval one.'[37]

Norman Daniel's comments on Voltaire within the context of Islam are fairly well balanced. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that Voltaire's attacks on Islam and the prophetic career of Muhammad were a part of his worldview, which rejected religion and attacked Christian beliefs and the Scriptures as well. As the reader notices, his criticism of Islam and the Prophet are also obliquely directed against Christianity. It is quite true to say that his historical knowledge of Judaism and Christianity, their history and development, was far superior to his knowledge of Islam. His sources for his writings on Islam happened to be very limited. He relied mostly on English sources, especially Sale, as he knew English well.

The eighteenth-century European writers, as we have seen, largely denigrated Muhammad as a prophet, but they recognised his human qualities and achievements. They also acknowledged that Islam had the qualities of a natural religion, which served human purpose, and perhaps there was some hidden purpose of God in the rise of Islam, but no more. No one was willing to accede to its divine origin. For instance, Joseph White, professor of Arabic at Oxford chose 'a comparison of Islam and Christianity by their origins, evidence and effects' as a theme for the Bampton Lectures in 1784. He offers the familiar arguments that the origin of Islam was not a miraculous event, nor did it play any part in the providential scheme. He regards it as a purely natural religion borrowing from the Jewish and Christian scriptures and arising out of particular situation that existed in Arabia in the seventh century. The reason why Islam succeeded could be explained by looking at the natural causes, such as by the corruption of the Christian Church of the times and the forceful personality of Muhammad. White disagreed with the traditional depiction of the Prophet as the 'monster of ignorance and vice' and instead found him 'an extraordinary character [of] splendid talents and profound artifice . . . endowed with a greatness of mind which could weather the storms of adversity [by] . . . the sheer force of a bold and fertile genius.'[38]

Professor White, like many other scholars of his age and of the coming generations, formulates his views within a cultural framework where the uniqueness and eternal truth of the Christian faith is axiomatic. As a consequence, other religions, the 'natural' religions were assumed to present various belief systems designed by humans, where the hand of Providence plays no part. Occasionally, some writers, as we saw above, also accepted the positive elements found in Islam and other religions. The question of Christianity's unique status also came under review. 'It was possible to regard Christianity as being different, in its origins and beliefs, from all others, but it was also possible to see all of them as the products of human minds and feelings, and Christianity was not necessarily unique, or necessarily the best of them.'[39] During the Age of Enlightenment, the basis of Christian faith came under scrutiny and the conclusions arrived at had struck at the very roots of Christian religion.[40]

Edward Gibbon (1737--94), the great English historian, produced his monumental history *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in six volumes. It is a work of enormous erudition and a masterpiece of organised detail. Chapter 50 (in volume 5) is devoted to Muhammad and the rise of Islam. Gibbon relies on the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European scholars such as Reland, Pococke, Boulainvilliers, and Gagnier for his investigation of Islam. There was a paucity of Arabic sources available to the European scholars at that time. The only Arabic sources available to Gibbon were Gagnier's translation and commentary of the Arabic chronicle of Abu al-Fida, which he regards as 'the best and most authentic of guides', and an Arabic chronicle written by Hasan al-Jannabi. He was unaware of *Sirat Rasul Allah*, known as *Life of the Prophet* of Ibn Ishaq (*c*. 704--67), the great traditional biography of the Prophet, which remained unknown to European scholars until the nineteenth century.

Evidently, the defective state of European scholarship and negative stereotypes of Islam stood in the way of Gibbon giving a balanced account of the life of the Prophet. Gibbon was a secularist with little interest in exploring the religious dimension of the Prophet's life. He rejects many myths about Muhammad as 'vulgar and ridiculous'. The story that Muhammad was of low, plebeian origin is 'an unskilful calumny of the Christians, who exalt instead of degrading the merit of their adversary.'[41] He dismisses Muhammad's supposed 'epilepsy' as 'an absurd calumny

of the Greeks'.[42] Despite his rejection of such myths, he was not above his own cultural (as distinct from religious) prejudices. Bernard Lewis observes in this connection:

> The chapter on Muhammad and on the beginnings of Islam is still much affected by myths, and in this, more visibly than in the chapters on Rome and on Byzantium, Gibbon gives expression to his own prejudices and purposes and those of the circle in which he moved. There were several layers of myth and misunderstanding in the portrait of the Prophet as depicted in the literature available to him. Medieval Christian denigration of a rival product had little effect on him . . . Where he himself is very clearly affected is by the ideology of the Enlightenment.[43]

For Gibbon, Islam has purely a human founder, an ordinary mortal like the rest of us. This view seems to be compatible with the Islamic view of the Prophet but, in reality, it bears opposite meanings. In Islam, Muhammad is regarded a human being, but in his prophetic mission he is believed to have been divinely guided. However, it should be borne in mind that Gibbon's view is not meant to refute Islamic tradition in support of Christianity. In fact, his historical perspective on the rise of Christian dogma that ascribes divinity to Jesus as the Son of God, God Incarnate, for instance, reflects the Enlightenment thought where some leading thinkers and writers had rejected Christian doctrine in its essentials. The transformation of Christianity from its monotheistic origin (as the close disciples of Jesus in the Jerusalem Church had understood God and the prophetic role of Christ which we have discussed) into something diametrically opposite was a matter of grave concern to the Prophet when he started preaching in the seventh century. Gibbon in the following passage depicts the plight of Christianity at that time:

> The Christians of the seventh century had insensibly relapsed into a semblance of paganism; their public and private vows were addressed to the relics and images that disgraced the temples of the East: the throne of the Almighty was darkened by a cloud of martyrs, and saints, and angels, the objects of popular veneration; and the Collyridian heretics, who flourished in the fruitful soil of Arabia, invested the Virgin Mary with the name and honours of a goddess. The

> mysteries of the Trinity and Incarnation *appear* to contradict the principle of the divine unity. In their obvious sense, they introduce three equal deities, and transform the man Jesus into the substance of the Son of God: an orthodox commentary will satisfy only a believing mind: intemperate curiosity and zeal had torn the veil of the sanctuary: and each of the Oriental sects was eager to confess that all, except themselves, deserved the reproach of idolatry and polytheism.'[44]

In contrast to Christianity, 'the creed of Mohammed is free from suspicion or ambiguity; and the Koran is a glorious testimony to the unity of God. The prophet of Mecca rejected the worship of idols and men, of stars and planets, on the rational principle that whatever rises must set, that whatever is born must die, that whatever is corruptible must decay and perish.'[45] After describing in highly laudatory terms the Islamic view of 'the Author of the universe' and 'the sublime truths' announced by the Qur'an, Gibbon says: 'A philosophic theist might subscribe to the popular creed of the Mohammedans: a creed too sublime perhaps for our present faculties.'[46]

The question of Muhammad's sincerity in his prophetic mission was always in doubt in apologetic literature from the Middle Ages. In Enlightenment thought it continued to arouse interest, and some writers accorded half-hearted recognition to Muhammad for his human qualities as a sagacious and tolerant ruler and legislator, but, despite this, many continued to regard him as an impostor. For instance, Castel de St Pierre in his *Discourse II* (1733) distinguished between the Meccan and Medinan period of the Prophet's life and developed the argument that Muhammad began in sincerity, that he 'was the first to be deceived, and was only more fit to deceive others', but after his migration to Medina 'from being a fanatic he became an impostor.'[47] Gibbon follows this line of investigation with some hesitation. He says that it may be expected of him to balance the virtues and faults of Muhammad, but to 'decide whether the title of enthusiast or impostor more properly belongs to that extraordinary man' was a difficult task. He elaborates: 'The author of a mighty revolution appears to have been endowed with a pious and contemplative disposition: so soon as marriage had raised him above the pressure of want, he avoided the path of ambition and avarice; till the age of forty he lived with innocence, and would have died without a name.'[48] His initial admiration of the man soon gives way to a severe

indictment of him when the Prophet finally accomplished the task and emerged victorious. Gibbon accuses him of subordinating 'the use of fraud and perfidy, of cruelty and injustice' to the propagation of the faith when he became a ruler.[49] He describes how the sincere preacher of the unity of God at Mecca was transformed into a self-deceiving impostor:

> The energy of a mind incessantly bent on the same object would convert a general obligation into a particular call; the warm suggestions of the understanding or the fancy would be felt as the inspirations of Heaven . . . From enthusiasm to imposture the step is perilous and slippery; the demon of Socrates affords a memorable instance how a wise man may deceive himself, how a good man may deceive others, how the conscience may slumber in a mixed and middle state between self-illusion and voluntary fraud. Charity may believe that the original motives of Mohammed were those of a pure and genuine benevolence; but a human missionary is incapable of cherishing the obstinate unbelievers who reject his claims, despise his arguments, and persecute his life.[50]

Gibbon presents the last years of the Prophet's life in utterly negative terms: 'Of his last years ambition was the ruling passion; and a politician will suspect that he secretly smiled ('the victorious impostor!') at the enthusiasm of his youth, and the credulity of his proselytes.'[51] Gibbon in the first few lines of his chapter 50 on the rise of Islam, describes Muhammad who 'with the sword in one hand and the Koran in the other, erected his throne on the ruins of Christianity and of Rome.'[52] On this opinion, Bernard Lewis comments that

> the statement is remarkably inaccurate. Both Christianity and Rome survived the advent of Islam; the Qur'an did not become a book until some time after Muhammad's death; only a left-handed swordsman could brandish both, since no Muslim would hold the sacred book in the hand reserved for unclean purposes--and most important of all, there was a third choice, the payment of tribute and acceptance of Muslim rule.[53]

These were just a few examples of Gibbon's opinion about the Prophet and it is best to leave the others that are scattered throughout chapter 50. His judgement on the Prophet, though elegant in style, 'in no way changes the medieval charges, it only reduces them to misdemeanours. There is hardly one phrase that would not shock a believing Muslim profoundly.'[54]

For Gibbon, Islam is a religion with a purely human founder, a point we have already referred above. However, he sees the most striking trait of Islam to be the permanence of its original form in which its founder left it, in marked contrast to what befell the teaching of Jesus:

> It is not the propagation, but the permanency of his religion that deserves our wonder: the same pure and perfect impression which he engraved at Mecca and Medina is preserved after the revolutions of the twelve centuries, by the Indian, the African, and the Turkish proselytes of the Koran. If the Christian apostles, St. Peter or St. Paul, could return to the Vatican, they might possibly inquire the name of the Deity who is worshipped with such mysterious rites in that magnificent temple.[55]

With a view to criticise Christianity and the Church, Gibbon uses Islam, not to highlight its dynamic message but rather to point out the shortcoming of the Christian faith, in dogma and in practice. In this connection, Bernard Lewis observes:

> The honour and reputation of Islam and its founder were protected in Europe neither by social pressure nor by legal sanction, and they thus served as an admirable vehicle for anti-religious and anti-Christian polemic. Gibbon occasionally accomplishes this purpose by attacking Islam while meaning Christianity, more frequently by praising Islam as an oblique criticism of Christian usage, belief, and practice. Much of this praise would not be acceptable in a Muslim country.[56]

A number of instances support this view. Gibbon argues that Islam is a simple faith that has few dogmas. But when he argues that Islam has been free from schism and internal strife, he is evidently mistaken. Islamic history from its early phase after the

death of the Prophet shows internal struggles for political power and sectarian splits, but it is true that they do not reach the degree of Christian ferocity in sectarian strife and doctrinal disputes. Even though there was no place for priests in the teachings of the Prophet, yet they soon appeared in the early stages of Islamic history and have existed since then, with the important difference that they have never become a hierarchical priesthood to the degree they have in the Christian Churches.

Gibbon's work on Islam can be seen as a mixture of old anti-Islamic polemic from the Middle Ages and the new rational spirit of the Enlightenment that confronted Christian doctrine and practice. He was a great historian, and his monumental history has profoundly influenced historians since its publication. His views on Islam and the Prophet were presented in the unfolding and shaping of world events against the background of military confrontations between the Romans and the Persians, and the interaction of secular and religious ideas and movements that emanated from the Middle East.

Chapter 14. European colonialism and Islam

The images of Islam that emerged in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries relate to Western colonial expansion and imperialism, which radically altered the relationship between the Islamic world and the West. If the medieval image of Islam was based on the notion of equality of two enemies confronting each other politically and religiously, then by the nineteenth century the whole political situation had changed. European colonial powers had become the masters of the Muslim world, controlling and deciding the destiny of the subject nations. The new political relation between the two old rivals was now one of Western domination and Muslim subservience. Nearly every part of the Muslim world from Indonesia to North Africa, up into central Asia, and down into sub-Saharan Africa, at some period became part of the colonial possessions of Britain, France, Holland, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Russia.

In a broader context, by 1815 the continuous outward European expansion over other continents had been going on for almost four hundred years. During the course of these centuries the Spanish, Dutch, French, and British founded their colonial empires overseas. All of these countries were maritime powers and their control overseas was one of absolute power over non-European peoples and their countries. At the same time, the extension of colonial power overseas was not the only condition for carving imperial empires. Dr David Thomson explains: 'The creation of the great dynastic empires of the Hapsburgs, and the Ottoman Turks, the traditional drive eastwards (*Drang nach Osten*) of the Germans in quest of lands for settlement and trade, the continental conquests of Napoleon, the rapid advance of Russia into southern and central Asia during the nineteenth century, even the expansion westward of the United States during the same period, it so happened, within continental land areas rather than across oceans.'[1]

Thus, big colonial empires were created in America, Asia and Africa. In this process, America and Australia were colonised and Europeanised so that they became an extended part of European civilisation and power.

The defeat of Napoleon in 1815 left only one major imperial power with enhanced prestige and strength, namely, Britain. From 1815 to 1870, the interest of the European states in overseas expansion reached its lowest point in several centuries. It seemed the age of colonial empire-building had come to an end. Of all the continental powers, only France undertook serious ventures, when it moved into Algeria, Tahiti and Cochin China, while the British acquired large territories such as New Zealand, the Punjab, central Canada, and western Australia.

But the period between 1870 and 1900, called the period of 'new imperialism', witnessed an unprecedented imperial onslaught in which the European states began to extend their control over areas in which they previously had only interests. The British who had the largest empire to start with acquired most territory. But France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and others also gained extensive territories. About ten million square miles and one hundred fifty million people--about a fifth of the world's land area and almost a tenth of its population at the time--were subjugated to imperialism.[2] The acquisition of new colonies was accomplished by the waging of blatant and aggressive wars in one-sided conflicts which Bismarck sardonically called 'sporting wars'. The only mode of control was now outright annexation of the territories, which belonged to Africa, eastern Asia, and numerous islands in the Pacific and elsewhere. By 1900, the world map showed some eight or ten colours representing the possessions of the imperial powers.

G.H. Jansen in his book *Militant Islam* covering the period from 1798 to 1956, gives a list of military and political events showing that 'during these 150-odd years scarcely a decade, indeed scarcely half a decade, passed without some Muslim area somewhere in Asia or Africa being lost to the Western Christian powers or Muslims fighting against the encroachment of these powers.'[3]

The spirit of the age of 'new imperialism' is best caught in the words of Cecil Rhodes who said: 'Expansion is everything . . . I would annex the planets if I could.' Hannah Arendt writes in this regard:

> Expansion as a permanent and supreme aim of politics is the central political idea of imperialism. Since it implies neither temporary looting nor the more

> lasting assimilation of conquest, it is an entirely new concept in the long history of political thought and action. The reason for this surprising originality . . . is simply that this concept is not really political at all, but has its permanent broadening of industrial production and economic transactions characteristics of the nineteenth century.[4]

Historians and political thinkers for over a century have analysed economic and political causes that led to the phenomenal growth and strength of imperialism and aggressive militarism. In this connection, a famous British economist, John A. Hobson (1858--1940) and, after him, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (1870--1924) investigated the economic factors at work in the expansion of imperialism. In his renowned book *Imperialism* (1902), Hobson discussed the pivotal role of economic forces in the industrialised western and central Europe to the upsurge of new imperialism of the last three decades of the nineteenth century. His argument, in brief, is that excessive capital, which needs new profitable markets abroad, forms 'the economic taproot of imperialism'. The costly imperial wars are not what they are pronounced by the rulers to be, but in reality these are fought and serve the particular interests of some industries and certain professions. He writes:

> Although the new Imperialism has been bad business for the nation, it has been good business for certain classes and certain trades within the nation. The vast expenditure on armaments, the costly wars, the grave risks and embarrassment of foreign policy, the stoppage of political and social reforms within Great Britain, though fraught with great injury to the nation, have served well the present business interests of certain industries and professions . . . We must put aside the merely sentimental diagnosis which explains wars or other national blunders by outbursts of patriotic animosity or errors of statecraft. Doubtless at every outbreak of war not only the man in the street but also the man at the helm is often duped by the cunning with which aggressive motives and greedy purposes dress themselves in defensive clothing. There is, it may be safely asserted, no war within memory, however nakedly aggressive it may seem to the dispassionate historian, which has not been presented to the people who were called upon to fight as a necessary defensive policy, in which the honour, perhaps the very existence, of the State was involved.[5]

Hobson argues how the moral and sentimental factors are resorted to enhance the sham glories of militarism and empire-building as part of jingoism:

> But it is quite evident that the spectatorial lust of Jingoism is a most serious factor in Imperialism. The dramatic falsification both of war and of the whole policy of imperial expansion required to feed this popular passion forms no small portion of the art of the real organisers of imperial exploits, the small groups of business men and politicians who know what they want and how to get it.[6]

Hobson shows how the secular forces of imperialism so easily bring the church, the educational system and the press to cater to the imperial needs and purposes:

> Where this spirit of naked dominance needs more dressing for the educated classes of a nation, the requisite moral and intellectual decorations are woven for its use; the church, the press, the schools and colleges, the political machine, the four chief instruments of popular education, are accommodated to its service. From the muscular Christianity of the last generation to the imperial Christianity of the present day it is but a single step; the temper of growing sacerdotalism and the doctrine of authority in the established churches well accord with militarism and political aristocracy.[7]

Within Marxist theories of imperialism, Lenin's analysis is important. In his pamphlet *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916), he argues that imperialism which had emerged in the last decades of the nineteenth century was a special stage of the development of capitalism with specific new features: the formation of capitalist monopolies and the establishment of domination by these monopolies. Lenin explains:

> Imperialism emerged as the development and direct continuation of the fundamental attributes of capitalism in general. But capitalism only became capitalist imperialism at a definite and a very high stage of its development, when certain of its attributes began to be transformed into their opposites, when

> the features of a period of transition from capitalism to a higher social and economic system began to take shape and reveal themselves all along the line. Economically, the main thing in this process is the substitution of capitalist monopolies for capitalist free competition . . . Monopoly is the transition from capitalism to a higher system.[8]

Lenin views imperialism as the monopoly stage of capitalism, whose essential features included the formation of international capitalist monopolies that share the world and the completion of the territorial division of the world among the capitalist powers. He concludes that imperialism had entered a special stage of its development: 'Imperialism is capitalism in that stage of development in which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of the world among the international trusts has begun; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the great capitalist powers has been completed.'[9]

Lenin had foreseen in 1916 the 'division of the world among the great international trusts', which in fact occurred in the 1920s and 1930s. The major industries developed monopolistic and quasi-monopolistic structures, and through the cartel agreements divided the world markets. The growth of multi-national concerns and globalisation of their interests, which are the economic signposts of the twentieth century, show that the Leninist theory of imperialism is firmly grounded.[10]

Once the imperial process started, it generated its own momentum. To grab as much territory as possible was not with a view to make investments and reap quick results in the present but as an insurance to get rich dividends in the future. Baumont described this policy as 'taking as much as possible without knowing what to do with it, taking what others want because they want it and to prevent them getting it'. Many pressure groups, the press and literary figures contributed to the cause of imperial control. Western imperialists assumed the ideals of civilising the uncivilised people for which they saw themselves amply qualified. They had the financial resources, modern weapons, military power, advanced know-how in science and technology and Christian missionaries. There was widespread euphoria for imperial ventures and land-grab. Even Eduard Bernstein (1850--1932), a socialist thinker, gave a guarded

support to imperialism because he saw in it some material benefits for the colonised people. In his words: ‘A certain tutelage of the civilised people over the uncivilised is a necessity.’ For the British it was the White Man’s Burden, to the French their *mission civilisatrice,* for the Germans to diffuse *Kultur* and to the Americans to extend the blessings of Anglo-Saxon protection.

Social Darwinism extended the scientific concept of evolution to the historical development of societies laying special emphasis on the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest. It was used to support the theories that white races were more gifted and fitter than the non-white races. It reviewed relations between states as a perpetual struggle in which only the strongest survived. Thus the virtues of military life and martial adventures were glorified. It also led to the belief that the future of the states lay in their growth and extension otherwise they would stagnate and decline. Among the competing imperial powers only the strongest was to survive, a view which was well summed up by Joseph Chamberlain in 1902: ‘The future is with great Empires and there is no greater Empire than the British Empire.’

The civilising-mission theme of the Europeans had become part of imperial psychology. The colonial administrators and soldiers came to believe that they were advancing the cause of humanity among the savages and the ignorant. Selfish imperial exploitation and loot in Africa and Asia were justified in the name of disseminating European civilisation and its enlightening role. Amongst the worst examples of imperial activities was the case of the Congo. Leopold II, King of the Belgians, proclaimed the aims of his government of the Congo: ‘Our only programme is that of the moral and material regeneration of the country.’ But the fact is under Leopold some of the worst organised massacres took place in the Congo, where some ten million people were killed. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* records that he earned ‘enormous fortune’ by ‘exploitation of this vast territory.’ The last line of a lengthy entry reads: ‘but he had a hard heart towards the natives of his distant possession.’[11] The motives of the imperial policies were presented in a guise that had no relation to reality. John A. Hobson, exposing the role of the British in India and Egypt, remarks:

> It is precisely in this falsification of the real import of motives that the gravest vice and the most signal peril of Imperialism reside. When, out of a medley of

> mixed motives, the least potent is selected for public prominence because it is the most presentable, when issues of a policy which was not present at all to the minds of those who formed this policy are treated as chief causes, the moral currency of the nation is debased. The whole policy of Imperialism is riddled with this deception.[12]

What enormously facilitated the imperial expansion of Western powers was the employment of well-trained armies and their technologically superior weapons. The indigenous populations had no chance when they faced the advanced weapons that Europeans wielded, with the inevitable outcome that whenever they resisted they were finally overpowered and defeated. This partly explains why small detachments of well-equipped European soldiers were able to take possession of large territories in Africa and Asia, as had earlier been the case in Latin America. Once they had consolidated their power, they looked at the colonised races with gross condescension and complacency. The common perception was that they had a moral right to civilise any alien people. They believed that by bringing the Africans and Asians under their sway, they were doing them a great service. Rudyard Kipling summed up the imperial stock-in-trade in 1899:

Take up the White Man's burden—
Send out the best ye breed—
Go bind your sons to exile,
To serve your captives' need;
To wait in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild—
Your new-caught sullen peoples,
Half devil and half child.

It is true that many imperial administrators and the officials, civil and military, believed that the work they were doing was altruistic and morally right. In Professor W.L. Burn's words: 'The dominant element in any given society will seek the combination of what they want with what they believe that society needs.'[13] The colonial officials approached their task with a sense of moral duty and righteousness, which at the same time afforded them opportunities, privileges and services they

could not have enjoyed in their own countries. Norman Daniel succinctly assesses their role:

> The question seemed simple to them: there were people in need of good rule and people who knew how to rule. These men did indeed establish a government, possibly more just, probably more kindly, certainly more orderly than that which it replaced, in wide areas of the world. The conviction of moral righteousness was often reinforced by a religious cast of thought. These men had an undoubting faith that their civilisation must dominate the world; although it might be expressed in terms of technical superiority, both technological and institutional, they believed that its strength was its moral force, which itself was inextricably Christian. Their moral earnestness was invincible and their success was sure.[14]

During the expansion of colonialism Christian missionaries also played their part. For instance, Dr David Livingstone (1813--73), a medical missionary was originally sent to Africa by the London Missionary Society where he travelled extensively and explored territories along the Zambezi River. He later returned to Africa under government auspices to ‘open a path for commerce and Christianity’. After his death in 1873, his successors continued his work of exploration of ‘the Dark Continent’. Missionary work in the late nineteenth century in Africa and Asia had reached unprecedented levels in the history of the Church. Both the Catholic and Protestant countries sent large contingents of missionaries to Africa, Asia and Latin America. The contribution of France was very large: it provided about forty thousand Catholic missionaries. Protestant missionaries numbered over twenty thousand, evangelising in Africa and Asia. Large numbers of indigenous populations were converted to Christianity and for a short period, the conversion of the whole world seemed a real possibility. In a number of cases, the missionary activity facilitated political take-overs. In 1869, Cardinal Lavigerie founded the Society of African Missionaries, also known as the ‘White Fathers’. They extended their work from Algeria into Tunisia and set up a religious protectorate there, thus facilitating the political take over by France in 1881. Gambetta said of Lavigerie, ‘His presence in Tunisia is worth an army for France.’ Any harm to missionaries could easily be used as a pretext for

imperial intervention. Thus, the murder of two missionaries in China in 1897 was used as an excuse by the German government to seize the port of Kiao-Chow.

The economic, political, military, technical and cultural dominance of European colonial powers was an overwhelming experience for the Muslims. For them, it was a period not only of Western dominance but also of social and cultural humiliation. During the nineteenth century the European powers had extended their direct control over most of the Muslim countries. The political power and prestige of Iran and the Ottoman Empire had sunk low; and more and more they were becoming European protectorates. There were two kinds of attitudes that Europeans took about Islam. In the first place there were those who looked upon Islam as the enemy and rival of Christianity. This attitude, as we have seen, having its roots in the Middle Ages had continued to nourish the needs of Christian apologists through the centuries. The second attitude that had started with the Enlightenment thought had gained good ground in the nineteenth century; it saw Islam as a human contrivance which, while basing itself on human reason and feeling, endeavoured to understand God and the universe. In both cases, no matter how grudgingly, the historical importance of the role of the Prophet and his followers came to be acknowledged.

As the European rule and influence extended in the Muslim countries, the imperial attitudes towards Islam took various forms. Albert Hourani admirably describes the pivotal role of the imperial rule in shaping the general attitudes of the European rulers towards their subject people:

> To be powerless in the hands of others is a profound and conscious experience; to have power over others may affect people as deeply but without their being conscious of it. Those who found themselves ruling Muslim peoples, whether Englishmen or Frenchmen, could easily take up an attitude which in some ways continued those older attitudes . . . In this attitude we can distinguish a kind of proprietary feeling towards those who lie in one's power, so long as they are willing to accept the pattern of dependence; a sense of superiority which is natural in the circumstances, because the possession of power both depends upon and strengthens certain qualities, whether intellectual or moral, and absence of power may weaken them.[15]

The attitude of the European colonial rulers in relation to the subject peoples, 'the natives', was one of cultural and racial superiority. Professor Edward Said (1935--2003) in his renowned book *Orientalism* has shown this pervasive attitude from the examples of A.J. Balfour and Lord Cromer in dealing with the British control of Egypt. Both assumed British superiority and Egyptian inferiority without question. The 'Oriental' had all possible political and social afflictions, which made him incapable of self-government, rational and logical thinking and moral rectitude. For Balfour, British occupation of Egypt could be justified by arguing that the Eastern nations had been incapable of self-government; Britain by taking up the responsibility of ruling Egypt was in fact rendering a service to the Egyptians:

> Is it a good thing for these great nations--I admit their greatness--that this absolute government should be exercised by us? I think it is a good thing. I think that experience shows that they have got under it far better government than in the whole history of the world they ever had before, and which not only is a benefit to them, but is undoubtedly a benefit to the whole of the civilised West . . . We are in Egypt not merely for the sake of the Egyptians, though we are there for their sake; we are there also for the sake of Europe at large.[16]

Thus the advantages of British rule flow in both directions, uplifting the Egyptians from their historical stupor to a level which the civilising mission of the West had set for them, and the benefits of it accruing to the British rulers for such humanitarian tasks and services. The attitude of superiority which the colonial rulers and administrators had towards their Asian and African subject races and indigenous populations across the Americas was based on the conviction that the natives were 'lesser breeds without the law', therefore, by denying them full human dignity they were assumed not to pose any threat or challenge to the political, cultural and racial supremacy of their Western masters. The scientific and technical achievements of Europe were implicitly construed to signify the moral and cultural superiority of European nations, while the non-European nations were regarded inferior on various counts.

Christian missionaries and Muslims

In the nineteenth century, the European attitudes towards Islam took various forms. In this regard, the work of missionaries in the Muslim countries was heavily influenced by colonial rule and its outlook. In an article 'Mission and Colonialism', Hans-Werner Gensichen has discussed the complex role of missions over the course of centuries. Concerning the period of colonial imperialism, he discussed three stages: mission as forerunner of colonialism, mission in its dependency of colonial powers, and mission in its occasional opposition to colonialism.[17] But the history of missions amply shows that their crucial role relates to the first two stages and not to the third. In Britain, the task of empire-building and the new spirit of Evangelicalism found easy accommodation. The Evangelical Revivalists, a form of Protestantism, firmly adhered to the doctrine that emphasised teachings like the infallibility of the Bible, justification by faith and salvation through the acceptance of the gospel of Christ. The path to salvation was via Christianity, and those who felt themselves saved, wanted to bring others to this benediction. In the growing British Empire, the possibilities for missionaries striving for this end were unlimited and the task enormous.

In general, the missionaries who were influenced by the Evangelical spirit were very hostile to Islam and eagerly sought to convert Muslims. Their attitude towards the people they went to convert was attuned to the supremacy of Western civilisation and the blessings of imperial rule. Montgomery Watt explains their outlook:

> They hoped that many of the people to whom they went would become Christian, but they do not seem to have expected to be able to treat them as equal during the foreseeable future. They further assumed that their own intellectual and privatized form of the Christian faith would be suitable for everyone, and they did not seriously study Islam and Muslim communities in order to discover what things were lacking in Islam which Christianity was able to supply.[18]

Missionaries in colonised countries did substantial work in the educational sphere. They opened schools and colleges on western models where educational standards were high. Generally, there was no compulsory indoctrination but the teaching of

Christianity was encouraged. They used different methods to bring their Christian message to the people. In the early stages, they would open free medical dispensaries and clinics, as they still do in many part of the world, to provide health care to the local people. After a while when the word had spread around about the charitable work the white 'Fathers and Sisters' were doing, the next step was to invite them to come to a local centre to hear about Jesus because all the good works missionaries did were in his name. Jesus was so kind, loving and caring for all. It was a well-planned and rather effective and impressive way to prepare the ground for evangelising and conversions. 'It was also realized, of course,' writes Montgomery Watt, 'that efficient medial work could reduce the feelings of hostility and suspicion towards Christian missionaries present in some regions. One hears of places where it was made a condition of treatment that the patients should attend services or listen to sermons, but this was frowned on by most missionaries.'[19] But the history of missions has shown that the envisioned prospects of turning the Muslim multitudes to the side of Christianity did not come true. There never were large-scale conversions to the faith of the colonial masters amongst Muslim peoples anywhere.

There have been a number of well-known missionaries who have held Islam to be completely opposed to and at variance with Christianity. Their views were a replica of the medieval distortions that were still popular in Christendom. For instance, Thomas Valpy French (1825--91), Principal of St John's College at Agra and later Bishop of Lahore, rejected any credentials that Islam possessed any truth at all. For him, 'Christianity and Islam are as distinct as earth and heaven, and could not possibly be true together.'[20] Sir William Muir, a devout advocate of missions, wrote a pamphlet entitled *The Rise and Decline of Islam*, which was published about 1887 by the Religious Tract Society of London. In it he repeated the old medieval charges, which apologists had levelled against Islam and the Prophet. He accuses Islam, among other things, of many falsehoods in its teachings, its spread by violence and the sexual laxity it allows. In a collection of papers published in 1897 under the title of *The Mohammedan Controversy*, Muir remarks that 'Mohammedanism' is the only undisguised and formidable antagonist of Christianity. Muir was an eminent scholar who was strongly motivated by his support for the missionary cause. He, like Peter the Venerable, believed that if missionaries were to successfully to refute Islam they were to be equipped with more accurate information about Islam than what had been

available to their predecessors. Thus Christians could use Islam's 'best sources' to prove to Muslims the falsity of their superstitious beliefs on many important points. His major publications were aimed at achieving such results. A later famous scholar-missionary, Canon Gairdner of Cairo (1873--1928), saw Islam as the great challenge to Christianity and maintained Islam and Christianity to be basically incompatible.

In some places in the nineteenth century, missionaries occasionally held open debates with Muslim scholars and theologians without gaining the desired results, as the records show. The famous debate between Karl Pfander (1803--55), a German missionary and writer on religious matters and an Indian scholar Shaikh Rahmatullah al-Kairanawi on the authenticity of the existing Bible in 1854 was inconclusive, because Pfander withdrew after the second session. The records of the proceedings indicate that Pfander was not able to gain any advantage over his opponent. The Shaikh had some knowledge of the new science of biblical criticism and he used this to question the authenticity of the Bible in its present form.[21]

Muslims under European subjugation, like other subject communities, experienced social and political humiliation and helplessness. They became an object of criticism at the hands of missionaries, who rejoiced over the success and superiority of Christianity and European civilisation over its old enemy, Islam. Despite the less disputatious attitudes towards Islam in the wake of the Romantic Movement, devout Christians clung to their old hatred of Islam. Norman Daniel observes that their

> repugnance to Islam seemed to increase as the century progressed towards the apogee of empire, at least in France and England. The English Christians were on the whole the more prejudiced, and exhibited more clearly the continuing influence of an unmodified medieval tradition at its most uncompromising. Usually the medieval critics of Islam had been patronising at worst about the good they had to concede to Islam, but the modern reappearance of any specifically Christian concession of that sort came very late, and hardly before the twentieth century.[22]

In this situation, they accelerated the proselytising campaigns zealously with little regard to Muslims' beliefs and their religious susceptibilities. They attributed the success of the European nations to Christianity while censuring Islam for the misfortunes of the Muslim world. What it implied was that Christian faith was inherently conducive to progress whereas Islam, by contrast, was an impediment to material and spiritual development.

The question whether the British imperial government followed a policy of neutrality in the religious affairs of the Indian subjects is a matter that I leave out of the present discussion. However, there is no doubt that mission stations received governmental patronage and financial support in their work, yet no *en masse* conversions of Muslims and Hindus took place. Arminius Vambéry in his book *Western Cultures In Eastern Lands* (1906), based on his personal travels and researches, writes:

> As regards the usefulness of the missionaries, opinions differ even in England. Some hold that their activity may be instrumental to convert Mohammedans and Hindus to the Christian faith, although the results so far obtained are not very encouraging. In the year 1830 there were nine Protestant missionary societies in Ceylon, India, and Burma, with the result of 27,000 converts, and in 1870 there were no less than thirty-five societies at work, and the number of converts was 318,363, a figure which is hardly worth mentioning as representing Christian supremacy over a gigantic region of nearly 292,000,000 heathens . . . According to Sir John Strachey, the Christian natives of India are only Christians in name, and are not respected either by the Europeans or by their own compatriots. European culture has exercised a considerable influence over the Hindu without making him a Christian. With the Mohammedans the task is still more difficult. It is chiefly the people of the lowest castes -- the so-called pariahs -- who come to be baptised.[23]

The British rulers classified the age-old pariahs or 'untouchables' in the Hindu caste system as 'Scheduled Castes'. In the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi called them 'Harijans' ('the Children of God') with a view to changing their social status in the eyes of Indians, especially those of the Hindu faith. Unfortunately, traditional

attitudes sanctified by ancient customs and religions do not change so easily. The social status of the 'untouchables', who now like to be called 'Dalits', has not changed in practice, despite the political and social equality guaranteed by the Indian Constitution to all its citizens irrespective of race, caste and religion.

The Catholics were fiercely hostile to Islam; besides, they came to look upon many others as the enemies of the Church as well. Rodinson observes: 'French Catholics claimed that a conspiracy was uniting against progress and truth (as represented by the Church). Furthermore, the conspirators in this case were not only Muslims, but Protestants, Englishmen, Freemasons, and Jews, [were] all obedient to Satan. The Muslim religious orders were considered particularly dangerous and were believed to be inspired by a virulent hatred of civilisation.'[24]

Outside the clerical thought and the missionary evangelising, we also see the strengthening of enlightened attitudes towards Islam. It was a period of intense scientific invention and technological change. The achievements of science and technology changed peoples' lives. Dr Charles Singer rightly writes: 'It had provided an intellectual stimulus that was far more effective than those of some other and more fatigued disciplines. It had rendered many current philosophical and theological positions completely untenable. It had--despite modern misunderstandings--introduced a humaner spirit into human relations. It provided a new basis for education, and had made certain of the older bases more than a little ridiculous.'[25]

This new spirit was also evident in the serious studies of Islam during this period, which we discuss in the following section.

Islam in serious studies

In the nineteenth century, the emphasis had shifted to professionalism and specialisation in all branches of knowledge. Within the humanities, historians and philosophers of history studied evolutionary processes that have been operative in the shaping of various cultures and civilisations. A detailed analysis of the civilisational complex led them to distinguish between the universal and the particular aspects of every great civilisation and acknowledged the contribution made by every civilisation

to human progress. An essential point was to explain the historical process of transmission from one stage to another as happened in the case of the Greek, Indian, Roman, Muslim, and European civilisations. Social philosophers and historians affected by the biological sciences and the new science of physical anthropology started to classify human races, cultures and religions into family-groups. Such classificatory work was carried on with the use of the principles of the scientific method, and consequently received widespread recognition and appreciation.

The new spirit of investigation within religions is apparent in the work of various European thinkers of the age. For instance, the German philosopher and Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768--1834) in his book *Discourses on Religion* (*Redan über die Religion*, 1799) provided the intellectual framework for religious consciousness. He suggested that the basis of all religion lies in the human feeling of dependence (*Abhängigkeitsgefühl*), which is the 'religious side' of consciousness. For the essence of religion is 'neither thought nor action but intuition and feeling'; 'religion is feeling and taste for the infinite.'[26] And the universe, for Schleiermacher, is the infinite divine reality. Hence religion is for him essentially or fundamentally the feeling of dependence on the infinite. In other words, it is man having a relationship with God. This feeling is universal and exists in all human beings. It exists earlier in time to knowing and doing, and the attempts to articulate this underlying feeling have given rise to various religious communities in the world. An historical religion, such as Christianity, is founded by a religious genius, and its adherents, deeply affected by the spirit of the founding genius, perpetuate its life. The religious communities thus founded develop their distinctive articulation of religious feeling in their dogmas and practice.

While Schleiermacher explains his quasi-mystical consciousness of the One as underlying and expressing itself in the Many, his attitude towards a universal natural religion is somewhat more complex. He rejects the idea that a universal religion should be a substitute for historical religions, because the former is merely a fiction and the latter a reality. But he also sees in historical religions a progressive movement towards a universal ideal which can never be fully grasped. In his *Der Christliche Glaube*, he also made a distinction between historical religions which accept the idea of human dependence upon a single Supreme Being and those which do not. Judaism,

Christianity and Islam are among the three major monotheistic religions. So far Judaism is concerned, it is in the process of extinction, but Christianity and Islam as proselytising faiths are 'still contending for the mastery of the human race'. As absolute dependence and community with God is gloriously manifested by Christ's redemptive act, Christianity stands superior. However, it does not mean that any single religion, to the exclusion of all others, has the possession of the sole truth. The truth and the corruption of truth are always present in it: 'This excludes the idea that Christian religion should adopt, in regard to other forms of piety, the attitude of the true towards the false . . . error does not exist in and for itself, but always together with some truth, and we have never fully understood it until we have discovered its connection with truth.'[27]

These liberal theological ideas were an expression of the new spirit of the age. They tried to accommodate the older forms of religious perspectives to the growing intellectual curiosity of the nineteenth century. The universal historians tried to explain the particular essence of great civilisations. In this, the role of Islam also came under review.

Among the great philosophers whose philosophy was deeply ingrained in theological concerns and human history was G.W.F. Hegel (1770--1831). *Geist* or spirit is the central concept in his philosophy. For Hegel, the spirit is a real, concrete, objective force that remains one, but it is particularised as spirits of specific nations and impersonated in particular persons as the World Spirit. The march of history onwards can be viewed as the succession of communities, the earlier ones being imperfect expressions of what the latter ones will embody more adequately. It is the concrete spirit of a people that leads their deeds and shapes their tendencies. This is the essential task of the spirit that it must accomplish. Each phase is embodied in certain persons who bring forth the idea of that particular age.

However, once the task is accomplished, the spirit is no longer there; this 'accomplishment is at the same time its dissolution, and the rise of another spirit, another world-historical people, another epoch of Universal History.'[28] Thus seen, the march of history brings forth its various phases in its move forward. In these phases the World Spirit progresses towards self-consciousness, whose aim is freedom.

Accordingly, the world history is the progressive manifestation of one universal spirit; it is its biography.

Hegel views human history as consisting of various phases; every phase being a developmental phase itself, it manifests the universal spirit in a national or communal spirit. The process of progressive evolution of the consciousness of freedom can be traced from its early beginning in Asia from where it moves to the West. Hegel divides history in four main phases. In the first place is the Oriental civilisation that is the childhood of history. Second, the Greek civilisation that marks its period of adolescence. Third, the Roman civilisation when history develops to manhood. And the final, fourth phase of civilisation, the old age of world history, is the Germanic civilisation. Hegel presented these ideas in a series of lectures he delivered in 1822 at the University of Berlin that were posthumously published as *Philosophy of History*. He describes historical development in these words:

> The principle of *Development* involves also the existence of a latent germ of being--a capacity or potentiality striving to realise itself. The formal conception finds actual existence in Spirit; which has the History of the World for its theatre, its possession, and the sphere of its realization. It is not of such a nature as to be tossed to and fro amid the superficial play of accidents, but is rather the absolute arbiter of things; entirely unmoved by contingencies, which, indeed, it applies and manages for its own purposes.[29]

Hegel, however, makes it clear that his view of development takes into account serious reverses history has undergone at different times: 'There are many considerable periods in History in which this development seems to have been intermitted; in which we might rather say, the whole enormous gain of previous culture appears to have been entirely lost.'[30] There are numerous examples in history to show this.

Hegel gives a brief assessment of Islam's role, consisting of only five pages of his discussion of various phases of universal history. The specific contribution of Islam, in contrast to the Judaic concept of Jehovah, as being the God of one people, the Jews, is the oneness of God: '*Allah* has not the affirmative, limited aim of the

Judaic God. The worship of the One is the final aim of Mahometanism, and subjectivity has this worship for the sole occupation of its activity, combined with the design to subjugate secular existence to the One.'[31] Hegel aptly sums up in a few words Islamic approach to God and the Prophet: 'The object of Mahometan worship is purely intellectual; no image, no representation of Allah is tolerated. Mahomet is a prophet but still a man--not elevated above human weaknesses.'[32]

Hegel summarises the leading features of Islam, according to which in actual existence nothing can become fixed, but that everything is destined to expand itself in activity and life in the world, 'so that the worship of the One remains the only bond by which the whole is capable of uniting'.[33]

Hegel regards the triumphs of Arabs in the early history of Islam due to their great enthusiasm, a sort of fanaticism. Generally, fanaticism is harmful but that of Islam was 'at the same time, capable of the greatest elevation--an elevation free from all petty interests, and united with all the virtues that appertain to magnanimity and valour.'[34] But when the great enthusiasm that had inspired the Muslims to perform great deeds came to an end, nothing more was left. In Hegel's concluding remarks: 'At present, driven back into Asiatic and African quarters, and tolerated only in one corner of Europe through the jealousy of Christian Powers, Islam has long vanished from the stage of history at large, and has retreated into Oriental ease and repose.'[35] If Hegel has the sensual pleasures of the Muslim rulers and potentates in mind, then he was certainly right, but to write off Islam from the stage of history was to award it a premature epitaph. Hegel was a Christian philosopher and his view of Islam was affected by his cultural bias against Islam.

In the nineteenth century, the decline of Muslim power and the subjugation of Muslim nations by the Western powers undoubtedly was a clear demonstration of the military, scientific and technical superiority of the West. Apart from Christian missionaries, there were also some serious scholars who ascribed the decline and degradation of Muslim people to their religion, which was held to be anti-rational and anti-science as well as incapable of developing or reforming itself. For instance, the renowned French philologist and thinker Ernest Renan (1823--92) in a famous lecture on 'Islam and science', which was published in 1883, held that science and Islam, and

by implication, modern civilisation and Islam, were incompatible with each other. In his view Arabs from the early days of Islam had been hostile to the scientific and philosophic spirit, and that the contribution to science and philosophy that is attributed to Muslim Arabs was in fact made by non-Arabs, such as, the Persians and the Greeks. The spirit of hostility towards science and modernity, which Islam has instilled, was visible in Muslims societies everywhere. Renan says:

> Anyone who has been in the East or in Africa will have been struck by the hidebound spirit of the true believer, by his kind of iron circle, which surrounds his head, rendering him absolutely closed to science, incapable of anything or of any opening himself to a new idea.[36]

Here Islam seems to be his prime target, but Renan is also thinking in the same way of the Roman Catholic Church. His critique of Islam is not one of traditional polemic either. However, his views on Islam need to be seen in the context of his general theory of race, languages and cultures.[37] According to Renan, the cause of Europe's greatness was its dynamic Aryan spirit, which carried forward the Greek heritage of reason and creativity, and which inspired and created science, philosophy, art and literature. In opposition to this was the Semitic spirit that produced monotheism, religious intolerance, scholastic dogmatism, and blind faith, but it did not produce science, myths, great literature or political culture. It was due to 'the terrible simplicity of the Semitic spirit, closing the human brain to every subtle idea, to every fine sentiment, to all rational research, in order to confront it with an eternal tautology: God is God.'[38]

In these formulations, there was also an implicit criticism of other Semitic religions. Renan saw the future of humanity linked with the progressive Aryan spirit of the people of Europe. For this to come to fruition, he thought it necessary to eliminate the Semitic elements in civilisation, particularly the theocratic power of Islam.

Renan's theories provoked a strong reaction among some scholars. The Jewish scholar Ignaz Goldziher wrote his book *Mythology among the Hebrews*, arguing that the ancient Hebrews had created myths, some of which became part of the scriptures.

The renowned pan-Islamic leader and writer Jamal al-Din Afghani (1839--1897) who was residing in Paris at the time wrote an essay in reply to Renan's lecture on Islam, which was highly praised by Renan in a rejoinder. In the Muslim world those who have not read Afghani's response in full have misconstrued the discussion between Afghani and Renan, assuming that he must have shown Islam was not inimical to the spirit of science as Renan had held. But Afghani's response was quite different. He saw the role of Islam and of other religions in a broad historical and sociological context, explaining that all religions in their early stages start with the same type of presuppositions. He agreed with most of the views of Renan on Islam, but he drew different conclusions. Nikki R. Keddie says: 'A remarkable point about Afghani's answer is that in many ways it seems *more* in line with twentieth-century ideas than Renan's original argument. It rejects Renan's racism and puts in its place an evolutionary and developmental view of peoples.'[39] For instance, in response to Renan's view that Islam was opposed to science, he argues that no people in their earliest stages of history accept science and rational method of investigation:

> And, since humanity, at its origin, did not know the causes of events that passed under its eyes and the secret of things, it was perforce led to follow the advice of its teachers and the orders they gave. This obedience was imposed in the name of the supreme Being to whom the educators attributed all events, without permitting men to discuss its utility or its disadvantages. This is no doubt for man one of the heaviest and most humiliating yokes, as I recognize; but one cannot deny that it is by this religious education, whether it be Muslim, Christian, or pagan, that all nations have emerged from barbarism and marched toward a more advanced civilization.[40]

Afghani does not deny, as Renan had claimed, that Muslim faith and science are incompatible. But the perspective he holds and the way forward he suggests shows how this enlightened pragmatist approached the problems of the Muslim world. He was confident that Muslim nations also had the potential to break the chains of ignorance and make progress as the Christian nations of Europe had done. He continues:

> If it is true that the Muslim religion is an obstacle to the development of sciences, can one affirm that this obstacle will not disappear someday? How does the Muslim religion differ on this point from other religions? All religions are intolerant, each one in its own way. The Christian religion, I mean the society that follows its inspirations and its teachings and is formed in its image, has emerged from the first period to which I have just alluded; thenceforth free and independent, it seems to advance rapidly on the road of progress and science, whereas Muslim society has not yet freed itself from the tutelage of religion. Realizing, however, that the Christian religion preceded the Muslim religion by many centuries, I cannot keep from hoping that Muhammadan society will succeed someday in breaking its bonds and marching resolutely in the path of civilization after the manner of Western society, for which the Christian faith, despite its rigours and intolerance, was not at all an invincible obstacle. No, I cannot admit that this hope be denied to Islam.[41]

While he accepts the contribution of non-Arabs to Islamic civilization as Renan had stressed, Afghani also points to the historical facts where science and philosophy under the Arab rule were developed, extended and perfected with great precision and exactitude. Besides, Christian Arabs were also Arabs, ethnically of the same Semitic stock; their contributions to Islamic civilisation should not be considered as those of non-Arabs or of 'non-Semitic' race.

Scholarly work on Islam and its culture had greatly improved in Europe by the mid-nineteenth century. In England, Thomas Carlyle (1795--1881), an exponent of the cult of the hero, delivered his public lectures in London *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* in 1840 which were published in 1841. He held the theory that the history of mankind consisted in the lives of its great men and that there was such a cult of hero worship. He says:

> The most significant feature in the history of an epoch is the manner it has of welcoming a Great Man. Ever, to the true instincts of men, there is something godlike in him. Whether they shall take him to be a god, to be a prophet, or what shall they take him to be? that is ever a grand question; by way of their answering that, we shall see, as through a little window, into the very hearts of

> these men's spiritual condition. For at bottom the Great Man, as he comes from the hands of Nature, is ever the same kind of thing.[42]

Carlyle chose Muhammad for the role of the hero as prophet. Carlyle was more interested in offering insights in the 'inner experience' of the Prophet. This also indicates a growing trend in the non-clerical writers to assess the role of the Prophet with some sympathy and understanding. This essay on 'The Hero as Prophet' has been described by Watt as 'The first affirmation in the whole of European literature, medieval or modern, of a belief in the sincerity of Muhammad.'[43] Carlyle argues against those who had held Muhammad false and insincere:

> Our current hypothesis about Mahomet, that he was a scheming Impostor, a Falsehood incarnate, that his religion is a mere mass of quackery and fatuity, begins really to be now untenable to any one. The lies, which well-meaning zeal has heaped around this man, are disgraceful to ourselves only. When Pococke inquired of Grotius, Where the proof was of that story of the pigeon, trained to pick peas from Mahomet's ear, and pass for an angel dictating to him? Grotius answered that there was no proof! It is really time to dismiss all that.[44]

In Carlyle's opinion, every great man, the hero, cannot but be sincere: 'No Mirabeau, Napoleon, Burns, Cromwell, no man adequate to do any thing, but is first of all in right earnest about it; what I call a sincere man. I should say *sincerity*, a deep, great, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic.'[45] He regards Muhammad to have been genuinely sincere, and not to have started on the 'career of ambition' as many polemicists had portrayed him:

> This deep-hearted Son of the Wilderness, with his beaming black eyes and open social deep soul, had other thoughts in him than ambition. A silent great soul; he was one of those who cannot *but* be in earnest; whom Nature herself has appointed to be sincere . . . The great Mystery of Existence . . . glared-in upon him, with its terrors, with its splendours; no hearsays could hide that unspeakable fact, 'Here am I! Such *sincerity*, as we named it, has in very truth something of divine.[46]

Carlyle maintains that we can call such a man an *original man*, a messenger from the Infinite to bring us news. The calling of such a great human being rests on his integrity, because in his own person he lives and is in daily contact with the inner facts of existence. He becomes a voice of the creative force of the Infinite. The message Muhammad 'delivered was a real one, an earnest confused voice from the unknown Deep. The man's words were not false, nor his workings here below; no Inanity and Simulacrum; a fiery mass of Life cast-up from the great bosom of Nature herself. To *kindle* the world; the world's Maker had ordered it so.'[47]

Carlyle had forcefully rejected some of the centuries-old calumnies against the Prophet and emphasised his heroic role. What concerns Carlyle the most is Muhammad, the hero, the charismatic leader. But Muhammad was also a prophet, a role about which Carlyle's account shows no great originality or new perspective. In fact, he presents the origin of Islam and the 'Mission of the Prophet' from the old Christian tradition in a somewhat modified guise. When he holds the Prophet sincere, what he really means is that whatever the Prophet taught or presented as revelation was in fact his own creation although he earnestly believed in its truth.[48] He used Sale's translation of the Qur'an. He raises objections to the literary merits of the Qur'an as 'a wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; most crude, incondite; . . . Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran.'[49] However, once one glosses over its stylistic shortcoming, then 'the essential type of it begins to disclose itself; and in this there is a merit quite other than the literary one. If a book comes from the heart, it will contrive to reach other hearts; all art and authorcraft are of small amount to that.'[50]

A number of views have been advanced throughout the course of fourteen hundred years on the merits, the fundamental message, and the source of the Qur'an to which we have referred in the present study, but whose detailed analysis falls outside the scope of the present book. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the revealed word of God through Muhammad the Messenger. In other words, it is believed to be solely the word of God communicated to the Prophet Muhammad. To trace the sources and development of religious ideas contained in the Qur'an, as H.A.R. Gibb says, is 'not only meaningless but blasphemous' in the sight of Muslims. In response to Carlyle's strictures, he comments that 'the question of the literary merit is one not

to be judged on *a priori* grounds but in relation to the genius of the Arabic language; and no man in fifteen [fourteen] hundred years has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness, and such range of emotional effect as Mohammed did.'[51] The problems of translating some particular idiom and expression of an ancient language are well known to us. In many cases a delicately balanced structured composition loses its original force and meanings when translated in a language that has a different cultural and social background. To translate the Qur'an from Arabic, as Karen Armstrong points out, presents special difficulties:

> The most beautiful lines of Shakespeare frequently sound banal in another language because little of the poetry can be conveyed in a foreign idiom; and Arabic is a language that is especially difficult to translate . . . If this is true of ordinary Arabic, of mundane utterance or conventional literature, it is doubly true of the Qur'an, which is written, in highly complex, dense and allusive language. Even Arabs who speak English fluently have said that when they read the Qur'an in an English translation, they feel that they are reading an entirely different book.[52]

By the nineteenth century systematic study of languages had developed into philology. Sir William Jones (1746--94) was a distinguished Orientalist who became a judge in Calcutta. In his *Anniversary Discourses* (1785--92), he showed the similarities of vocabulary and structure between Sanskrit and some European languages. This idea was taken up by other scholars, particularly German philologist Franz Bopp (1791--1867) who put forth his ideas in his *Vergleichende Grammatik* (1832). These studies led to the conclusion that Indo-European languages or 'Aryan' languages were related to each other. Moreover, there were principles on the basis of which one language or its one form developed into another. Apart from Indo-European languages, the same pattern of linguistic development was traced in Hebrew, Syriac and Arabic as forming the family of the Semitic languages. In this light, the mythical concept of the divine origin of language was laid to rest. Thus 'the idea of a first Edenic language gives way to the heuristic notion of a protolanguage (Indo-European, Semitic) whose existence is never a subject of debate, since it is acknowledged that such a language cannot be recaptured but can only be reconstituted in the philological process.'[53]

The language plays a key role in developing and communicating the spirit of a people. As humanity at large consisted of various nations or peoples, each nation sees itself and the rest of the world through the medium of its own language. This expression of a collective view becomes an important contribution to culture and civilisation. German literary philosopher and historian Johann Herder (1744--1803) had propounded the idea that each people (*Volk*) held within it a unique genius, the spirit of its being, which contributed to the movement of humanity towards a higher stage in its history. The spirit of a people (*Volkgeist*) is shown in the particular features of its language. If languages could be seen to be interrelated empirically, then, in a similar way, there was interconnection between spirits of different nations on a deeper level. He accorded a primal place to the Muslim contribution to Eastern literature and culture; according to him, the Arabs had been 'Europe's teachers'.

In Europe, the cause of Islamic studies was greatly enhanced by the Arabic chairs at Leiden and the Collège de France, which produced some outstanding Arabist scholars. In advancing modern Islamic and Arabic studies in the West, the French scholar Silvestre de Sacy (1758--1838) occupies the most prominent place. His contribution was enormous and his work was followed up by subsequent generations of scholars. He was professor at the Collège de France in Paris from 1806. He was also a resident Orientalist at the French Foreign Ministry from 1805, becoming the director of the Ecole des Langues Orientales Vivantes in 1824. During his distinguished scholarly career and official positions, he facilitated the translation of Arabic works on history, the compiling of dictionaries and the preservation of valuable manuscripts, which incidentally had found place in European libraries as a result of colonial plunder of the Muslim countries. Edward Said assesses his impact: 'And the living legacy of Sacy's disciples was astounding. Every major Arabist in Europe during the nineteenth century traced his intellectual authority back to him. Universities and academies in France, Spain, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and especially Germany were dotted with students who formed themselves at his feet and through the anthological tableaux provided by his work.'[54]

The influence of Leiden and Paris, the two main centres of Islamic studies, proved to be particularly strong in German-speaking countries. Among the German

scholars, the names of H. Fleischer (1801--88) professor at the University of Leipzig and T. Nöldeke (1836--1930) at the University of Strasbourg are prominent. They exerted great influence in shaping the minds of their students in Islamic studies.

The nineteenth century was an age of intellectual curiosity and inquiry, an age in which the European mind and imagination reached out to discover and appropriate knowledge of all existing things. Rigorous scientific methods were used to investigate and categorise the fast growing subject matter of the physical and social sciences. The major accomplishments made in terms of understanding the economic and social structures of societies, world cultures and new ideas were the intellectual fruit of some exceptionally great thinkers and scholars of the age.

The growth of knowledge in human and social sciences, like psychology, sociology, and political economy had opened up new vistas of understanding and provided new perspectives and insights in social and historical studies, but their influence on the Orientalists was negligible. The Oriental specialists showed little interest in these disciplines. However, ethnography of the Muslim societies was initiated, and as a result, Edmund Doutté and Edward Westermarck produced some outstanding works that were published in the early part of the twentieth century.

The Orientalists kept their focus on the limited area of the classical Muslim world or whatever had survived of it from the past. The present-day development of Muslim world ‘was not considered an important subject of scholarly inquiry and was disdainfully relegated to people such as economists, journalists, diplomats, military men, and amateurs’.[55] The sociologists of the period relied mostly on European and American societies for the data that they used for empirical studies.

The renowned German sociologist Max Weber (1864--1920) made his important studies of ancient Hinduism, Buddhism, ancient Judaism, Confucianism and Christianity. His primary objective was to trace the relationship between religion and socio-economic developments. His understanding of Islam as compared to that of other world religions was markedly inferior. He had planned to write a full-scale study of the sociology of Islam, but he was not able to accomplish this task prior to his death.

In the nineteenth century, history in the Oriental areas, as elsewhere, was essentially descriptive. However, a few scholars went further and tried to interpret Islam in the context of a wider cultural complex, by using rigorous methods in the analysis of source materials. Among the Oriental scholars, this perspective was clearly formulated perhaps for the first time by Alfred von Kremer (1828--89) who saw the history of Islam as an integrated whole. The ideas of German philosophers, especially of Herder and Hegel, and the famous Arab historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun (1332--1406), were the major influences to shape von Kremer's ideas. For him, culture or civilisation was a total expression of the spirit of a people. The role of leading ideas was crucial in understanding the religious and social system of a society. Among other works, he wrote and published a two-volume book on Ibn Khaldun and the cultural history of the East under the caliphs.

The role of social factors in developing historical persons was also gaining ground. Herbert Grimme (1864--1942) in his book *Mohammed* explained that social factors had a vital role in the life of the Prophet. But it was the German theologian and historian Julius Wellhausen (1844--1918) who undertook a critical analysis of the inner dynamics of social and political conflict in the early history of Islam. In his *History of Israel* (1878), he showed how Judaism emerged from the early Mosaic religion, followed subsequently by religious law and ritual. Similar was the case of Christianity, where the historical Jesus came first, and afterwards evolved the doctrines and rituals of Christianity. In his study of Islam, he laid special emphasis on the role of the Prophet.

Among the leading scholars of the nineteenth century, Ignaz Goldziher (1850--1921) occupies an important place. He was a Hungarian Jew who was deeply committed to Judaism. He studied at Leiden and Leipzig where he was deeply influenced by Fleischer. During this period, he became fully engaged with Islamic studies. Later on, he had the opportunity to travel to the Near East, and Beirut, Damascus and Cairo where he came in contact with many scholars and divines. In Cairo, he attended lessons at al-Azhar University, the great centre of Islamic learning.

Goldziher was one of those scholars who undertook to study Islam in depth by using the modern methods of critical scholarship. In his work, he was only interested in examining the influence of religious ideas on the development of Islamic thought, paying little attention to the political factors in its formation. He applied these methods in studying the Traditions of the Prophet and wrote on Islamic theology and jurisprudence.

For him the central feature of Islam, pure monotheism, was something towards which all the religions should strive, because it was 'the only religion in which superstition and heathen elements were forbidden not by rationalism but by orthodox teaching.'[56] He attempted to understand Islam within the general framework of nineteenth-century German speculative thought, especially Schleiermacher's theory of religion where the human feeling of dependence, as we have mentioned before, is regarded as the basis of all religions. In Islam it takes the form of submission to the will of the Infinite. The Prophet, who by the force of his passionate conviction gave it a particular direction and purpose, provided this insight, which became the foundation of the new religion of Islam. From this, Islam developed as a universal religious system, absorbing elements from Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and late classical antiquity. In his books, Goldziher rejected the widely held view that the spirit of Islam had exhausted itself in the past and that it was no longer capable of further development. To Goldziher, Islam was a living reality, a living force playing its role in the present and pointing the way towards the future. Albert Hourani comments:

> In Goldziher's work there is a sense of Islam as a living reality, changing over time but with its changes controlled, at least up to a point, by a vision of what 'a life lived in the spirit of Islam' should be: creating and maintaining a balance between the law, the articulation of God's word into precepts for action, and mysticism, the expression of the desire for holiness; drawing into itself ideas from the older civilisations engulfed in it; sustained by the learned elites of the great Islamic cities; and still living and growing. This is far from the view held a century earlier, of Islam as created by man, sustained by the enthusiasm of a nomadic people, and ceasing to be of importance in world history once the first impulse had died.[57]

The Orientalist scholars, however, were deeply dependent on philological work. Despite the great wealth of detail and accurate information involved in their work, they had a particular perspective of viewing the events of the past in a manner which gave prominence to the power of religion, language and race. One of the notable exceptions in this regard was Leone Caetani (1869--1935) who in his historical studies showed the power relationship between Europe and the East. In his *Studia di storia orientale* (1914), he presented the Prophet Muhammad as a statesman, and instead of focusing on religious ideas he emphasised the vital role of political and economic factors in the formative stage of Islam and its body-politic. He was a keen observer of the policies pursued by European powers who had subjugated the people of the East and built their colonial empires. He was one of those few historians, who instead of defending the interests of their imperial governments as the majority of academics did at that time, condemned colonialism. When Italy annexed Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, in an essay entitled *La fonction de l'islam dans l'évolution de la civilisation* (1912), he attacked all attempts to Europeanise the people of the East. Under the changed political situation when Muslim nations had gradually been brought under European colonial rule, he championed their right to independence and their right to live according to their cultural traditions.[58]

Another scholar who did much to expose the Western stereotypes of Muslim society was C. Snouk Hurgronje (1857--1936). He had devoted himself completely to the study of Islam in its widest aspects. In 1880 he published his first important work *Het Mekkaansch Feest.* After working as a lecturer on Islamic Law in Leiden, he spent eight months in 1884--85 in Mecca as a seeker after the understanding of Islam. The result of his observations was his book *Mekka* (1888--89). He was sent as an advisor to the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies and spent the years from 1889 to 1906 there. Upon his return, he was appointed Professor of Arabic at the University of Leiden.

In his books on Islam, he follows a critical approach. For instance, he contrasts the Islamic concept of slavery with that of the European settlers in America in a series of lectures entitled *Mohammedanism,* which he delivered in 1914 in the United States of America:

> [Slavery] should not be called a medieval institution; the most civilised nations not having given it up before the middle of the nineteenth century. The law of Islam regulated the position of slaves with much equity, and there is a great body of testimony from people who have spent a part of their lives among Mohammedan nations which does justice to the benevolent treatment which bondmen generally receive from their masters there. Besides that, we are bound to state that in many Western countries or countries under Western domination whole groups of the population live under circumstances with which those of Mohammedan slavery may be compared to advantage.[59]

Of course, Hurgronje had firsthand knowledge of Muslim nations that were under European colonial rule; his opinions were based on his observations. To him, it is quite obvious that 'the Christian world takes towards Islam an attitude of misunderstanding and falsehood.'[60] He explained the gender relations in the Muslim family, the common practice of monogamy, and the role of Islamic law. The views he advanced went against the Western stereotyped projections. He saw difficult tasks ahead of those who tried to break away from the misperceptions whose currency was rooted in the medieval era. He writes:

> Everything maintained or invented to the disadvantage of Islam was greedily absorbed by Europe; the picture which our forefathers in the Middle Ages formed of Mohammed's religion appears to us a malignant caricature. The rare theologians who, before attacking the false faith, tried to form a clear picture of it, were not listened to, and their merits have only become appreciated in our own time. A vigorous combating of the prevalent fictions concerning Islam would have exposed a scholar to a similar treatment to that which, fifteen years ago, fell to the lot of any Englishman who maintained the cause of the Boers.[61]

An early example of the fear of reprisals and retribution can be illustrated from the case of Johann H. Hottinger whose *Historia Orientalis* was published in 1651. In his work, whenever he says something favourable about Muslims or the Prophet Muhammad, he thinks it necessary to protect himself against misconstruction by the device of adding some abuse. When he mentions Muhammad, he says: 'ad cujus

profecto mentionem inhorrescere nobis debet animus' ('at the mention of whom the mind shudders').

Hurgronje emphasised that Islam was a living and changing reality, which one could see in the lives of Muslims in different countries. For them, Islam was always adaptable to the new needs of times and places. This process has a long history and it started at an early stage in Islam's history, when 'the sober monotheism' of Muhammad was adapted to the 'religious ideals of Western Asia and Egypt, both permeated with Hellenistic thought.'[62] According to Hurgronje, the question of the unity of Islamic thought is relevant to modern times. Islamic thought has been subject to the process of change, resulting from the interaction with the ideas of the classical Greece, Persia, and India. Hurgronje says:

> The ideas of Mohammedan philosophers, borrowed for a great part from Neoplatonism, the pantheism and the emanation theory of Mohammedan mystics are certainly still further distant from the simplicity of the Qoranic [Qur'anic] religion than the orthodox dogmatics; but all those conceptions alike show indubitable marks of having grown up on Mohammedan soil. In the works of even of those mystics who efface the limits between things human and divine, who put Judaism, Christianity, and Paganism on the same line with the revelation of Mohammed, and who are therefore duly anathematised by the whole orthodox world, almost every page testifies to the relation of the ideas enounced with Mohammedan civilisation.[63]

Hurgronje stands for a meaningful dialogue between Islam and the modern world and one major condition for it is that we make the Muslim world an object of continual serious investigation in our intellectual centres. Modern education and the force of new social processes will inevitably lead to changes towards a secular and rational civilisation: 'We must leave it to the Mohammedans themselves to reconcile the new ideas which they want with the old ones with which they cannot dispense; but we can help them adapting their educational system to modern requirements.'[64] He points out that efforts of missionaries to convert significant numbers of Muslims to any Christian denomination have not been encouraging. However, Christian missionaries were not to be dissuaded from their 'seemingly hopeless labour' among the Muslims who

‘disinclined as they are to reject their own traditions of thirteen centuries and to adopt a new religious faith.’[65]

Unlike many traditional Orientalists, from his roles both as a scholar and as an adviser to the government in the Dutch East Indies, Hurgronje viewed Islam and colonised Muslim people with sympathy and deep insights. He was less concerned with the exotic mystique of otherness in Islam, that hallmark of Orientalism. He underlined that if non-Muslims wanted to understand the legal and social structures of Muslim societies, they must study them within the context of their history. In other words, social and political backwardness of Muslim countries was due to a number of causes, but history had not stood stationary in the world of Islam.

The Orientalist approach has largely been under censure at the hands of certain contemporary academics. Edward Said has made the most important contribution to the Western conceptions of the Orient in his book *Orientalism* (1978) [66] One recent objection to some Orientalist scholars has been that they have sought to explain all the divergent factors that shaped Muslims societies and their culture in an essentialist manner, considering Islam unchanging, undifferentiated and all-pervasive. Aziz al-Azmeh, Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Exeter, concisely sums up the situation:

> Thus orientalist scholarship piles fact upon fact and date upon date in an order ostensibly blind to all but real succession. But this research is always geared towards the discovery of origin. It is not at all surprising that the overwhelming volume of orientalist research into Islamic matters has investigated beginnings, historical beginnings and Koranic textual beginnings. It has claimed to find in these beginnings the fount, origin and explanation of the whole sad story of Islamic history, institutions, societies and thought. From the Koran this scholarship has derived the principles of economic life and the supposed failure of capitalism. From the same text it seeks to explain the actual source of history . . . The result is that elusive origins are sought, and the actual course, outcome, institutions and processes of Islamic history and culture are ignored, except under the metaphysical auspices of the study of ‘decline’.[67]

This particular attitude, to interpret the present by going fourteen centuries back to find support or justification, can hardly be a helpful way to understand and seek solutions to contemporary socio-political problems. As Aziz al-Azmeh has indicated, the Orientalist outlook on Islam, which was distinct in the nineteenth century, still pervades the work of the Orientalists, even though there are academics who are trying to break away from this narrow cultural cast.

Chapter 15. Political changes in the twentieth century and Islam

By 1914 the rivalries and the interests of the imperial powers had reached the stage where a major military conflict between them was merely a question of time. The Balkans provided the immediate cause of the outbreak of the war. V.I. Lenin clearly depicts the nature of the First World War in a long lecture that he delivered in May 1917, a few months before the Bolshevik Revolution. In the following passage, he underlines the real objectives of the two hostile groups of powers:

> What we have at present is primarily two leagues, two groups of capitalist powers. We have before us all the world's greatest capitalist powers--Britain, France, America, and Germany--who for decades have doggedly pursued a policy of incessant economic rivalry aimed at achieving world supremacy, subjugating the small nations, and making threefold and tenfold profits on banking capital, which has caught the whole world in the net of its influence. That is what Britain's and Germany's policies really amount to . . . The real policies of the two groups of capitalist giants--Britain and Germany, who, with their respective allies, have taken the field against each other--policies which they were pursuing for decades before the war, should be studied and grasped in their entirety.[1]

Lenin made a profound analysis of the colonial policies of the imperialist powers and the nature of the ongoing war. In his numerous pamphlets, articles and speeches he did much to expose the imperialists' objectives in pursuing this war. One vital aspect of the anti-imperialist movement was to rally support for the anti-colonial struggle of the Afro-Asian people. By the time the war ended in 1918, big changes had taken place in Europe. The Ottoman Empire had lost its Arab provinces; now it had only Anatolia and a small part of Europe under its control. For the time being, the Austrian, German and Russian empires ceased to be the main players in the international arena. Only two powers, Britain and France emerged victorious, but much weakened from the war. For the Western powers, the emergence of Soviet Russia was seen as a great peril to their global interests; this political perspective was to shape and dominate the East-West relations for the next seven decades till the Soviet Union disintegrated.

During the First World War the demise of Ottoman Turkey was anticipated. The Arab uprising against the Turks with the help of Britain soon brought the end of Turkish rule in the Middle East. The British policy in 1915 was to help establish an independent Arab state in the Fertile Crescent in which Britain was to have special privileges. But France and imperial Russia also claimed their right to share in the spoils; consequently the British, French and Russians drew up a secret treaty known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement in 1916. It provided for direct French rule in much of northern and western Syria and a protectorate in the Syrian hinterland including Damascus, Aleppo and Mosul. Britain was to have direct control in Palestine, Jordan, lower Iraq, and areas around the Persian Gulf. Tsarist Russia was to have a free hand in Turkish Armenia and northern Kurdistan. A small area around Jaffa and Jerusalem would be established under international control because Russia wanted to share in the administration of the Christian holy places. Thus the only place left for the Arabs to establish their independent home, free from direct European control or interference, was the Arabian desert. The agreement was in clear breach of the promises the British government had made to leaders of the Arab revolt against Ottoman rule. The details of this secret deal came to light when the Bolsheviks seized control of Russia in 1917. They found a text of this agreement in Petrograd and published it in November 1917.

While the double-dealing with the Arabs was going on, another imperial design was also set in motion that was to have far-reaching consequences for the Arab world. In 1917, the British cabinet decided to support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The British foreign secretary Lord Balfour wrote a formal letter on 2 November 1917 to a leading Zionist Jew, Lord Rothschild that announced:

> His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.[2]

This letter, better known as ‘the Balfour Declaration’ was an act of imperial indifference to the fate of the Palestinian people, their country, and their future. The imperial masters pledged not to harm the civil and religious rights of Palestine’s ‘existing non-Jewish communities’, who formed 93 percent of its population. There were a number of questions about the Palestinian Arabs, Muslims and Christians, which needed an answer before one could have thought of creating a Jewish state to meet the Zionist demands, but all these things were simply ignored. As Peter Mansfield says, it ‘planted the seeds of a conflict which has lasted almost to the end of the century and is unlikely to be resolved before another century has passed. Although few were aware of this at the time, it was the result of a compromise between British and Zionist aims. Its consequences have been greater than those of the Anglo-French agreement, which was eliminated by the demise of British and French imperial power within a few decades.’[3]

After the end of the First World War, Britain and France intensified their scramble for their interests in the Middle East at the expense of the nationalist movements that were rising there. Britain tried to make permanent its direct protectorate over Egypt. The Treaty of Versailles (1919) provided that the Arab countries formerly under Ottoman rule could be provisionally recognised as independent, subject to receiving the assistance of a state charged with a ‘mandate’ over them. The mandate system was in fact nothing more than a political fiction. There was virtually no difference in practice between mandates and colonies. The British foreign secretary Lord Curzon made this clear when he told the House of Lords on 25 June 1920:

> It is quite a mistake to suppose . . . that under the Covenant of the League or any other instrument, the gift of the mandate rests with the League of Nations. It does not do so. It rests with the powers who have conquered the territories, which it then falls to them to distribute, and it was in these circumstances that the mandate for Palestine and Mesopotamia was conferred upon and accepted by us, and that the mandate for Syria was conferred upon and accepted by France.[4]

The First World War had many consequences both for the imperial powers and the colonised Muslim people. The great losses suffered by even the victorious countries had left their people exhausted and disillusioned with the outcome of the war or the ideals they thought they had fought for. At least, the unquestioned moral high ground of the West and the belief in the civilising mission of Western nations seemed less credible. The colonial myth of 'non-white savages' needed some re-thinking because the war, a result of the clash of imperialist interests, had been the making of the civilised and noble white races, the 'nobles' who had proved to be savages. Imperial expansion had enjoyed great support in Britain from the end of the nineteenth century, but now the war-weary Britons had little taste for more imperial ventures. In fact, an important section of British public opinion saw self-government of all the colonised people to be the ideal solution at some time in the distant future. The emphasis was always on the colonised 'people' and Europeans often forgot that colonised people were also nations, or at least had national aspirations.

The Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 reinforced anti-colonialism and the impact of it was felt both in the East and the West. The right of colonised nations to self-determination was a cardinal aspect of the socialist policy of the new state. This approach was clearly formulated by Lenin, who said in 1916 that there were

> the semi-colonial countries, such as China, Persia and Turkey, and all the colonies, which have a combined population amounting to a billion. In these countries the bourgeois-democratic movements either have hardly begun, or have still a long way to go. Socialists must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation--and this demand in its political expression signifies nothing else than the recognition of the right to self-determination; they must also render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for the national liberation in these countries and assist their uprising--*against* the imperialist powers that oppress them.[5]

Historically, Russia had a close interest in the Muslim world. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire had some fifteen million Muslims under its rule. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the Muslim territories of the former Russian

Empire were organised into six Soviet republics as parts of the Soviet Union. Under the Soviet system, the tsarist policy of hostility towards Islam was maintained even though for a different reason; Islam was regarded as a reactionary force. At the same time, the role of Islam as a cultural force and its deep influence on the people was accepted. In the period of national liberation struggles of the colonised Muslim people, Islam has also been a progressive force and the Soviet leadership accepted this role of Islam. But Islam, as a religious belief-system (as distinct from Islamic culture), like other religions, was regarded as inherently reactionary, a vehicle of superstition and obscurantism. There were also some Muslims who had argued that Islam did not oppose socialism; it rather had many similarities with socialism in the economic and social spheres. For instance, the Tatar communist Sultan Galiev (*c*. 1880--1940) right in the beginning of the Soviet regime argued that Muslims, due to the nature of their religion that emphasises equality of all human beings free from the fetters of race, colour or status, were more amenable to socialist ideas and therefore there was no need to destroy Islam to achieve the communist goal. His ideas represented the broad truth of Islamic egalitarianism. There were some communists outside the Soviet Union especially in Indonesia and the Arab countries who eventually began to see the relevance of these ideas in their political and societal context.

The effect of the war on Muslim countries was enormous. The political changes in the Muslim countries, in which the European powers played a major part, also meant that the picture of Islam in West, which the imperial administrators, officials and Christian missionaries had done much to etch in the minds of the Western nations, now needed some modifications. Islamic studies in the European universities reflected this change; contemporary affairs and issues of the Muslim world attracted academic attention as never before. Among those who did not share the Orientalist outlook were historians like H. G. Wells, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee. They had their own particular views on the philosophy of history and world civilisations, and they attempted to consider the role of Islam according to their new perspectives.

The process of decolonisation of Muslim countries gained momentum after the Second World War. The French and British mandates in the Middle East came to an end. Under Zionist terrorism in Palestine, the British hurriedly packed up their baggage and left Palestine in utter chaos. British rule over Palestine was formally

relinquished in 1948 when the United Nations agreed to a plan to divide Palestine into three entities: a Jewish state, an Arab state and the separate entity of the city of Jerusalem.

The period between 1950 and 1989 was marked by the Cold War in which the West under the leadership of the United States of America confronted the Soviet Union. During this period, a bipolar world order was the determining factor between two power-blocs in the conduct of international relations. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 signalled the end of this balance of power, leaving the United States of America the sole superpower in the international arena. This has far-reaching consequences for the Middle East region. A detailed survey of relations between Muslim countries of the region and the West during the Cold War period is beyond the scope of this book; however, we can briefly mention a few points relating to the policies followed by the United States and its allies in the Middle East.

During the East-West rivalries of the Cold War, the Western powers paid great attention to Muslim countries in their project of containing the Soviet influence and furthering their own strategic, political and economic interests. As the Soviet Union was considered to be the Enemy Number One, Islam, considered to be a conservative ideology, was carefully cultivated as a natural ally in resisting communist, national revolutionary, or even militant non-communist nationalist movements in Muslims countries. Islamist parties throughout the Muslim world (e.g. Indonesia, Pakistan, Egypt, Sudan, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan) were encouraged by various means and incentives to resist the godless communist enemies and their ideas. Conservative and oppressive Muslim regimes (e.g. the Shah of Iran, the Pakistani military and civilian rulers, General Suharto in Indonesia, the kings of Morocco, Jordan and Saudi Arabia) which depended upon Western support played a major part in bolstering and furthering the policies of the United States. Before the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, which was aimed primarily against the puppet regime of the Shah, the West saw no danger from what has been now termed ‘Islamic fundamentalism’ in Muslim countries. When, after the overthrow of the Shah by his fellow Iranians, the American military made an attempt to free their hostages in Tehran in 1980, the attempt ended in an embarrassing fiasco. Despite this the West continued to maintain friendly

regimes in the Arab world. Dr Jochen Hippler, Director of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam, comments:

> But then we still had 'good' Muslims, those with whom we did good business or with whom we cooperated closely in politics. The Saudi Royal family are a classic example of this: their 'fundamentalist' rule is characterised by a high degree of religious intolerance, but has nonetheless been an important mainstay of Western politics in the Middle East since the mid-1940s.[6]

The prime importance now attached to 'Islamic fundamentalism' and 'political Islam' in the Middle East had no serious policy implications earlier for the Western strategists. What really mattered in shaping their policies were five vital Western interests: unhindered access to and control over oil, the stability of anti-democratic and pro-Western regimes which were and are dependent upon Western support to survive, total support for Israel and its regional political agenda, and guarding against any internal political or regional instabilities that could bring anti-Western Islamists to power. These policies have been pursued relentlessly. When the Iranian nationalist leader Dr Muhammad Musaddiq challenged British control of the Iranian oil and started the nationalist revolution that ousted the young Shah, the British and American intelligence services intervened. They restored the Shah to power in 1953. From this time onwards, the Shah was dependent on the United States to survive. The United States controlled the foreign policy and internal developments of Iran by means of a vast intelligence network that came to an end with the overthrow of the Shah in 1979.

Two American foreign policy analysts, Graham E. Fuller and Ian O. Lesser have outlined the prominent cases of Western intervention in the Middle East. Below is a brief selection from their list:

- In 1956 Britain, France and Israel invaded Egypt when President Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal. This assertion of national rights over Egypt's water and soil was considered a challenge to Western interests and supremacy. Nasser, the hero of the Egyptian revolution and an ardent Arab nationalist was demonised in the West.

- In 1958, the United States intervened in Lebanon to protect the pro-Western rulers against the pan-Arab nationalist movement that demanded an end to imperial intervention and control.
- In 1967 in the Six-Day War between Israel and the Arab countries, the United States provided intelligence support and military hardware to Israel immediately to carry out its expansionist designs, which were to serve both Israel and the United States in the region.
- In 1973, the United States provided all possible military and intelligence support to Israel during the Yom Kippur War when Egypt had tried to liberate the Sinai that Israel had occupied in 1967.
- In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon to wipe out the Palestine Liberation Organisation. The United States sent marines into Lebanon to help the Israeli invading army and to stop Syrians from coming to the aid of the Lebanese and the Palestinians.
- In 1985 the United States carried out heavy airstrikes against Libyan targets in Tripoli in response to a Libyan terrorist bombing in Germany.
- In 1990--91 the United States gathered massive armies in Saudi Arabia to unleash the war against Iraq to liberate Kuwait, without allowing Iraq to vacate Kuwait which it had agreed to do. Iraq was militarily crushed. By manipulating and controlling the United Nations, the United States and its close ally, Great Britain, imposed sanctions on Iraq that were still in force (in 2003).[8] Over the no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq imposed by America and Britain (not authorised by the United Nations) since 1991, American and British air forces carried out air strikes, regularly causing loss of civilian life and other damage.
- In 2003, the United States and Great Britain started a major war against Iraq, and have occupied the country. They ignored the United Nations and the international community's opposition to an uncalled for and illegitimate war against Iraq.

Besides military interventions, the United States has been the patron of conservative and repressive regimes for its geopolitical and economic interests. It has also fanned inter-Arab differences for its own objectives. Over the course of the last few decades this pattern has been the defining characteristic of the American policy in the Middle East region. Fuller and Lesser point out that

> the West, especially Washington, has actively supported selected Middle East regimes in the broader context of inter-Arab politics: Lebanon and Jordan against Nasser's Egypt; the Shah's Iran against Iraq; Kuwait against Iraq; Saudi Arabia against Nasser's Egypt and Saddam's Iraq; North Yemen against communist South Yemen; Egypt against Libya; Morocco against Algeria; and of course Israel against all regional states. This kind of support was often important in keeping friendly regimes in place. As a result, the United States is perceived to be an intrusive and active player in inter-Arab politics on both the overt and the covert level.[9]

The policies pursued by the United States with the help of its closest allies, Great Britain and Israel, in the Middle East region, and in other Muslim countries are of utmost importance in understanding the contemporary political realities. They also reveal the undercurrent of those old images of Muslims and special interests that influence the political objectives of the main actors on the world stage now. But apart from a brief discussion of present-day perceptions of Islam given below, I do not intend to discuss the contemporary political developments, a subject that falls outside the scope of this survey.

Western perceptions of an Islamic threat

In the post-Cold War period, the earlier political perspective on the East-West dichotomy was swiftly replaced by a new version of East-West confrontation. The Western media wasted no time to cultivate the image of Islam as the new threat when the Soviet Union disappeared from the international scene. The 'East' now came to signify those regions where roughly one billion people live whose historic religious affiliation has been with Islam. The 'West' now corresponds to the states where Christianity has historically predominated. Thus in a unipolar hegemonic world-order such as we have at present, and the consequent international relations thereof, the Western media and policy-makers have retooled their image of Islam, the old historic enemy, to met the West's present needs, real or artificial. No doubt, the projection of Islam as a threat plays easily upon old fears and prejudices of very many people; it also strengthens the old stereotypes about Muslims and their faith.

The question of Islamic challenge to the West is based on presuppositions that have no relevance to reality. After 1990, a number of publications bearing sensational titles like 'Sword of Islam', 'the Islamic Threat', 'The Roots of Muslim Rage', 'Islam's Battle Cry' appeared in the West, indicating what kind of image the intellectual spokesmen of the New World Order were aiming to instil. Some Western writers have peremptorily explained the actions of a few groups or Islamist parties as the authentic voice of Islam. The media highlight the aims and declarations of such religious movements, presenting it as the predominant expression of the collective behaviour of Muslim people. Islam is equated with fanaticism, intolerance and violence. For instance, the well-known French writer Raymond Aaron had earlier warned of an Islamic revolutionary wave generated by the fanaticism of the Prophet.

One leading exponent of 'the new phase' in world politics after the collapse of the Soviet Union is Professor Samuel Huntington, former counter-insurgency expert for President Johnson's administration in Vietnam, and later President of the Institute of the Strategic Studies at Harvard University. In 1993 his article 'The Clash of Civilisations?' was published in *Foreign Affairs* and attracted worldwide attention and various reactions. He advanced the view that future world politics would be dominated by the clash of different cultures. Among these he listed Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slav-Orthodox, Latin American and (with some reluctance) also African. He saw the main divide between the West and the rest. According to him, a 'Confucian-Islamic connection' has already emerged to challenge Western interests, values and power. He came to the conclusion that Muslim nations, since they belonged to a monolithic faith which might be viewed as having the political shape of the United States of Islam, had already made an alliance with the Chinese 'civilisation'. Huntington asserted that this 'holy alliance' was ready to strike at Western civilisation, especially its chief bastion, the United States of America. This startling assertion is the figment of a surrealist imagination that had no basis in historical or contemporary political realities at all. But Huntington's thesis was not meant to enlighten. It was intended to influence and colour the vision of the militarist policy-makers of the New World Order. Seen in this light, Huntington had outlined a grand road map for these policy-makers, laying down definite objectives. To safeguard against the coming threat, he advocated that the United States should prepare its military power. His crude and misleading analysis has been a convenient

tool for the United States policy-makers and militarists. It was designed to encourage the use of military power as a legitimate weapon for defending and safeguarding Western interests wherever they might be considered at risk. At the same time, there was nothing new in it, because the United States has followed this course for a long time. The real power wielded by the West in general and the United States of America in particular in the economic, political and military arena throughout the Middle East and beyond is a geopolitical reality, while the real facts completely give the lie to the so-called 'threat' of Islam. As far as the question of protecting its interests is concerned, the United States has unquestioned political, economic, and military domination over the oil-rich Middle East.

The anti-Muslim conservatives and fundamentalist Christians in the West keep on jousting, like Don Quixote at the windmill, at the common stereotypes where Muslims are held to be more prone to conflict and violence than other people. Various conflicts in Muslim countries are said to be the proof and self-evident truth that reinforces such images. There is a general tendency to oversimplify or ignore altogether the diverse trends and complex socio-economic and political factors which lead to instability and conflicts within these countries. The explanations offered and conclusions drawn are based on (occasionally implicit but more often explicit) presuppositions of the superiority of Western--the Judaeo-Christian--culture and its civilising and ennobling role, while Islam is looked down upon as the epicentre of violence and disharmony. However, the whole history of Western imperial expansion and colonial exploitation over the course of centuries tells a completely different story of their supposed enlightenment. In the same way, political conflicts, wars and internal violence within Western countries and societies also present us a different picture. This 'superior' culture when seen in the limited area of politics and international relations in the twentieth century has left the legacy of two global wars, the horrors of concentration camps, ethnic cleansing and racist massacres on a scale unprecedented in history. If we look at the depredations of neo-colonial wars undertaken by the West since the end of the Second World War in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia and the Middle East, to name only a few, then the record of Western cultural values of non-violence and respect for the lives, liberties and interests of other nations around the globe appears indubitably unsurpassed in world history. Yet it is

Muslims and their religion Islam who are said to be the flag-bearers of violence and the threat to other nations.

For the Western media to enlarge the image of an illusory Islamic threat has been to reiterate the old clichés where Islam has been identified as inherently irrational, aggressive and fanatical in contrast to Western culture which is credited to be progressive, rational and secular. As a result, whenever any individual or group in or from a Muslim country resorts to extremism in the political or religious sphere, many Western writers, clerics and politicians readily single out Islamic tradition as the cause of such behaviour. It is assumed that Western culture creates finer qualities in people, therefore, it is superior to other cultures. All wars of aggression, genocidal adventures and violence perpetrated by the powerful West countries upon weaker nations are presented as merely 'political' and 'military' aspects of foreign policies; they do not impinge upon the high moral ground on which this superior culture and its values rest. But Muslims, together with their religion and cultures are put into a different category: they are 'aggressive' and 'irrational' and 'backward'. For instance, French writer Jean-Claude Barreau explains the aggressive disposition of Muslims 'in the origin of their faith' which 'is warlike, conquest-hungry and full of contempt for the unbeliever'. He says, 'Muslim militants do not understand what is going on. They do not realise that they have been beaten by a modernity whose rationality is superior to the Muslim one.'[10] Here Barreau refers to the rational superiority of the West over the Orient when Napoleon took over Egypt in 1798; a superiority that the West has maintained and which will continue in the future: 'They [Muslims] can buy modern weapons and even deploy them, but the victories of the West are not dependent on the quality of the weapons alone, but rather on the "system" of its organisation.'[11] Thus the Western technological superiority of their advanced weapon systems and efficiency of its military organisation have been shown time and again in many places. In 1991 the manner in which the United States inflicted maximum damage to the infrastructure of a large country like Iraq, its ill-equipped army and its defenceless people was a living proof of that efficient system. In 2001, the decimation of Afghanistan, where even the mountains were pulverised by lethal high-powered bombs by the United States is a more recent example of that superiority**.** The invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States in 2003 with the help of Britain is the latest addition to the United States' trophy-cabinet.

But there are also some influential academics who have investigated from a different angle the question of perceived threats of Muslims to Western power and hegemony. John L. Esposito, Professor of Religion and International Relations at Georgetown University, in his book *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality*? has explored political developments in different Muslim countries. In his view the picture of Islam as a monolithic force inimical to West was utterly baseless and misleading. After discussing many examples of the contemporary scene where 'Islamic Fundamentalism' has been equated with Islam and construed as a threat to the West, he writes:

> According to many Western commentators, Islam and the West are on a collision course. Islam is a triple threat: political, demographic, and socioreligious . . . Much as observers in the past retreated to polemics and stereotypes of Arabs, Turks, or Muslims rather than addressing the specific causes of conflict and confrontation, today we are witnessing the perpetuation or creation of a new myth. The impending confrontation between Islam and the West is presented as part of a historical pattern of Muslim belligerency and aggression. Past images of a Christian West turning back the threat of Muslim armies are conjured up and linked to current realities.[12]

Professor Esposito has explained at length the ramifications of creating such a myth and also offered his deep insights into the political realities of Muslim countries. His conclusions are supported by the evidence we have of the unrestrained and growing role of the United States in the Middle East. I would now like to turn to some important changes that have taken place in the twentieth century towards Islam among the mainstream Catholics and Protestants.

A positive change of attitude in Catholic and Protestant thought

Louis Massignon

The tendency to view Islam with greater understanding among left-wing Catholics found its outstanding exponent in French scholar Louis Massignon (1883--1962), generally regarded as the most influential figure in Catholic thinking about Islam. Among the Catholics, the old Christian tradition of devotion to the poor and the needy has been particularly strong. Due to a number of historical factors, such as the threat of atheism, the slackening of the traditional Christian hold on European society proved helpful to their appreciation of the significance of other religions in a spirit of mutual understanding and solidarity, without sacrificing their claim to possess the sole truth as provided by the Christian faith. Massignon posed some important questions about Islam for Christian thinkers within the theological concerns of the Christian Church. He called for a great change in the understanding of Islam by Christians who should place themselves at the centre of Islam and not adopt the stance of outside viewers as had happened in the past.

His own ideas on Islam were formed under a very unique personal experience in 1908 in Iraq. According to his account, he was arrested by the Ottoman authorities on charges of espionage, imprisoned and threatened with death. There have been doubts about this version of events. However, in a condition of deep moral and spiritual crisis Massignon felt an unseen presence interceding on his behalf; he had some kind of experience of the Divine--the ‘visitation of the Stranger’. For the first time he was able to pray, and his prayers were in Arabic. This experience, most probably, gave him an abiding sense of the divine origin of Islam, which was to stay with him for the rest of his life, which stretched over half a century. The questions before him were: If Islam was of divine origin, how could it have diverged from the truth of revealed Christ? And if it had diverged, could it still provide an avenue to salvation?

Massignon’s answer to these questions can be found in his view of history which is totally different from those of the nineteenth-century philosophers of history. For him, the meaning of history was to be found in the working of the Grace of God through individual souls across the human communities. According to Massignon, Islam was a genuine expression of the monotheistic faith and its origin, just as Judaism and Christianity were in God’s revelation to Abraham. Even though Ishmael and his seeds were excluded from the Covenant given to Abraham, this exclusion was not absolute; the descendants of Ishmael could still claim their share as promised in

Genesis. The coming of Islam was to give consolation to the excluded and deprived. But that is not the whole story of Islam. The revelations to Muhammad have their own value. When seen against the corruptions of the teachings of Judaism and Christianity, Islam teaches the transcendence of God and reproaches the idolaters. As Muslims could give Christians example of faith, Christians in return had a duty to Muslims. Christian people and nations should not 'abuse hospitality' [the policies pursued by the colonial rulers] in the Muslim countries. Massignon in fact became an active opponent of the French colonial policies in the Maghreb and Madagascar during the anti-colonial struggles of the local populations. He was of the opinion that Christians who lived among Muslims could bring them to the fullness of truth by offering prayers of intercession and sufferings in substitution for them.

Massignon was attracted to mysticism. His most famous work is his study of al-Hallaj (857--922), a Muslim mystic and theologian, who preached that everybody was able to find God in his own heart, and according to some hostile accounts was reported to have proclaimed 'I am the Truth' ('*ana al-haqq*'). He was accused of holding heretical views, imprisoned for nine years and then finally executed. This book was Massignon's doctoral dissertation. He continued to work on this topic for the rest of his life and produced a work of great erudition and original thought in an enlarged version that was published after his death.

Contrary to the view that mysticism in Islam was brought in from outside, Massignon maintained that it was produced by an inner logic of the development that took place in Islam. The Sufis (mystics) provided a new vision of the union of man and God in Islam and in this way they were instrumental in enriching Muslim spirituality.

Various scholars have acknowledged the influence Massignon exerted on Islamic studies in France. In Albert Hourani's judicious appraisal, Massignon was 'perhaps the only Islamic scholar who was a central figure in the intellectual life of his time. His work was a sign of a change in the Christian approach to Islam, and even perhaps one of the causes of it.'[13] There were several religious scholars and priests of Arab or Muslim origins who were deeply influenced by Massignon's ideas. Among these, the names of Moubarac, Hayek and Abdel-Jalil are well known. The French

Catholic theologians Louis Gardet and G.C. Anawati, who wrote on Islamic theology and mysticism, were also influenced by Massignon's work. In their work they undertook a careful examination of different aspects of Islamic civilisation and Muslim thought.

The dialogical approach

An important feature of Christian-Muslim relations in the twentieth century was the evolution of a dialogical approach towards Muslims and their faith in the Catholic and Protestant churches. Any moves towards dialogues between the two communities in the previous centuries were of limited impact and duration; there had been no sustained effort to build on any dialogical approach initiated by individual theologians or scholars. Besides, the dialogue in the second-half of the last century gradually came to signify something more than inter-religious disputations and debates, where each tried to convince the other of the theological truth it possessed. But in the evolution of dialogical approach the emphasis was towards a constructive Christian-Muslim relationship, where the faithful were not expected, or required to give up or compromise their basic religious beliefs. The sceptics on both sides have viewed any such efforts fraught with danger that could lead to compromising their religious convictions. However, the history of the developing relationship over the last few decades between the Christians and Muslims has shown many positive results without posing any danger to the religious conviction of any side.

The Vatican Council

A major shift in policy towards Muslims came from the Roman Catholic Church. The documents issued by the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II (1962--65) were an important landmark in the Catholic approach towards Islam and other religious traditions. The remarks in the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions about Islam may appear in hindsight to be quite reserved, but, given the past history of Roman Catholic attitudes towards Islam, the texts were quite extraordinary. The *Nostra Aetate* document declared that 'the Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in other religions.'[14] It paid tribute to Islam for the

truths it helped to impart about God, Jesus, Mary, the prophets, and apostles. In the Middle Ages, the Qur'anic teachings were regarded merely a façade to hide Islam's fundamental beliefs. But in the contemporary Catholic environment and the growing contact between Catholics and Muslim a new attitude had emerged. The *Nostra Aetate* announced:

> Upon the Muslims too, the Church looks with esteem. They adore one God, living and enduring, merciful and all-powerful, Maker of Heaven and earth, Speaker to men. They strive to submit wholeheartedly even to his inscrutable decrees, just as did Abraham, with whom the Islamic faith is pleased to associate itself. Though they do not acknowledge Jesus as God, they revere Him as a prophet. They also honour Mary; His virgin mother; at times they call on her, too, with devotion. In addition they await the day of judgement when God will give each man his due after raising him up. Consequently, they prize the moral life, and give worship to God through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.
>
> Although in the course of the centuries many quarrels and hostilities have arisen between Christians and Muslims, this most sacred Synod urges all to forget the past and to strive sincerely for mutual understanding. On behalf of all mankind, let them make a common cause of safeguarding and fostering social justice, moral values, peace, and freedom.[15]

In another place it states that 'the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place among these there are the Muslims, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind.' So far as the everlasting salvation is concerned, divine Providence does not 'deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his Grace' and any 'goodness or truth found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the gospel.'[16] Without compromising the Christian belief in the final nature of God's revelation in Christ [=Christ the God], these formulations in fact were a great improvement upon the previous pronouncements of the Vatican Council; they encouraged a positive and respectful attitude towards other religions. Hans Küng, the eminent Catholic theologian who was an official adviser to the Second Vatican

Council in the early 1960s, emphasises 'the epoch-making reorientation of the Catholic Church' that is documented in the Declaration and necessary consequences flowing from it:

> There will be no returning, then, to the old 'Christian' polemics, to the policy of immunizing through slander. For more and more people, the centuries-old isolation and ignorance are becoming an impossible anachronism: books, mass media, travel, the presence of millions of Muslim 'guest workers' in Western Europe, a hundred thousand immigrants in America, have all their effect. Contempt for the 'foreign' religion is slowly giving way to understanding; ignorance is being replaced by study, and missionary campaigns by dialogue.[17]

In the Declaration, the reference is only to the Muslims and there is no guideline for the Catholics on the question of Muhammad's prophethood or the Qur'an as the revealed word of God. But Hans Küng deals with these important theological issues. His insights make important contribution to understand the central beliefs of Muslims, the objects of traditional Christian polemic and distortion.

For Küng to understand the role of Muhammad and the place of the Qur'an in the world religions can be meaningfully undertaken if 'we try to understand this story from within, from the standpoint of a believing Muslim, and not only from without.' Following this open-minded approach, he deals with the controversial issues, which have stood in the way of mutual understanding and toleration of each other's views between Christians and Muslims. Regarding the prophethood of Muhammad, he takes into account the historical facts and the Christian theological concerns and recognises Muhammad as a prophet. As he points out:

> In the Christian world today the conviction is surely growing that, faced with the world-historical reality of Muhammad, we have no choice but to make some corrections. The 'plague of exclusivity' stemming from Dogmatic intolerance, which Arnold Toynbee so castigated, must be abandoned; . . . For the men and women of Arabia and, in the end, far beyond, Muhammad truly was and *is* the religious reformer, lawgiver, and leader: *the* prophet, pure and simple. Actually Muhammad, who always insisted he was only a human being, is more than a

> prophet in our sense for those who follow in his footsteps (*Imitatio Mahumetis*): He is the model of the kind of life that Islam wishes to be. And if, according to Vatican II's Declaration on the Non-Christian Religions, the Catholic Church 'also looks upon the Muslims with great respect: They worship the one true God . . . who has spoken to man.' Then, in my opinion, that Church--and all the Christian Churches--must also 'look with great respect' upon the man whose name is omitted from the declaration out of embarrassment, although he alone led the Muslims to the worship of the one God, who spoke *through* him: Muhammad, the Prophet.[18]

Küng explains that according to the New Testament there were authentic prophets who came after Jesus and that the New Testament does not bid us to reject in advance Muhammad's claim to be a true prophet after Jesus. If the Christians do not recognise him a prophet, the cause is their 'dogmatic prejudice'.

While discussing the status of Jesus in the Qur'an, Küng suggests that the interpretation of the Qur'an should be '*from the standpoint of the Qur'an*, not from that of the New Testament or the Council of Nicaea or Jungian psychology.'[19] In the Qur'an, Jesus is a great prophet, and not a divine being. If the Christian side makes a serious effort to re-evaluate Muhammad on the basis of Islamic sources, then they 'also hope that for their part the Muslims will eventually be prepared to move toward *a re-evaluation of Jesus of Nazareth on the basis of historical sources* (namely the Gospels) as many Jews have been doing.'[20] No doubt, here the good intentions of Küng to find common ground between Muslim and Christian positions are commendable, but to expect Muslims to take a doctrinal position that is in accordance with the New Testament but violates the fundamental Qur'anic view of Jesus may not be the practicable solution, simply because no believing Muslim can accede to it. Somehow, St Thomas Aquinas's advice to Christians is quite sound. He had emphasised the necessity of looking for moral and philosophical reasons which the Saracens accept and not the scriptural authority because 'the Mohammedans and the pagans, do not agree with us in accepting the authority of any Scripture, by which they may be convinced of their error.' As Muslims do not accept the authority of the Old or the New Testament, it is pointless to multiply scriptural quotations, as earlier writers and polemicists had done against Islam. Therefore, St Thomas Aquinas

suggested that Christians must 'have recourse to the natural reason, to which all men are forced to give their assent.'[21]

For dealing with relations with Islam and Muslims, the Vatican Council established the 'Commission on Islam'. In 1969, the Commission produced *Guidelines for a Dialogue between Muslims and Christians*, and a second edition that took into account the experience gained during the 1970s was published in 1981. The theological basis for changed attitudes towards other faiths is found in a number of other documents of the Council that have appeared since 1969. Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II have been strong advocates of inter-religious dialogue in general and to dialogue with Muslims in particular. As a result of the Vatican's active engagement, a number of Christian-Muslim conferences have taken place. Before the invasion and occupation of Iraq by the United States and Britain in 2003, Pope John Paul II, along with the officials of the World Council of Churches, supported the international anti-war movement. He made repeated appeals to the leaders of these two powers to desist from war and violence in resolving their differences with Iraq, and to adhere to international norms of legitimacy.

The World Council of Churches

There has also been some noticeable change of attitude towards Islam within the Protestant churches, which shows a general trend towards recognition of the religious and spiritual dimension of Islam. The World Council of Churches (WCC) which was formally inaugurated in 1948 includes today 342 churches in more than one hundred countries across the world representing most Christian traditions. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member but works in cooperation with the WCC.

The WCC did not produce any specific guidelines for Christian-Muslim dialogue, but in 1971 it set up a Sub-Unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies. There were differences between Protestant member churches, some of whom were deeply suspicious about the whole idea of dialogue of the WCC because in it they saw a denial of the uniqueness of Jesus, hence the irrelevance of mission. The Sub-Unit after protracted discussions and debates produced some guidelines for

dialogue in 1979. In 1991, the WCC overhauled its organization and the Sub-Unit was replaced by the 'Office on Inter-Religious Relations', which in 1992 produced a document, entitled *Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations: Ecumenical Considerations*.

During the last three decades, the Pontifical Council and the WCC Sub-Unit organised a number of conferences and seminars in different places towards a new understanding between Christians and Muslims. It is quite true that the dialogue movement started when Christians in the West became convinced that the old attitudes towards Islam and Muslims marked by confrontation and hostility needed rethinking. Now the focus gradually shifted from exclusionist and reductionist attitudes to dialogue where the believers of two monotheistic traditions could meet and discuss issues of mutual concern in a changed political landscape after the end of the old colonial system. Even though many initiatives towards meetings came from the Christians, Muslims' response has been significant. A number of Muslim organizations and groups in various Muslim countries, Europe and North America have been active in furthering the inter-religious dialogue.

In one of the conferences organised by the WCC in Broumana in Lebanon in 1972, twenty-five Christian and twenty-two Muslims from twenty countries participated. Dr Blake, the then General Secretary of the World Council of Churches said that dialogue is 'a living relationship in which we as individuals and communities lose our suspicion, fear and mistrust of each other, and enter into new confidence, trust and friendliness.' He pointed out that the objective to create better relations between Muslims and Christians was not directed against humanist ideologies: 'Although faith in the transcendent God is our common faith; although we believe that man cannot fully be human without relationship to the Creator God, yet we must remember how often so-called religious men have sinned and done evil in the name of God, and how much good has been done and is done by men who serve Him even when they do not know Him or even reject Him.'[22]

Another participant in the discussion Dr Ali E. Hillal Dessouki, outlining the problems between two religious communities of Egypt--Muslims and Copts--did not underestimate the problematic relationship between the two communities in the present age and therefore he suggested:

> Concerned people should try to bring the two communities closer to one another in all respects--social, economic, cultural and political--so as to increase their mutual understanding and sympathy. More specifically, a conscious and deliberate effort should be directed to spread concrete knowledge of each religion among the adherents of the other, thus emphasising the ultimate unity among all revealed religions in the sense that all imply a more or less a similar system of ethics and morality. Such an effort will be more rewarding if enlightened authors of each religion start to write about the others.[23]

The Memorandum which was published at the end of the conference indicates cordial atmosphere at the meeting. The participants accepted that dialogue is not an attempt to suppress differences but rather to explore them frankly and self-critically together with those who come from another religious tradition. The guiding principles of dialogue were frank witness, mutual respect and religious freedom.

The WCC has tried to tackle issues of common concern in Christian-Muslim relations. One good example was the conference organised by the WCC at Chambésy in Switzerland in 1976, on the theme of Christian Mission and Islamic *Da'wah*, the participants accepted the basic principle concerning the freedom to exercise one's religion, to propagate one's faith and 'the right to convince and be convinced'. Muslim scholars explained how Western Christian missionaries presented a totally false picture of the teachings of Islam and the life and message of the Prophet; they used underhand methods to exploit the weaknesses of the poor and disadvantaged in society for the sake of proselytism. This was regarded an unfair way to bring people to any religion. The historical experience of Muslim nations of Christian mission has been an unhappy one. The discussions that followed created heated exchanges and tension. It is noteworthy that the final statement clearly attends to the role of missionaries:

> The Christian participants extend to their Muslim brethren their full sympathy for the moral wrongs which the Muslim world has suffered at the hands of colonialists, neo-colonialists and their accomplices. The conference is aware that Muslim-Christian relations have been affected by mistrust, suspicion and

> fear. Instead of cooperating for the common good, Muslims and Christians have been estranged and alienated from one another. After more than a century of colonialism during which many missionaries served the interests of the colonial powers, whether deliberately or unconsciously, the Muslims have felt reluctant to cooperate with the Christians whom they have fought as agents of their oppressors. Although the time has come to turn a new page in this relationship, the Muslims are still reluctant to take the step because their suspicion of Christian intentions continues. The reason is the undeniable fact that many of the Christian missionary services today continue to be taken for ulterior motives. Taking advantage of Muslim ignorance, of Muslim need for education, health, cultural and social services, of Muslim political stresses and crises, of their economic dependence, political division and general weakness and vulnerability, these missionary services have served purposes other than holy--proselytism, that is, adding numbers to the Christian community for reasons other than spiritual. Recent revealed linkages of some of these services with the intelligence offices of some big powers confirm and intensify an already aggravated situation. The conference strongly condemns all such abuse of diakonia (service).[24]

The conference suggested a number of measures which the Christian churches and religious organisations should take with regard to the abuse of diakonia in Muslim countries, an abuse that embittered Muslim-Christian relations and stood in the way of mutual recognition and cooperation between the two religions.

The WCC in a recent important document, entitled *Striving Together in Dialogue. A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action* (Geneva, 2001) outlined a wide range of issues in which Christian and Muslim religious leaders, educators and activists have been involved since 1991. Muslims and Christians are encouraged to participate in inter-cultural, inter-religious and international dialogue initiatives. As both Christians and Muslims regard justice to be a universal value grounded in their religion, they are called upon to take sides with the oppressed, excluded and marginalised irrespective of their religious identity. The document recognises that mission and *da'wa* are essential religious duties in Christianity and Islam, but it warns that many missionary activities, and the methods they use, arouse legitimate

suspicions. There are situations when humanitarian service is undertaken for ulterior motives, and takes advantage of the vulnerability of people.

When the United States Administration and the British Government were preparing to invade and occupy Iraq, the WCC in a statement released on 2 September 2002 staunchly opposed the United States policy. It called on Washington to desist from military threats against Iraq, and to respect human rights and international law. The statement urged the United States and its allies to resist pressures to join in pre-emptive military strikes against a sovereign state under the pretext of the 'war on terrorism'. But the appeals by the WCC and the Vatican were ignored by the United States. When the United States and Britain started the offensive in 2003, the General Secretary of the WCC, Dr Konrad Raiser, on 20 March 2003 issued a press statement on war against Iraq. The following extracts from his statement show how the WCC, in unity with the rest of the international peace movement, saw the dangers:

> The pre-emptive military attack against Iraq is immoral, illegal and ill-advised. The WCC and its member churches repeatedly warned these powers [the United States of America, Britain and Spain] that this war will have grave humanitarian consequences, including loss of civil life, large-scale displacement of people, environmental destruction and further destabilisation of the whole region.
>
> The implicit uniteralism, by the US, the UK and Spain, contradict the spirit and prospect of multilateralism, the fundamental principles laid out in the UN Charter, and may damage hopes to create a strong international order in the post-Cold War period. By relying on the right of the powerful, including the use of threat and economic pressure, to influence other states to support their action, these countries undermine international rule of law that has taken half a century to construct. . . .
>
> The failure, however, does not lie with the UN, but with those governments that chose to go outside the Security Council. The international community must clearly demonstrate, and remind those countries, that the UN Charter and multilateral responsibility are expressions of a civilised, progressive and peaceful international order and that the only sustainable response to terrorism is to achieve rule of law, within the rule of law.

> The fact that the sole superpower, together with old colonial powers of Europe, chose to go alone against a country with a Muslim majority is politically dangerous, culturally unwise and ignores the growing importance of religion and culture for the political identification of many people. We fear that this war will only confirm and aggravate stereotypes and, in many parts of the world, add to an image of the West marked by colonialism and crusades.[25]

The fears expressed in the statement have proved true. Despite their use of overwhelming military power and influence, the American and British armies are finding it difficult to eliminate the Iraqi resistance against the foreign occupation of their land. At the same time, the inhuman treatment and abuse of Iraqi prisoners at the hands of the American forces, which came to light in 2004, has deeply horrified and traumatized the whole world. But the killing of more than one-hundred-thousand Iraqis (according to Western estimates in 2004) and the barbarous destruction of Iraq by the Americans forces have largely been ignored or had no meaningful response from the international community.

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Among the Protestants, Dr Kenneth Cragg, a bishop of the Anglican Church, has been a leading exponent of Christian-Muslim dialogue and mutual recognition in the world that started to take shape after 1945. He has written a number of books on Islam and made valuable contributions in this respect. In his book, *The Call of the Minaret* (1956), he observes that in the West the academic interest in Islam is increasing for different reasons. There are also those whose basic impulse to understand Islam is merely utilitarian and pragmatic in world politics: they try to find out how it can be useful in the global politics of the Cold War or how the place and voice of millions of Muslims could be used in the United Nations for their ends. This attitude is understandable, but Dr Cragg points out that

> it still falls short of a satisfactory response to the fact of Islam. It rests finally on incomplete criteria. It does not strive to penetrate Islam with genuine objectivity. It is motivated too largely by utilitarian attitudes. It is looking for allies rather than inwardness. Its standpoint is the significance of Islam for the West, rather than the meaning of Islam for Muslims. The self-preoccupation of this attitude is liable to preclude its coming to a valid relation. It does not face

> the demands the minaret makes upon the Muslim nor relate itself to his response to those demands. It needs to take with a more objective seriousness the concepts within the summons, to go deeper than interest, prudence, or policy into areas of spiritual communication.[25]

Even though the period of the Cold War is over, the objectives of academic and political interest in the West in Islam, to which Dr Cragg referred about half a century ago, have become all the more important in the present-day unipolar New World Order. The place of Muslim countries in the foreign policy of the United States is exclusively determined by its global political and economic interests and of its close allies. However, the recognition and appreciation of Islam's spiritual significance that Dr Cragg espouses is not universal in Christian clergy or Christian academics. The Christian conservatives, especially in the United States, are vociferous in their hostility towards Islam. They exert great influence in perpetuating and reinforcing the negative image of Islam. Their influence extends to the political establishment of the United States and its policy-makers.

There are many Christians who are still firmly committed to the view that God cannot be known by human efforts but only by his self-revelation in the person of Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, which the New Testament records. Accordingly, all other religions and their holy books are expressions of human efforts to seek God, and nothing more. But such exclusivist interpretations of Christianity have also been criticised by some liberal Christian writers and thinkers. And it is in the interpretations of these liberal Christian thinkers one can find answers to questions, answers given from Christian perspectives with regard to inter-religious dialogues and mutual understanding. There are hopeful signs that a growing number of Christian leaders and scholars in Europe, North America and other parts of the world are trying to forge dialogical contacts with Islam in a new spirit of recognition of the religious and social role of Islam. On their part Muslim response to such approaches has been positive. These developments seem auspicious in the context of Christian-Muslim relations.

Concluding remarks

We have covered a vast area in this book, starting from the history of the early Church, with special focus on how the Christian dogmas took shape, and the rise of Islam within the historical context of the Perso-Roman empires and their imperial policies regarding the Middle East, to present-day developments both regional and global. This information was essential for presenting a broad review of the shaping of the polemical and distorted images of Islam within the Christendoms, a process that has persisted to the present; but the twentieth century saw some important modifications in such attitudes within the main currents of Christianity. Even though the discussion has revolved around religious themes, my main concern has been to investigate the subject matter in a historical perspective. I have used some fundamental theological interpretations of concepts relating to God and his attributes, the divine revelations as commonly understood in monotheistic religious tradition and have not offered any philosophical or sociological perspective or critique. In the formation of Christian doctrines, I have investigated the role played by mundane forces.

Regarding their differing beliefs, how far can the theological positions of the two closely-related faiths be reconciled? Not being a professional theologian, I have no theological advice to offer. I think the believers should settle this question among themselves. However, the views of three Western scholars of religion on this matter demonstrate that there is no single answer. For instance, Hugh Goddard while rightly pointing to the vast range of opinions and attitudes among Muslims towards Christianity finds it proper to give recognition to those Muslims who show conciliatory theological attitude towards the doctrine of the Trinity, that

> Christians are not, after all, tritheists. The issue here is clearly the complex and hotly debated one, both among Christians and between Christians and Muslims, of the Trinity. Trinitarianism, it is true, is not Unitarianism, but equally it is not tritheism either, and Muslim recognition of this, as well as aiding better understanding of Christianity, would also help to remove some of the bitter antagonism which has clearly been felt towards Christianity by some Muslims. Difficult linguistic as well as theological issues are of course involved here, and

> the Arabic Christian term for Trinity, *tathlith*, does certainly not help the process of understanding.[27]

But Norman Daniel in the concluding section of his important book *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* maintains that the basic relationship between Christianity and Islam remains unaltered because 'there are irreducible differences between non-negotiable doctrines. Both sides deceive themselves if they think otherwise. The Christian creeds and the Qur'an are simply incompatible and there is no possibility of reconciling the content of the two faiths, each of which is exclusive, as long as they retain their identities.'[28] Apparently, this seems to a fair assessment of the theological standpoint of the two faiths, but Goddard's view highlights the positive consequences of such understanding from Muslims on Christian-Muslim relations worldwide.

Moreover, there are other factors that have the potential to increase their mutual understanding and accommodation in matters that have common theological ground as well as the matters outside the theological domain. A leading advocate of such a wider approach is a leading academic and missionary, Dr Willem Bijlefeld, who has been actively involved in extending Christian-Muslim relations. He writes that

> the atmosphere in which we meet or avoid each other is determined not only by religious and semireligious statements but also by purely secular discussions and events. Our future relations will be less affected by even the most impressive theological pronouncements of an international dialogue conference than our action and inaction on issues such as the use of the world's natural resources, questions of poverty, justice, discrimination, and marginalization, and the delicate problem of equal treatment of all nations, Islamic or not, in the foreign policy decisions of western governments.[29]

Dr Bijlefeld has precisely pointed to some of the real issues that confront the Third World, to which Muslim countries belong. In traditional societies, many social, political and economic matters are often couched in religious phraseology, and therefore such a culturally determined mode of expression should not be interpreted as relevant to religious issues only.

The demonising of the Other in the name of one's religious belief is a product of deep-rooted prejudices and inverse consciousness. Such an irrational and anti-human attitude becomes self-perpetuating. Perhaps one of the most humane attitudes towards other religions finds expression in the Indian emperor, Asoka the Great (r. 273--232 B.C.). He enjoined respect for the dignity of all human beings, and encouraged the principles of non-violence, tolerance of all religions, sects and opinions in his vast empire. His precepts have the overall name of *Dhamma*, a term which carries a variety of meanings, such as universal law, social order, piety, or righteousness. His edicts inscribed on rock surfaces and sandstone pillars were addressed to the entire populace in different languages and scripts; one bilingual edict found in Afghanistan is written in Aramaic and Greek. His twelfth edict proclaimed:

> His Sacred Majesty honours both ascetics and the householders of all religions, and he honours them with gifts and honours of various kinds. But [he] does not value gifts and honours as much as he values this -- that there should be growth in the essentials of all religions. Growth in essentials can be done in different ways, but all of them have as their root restraint in speech, that is, not praising one's own religion, or condemning the religion of others without a good cause. And if there is cause for criticism, it should be done in a mild way. But it is better to honour other religions for this reason. By so doing, one's own religion benefits, so do other religions. Whoever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought 'Let me glorify my own religion,' only harms his own religion. Therefore contact between religions is good. One should listen to and respect the doctrine professed by others. The Sacred Majesty desires that all should be well-learned in the good doctrines of other religions.[30]

Himself an ardent Buddhist, Asoka was averse to the notion or the claim of only one religion containing all the truth. He said:

> Do not quarrel about religions, concord is meritorious. Do not imagine that you have a complete hold on Truth. You may not have it; no religion has a

> monopoly of Truth; you must try to know the God above all gods who is expressed in different ways and different individuals.[31]

This, twenty-three centuries old message of Asoka, is a splendid guide to a non-sectarian and open-minded approach to social discourse and inter-faith relations. In our age, it is only in the recognition of our common human aspirations and our common destiny in an interdependent world that we can face the challenges of the present and the future. Christian and Muslim believers, along with the followers of other faiths and ideologies, have a broad common basis to work together. By recognising the positive role of each other and also respecting the viewpoint of humanists, the believers can advance the cause of social justice, peaceful coexistence and a non-militaristic and non-hegemonic world order.

Notes

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