

Dr. Laurence B. Brown

MISGOD'ED

A ROADMAP OF GUIDANCE AND MISGUIDANCE WITHIN THE ABRAHAMIC RELIGIONS

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ISBN: 1-4196-8148-6

ISBN-13: 978-1419681486

TO
THE LOVERS OF TRUTH,
THE
FRIENDS OF FREE INQUIRY;
TO THOSE WHO DARE,
IN THE FACE OF CHURCH ESTABLISHMENTS,
OF
ORTHODOX DENUNCIATIONS,
AND OF
LUKEWARM, TIME-SERVING CHRISTIANS,
TO OPENLY PROFESS
WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE TRUE:
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED.

Dedication by the Editor of:

*An Enquiry into the Opinions of the Christian Writers of
the Three First Centuries Concerning the Person of Jesus
Christ,*

by Gilbert Wakefield, B.A., 1824

– The Peace Prayer of St. Francis –

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace;

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

Where there is injury, pardon;

Where there is doubt, faith;

Where there is despair, hope;

Where there is darkness, light;

And where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved as to love;

For it is in giving that we receive;

It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

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– Notes on Scriptural Sources and Translations –

Biblical quotes in the following work, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the New King James Version. The reason for selecting this version of the Bible does not relate to the degree of scriptural fidelity, which is debatable, but rather to the popularity of the text. In English-speaking countries, the 1611 edition of the King James Version is the most widely read translation of the Bible. The *New King James Version* (NKJV) grew from an effort to render the 1611 translation more accessible to modern readers, tossing the *thees* and *thous* out the window. Unfortunately, little effort has been made to reconcile differences between the 1611 King James Version and the Sinaiticus and Vaticanus codices, which were discovered in the 1800's and contain the oldest and most authoritative New Testament manuscripts found to date. Furthermore, "most of the important copies of the Greek gospels have been 'unearthed' – mostly in museums, monasteries, and church archives – in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries."¹ Now that these texts are available, one can reasonably expect to see their influence upon more modern Bible translations. This is not the case in the New King James Version, which retains verses and passages in conflict with the most ancient and respected New Testament manuscripts. Therefore, while this book predominantly cites the New King James Version in the interest of satisfying the Protestant majority of Western Christianity, a complementary version is employed where greater scholastic accuracy is required.

The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) fills this gap. Like its predecessor, the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the NRSV is an ecumenical collaboration, reflected

in its three separate Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox editions. More importantly, the NRSV reflects modern biblical scholarship hitherto unavailable. Indeed, the dust had barely been blown off the Dead Sea Scrolls when the RSV translation of the Old Testament was first published in 1946. For these reasons, the NRSV has effectively replaced the Revised Standard Version and enjoys the broadest acceptance of all Bible translations.

Quotations from the *World Bibliography of Translations of the Meanings of the Holy Qur'an* (hereafter TMQ), unless otherwise noted, are taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali's *The Holy Qur'an: Translation and Commentary*. Where more exacting translation is required, those of Saheeh International or of Muhammad Al-Hilali and Muhammad Khan (i.e., *The Noble Qur'an*) are employed.

For those who question the use of multiple translations, it should be said that no language, and most especially one as complex as Arabic, can be translated with complete accuracy. As orientalist and translator Alfred Guillaume stated, "The Qur'an is one of the world's classics which cannot be translated without grave loss."² This opinion is echoed by A. J. Arberry, translator and author of *The Koran Interpreted*: "I have conceded the relevancy of the orthodox Muslim view . . . that the Koran is untranslatable."³

Hence the need for multiple translations of the Qur'an, for no single translation, and some would say no collection of translations, can adequately convey the meaning of the original.

– Introduction –

“Where shall I begin, please your Majesty?” he asked.

“Begin at the beginning,” the King said, gravely, “and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

Recent decades have witnessed a society-wide shift with regard to the values by which truth and quality are measured. In their homes and workplaces to community centers and town halls, our ancestors discussed subjects of depth and importance, vital issues such as political ethics, social mores and the practical limits of science, laws and religion. Jump forward to the modern world, and conversations typically focus on relationships, money, sports and entertainment. Whereas previous generations spent evenings in forums of discourse, analysis and intellectual exchange, most citizens of today subject themselves to vacuous hours of media brainwashing by that master of hypnosis, the television.

The results can be seen in every aspect of modern life. Salesmanship has come to rely less on factual analysis than on stylized presentation. Political offices are no longer won and lost on the basis of leadership qualities, social consciousness and moral example,

but on photo ops and sound bites. News, both local and international, is “spun” to satisfy social and political agendas more than to convey events as they actually occurred.

Nowadays the general public is less reliant upon facts and more influenced by emotional ploys, even when false. Nowhere is this more evident than in religion, where the beliefs of billions have been swayed more by the media than by their own scripture. The image of Moses portrayed in the animated film, *The Prince of Egypt*, replaces previous generations’ mental picture of Charlton Heston in Cecil B. DeMille’s *The Ten Commandments*. Yet both movies present a Hollywoodized Moses with dynamic oratory skills, ignoring the prophet’s own assessment on that score: “O my Lord, I *am* not eloquent, neither before nor since You have spoken to Your servant; but I *am* slow of speech and slow of tongue” (Exodus 4:10). Recent representations of Jesus Christ have similarly corrupted imaginations, with imagery that spans the spectrum from the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* to accounts of this great messenger of God having married Mary Magdalene.

Spinning off from this swirl of generational trends, many religions have emerged with a new focus—that of style and emotional appeal. Rational analysis and theological discussion have been buried beneath an avalanche of popularized slogans and designer dogma. In this manner, hearts and souls are being seduced more by salesmanship than by truth.

But that is not what this book is about.

Throughout time, there have always been honorable individuals who refused to base religious beliefs upon such frail foundations as the whims of others, the fads of peers, the traditions of family, or even the convictions of seemingly sincere and pious clergy.

These individuals, with a genuine hunger for the truth, boldly cross the currents of cultural convention. They demand answers to well-considered questions, and seek understanding of the history of revelation and man. And *that* is what this book is about—the questions, the history, the revelation, and most of all, the answers.

This is the first of two books designed to analyze the scriptural foundation of the three Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In doing so, I hope to help readers identify the valid links in the chain of revelation and differentiate the truth of God's guidance from the falsehoods of human corruption.

The methodology and conclusions drawn herein are founded upon respected scholastic research—as well as common sense. With regard to methodology, there is no substitute for shaking the trees from which different faiths claim to harvest fruits of sacred knowledge, and seeing what falls out. Analysis of the foundation of Christian doctrines has become very popular recently, and many respected scholars have discovered that much of Christian canon derives from non-biblical sources. The real shock is that many of these non-biblical sources actually *contradict* the teachings of Jesus Christ. For example, nowhere in the foundational manuscripts of the New Testament does Jesus Christ refer to himself as a literal Son of God. He identifies himself as the Son of Man eighty-eight times, but not once as a Son of God in a literal, begotten and not made sense.

Nor does Jesus Christ espouse the Trinity. In fact, in three separate passages he teaches the exact opposite, defining God as One—never as a Trinity.

Here we have two critical elements of Christian belief. The first concerns the nature of Jesus, and the second the nature of the Creator. In both cases, Trinitarian dogma was derived not from the record of what Jesus said or taught, but from what others said or

taught. Jesus was quoted as having called himself the Son of Man; others claimed he was the Son of God. Jesus taught God is One; others proposed God is three-in-one. Could the teachings be more opposite? And should we care? After all, Jesus died for our sins. Or so someone said. Someone, that is, but once again, not Jesus. He said no such thing.

So is there a problem here? And should we investigate it?

Only if we consider the purpose of revelation being to *reveal*, to make clear. For if that is the purpose, we must assume that God revealed the truth, Jesus conveyed the revelation, but somewhere in the chain of transmission that message got garbled. How else can we explain the fact that many basic doctrines of modern Christianity either fail to find support in Jesus' biblical teachings or, worse yet, actually contradict them?

Hmm. Perhaps the issue *is* worth investigating.

Perhaps Christians shouldn't be surprised to find that Moses and Jesus taught the same things. After all, Christians claim that both received revelation from the same source. Now, the idea that God changed overnight from the wrathful God of the Old Testament to the forgiving God of the New Testament conveniently dismisses inconsistencies between the two revelations. But not everybody accepts that explanation. Those Christians who consider God to be perfect and never-changing should be more surprised to find differences, rather than commonalities, in the teachings of Moses and Jesus. After all, Jesus was a rabbi who lived and taught the same Old Testament Law that Moses served to convey. "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets," Jesus says in Matthew 5:17. "I did not come to destroy but to fulfill."

And so, an important question arises. If scriptural teachings common to Moses and Jesus suggest continuity in revelation from the Old to New Testaments, then what should

we make of scriptural teachings common to Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, the prophet of Islam? If not by revelation, how did Muhammad so accurately convey the true teachings of Moses and Jesus?

Not surprisingly, Christians claim plagiarism. However, as discussed in the second book of this series, historical evidence seems to negate that possibility. The New Testament was not translated into Arabic until centuries after Muhammad's death, and the oral traditions that circulated among the Arab Christians during his lifetime were considered heretical by the Christian orthodoxy. And yet the Holy Qur'an doesn't convey early Arab Christians' heretical views of Jesus, but the truth as recorded in the Bible.

So the question remains: If not through revelation, how did Muhammad convey the true teachings of Moses and Jesus? This question demands analysis, and it is this analysis that forms the substance of the sequel to this book, *God'ed*.

The eleventh-century philosopher and theologian St Anselm of Canterbury proposed in his *Proslogium*: "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand." The proposal of *this* author is that such a statement makes about as much sense as saying, "I had to taste the sandwich before I could pick it up." The true order of priorities should be the exact opposite. Belief logically follows understanding—not the other way around. Most people demand sufficient explanation to nurse the embryo of a proposal to a formed conclusion before embracing it.

Humankind is divided. Some people are slaves to their emotions, in line with Benjamin Franklin's wry comment, "The way to see by Faith is to shut the Eye of Reason." Others demand logical explanations and rational conclusions, and side with William Adams' comment, "Faith is the continuation of reason." Such individuals expect

to find the truth of God in the union of common sense, scriptural analysis, and innate understanding of the Creator.

I count myself among the latter group, and such is my approach.

Lastly, the problem with heavily referenced works such as this is that the reader doesn't always know whether it's worth flipping pages to read the endnotes. To solve this problem, endnotes containing explanatory text are denoted by the endnote number followed by (EN), like this, ^{36(EN)} which means, "Endnote number 36: Explanatory Note." Endnote numbers lacking the (^{EN}) denotation contain purely bibliographical information.

PART I: MONOTHEISM

Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true.

—Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

Judaism, Christianity and Islam constitute the three Abrahamic faiths. Although familiar by name, Judaism and Christianity prove surprisingly difficult to define. But define them we must, if we are to engage in any significant analysis. Islam is the least understood and the most maligned of the Abrahamic faiths in Western civilization, but is relatively easy to define once stripped of its mystique and negative image. The pages that follow lay the foundation for subsequent discussion by clarifying the essence of these three Abrahamic faiths.

1 — Judaism

The Foundation of all foundations, the pillar supporting all wisdoms, is the recognition of the reality of God.

—Maimonides

The term *Jew* originated as an ethnic definition of the descendants of the tribe of Judah, with Judaism being a contraction of *Judah-ism*. Orthodox Judaism defines a Jew as one born of a Jewish mother or one, independent of bloodline, converted to the Judaic faith. More liberal movements of Judaism (e.g., Reform) deny the necessity of the maternal bloodline, and propose that a child born of a Jewish father is equally considered a Jew, if raised Jewish. Although modern definitions vary, most include, implicitly or explicitly, adherence to Mosaic Law as expressed in the Torah and Talmud. Historically, however, even this was not agreed upon, for the Sadducees believed only the written law and prophets to be binding, and rejected the Talmud.

Ideological differences divide Orthodox from Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist movements, all of which possess smaller sectarian subdivisions. Geographic origins distinguish the Sephardim (from Spain) from the Ashkenazi (from Central and Eastern Europe); religious/political differences divide Zionists from

non-Zionists (such as the *Neturei Karta* Jews); and Hasidic Jews are dissociated from non-Hasidic (also known as *Misnagdim*, or “opponents”) on the basis of their practices, extreme religious zeal, and devotion to a dynastic leader (known as a *rebbe*).

Although considering themselves a nation, present-day Jews are not united upon culture or ethnicity, are not a race in the genetic sense of the term, and do not unanimously agree upon a creed. Nonetheless, the most widely accepted tenets of Jewish faith are probably those defined by the twelfth-century rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides), known as his Thirteen Principles of Jewish Faith:

1. God is the Creator and Ruler of all things.
2. God is One and unique.
3. God is incorporeal, and there is nothing like unto Him.
4. God is eternal.
5. Prayer is to be directed to God alone.
6. The words of the prophets are true.
7. Moses was the greatest of the prophets.
8. The Written Torah (i.e., the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament) and Oral Torah (teachings now codified in the Mishna and Talmud) were given to Moses.
9. The Torah will never be changed, and there will never be another given by God.
10. God knows the thoughts and deeds of men.
11. God will reward the good and punish the wicked.
12. The Messiah will come.
13. The dead will be resurrected.

Other definitions of Jewish creed exist, but in general the variations are minor, and for the purposes of this book the above list is considered the most representative model.

2 — Christianity

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there.

—Will Rogers

If the term *Jewish* is difficult to define, the term *Christian* is even more fraught with problems.

One stumbling block is that early Christians considered themselves Jews, as acknowledged in the following: “The Christians did not initially think of themselves as separate from the Jewish people, though Jesus had had severe things to say about Pharisees. (But then, so has the Talmud.)”⁴ Initially, the Jews clashed over acceptance of Jesus Christ as a prophet. Subsequently, a steady flow of doctrinal evolution eroded a giant crevasse between the entrenched Jews and the new sect of Christian-Jews. Yet both groups considered themselves Jewish.

Notably, Jesus never identified himself as a Christian and never claimed to have established Christianity on Earth. In fact, while the word *Christian* is encountered three times in the Bible (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; Peter 4:16), none of these verses use the label *Christian* in a context which bears the authority of Jesus or of God.⁵

Most significantly, there is no record of the word *Christian* ever issuing from the lips of Jesus. We read in Acts 11:26 that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”—which means the term *Christian* was first applied to the disciples by non-believers around 43 CE.^{6(EN— Explanatory Note, as opposed to a bibliographical reference.)}

It was not a polite term.

Contrary to popular belief, the term *Christian* appears to have been conceived in contempt. *Christian* is what disbelievers called the followers of Christ—a distasteful name to believers who knew themselves as Jews, following the latest in the line of Jewish prophets. And yet, that very label is now worn with pride, despite the fact that, “It is not the usual designation of the NT, which more commonly uses such terms as brethren (Acts 1.16), believers (Acts 2.44), saints (Acts 9.32), and disciples (Acts 11.26).”⁷ Furthermore, with regard to the term *Christian*, “It appears to have been more widely used by pagans, and according to Tacitus it was in common use by the time of the Neronian persecution (Annals, 15.44).”⁸ In other words, the term *Christian* was a derogatory label imposed upon believers by their enemies. And yet, the term stuck and with typical Christian humility, was eventually accepted.

The second difficulty with the word *Christian* is that of definition. If we apply the term to those who affirm the prophethood of Jesus Christ, then Muslims demand inclusion, for the Islamic religion requires belief in Jesus Christ as an article of faith. Granted, the Islamic understanding of Jesus differs from that of the Trinitarian majority of those who would identify themselves as Christian. However, many Islamic beliefs are remarkably consistent with those of classic Unitarian^{9(EN)} Christianity.

If we apply the label *Christian* to those who follow the teachings of Jesus, we face

a similar difficulty, for Muslims claim to follow the teachings of Jesus more faithfully than Christians. That claim hurls a hefty gauntlet in the face of Christianity, but is made with sincerity and commitment, and deserves examination.

Should we associate the label of Christianity with the doctrines of original sin, the Deity of Jesus, the Trinity, crucifixion, and atonement? Makes sense, but here's the problem: Although these doctrines define creedal differences between Trinitarian Christianity and Islam, they also define creedal differences between various sects of Christianity. Not all Christians accept the Trinity, and many deny Jesus' alleged divinity. Not even the doctrines of original sin, the crucifixion, and atonement achieve universal acceptance within the fractured world of Christianity. Subgroups of Christianity have canonized widely variant creeds, but no single definition has ever gained unanimous acceptance.

Hence, the world of Christianity has been divided since the time of Jesus. History chronicles an initial two hundred years, during which the disciples and their followers split from Paul and his divergent theology. This early period is crucial to an understanding of Christianity, for one can reasonably expect the purity of Christology (doctrines of Christ) and Christian creed to have been best represented among those closest to the teachings of Jesus. However, our knowledge of this period is vague, with disappointingly little verifiable information surviving to the present day. What is clear is that opinions differed wildly. Some early Christians believed God manifested His message on Earth through inspiration, others through incarnation. Some believed the message was conveyed through direct transmission and interpretation by the prophet himself, others spoke of spiritual enlightenment, as claimed by Paul. Some followed the Old Testament Law taught

by Jesus; others negated the laws in favor of Paul's "Justification by Faith." Some (such as the disciples) believed God's law was to be interpreted literally. Others (such as Paul) felt the law was to be interpreted allegorically.

Whether the apostles ever agreed upon a creed is unclear. What is commonly known as the Apostles' Creed is *not*, in fact, the creed of the apostles, but rather a baptismal formula that evolved over an indefinite period. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states that the Apostles' Creed "did not achieve its present form until quite late; just how late is a matter of controversy."¹⁰ So how late is "quite late"? According to Ehrman, the Apostles' Creed was derived from credal formulas conceived in the fourth century.¹¹ That dates its origin, at the very earliest, three hundred years from the time of the apostles, and many would say considerably later.

Just as different understandings of Christology evolved over centuries, so too has the creed of Christianity remained in debate to the present day. Some seek answers in the New Testament and early Christian documents; others question the integrity of the New Testament in the first place—a discussion deferred to the final chapters of this book.

From these murky origins, the third century saw the many and varied Unitarian schools thrown into conflict with the newly conceived Trinitarian formula. This came to a head when Emperor Constantine sought to unify his empire under one Christian theology, and imperially summoned the Council of Nicaea, the First Ecumenical Council, in 325 CE. Convened to address the Unitarian theology of Arius, a prominent priest of Alexandria, seven ecumenical councils followed in well-spaced sequence over the next six centuries. A further thirteen councils (considered ecumenical by the Roman Catholic Church, but not by the Orthodox) followed, the most recent being the Second Vatican

Council of 1962–65, to make a total of twenty-one. And yet, debate continues to rage over issues which have failed to achieve unanimous acceptance.

Hence, Trinitarian theology has not only been at odds with Unitarian theology for the past two millennia, but has roused contentious debate among its *own* constituents. Historically, the greatest upheavals came in the form of gnostic theosophy, the schism between the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches and, later still, the eruption of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century. From the metaphysical seeds planted by Martin Luther, John Calvin, the Anabaptists and the Anglican reformers, myriad theologies grew, persisting to the present day in such a plethora of sects as to require religious encyclopedias to catalog the variants.

With such tremendous diversity, how should the term *Christianity* be defined? If used to identify those who claim to adhere to the teachings of Jesus Christ, then Muslims deserve inclusion. If used to define any specific system of beliefs to ideologically separate Christianity from Islam, these same tenets of faith divide the world of Christianity itself.

Hence, any attempt to define a term of such uncertain origin and meaning, and one that has defied definition by billions of people over two thousand years, would seem futile at this point. Consequently, for the purposes of this book, the term *Christian* is applied in the colloquial sense of the word, to all who identify with the label, whatever the beliefs of their particular Christian sect may be.

3 — Islam: Part 1

Man's mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimension.

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

As Margaret Nydell states in *Understanding Arabs*, “The God Muslims worship is the same God Jews and Christians worship (*Allah* is simply the Arabic word for God; Arab Christians pray to Allah).”¹²

The word *Islam* is the infinitive of the Arabic verb *aslama*, and is translated, “to submit totally to God.”¹³ Furthermore, “The participle of this verb is *muslim* (i.e., the one who submits completely to God) by which the followers of Islam are called.”¹⁴ The word *Islam* also connotes peace (being from the same root as the Arabic word *salaam*), with the understanding that peace comes through submission to God. Unlike the terms *Judaism* and *Christianity*, both of which aren't mentioned in their own bibles, *Islam* and *Muslim* are mentioned numerous times throughout the Holy Qur'an. Hence, those who consider the Holy Qur'an the revealed word of God find divine authority for the terms *Islam* and *Muslim* within their own scripture.

The above is the literal definition of *Muslim*—a person who submits to the will of God. What, then, is the definition in accordance with Islamic ideology? The Islamic understanding is that true believers, since the creation of humankind, have always accepted belief in God as one God and in the teachings of the messenger of their time. For example, Muslims—meaning those who submitted to the will of God—during the time of Moses would have testified that there is no God but Allah, and Moses was the messenger of Allah. Muslims during the time of Jesus would have testified that there is no God but Allah, and Jesus was the prophet of Allah. For the last 1,400 years, Muslims have acknowledged Muhammad ibn (son of) Abdullah to be the last and final messenger of God. To this day, a person enters Islam and becomes Muslim by stating, “I testify that there is no god but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.”

Islam acknowledges the testimony of faith to be valid only if made by sincere and willing adults who understand the full meaning and implications of what they are saying. Despite the erroneous assumption that Islam was spread by the sword, the religion forbids coercion, as per the commandment “Let there be no compulsion in religion . . .” (TMQ 2:256). Furthermore, an entire chapter of the Holy Qur’an (TMQ, Chapter 109) teaches the following:

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful,

Say: O you that reject faith!

I worship not that which you worship,

Nor will you worship that which I worship.

And I will not worship that which you have been wont to worship,

Nor will you worship that which I worship.

To you be your way, and to me mine.

The seventeenth-century English philosopher John Locke, though ranked in history as a Unitarian Christian, provided a most beautiful argument, which might serve the purpose of all (Muslims included) who seek to explain the futility of forced conversion:

No way whatsoever that I shall walk in against the dictates of my conscience, will ever bring me to the mansions of the blessed. I may grow rich by art that I take not delight in; I may be cured of some disease by remedies that I have not faith in; but I cannot be saved by a religion that I distrust, and by a worship that I abhor. . . . Faith only, and inward sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God. . . . In vain therefore do princes compel their subjects to come into their church-communion, under pretence of saving their souls. If they believe, they will come of their own accord; if they believe not, their coming will nothing avail them. . . .¹⁵

It is notable that the slander of Islam having been spread by the sword was largely perpetuated by religious institutions that are themselves notorious for nearly two millennia of forced conversion, often by the most sadistic means. Clearly, testimony of faith cannot be coerced when a religion requires sincerity in the first place. Nearly three hundred years ago, the following comment was offered by George Sale, one of the first to translate the Qur'an into English, a self-professed antagonist of the man, Muhammad, and a hater of the Islamic religion:

I shall not here enquire into the reasons why the law of Mohammed has met with so unexampled a reception in the world (for they are greatly deceived who imagine it to have been propagated by the sword alone), or by what means it came to be embraced by nations which never felt the force of the Mohammedan arms, and even by those which stripped the Arabians of their conquests, and put an end to the sovereignty and very being of their Khalifs: yet it seems as if there was something more than what is vulgarly imagined, in a religion which has made so surprising a progress.¹⁶

It is just such sentiments that have prompted modern scholars to cast aside the popularized slander of coercion. Hans Küng, believed by many Christian scholars to be, in the words of former Archbishop of Canterbury Lord George Carey, “our greatest living theologian,”¹⁷ writes,

Were whole villages, cities, regions and provinces forcibly converted to Islam? Muslim historiography knows nothing of this and would have had no reason to keep quiet about it. Western historical research, too, has understandably not been able to shed any light here either. In reality, everything happened quite differently. . . .¹⁸

And truthfully, how can claims of forced conversion be seriously entertained when Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, “never felt the force of the Mohammedan arms,”¹⁹ having assimilated the Islamic religion from nothing more than the teachings and example of a few merchants from Yemen? Such forces of

Islamic progress are witnessed to this day. Islam has grown within the borders of countries and cultures that were not the conquered, but rather the conquerors of many of the Muslim lands. In addition, Islam continues to grow and prosper within populations that stand in expressed contempt of the religion. No difficulty should be encountered, then, in accepting the following comment:

No other religion in history spread so rapidly as Islam. By the time of Muhammad's death (632 AD) Islam controlled a great part of Arabia. Soon it triumphed in Syria, Persia, Egypt, the lower borders of present Russia and across North Africa to the gates of Spain. In the next century, its progress was even more spectacular.

The West has widely believed that this surge of religion was made possible by the sword. But no modern scholar accepts that idea, and the Koran is explicit in support of freedom of conscience.²⁰

It is worth noting that Islam does not differentiate between believers of different periods. The Islamic belief is that all messengers since Adam conveyed God's revelation. The faithful submitted and followed, the unfaithful didn't. Therefore, ever since Cain and Abel, humankind has been divided between the pious and impious, between good and evil.

Islam professes a consistency in creed from the time of Adam, and asserts that the tenets of faith declared at each and every stage in the chain of revelation were the same—without evolution or alteration. As the Creator has remained perfect and unchanged throughout time, so has His creed. The Christian claim that God changed from the

wrathful God of the Old Testament to the benevolent God of the New Testament is not honored by the Islamic religion, for it implies that God was imperfect to begin with and required spiritual adjustment to a higher, faultless state.

Because Islam's teachings have remained constant, there are no creedal inconsistencies. Is it true that early man lived by one creed and set of rules, the Jews by another, and the Christians a third? That only Christians are saved by Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice? Islam answers "No" to both questions. Islam teaches that from the creation of man until the end of time, salvation depends on acceptance of the same eternal creed, and adherence to the teachings of God's prophets.

Along this line of thought, a person might question how different religions view the fate of Abraham, as well as that of other early prophets. Was Abraham subject to the laws of Judaism? Apparently not. If Judaism refers to the descendants of Judah, then Abraham, being the great-grandfather of Judah, was most certainly not a descendant. Genesis 11:31 defines Abraham as being from an area in Lower Mesopotamia called Ur of Chaldees, in what is now present-day Iraq. Geographically speaking, and applying the terminology of today, Abraham was an Arab. Genesis 12:4–5 describes his move to Canaan (i.e., Palestine) at the age of seventy-five, and Genesis 17:8 confirms he was a stranger in that land. Genesis 14:13 identifies the man as "Abraham the Hebrew"—"Hebrew" meaning:

Any member of an ancient northern Semitic people that were the ancestors of the Jews. Historians use the term Hebrews to designate the descendants of the patriarchs of the Old Testament (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and so on) from that period until their conquest of

Canaan (Palestine) in the late 2nd millennium BC. Thenceforth these people are referred to as Israelites until their return from the Babylonian Exile in the late 6th-century BC, from which time on they became known as Jews.²¹

So Abraham was a Hebrew, in a time when the term *Jew* did not even exist. The descendants of Jacob were the Twelve Tribes of the Israelites, and only Judah and his line came to be known as Jews. Even Moses, despite popular opinion, was not a Jew. Exodus 6:16–20 identifies Moses as a descendant of Levi and not of Judah, and therefore a Levite. He was a lawgiver to the Jews, certainly, but not a Jew by the definition of that time in history. This is not to diminish who he was and what he did, certainly, but just to state the case for the record.

So if Abraham was not a Jew—and most certainly he was not a Christian—what laws of salvation was he subject to? And what about the other prophets preceding Moses? While the Jewish and Christian clergy struggle over this point, Islam teaches that “Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian; but he was true in Faith, and bowed his will to Allah’s (which is Islam), and he did not join gods with Allah (God)” (TMQ 3:67). In addition to stating that the religion of Abraham was that of “submission to God” (i.e., Islam), this passage of the Holy Qur’an teaches that an individual’s faith and submission is more important than the label by which that person is known.

4 — Islam: Part 2

Knowledge is the only instrument of production that is not subject to diminishing returns.

—J. M. Clark, *Journal of Political Economy*, Oct. 1927

We have already noted the Islamic belief that the world is peppered with those who are Muslim by literal but not by ideological definition. These individuals may call themselves agnostic, Jewish or Christian, but they submit to the will of the Creator as best they can, and if adequately exposed to the teachings of Islam will readily accept them. These are those who, when they learn the teachings of Islam, state, “We believe therein, for it is the Truth from our Lord: indeed we have been Muslims (bowing to Allah’s Will) from before this” (TMQ 28:53), for prior to becoming Muslim, they submitted themselves to the evident truths of God, whether to their liking or not, and lived by His decree as they understood it. And that made them Muslim in everything but oath.

Ironically, the historical archetype of such individuals may very well be Thomas H. Huxley, the father of agnosticism. Huxley penned one of the most fluent statements of willingness, even desire, to submit his will to that of the Creator: “I protest that if some great Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on

condition of being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer.”²²

Many profess a similar willingness or desire to live in submission to God, but the ultimate test is the embracing of divine truths when made evident. To leap backward from T. H. Huxley to the Bible, Muslims and Christians alike cite the story of Lazarus (John 11:1–44) by way of example. By the power of God, Jesus reportedly raised Lazarus from the dead “that they may believe that You sent me” (John 11:42). On the strength of this miracle, some Jews acknowledged Jesus’ prophethood, while others condemned him.

The main lesson to be learned, from the Islamic viewpoint, is that when presented with clear evidence of prophethood, the sincere (Muslim by literal definition) follow (and become Muslim in the full meaning of the word). Meanwhile, the insincere favor worldly considerations over the direction of God.

The lessons don’t end there. There is a moral to the story of Lazarus regarding the purpose behind revelation. A person may question, why else would God send messengers, if not to guide humankind to the straight path of His design? Who will reap the rewards of following God’s directions if not those who submit to His evidence? And who is more deserving of punishment than those who deny the truth when made clear?

Muslims assert that all prophets bore revelation to correct the deviancies of their people. After all, why would God send a prophet to a people who were doing everything right? Just as Jesus was sent to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matthew 15:24) with divine evidence of prophethood and a corrective revelation, so was Muhammad presented to all people, from his time to the Day of Judgment, with evidence of prophethood and a final revelation. This final revelation redresses the deviancies that had

crept into the various world religions, Judaism and Christianity included. Muslims assert that those who live in submission to God and His evidence will recognize and accept Muhammad as a prophet, just as the pious Jews recognized and accepted Jesus. Conversely, those who live in submission to anything other than God—be it money, power, worldly enjoyment, cultural or family tradition, unfounded personal prejudices, or any religion more self- than God-centered—would be expected to reject Muhammad, just as the impious Jews rejected Jesus.

An interesting point is that Islam demands submission to God, whereas Judaism and Christianity demand submission to ecclesiastical doctrine. Muslims do not adhere to ecclesiastical doctrine for the simple reason that, in Islam, there *is* no ecclesiastical doctrine. In fact, there are no clergy to begin with. To quote the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion*, “There is no centrally organized religious authority or magisterium in Islam and for this reason its character varies sometimes widely from traditional norms . . .”²³ and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, “Islam has no church, no priesthood, no sacramental system, and almost no liturgy.”²⁴

What Islam does have are scholars, who serve to answer religiously challenging questions. However, scholarship does not necessarily imply any greater closeness to God than that of a simple and pious, though uneducated, Muslim. Most notably, there is no papal equivalent, and there are no intercessors between man and God. Once a person accepts the Holy Qur’an as the word of God and Muhammad as His final prophet, all teachings follow from these foundational sources. Only in the deviant sects does one find what might be called clergy. The Shi’ites have their imams, the Sufis their saints, and the Nation of Islam their preachers. Not so in orthodox (i.e., Sunni) Islam, where *imam* means

nothing more than “somebody who goes out in front.” In other words, a leader of the prayer. The imam is not ordained and does not administer sacraments. His function is nothing more than to synchronize prayer by providing leadership. This position requires no particular office or appointment, and can be fulfilled by any mature member of the congregation.

The Islamic religion is built upon the foundation of its faith. A person enters Islam professing belief in one God, in the Holy Qur’an as His final revelation, and in Muhammad as His final prophet. Subsequently, the answer to any particular question, whether regarding creed, laws, manners, spirituality, etc., must refer back to God’s revelation and the teachings of the Prophet to be considered valid.

Not so with Judeo-Christian institutions, which, as we shall see later in this book, demand faith in doctrines that frequently supersede the commandments of God with the interpretations of men. The examples of Jesus never having called himself the Son of God or having taught the Trinity were discussed in the Introduction to this book. These are but two of a long list of creedal elements Jesus never taught. Hence, the Christian might enter the faith believing in one God (as Jesus taught), the Bible as revelation, and Jesus as a prophet of God. However, those who question the foundation of Christian creed find many creedal elements founded not on the teachings of God or Jesus, but on non-biblical sources, such as the writings of the apostolic fathers, Pauline theologians, or even contemporary clergy. That these sources are neither Jesus Christ nor God is obvious, although they typically claim to have spoken on behalf of Jesus Christ or God. Thus, Christians have reason to question their canon, for many of these non-biblical sources frankly contradict Jesus’ teachings.

The situation is not much different in Judaism, where the majority of Jews are Reform Jews, following the teachings of those who “reformed” God’s laws from harsh orthodoxy to a more flexible construct.

Much to the frustration of their Abrahamic neighbors, Muslims challenge the Jews and Christians to prove how the teachings of Moses or Jesus conflict with the Islamic understanding of God and revelation. After all, the Holy Qur’an commands Muslims to say, “We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Isma’il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to (all) Prophets from their Lord: we make no difference between one and another of them, and we bow to Allah (in Islam)” (TMQ 2:136). By this *ayat* (i.e., verse), Muslims are duty-bound to follow the revelation given to Moses and Jesus. Therein lies the challenge. Had any of the prophets taught contrary to the creed^{25(EN)} of Islam, Muslims would be duty-bound to face the significance of that contradiction. On the other hand, should Jews and Christians fail to prove a contradiction, they are duty-bound to face the striking agreement of these three prophets.

Fourteen hundred years have passed since the revelation of the Holy Qur’an, and to date this challenge hasn’t been met. No one has ever proven the reality of God to differ from the Islamic understanding. Furthermore, no one has proven the teachings of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad to conflict. In fact, many have suggested the exact opposite—that these three prophets firmly support one another.

As a result, many sincere nuns, priests, ministers and rabbis—educated clergy who know their respective religions best—have embraced Islam. During the lifetime of Muhammad, a Christian monk of Syria named Bahira claimed to have recognized him as

the final prophet when he was a small boy, decades prior to his first revelation.²⁶ Waraqah ibn Nawfal, the old, blind Christian cousin of Khadijah (Muhammad's first wife) swore, "By Him in whose hand is the soul of Waraqah, you (Muhammad) are the prophet of this nation and the great *Namus* (the angel of revelation—i.e., angel Gabriel) has come to you—the one who came to Moses. And you will be denied (by your people) and they will harm you, and they will expel you and they will fight you and if I were to live to see that day I would help Allah's religion with a great effort."²⁷

In the early days of Islam, when the Muslims were weak and oppressed, the religion was embraced by such seekers of truth as Salman Farsi, a Persian Christian who was directed by his mentor, a Christian monk, to seek the arrival of the final prophet in the "country of the date-palms."²⁸ The Negus, the Christian ruler of Abyssinia, accepted Islam without ever having met Muhammad, and while the Muslims were still a small group, widely held in contempt and frequently fighting for their lives.²⁹

One wonders, if Christian scholars and Christians of prominent position accepted Islam during a time when the Muslims were a persecuted minority lacking wealth, strength, and political position with which to attract, much less protect new Muslims, what drew these Christians to Islam, if not sincere belief? History records that even Heraclius, the Christian emperor of Rome, considered accepting Islam, only to renounce his resolve when he saw that conversion would cost him the support of his people as well as his empire.³⁰

One of the most striking early conversions was that of Abdallah ibn Salam, the rabbi whom the Jews of Medina called "our master and the son of our master."³¹

Encyclopedia Judaica explains that when his co-religionists were invited to accept Islam

as well, “The Jews refused, and only his immediate family, notably his aunt Khalida, embraced Islam. According to other versions, Abdallah’s conversion occurred because of the strength of Muhammad’s answers to his questions.”³²

So the conversions started, and so they have continued to the present day. Converts to Islam typically consider their conversion to be consistent with, if not dictated by, their own scripture. In other words, they discover that Islam is the fulfillment of, rather than in conflict with, teachings of the Bible. This naturally raises the question: Are Jews and Christians, in the face of the revelation of the Holy Qur’an, defying God and His chain of revelation? This issue cuts at the very root of the theological debate. Muslims believe that, as with those who denied Jesus Christ’s prophethood, those who deny the same of Muhammad may continue to be accepted by their people and regarded highly by their peers—but at the cost of disfavor with God. If true, this claim deserves to be heard. If not, the error of this conviction demands exposure. In either case, there is no substitute for an examination of the evidence.

While there have always been significant numbers of educated and practicing Jewish and Christian converts to Islam, the reverse is not true, nor has it been true at any time in history. There are cases of those belonging to deviant sects of Islam who convert to different religions, but this is hardly surprising. Ignorant of the true teachings of the Islamic religion, they are often seduced by the worldly permissiveness of other religions. Examples of these deviant groups include the Baha’i, the Nation of Islam, the Ahmadiyyah (also known as Qadianis), the Ansar, extreme Sufi orders, and many, if not most, of the Shi’ite sects. These groups may identify with the label of Islam, but like a man who calls himself a tree, lack sufficient roots in the religion to substantiate the claim.

More importantly, the illegitimate doctrines of these misguided sects separate them from orthodox (Sunni) Islam, demanding rejection by all Muslims.

As for those born Muslim and raised in ignorance of their own religion, their conversion to other religions cannot fairly be viewed as turning away from Islam—since these individuals never truly embraced Islam in the first place. And, of course, not every person born into a religion is an example of piety, even if knowledgeable of their religion. Then there are those weak of faith, who find religious conviction pushed aside by worldly priorities or the allure of more permissive faiths. But the sum total of these apostates simply doesn't match 1,400 years of Jewish and Christian clergy converting in the opposite direction. Conspicuously absent from the equation is the conversion of sincere and committed, educated and practicing Sunni Muslims, much less scholars (the Islamic equivalent of the convert rabbis and priests).

The question remains: Why *do* some Jewish and Christian scholars embrace Sunni Islam? There is no pressure upon them to do so, and significant worldly reasons not to—things like losing their congregation, position and status, friends and family, jobs and retirement pension. And why don't Islamic scholars turn to something else? Other religions are much more permissive in matters of faith and morals, and there is no enforcement of a law against apostatizing from Islam in Western countries.

So why have Jewish and Christian scholars embraced Islam, while educated Muslims remain firm in their faith? Muslims suggest the answer lies in the definition of Islam. The person who submits to God and not to a particular ecclesiastical body will recognize a divine sense to revelation. Islam represents a continuum from Judaism and Christianity which, once recognized, sweeps the sincere seeker down the smooth road of

revelation. Once a person sees past Western prejudices and propaganda, the Muslim believes, doors of understanding open.

The Islamic viewpoint is that, between the missions of Jesus and Muhammad, those who recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies bore witness to the one true God, and Jesus as his prophet. By Islamic definition, these early “Christians” were Muslims for all intents and purposes. Modern-day Muslims remind us that Jesus could not have taught things that did not exist in the period of his ministry, such as the label of “Christian” and Trinitarian doctrine, which was to evolve over the first few centuries in the post-apostolic age. What Jesus most certainly *did* teach was the simple truth of God being One, and of God having sent himself as a prophet. The Gospel of John says it best: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3), and “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1). Hence, the Islamic viewpoint is that whatever this group of early followers called themselves during the forty years following Jesus (before the word *Christian* was even invented), they lived in submission to the truth of God as conveyed in the teachings of Jesus. And despite whatever label they identified with back then, today their character would be defined by a word attributed to those who live in submission to God via the message of revelation—that is, *Muslim*.

Similarly, “convert” Jewish and Christian scholars believed Muhammad fulfilled Old and New Testament prophecies of the final prophet. Some readers would object on the basis of never having found the name Muhammad in the Bible. On the other hand, how many times have they found the name Jesus in the Old Testament in reference to the promised messiah? The answer is *none*. The Old Testament contains numerous

predictions of prophets to come, but none by their proper name. Some of these predictions are thought to describe John the Baptist, others allegedly speak of Jesus, and still others appear to be unfulfilled by any biblical personage. The Bible informs us that the Jews expected three prophets to follow, for the Pharisees are recorded as having questioned John the Baptist as follows:

Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the Prophet?” And he answered, “No.” (John 1:19–21)

After John the Baptist identified himself in evasive terms, the Pharisees persisted by inquiring, “Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?” (John 1:25).

So there we have it—“Elijah,” “the Christ,” and “the Prophet.” Not just once, but twice. That was the short list of prophets the Jews expected according to their scripture.

Now, despite the fact that John the Baptist denied being Elijah in the above quote, Jesus identified him as Elijah twice (Matthew 11:13–14, 17:11–13). Scriptural inconsistencies aside, let’s chalk up Elijah on the word of Jesus, not think too deeply over who “the Christ” refers to, and concentrate on what remains. Who is the third and last on the Old Testament list of foretold prophets? Who is “the Prophet?”

Some Christians expect this final prophet to be Jesus returned, but others expect a different prophet entirely. Hence the reason why all Jews and many Christians are waiting for a final prophet, as predicted by their own scripture.

The Muslim believes this final prophet has already come, and his name was Muhammad. Through him the Holy Qur'an was revealed by Almighty God (Allah). Those who adhere to the Holy Qur'an as the revealed word of Allah, and to the teachings of the final prophet, Muhammad ibn Abdullah, are regarded to be Muslims both by literal definition *and* by ideology.

PART II: UNDERSTANDING AND APPROACHING GOD

We are all bound to the throne of the Supreme Being by a flexible chain that restrains without enslaving us. The most wonderful aspect of the universal scheme of things is the action of free beings under divine guidance.

—Joseph de Maistre, *Considerations on France*

While monotheistic faiths share a fundamental belief in one God, their understanding of His attributes differs greatly. Many of these differences, like individual strands of a spider web, may appear separate and divergent when viewed too closely. However, these individual threads knit together a larger design, the full significance of which is recognized only when viewed as a whole. Only from a distanced perspective does the complexity of design become known, and the fact that each strand points to a central truth becomes recognized.

1 — God's Name

The difference between the almost-right word & the right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.

—Mark Twain, Letter to George Bainton

A simple example of how several strands of evidence weave together a logical conclusion relates to the name of God. Evidence taken from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam tie together to support a conclusion that should be acceptable to all three religions. For example, recognition of God as “the Creator” and “the Almighty” are universal. Indeed, God is universally recognized by many beautiful names and glorious attributes. When a person calls upon the Creator by any of His many beautiful names or perfect attributes, He is sure to hear the call. So what more is needed?

Well, for some people, a name. A definitive name is needed.

That the name of God in Islam is *Allah* should be of no surprise to anybody. That a person might suggest that the name of God in Christianity is also *Allah* risks provoking consternation, if not violent protest, from the entrenched community of Western Christianity. But a visitor to the Holy Land quickly appreciates that *Allah* is the name by

which God is known to all Arabs, Christians and Muslims alike. The Arab Christians trace their heritage to the days of revelation—in fact, their distant ancestors walked the same land as the prophet Jesus—and they identify the Creator as *Allah*. Their lineage prospered for 2,000 years in a land renowned for religious tolerance up until the creation of the Zionist state of Israel (a little-known fact, and one hugely distorted by the Western media), freely practicing their beliefs up to the present day. And they identify the Creator as *Allah*.

The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church tells us “the name is used also by modern Arab Christians who say concerning future contingencies: ‘In sha’ Allah.’”³³ This phrase *In sha’ Allah* is translated as “Allah willing” or “If Allah wills.” The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* confirms the shared Arabic usage of the name “Allah”: “Allah is the standard Arabic word for ‘God’ and is used by Arab Christians as well as by Muslims.”³⁴

In fact, from the Orthodox Christians of the land that was birthplace to Abraham (now modern-day Iraq), to the Coptic Christians of the Egypt of Moses, to the Palestinian Christians of the Holy Land trod by Jesus Christ, to the entire Middle Eastern epicenter from which the shockwaves of revelation radiated out to the entire world, *Allah* is recognized as the proper name for what Western religions call *God*. The Christian Arabs are known to call Jesus *Ibn Allah*—*ibn* meaning “son.” Pick up any copy of an Arabic Bible and a person will find the Creator identified as *Allah*. So *Allah* is recognized as the name of God in the land of revelation of the Old and New Testaments, as well as of the Qur’an.

What is *not* recognized by Christian and Muslim purists in the Holy Land is the

generic Westernized name, *God*. This word is completely foreign to the untranslated scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Qur'an—it simply doesn't exist in the foundational manuscripts of *any* of the three Abrahamic religions.

So while the *concept* of God is readily recognized, a little research reveals that the word *God* has an uncertain origin. It may have arisen from the Indo-European root, *ghut-*, it may have the underlying meaning of “that which is invoked,” and may bear the prehistoric Germanic *guth-* as a distant ancestor (from which the modern German *Gott*, the Dutch *God*, and the Swedish and Danish *Gud* are derived).³⁵ Lots of maybes, but nothing definitive. No matter how the origin of the word is traced, the name *God* is of Western and non-biblical derivation, and its etymological origin and meaning are lost in history.

In short, we don't know where the word *God* came from, but we *do* know where it *didn't* come from—it didn't come from any of the biblical scriptures, whether Old or New Testament.

Nonetheless, the fact that Middle Eastern Christians equate *God* with *Allah* is an affront to the sensitivities of those who associate *Allah* with heathens. Be that as it may, the relevant question is whether *Allah* can be substantiated as the name of our Creator. Most people would like to be assured that their religious beliefs and practices have a basis in scripture and not just local custom, so one may reasonably question whether the Old and New Testaments support use of the name *Allah* in Judaism and/or Christianity.

The answer is *yes*.

In Judaic texts, God is referred to as *Yahweh*, *Elohim*, *Eloah*, and *El*. In Christian texts the terminology is little different, for the Greek *theos* is nothing more than the

translation of *Elohim*. *Eloi* and *Eli* are also encountered.

In the Old Testament, *Yahweh* is used more than 6,000 times as God's name, and *Elohim* in excess of 2,500 times as a generic name for God; *Eloah* is encountered 57 times and *El* more than 200.^{36, 37} How do these Old Testament names tie in with the name *Allah*? Simple. *Elohim* is the royal plural (a plural of majesty, not numbers) of *Eloah*.³⁸ The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* confirms that the Arabic word *ilah* (the generic Arabic word for "god") is "identical with the *eloah* of Job."³⁹ The linguistic explanation of the origin of the name "Allah" is that the contraction of the Arabic definite article *al* (the) and *ilah* (god), according to the rules of Arabic grammar, becomes *Allah* (The God). Consequently, the 2,500-plus entries of *Elohim* and the 57 entries of *Eloah* in the Old Testament bear direct relation to the name of God as Allah, for *Elohim* is the plural of *Eloah*, which itself is identical with the Arabic *ilah*, from which *Allah* appears to be linguistically derived.

Muslim scholars offer yet another tantalizing thought, for when calling upon their Creator, Muslims beseech Allah by the appellation of *Allahuma*, which means "Oh, Allah." The Siamese twin similarity of the Semitic cousins *Allahuma* and *Elohim* cannot escape easy recognition.

Unfortunately, such facts are not acknowledged by those who approach scriptural analysis more as a religious turf war than as an objective search for truth. An example of the extreme sensitivity over this issue concerns the *Scofield Reference Bible*, edited by the American theologian and minister, Cyrus I. Scofield, and published in 1909 by Oxford University Press. Its original publication incited Christian censure for invoking the name "Alah" (*sic*). Specifically, a footnote to Genesis 1:1 explained that the name *Elohim* is

derived from the contraction of *El* and *Alah*. The fact that this explanation closely matches the aforementioned linguistic explanation that the origin of the name “Allah” may derive from the contraction of the Arabic definite article *al* (the) and *ilah* (god) to *Allah* (the God) did not escape the notice of certain Muslim apologists, the South African Ahmed Deedat in particular. However, the conclusions that can be drawn from the circumstance are speculative, for the *Scofield Reference Bible* did not identify “Alah” as the proper name of the Creator, but rather offered the definition: “*El*—strength, or the strong one, and *Alah*, to swear, to bind oneself by an oath, so implying faithfulness.” Certainly the claim that the *Scofield Reference Bible* in any way implied that the proper name of the Creator is “Allah” would be inappropriate. However, their comment has relevance to what they meant to convey, and does not seem in any way improper, incorrect, or inflammatory. Yet the least suggestion that the name of God in the Old Testament matches that of the Holy Qur’an excited Christian sensitivities. As a result, this footnote was edited from all subsequent editions.

To move from the Old to New Testament, the Christian reader can fairly ask, “How does the New Testament fit into the above-described scheme?” Once again the answer is fairly simple, boiling down to a few concrete points. The first is that the most frequently used word for God (1,344 of the 1,356 entries) in the Greek New Testament is *theos*.⁴⁰ This word is found in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament) primarily as the translation of *Elohim*, the Hebrew name for God.⁴¹ The seventy-two Jewish scholars entrusted to translate the Septuagint (six from each of the twelve tribes of Israel) stuck to tradition by translating *Elohim* to *theos*. The New Testament is no different. The *theos* of the Greek New Testament is the same as the *theos*

of the Greek Old Testament (i.e., the Septuagint), both derived from *Elohim*.

Recognizing that the basis of the *theos* of the New Testament is the *Elohim* of the Old Testament, a person is led back to the above-described link between *Elohim* and *Allah*.

And truly, a person should not be surprised. The *Eli* and *Eloi* allegedly found on the lips of Jesus in the New Testament (Mathew 27:46 and Mark 15:34) are immeasurably closer to “Allah” than to the word “God.” As is the case with *Elohim* and *Eloah*, *Eloi* and *Eli* sound like “Allah” and linguistically match “Allah” in form and meaning. All four of these biblical names are Hebrew, a sister language to Arabic and Aramaic. The languages commonly acknowledged by scholars to have been spoken by Jesus are Hebrew and Aramaic. For example, in the phrase “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*” (Mark 15:34), the words *Eloi* and *lama* are transliterated from Hebrew, while *sabachthani* is transliterated from Aramaic. Hence, being sister languages, it is not surprising that Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic words having similar or the same meaning sound like phonetic cousins. All three are Semitic languages, with slight pronunciation differences for words of the same meaning, as in the Hebrew greeting, *shalom*, and the Arabic greeting, *salaam*, both meaning peace. Suspicion that the Hebrew *Elohim*, *Eloah*, *Eloi*, and *Eli* equate to the Arabic *Allah* in the same way that the Hebrew *shalom* equates to the Arabic *salaam* seems well founded.

Despite the above, there are still those who have been conditioned to propose that “Allah” is the name of a pagan god! They ignore the fact that pagans generically use the word “god” in the same way that Christians, Jews, and Muslims use it, and it does not change the fact that there is only one God. Similarly, the word *elohim* was used in the

Septuagint to refer to pagan gods, as well as to the Greek and Roman gods, in addition to the one true God of the Old and New Testaments.⁴² *Encyclopaedia Judaica* clarifies this point: “The plural form *elohim* is used not only of pagan ‘gods’ (e.g., Ex. 12:12; 18:11; 20:3) but also of an individual pagan ‘god’ (Judg. 11:24; 2 Kings 1:2ff.) and even of a ‘goddess’ (1 Kings 11:5). In reference to Israel’s ‘God’ it is used extremely often—more than 2,000 times . . .”⁴³ Remembering that *Elohim* is the word from which the New Testament *theos* is primarily derived, one finds that use of this biblical term for God flowed from the lips and pens of the pagans, as well as from the Jews and Christians. Does this mean that *Elohim* is a pagan god, or even an exclusively Jewish or Christian God? Obviously, the fact that different religions, pagan religions included, have used “God,” “Elohim,” and “Allah” to identify their concept of the Supreme Being reflects nothing more than their adoption of a commonly recognized name for God.

“Commonly recognized? Sounds strange to me,” some will say. Such is also likely to be the case with the names Shim’own Kipha, Yehowchanan, Iakobos, and Matthaïos—but how strange are these names really? Unknown to some, maybe, but strange? No. These are transliterations of the Hebrew and Greek from which the biblical names Simon Peter, John, James, and Matthew are translated into English.

So which is really more strange—to invent and popularize new names in preference to those identified in scripture, or to remain faithful to what are held to be holy texts? To identify the Creator by the “God” label hatched from human creativity and incubated in Western culture, or by the name specified by the Almighty, as He declares Himself in scripture?

Undeniably, one who speaks of Yehowchanan, Iakobos, and Allah will be greeted

with a certain reserve in the West, but the concern of true believers has never been one of popularity, but of truth of testimony in front of the Creator. A Creator whose proper name, according to Judaic, Christian, and Muslim sources, is “Allah.”

2 — God’s Name and the Royal Plural

You see things; and you say “Why?” But I dream things that never were; and I say “Why not?”

—George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*

No discussion of God’s name is complete without explaining the royal plural. This is a linguistic concept foreign to most native English speakers, but not to the English language. As recently as the seventeenth century, the word *thou* was applied to commoners while the word *you*, the Old English plural of respect, was reserved for royalty and the social elite. Hence “Your Highness” and “Your Lordship,” rather than “Thou Highness” or “Thou Lordship.” Hence also Queen Victoria’s “*We* are not amused,” and Margaret Thatcher’s “*We* are a grandmother.”

In sacred scripture (including the Old and New Testaments, as well as the Holy Qur’an), God is sometimes referred to as “We” or “Us.” For example, Genesis 1:26 and 11:7 record God as having said, “Let Us make man . . .” and “Come, let Us go down . . .”

From the Muslim scripture, the name *Allah*, unlike the Hebrew *Elohim*, is singular and cannot be made plural.⁴⁴ Some Arabic terms (for example, pronouns and pronoun suffixes) do describe Allah in the plural, but in what is known as the royal plural. This is a

plural not of numbers, but of respect. The royal plural is a literary device of Oriental and Semitic languages that denotes majesty. In both Old and New Testaments, *Elohim* is the plural form of *Eloah* (the closest name to “Allah” in transliteration and meaning).⁴⁵ In the same way that expressions of the royal plural in the Qur’an denote the majesty of God, so *Elohim* in the Old and New Testaments conveys the plural of respect.^{46, 47} The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* comments, “*Elohim* is clearly a numerical plural only in a very few instances (cf. Ex. 15:11). Even a single pagan god can be meant by the word (e.g., 1 Kgs. 11:5). In the main, then, we have a plural of majesty.”⁴⁸

People may lob opinions on this subject back and forth from the respectful distance of their individual faiths, but it is interesting to note the conclusion of at least one scholar who spent time on both sides of the theological fence. David Benjamin Keldani served for nineteen years as a Catholic priest of the Chaldean Rite in the diocese of Uramiah (in what was then called Persia), before converting to Islam at the beginning of the twentieth century. Known by the Islamic name of Abdul-Ahad Dawud, he authored one of the earliest scholarly works in the English language on the subject of biblical correlates with the prophet of Islam, Muhammad. In this work, he wrote,

It would be a mere waste of time here to refute those who ignorantly or maliciously suppose the Allah of Islam to be different from the true God and only a fictitious deity of Muhammad’s own creation. If the Christian priests and theologians knew their Scriptures in the original Hebrew instead of in translations as the Muslims read their Qur’an in its Arabic text, they would clearly see that Allah is the same ancient Semitic name of the Supreme Being who revealed and spoke to Adam and all the prophets.⁴⁹

Just as Arab Christians identify God as “Allah,” and just as the Bible employs the royal plural both in pronouns and in the proper name *Elohim*, Western Christians can adopt the same practice without compromising their creed. But faith need not depend on such issues, when there remains a more relevant point to ponder: Regardless of His name, how does God command humankind to understand Him?

3 — Understanding of God

Those who agree with us may not be right, but we admire their astuteness.

—Cullen Hightower

The Jewish understanding of God is relatively concrete, despite the vast differences between Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Hasidic Judaism in other matters. Throughout Judaism, the One-ness of God remains the primary attribute of the Creator, followed by many others, including justice, love, mercy, omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence, sovereignty, truth, wisdom, self-existence, goodness, holiness, eternity, and the even trickier concept of infinity. Furthermore, Jews consider God incomprehensible, for God's attributes transcend those of His creation.

The Jewish attributes of God carry over into Christian definitions as well, although God's One-ness suffered in the transformation from the strict monotheism of the apostolic age to the mysticism of the Trinity. Coming out of one corner is the Trinitarian understanding of three entities in One—a concept repudiated by Unitarian challenges. Indeed, how could substances with opposite polarities (i.e., mortality/immortality; with beginning/without beginning; mutable/immutable, etc.) possibly exist in one entity? Why

did Jesus Christ ascribe his miraculous works exclusively to God and not to any divinity of his own, if he was in fact a partner in divinity? And why did he testify to having received his gifts from God if he and the Creator are co-equal? (For relevant verses, see John 3:35, 5:19–23, 5:26–27, 10:25, 13:3, 14:10, Acts 2:33, 2 Peter 1:17, Rev 2:26–27.)

The doctrine of God being three, but One, that is to say three-in-One, lives up to its label of a religious mystery. Although many profess belief, none can explain it in terms a healthy skeptic can understand. The struggle to explain how “the created” can possibly equate to the Creator is ages-old, as are the other mysteries of Trinitarian belief. Cutting across such issues, the most common Christian image of God is the “big man in the sky,” much like the aged, white-bearded and flowing-robed representation preserved in Michelangelo’s ceiling fresco in the Sistine chapel. The fact that this image is not at all dissimilar to the ancient Greek representation of Zeus has not gone unnoticed, and many object, and not just on the basis of the second commandment (which forbids “any likeness *of anything* that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth . . .”(Exodus 20:4–5)

So, if not on the basis of the second commandment, why else should anyone object? Well, does the biblical passage stating that God created man “in Our image, according to Our likeness” mean that God created man to *look* like Him, or to have dominion over worldly creation, similar to how God has dominion over *all* Creation, ourselves included? The latter is the context in which this verse was revealed, for the full verse reads, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (Genesis

1:26). This verse doesn't read, "In Our image, according to Our likeness; let him have eyes and a nose, a mouth and ears . . ." No, it speaks of dominion, not of physical appearance. Not once, but twice, for in the following verses God said to humankind, "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

So how should we portray God? According to both the second commandment and the above verses, not at all. For not only does God command us not to, but we have no idea what He looks like in the first place.

Similarly, the Christian claim that the God of the Old Testament repented and changed from a harsh and wrathful God to the loving and forgiving God of the New Testament is not universally accepted. In fact, many consider this concept contradicted both by scripture—"God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19)—and by common sense.

The Islamic understanding of God is simpler, and is similar to the Jewish understanding in many respects. The critical elements of Islamic creed rest upon the word *tawheed*, which defines the One-ness of Allah, affirms His many unique names and attributes, and directs people to speak and act in a manner pleasing to God.

According to the Islamic religion, Allah is One in essence, eternal and absolute. He is living, self-subsisting, all-knowing, all-powerful. He is in need of no one, but all are in need of Him. He does not beget, and is not begotten. He is "the First," without beginning, "the Last," without end, and He has no partners or co-sharers in divinity.

Allah is “the Predominant,” above Whom there is no one. He is “the Omniscient,” perfect in knowledge, comprehending all things large and small, open and concealed, and “All-Wise,” free from errors in judgment. He is “the Compassionate,” “the Merciful,” whose mercy encompasses all creation. However, while Allah loves and rewards belief and piety, He hates impiety and punishes transgression. Being “the Omnipotent,” His power is absolute, and none can frustrate His decree.

Many other characteristic names are given in the Holy Qur’an, such as Allah being the Lord and Master of creation: humankind having been created through His will and living, dying, and returning to Him on The Day of Judgment according to His decree. Muslims further recognize that Allah is beyond complete human understanding, as there is nothing in creation comparable to Him. Perhaps in the afterlife we will be gifted with greater understanding, but in this life, knowledge of our Creator is confined within the boundaries of revelation.

Similar to Judaism, but unlike Christianity, there are no physical representations of Allah in Islam. Consequently, the minds of the believers are not befuddled with anthropomorphic “big man in the sky” imagery. Furthermore, the Islamic religion does not assign gender to Allah, for Allah is understood to be transcendentally above all such characteristics. The attribution of sexual traits is considered especially offensive, blasphemous even, to Muslims. So, while referred to by the male pronoun in the Qur’an, this is nothing more than a linguistic necessity, for there is no gender-neutral pronoun in the Arabic language. Lord, God, Creator and Master though He may be, nowhere in Islam is Allah referred to as “Father.”

The Islamic understanding of God meets a number of objections in the

predominantly Christian West. The first is that Islam recognizes Jesus as a prophet but not as a “son of God,” and especially not in a “begotten, not made” sense. The second is that Islam teaches the One-ness of God and condemns the concept of the Trinity. The third objection is that Muslims do not believe humankind inherited the burden of original sin, for this concept is not compatible with God’s justice and mercy. The last is that Muslims believe Jesus was raised up and saved from crucifixion, which invalidates the doctrines of atonement and resurrection.

These differences in belief are significant, for they constitute the major fault-lines where the continental shelves of Christianity and Islam collide.

PART III: DOCTRINAL DIFFERENCES

*The trouble with people is not that they don't know,
but that they know so much that ain't so.*

—Josh Billings, *Josh Billings' Encyclopedia
of Wit and Wisdom*

The differences between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam can be addressed on a number of levels, the most basic of which is that of common sense. Plain *Alice in Wonderland* kind of sense, exemplified by such sensible exchanges as:

“That’s not a regular rule: you invented it just now.”

“It’s the oldest rule in the book,” said the King.

“Then it ought to be Number one,” said Alice.⁵⁰

When correctly applied, this form of logic leaves no room for further argument. However, a complementary avenue of analysis is to contrast Judaic, Christian, and Islamic teachings, and leave readers to weigh the evidence against their own beliefs.

Let us begin by taking an *Alice in Wonderland* peek at the history of the

Unitarian/Trinitarian debate.

1— Unitarians vs. Trinitarians

They decided that all liars should be whipped.

And a man came along and told them the truth.

And they hanged him.

—T.W.H. Crosland, *Little Stories*

Many tenets of Trinitarian faith are regarded as the “oldest rules in the book,” but in fact are derived from non-biblical sources. Rather than being “rule number one,” as a person might logically expect given their primacy, these tenets of faith are not found in the Bible at all.

Alice would object.

And, in fact, many great thinkers *have* objected: thinkers like Bishop Pothinus of Lyons (murdered in the late second century along with *all* the dissenting Christians who petitioned Pope Elutherus for an end to persecution); Leonidas (a follower of Apostolic Christianity and expositor of Pauline innovations, murdered in 208 CE); Origen (who died in prison in 254 CE after prolonged torture for preaching the Unity of God and rejection of the Trinity); Diodorus; Pamphilus (tortured and murdered, 309 CE); Lucian (tortured for his views and killed in 312 CE); Donatus (chosen to be Bishop of Carthage in 313 CE,

and subsequently the leader and inspiration of a Unitarian movement that grew to dominate Christianity in North Africa right up until Emperor Constantine ordered their massacre. So complete was their obliteration that little of the sacred writings of this once huge sect remains); Arius (the presbyter of Alexandria, whose motto was “follow Jesus as he preached,” killed by poisoning in 336 CE); Eusebius of Nicomedia; and not to mention the million-plus Christians killed for refusing to accept official church doctrine in the immediate period following the Council of Nicaea.

Later examples include Lewis Hetzer (decapitated February 4, 1529); Michael Servetus (burned at the stake October 27, 1553, using green branches still in leaf to produce an agonizingly slow, smoldering fire);^{51(EN)} Francis Davidis (died in prison in 1579); Faustus Socinus (died in 1604); John Biddle (who suffered banishment to Sicily and multiple imprisonments, the last of which hastened his death). Biddle, who considered the terminology employed by Trinitarians “fitter for conjurers than Christians,”⁵² established a breastwork of arguments against the assault of Trinitarian theology of such effectiveness that, on at least one occasion, debate opponents arranged his arrest to avoid facing him in public forum.⁵³ He left a legacy of freethinkers affirming divine unity, including some of the leading intellectuals of the day, such as Sir Isaac Newton, John Locke, and John Milton. Biddle’s days in banishment also gave rise to one of the most touching comments on religious persecution, penned by a sympathetic correspondent of *The Gospel Advocate*:

The conclave met, the judge was set,
Man mounted on God’s throne;
And they did judge a matter there,

That rests with Him alone;
A brother's faith they made a crime,
And crushed thought's native right sublime.⁵⁴

During his lifetime, Parliament attempted to kill (literally, that is) Biddle's movement by establishing the death penalty for those who denied the Trinity (May 2, 1648). The year of his death, Parliament passed the second Act of Uniformity and outlawed all non-Episcopal worship and clergy.⁵⁵ Under this act, 2,257 priests were ejected from the clergy and over 8,000 people died in prison out of refusal to accept the Trinity.

There is at least one case where, in the selective wisdom of the church, the population of an entire country was condemned:

Early in the year, the most sublime sentence of death was promulgated which has ever been pronounced since the creation of the world. The Roman tyrant wished that his enemies' heads were all upon a single neck, that he might strike them off at a blow; the inquisition assisted Philip to place the heads of all his Netherlands subjects upon a single neck for the same fell purpose. Upon the 16th February 1568, a sentence of the Holy Office condemned all the inhabitants of the Netherlands to death as heretics. From this universal doom only a few persons, especially named, were excepted. A proclamation of the King, dated ten days later, confirmed this decree of the Inquisition, and ordered it to be carried into instant execution, without regard to age, sex, or condition. This is probably the most concise death-warrant that was ever framed. Three millions of people, men, women, and children, were

sentenced to the scaffold in three lines; and, as it was well known that these were not harmless thunders, like some bulls of the Vatican, but serious and practical measures, which were to be enforced, the horror which they produced may be easily imagined. It was hardly the purpose of government to compel the absolute completion of the wholesale plan in all its length and breadth, yet in the horrible times upon which they had fallen, the Netherlanders might be excused for believing that no measure was too monstrous to be fulfilled. At any rate, it was certain that when *all* were condemned, *any* might at a moment's warning be carried to the scaffold, and this was precisely the course adopted by the authorities. Under this universal decree the industry of the Blood-Council might now seem superfluous. Why should not these mock prosecutions be dispensed with against individuals, now that a common sentence had swallowed the whole population in one vast grave? Yet it may be supposed that if the exertions of the commissioners and councilors served no other purpose, they at least furnished the government with valuable evidence as to the relative wealth and other circumstances of the individual victims. The leading thought of the government being, that persecution, judiciously managed, might fructify into a golden harvest, it was still desirable to persevere in the cause in which already such bloody progress had been made.

And under this new decree, the executions certainly did not slacken. Men in the highest and the humblest positions were daily and hourly dragged to the stake. Alva, in a single letter to Phillip, coolly estimated the number of executions which were to take place immediately after the expiration of holy week, at "eight hundred heads." Many a citizen, convicted of a hundred thousand florins and of no other crime, saw himself suddenly tied to a horse's tail, with his hands fastened behind him, and so dragged to the gallows. But

although wealth was an unpardonable sin, poverty proved rarely a protection. Reasons sufficient could always be found for dooming the starveling labourer as well as the opulent burgher. To avoid the disturbances created in the streets by the frequent harangues or exhortations addressed to the bystanders by the victims on the way to the scaffold, a new gag was invented. The tongue of each prisoner was screwed into an iron ring, and then seared with a hot iron. The swelling and inflammation which were the immediate result, prevented the tongue from slipping through the ring, and of course effectually precluded all possibility of speech.⁵⁶

Only a decade earlier Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor and King of Spain, recommended that “all [Netherlanders] who remained obstinate in their errors were burned alive, and those who were admitted to penitence were beheaded.”⁵⁷ So even the penitent were not to be spared.

The above list catalogs individuals once regarded by the Catholic Church as the most notorious of heretics and by Unitarian Christians as the greatest of martyrs to the revival of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Some of the Unitarians mentioned above were associated with movements of such significance as to have swept across countries, but in all cases the Trinitarian Church eventually dominated through the combination of superior force, inferior tolerance, and willingness to sacrifice fellow men and women to the cause of religious purification.

Although they use the same book for guidance, Unitarian and Trinitarian Christianity could hardly differ more in their methodology. Trinitarian Christianity condemns anything that conflicts with derived doctrine, whereas Unitarian Christianity condemns anything that conflicts with scriptural evidence. The conflict between these two

standards lies at the heart of the debate. The Catholic church succeeded in killing off dissenting individuals, but failed to suppress the thoughts and fierce passions they expressed. Far greater success would have been achieved had the church provided rational and conclusive rebuttal to the challenges, and established their authority through intellectual superiority rather than through tyranny. However, church history documents nearly two millennia of failure to overthrow the arguments of the Unitarians, much to the discredit of the Trinitarians.

Examples can be taken from the life of Arius, but with the caution that, with rare exception, few books about Arius remain, other than those written by his enemies. Consequently, most authors' opinions betray an unkind prejudice, and the only objective course is to examine his pure teachings.

Perhaps one of the earliest Arian arguments is that if Jesus was the "son of God," then there must have been a time when he did not exist. If Jesus was created of the Father, then there must have been a time when the Eternal Father preceded the later-created Jesus. Hence, the Creator and His creation are not the same, and Jesus cannot be considered a partner in Godhead.

Arius held that if Jesus truly did say, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), then equating Jesus with God is to deny the Bible. Arius suggested that if anything is evident from the teachings of Jesus, it is that he affirmed his own humanity and the inviolability of divine unity.

When Trinitarian clergy claimed Jesus was "of the essence of God," Arius and Trinitarian Christians alike objected, for "from the essence" and "of one essence" are materialist expressions, Sabellian^{58(EN)} in origin, not encountered in scripture, and are

contrary to church authority (since the expression originated at a council at Antioch in 269 CE).⁵⁹ When the Catholic Church subsequently asserted that Jesus was “of God,” the Arians responded that the Bible describes all people as being “of God” in the verse, “Now all things *are* of God . . .” (2 Corinthians 5:18—see also 1 Corinthians 8:6).⁶⁰ Forced to correct themselves, the church then asserted that Jesus Christ “is not a creature, but the power and eternal image of the Father and true God.”⁶¹ The Arian response that the Bible describes *all* men as “the image and glory of God” (1 Corinthians 11:7) left the church confounded.⁶² In the words of British theologian Henry Melvill Gwatkin, “The longer the debate went on, the clearer it became that the meaning of Scripture could not be defined without going outside Scripture for words to define it.”⁶³ To adopt such a methodology is to propose that man can explain revelation better than The Source of revelation Himself.

So the arguments started and so they have continued to the present day. After failing to win through rational argument, the Trinitarian Church violently suppressed dissension to the point where entire populations were terrorized into conformity. In the process, the church failed to address the issues. As Castillo, one of the followers of the sixteenth-century theologian Servetus, commented, “To burn a man is not to prove a doctrine.” Meaning, the church can reduce a man to ashes but can only eliminate his arguments through intelligent rebuttal. Typical of those who lack the ability to substantiate their beliefs but who possess the power of oppression, violent response has been the historical reflex against those who challenged Trinitarian creed. That this oppression existed in the vacuum of reasonable justification weakens, rather than strengthens, the institution. As John Toland commented, “This conduct, on the contrary, will make them suspect all to be a cheat and imposture, because men will naturally cry out when they are

touched in a tender part . . . no man will be angry at a question who's able to answer it. . . ."⁶⁴ In the words of H. G. Wells, "They were intolerant of questions or dissent, not because they were sure of their faith, but because they were not. They wanted conformity for reasons of policy. By the thirteenth century the church was evidently already morbidly anxious about the gnawing doubts that might presently lay the whole structure of its pretensions in ruins."⁶⁵

Pythagoras summarized the risk of speaking one's mind in such a circumstance: "To tell of God among men of prejudicial opinion is not safe." Unitarians throughout history noted that Jesus himself predicted, "They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me" (John 16:2–3).

The establishment of Trinitarian doctrine by the inquisitor's chamber, fire, sword, and the headman's axe does not threaten us today. Instead of the horrors of the past, we are now faced with a variety of emotionally provocative justifications, coupled with a systematic avoidance of relevant issues. Disarmed as they now are, much of the modern Christian world follows the example of Myser of Nicholas, a bishop at the Council of Nicaea who boxed his own ears whenever Arius spoke. Some would suggest the response of Trinitarians to Unitarian challenges is not much different today. Clergy tend to avoid debate and cloak their theology in a mantle of emotionally charged, manipulative oratory, embroidered with the glitter of self-righteousness.

Some are swayed by the sanctimonious presentation and parroted sectarian lines; others are not. More than a few God-fearing people tire of such psychological ploys and seek to reexamine the unfounded tenets of the past in the light of modern knowledge and

open-minded analysis.

To this end, let us now consider the relevant issues one by one.

2 — Jesus Christ

But why do you call me “Lord, Lord,” and not do the things which I say? Whoever comes to me, and hears my sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great.

—Jesus Christ (Luke 6:46–49)

Who was the historical Jesus? Throughout history, that question has haunted all who wished to know him. Jews have one concept, Unitarian Christians another, Trinitarians yet one more; and these viewpoints are well known. What is not so widely understood is the Islamic perspective.

Most Christians are pleasantly surprised to learn that Muslims recognize Jesus as Messiah and a Word of God. Most Jews are . . . well . . . not so positively impressed.

Translation of the Holy Qur’an, *surah* (Chapter) 3, *ayat* (verses) 45–47, reads,

Behold! The angels said: “O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah;

“He shall speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. And he shall be (of the company) of the righteous.”

She said, “O my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man has touched me?”

He said: “Even so: Allah creates what He wills: when He has decreed a Plan, He says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is!”

In a theological nutshell, Muslims believe Jesus to be *a* Word of Allah (unlike Christians, who regard him as *the* Word), a Messiah, born by virgin birth to Mary (Maryam) and strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Muslims believe he performed miracles from the cradle, conveyed revelation to humankind in fulfillment of previous scripture, healed lepers, cured the blind and raised the dead, all by the will of Allah. They also believe Allah raised Jesus up at the end of his ministry to spare him the persecution of the people, and substituted another to be crucified in his place. Muslims further believe a time will come when Jesus will be sent back to vanquish the Antichrist. Following this, he will eradicate deviant beliefs and practices in all religions, which will include correcting those who consider themselves to be following his teachings as Christians, but who in fact are astray. He will then establish submission to God’s will (again, the definition of Islam) throughout the world, live an exemplary life, die, and shortly thereafter will come the Day of Judgment.

Given the complexity of the issues, each point warrants separate discussion. No

doubt, the reader hopes that once the picture of the scriptural Jesus is blown up for examination, detailed analysis will reveal a profile consistent with one's expectations. However, in seeking the truth, we must be prepared to encounter a Jesus at odds with two thousand years of false preconception and canonical corruption, the *real* Jesus in conflict with popularized notions, media profiles, and modern Christian teaching. Could Jesus be so contrary to personal and societal constructs that he will openly oppose the churches built around his existence? If so, then popes and priests, parsons and pastors, bishops and cardinals, evangelists and monks, ministers and messianic pretenders may all find Jesus condemning them just as he condemned the Pharisees in his homeland. In other words, a Jesus may surface who will disown those who claim to follow in his name, *just as he said he would*, as recorded in Matthew 7:21–23:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven. *Many* will say to me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name, cast out demons in your name, and done many wonders in your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness!"

This passage clearly predicts a time when Jesus will disown seemingly pious "followers," despite their impressive prophecies, wonders, and exorcisms. Why? Because, as Jesus said, they practiced "lawlessness." These are the followers who, despite their miracles of ministry, disregarded "the Law." What law? God's law, of course—the Old Testament Law Jesus upheld. The same Old Testament Law Paul negated. The same Paul from whom Trinitarian theology took root. The same Trinitarian theology founded largely

upon non-biblical sources.

“Hey, wait a minute,” the reader may say. “Who did Jesus say he would disown, and why?”

Let’s take a closer look.

3 — Word of God

It was then that I began to look into the seams of your doctrine. I wanted only to pick at a single knot; but when I had got that undone, the whole thing raveled out. And then I understood that it was all machine-sewn.

—Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts*, Act II

Jesus is identified in the Holy Qur'an as a "Word" from Allah. *Surah 3:45* reads,

Behold! the angels said:

"O Mary! Allah gives you glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be the Messiah, the son of Mary, held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah" (TMQ 3:45).

In biblical contrast, John 1:1 reads: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Christian exegesis on this point is that Jesus is the Word of God, which means the *logos*—the Greek word for "word," or "saying." This redundant reasoning satisfies some, but not those who realize the explanation repeats the

assertion. The question, “What does it mean?” is left unanswered.

The point is that a statement must rest upon a foundation of axioms, or self-evident truths, if it is to be considered factual. Axioms establish a clear knowledge base from which valid conclusions can be derived. Should conclusions violate foundational axioms, these same conclusions are considered to fall outside the bounds of reason. In the field of mathematics, a simple axiom is that one plus one equals two. Anyone in the world can place an apple next to an apple and see that, by definition, there are now two apples. Add one more, and there are three. Should a scientist later derive some new and revolutionary concept, but one that violates the axiom that one plus one equals two, the whole theory is rendered invalid. In the case of the Christian concept of Jesus being “the Word,” the doctrine unravels, for the simple reason that there *are* no axioms—there *are* no self-evident truths. All that exists is a reshuffling of words.

On the other hand, Islam teaches that the “Word of God” is the word by which Allah commands things into existence—the Arabic word *kun*, meaning “be.” The foundational axiom in this regard is that God creates through willing things into existence. And just as He willed into existence every big, every little, every *thing*, He created Jesus through His divine command, “Be.” *Surah 3:47* points out: “Allah creates what He wills: when He has decreed a Plan, He but says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is!”

In the Bible we find the first example of the “Word of God,” Islamically speaking, in Genesis 1:3, God said “Let there be . . .”—and it was! Returning to the Holy Qur’an, *surah 3:59* reads, “The similitude of Jesus before God is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: ‘Be’: and he was.”

For those who claim the “Word” of John 1:1 (“In the beginning was the Word, and

the Word was with God, and the Word was God”) implies equality between Jesus and God, 1 Corinthians 3:23 muddies the doctrinal waters. This verse states, “And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s.” Now, in what way are “ye Christ’s”? A follower of his teachings? But then, in what way is Christ God’s? And if Jesus were God, why doesn’t the passage read “Christ is God” rather than “Christ is God’s”?

This verse emphasizes the fact that just as the disciples were subordinate to the prophet Jesus, so too was Jesus subordinate to God. Surely this distinction comes as no surprise to those who respect the authority of Isaiah 45:22 (“For I am God, and there is no other”), Isaiah 44:6 (“Thus says the Lord . . . ‘I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God’”), Deuteronomy 4:39 (“The Lord Himself is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; these is no other”), and Deuteronomy 6:4 (“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!”). Given the above, claiming the wording of John 1:1 to equate Jesus to God certainly is selective reasoning at best. All of which leaves a reasonable person to wonder if anything is wrong with the Islamic viewpoint on this issue, whether understood in the framework of Unitarian Christianity or Islam.

4 — Messiah (Christ)

The Old Testament teems with prophecies of the Messiah, but nowhere is it intimated that that Messiah is to stand as a God to be worshipped. He is to bring peace on earth, to build up the waste places, to comfort the broken-hearted, but nowhere is he spoken of as a deity.

—Olympia Brown, first woman minister
ordained in the U.S., Sermon of 13
January, 1895

The concept of Jesus being the predicted messiah is so well known to the world of Christianity as to obviate need for discussion. But Jesus, the messiah, in *Islam*? The fact that Muslims recognize Jesus as the messiah has prompted Christian evangelists to try to sway Muslims to Trinitarian beliefs.

“Was Jesus the Messiah?” questions the evangelist, to which Muslims answer, “Yes.” The evangelist asks, “Was Muhammad the messiah?” Muslims answer, “No.”

The evangelist then seeks to lead the Muslim to conclude that Muhammad was not a messiah, and therefore not a prophet, and that Jesus *was* the predicted messiah, and therefore is partner in divinity.

It's a tortured argument, to which Muslims respond with some questions of their own:

1. Other than Jesus, are there other biblical messiahs? Answer: Yes, lots of them—no less than thirty-eight.⁶⁶ (For specifics, see below.)
2. Were all biblical messiahs, such as the Davidic kings and high priests of ancient Palestine (now called Israel), prophets? Answer: no.
3. Conversely, were all biblical prophets, such as Abraham, Noah, Moses, etc., messiahs? Answer: no.
4. Therefore, if not all biblical prophets were messiahs, how can we disqualify any man's claim to prophethood on the basis of not being a messiah? For in that case, Abraham, Noah, Moses, and other biblical prophets would also be disqualified by the same standard.
5. Lastly, if there were biblical messiahs who were not even prophets, how can being a messiah equate to divinity when the label doesn't even equate to piety?

The fact is that the word *messiah* simply means “anointed one,” and bears no connotation of divinity. So the Muslim has no difficulty recognizing Jesus as Messiah, or in the language of the English translations, Jesus as Christ, but without transgressing into the error of apotheosis (equating with divinity, i.e., deification). Where, then, do “messiah” and “Christ” come from in the first place?

The name “Christ” is derived from the Greek *christos*, which was subsequently Latinized to “Christ.” The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines *christos* as “Christ, Messiah, Anointed One.”⁶⁷ A second opinion is as follows: “The word Messiah

(sometimes *Messias*, following the Hellenized transcription) represents the Hebrew *mashiah*, or *mashuah* ‘anointed,’ from the verb *mashah* ‘anoint.’ It is exactly rendered by the Greek *christos* ‘anointed.’”⁶⁸ In plain English, if people read the Old Testament in ancient Hebrew they will read *mashiah*, *mashuah*, and *mashah*. Read it in ancient Greek, and the above three are “exactly rendered” as *christos*.

The subject becomes interesting at this point because Aramaic, Hebrew, and ancient Greek do not have capital letters, so how Bible translators got “Christ” with a capital C from *christos* with a small C is a mystery known only to them. Claims that context mandates capitalization in the case of Jesus Christ don’t work, for *christos* is applied to a wide variety of subjects throughout the Bible. The verb *chrío*, meaning “to anoint,” is found sixty-nine times in the Old Testament in reference to Saul, David, Solomon, Joash, and Jehoahaz, among others. The noun *christos* (the same *christos* translated to “Christ” in the case of Jesus) occurs thirty-eight times—thirty in reference to kings,^{69(EN)} six in reference to the high priest, and twice in reference to patriarchs of the Old Testament.⁷⁰

The argument can be made that “Christ” with a capital C was “anointed of God” in some special sense, different from all other “christs” with a small C. Either the difference needs to be defined or the argument abandoned. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, “Saul is most commonly called ‘the Lord’s anointed.’ Apart from Saul, only Davidic kings bear the title (except in Is. 45:1).”⁷¹ In reading this quote, few people are likely to take notice of the inconspicuous exception bracketed by parentheses—a literary cloaking device. The few readers who stop and overturn that little exception will find that what crawls out of Isaiah 45:1 is Cyrus the Persian—Cyrus the king of the

fire-worshipping Zoroastrians, that is.

Graham Stanton, Lady Margaret's Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge, summarizes the above information as follows:

The Hebrew word “messiah” means an anointed person or thing. It is translated by “christos” (hence Christ) in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX). In numerous passages in the Old Testament “anointed one” is applied to the divinely appointed King. (See, for example, I Sam. 12:3 (Saul) and 2 Sam. 19:22 (David)). In a few passages “anointed one” is used of prophets (most notably in Isa. 61:1) and of priests (Lev. 4:3,5,16), but without further designation the term normally refers to the king of Israel.⁷²

Consequently, the “Lord’s Christ” (i.e., the “Lord’s *Christos*”—the “Lord’s anointed,” or the “Lord’s messiah”) list includes Saul the Christ, Cyrus the Christ, and the many Davidic kings—all “Christ.” Or at least, that’s how the Bible would read if everyone’s title were translated the same.

But they aren’t.

In the selective wisdom of the Bible translators, *christos* is translated “anointed” in every case but that of Jesus Christ. When the word “anointed” is found in any English translation of the Bible, a person can safely assume that the underlying Greek is the same *christos* from which Jesus gets his unique label of “Christ.” This exclusive title of “Christ” with a capital C, and “Messiah” with a capital M, is singularly impressive. In fact, it makes a person believe that the term implies some unique spiritual link, distinct from the flock of lay “messiahs” with small M’s and no C at all—the *christos* hidden in the

alternative translation of “anointed.”

All this represents a point of embarrassment to educated Christians, for it suggests the questionable ethic of doctrinally driven Bible translation. Those who recognize the concern might also recognize that yet another fundamental difference between Unitarian/Islamic and Trinitarian beliefs exists in a vacuum of biblical support for the Trinitarian viewpoint.

The Islamic religion confirms that Jesus was *an* “anointed” one of God, but does not strain to elevate him beyond the station of prophethood, or to appear more unique than others bearing similar title or prophetic office. The most ancient biblical scriptures, as discussed above, support the Islamic belief that just as all prophets and Davidic kings were *christos*, so was Jesus. The conclusion that no particular king or prophet should bear unique labeling, separate and distinct from others possessing similar titles, is not unreasonable.

One intriguing directive of the Islamic religion is for humankind to be truthful and avoid extremes. In this instance, unjustified literary license is to be shunned. Honest translation should avoid the bias of doctrinal prejudice. A document perceived to be revelation from God should not be adjusted to suit personal or sectarian desires. Such a document should be held in due reverence, and translated faithfully. And the challenge to humankind has always been just this—for the faithful to mold their lives to the truth rather than the other way around. This concept, encompassing the recognition of Jesus and cautioning against extremes in religion, is succinctly expressed in *surah* 4:171 of the Holy Qur’an:

O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah anything but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him [i.e., a soul, created by His command]: so believe in Allah and His messengers (TMQ 4:171).

5 — Virgin Birth

A baby is God's opinion that life should go on.

—Carl Sandburg, *Remembrance Rock*

And in the case of Jesus, a baby was God's determination that revelation should go on.

The fact that Jews, as well as a few “progressive” Christian churches, deny the virgin birth is surprising, for the Old Testament foretells, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14) Whether this passage refers to Jesus Christ or to another of God's creation misses the point. The fact is that virgin birth is foretold, and in the context of a divine sign. Hence, to deny a prophet's legitimacy on this basis is purely capricious.

The mainstream Christian viewpoint is well-known, and the Islamic religion is entirely supportive. Islam teaches that just as God created Adam from nothing more than clay, He created Jesus without biological father as a sign to the people—a miraculous origin portending messianic status. *Surah* 19:17–22 (TMQ) describes Mary receiving the good news of her son as follows:

She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her Our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects.

She said: “I seek refuge from you to (Allah) Most Gracious: (come not near) if you fear Allah.”

He said: “Nay, I am only a messenger from your Lord, (to announce) to you the gift of a holy son.”

She said: “How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?”

He said: “So (it will be): your Lord says, ‘That is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign to men and a Mercy from Us’: it is a matter (so) decreed.”

So she conceived him, and she retired with him to a remote place.

Muslims believe that through the miraculous birth of Jesus, Allah demonstrates the completeness of His creative powers with regard to humankind, having created Adam without mother or father, Eve from man without mother, and Jesus from woman without father.

6 — Jesus Begotten?

To create is divine, to reproduce is human.

—Man Ray, *Originals Graphic Multiples*

Christian laity have accepted the doctrines of Jesus being of divine sonship and “begotten, not made” for so long that these doctrines have largely fallen from scrutiny. Until three centuries ago, dissenting views were suppressed by means sufficiently horrific to have driven intellectual challenges underground. Only in recent times have Western societies been freed from religious oppression, allowing a free exchange of opinions. Not so in Muslim lands, where these Christian doctrines have been freely opposed since the revelation of the Holy Qur’an, 1,400 years ago.

The Islamic understanding is that “begetting,” which is defined in *Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* as “to procreate as the father,” is a physical act implying the carnal element of sex—an animal trait light-years below the majesty of the Creator. So what does “begotten, not made” mean, anyway? Nearly 1,700 years of exegesis have failed to provide an explanation more sensible than the original statement, as expressed in the Nicene Creed. Which is not to say that the Nicene Creed is sensible, but that everything else seems even less so. The creed reads, “We believe in one Lord, Jesus

Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father . . .”

The question has been raised before, “What language is this?” If someone could explain the above in terms a child could understand, and not just be forced to blindly accept, then they will succeed where all others have failed. The oft-recited Athanasian Creed, which was composed roughly a hundred years following the Nicene Creed, bears such strikingly similar convolutions that Gennadius, the patriarch of Constantinople, “was so much amazed by this extraordinary composition, that he frankly pronounced it to be the work of a drunken man.”⁷³

More direct challenges arise. If Jesus is the “only begotten Son of God,” who is David? Answer: Psalms 2:7—“The LORD has said to me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten you.’” Jesus the “only begotten son of God,” with David “begotten” a scant forty generations earlier? The label of “religious mystery” may not satisfy all free-thinkers.

In the face of such conflicts, a reasonable person might question whether God is unreliable (an impossibility), or if the Bible contains errors (a serious possibility, and if so, how does a person know which elements are true and which false?).^{74(EN)} However, let us consider a third possibility—that an incorrect creed has been constructed around a nucleus of scriptural colloquialisms.

One supremely disconcerting challenge revolves around the word, *monogenes*. This is the *only* word in the ancient Greek biblical texts that bears the translation “only begotten.”⁷⁵ This term occurs nine times in the New Testament, and the translation of this term in the Gospel and First Epistle of John form the foundation of the “begotten, not made” doctrine. Of the nine occurrences of this term, *monogenes* occurs three times in

Luke (7:12, 8:42, and 9:38), but always in reference to individuals other than Jesus, and in *none* of these cases is it translated “only begotten.” That alone is curious. A person would rationally expect an unbiased translation to render the same Greek word into equivalent English in all instances. Clearly that is not the case, but again, one would expect . . .

Only John applies *monogenes* to Jesus.⁷⁶ The term is found in five of the six remaining New Testament occurrences, namely John 1:14, 1:18, 3:16, 3:18, and the First Epistle of John 4:9. John 3:16 reads, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son . . .” Such a crucial element of church doctrine, and the other three gospel authors neglected to record it? The Gospel of John alone does not exactly exorcise the ghost of doubt when the other three gospels are conspicuously silent on this matter. By way of comparison, all four gospel authors agree that Jesus rode a donkey (Matthew 21:7, Mark 11:7, Luke 19:35, and John 12:14), which is relatively high on the “who cares?” list. But three of the gospel authors fail to support the critical “begotten, not made” tenet of faith? Hardly a sensible balance of priorities, one would think.

Should the doctrine be true, that is.

So three of the nine New Testament occurrences of the term *monogenes* are in the Gospel of Luke, refer to someone other than Jesus, and are selectively mistranslated. Occurrences four through eight are encountered in the Gospel and First Epistle of John, and are held to describe Jesus. But it’s the ninth occurrence that’s the troublemaker, for “Isaac is *monogenes* in Heb. 11:17.”⁷⁷

We are led to question biblical accuracy at this point, for Isaac was never the only begotten son of Abraham. How could he have been, when Ishmael was born fourteen years prior? Comparison of Genesis 16:16—“Abram [i.e., Abraham] was eighty-six years

old when Hagar bore him Ishmael”—with Genesis 21:5—“Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him”—reveals the age difference. This is confirmed in Genesis 17:25, which tells us Ishmael was circumcised at the age of thirteen, one year prior to the birth of Isaac. Furthermore, Ishmael and Isaac both outlived their father, Abraham, as documented in Genesis 25:8–9. So how could Isaac ever, at any moment in time, have been Abraham’s “only begotten son”?

A lay defense is the assertion that Ishmael was the product of illicit union between Abraham and Hagar, Sarah’s maidservant. Therefore he was illegitimate and doesn’t count.

No serious scholar agrees with this defense, and for good reason. To begin with, Ishmael was Abraham’s begotten son regardless of the nature of his parentage. More concrete validation of his status as Abraham’s legitimate son is simply that *God* recognized him as such, as encountered in Genesis 16:11, 16:15, 17:7, 17:23, 17:25, and 21:11. And if God recognized Ishmael as Abraham’s son, who of humankind dares to disagree?

Yet man is inclined to argument, so by looking at all angles a person should recognize that polygamy was an accepted practice according to the laws of the Old Testament.⁷⁸ Examples include Rachel, Leah, and their handmaids (Gen 29 and 30), Lamech (Gen 4:19), Gideon (Judges 8:30), David (2 Samuel 5:13), and the archetype of marital plurality, Solomon (1 Kings 11:3). *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* notes that polygamy was permitted in the laws of the Old Testament, and was recognized as legally valid by the rabbis.⁷⁹ *Encyclopedia Judaica* acknowledges the common practice of polygamy among the upper classes in biblical times.⁸⁰ Polygamy was banned among

Ashkenazi Jews in the tenth century, but the practice has persisted among Sephardi Jews.^{81, 82} Even in Israel, the chief rabbis officially banned the practice only as recently as 1950, and considering the thousands of years it took to rewrite Mosaic Law, we have good reason to suspect the above rulings were motivated more by politics than by religion.⁸³

So what should we understand when Genesis 16:3 relates, “Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her slave-girl, and gave her to her husband Abram as a *wife*” (italics mine)? Polygamy may offend Western sensitivities, be that as it may. The point is that according to the laws of Abraham’s time, Ishmael was a legitimate child.

Purely for the sake of argument, let’s just forget all that (as many do) and say that Hagar was Abraham’s concubine. Even that claim has an answer. According to Old Testament Law, concubines were legally permitted, and their offspring had equal rights. According to Hasting’s *Dictionary of the Bible*, “There does not seem to have been any inferiority in the position of the concubine as compared with that of the wife, nor was any idea of illegitimacy, in our sense of the word, connected with her children.”⁸⁴ Jacob M. Myers, professor at Lutheran Theological Seminary and acknowledged Old Testament scholar, comments in his *Invitation to the Old Testament*:

Archaeological discoveries help us to fill in the details of the biblical narrative and to explain many of the otherwise obscure references and strange customs that were commonplace in Abraham’s world and time. For instance, the whole series of practices relating to the birth of Ishmael and the subsequent treatment of Hagar, his mother . . . all are now known to have been normal everyday occurrences regulated by law.

A Nuzi marriage contract provides that a childless wife may take

a woman of the country and marry her to her husband to obtain progeny. But she may not drive out the offspring even if she later has children of her own. The child born of the handmaid has the same status as the one born to the wife.⁸⁵

Returning to the *Alice in Wonderland* perspective for a moment, what makes more sense, anyway? Would God design a prophet to violate the same commandments he bears from the Creator? Would God send a prophet with a “do as I say, not as I do” message? Doesn’t it make more sense for Abraham to have acted within the laws of his time by engaging Hagar in a lawful relationship?

Given the above evidence, the union between Ishmael’s parents was legal, God endorsed Ishmael as Abraham’s son, and Ishmael was the first begotten. Look up *Ismael* in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (the reference of those who would be most likely to oppose, on ideological grounds, the piecing together of this puzzle), and there one finds the following agreement: “Ismael (Ishmael), son of Abraham, Abraham’s firstborn . . .”⁸⁶

So what should we make of the book of Hebrews using *monogenes* to describe Isaac as the only begotten son of Abraham? A metaphor, mistranslation, or mistake? If a metaphor, then literal interpretation of *monogenes* in relation to Jesus is indefensible. If a mistranslation, then both the mistranslation and the doctrine deserve correction. And if a mistake, then a greater challenge surfaces—reconciling a biblical error with the infallibility of God.

This problem demands resolution, and the most respected modern translations of the Bible (i.e., the Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Good News Bible, New English Bible, Jerusalem Bible and many

others) have recognized “begotten” as an interpolation and have unceremoniously expunged the word from the text. By so doing, they are narrowing the gap between Christian and Islamic theology, for as stated in the Holy Qur’an, “It is not consonant with the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a son” (TMQ 19:92), and, “He (Allah) begets not, nor is He begotten” (TMQ 112:3).

7 — Jesus Christ: Son of God?

One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives.

—Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar*

Son of God, son of David, or son of Man? Jesus is identified as “son of David” fourteen times in the New Testament, starting with the very first verse (Matthew 1:1). The Gospel of Luke documents forty-one generations between Jesus and David, while Matthew lists twenty-six. Jesus, a distant descendant, can only wear the “son of David” title metaphorically. But how then should we understand the title, “Son of God?”

The “trilemma,” a common proposal of Christian missionaries, states that Jesus was either a lunatic, a liar, or the Son of God—just as he claimed to be. For the sake of argument, let’s agree that Jesus was neither a lunatic nor a liar. Let’s also agree he was *precisely* what he claimed to be. But what, exactly, was that? Jesus called himself “Son of Man” frequently, consistently, perhaps even emphatically, but where did he call himself “Son of God?”

Let’s back up. What does “Son of God” mean in the first place? No legitimate Christian sect suggests that God took a wife and had a child, and most certainly none

conceive that God fathered a child through a human mother *outside* of marriage.

Furthermore, to suggest that God physically mated with an element of His creation is so far beyond the limits of religious tolerance as to plummet down the sheer cliff of blasphemy, chasing the mythology of the Greeks.

With no rational explanation available within the tenets of Christian doctrine, the only avenue for closure is to claim yet one more doctrinal mystery. Here is where the Muslim recalls the question posed in the Qur'an, "How can He have a son when He has no consort?" (TMQ 6:101)—while others shout, "But God can do anything!" The Islamic position, however, is that God doesn't do inappropriate things, only *Godly* things. In the Islamic viewpoint, God's character is integral with His being and consistent with His majesty.

So again, what does "Son of God" mean? And if Jesus Christ has exclusive rights to the term, why does the Bible record, "For I (God) am a father to Israel, and Ephraim (i.e., Israel) is my firstborn" (Jeremiah 31:9) and, "Israel is My son, even my firstborn" (Exodus 4:22)? Taken in the context of Romans 8:14, which reads, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God," many scholars conclude that "Son of God" is metaphorical and, as with *christos*, doesn't imply exclusivity. After all, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion* confirms that in Jewish idiom "Son of God" is clearly metaphorical. To quote, "Son of God, term occasionally found in Jewish literature, biblical and post-biblical, but nowhere implying physical descent from the Godhead."⁸⁷

Hasting's *Bible Dictionary* comments:

In Semitic usage "sonship" is a conception somewhat loosely employed to denote moral rather than physical or metaphysical

relationship. Thus “sons of Belial” (Jg 19:22 etc.) are wicked men, not descendants of Belial; and in the NT the “children of the bridechamber” are wedding guests. So a “son of God” is a man, or even a people, who reflect the character of God. There is little evidence that the title was used in Jewish circles of the Messiah, and a sonship which implied more than a moral relationship would be contrary to Jewish monotheism.⁸⁸

And in any case, the list of candidates for “son of God” begins with Adam, as per Luke 3:38: “Adam, which was the son of God.”

Those who rebut by quoting Matthew 3:17 (“And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased’”) have overlooked the point that the Bible describes many people, Israel and Adam included, as “sons of God.” Both 2 Samuel 7:13–14 and 1 Chronicles 22:10 read, “He (Solomon) shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.”

Entire nations are referred to as sons, or children of God. Examples include:

1. Genesis 6:2, “That the *sons of God* saw the daughters of men . . .”
2. Genesis 6:4, “There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the *sons of God* came in to the daughters of men . . .”
3. Deuteronomy 14:1, “Ye are the *children* of the Lord your God.”
4. Job 1:6, “Now there was a day when the *sons of God* came to present themselves before the LORD . . .”
5. Job 2:1, “Again there was a day when the *sons of God* came to present themselves before the LORD . . .”

6. Job 38:7, “When the morning stars sang together, and all the *sons of God* shouted for joy?”
7. Philippians 2:15, “that you may become blameless and harmless, *children of God* without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation . . .”
8. 1 John 3:1–2, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called *children of God!* . . . Beloved, now we are *children of God* . . .”

In Matthew 5:9 Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Later in Matthew 5:45, Jesus prescribed to his followers the attainment of noble attributes, “that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.” Not exclusively *his* Father, but *their* Father. Furthermore, John 1:12 reads, “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God . . .” If the Bible is to be respected, any person of piety could aspire to the office of “child of God.”

Graham Stanton comments, “In the Graeco-Roman world heroes, rulers, and philosophers were called sons of God. In the Old Testament ‘son of God’ is used of angels or heavenly beings (e.g., Gen. 6:2,4; Deut. 32:8; Job 1:6–12), Israel or Israelites (e.g., Ex. 4:22; Hosea 11:1), and also of the king (notably in 2 Sam. 7:14 and Psalm 2:7).”⁸⁹ And Joel Carmichael elaborates:

The title “son of God” was of course entirely familiar to Jews in Jesus’ lifetime and indeed for centuries before: *all* Jews were sons of God; this was in fact what distinguished them from other people . . .

During the postexilic period in Jewish history the word was further applied to any particular pious man; ultimately it became common in reference to the Righteous Man and the Prince.

In all these cases of Jewish usage, the phrase was plainly a mere metaphor to emphasize a particularly close connection between individual virtue and divine authority.⁹⁰

So if the phrase “son of God” was “plainly a mere metaphor,” why does Christianity elevate Jesus Christ to “son of God” in the literal sense of the phrase? The question echoes unanswered, “Where did Jesus get an exclusive on the title ‘Son of God’?”

If this were not confusing enough, there is Hebrews 7:3, where Melchizedek, King of Salem, is described as being “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, remains a priest continually.” An immortal, preexisting without origin and without parents? Fanciful thinking, or does Jesus have scriptural competition?

Strikingly, Jesus refers to himself as “Son of man” in the Bible, and not as “Son of God.” *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* suggests, “Jesus must have used ‘Son of man’ as a simple self-designation, perhaps as a self-effacing way of referring to himself simply as a human being.”⁹¹ The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* says of “Son of man,” “This title is of special interest because it was the one employed by Jesus by preference to designate Himself and His mission.”^{92(EN)}

As a matter of detail, Jesus described himself as “son of man” eighty-eight times in the New Testament. “Son of God” occurs forty-seven times in the New Testament, but always on the lips of others. As *Harper’s Bible Dictionary* states,

Although the synoptic tradition contains two sayings in which Jesus refers to himself as “son” in relation to God as his Father (Mark 13:32; Matt. 11:27 [Q]), the authenticity of these sayings is widely questioned, and it remains uncertain whether Jesus actually called himself “son” in relation to God as Father. . . .

It is noteworthy, however, that Jesus never claims for himself the title “Son of God.” While he is represented as accepting it in Mark 14:61–62, both Matthew (26:64) and Luke (22:67) are at pains to tone down Jesus’ acceptance of the title as though what he says to the High Priest is, “It—like the title ‘messiah’—is your word, not mine.”⁹³

Hasting’s Bible Dictionary concurs: “Whether Jesus used it [“Son of God”] of himself is doubtful. . . .”⁹⁴

Might the phrase “son of man” imply uniqueness? Apparently not—the book of Ezekiel contains ninety-three references to Ezekiel as “son of man.”

All of which leaves an objective researcher with the following conclusions:

1. Jesus is assumed to be exactly what he called himself.
2. Jesus called himself “son of man.” Eighty-eight times.
3. Nowhere in the Bible did Jesus call himself a literal “son of God.” Not once. Anywhere.⁹⁵
4. And in any case, in Jewish idiom the term “son of God” was either metaphorical or contrary to monotheism.

Christian clergy openly acknowledge the above, but claim that although Jesus

never called himself “son of God,” others did. This too has an answer.

Investigating the manuscripts that make up the New Testament, one finds that the alleged “sonship” of Jesus is based upon the mistranslation of two Greek words—*pais* and *huios*, both of which are translated as “son.” However, this translation appears disingenuous. The Greek word *pais* derives from the Hebrew *ebed*, which bears the primary meaning of servant, or slave. Hence, the primary translation of *pais theou* is “servant of God,” with “child” or “son of God” being an extravagant embellishment. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, “The Hebrew original of *pais* in the phrase *pais theou*, i.e., *ebed*, carries a stress on personal relationship and has first the sense of ‘slave.’”⁹⁶ This is all the more interesting because it dovetails perfectly with the prophecy of Isaiah 42:1, upheld in Matthew 12:18: “Behold, My servant [i.e., from the Greek *pais*] whom I have chosen, My beloved in whom my soul is well pleased . . .”

Whether a person reads the King James Version, New King James Version, New Revised Standard Version, or New International Version, the word is “servant” in all cases. Considering that the purpose of revelation is to make the truth of God clear, one might think this passage an unsightly mole on the face of the doctrine of divine sonship. After all, what better place for God to have declared Jesus His son? What better place to have said, “Behold, My son whom I have begotten . . .”? But He *didn't* say that. For that matter, the doctrine lacks biblical support in the recorded words of both Jesus and God, and there is good reason to wonder why. Unless, that is, Jesus was nothing more than the servant of God this passage describes.

Regarding the religious use of the word *ebed*, “The term serves as an expression of

humility used by the righteous before God.”⁹⁷ Furthermore, “After 100 B.C. *pais theou* more often means ‘servant of God,’ as when applied to Moses, the prophets, or the three children (Bar. 1:20; 2:20; Dan. 9:35).”⁹⁸ A person can easily get into doctrinal quicksand over this point, for out of the eight mentions of *pais theou* in the New Testament, only five refer to Jesus (Matthew 12:18; Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30)—the remaining three are divided between Israel (Lk. 1:54) and David (Lk. 1:69; Acts 4:25). So Jesus did not have exclusive rights to this term, and experts conclude, “In the few instances in which Jesus is called *pais theou* we obviously have early tradition.”⁹⁹

Furthermore the translation, if impartial, should be the same—all individuals labeled *pais theou* in the Greek should be identical in the translation. Such, however, has not been the case. Whereas *pais* has been translated “servant” in reference to Israel and David in the above-referenced verses, it is translated “Son” or “holy child” in reference to Jesus. Such preferential treatment is canonically consistent, but logically flawed.

Lastly, an interesting, if not key, religious parallel is uncovered: “Thus the Greek phrase *pais tou theou*, ‘servant of God,’ has exactly the same connotation as the Muslim name Abdallah—the ‘servant of Allah.’”¹⁰⁰

The symmetry is all the more shocking, for the Holy Qur’an relates Jesus as having identified himself as just this—Abdallah (*abd* being Arabic for slave or servant, Abd-Allah [also spelled “Abdullah”] meaning slave or servant of Allah). According to the story, when Mary returned to her family with the newborn Jesus, they accused her of being unchaste. Speaking from the cradle in a miracle that gave credence to his claims, baby Jesus defended his mother’s virtue with the words, “*Inni Abdullah . . .*” which means, “I am indeed a servant of Allah . . .” (TMQ 19:30)

Translation of the New Testament Greek *huios* to “son” (in the literal meaning of the word) is similarly flawed. On page 1210 of Kittel and Friedrich’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, the meaning of *huios* journeys from the literal (Jesus the son of Mary), to mildly metaphorical (believers as sons of the king [Matt. 17:25–26]), to politely metaphorical (God’s elect being sons of Abraham [Luke 19:9]), to colloquially metaphorical (believers as God’s sons [Matt. 7:9 and Heb 12:5]), to spiritually metaphorical (students as sons of the Pharisees [Matt. 12:27, Acts 23:6]), to biologically metaphorical (as in John 19:26, where Jesus describes his favorite disciple to Mary as “her son”), to blindingly metaphorical as “sons of the kingdom” (Matt. 8:12), “sons of peace” (Luke. 10:6), “sons of light” (Luke. 16:8), and of everything from “sons of this world” (Luke 16:8) to “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). It is as if this misunderstood word for “son” is waving a big sign on which is painted in bold letters: METAPHOR! Or, as Stanton eloquently puts it, “Most scholars agree that the Aramaic or Hebrew word behind ‘son’ is ‘servant.’ So as the Spirit descends on Jesus at his baptism, Jesus is addressed by the voice from heaven in terms of Isaiah 42:1: ‘Behold my servant . . . my chosen . . . I have put my Spirit upon him.’ So although Mark 1:11 and 9:7 affirm that Jesus is called by God to a special messianic task, the emphasis is on Jesus’ role as the anointed servant, rather than as Son of God.”¹⁰¹

The objective researcher now needs to expand the list of notes as follows:

1. Jesus is assumed to be exactly what he called himself.
2. Jesus called himself “son of man.”
3. Nowhere in the Bible did Jesus ever lay claim to the literal title of “son of God.”

4. And in any case, in Jewish idiom the term “son of God” was either metaphorical or contrary to monotheism.
5. The primary translation of the phrase *pais theou* is “servant of God,” and not “son of God.”
6. *Huios*, which is translated from New Testament Greek to the word “son,” is used metaphorically with such frequency as to make literal translation indefensible.
7. Hence, when others spoke of Jesus as “son of God,” the metaphorical sense can be assumed in consideration of Jewish idiom, in combination with the strictness of Jewish monotheism.

So, how does the world of Christianity justify the claim of divine sonship?

Some say Jesus was the son of God because he called God “Father.” But what do other people call God? For that matter, what is Jesus recorded as having taught in the Bible, if not, “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father . . .” (Matthew 6:9)? So not only did Jesus teach that any person can attain the title of “son of God,” he taught his followers to identify God as “Father.”

Some suggest that Jesus was human during life but became partner in divinity following crucifixion. But in Mark 14:62, when Jesus speaks of the Day of Judgment, he says that people will see him as “the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.” So if Jesus is the “Son of Man” come the Day of Judgment, what is he between now and then?

The question repeats itself, “Where did the concept of divine sonship come from?”

If we look to church scholars for an answer, we find “It was, however, at the Council of Nicaea that the church was constrained by circumstances to introduce non-biblical categories into its authentic description of the Son’s relation to the Father. The Arian controversy occasioned this determination.”¹⁰²

Hmm . . . “constrained by circumstances” . . . “constrained by circumstances”—now what, exactly, does that mean? A person can’t help but draw upon familiar parallels, such as, “I was constrained by circumstances—I didn’t have enough money, so I stole,” or, “The truth wasn’t working, so I lied.”

What, exactly, were the circumstances that constrained the church? Was it that Arius demonstrated that they couldn’t justify their doctrine through scripture, and they responded in the only way they knew how to salvage their position? The Bible was all fine and good right up until it failed to support their theology, and then they cast the sacred “rulebook” aside and came up with their own? Is that what happened? Because that’s what they seem to say—that they couldn’t get the Bible to work for them, so they turned to non-biblical sources for support.

Hey! Is that allowed?

Let’s look at what happened.

Arius argued that the divine Triad was composed of three separate and distinct realities, and that Jesus Christ was of created, finite nature. In other words, a man. Arius’ major work, *Thalia* (meaning “banquet”), was first publicized in 323 CE and created such a stir that the Council of Nicaea was convened in 325 to address the Arian challenges. For example, the Arian syllogism proposed that if Jesus was a man, then we shouldn’t say he was God, and if Jesus was God, we shouldn’t say he died. Arius proposed that the