Anthropomorphism, Transcendence and the Qur'an

IN ISLAM GOD STANDS ALONE: Transcendent and Majestic. The faith is marked by a strict and uncompromising ethical monotheism, signifying the absolute Oneness, Unity, Uniqueness and Transcendence of God, in its highest and purest sense, and which formally and unequivocally eliminates all notions of polytheism, pantheism, dualism, monolatry, henotheism, tritheism, trinitarianism, and indeed any postulation or conception of the participation of persons in the divinity of God. Thus, it is a universal truth that mainstream Islam has always emphasized the absolute transcendence and unity of God, avoiding corporeal notions and anthropomorphic images of His being.

However, this understanding of transcendence is not abstract in the philosophical sense of the term, for many poetical expressions are used in the Qur'an to establish a kind of divine yet vague modality with regards to God, so as to make the transcendent Deity immanent and live, and to allow for the provision of ample opportunities to develop a meaningful relationship with Him. There are few Qur'anic expressions, which if taken absolutely literally, could lead to mildly anthropomorphic perceptions of the Deity, and these seemingly anthropomorphic expressions have been the center of debate for Muslim theologians for centuries. Hence, phrases referring to the 'hand,' 'face,' 'eyes,' of God, though very few in number, are taken as mysteries by the majority of Muslim scholars and are either often accepted as they stand with the pronouncement *bila kayf* (literally, "without how" but figuratively as "in a manner that suits His majesty and transcendence") or interpreted

metaphorically. The acceptance *bila kayf* of these phrases is always accompanied with the absolute denial of any similarity between God and His creatures (anthropomorphism) and with repeated emphasis upon the divine otherness and transcendence of God. The total submission to the moral will of this transcendent and unique God is Islam.

The word "Islam" means submission and peace: submission to the moral will of the One and Transcendent God, and peace with the Creator and His creatures. Islam claims to be in unison with the original messages of the prophets Moses and Jesus, but finds fault with the historical Judaic and Christian notions of the deity. The Hebrew Bible's anthropomorphic conceptions of Yahweh (God) and Christianity's belief in a triune God, are both unacceptable to Islam for they are viewed as having compromised God's transcendence and unity. The Islamic Scripture, the Qur'an, on one level, is believed to have been revealed as a corrective measure, to rectify not only the polytheistic conceptions of God but also to clarify and amend Jewish and Christian compromises with regards to God's transcendence. Islam identifies the source of this compromise in the historical adulteration of the previous revelations (both intentional and unintentional) and claims to have fixed the problem through the revelation of the Qur'an, returning to original purity the message that had been undermined and corrupted.

Islam also claims to have avoided the historical mistakes which led to the intermixing or interjection of the words of man with the word of God. Indeed, the faith deems historical authenticity, textual purity and solemn preservation of the original scripture, as key safeguards to guarantee and preserve the transcendence of God and humanity's correct perception of Him.

To demonstrate that the Qur'an has been historically and authentically preserved, and that transcendental monotheism is the essence of the Islamic faith, we discuss initially the Qur'an, the central document of the Islamic faith, to Muslims the very word of God Almighty, and the concept of *al-Tawhid*, the Islamic doctrine of God's unity and the foremost Muslim profession and affirmation that Allah is the One, the absolute, transcendent Creator, the Lord of all that is, independent entirely of creation and of everything.

THE QUR'AN: AN INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is the "Holy Scripture" of the Muslims. It is one of the most widely and seriously read books in the world and one of the leading sources of Arabic learning. To Philip K. Hitti, "the Koran is the most widely read book ever written. For besides its use in worship it is the textbook from which practically every young Moslem learns to read Arabic."[1] The Qur'an is at once the most memorized and the most influential book in the daily life of Muslims and arguably the most influential book in the history of mankind. Held as deeply sacred, Muslims all over the world read it, reflect upon it, and take it as the original, authentic, divine revelation given by God to man. It is universally accepted as the first determining principle and the primary source of the Islamic system of beliefs, laws, ethics, behavior and even emotions and attitudes. It has been the dynamic force behind the rise of Islamic culture and civilization for the last fourteen centuries and regarded by Muslims as the very word of God Almighty, therefore normative and binding in nature. It is neither simple prose nor poetry yet has the ability to arouse its hearers to heights of spiritual ecstasy. The Qur'an's combination of practical daily instruction and dedication to the One and only God makes it the most uniquely treated book in the world.

It could be argued of course that all religious scriptures are of deep significance to their followers and thus held as sacred. Nonetheless, few would contend that the Qur'an is 'something else,' for want of a better phrase, and exits on a very special plane. It refers to itself for instance within its own verses and is aware of its existence. But far more than this, where it is very often the case that people do not live their lives on a daily basis according to the scriptural dictums of their chosen faith, with the Qur'an the opposite is true. God and His revelation fill the consciousness of Muslims with a presence that is rarely witnessed elsewhere and certainly not in the numbers that exist in the Islamic faith. Quite often the dualistic dichotomy of the sacred and the profane plays a key role in the life of man, dividing his existence into two realms, the secular and the religious. By this is meant that religious scriptures are limited to application in terms of spiritual or so-called religious aspects, while the mundane everyday aspects of life are governed by mostly non-

scriptural and culturally conditioned secular laws. The Qur'an is unique in the sense that it is the alpha and omega of the Islamic religion tackling this dualistic dichotomy to allow the sacred to dissolve and overcome the profane, merging life into a God-centered whole, suffusing every aspect with a consciousness of the divine. In this way, the otherwise most mundane dimensions of life, such as politics, and the most mysterious such as sexuality, are elevated to great and sacred realms. Boundaries such as those that exist between Church and State are effectively eliminated by the Qur'anic principle of *al-Tawhid i.e.,* Oneness of God and oneness of the existence, meaning that both Church and State must reflect divine unity by following the divine axioms of universal justice and human equality. In short, it will be found that each and every aspect of Muslim existence and Islamic society, whether Islamic law, culture, civilization, spiritual or ethical teachings, education, social and political systems etc. is rooted in the explicit or implicit teachings of the Qur'anic text. As the Muslim newborn enters the world the first thing he/she hears is the Qur'an, specifically the *adhan* (the Muslim call to prayer containing the *shahadah* a Qur'anic verse), recited into the baby's ear immediately at birth. As the child grows he/she lives his entire life surrounded by the sound of the Qur'an, particularly in traditional Islamic societies where recitations permeate the day. Finally, at death, the Qur'an is recited to facilitate the transition from this material existence to the life hereafter. In a sense, all Muslims whether male or female, are enveloped in the psalmody of the Qur'an from the cradle to the grave; and this has been the situation since the inception of Islam in the seventh century CE.

The word *qur'an* is an Arabic word. It is an infinitive verbal noun derived from the root *qara'a* which means "to read", "to recite", "to combine things together". Therefore, the word *qur'an* literally would mean "reading, recitation, collection, revelation, a book recited or read". The literal meanings of the term correspond to the nature of the Book. It is read, recited, and in reading and recitation the letters and words are joined together to convey the message. On the other hand Imam al-Shafiʿi (d.204 AH), founder of one of the four schools of thought in Islamic jurisprudence, held that *qur'an* is not a derivative noun but a proper noun denoting the divinely revealed book.

The "Qur'an", as a technical term, refers to the Book which is commonly defined by Muslim scholars and theologians as the inimitable word of God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, transmitted from Prophet Muhammad successively without any break, and whose recitation is an act of devotion. Ismail R. al-Faruqi 1921–1986, a Palestinian-American philosopher and scholar, defines it as the final revelation of God's will to the Prophet Muhammad, "conveyed in Arabic and relayed to his companions, memorized verbatim and publicly and continuously recited by them and their descendants to the present time."[2] Hamilton Alexander Rosskeen Gibb (1895–1971), a Scottish orientalist, introduces the Qur'an in the following words:

> The Koran is the record of those formal utterances and discourses which Mohammad and his followers accepted as directly inspired. Muslim orthodoxy therefore regards them as the literal Word of God mediated through the angel Gabriel. They are quoted with the prefix 'God has said'; the phrase 'The Prophet said' is applied only to the sayings of Mohammad preserved in the Traditions. Mohammad's own belief, which is still held without question by his followers, was that these discourses were portions of a 'Heavenly Book' sent down to or upon him in Arabic version, not as a whole, but in sections of manageable length and in relation to the circumstances of the moment.[3]

The organization of the Qur'an: The Qur'an consists of a text of 114 chapters (*suwar* sing. *surah*) of very unequal length, 6,616 verses (*ayah*), 77,934 words, and 323,671 letters. The 114 chapters are divided into *makki* chapters (those revealed in the city of Makkah) and *madani* chapters (those revealed in the city of Madinah), after the names of the two cities in Arabia where the Prophet Muhammad lived, received and delivered the revelation. The *madani* chapters are usually longer than the *makki* chapters. The present order of the chapters is not chronological. The period of revelation spanned 22 years, 2 months and 22 days. Qur'anic verses were revealed in stages, bit by bit, over this time in varying contexts addressing different issues. Therefore, Muslims universally acknowledge that an accurate and complete chronological

arrangement of the Qur'an is not possible. To facilitate public or private recitations, the Qur'an has been further divided into thirty parts (*ajza'* sing. *juz'*) and 60 *ahzab* or sections.

The language of the Qur'an is Arabic. Yet Arabic in a uniquely other and higher plane, for it differs from other Arabic literary compositions and treatises in a number of ways. The Qur'an is also held as a miracle. This follows from not only its own declarations of itself as such,[4] but also due to its contents, linguistic and literary nature, as well as other factors. There is, and always has been, a consensus among Muslim scholars and theologians that the Qur'an is miraculous in character and the miracle of Allah, although views concerning what constitutes this miraculous nature (*iʿjaz*) differ amongst different scholars.

With the exception of a few skeptics like Abu al-Husayn Ahmad ibn Yahya ibn al-Rawandi (827–911), an early Muslim heretic and a critic of religion in general, Muslim writers have unanimously held the Qur'an to be *muʿjiz* "inimitable". Helmut Gatje observes that, "Although opinions concerning the validity and significance of these views, and concerning particulars, may vary, the fundamental existence of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an has not been doubted by Muslim exegetes."[5]

So what constitutes the miraculous nature of the Qur'an? As mentioned a great majority of Muslim scholars both historically and today, hold the language, style, beauty and ideas of the Qur'an to be inimitable and miraculous. As well as the language of the Qur'an itself, which is held as divine, perfect, eternal, unchangeable and unsurpassable, several other factors point to its miraculous nature and these include, the presence of correct scientific data, accurate predictions of future events, reports concerning the past, historical facts unknown at the time, a great variety of ideas, concepts and the timeless nature of its principles etc.

Abu Sulayman Hamd ibn Muhammad al-Khattabi (319–388/931–998), the famous Shafiʿi jurist, observes that the key to the Qur'an's miraculous nature and inimitability or *iʿjaz*, is its eloquence: "The Qur'an is inimitable", he writes, "in that it employs the most eloquent words in ideal forms of composition (*ahsan nuzum al-taʿlil*), embodying the truest meanings."[6] Abu Bakr al-Baqillani (338–403/950–1013), an

Asha'rite Islamic scholar and Maliki jurist, argues that the Qur'anic inimitability is connected with the *nuzum* and *badi'*. The *badi'* denotes that branch of eloquence that deals with the use of literary devices such as the *mumathalah* (similarity), *mubalaghah* (emphatic statement), *mutabaqah* (contrasting pairs), *tajnis* (paronomasia), *isti'arah* (metaphor) etc. Baqillani discusses these literary devices in detail[7] and argues that the Qur'an has made use of these devices in such an eloquent manner (without effecting proper communication) that noone can imitate such a usage and eloquence. Though the *i'jaz* is not confined to these aspects only, the greater part of it, to Baqillani, lies in the Qur'anic *nazm* as a whole i.e. the unique relationship between the words and meanings. Abu Bakr al-Jurjani (d.471/1078), renowned Persian grammarian of the Arabic language, also discusses at great length in his book *Dala'il al-I'jaz*, the many literary devices and subtleties of the Arabic language as employed by the Qur'an.[8] Like Baqillani, he too connects the Qur'anic *i'jaz* with the *nazm,* arguing that the Qur'an relates words in such a fashion as to establish a natural connection between them. The Qur'an miraculously maintains this *nazm* while fully adhering to *m'ani al-nahw* (grammatical rules or meanings). Abu al-Qasim al-Zamakhshari also wrote extensively concerning the *i'jaz* (inimitability) of the Qur'an. In the beginning of his famous commentary on the Qur'an, he thanks God for revealing "*kalaman mu'allafan munazzaman*" meaning "a well-composed and well-knit discourse".[9] His concept of the Qur'anic *nazm,* in essence, is similar to the views of Baqillani and Jurjani. All these scholars regard the Qur'anic language as inimitable.

Contemporary Muslim scholars and literary specialists also consider the language of the Qur'an to be beautiful, its style inimitable and its composition unrivaled and unmatchable. For instance, according to famous Egyptian poet Mustafa Sadiq al-Raf'i (1880–1937), the Qur'an's *i'jaz* (in addition to those aspects of it's inimitability just discussed) is most fully revealed in what he terms its *al-Nuzum al-Musiqi* that is, its musical form.[10] Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), renowned Egyptian author, poet and ideologue, emphasizes the Qur'an's "*al-taswir al-fanni*" as the most revealing aspect of it's inimitability, meaning it's artistic, imaginative, and vivid representations and depiction of thoughts, ideas, incidents, and scenes.[11] This would be an

interesting aspect of the Qur'an to study in light of modern educational or learning psychology,[12] for modern psychology has shown that mental images, as well as vivid and imaginative representations and depictions play a vital role in the encoding, storing, and retrieval of information. Allan U. Paivio (b.1925), emeritus professor of psychology at the University of Western Ontario for instance conducts research on memory and encoding through imagery and verbal forms. His findings if applied to some of the techniques employed in the Qur'an would be illuminating.[13]

Al-Faruqi observes that:

> Without a doubt, the Qur'an is beautiful, indeed, the most beautiful literary composition the Arabic language has ever known. Its beauty, however, is not the consequence of faith but its very cause. The esthetic judgment – that the Qur'an is beautiful, nay, sublime – is not a pronouncement of faith. It is a critical judgment, reached through literary analysis. Hence, its beauty is not only held by Muslims but also by non-Muslims conversant with the literary esthetics of the Arabic language. Instead of beauty depending upon the divine origin and flowing out of faith in that origin, the divine origin of the Qur'an is the reasoned consequence of its literary beauty. Beauty is the cause and evidence for its divine origin.[14]

Fazlur Rahman (1919–1988), a liberal Muslim scholar, notes:

> There is a consensus among those who know Arabic well, and who appreciate the genius of the language, that in the beauty of its language and the style and power of its expression the Qur'an is a superb document. The linguistic nuances simply defy translation. Although all inspired language is untranslatable, this is even more the case with the Qur'an.[15]

John L. Esposito (b.1940), renowned contemporary Christian scholar of Islam, agrees with this conclusion: "Indeed, throughout history, many Arab Christians as well have regarded it as the perfection

of Arabic language and literature."[16] Long before Esposito, Philip K. Hitti (1886–1978), a Maronite Christian scholar of Islam, observed: "No small measure of its force lies in its rhyme and rhetoric and in its cadence and sweep, which cannot be reproduced when the book is translated."[17]

As one historical proof of the inimitable nature of the Qur'an, its *i'jaz*, traditional theologians cite an incident which took place between the polytheists of Makkah and the Prophet. The former harbored great animosity to the new faith and wanted to defeat the Prophet at any cost. As they considered themselves at the pinnacle of literary skill, eloquence and poetry (a fact not untrue) the Qur'an challenged them to produce a book similar to it (Qur'an 2:23 52:34), even ten chapters or *suwar* (11:13) or even one chapter. As the shortest chapter of the Qur'an consists of less than thirty words they were in effect being shown that Allah was not making the challenge difficult for them but giving them great scope to meet it, which of course they were told they could not, thereby proving categorically that the Qur'an was not of human, but divine, origin. Whilst we read of the incident rather glibly, through the spectacles of time, we should be aware that the challenge in fact was a tremendous one, and the stakes were high; for producing even one small verse or chapter equivalent to that of the Qur'an would have granted the Makkans decisive victory over the Prophet sparing them the terrible struggle they would wage, and the great financial, human, social and political cost this would entail. Despite multiple attempts the Makkans failed and could not surpass the Qur'an in eloquence or literary beauty.

Non-Muslim scholars of Islam also agree to this historical evaluation. Professor Gibb writes:

> But the Meccans still demanded of him a miracle, and with remarkable boldness and self-confidence Mohammed appealed as the supreme confirmation of his mission to the Koran itself. Like all Arabs they were connoisseurs of language and rhetoric. Well then, if the Koran were his own composition other men could rival it. Let them produce ten verses like it. If they could not (and it is obvious that they could not), then let them accept the Koran as an outstanding evidential miracle.[18]

Issa J. Boullata, professor of Islam at McGill University, points out, "The fact that the qur'anic challenge [*tahaddi*] has never been taken up successfully, either in Muhammad's lifetime or later on, gave Muslim thinkers cause to consider this as a divine authentication of the Qur'an and proof of the veracity of his prophethood."[19] From these historical as well as internal factors, al-Faruqi concludes, that the Qur'an is "so beautiful that it is inimitable; it is so inimitable that it is miraculous. It is therefore not the work of humans but of God."[20]

In opposition to this view stands the view of Abu Ishaq Ibrahim al-Nazzam (d. 232/846), a Muʿtazilite theologian. Al-Nazzam argued that the Qur'an was not miraculous in its language or style but simply scripture, like other scriptures, containing rules and regulations pertaining to religious matters. Its miracle, he stated, lay in its reports of the past. And its inimitability lay in "*sarafa*" meaning that God averted the attention of the opponents from producing anything like the Qur'an though they had the ability to do so. This notion was accepted by a few Muslim scholars such as Hisham al-Fuwati (d. 218/833), ʿIbbad ibn Sulayman (3rd/9th century) and al-Rummani (d. 386/996). Some contemporary Shiʿites like Ali Dashti (1894–1982), Iranian rationalist and contemporary Iranian statesman, also argued that neither Qur'anic Arabic nor the Qur'an's style was miraculous. He wrote:

> The Qor'an contains sentences which are incomplete and not fully intelligible without the aid of commentaries; foreign words, unfamiliar Arabic words, and words used with other than the normal meaning; adjectives and verbs inflected without observance of the concords of gender and number; illogically and ungrammatically applied pronouns which some times have no referent; and predicates which in rhymed passages are often remote from the subjects. These and other such aberrations in the language have given scope to critics who deny the Qor'an's eloquence.[21]

This view is highly disputed for a great many scholars have roundly rejected the presence in the Qur'an of any such linguistic aberrations.[22] On the other hand, Dashti himself observes that:

> In all fairness the Qor'an is a wonder. Its short *suras* of the Meccan period are charged with expressive force and persuasive power. Its style has no precedent in the Arabic language. Its effusion from the tongue of an illiterate man with no education, let alone literary training, is a phenomenon which, in this respect, can justifiably be described as a miracle.[23]

He concludes contending that, "The Qor'an is miraculous because it enabled Mohammad, single-handedly and despite poverty and illiteracy, to overcome his people's resistance and found a lasting religion; because it moved wild men to obedience and imposed its bringer's will on them."[24]

Though scholars, like al-Nazzam and Dashti, do not deny the divine and miraculous nature of the Qur'an, they do deny the fact that the miracle lies in its language, beauty or style. Their views were debated and rejected by their own followers. For instance, al-Nazzam's own student al-Jahiz and other known Muʿtazilites like al-Qadi ʿAbd al-Jabbar, rejected his views *viz-à-viz* the Qur'anic *iʿjaz*. Even a modernist like Fazlur Rahman observes that

> the question of ideas and doctrines apart, it appears certain that the claim of the miraculous nature of the Qur'an is connected with its linguistic style and expression. Unfortunately, non-Arab Muslims do not realize this enough; while they correctly assume that the Qur'an is a book of guidance and hence may be understood in any language, they yet not only deprive themselves of the real taste and appreciation for the Qur'anic expression but – since even a full understanding of the meaning depends upon the linguistic nuances – also cannot do full justice to the content of the Qur'an.[25]

In the West, several views have existed concerning the origin, nature, style, language and composition of the Qur'an. Unfortunately, since the advent of Islam and until today, there have always been individuals who have looked upon the Qur'an as the work of an impostor and a collection of fabricated stories and absurdities. But what has fuelled this seemingly entrenched antipathy? Islam rose in seventh century Arabia

(a peninsula comprised of mostly desert and barren land), achieving territorial expansion with unprecedented speed, and within a few short years following the death of its founder, overrunning much of the Middle East Christian world, as well as crucial parts of the Church of North Africa. This brilliant success was enormously threatening. As a result, the initial seeds of hostility were sown as opposition to and propaganda against Islam and the Prophet mushroomed, becoming harsh and vociferous. And, from the time of Rudolph de Ludheim (620) until the present, this antipathy has remained. For example, Nichlas de Cuse (1401–1464), German philosopher and bishop, Juan Luis Vives (1493–1540), Valencian Spanish scholar and humanist, Louis Maracci (1612–1700), an Italian Catholic priest who translated the Qur'an into Latin in 1698 in Padua, Johann Jakob Hottinger (1652–1735), Zurich theologian, Theodore Bibliander (1506–1564), Swiss orientalist, Humphrey Prideaux (1648–1724), Oxford theologian, and many other reputed figures have down the centuries presented the Prophet as an impostor, Islam as a cluster of all heresies, the Muslims as brutes, and the Qur'an as a tissue of absurdities. With the onset of the Crusades, the tone and words chosen to present the Prophet Muhammad as well as the Qur'an and its message, became increasingly bitter. Such was the state of affairs that in the Middle Ages a preposterous story of a "dove" and "bull" became the almost standard interpretation of the Islamic revelation. "One tale", writes K. Armstrong,

> spoke of a white bull which had terrorized the population and which finally appeared with the Qur'an the scripture which Muhammad had brought to the Arabs, floating miraculously between its horns. Muhammad was also said to have trained a dove to peck peas from his ears so that it looked as though the Holy Spirit were whispering into them.[26]

In 1697, at the very beginning of the Enlightenment, two influential books appeared on Islam. Barthelmy d'Herbelot de Molainville (1625–1695), a French orientalist, was author of the first, *Bibliotèque Orientale*. In it, he describes Prophet Muhammad with the words: "This is the famous impostor Mahomet, Author and Founder of a heresy,

which has taken on the name of religion, which we call Mohammadan."[27] Author of the second was Humphry Prideaux, a Doctor of Divinity, who in his *The History of The Life of The Great Impostor Mahomet* writes about the Prophet:

> For the first Part of his Life he led a very wicked and licentious Course, much delighting in Rapine, Plunder, and Blood-shed...His two predominant Passions were *Ambition* and *Lust*. The Course which he took to gain Empire, abundantly shews the former; and the multitude of Women which he had to do with, proves the latter. And indeed these two run through the whole Frame of his *Religion*, there being scarce a Chapter in his *Alcoran*, which doth not lay down some Law of war and Blood-shed for the promoting of the one; or else give some Liberty for use of Women here, or some Promise for the enjoyment of them hereafter, to the gratifying of the other.[28]

Ironically despite the 'age of reason' in which these books were written, an age marked by its supposed belief in rationality liberating thinking from dogmatism and crippling religious biases, both books revert to the worst anti-intellectualism of the past, reiterating the same irrational propaganda against the Prophet Muhammad which had prevailed in the Middle Ages.

It is a trend we find continuing even into the eighteenth century with writers such as Simon Ockley, George Sale, and Voltaire, as well as historians such as Gibbon etc., accusing Muhammad of insincerity, ambition and lust. Simon Ockley, for instance, describes Muhammad as a "very subtle and crafty man, who put on the appearance only of those good qualities, while the principles of his soul were ambition and lust."[29]

In 1841, renowned Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), took a stand against this vicious and centuries old hostility, considering Muhammad to be neither an impostor nor ambitious but:

> A silent great soul; he was one of those who cannot but be in earnest; whom Nature herself had appointed to be sincere.... Such

sincerity, as we named it, has in very truth something of divine. The word of such a man is a Voice direct from Nature's own Heart.... To be Sheik of Mecca or Arabia, and have a bit of gilt-wood put into your hand, ... will that be one's salvation? I decidedly think not. We leave it altogether, this impostor hypothesis, as not credible; not very tolerable even, worthy chiefly of dismissal by us.[30]

Many writers followed Carlyle in this regard. French philosopher Ernest Renan (1823–1892), described Muhammad as "a man gentle, sensible, faithful, and free from hatred. His affections were sincere; his character in general bent to benevolence... All his conduct gives the lie to the enterprising audacious character which has been commonly attributed to him."[31] James William Hampson Stobart, Principal of La Martiniere College, Lucknow, India, argued that

the impostor pictured by some writers is refuted alike by his unswerving belief in the truth of his own mission, by the loyalty and unshaken confidence of his companions, who had ample opportunities of forming a right estimate of his sincerity, and, finally, by the magnitude of the task which he brought to so successful an issue. No impostor, it may safely be said, could have accomplished so mighty a work. No one unsupported by a living faith in the reality of his mission, in the goodness of his cause, could have maintained the same consistent attitude through long years of adverse fortune, alike in the day of victory and the hour of defeat, in the plenitude of his power and at the moment of death.[32]

Despite this drastic change in attitude towards Muhammad, most Westerners persisted in maintaining the centuries-old maxims concerning Islam. Hence the Qur'an was condemned as inconsistent, disjointed, the most boring book in the world in fact, and viewed as the word of Muhammad and not of God.

Thomas Carlyle himself described the Qur'an "as toilsome reading as I ever undertook, a wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite.

Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran."[33] Tor Julius Efraim Andrae (1885–1947), a Swedish scholar of comparative religion and bishop of Linköping, well summarized the European attitude toward the Qur'an, noting:

> The eloquence of the Koran has made even less impression on the Occident. Voltaire called it "an incomprehensible book which violates our common sense upon every page", and since Voltaire most European readers have found that the Koran is most bore-some reading that can be imagined.[34]

Although both François-Marie Arouet Voltaire (1694–1778) and Carlyle are reported to have later changed their views on the Qur'an, their first dictum has frequently been echoed in many western writings. English historian Edward Gibbon (1737–1794), for instance describes the Qur'an as "the endless incoherent rhapsody of fable, and precept, and declamation, which seldom excites a sentiment or an idea, which sometimes crawls in the dust, and is sometimes lost in the clouds."[35] Hartwig Hirschfeld (1854–1934), lecturer on Judaeo-Arabic studies at Jews College, London, observes that there are "manifold difficulties" in the Qur'an and these difficulties, "repel rather than encourage the study of the Qur'an." [36]

The old biases and stereotypes of the medieval age still surface occasionally in some Evangelical circles. William St. Clair Tisdall (1859–1928), British historian, philologist and missionary, contends:

> The Qur'an breathes the air of the desert, it enables us to hear the battle-cries of the Prophet's followers as they rushed to onset, it reveals the working of Muhammad's own mind, and shows the gradual declension of his character as he passed from the earnest and sincere though visionary enthusiast into the conscious impostor and open sensualist.[37]

Salomon Reinach (1858–1932), French archaeologist, claims:

> From the literary point of view, the Koran has little merit. Declamation, repetition, puerility, a lack of logic and coherence

strike the unprepared reader at every turn. It is humiliating to the human intellect to think that this mediocre literature has been the subject of innumerable commentaries, and that millions of men are still wasting time in absorbing it.[38]

There are several views commonly held about the Qur'an and its first recipient in contemporary western academic circles. William Montgomery Watt (1909–2006), Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Edinburgh, and influential scholar in his field, like many other contemporary western writers, believed in the utmost sincerity of Muhammad[39] and his capacity to distinguish between divine revelation and the product of his own consciousness.[40] He also professes that the Qur'an contains many divine truths, "I am not a Muslim in the usual sense, though I hope I am a *muslim* as 'one surrendered to God'; but I believe that embedded in the Qur'an and other expressions of the Islamic vision are vast stores of divine truth from which I and other occidentals have still much to learn."[41] Watt also recognized the originality and individuality of the Qur'anic literary nature: "Not merely was it in Arabic language, but in many respects it is typically Arab in its literary form, even though there is no other Arabic literature quite like it."[42]

In spite of all these factors, Watt drew the conclusion, as other orientalists have done, that the Qur'an was a product of Muhammad's creative imagination and that he may have been mistaken in his belief that it was a divine message. "What seems to a man to come from outside himself may actually come from his unconscious."[43] He also felt that the Qur'an's arrangement was "unsystematic", declaring "disjointedness" as a characteristic of the Qur'an and observing that the scripture lacked "sustained composition at any great length".[44] Sir James Norman Anderson (1908–1994), English missionary and academic Arabist, looked upon the Qur'an as "the result of wishful thinking."[45] Edinburgh based Arabist, Richard Bell (1876–1952), propounded a "written-document" hypothesis to explain what he felt was Qur'anic inconsistency, speculating that the Prophet wrote his revelations on certain bits of paper whilst writing certain other chapters (surahs) on the back of these sheets, explaining why heterogeneous

matters, according to him, appear mixed up in the surahs, and drawing the conclusion that verses of the Qur'an became disjointed because they were "wrongly assembled, interrupted or detached."[46] Tor Andrae concludes: "However, although certain passages are characterized by genuine beauty of style, it must be admitted that as a whole the Koran can hardly be regarded as fascinating reading."[47] Arthur Stanley Tritton, (1881–1973), a British historian and scholar of Islam, wrote: "Those, who are not Muslims, cannot endorse these high praises."[48] Patricia Crone (b.1945), a Danish historian of Islam, and Michael Allan Cook (b.1940), a Scottish historian and scholar of Islamic history, write of the Qur'an in their controversial book *Hagarism*, that it is "strikingly lacking in overall structure, frequently obscure and inconsequential in both language and content, perfunctory in its linking of disparate materials, and given to the repetition of whole passages in variant versions."[49] Andrew Rippin, dean of humanities at the University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, observes that, "The text of the Qur'an presents many ambiguities, difficult words whose precise readings are unsure, problems of textual division and apparently incompatible statements."[50]

In contrast, Arthur John Arberry (1905–1969), a prolific and widely respected scholar of Arabic, Persian, and Islamic studies, voiced his protest against such crude treatment of the Qur'an contending that the disciples of the Higher Criticism had enthusiastically tried to demolish the Qur'an by artificial and arbitrary methodologies of their own. They had cut into pieces the main body of the Qur'anic revelation but in doing so the

> erudite sleuths have found themselves with a corpse on their hands, the spirit meanwhile eluding their preoccupied attention. So they have been apt to resort to the device of explaining away what they could not explain; crushed between their fumbling fingers, the gossamer wings of soaring inspiration have dissolved into powder. The most extreme representative of this school of thought, which once tyrannized over Koran studies in the West was no doubt the late Dr. Richard Bell.[51]

After explaining Bell's hypothesis, Arberry goes on to criticize it, contending that both Bell and other champions of the Higher Criticism of the Qur'an had committed violence against it:

> It is against this excess of anatomical mincing that I argue the unity of the sura and the Koran; instead of offering the perplexed reader *disjecta membra* scattered indifferently over the dissecting table, I ask him to look again at the *cadaver* before it was carved up, and to imagine how it might appear when the lifeblood of inspiration flowed through its being. I urge the view that an eternal composition, such as the Koran is, cannot be well understood if it is submitted to the test of only temporal criticism. It is simply irrelevant to expect that the themes treated in the individual sura will be marshaled after some mathematical precision to form a rationally ordered pattern; the logic of revelation is not the logic of the schoolmen. There is no 'before' or 'after' in the prophetic message, when the message is true, everlasting truth is not held within the confines of time and space but every moment reveals itself wholly and completely.52

Many modern Muslim scholars also defend the Qur'an against allegations of disjointedness, lack of overall structure, and ambiguity. Abul A'la Mawdudi (1903–1979), Pakistani scholar and ideologue, argues that the Qur'an is a unique book of revelation. It will defy any preconceived notions of an ordinary book because the Qur'an is "unique in the manner of its composition, in its theme and in its contents and arrangement."53 He argued that the Qur'anic unity lay in its subject, purpose, and central thesis; the subject of the book was man and the purpose, man's salvation. The central concepts of the book are related to God, man and the universe in their mutual relationship to human salvation. The book is neither a book of history nor science: "The real object of the Book is to call people to this 'right way' and to illuminate God's true guidance, which has often been lost either through man's negligence and heedlessness or distorted by his wicked perversity."54 The Qur'an in its entirety is geared towards this central theme of ethical monotheism and salvation through submission to the

moral will of God and peace with man and his surroundings. Mawdudi concludes that:

> If we study the Qur'an with these facts in mind it is bound to strike us that the Qur'an does not deviate one iota from its main subject, its central theme and its basic objective. All the various themes occurring in the Qur'an are related to the central theme; just as beads of different sizes and colors may be strung together to form a necklace.[55]

M. Mahmud Hijazi, a contemporary Egyptian Qur'anic studies scholar, emphasizes "topical unity" in the Qur'an.[56] He observes that the coherence of the Qur'an becomes evident when all the Qur'anic verses on a given subject are brought together and studied in the light of each other. Fazlur Rahman emphasizes the Qur'anic "cohesive outlook on the universe and life"[57] arguing that Qur'anic teaching has "no inner contradictions" but coheres as a whole.[58] Indian Islamic scholar, Hamiduddin Farahi (1863–1930), notes that each chapter of the Qur'an revolves around a central theme which he calls "*ʿAmud*" meaning pillar or column or hub of the chapter.[59] Amin Ahsan Islahi (1904–1997), a Pakistani exegete, argues that there is a structural as well as thematic coherence in the Qur'an.[60] He elaborates upon the concept of "*ʿAmud*" as one of the methods of showing unity and coherence in the Qur'an. Farahi, Islahi, Tabatabai and Sayyid Qutb, all of them try to show that the Qur'an is not inconsistent or disjointed by emphasizing that "each sura is a thematically complete discourse that has been presented in a coherent structural framework."[61] Mustansir Mir, a Youngstown University scholar of Islamic studies, has discussed many of these responses and approaches in detail. After discussing Islahi's work at great length, he concludes:

> Islahi has convincingly shown – although it is not necessary to agree with all of his conclusions – that the Qur'an has design and method. He has shown that individual qur'anic surahs revolve around specific central themes, that an essential complementarity exists between the members of surah pairs, and that larger sets of

surahs, which he calls surah groups, display identifiable patterns of nazm. A study of *Tadabbur-i Qur'an* is bound to leave one with the impression that, contrary to the usually held view, the Qur'an is a well-ordered book.[62]

As the Qur'an to certain degrees is pedagogically oriented (*huda'* guidance and *nur* light), the findings of modern scholars such as these, can possibly be studied and grasped more fully in light of the findings of educational or learning psychology. For instance, it has been observed by a number of psychologists that breaking down topical units into smaller subunits (multiple discrimination) and presenting these subunits over specific intervals and by a variety of methods, greatly facilitates understanding, assimilation, and retention of the material.[63] The Qur'an's supposed disjointedness, seen in this light, transforms into something to be understood and appreciated in this sense. Similarly, the repetitive material of the Qur'an can now be interpreted in light of what psychologists call the process of "*shaping*" through the "*schedules of reinforcement*".[64] "The behavior is shaped through a series of successive approximations to the desired behavior, each made possible by selectively reinforcing certain responses and not others. Thus behavior gradually is brought closer and closer to the desired pattern."[65] The Qur'an, it can be argued, uses a kind of *fixed* as well as *variable interval schedules of reinforcement*, the intention being to bring the reader closer and closer to the desired pattern and goal through constant reinforcement or repetition.

To fully appreciate the repetitions and topical variety found in the Qur'an, an understanding of the Qur'an's discourse on the universe and reality may be required. There is a unity of purpose in the diversity of topics and themes. Sachiko Murata (b. 1943) and William C. Chittick, two Stony Brook University professors of religion, argue that:

> For Westerners, the Koran is an extremely difficult text to appreciate, especially in translation. Even for those who have spent enough years studying the Arabic language to read the original, the Koran may appear as disorderly, inaccurate, and illogical. However, there is enough evidence provided by Islamic civilization

itself, and by the great philosophers, theologians, and poets who have commented on the text, to be sure that the problem lies on the side of the reader, not the book. The text is undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary ever put down on paper. Precisely because it is extraordinary, it does not follow people's expectations as to what a book should be.[66]

They further contend that our cultural milieu is dominated by mass media, internet and educational institutions, meaning that our thought patterns are not shaped by the church, synagogue or other centers of religious learning but predominantly by the media and educational institutions. So, even though the Qur'anic worldview bears close affinity with that of Judaism and Christianity, this has little bearing, for most people whether consciously or unconsciously have little understanding of the biblical world view either:

> We may like to think that our education is scientific and unbiased, but this is a highly biased judgment, as many contemporary thinkers and social critics have told us. As a rule, it seems, when people with no grounding in the Islamic world view pick up a translation of the Koran, they have their prejudices confirmed, whatever these may be. No real entrance into the Koranic view of things is possible without some idea of the type of thinking that infuses the text. And that thinking is foreign to the way that we are taught to think in our own culture and modern education in general.[67]

There is a third group of western writers and thinkers, whose views on the language, composition and impact of the Qur'an, come very close to those of Muslims regarding these issues. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), famous German writer and polymath, for example famously commented on the Qur'anic style, "As often as we approach it, it always proves repulsive anew, gradually, however, it attracts, it astonishes and in the end it forces admiration."[68] H. A. R. Gibb, commenting on Carlyle's statement that the Qur'an is "as toilsome reading as I ever undertook," writes:

But years of close study confirm his further judgment that in it 'there is a merit quite other than the literary one. If a book come from the heart, it will contrive to reach other hearts; all art and authorcraft are of small account to that.' Though, to be sure, the question of literary merit is one not to be judged on *a priori* grounds but in relation to the genius of the Arabic language; and no man in fifteen hundred years has ever played on that deep-toned instrument with such power, such boldness, and such range of emotional effect as Mohammed did.[69]

Emil Derenghem observes that, "Its literary beauty, its irradiation, an enigma even today, have the power of putting those who recite it into a state of fervor, even if they are the least pious."[70] George Sale (1697–1736), the English orientalist, stated that the Qur'an is of

... the utmost elegance and purity of language, ... to its miracle did Mohammad chiefly appeal for the confirmation of his mission, publicly challenging the most eloquent men in Arabia – which was at that time stocked with thousands whose sole study and ambition was to excel in elegance of style and composition – to produce a single chapter that might be compared with it.

He further observes that, "The Style of the Qur'an is beautiful, it is adorned with bold figures after the Eastern taste, enlivened with florid and sententious expressions and in many places where the majesty and attributes of God are described, sublime and magnificent."[71] John Alden Williams, the William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Humanities at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, observes that, "the Arabic of the Qur'an is by turns striking, soaring, vivid, terrible, tender and breathtaking.... It is meaningless to apply adjectives such as "beautiful" or "persuasive" to the Qur'an; its flashing images and inexorable measures go directly to the brain and intoxicate it."[72]

The real problem for those in the West, including orientalists, is that of the Qur'an's translation. It is extremely difficult to convey real poetry in a foreign idiom without loss of profundity and beauty, and this to an enormous degree is the case with the Qur'an. If some of the most

beautiful and eloquent lines of Rumi or Shakespeare are rendered banal when expressed in another language, is it any wonder that given the beauty and literary power of the Arabic language, its true nature and rich erudition become lost in translation? We see this in the many masterpieces of Arabic prose and poetry which have become unrecognizable when translated into other tongues. And if this is the case with the latter, then how much more so for the Qur'an? Renowned scholar of comparative religions, Karen Armstrong (b.1944), has this to say:

> There is something about Arabic which is incommunicable in another idiom: even the speeches of Arab politicians sound stilted, artificial and alien in an English translation. If this is true of ordinary Arabic, of mundane utterance or conventional literature, it is doubly true of the Qur'an which is written in highly complex, dense and allusive language. Even Arabs who speak English fluently have said that when they read the Qur'an in an English translation, they feel that they are reading an entirely different book.[73]

Oxford scholar John Naish comments, "The Qur'an in its original Arabic dress has a seductive beauty and charm of its own. Couched in concise and exalted style, its brief pregnant sentences, often rhymed, possess an expressive force and explosive energy which it is extremely difficult to convey by literal word by word translation."[74] Prolific English writer, Ronald Victor Courtenay Bodley, after having spent years with the nomadic Arab tribes of the western Sahara, stated of the Qur'an that, "In addition to its delivery and its subject, it depends a great deal on its phraseology.... the Koran lose its inspiring rhythm when taken out of Arabic."[75] This would explain the frustrations that those in the West as well as orientalists claim to experience on encountering the Qur'an. More importantly it would also call into question the worth of their assessment, for in point of fact so much is lost in translation that one is forced to question the value of any assessment that uses as its basis a translated edition. In other words, being so far removed from the language of the original they may not be

in a position to appreciate the literary composition, beauty and erudition of this deep and complex text.

The Qur'an's composition is unique in the sense that it is neither complete prose nor poetry. It is neither full history nor biography. Unlike Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, it is not an anthology. Unlike the Buddhist Sutras, it shuns metaphysical dialects. It also defies abstract philosophical homiletics such as Plato's conferences of the wise and foolish teachers. It is a Semitic cry focused upon morality, social transformation, peace, justice and eternal salvation. It eliminates the dualistic dichotomy of the sacred and profane realms. It unifies material life with the spiritual realm and gives conceptual framework and meanings to this worldly life so much so that the transformation of time and space becomes an urgent matter, of great concern to man here and now. The Qur'an is egalitarian and moral through and through. This is why it transformed, as Bodley explains, "the simple shepherds, the merchants and nomads of Arabia into warriors and empire builders." [76] It is worthwhile quoting Philip Hitti here who observes that:

> Its length is four-fifths that of the New Testament in Arabic. The religious influence it exercises as the basis of Islam and the final authority in matters spiritual and ethical are only part of the story. Theology, jurisprudence and science being considered by Moslems as different aspects of one and the same thing, the Koran becomes the scientific manual, the textbook, for acquiring a liberal education.... Its literary influence may be appreciated when we realize that it was due to it alone that the various dialects of the Arabic-speaking peoples have not developed into distinct languages. While today an Iraqi may find it a little difficult fully to understand the speech of a Moroccan, he would have no difficulty in understanding his written language, since in both Iraq and Morocco – as well as in Syria, Arabia, Egypt – the classical language modeled by the Koran is followed closely everywhere. At the time of Muhammad there was no work of the first order in Arabic prose. The Koran was therefore the earliest, and has ever since remained the model prose work. Its language is rhythmical and rhetorical, but not poetical. Its rhymed prose has set the

standard which almost every conservative Arabic writer today consciously strives to imitate.[77]

Observations such as these, when joined with others – like that of Alphonse Marie Louis de Prat de Lamartine (1790–1869), a French writer, poet and politician,[78] Arnold Joseph Toynbee (1889–1975) a British historian,[79] Hans Küng (b.1928), a Swiss Catholic priest, controversial theologian, and prolific author,[80] John Louis Esposito (b.1940), a Georgetown University Professor of Islamic Studies, and many others[81] – come very close to traditional Islamic views and impressions held of the nature of the Qur'an. It must be borne in mind that the Qur'an was revealed to seventh century Arabs, steeped in literary tradition, to be read, recited, and practiced. What this means, in the first instance, is that an extensive knowledge of classical Arabic is essential to appreciate its style, beauty and composition; a critical factor which Mohammad Asad, European Jewish convert to Islam (born Leopold Weiss 1900–1992), acclaimed translator and modern scholar of the Qur'an, recognized.[82] Asad asserted that "familiarity with the Bedouin speech of Central and Eastern Arabia – in addition, of course, to academic knowledge of classical Arabic – is the only way for a non-Arab of our time to achieve an intimate understanding of the diction of the Qur'an."[83]

This does not mean, however, that one needs to be proficient in the various subtleties of the Arabic language to understand the message of the Qur'an. Even if translated into any other language the message itself is simple and easy to grasp. However, in terms of deeper literary / linguistic appreciation of the text, meaning apprehension of the Qur'an's literary style, beauty, and composition, a thorough grasp of the intricacies of classical Arabic is essential. Once a person becomes acquainted with the latter, and combines this with a good working knowledge of other related Islamic sciences, it may become easy for him to appreciate the aesthetic and rhetorical features of the Qur'an. He may then conclude with Arthur J. Arberry that the richly varied rhythms of the Qur'an and its message constitute its "undeniable claim to rank amongst the greatest literary masterpieces of mankind."[84]

Therefore, the remarks and claims of non-Muslim readers that the Qur'an is "crude", "toilsome", and "incoherent rambling" can be

understood and explained in light of these observations and realities. It may not be inappropriate here to conclude with Charles J. Adams that, "The study of the Qur'an for its own sake as the basic document of the Islamic community must now be fostered and encouraged, and study of this kind stands in the first rank of importance for the deepened understanding of Islam as a religion."[85] Attempts along these lines have been made by various scholars like Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993), McGill University Professor of Islam, [86] Bishop Kenneth Cragg (b.1913), renowned Anglican scholar of Islam,[87] Fazlur Rahman,[88] and especially Angelika Neuwirth,[89] a contemporary German expert on the Qur'an, and Pierre Crapon de Caprona, French scholar of the Qur'an. A. Neuwirth, after studying oath clusters (kinds of oaths implied to emphasize points) in the Makkan surahs, concluded:

> 'The book' is thus the only relic from among a complex ensemble of manifold 'accessories of revelation', originally comprising cosmic, vegetative, topographic, cultic and social elements. The book as the symbol of revelation *par excellence* thus acquires even in early Makkan times the dignity which it has preserved until the present day: to represent the noblest emblem of Islamic religion.[90]

It is only after attempts such as these and the application of genuine fresh approaches can the Muslim idea of Qur'anic *i'jaz* be better apprehended and more fully appreciated.

In terms of compilation, the Qur'an is very unlike the present day Bible. For one thing the Qur'an was sanctified, recorded, carefully preserved, and canonized from the very moment of its revelation, i.e. its very inception. Harvard Professor William A. Graham rightly observes that the Christian and Jewish concept of scriptural canonization over time is foreign to Muslims. Muslims view the Qur'an as God's last and final revelation to mankind:

> in the course of one prophetic career during which and immediately afterward it was collected into book form. The collected text, as God's direct Speech, has been explicitly recognized as scripture since the actual time in which it "came

down." Of a process of canonization Muslims know nothing analogous to that of Jewish and Christian scripture.[91]

Muslim sources agree that the Qur'anic text was fully memorized and put into some written forms during the lifetime of the Prophet. At the end of his life, writes al-Faruqi, "Muhammad had about 30,000 contemporaries who had heard and memorized the Qur'an in whole or in part. Several of them could read and write and had committed the Qur'an to writing in part or in toto."[92] The fact that Prophet Muhammad was conscious of the divine nature and otherness of the Qur'an from the very beginning of his mission, is something well attested by historical facts and recognized by western scholars.[93] A. Guillaume, a London University Professor of Arabic states, "It is beyond doubt that his hearers recognized the symptoms of revelation, otherwise his *obiter dicta* which the literature of tradition purports to record would be included in the Qur'an."[94] Western scholars of Islam also agree that the Prophet's followers committed the text of the Qur'an to memory, as was the case with most literary works in Arabia.[95] German Professor of Islam, Helmut Gatje observes that "Muhammad seems to have begun quite early the practice of reciting passages from the Qur'an to his followers for as long as necessary until they knew them by heart. This type of transmission had its model in the propagation of ancient Arabic poetry."[96] It is pertinent to quote at this point Sir William Muir, a resolute Christian missionary:

> The divine revelation was the cornerstone of Islam. The recital of a passage from it formed an essential part of daily prayer public and private; and its perusal and repetition were enforced as a duty and a privilege fraught with religious merit. This is the universal voice of early tradition, and may be gathered also from the revelation itself. The Coran was accordingly committed to memory more or less by every adherent of Islam, and the extent to which it could be recited was one of the chief distinctions of nobility in the early Muslim empire. The custom of Arabia favored the task... The recollective faculty was thus cultivated to the highest pitch; and it was applied, with all the ardor of an awakened spirit, to the

Coran. Such was the tenacity of their memory, and so great their power of application, that several of Mahomet's followers, according to early tradition, could, during his life-time, repeat with scrupulous accuracy the entire revelation.[97]

It is also recognized by orientalists that writing skill was common in the metropolitan town of Makkah due to its mercantile atmosphere. According to Watt, "The Meccan merchants must have kept some record of their transactions, and it may be assumed that writing was well enough known there."[98] That Muhammad used secretaries to write down the Revelation, is also a fact widely affirmed historically and recognized by western scholarship.[99] Gatje observes that "Muhammad also probably dictated connected sections of the revelation to be written down even before his departure for Medinah."[100] Watt quotes several traditional stories to conclude: "it shows that some revelation had been written down by the middle of the Meccan period."[101] W. Muir observes:

Besides the reference in the Coran to its own existence in a written form, we have express mention made in the authentic traditions of Omar's conversion, of a copy of the 20th Sura being used by his sister's family for social and private devotional reading. This refers to a period preceding, by three or four years, the emigration to Medina. If transcripts of the revelations were made, and in common use, at that early time when the followers of Islam were few and oppressed, it is certain that they must have multiplied exceedingly when the Prophet came to power, and his Book formed the law of the greater part of Arabia.[102]

It is true, observes Watt, that "After Muhammad went to Medina his employment of secretaries is well attested. Among those used for the writing down of revelations were ʿUthman, Muʿawiya, Ubayy ibn-Kaʿb, Zayd ibn-Thabit and ʿAbd-Allah ibn-Abi-Sarh."[103]

From these facts and other related authentic traditions, Muslim scholars conclude that the entire text of the Qur'an was written down

in some shape or form in the lifetime of the Prophet. They also unanimously hold that Prophet Muhammad himself was responsible for the arrangement of the verses into surahs.

Many western scholars, like Muir, Burton and Smith agree with these conclusions. Muir, for instance, writes:

> there is good reason for believing that many fragmentary copies, embracing amongst them the whole Coran, or nearly the whole, were made by Mahomet's followers during his life. Writing was without doubt generally known at Mecca long before Mahomet assumed the prophetical office. Many of his followers are expressly mentioned as employed by the Prophet at Medina in writing his letters or dispatches... The ability thus existing, it may be safely inferred that the verses which were so indefatigably committed to memory, would be likewise committed carefully to writing.[104]

Burton also concludes that the present text of the Qur'an was organized by the Prophet himself, observing that the present text, "is none other than the unique text of the revelations…the text which has come down to us in the form in which it was organized and approved by the Prophet."[105] K. Cragg notes that "there is no place for serious misgiving that what is here was substantially what the Prophet said or that what he said under conditions of qur'anic inspiration is not here."[106]

Other orientalists, like Watt, Tritton, Gibb, hold that the Qur'an was partially and not entirely written down in the lifetime of the Prophet. Watt states that "much of the Qur'an was written down in some form during Muhammad's lifetime."[107] A. Guillaume observes that, "There is no doubt that at the death of Muhammad a good deal of the Qur'an was already written down, though not all of it, for while he was alive new suras or chapters were constantly being added."[108] A. S. Tritton concludes:

> The Koran contains the revelations given to Muhammad. These had not been collected during his lifetime though partial collections had been made. A definitive collection was begun

during the reign of his successor and this was revised during the reign of Uthman; there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the result.[109]

It is pertinent to mention here that Abu Bakr (632–634), who succeeded Prophet Muhammad (who died in 632), ordered the collection of the written material in one volume after ʿUmar urged him to do so. The massacre of Yamamah had claimed the lives of many of the memorizers (*huffaz*) and reciters of the Qur'an and as such a written volume became essential. Scholars like Gibb, Watt, and Burton, have critically examined various traditions *vis-à-vis* who started the work of collection in the first place, and believe, as Watt has expressed, that the traditions are "open to criticism on a number of grounds."[110] Still they reach the same conclusion that it was a careful, sincere and scholarly collection of what was recorded in the lifetime of the Prophet. Burton, for instance, observes that, "The task, whoever first accomplished it, was merely one of assembling the Qur'an which already in the lifetime of the Prophet was recorded in writing. Abu Bakr's contribution was to arrange for the transfer of these sheets, then scattered about Medina, into a single volume."[111] It was Zayd ibn Thabit, the secretary of the Prophet, who headed the commission and did the job for Abu Bakr. He collected the written texts of the Qur'an, verified them against his own memory (he was a *hafiz*), used other safeguards, and produced the single volume. "The original copy", observes Sir W. Muir:

> prepared by Zeid was probably kept by Abu Bakr during the short remainder of his reign. It then came into the possession of Omar who... committed it to the custody of his daughter Haphsa, the Prophet's widow. The compilation of Zeid, as embodied in this exemplar, continued during Omar's ten years' Caliphate to be the standard and authoritative text.[112]

ʿUthman (644–656), who succeeded ʿUmar, ordered the same Zayd to produce in written form a single transcript, meaning text, in accordance with the standard Makkan dialect. The reason being that Islam had spread far and the conversion of many non-Peninsular Arabs

as well as non-Arab peoples was causing a variety of expression in the modes of recitation of the Qur'anic text to enter, which itself did allow various variant readings since the time of the Prophet, as we will see in the coming pages. Alarmed by the diversity, ʿUthman ordered recension of the Qur'anic text to one standard transcript and ordered others to be burnt. These burnt pre-ʿUthmanic codices of, for instance, ʿAbd Allah ibn Masʿud (d. circa 653), Ubayy ibn Kaʿb (d. circa 639 or later), Abu Musa al-Ashʿari (d. circa 662 or later), and Miqdad ibn ʿAmr (d. 653), with the exception of a few variant readings, observes Gatje, "had the same suras as the Uthmanic Qur'an, although in somewhat different orders."[113] After critically examining the traditions concerning these codices, Professor Watt concludes that:

> on the whole the information which has reached us about the pre-Uthmanic codices suggests that there was no great variation in the actual contents of the Qur'an in the period immediately after the Prophet's death. The order of the suras was apparently not fixed, and there were many slight variations in reading; but of other differences there is no evidence.[114]

We may kind of agree here with Muir who observes that, "We may then safely conclude that Othman's recension was, what it professed to be, namely, the reproduction of the text of Zeid, with a more perfect conformity to the dialect of Mecca, and possibly a more uniform arrangement of the component parts – but still a faithful reproduction."[115] Here we may add a word of caution that ʿUthman did neither edit nor add anything to the existing text of the Qur'an. He faithfully reproduced the already existent text. This ʿUthmanic text, observes Burton:

> had been arrived at only after the most rigorous inquiries by the commission appointed for the purpose by the Head of State. We have seen something of the scholarly caution with which the commission had approached its sacred task, including in the completed draft only what it had no human reason to doubt had come down from the direct instruction of the Prophet via the most veracious witnesses.[116]

429

Gibb concludes that "it seems reasonably well established that no material changes were introduced and that the original form and contents of Mohammed's discourses were preserved with scrupulous precision."[117] K. Cragg notes, "the consensus of view – Shi'ahs excepted – is that the Qur'an as it stood in ʿUthman's recension omits no significant and includes no extraneous material. The Prophet's death had decisively closed the Book."[118] Therefore, within a short span of 12 years after the departure of the Prophet as al-Faruqi contends,[119] or about 18 years as Watt argues,[120] a standard, complete, written codice of the Qur'an was officially published and made available along with expert teachers to the metropolitan cities of the empire. Al-Faruqi points out that

> several copies were made and distributed…Except for the diacritical marks and some improvements of orthography and calligraphy, the Qur'an extant in every Muslim home around the world today, or kept and recited from memory by the millions, is identical to the material that was recited and conveyed by the Prophet to his companions fourteen centuries ago.[121]

John Wansbrough, a Reader in Arabic at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, who passed away in 2002, authored two controversial books in an effort to critique the Qur'an, denying its existence in the life of the Prophet Muhammad or even before the end of the second/eighth century. Of course much is pure speculation, ignoring as Charles Adam rightly points out with regards to Wansbrough's views, the fact that, "Such matters as the formation of the Qur'an text, the chronology of the materials assembled in the text, the history of the text, variant readings, the relationship of the Qur'an to prior literature, and a host of other issues of this kind have been investigated thoroughly."[122] Nevertheless, refuting all conclusions drawn by conventional Islamic as well as western scholars, Wansbrough in the opinion of Andrew Rippin "has made it clear that we have really only scratched the surface of these studies."[123]

Wansbrough, applied the 'literary' method of biblical criticism to the Qur'an (following Geza Vermes[124] and Raphael Loewe's treatment

of the Bible), undertaking a form-critical analysis of the Qur'anic text to reach a very unusual conclusion. He isolated four major features of the Qur'anic message – divine retribution, sign, exile, and covenant – all taken from the traditional stock of monotheistic imagery,[125] to observe that these motifs are repeatedly signaled but seldom developed in the Qur'an. From here he discerned that the Qur'an has a "referential" style,[126] a significant insight, and to elaborate his point that the Qur'an presumes its audience to fill in the missing details of the narratives[127] refers as example the story of prophet Joseph and his brothers, narrated in surah 12:59. Wansbrough goes on to maintain that this referential character of the Qur'an is a key to understanding that it is not an exclusively Arabian book and that it should not be detached from its Judeo-Christian background.[128] The Qur'an, he argued was produced in an atmosphere of intense Judeo-Christian sectarian debate and was a composite work of "variant traditions."[129]

This emphasis upon the Judeo-Christian background of the Qur'an is an old hypothesis and has been repeatedly mentioned by many western writers. J. Wellhausen, R. Bell, Tor Andrae, S. Zwemer,[130] Gardner,[131] Margoliouth,[132] Torrey,[133] Goitein,[134] W. Ahrens, Anderson, Rodinson, and Jeffery are just a few examples. Wellhausen, Bell, Andrae and Ahrens advocated a Christian Aramaic background to the Qur'anic text, whilst H. Hirschfeld, D. Kuenstlinger, R. Lesczynsky, H. Speyer, Anderson, C. Torrey, A. Geiger, and Katsh, asserted the Judaic foundations of Islam. Anderson, for instance, claimed that, "The long rambling accounts of Jewish patriarchs and prophets [in the Qur'an] correspond in so much detail with the Talmud that of their essentially Jewish origin there can be no doubt."[135] Gieger concluded that, "Muhammad had appropriated much from Jewish sources by means of oral communication, frequently without being aware of the differences between sacred text and later embellishments or exegetical comment, between primary biblical and post-biblical materials."[136]

On the other hand, Bell himself recognized that, "Of any intimate knowledge for the Prophet of either [of] these two religions or the Bible itself there is no convincing evidence."[137] Additionally two thirds of the Qur'an was revealed in Makkah. J. Fueck observes that, "There is no evidence for the existence of a strong Jewish colony with a living

tradition at Mecca, nor does [the] Qur'an give evidence of that intimate knowledge of Jewish matters which we would expect if Muhammad had actually been dependent on Judaism."[138] Ahrens argued that Muhammad "during the greater part of the Meccan period…was predominantly dependent upon Christians in the formulation of his doctrines."[139] He also claimed that Muhammad compromised the best of those principles that had been drawn from Christianity because of political opportunism. Johann W. Fück (Fueck) (1894–1974), a German orientalist, refuting these allegations, argues:

> How, we ask, is it possible for a gang leader who supposedly had no scruples against using whatever means were available to achieve his goals, who carried out "general massacre," and who "took delight in enemies slain," to exert such influence on world history that 1300 years after his death over three hundred million persons confess their faith in him? The witness of many centuries of history and the witness today of an Islam that is still vigorous refute more conclusively than any other argument the judgments that Ahrens expressed on the basis of a flawed interpretation.[140]

Fueck further asserts that the concept of cyclical revelation is intrinsic to Muhammad's prophetic consciousness:

> This cyclical theory of revelation cannot be derived either from Judaism or from Christianity. The idea … seems to be Muhammad's own creation. It reflects his philosophy of history and indicates how he understood his relationship to other peoples who had previously received a divine revelation. It is convincing evidence that Muhammad could not have received the decisive stimulus to prophetic action from either Jews or Christians.[141]

The presence in the Qur'an of many biblical stories is often cited as proof of Muhammad's dependence upon Christian and Jewish sources. Yet this is false logic and there is no rational justification for this, for a number of reasons. First, the Qur'an itself has come to affirm the truth of previous scriptures and to correct that which has been corrupted.

432

Second, and as any student of the Qur'an and the Bible would easily notice, the Qur'anic accounts contain many detailed and important differences as well as focusing on points of emphasis. In fact, the Qur'an focuses largely upon the lessons to be drawn, the glad tidings and warnings that are to be understood, explanation of Islamic doctrines, and consolation of the Prophet through these stories: "All that We relate to thee of the stories of the messengers, with it We make firm thy heart: in them there cometh to thee the Truth, as well as an exhortation and a message of remembrance to those who believe" (11:120). Further, the Qur'an does not give a detailed account of all the previous prophets sent to mankind: "Of some messengers We have already told thee the story; of others we have not" (4:164), and of those prophets whose stories are mentioned, little historical detail is given concerning them. The Qur'an's emphasis is upon the moral and spiritual lessons to be gained from these stories. One important point of difference is that the Qur'an makes no mention of the immoral behavior which the Bible attributes to a number of prophets including Lot (Genesis 19:30–38), David (II Samuel 11:1–27), and Solomon (I Kings 11:1–10). Rather, it vindicates them, purging their personality and character of the indecencies, obscenities, and myriad of moral and spiritual defects ascribed to them.[142] In the Qur'an they are not only presented as God's prophets and messengers but as men of great character, infallible human beings who lived their lives as walking embodiments of submission to God's will and commandments. Watt observes that "there is something original in the Qur'an's use of the stories and in its selection of points for emphasis,"[143] and to him "[i]ts originality consists in that it gave them greater precision and detail, presented them more forcefully and by its varying emphasis, made more or less coherent synthesis of them; above all, it gave them a focus in the person of Muhammad and his special vocation as messenger of God."[144] Additionally biblical stories are used in the Qur'an as illustrative material, playing a subordinate role, to substantiate Qur'anic themes. Fueck observes:

> it was the discovery of a substantive correspondence between his
> own preaching and what Christians and Jews found in their sacred
> books that first motivated him to concern himself more directly

with their tradition, for it is the second Meccan period that first reflects an extensive knowledge of biblical stories.[145]

Watt observes that, "There is no great difficulty in claiming that the precise form, the point and the ulterior significance of the stories came to Muhammad by revelation and not from the communications of his alleged informant."[146] In addition to this, if Muhammad had borrowed material from the Christians or Jews he could never have preached a faith so radically different from Christianity and Judaism. Moreover, given the hostile climate and antagonism that existed between Muhammad and his adversaries, and given that he lived in the full light of history with his life an open book and the subject of detailed and prolific research, the name of an alleged informant could scarcely have remained unknown to his enemies and contemporaries or non-existent down the centuries.

The Qur'an informs us that similar accusations of Muhammad having borrowed and learnt from others were also leveled by the Makkan elite:

> But the misbelievers say: "Naught is this but a lie which he has forged, and others have helped him at it." In truth it is they who have put forward an iniquity and a falsehood. And they say: "Tales of the ancients, which he has caused to be written: and they are dictated to him morning and evening." (25:4–5)

The Makkans would also mention certain individuals as Muhammad's teachers, as the Qur'an states: "And we know well that they say: Only a man teaches him. The speech of him at whom they falsely hint is outlandish and this is manifest Arabic speech" (16:103).

Several reports concerning the alleged teachers of the Prophet exist. One of them names the person as Jabr, a Roman slave of ʿAmir ibn al-Hadrami, another mentions ʿA'ish or Yaʿish, a slave of Huwaytib ibn ʿAbd al-ʿUzza, and yet another points to Yasar, a Jew, whose agnomen (*kunyah*) was Abu Fukayhah, and who was the slave of a Makkan woman. Still another report mentions someone by the name of Balʿan or Balʿam, a Roman slave. In fact rather like grasping at straws any

acquaintance of Muhammad who had the slightest knowledge of the Torah or Gospels was touted as the alleged teacher of the Prophet. The Qur'an refuted these allegations by arguing that the individuals being pointed to were non-native Arabs with minimal language skills while the Qur'an was an Arabic composition of the highest linguistic standards. The evidence therefore spoke for itself.

Today little has changed, with the same accusations still being leveled by writers such as Gardner and others, in this instance naming Salman, a Persian convert, as the chief aid of the Prophet in composing the Qur'an.[147] However, in reality Salman only met the Prophet in Madinah, and as mentioned earlier, the greater part of the Qur'an was revealed in Makkah with most of the stories in question revealed in the later part of the Makkan period. So, given historical facts, the Prophet could not in fact have learned the stories from Salman. Moreover, Salman was a devoted follower of the Prophet, a reality that would categorically not have been the case were either he or any other person for that matter, to have been teaching Muhammad behind the scenes. Consequently, any attempt to prove Muhammad's dependence upon Jewish or Christian sources, argues Fueck, "leads inevitably to insoluble difficulties and contradictions."[148] Muslim explanation of the similarities that exist between the biblical and Qur'anic accounts is clear: a) the source of both scriptures is one, Almighty God, b) the Qur'an came to affirm the truth of previous scriptures c) it came as a corrective force to realign mankind to the straight path where deviation had occurred through tampering with earlier revelation and biblical narrations (whether through changes, insertions or deletions). So Muslims consider similarities neither unusual nor impossible for they form a universal norm that stands for all time.

Then we have Wansbrough, who in addition to emphasizing the Judeo-Christian background of the Qur'an, contends it to be post-Muhammad:

> It is, however, worth recalling that those sources which may with some assurance be dated before the end of the second /eighth century (and thus before Ibn Ishaq) contain no reference to Muslim scripture. A possible exception might be the much cited

and recently disputed chapter of John Damascene's De Haeresibus. I am myself disposed to accept Abel's arguments for later compilation and pseudepigraphy, but were the document authentic it could anyway not be adduced as evidence for a canonical text of Muslim scripture.[149]

Connecting the canonization and stabilization of the Qur'anic text with the formation of the community,[150] he argues that:

Upon the vexed question of a Vorlag for Ghevond text of the alleged correspondence between Leo III and ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAziz I am unable to offer an opinion, though it is of some interest to note that connection of a composition/redaction of the Qur'an with the figure of Hajjaj b. Yusuf, included in both the Risala of ʿAbd al-Masih Kindi and the 'Jerusalem dispute' ascribed to one Ibrahim Taberani, is also found there. That motif, as well as several others in the same correspondence, was characteristic of polemical literature not in the first/seventh but in the third/ninth century. Its point would seem to be [a] quarrel about the authenticity of a Muslim scripture, in the sense of valid suppression of the Biblical dispensations. On the other hand, the witness of both the Patriarch Timotheos and of the Christian tract contained in Heidelberg Papyrus 438, possibly contemporary with the author of sira (d.151/768), might reflect the circumstances obtaining within the Muslim community.[151]

Hence, we have Wansbrough's conclusion of the text of the Qur'an being post-Muhammad – and not the outcome of Muhammad's discourses – supposedly a result of the stabilization of political power by the end of the second/eighth century.[152]

Patricia Crone and Michael Cook espouse the same theory in their controversial work *Hagarism*. Without any further inquiry or questioning of premises they confess their indebtedness to Wansbrough for their views on the Qur'an concluding that, "There is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any way before the last decade of the seventh century, and the tradition which places this rather opaque

revelation in its historical context is not attested before the middle of the eighth."[153] Apparently they would seem to deny the historical existence of Muhammad even, taking both the Qur'an and the entire corpus of Islamic teachings to be simply a conspiracy and fabrication of mysterious "Hagarenes" who supposedly invented their prophet:

> Where the Hagarenes had to fend for themselves was in composing an actual sacred book for their prophet, less alien than that of Moses and more real than that of Abraham. No early source sheds any direct light on the questions how and when this was accomplished. With regard to the manner of composition, there is some reason to suppose that the Qur'an was put together out of plurality of earlier Hagarene religious works. In the first place, this early plurality is attested in a number of ways. On the Islamic side, the Koran itself gives obscure indications that the integrity of the scripture was problematic, and with this we may compare the allegation against ʿUthman that the Koran had many books of which he had left only one. On the Christian side, the monk of Bet Hale distinguishes pointedly between the Koran and the surat al-baqara as source of law, while Levond has the emperor Leo describe how Hajjaj destroyed the old Hagarene 'writings'.[154]

Crone and Cook further assert that the literary character of the Koran, its obscurity of meanings, lack of structure and repetition of whole passages leads one plausibly to argue that "the book is the product of the belated and imperfect editing of materials from a plurality of traditions. At the same time the imperfection of the editing suggests that the emergence of the Koran must have been a sudden, not to say hurried, event."[155] And they go on to conclude that this conspiracy took place at the time of Hajjaj (by the end of the seventh century): "It is thus not unlikely that we have here the historical context in which the Koran was first put together as Muhammad's scripture."[156]

This theory is so nonsensical and historically unsubstantiated that Christian, Jewish and Islamic scholars have rejected it altogether. In his review of Wansbrough's *Qur'anic Studies*, Serjeant dismissively states that, "An historical circumstance so public [as the emergence of the

Qur'an] cannot have been invented."[157] He further observes that John Burton "argues vastly more cogently than Wansbrough's unsubstantiable assertions, that the consonantal text of the Qur'an before us is the Prophet's own recension."[158] N. Daniel reviewing *Hagarism*, writes: "The notion that a "conspiracy" is involved in such a historical reconstruction becomes a rallying point for many objections."[159] Rippin, on the other hand, defends the theory, arguing:

> one hundred years is a long time, especially when one is dealing not with newspaper headlines and printing presses but the gradual emergence of a text at first within a select circle, then into ever widening circles. One could point to similar instances of "conspiracies" in the canonization of the other scriptures, for example the identification of John the disciple with the Gospel of John is well less than a century after the emergence of the text.[160]

Rippin still has to substantiate his claim that the same "conspiracy" took place in connection with the Qur'an.

Fazlur Rahman observes that there are a number of problems with Wansbrough's thesis. Consider first Wansbrough's second thesis, that the Qur'an is a composite of several traditions and hence post-Prophetic: "I feel that there is a distinct lack of historical data on the origin, character, evaluation, and personalities involved in these "traditions." Moreover, on a number of key issues the Qur'an can be understood only in terms of chronological and developmental unfolding within a single document."[161] He further argues that, "Wansbrough's method makes nonsense of the Qur'an, and he washes his hands of the responsibility of explaining how that "nonsense" came about."[162] Fazlur Rahman declares these methods as "so inherently arbitrary that they sink into the marsh of utter subjectivity."[163] We conclude the discussion with R. W. Bulliet's statement in his recent work *Islam, The View from the Edge*:

> I cannot imagine how so abundant and cohesive a religious tradition as that of the first century of Islam could have come into being without a substantial base in actual historical event.

> Concocting, coordinating, and sustaining a fantasy, to wit, that
> Muhammad either did not exist or lived an entirely different sort
> of life than that traditionally depicted, and inculcating it consis-
> tently and without demur among a largely illiterate community of
> Muslims dispersed from the Pyrenees to the Indus River would
> have required a conspiracy of monumental proportion. It would
> have required universal agreement among believers who came to
> differ violently on issues of far less import.[164]

The question of the integrity of the Qur'anic text so easily raised out
of thin air by the authors of *Hagarism* is not surprisingly unsubstan-
tiated. What we are in fact left with is simple repetition of earlier
medieval stereotypes which should have been laid to rest a long time
ago as products of an age of ignorance. I refer specifically to the "dove"
and "bull" stories and claims of Pedro de Alfonso as well as others who
alleged that the existing Qur'an did not really represent what the
Prophet originally claimed. It is a universally recognized, historical fact
that the unity, integrity, and absolute textual uniformity of the Qur'an
has been maintained since its compilation into a single volume and text,
and to challenge this fact is to leap into the realm of the absurd. Wild
theorizing has no place where facts are indisputable. There has only
ever been one same Qur'anic text in the entire world. W. Muir,
recognizing the purity of the ʿUthmanic text, asserted:

> The recension of Uthman had been handed down to us unaltered.
> So carefully, indeed, has it been preserved, that there are no
> variations of importance – we might almost say no variations at
> all – among the innumerable copies of the Coran scattered
> throughout the vast bounds of the empire of Islam. Contending
> and embittered factions, taking their rise in the murder of Uthman
> himself within a quarter of a century from the death of Mahomet,
> have ever since rent the Mahometan world. Yet but ONE CORAN
> has been current amongst them; and the consentaneous use by
> them all in every age up to the present day of the same scripture,
> is an irrefragable proof that we have now before us the very text
> prepared by command of the unfortunate Caliph. There is

probably in the world no other work which has remained twelve centuries with so pure a text.[165]

Burton concludes his book with the following words: "only one text of the Qur'an has ever existed. This is the universally acknowledged text on the basis of which alone the prayer of the Muslim can be valid. A single text has thus already always united the Muslims....What we have today in our hands is the mushaf of Muhammad."[166] H. Lammen's suggests:

> The Qoran, as it has come down to us, should be considered as the authentic and personal work of Muhammad. This attribution cannot be seriously questioned and is practically admitted, even by those Muhammaden sects who obstinately dispute the integrity of the text; for all the dissidents, without exception, use only the text accepted by the orthodox.[167]

The dissident sects he refers to are those of certain extreme Shiites who claimed that two chapters of the Qur'an regarding the merits of the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-bayt*) as well as their right to rule in general and ʿAli's privileges in particular, were omitted by the first three caliphs who succeeded Muhammad to power. Some of these sects also maintained that ʿAli's collection of the Qur'anic text was different to that of Abu Bakr and ʿUthman's. Nevertheless, these reckless, clearly politically motivated, claims of falsification in the Qur'anic text have been roundly rejected by both Sunnis as well as mainstream Shiite scholars. Reaching the same conclusions as mainstream Muslims they have also been dismissed by a number of oriental scholars having thoroughly examined the issue. Gatje writes that, "Such accusations, which are tantamount to alleging a conscious falsification to the determent of ʿAli and his successors, do not stand up under investigation. On the contrary, a so-called 'Sura of Light', which has been handed down outside the Qur'an, represents with certainty a Shiʿite falsification."[168] Burton argues that, "Ali succeeded ʿUthman and if he had any reservation about the Qur'an text, he could easily have reinstated what he regarded as the authentic revelation."[169] Muir

denounces these accusations as "incredible". Giving a number of reasons to reject these accusations he writes:

> At the time of the recension, there were still multitudes alive who had the Coran, as originally delivered, by heart; and of the supposed passages favoring Ali – had any ever existed – there would have been numerous transcripts in the hands of his family and followers. Both of these sources must have proved an effectual check upon any attempt at suppression.

He further argues:

> The party of Ali shortly after assumed an independent attitude, and he himself succeeded to the Caliphate. Is it conceivable that either Ali, or his party, when thus arrived at power, would have tolerated a mutilated Coran – mutilated expressly to destroy his claims? Yet we find that they used the same Coran as their opponents, and raised no shadow of an objection against it.

Muir concludes that, "Such a supposition, palpably absurd at the time, is altogether an after-thought of the modern Sheeas."[170]

According to orthodox Muslims, the preservation of the Qur'anic text in such a fashion is no less than a miracle of Allah, a lasting miracle in fact. Indeed, the Qur'an itself in its very early Makkan period cites Allah's promise to protect it: "We have, without doubt, sent down the Message and We will assuredly guard it [from corruption]" (15:9). And it is due to this divine promise and the Qur'an's wondrous nature and inimitability (*'ijaz*), that nobody, including the extreme Shiite sects mentioned, have been able to introduce anything into its text. This meticulous preservation is a historically attested and universally recognized fact. So much so that the Shiites, observes Lammens, have "not dared to introduce these restitutions into Qorans which the sect uses for liturgical ceremonies and which agree with the edition transmitted by the Sunni channel."[171] Consequently, there has only ever been one text of the Qur'an in the hands of both Sunni and Shiite Muslims, this universally recognized text enjoying normative authority for both. David Pinault a modern scholar on Shiism observes:

> In Sunnism and Shiism alike the Qur'an enjoys an authority not fully comparable with that of the Bible in Judaism and Christianity. The latter religions ascribe the Bible to human authors (albeit divinely inspired) and consider the component texts comprising Scripture to be the product of human history, the records of the Creator's interaction with His people. From a Muslim perspective the author of the Qur'an is not Muhammad nor any other human but rather God Himself...[172]

S. Hossein Nasr, who himself happens to be a Shiite, puts the point in a nutshell: "There is only one text accepted by all Muslims, Sunnis and Shi'ites and other branches of Islam alike, and it is this definitive book which stands as the central source of truth, guidance and of inspiration for all Muslims."[173]

The Qur'an is held to be revealed in seven variants of recitation or *qira'ah*. These variants of recitation were approved and tolerated by the Prophet himself because they were congenial to the reciters' tribal or local linguistic traditions, in other words the purpose was to facilitate recitation for Muslims. These variants do not cause much change either in the meaning or the structure or format of the verses. However, some orientalists have misunderstood and overemphasized these various modes of recitation to insinuate a sort of disunity and nonconformity in the Qur'anic text failing to understand that the text of the Qur'an has allowed several equally valid ways of recitation without affecting as mentioned meaning or structure. Other orientalists have concurred with Muslim scholars, and have concluded over the years that these variants are just different ways of reciting the text which does not make much difference either to the Qur'an's meaning or the overall sense of the text. As A. S. Tritton observes:

> There are seven or ten different 'readings' of the Koran; these are for the most part what the English word implies, different ways of pronouncing the text, elision or assimilation of certain letters. Many variants in vocalization are recorded but they are so slight as to be negligible, except for specialists: they make no vital difference to the sense.[174]

442

Sir W. Muir writes: "The various readings are wonderfully few in number, and are chiefly confined to differences in the vowel points and diacritical signs."[175] Willaim A. Graham remarks:

> Accordingly, seven, ten, or fourteen traditions of *qira'at* are sometimes cited as "authentic" in the Muslim literature, and even these traditions have branched to form subtraditions. As a result, the panoply of variant *riwayat* that the expert must master is quite large, even though the actual textual variations they represent are relatively minor and do not involve crucial differences in the literal meaning of the sacred text.[176]

These conclusions drawn by orientalists are almost identical to the views of Muslims regarding the issue at hand. Muslims maintain that these variant readings were authorized by the Prophet himself, and the disciples kept them as exegetical footnotes in their commentaries and passed them on from generation to generation as *qira'ah* or "recitation tradition." These variant readings affect neither the form nor the substance nor the meaning of the Qur'an.

These facts led contemporary Harvard scholar H. P. Smith to reach conclusions fairly close to those of traditional Muslim views *viz-à-viz* the authenticity and integrity of the Qur'an. He observes with regards to the Qur'an that

> there is no reason to suspect either its integrity or its authenticity. The assurances we have on this point are very complete. The prime fact is that the revelations were committed to memory by a large body of converts during the life of Mohammad....There can be no reasonable doubt that the copies in our hands correspond very closely with this original, and that this original does not vary in any important particular from the text recited by Mohammad himself.[177]

R. V. C. Bodley observes that

> today there is no possible doubt that the Koran which is read wherever there are Moslems, is the same version as that translated

from Hafsa's master copy.... What is important is that the Koran is the only work which has survived for over twelve hundred years with an unadulterated text. Neither in the Jewish religion nor in the Christian is there anything which faintly compares to this.[178]

In addition Arabic, the original language of the Qur'an and the Prophet, is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world today, actively used by millions as their first language. In fact, it is the only Semitic tongue which has remained uninterruptedly alive for thousands of years, and moreover is the only living language which has remained largely unchanged for the last fourteen centuries. We have already quoted Hitti who argued that it was the Qur'an that "kept the language uniform. So that whereas today a Moroccan uses a dialect different from that used by an Arabian or an Iraqi, all write in the same style."[179] In fact it was the Qur'an which, according to Esposito, was "central to the development of Arabic linguistics and provided the basis for the development of Arabic grammar, vocabulary, and syntax."[180]

Moreover, unlike the Bible, the followers of the Qur'an believe it to be the divine word of God, the revelation verbatim. It is authoritative and normative to the very definition of the word, and although Muslims may differ, and have differed, over the interpretations and meanings of Qur'anic words, they have never questioned the authenticity, truthfulness and authoritative nature of its text. It is interesting to note that Muslims throughout their history and without exception, have unanimously accepted every part of the Qur'an – the entire Qur'anic text – as the verbatim word of God. They have revered it as the first determining principle of their religious beliefs, the fundamental source of their Law, and the unequivocal authority regarding matters of faith and religion by no way superseded by any other authority. A. Rippin notes that

> whatever the case, one thing remains quite clear. The Qur'an is, and has been from the beginning of the emergence of Islam as a religion, the primary source and reference point. Indeed, the Qur'an in its function as that source of authority is the defining point of Islamic identity. The emergence of the Muslim community

is intimately connected with the emergence of the Qur'an as an authoritative text in making decisions on matters of law and theology.[181]

Josef van Ess also observes that "the Muslims are not cut off from the word of God, for the Qur'an not only interprets what God has said but contains God's ipsissima verba. Each and every denomination of Islam believes in Muhammad's verbal inspiration. This was a logical result of the Islamic notion of prophecy, and we have already seen it taken for granted at every point when God turns to Muhammad with the imperative "Say." Islamic theology is thus spared the trouble of searching the Qur'an for the authentic sayings of Muhammad; and only an unbelieving student of Islamics could claim that the utterances of the Qur'an reflect the faith of the earliest Muslim community."[182] This is in contrast to the Christian scriptures where theologians struggle to differentiate the genuine words of Jesus from the words and sayings of his disciples. Therefore, the entire text of the Qur'an carries equal and indisputable religious authority.

There has been a tendency among several contemporary Muslim scholars to conceive of a human aspect with regards to Qur'anic revelation by emphasizing the part played by the person of the Prophet in receiving it. These are modernists some of whom have also emphasized the need to apply historical, philological, and literary methods to the text of the Qur'an.[183] For instance, Fazlur Rahman contends that, "The Qur'an is thus pure Divine Word, but, of course, it is equally intimately related to the inmost personality of the Prophet Muhammad whose relationship to it cannot be mechanically conceived like that of a record. The Divine Word flowed through the Prophet's heart."[184]

Rahman, furthermore, distinguishes between the moral regulations of the Qur'an and the legal regulations. To him, "The moral law is immutable: it is God's "Command", Man cannot make or unmake the Moral Law: he must submit himself to it..."[185] Legal regulations, on the other hand, are contingent. Quoting the Qur'anic injunctions regarding polygamy and the institution of slavery as examples, Rahman concludes:

445

> These examples, therefore, make it abundantly clear that whereas the spirit of the qur'anic legislation exhibits an obvious direction towards the progressive embodiment of the fundamental human values of freedom and responsibility in fresh legislation, nevertheless the actual legislation of the Qur'an had partly to accept the then existing society as a term of reference. This clearly means that the actual legislation of the Qur'an cannot have been meant to be literally eternal by the Qur'an itself. This fact has no reference to the doctrine of the eternity of the Qur'an or to the allied doctrine of the verbal revelation of the Qur'an.[186]

Rahman forgets that the institutions of polygamy and slavery were not original to the Qur'an. Polygamy existed centuries before the revelation of the Qur'an. As a guidance to mankind, the Qur'an had to address these issues. The Qur'an's condoning of polygamy was not as a piece of pure male chauvinism. It was meant to be a piece of social legislation. The Qur'an merely regularized the then unlimited choice (spousal number) of men to four wives, connecting this choice closely to the then pressing practical problem of the Muslim community namely, the heavy losses incurred at the battle of Uhud and the resulting surplus number of orphans. The Qur'an also connected this social responsibility with the stern condition of absolute justice, "But if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one or which your right hands possess" (4:3). It also warned men from the outset that, "Ye are never able to do justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire..." (4:129). Therefore it can be argued, that there is nothing in the Qur'anic understanding of the institution of polygamy that is specific or related only to the society of seventh century Arabia. Polygamy, for the Qur'an, is not a privilege; it is a social responsibility. In the presence of pressing situations and circumstances such as those prevailing in Madinah after the battle of Uhud, the Qur'anic institution of polygamy with its qualifying principles, may serve as an alternative, better than promiscuity or serial polygamy, even in current times.

Similarly, the institution of slavery was an ancient custom, not only a feature of Arabian society at the time, but also intrinsic to most societies of the day. Unlike prevailing practice however, the Qur'an

condoned neither maltreatment of slaves, nor the institution of slavery to a great extent. Rather, the Qur'an took practical and revolutionary steps to gradually eliminate the vast gulf that lay between slaves and their masters: (a) the Qur'an legislated for the freeing of slaves (*al-ʿItq*) as atonement for many intentional and non-intentional religious violations (4:92; 5:89; 58:3), (b) it promised great rewards for the freeing of slaves or the buying of their freedom (90:13), (c) it frequently emphasized the absolute equality and brotherhood of slaves and masters calling for mutual respect (49:13), (d) it encouraged masters to marry or free slave-girls, (e) it promulgated the institution of *mukatabah* i.e., allowing a slave to purchase his/her freedom in installments paid over a period of time (24:33), (f) it assigned a special portion of zakah for the freeing of slaves and other related areas such as helping a *mukatab* etc. (9:60) etc. The latter are just a few of the ways by which the Qur'an dealt with the issue of slavery and its dilution as a force in society, eliminating its ancient hold. Moreover, the stern attitude of the Prophet regarding the rights, equality, and respect of slaves as brothers in humanity and faith, worked as an additional element factor enforcing the Qur'anic spirit of equality and kindness towards them. Islam could not have unilaterally abolished slavery so long as the world did not agree to put an end to one of its primary sources, war, through enslavement of prisoners-of-war. But when the anti-slavery concord was reached by the international community, Islam welcomed it.

Such a sharp difference of focus and perspective on the part of the Qur'an regarding the issues of polygamy and slavery, alone refutes Rahman's claims that the Qur'an accepted the then existing society as a point of reference. Rather, it is the other way around. Moreover, such a legislation of the Qur'an cannot be interpreted as temporal or connected with a specific society or region. The existence and public practice of the institution of slavery until our modern times, nullifies such a supposition. Therefore, these examples do not prove the point Rahman has raised i.e., that the Qur'anic legal regulations are contingent. In addition, mainstream Islam has always accepted all Qur'anic regulations as eternal and authoritative. What the bases for Rahman's differentiation between the moral and legal legislations of the Qur'an are, is unknown.

Rahman however only goes so far, and interpretations and views such as his have been taken to astonishing extremes by others. To Rippin, for instance, these interpretations of Rahman mean that the Qur'an is not "revealed literally but... installed in Muhammad's heart and then spoken through the human faculties of the prophet. The language, therefore, is Muhammad's, although it is still possible to hold that this is ultimately God's word also."[187]

Rahman has made it very clear through his works that the words of the Revelation were also from God, arguing that, "Whatever the agency of Revelation, however, the true revealing subject always remains God, for it is He Who always speaks in the first person..."[188] He further observes, the fact that

> the Prophet actually mentally "heard" words is clear from 75:16–19: "Do not hasten your tongue with it [the Revelation] in order to anticipate it. It is our task to collect it and recite it. So *when we recite it, follow its recital*, and then it is also our task to explain it" (see also 20:114). It is also clear that, in his anxiety to retain it or to "anticipate" it in a direction different from that of his Revealing Spirit, the Prophet moved his tongue of his own ordinary human volition, the intrusion of which was repudiated by God. This necessarily implies the total "otherness" of the agent of Revelation from the conscious personality of Muhammad in the act of Revelation.[189]

We may possibly interpret Rahman's views as more fully related to the interpretations given to the Qur'anic text over the centuries by Muslim orthodoxy, rather than with the Qur'anic text itself. I would probably have the same observations about Rahman as Ian Richard Netton (b. 1948), Head of the Department of Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Leeds, did with regards to the blind Syrian poet, Abu al-ᶜAla' al-Maᶜarri (973–1057), whose *Risalat al-Ghufran* (The Epistle of Pardon) and "skeptical attitudes towards religion aroused considerable suspicions."[190] Netton observed that al-Maᶜarri, "was probably not anti-religion *per se* but against its organization and ritualized aspects. He sought truth but objected strongly to the truth

being encapsulated in rigid formulae."[191] Likewise, Rahman seems to be critical of so-called orthodoxy and its claims to sole authority in interpreting the Qur'an. To Rahman, the text of the Qur'an is the word of God and normative; however, he seems somewhat dissatisfied with the method by which this text has been understood by some Muslims in the past. Like other neo-modernists (i.e. Muhammad Ahmad Khalaf Allah, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, Mohammad Arkoun, to name a few), Rahman seems to be looking for such interpretations of the Qur'anic text that, to him, are appropriate or essential in connection with the developing circumstances of modern day life. He wants to do this without denying the divine origin of the Qur'an. Therefore, neo-modernists like Rahman cannot be quoted as an example within Islam of the trend common to modern biblical scholars of viewing scriptures as the word of God mixed with the word of man or emphasizing the human aspect in revelation. The Qur'an, to all Muslims without exception, is the word of God.

In contrast, the firm Muslim belief in the divine composition of the Qur'an is a factor / stance persistently denied by western writers down the years. The overwhelming majority of these have categorically rejected the claims of the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad, as well as Muslims of all ages and times, that God Almighty Himself directly revealed the text of the Qur'an to Muhammad and that Muhammad's sole function was to receive and convey the Qur'an to mankind with absolute sincerity and precision. A great majority of western scholars claim that the Qur'an was composed by Muhammad, with or without the help of others. For instance, Sale asserts, "That Muhammad was really the author and chief contriver of the Qur'an is beyond dispute; though it be highly probable that he had no small assistance in his design from others."[192] Sir William Muir in the 19th century,[193] Wollaston in 1905, Menezes in 1911, Draycott in 1916,[194] Lammens in 1926, Champion and Short in 1959,[195] Glubb in 1970, and Rodinson as late as 1977, advocated the same view, with Menezes writing that the Qur'an is "nothing else but a pure creation and concoction of Mohammed and of his accomplice."[196]

Muslim scholars on the other hand analyze linguistic and stylistic differences between the Qur'an and hadith to highlight the Qur'an's

divine origins. They also contend that the depth, variety and infinite range of the Qur'anic ideas were beyond Muhammad's mortal mind. They quote many Qur'anic verses bearing true and exact scientific information to argue that the subject matter of these verses was far beyond Muhammad's finite knowledge and mortal creative imagination. Maurice Bucaille,[197] Seyyed Hossein Nasr,[198] Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad,[199] ʿAbd al-Majid A. al-Zindani,[200] and many other Muslim writers have taken this route to argue for the divine origin and composition of the Qur'an; the intention being to prove the absolute divine nature of the Qur'an from the scientific data available within it.

Finally, it will be pertinent to mention here that the Qur'an divides its verses into *muhkam* and *mutashabih*. The word *muhkam* means "solid, firm, accurate, precise, exact, tight etc." Therefore, the *muhkam* are those verses that convey the precise and exact meanings without rendering different or conflicting interpretations. The *mutashabih*, on the other hand, are those verses which render more than one apparently similar meanings or interpretations. These kinds of verses i.e., the *mutashabih*, are very few in number and are to be understood in the light of the precise verses. The *muhkam* verses, according to the Qur'an, are "the mother" and the foundation of the Qur'an. This does not mean the denial of the text or the meanings of such (*mutashabih*) verses or their complete hijacking through devices of allegorism. Rather, it implies a selection or the choosing of one of the philological meanings of the *mutashabih* phrases as their metaphorical interpretation and as appropriate or intended meanings. Such a selection has to take place in light of the clear and precise passages of the Qur'an. The very few Qur'anic verses that express God in seemingly anthropomorphic terms are, for instance, placed under this category. Followers of various Islamic sects differ over the meanings and interpretations of these Qur'anic phrases without denying the canonization or authority of the text or the passages containing such phrases. The Qur'an, to all mainstream Muslims, is *the* holy Scripture, the very word of God verbatim, and cannot be altered or superseded by any other authority. It will be useful to quote Graham once more, who observes:

> The specific understanding of their own scripture is also different among Muslims from that among either Jews or Christians. While

all three traditions have been characterized by the centrality of scripture in worship, piety, devotion, and faith, the Qur'an stands more clearly alone as the transcendent focus of Muslim faith than does the Christian or even the Jewish Bible in its tradition of faith. It is of course true that the Torah in its most basic sense as the Law revealed at Sinai plays a role for Jews akin in significance to that of the Qur'an for Muslims, and further that Christians, especially Protestant Christian's, attachment to the scriptural Word of God has been overwhelmingly important. Nevertheless, the character of the Qur'an as the verbatim speech of God sets it apart. Whereas the divine presence is manifest for Jews in the Law and for Christians in the Person of Christ, it is in the Qur'an that Muslims directly encounter God.[201]

TRANSCENDENCE OF GOD AND THE QUR'AN

Divine transcendence is the essence of the Qur'anic message. The Qur'anic worldview divides reality into two generic realms: God and non-God. God is the Eternal Creator and nothing is like unto Him. He remains forever the transcendental Other devoid of any resemblance, similarity, partnership and association. He is that unique Being who can only be called the Reality and the Being as everything other than Him derives its reality, existence and being from Him. Allah, the Arabic word for God, is semantically the highest focused word of the Qur'an. The Qur'anic worldview is theocentric to the core. Ontologically nothing can stand equal or opposed to God. He always remains the transcendental Other who presides over the entire system of existence as its Master and Creator. Everything other than Him is His creature and stands inferior to Him in the hierarchy of being.

The second realm consists of everything other than God. It is the order of time-space, creation and of experience. Ontologically these two orders always remain disparate. The Creator neither descends to the realm of space-time and experience to be united, incarnated, diffused or confused with creatures, nor can creatures ascend to be ontologically

united or diffused with the Creator. He always remains the utterly sublime transcendental Other. This is the Qur'anic concept of divine Unity. That is the thread which runs through the entire Qur'anic corpus as the core of the Qur'anic message. All Qur'anic concepts, ideas, and ideologies are woven together to pinpoint, elaborate, and describe this very doctrine of the Oneness, Unity, and Transcendence of God, and to encourage mankind to establish a meaningful and right relationship with Him. There is so much emphasis placed in the Qur'an upon the Oneness, Unity and Uniqueness of Almighty God that no stone seems to be left unturned to make this concept crystal clear even to a cursory reader. Moreover, the Qur'anic concept of "Monotheism" is neither progressive nor ambiguous. It is neither confusing nor contradictory. It is monotheistic and theocentric to the very definition of the word. It is negative, affirmative, rational, normative and self-explanatory.

Qur'anic monotheism does not start with monolatry or with affirmations of the existence or Oneness of the Deity. It starts by absolutely negating all concepts, kinds, ideas, understandings, and illusions of divinity or godhead other then the One and the only Divine. It starts with the Credo of Islam *La ilaha illa Allah*, the *shahadah* or confession, which is derived from the Qur'an itself. The whole Qur'an, observes Charles Eaton, is "a commentary on these four words, or as an amplification of them."[202] The first part of this declaration, *La ilaha*, negates the existence of each and any false god, and condemns false devotion, worship, and ideas of dependence upon such gods. The profession of faith (*shahadah*) is a commitment to radical transcendental monotheism.

The Arabic word *ilah* is a comprehensive word. It stands for a number of mutually interconnected meanings. The root of this word consists of three letters i.e., *alif, lam* and *ha'*. Raghib al-Isfahani and Mawdudi have shown the connotations of various derivatives of this word, as found in the lexicons, as follows:

1. Became confused or perplexed;
2. Achieved peace and mental calm by seeking refuge with someone or establishing relations with him;
3. Became frightened of some impending mishap or disaster, and someone gave him the necessary shelter;

4. Turned to another eagerly, due to the intensity of his feelings for him;
5. The lost offspring of the she-camel rushing to snuggle up to its mother on finding her;
6. Became hidden, or concealed, or elevated;
7. Adored, offered worship to.[203]

These literal meanings of the word make it clear that the word *ilah* stands for any thing awfully mysterious, concealed, frightening, extremely attractive, absorbing one's whole being, demanding absolute love, adoration, dependence, and worship. Whatever and whosoever possesses these qualities, and makes human beings adore, worship, or take refuge in it or him, can be called *ilah*. Therefore, the word can refer to any being, person, matter, or concept which attracts people's full attention and is taken as an object of worship and absolute adoration whether out of love or fear. This is why the Qur'an uses the word in both positive and negative senses meaning that it may denote the true God or a false god. It may be added that the Qur'an frequently uses the term for the true God. There are some verses where it uses the same term for false gods also (see for instance see 28:38; 15:96; 17:22, 17:39; 25:43; 45:23).

By means of the first part of the *shahadah,* the existence as well as the reality of any and every god and object of worship is absolutely negated. With an explosive "No" all allusions of multiplicity, self-sufficience, godhead and divinity are at once shattered. The third word of the confession *illa* is the link and isthmus between what is negated and what is affirmed. All that is denied is finally restored by the fourth word Allah. It means that there is no reality, no god, none self-sufficient except Allah, the true Reality.

The second part of the *shahadah* contains an immediate corollary on the mission and prophethood of Muhammad. It says, *Muhammadun Rasul Allah*, "and Muhammad is the Messenger of God." The true Reality is historically revealed through the mission and prophethood of Muhammad. Prophet Muhammad is the embodiment of the divine message and not a reflection of the divine Person.

The pronouncement of this confession is the pronouncement of God's Oneness, Uniqueness and Transcendence. Perhaps this is the reason why it has been mentioned both in the Qur'an and the Prophetic traditions (Sunnah) more frequently than any other phrase. It has been referred to as *kalimah tayyibah* (sacred utterance) (14:24), *al-qawl al-thabit* (the firm word) (14:27), *kalimah al-taqwa* (utterance of piety) (48:26), *maqalid al-samawati wa al-ard* (key to the heavens and the earth) etc. As this confession is the essence of the Islamic faith and the only token of entry into it, it can safely be asserted that the Oneness, Unity and Unicity of God forms the essence of the Islamic religion. This is why the *shahadah* stands as the supreme religious act in Islam and its mere recitation brings one within the fold of the "community of believers". Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that one who recites with sincerity that there is no god but God will enter Paradise. In another report he said that he who bears testimony to that fact, that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, Allah makes him immune from Hell-Fire. According to Muslim traditions, prophet Moses' request for a special formula of remembrance was responded to by God in the following words: "If the seven heavens and the seven earths were placed in one pan of the Balance, and the Kalimah *La ilaha illa Allah* in the other, the latter will outweigh the former."[204] Therefore, this confession is a Muslims' sublime obsession. It occupies Muslim thought and action and polarizes the thought of Islam into real and non-real.

In the Qur'an, the Islamic unitarian formula with its *La ilaha* form occurs 41 times. This is in addition to the numerous other forms (23 different formulas) that the Qur'an uses to negate godhead or divinity. The Qur'an states: "And your God is One God: there is no god but He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful" (2:163).[205] In another place it states: "Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-Subsisting, the Supporter of all" (3:2). The reality of divine unity and transcendence is witnessed by God and by all of His righteous creatures: "There is no god but He: that is the witness of Allah, His angels, and those endowed with knowledge, standing firm on justice. There is no god but He the Exalted in Power, the Wise" (3:18). The famous "Verse of the Throne" (*Ayat al-Kursi*) also starts with the same confession:

> Allah! There is no god but He, the Living, the Self-subsisting,
> Supporter of all, no slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all
> things in the heavens and on earth. Who is there who can intercede
> in His presence except as He permitteth? He knoweth what
> (appeareth to His creatures as) Before or After or Behind them.
> Nor shall they compass aught of His knowledge except as He
> willeth. His Throne doth extend over the heavens and the earth,
> and He feeleth no fatigue in guarding and preserving them for He
> is the Most High, the Supreme (in glory)."(2:255)

Al-Qurtubi relates that one day the Messenger of Allah asked Ubayy
ibn Kaᶜb, (one of the Companions of the Prophet):

> "O Abu al-Mundhir! Do you know which of the verses of the
> Book of God in your possession is the greatest?" ᶜUbayy said,
> "God and His Apostle know best." The Prophet repeated the
> question, and ᶜUbayy answered, "God! There is no god but He,
> the Everlasting, the Eternal Sovereign." The Prophet struck ᶜUbayy
> in the chest and exclaimed, "You possess true knowledge...."[206]

Ibn Kathir relates on the authority of Abu Umamah that the Prophet
said: "Whoever recites the Throne Verse after every prescribed prayer,
nothing will stand between him and the *Jannah* (Paradise) except
death."[207] Al-Bukhari narrates on the authority of Ibn Masᶜud that the
Prophet said: "When you go to your bed, recite *Ayat al-Kursi*, for then
there will be a guard from Allah who will protect you all night long,
and Satan will not be able to come near you till dawn."[208] There are
many other virtues mentioned in the books of *tafsir* and hadith
regarding the *Ayat al-Kursi*.

The point of emphasis in the verse is clear. It is one of the countless
Qur'anic verses that leave no room for any confusion or ambiguity *vis-
à-vis* the absolute Oneness, Uniqueness, Omnipotence, Omnipresence,
Omniscience and Transcendence of God. Mawdudi explains the first
part of the verse:

> Irrespective of the number of gods or objects of worship set up by
> ignorant people, the fact remains that godhead in its entirety

455

belongs exclusively to the Eternal Being, Who is indebted to no one for His existence. In fact, He is not only self-existent, but upon Him rests the entire order of the universe. None shares either His attributes or His power and might, and no one has the same claims against creatures as He. Hence, if anywhere in the heavens or the earth someone sets up anything or anybody as an object of worship and service (*ilah*) either instead of or in addition to the One True God, this amounts to declaring war on reality.[209]

With regards to the *shahadah*'s significance, L. Gardet observes that "Even if monotheism cannot thus be considered the exclusive prerogative of Islam, the affirmation of the divine unicity in and by the Shahadah remains its characteristic heritage, the central fact structures its religious universe."[210] Al-Faruqi observes:

This seemingly negative statement, brief to the utmost limits of brevity, carries the greatest and richest meanings in the whole of Islam. Sometimes a whole culture, a whole civilization, or a whole history lies compressed in one sentence. This certainly is the case of *al-kalimah* (pronouncement) or *al-shahadah* of Islam. All the diversity, wealth and history, culture and learning, wisdom and civilization of Islam is compressed in this shortest of sentences – *la ilaha illa Allah* (There is no god but God).[211]

In addition to the *shahadah*, the Qur'an uses many other formulas to highlight the Unity and Oneness of God. "Allah has said: 'Take not (for worship) two gods: for He is just One God: then fear me (and Me alone).' To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on earth, and to Him is the religion always: then will ye fear other than Allah?" (16:51–52). "But your God is One God: so submit then your will to Him…" (22:34). Prophet Muhammad is ordained to declare: "Say: 'What has come to me by inspiration is that Your God is One God: will ye therefore bow to His Will (in Islam)?'" (21:108). "Say: 'I am but a man like yourselves, (but) the inspiration has come to me, that your God is One God: whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness, and in the worship of his Lord, admit no one as partner'"

(18:110; see also 13:30; 13:36; 6:56; 6:71; 6:162; 6:163; 10:104; 13:16; 17:42, 17:53; 39:11; 39:14; 39:38; 39:64; 40:66; 41:6; 72:20).

In the famed surah, *al-Kafirun* "the disbelievers" (109), the Prophet is ordered to absolutely and completely disavow himself from the unbelievers and what they worship other than the One God. But it is in surah 112 *al-Ikhlas*, literally "sincerity", in which the Prophet is given such a comprehensive lesson of the Oneness, Uniqueness, Unicity and Transcendence of God that if one read nothing of the Qur'an other than this short surah and properly apprehended its meaning, then one could not admit any doubt or confusion concerning the pure Qur'anic concept of transcendence and strict monotheism. T. B. Irving translates *Surah al-Ikhlas* as follows:

> Say: "God is **Unique!** God is the Source [for everything]; He has not fathered anyone nor was He fathered, and there is nothing comparable to Him."

Al-Ikhlas consists of four Makkan verses only. Yet, this brief construction heralds monumental implications: it emphasizes God's divine Unity, Uniqueness, Self-Sufficiency, Transcendence and Purity; stands as a powerful statement against the Christian concept of a triune God – the trinity of divine Persons; acts as a profound declaration against the Son of God Christology; and demands sincere and sole worship of the One and Only God eliminating possibilities of any partnership or association with Him. It is also equal to one third of the Qur'an (hadith reported by Bukhari, 4628) since it explains *al-tawhid* one of the three most essential doctrines of Islam, the other two being Prophethood/Revelation and the Day of Judgement.

The pagans of Makkah queried the Prophet about the lineage (origin) of Allah. As a response Allah revealed this verse "Say: 'Allah is Unique.'" The Arabic term *Ahad* is used in this surah to indicate the Unicity of God instead of the frequently used Qur'anic term *wahid*.[212] The term *Ahad* is much more precise than the much more frequently used term *wahid* which means "one". *Ahad* has the added connotations of absolute and continuous unity and the absence of equals. Al-Alusi explains that the root of the word *ahad* is *wahid*. The difference being

that *ahad* cannot be divided, distributed or analyzed while *wahid* could be.[213] Al-Bayhaqi states that *al-ahad* is the

> One who does not have any similar, like or an equivalent or match while *al-wahid* means the one who has no associate or partner. That is why God Almighty gave this name to Himself... As if the verse "He begets not neither is He begotten" is a kind of explanation of the verse "He is One"... and Almighty God can never be divided nor come to an end...[214]

L. Gardet observes:

> The qur'anic teaching does not limit itself to the affirmation of a strict monotheism. It is also clearly stated that the unique (*wahid*) God is one (*ahad*) in himself, one in his nature as deity.... Juxtaposed with the striking initial profession of faith ("Allahu ahad") is the final correlative, "not any one," no one ("Lam yakun ahad"). This affirmation-negation is the decisive confrontation between the creator and the created. It displays, like a diamond in its setting, the unfathomable and incommunicable mystery of the deity.[215]

The second verse of the chapter contains the word *al-Samad* that has been used nowhere else in the Qur'an except in this surah. The word itself is so comprehensive that it has been translated differently by different translators. *Al-Samad* is one of the "most beautiful names" of God, and its root has the primary meaning of "without hollow" or "without cleft". Allah is without mixture of any sort, without any possibility of division into parts, because in Him there is no 'hollow'. Louis Massignon would translate it as "dense to the absolute degree", whilst L. Gardet as "impenetrable."[216] *Al-Samad* denotes that God is unknowable, enjoying intrinsic self-sufficiency and unicity without cleft or internal division. There are others who have explained the word *al-Samad* as meaning, "The Master who is depended upon in all matters."[217] Abu Hurayrah, Companion of the Prophet Muhammad, stated that *Al-Samad* is the "One who is free from want and does not

need anything from anybody, while everything other than Him needs Him in everything." Ibn Jubayr stated that it refers to the "One who is perfect in His attributes as well as actions." Ibn al-Anbari said that *Al-Samad* is the "Master above whom there is no master, and upon whom all the people rely for their needs and affairs"[218] M. Asad translates it as "God the Eternal, the Uncaused Cause of All Being." He further observes:

> This rendering gives no more than an approximate meaning of the term as-samad, which occurs in the Qur'an only once, and is applied to God alone. It comprises the concept of Primary Cause and eternal, independent Being, combined with the idea that everything existing or conceivable goes back to Him as its source and is, therefore, dependent on Him for its beginning as well as for its continued existence.[219]

The third verse of *Surah al-Ikhlas*, "He begets not, and neither is He begotten" reaffirms this unicity by categorically rejecting any multiplicity within the divine unity. It also simultaneously shatters the "daughters of God" concept, held by the polytheists of Makkah, as well as the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity. Muslims were put on their guard during the very early stages of revelation against any association and multiplicity within the godhead, and it didn't take long for the supposed mystery of the Trinity or incarnation to be declared a betrayal of the divine transcendence, unity and uniqueness of God and a "cleft" in the godhead. It was unequivocally understood that Allah is everlasting while creatures are temporal; that no changeable circumstances effect the divine existence, ever, while creatures are changeable; that Allah is perfect while creatures are imperfect; and that birth, multiplication and development are an absurdity with regards to Allah while intrinsic to His creatures. In sum, so wholly strict and pristine was this stipulated quality of "One" that it included total refutation of utterly human and creaturely limitations including any notion of familial relations (father, son, daughter).

It will be apparent that the Qur'an categorically rejects the Christian concept of the Trinity, its categorization of Jesus as the son of God, and

the two central doctrines of Christianity discussed in the previous chapter. The categorical rejection of the Christian doctrine of Incarnation is not only found in this chapter but also in many other chapters and passages of the Qur'an. After giving a detailed description of the virgin birth of prophet Jesus the Qur'an states: "It is not befitting to (the majesty of) Allah that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him! When He determines a matter, He only says to it, 'Be', and it is" (19:35). There are in addition many other Qur'anic passages which address the issue of divine sonship at length: "They say: 'Allah hath begotten a son': Glory be to Him. – Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth: everything renders worship to Him. The Originator of the heavens and the earth: when He decreeth a matter, He saith to it: 'Be,' and it is" (2:116–17). The Qur'an argues the same point from a different perspective:

> No son did Allah beget, nor is there any god along with Him: (if there were many gods), behold, each god would have taken away what he had created, and some would have lorded it over others! Glory to Allah! (He transcends) the (sort of) things they attribute to Him! He knows what is hidden and what is open: too high is He for the partners they attribute to Him. (23:91–92)

> Wonderful Originator of the heavens and the earth: how can He have a son when He hath no consort? He created all things, and He hath full knowledge of all things. That is Allah, your Lord! There is no god but He, The Creator of all things: then worship ye Him: and He hath power to dispose of all affairs. (6:101–2)

The Qur'an addresses the "People of the Book" directly:

> O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: nor say of Allah aught but the truth. The Messiah Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a Spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His Messengers. Say not "Three": desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is One God: Glory be Him: (for Exalted is He) above having a son. To Him belong all things in

460

the heavens and on earth. And enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs. Christ disdaineth not to serve and worship Allah, nor do the angels, those nearest (to Allah): those who disdain His worship and are arrogant, He will gather them all together unto Himself to (answer). (4:171–72)

The Qur'an came as a rectifier of Jewish and Christian excesses against God. The Christian tradition claimed to have believed in monotheism, but, to the Qur'an, the Christian dogma of the Trinity and incarnation was a clear violation of the divine unity and transcendence. Hence Allah revealed the Book (al-Qur'an) to His servant (Muhammad), "that He may warn those who say, 'Allah hath begotten a son': no knowledge have they of such a thing, nor had their fathers. It is a grievous thing that issues from their mouths as a saying. What they say is nothing but falsehood" (18:4–5). The Prophet was asked to employ different arguments to bring the point across: "Say: 'Praise be to Allah, Who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) dominion: nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation: yea, magnify Him for His greatness and glory!'" (17:111). "Say: 'If the Most Gracious had a son, I would be the first to worship.' Glory to the Lord of the heavens and the earth, the Lord of the Throne! He transcends the things they attribute (to Him)!" (43:81–2). To the Qur'an, the most serious sin one can commit is the claim that God has begotten a son.

They say: "The Most Gracious has begotten a son!" Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are about to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountains to fall down in utter ruin, that they should invoke a son for The Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of The Most Gracious that He should beget a son. Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to The Most Gracious as a servant. (19:88–93).

According to the Qur'an:

Certainly they disbelieve who say: "(Allah) is Christ the son of Mary." But said Christ: "O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my

Lord and your Lord." Whoever joins other gods with Allah, Allah will forbid him the Garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrong-doers be no one to help. They disbelieve who say: Allah is one of three (in a Trinity): for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous chastisement will befall the disbelievers among them. Why turn they not to Allah and seek His forgiveness? For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Christ the son of Mary was no more than a Messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They had both to eat their (daily) food. See how Allah doth make His Signs clear to them; yet see in what ways they are deluded away from the truth! (5:72–76)

It is worth noting that these Qur'anic statements roundly reject both interpretations of the Trinity. The first verse refutes Christian docetistic tendencies whilst the second rejects Trinitarian claims, both Augustinian as well as Cappadocian. The Qur'an blames Christian dogma of blurring the transcendental realm with the utilitarian sphere of want and need.

It becomes evident then that the third verse of *al-Ikhlas* is refuting Christian understanding of the Holy Trinity whilst the next verse roundly rejects Christ's or the Holy Spirit's equality with God – in essence, glory, or majesty, as authorized by the Council of Niceae.

The last verse of *al-Ikhlas* dispels all possibilities of a crude anthropomorphism, corporealism and incarnation existing in relation to God. The verse is unequivocal in stating that nothing resembles God either in His being or in His actions and attributes. In fact, God is the only effective power in existence. He is the absolute reality with absolute qualities and attributes. Everything other than Him is relative and dependent upon His transcendental being for its existence, sustenance and continuity. The claims of God's absolute unity and uniqueness made in the previous verses are hereby sealed, confirmed and elaborated by this final verse "there is nothing like unto Him". M. Asad writes:

The fact that God is one and unique in every respect, without beginning and without end, has its logical correlate in the statement that "there is nothing that could be compared with

Him"– thus precluding any possibility of describing or defining Him....Consequently, the *quality* of His being is beyond the range of human comprehension or imagination: which also explains why any attempt at "depicting" God by means of figurative representations or even abstract symbols must be qualified as a blasphemous denial of the truth.[220]

Al-Bukhari, interpreting this surah, narrates on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said:

> Allah said: "The son of Adam tells a lie against Me, though he hasn't the right to do so. He abuses me though he hasn't the right to do so. As for his telling a lie against Me, it is his saying that I will not recreate him as I created him for the first time. In fact, to repeat or to recreate a thing is easier for the One Who has created it first (so it is easier for Me to repeat or recreate a creation which I created first). As for his abusing Me, it is his saying that Allah has begotten a son, while I am the One, As-Samad (self-sufficient Master Whom all creatures need, I neither eat, nor drink). I beget not, nor was I begotten, and there is none equal or comparable unto Me."[221]

He also narrates from Muʿadh ibn Jabal that the Prophet said:

> "O Mu'adh! Do you know what Allah's Right upon His slave is?" I said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "To worship Him (Allah) Alone and to join none in worship with Him (Allah). Do you know what their right upon Him is?" I replied, "Allah and His Messenger know best." The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Not to punish them (if they do so)."[222]

We conclude this part of the discussion with Murata and Chittick's observation that the brief Islamic confession "there is no god but God" excludes any worship and sincere service in the absolute sense to anybody or anything other than God Almighty since everybody or

everything other than God can only be a false god. The Bible as well as Judaeo/Christianity's comprehension of God had left many problems unsolved (as detailed in previous chapters) and the Qur'anic account came to purge the confused, adulterated, even mystical understanding of the Divine contained in i.e. ideas such as the incarnation, corporealism and physical anthropomorphism of God, that had come to prevail. Monotheistic theology is nothing new in the history of western religious traditions. Nevertheless, the radical monotheism of Islam offers distinctive solutions to the difficult and thorny problems of the nature of God, freewill and predestination, the relationship of good to evil, and of reason to revelation. Islamic insistence upon God's absolute transcendence and perfect unity is quite distinctive among the Semitic traditions. Therefore the distinctive feature of Islam, as Richard C. Martin rightly observes, is that, "Among the Western religious traditions, Islam has most insistently asserted the unity and oneness of God."[223]

In addition to insisting upon the unity, unicity, and transcendence of God, affirming this time and time again, the Qur'an aggressively attacks all forms of idolatry, monolatry and polytheism. *Shirk*, the act of associating anything or anybody with God, is according to the Qur'an, the only unforgivable sin: "Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed" (4:48). Verse 4:116 reiterating the same message contains an additional line: "one who joins other gods with Allah, hath strayed far, far away (from the right path)." In verse 31:13, *shirk* is declared the "the highest wrong-doing". "Being true in faith to Allah, and never assigning partners to Him: if anyone assigns partners to Allah [he] is as if he had fallen from heaven and been snatched up by birds, or the wind had swooped (like a bird on its prey) and thrown him into a far-distant place" (22:31). Mawdudi notes that in this parable, heaven

means the original human nature. Man by nature is the servant of none else but Allah and inherently accepts the Doctrine of *Tawhid*. That is why the one who follows the guidance of the Prophets becomes firm in these dictates of his nature and soars higher and

464

higher. On the other hand, the one who rejects Allah or associates a partner with Him falls down from the "heaven" of his nature. Then he either becomes a victim of Satans and evil leaders like the birds of the parable, which snatch away the fallen man, or he becomes a slave of his lusts, passions, whims, etc., which have been likened to the wind in the parable. They lower him down from one wrong position to the other till he falls into the deepest abyss of degradation.[224]

In addition to these appalling warnings, the Qur'an has vehemently denied the existence of gods as divinities other than the Almighty:

Whatever ye worship apart from Him is nothing but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, for which Allah hath sent down no authority: the Command is for none but Allah: He hath commanded that ye worship none but Him: that is the right religion, but most men understand not. (12:40)

Therefore gods are nothing but human inventions having no independent reality of their own. In *Surah al-Najm* it states:

Have ye seen Lat, and ʿUzza, and another, the third (goddess), Manat? What! For you the male sex, and for Him, the female? Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair! These are nothing but names which ye have devised, – ye and your fathers, – for which Allah has sent down no authority (whatever). They follow nothing but conjecture and what the souls desire! – Even though there has already come to them Guidance from their Lord! (53:19–23)

There is an incident narrated in the historical writings of Tabari and Ibn Saʿd relating to the *Sabab al-Nuzul* (context of revelation) of these verses.[225] Interestingly, the incident narrated received almost universal publicity with the publication of Salman Rushdie's controversial novel *The Satanic Verses* in 1988.[226] It has also long been seized upon by a great many scholars in the West to argue that there was a time during Muhammad's mission when he accepted the existence and validity of

the Makkan gods, and did so in an effort to reconcile with the Makkan opposition, as well as consolidate his political position. For instance, Watt quotes from Tabari's account to argue that while seeing the Makkans turning away from his message, Muhammad had a great desire to make it easier for them to accept it. At this juncture *Surah al-Najm* was revealed, but when Muhammad came to the verses, "Have ye considered *al-Lat* and *al-ʿUzza*, and *Manat*, the third, the other?" the following, according to the tradition, occurred: "as he was saying it to himself, eager to bring it to his people, Satan threw upon his tongue (the verses), 'these are the swans exalted, Whose intercession is to be hoped for'". On hearing this, the Makkans became delighted, and at the end when Muhammad prostrated himself, they all did likewise. News of this event reached the Muslims in Abyssinia who had migrated there due to Makkan persecution. Watt concludes that subsequently Gabriel came to Muhammad and showed him his error, and God revealed verse 22:51 to comfort the Prophet, abrogating the 'satanic verses' in question by revealing the true continuation of the surah. The Quraysh naturally stated that Muhammad had changed his mind about the position of the goddesses, but in the meantime the satanic verses had been eagerly seized upon by the idolaters.[227]

Narrating a number of other versions and how they differ from the above account, Watt argues that if we compare the different versions and try to distinguish between the external facts in which they agree and the motives which the various historians ascribe in order to explain the facts, we find

> at least two facts about which we may be certain. Firstly, at one time Muhammad must have publicly recited the satanic verses as part of the Qur'an; it is unthinkable that the story could have been invented later by Muslims or foisted upon them by non-Muslims. Secondly, at some later time Muhammad announced that these verses were not really part of the Qur'an and should be replaced by others of a vastly different import. The earliest versions do not specify how long afterwards this happened; the probability is that it was weeks or even months.[228]

Elsewhere, Watt argues that, "The story is so strange that it must be true in essentials."[229] Maxime Rodinson also argues that the tradition "may reasonably be accepted as true because the makers of Muslim tradition would never have invented a story with such damaging implications for the revelation as a whole."[230]

The conclusion Watt reaches is desperate. He argues:

> The Muslim scholars, not possessing the modern Western concept of gradual development, considered Muhammad from the very first to have been explicitly aware of the full range of orthodox dogma. Consequently it was difficult for them to explain how he failed to notice the heterodoxy of the satanic verses. The truth rather is that his monotheism was originally, like that of his more enlightened contemporaries, somewhat vague, and in particular was not so strict that the recognition of inferior divine beings was felt to be incompatible with it. He probably regarded al-Lat, al-ʿUzza, and Manat as celestial beings of a lower grade than God, in much the same way as Judaism and Christianity have recognized the existence of angels. The Qur'an in the later...Meccan period speaks of them as jinn, although in the Medinan period they are said to be merely names. This being so, it is perhaps hardly necessary to find any special occasion for the satanic verses. They would not mark any conscious retreat from monotheism, but would simply be an expression of views which Muhammad always held.[231]

Watt emphatically asserts that, "Indeed there is little about idols through the whole Meccan period."[232] M. Rodinson argues along the same lines observing:

> Muhammad's unconscious had suggested to him a formula which provided a practical road to unanimity. It did not appear to conflict with his henotheism, since these 'great birds' were, like angels or jinns, conceived of as subordinate to Allah. Elsewhere they were called the 'daughters of Allah'. On the other hand this provided a clear indication that the new teaching was in no way

revolutionary, and that the new sect honored the city's divinities, respected their shrines and recognized their cult as legitimate one.[233]

Watt explains the motive behind these verses by claiming that the leading Quraysh made some sort of offer to Muhammad; he was to receive certain worldly advantages, and in return make some acknowledgment of their deities. The promulgation of the satanic verses was doubtless linked to this bargain, and their abrogation simply a result of the failure of compromise. Watt further claims that Muhammad

> came to realize that acknowledgment of the Banat Allah, as the three idols (and others) were called, meant reducing God to their level. His worship at the Kaʿbah was outwardly not very different from theirs at Nakhlah, at-Ta'if, and Qudayd. And that would mean that God's messenger was not greatly different from their priests and not likely to have much more influence; hence the reform on which Muhammad had set his heart would not come about.[234]

In other words, it was not the strict monotheistic conception of God which alerted Muhammad to this awful mistake and prompted him to change his position but rather the desire for political advantage. Rodinson argues that Muhammad changed his mind because such an acknowledgment

> meant that the sect renounced all claim to originality. Jews and Christians pointed out maliciously that Muhammad was reverting to his pagan beginnings. Besides, what force had the threat of the Last Judgment if the daughters of Allah, propitiated by traditional offerings and sacrifices, would intercede on behalf of sinners and save them from eternal damnation? Above all, what authority was left to the herald sent by Allah if any little priest of al-ʿUzza or Manat could pronounce oracles contradicting his message?[235]

By drawing these conclusions both Watt and Rodinson touch upon several sensitive issues crucial to the very core of the Islamic faith. It is

important therefore, to analyze their assumption and reasoning respectively and in detail.

First is the issue of the certainty with which Watt attests to the authenticity of this tradition, particularly the part claiming that the words quoted with regards to the goddesses were pronounced by the Prophet himself. No doubt al-Tabari, and following him, many historians and Qur'anic exegetes have repeated the tradition. All the more strange is that even Ibn Hajar al-ʿAsqalani observes that, "Even though all the links by which this Tradition has been related are either weak or "broken", except in one case that of Saʿid ibn Jubayr, the very fact that it has been related through so many "links" is a proof that there is some truth about it."[236] He also observes that "there are two more chains of narrators (in addition to the one mentioned above) that satisfy the conditions of Bukhari and Muslim (*al-Sahihayn*) requisite for an authentic report."[237] At the same time, he observes that, "These reports are however, all "*mursal*" traditions, and those who believe the "*mursal*" traditions may argue on their basis."[238] *Mursal* is hadith terminology used to denote a disconnection between the Prophet and the original reporter of a tradition.

The authenticity of the "links", however, does not necessarily mean that all contents of the narration are historically correct or based on facts that cannot be denied. Such a supposition is clearly reflected from the observations of Ibn Hajar himself. He notes that although there is enough proof to conclude that the story has some truth in it, nevertheless parts are so atrocious that they must be rejected and interpreted in the light of other facts. One of these consists of the assertion that Satan put the words "they are exalted swans and their intercessions are to be hoped" into the mouth of the Prophet. He argues that:

> This cannot be accepted due to the fact that the Prophet was infallible. It is impossible for the Prophet to intentionally add something to the Qur'an that does not belong to it, or forgetfully say something contradictory to what he had brought about "*Tawhid*" (Oneness and Unity of God). That is why the scholars had given the tradition various interpretations....[239]

469

The best among these interpretations, contends Ibn Hajar, is the one which states:

> The Prophet (peace be upon him) was reciting the Qur'an. Satan kept an eye out waiting to insert something into his recitation. Satan found this opportunity during one of the pauses of the Prophet's recitation and uttered these words in a tone resembling that of the Prophet. The people close to the Prophet heard it, took it as his words and publicized it.... Therefore, these words are the words of Satan and in no way the words uttered by the Prophet himself....[240]

It is evident, as apparent in the case of Ibn Hajar, that even those few scholars who discussed the historical authenticity of the tradition, equally argued against the truthfulness of the assertion that the Prophet uttered any such words, praising or accepting the Makkan gods. Therefore, to claim that the tradition is authentic by a) implying that Muhammad uttered these words himself, or b) without qualifying it with the qualifiers used by the aforementioned scholars, is misleading.

Moreover, the tradition is a *mursal* one, meaning that the one narrating it (as is the case with all chains of narrations of this type), is not someone directly narrating it from the Prophet or from a Companion or disciple of the Prophet even. Rather such reports issue from a Successor i.e., *Tabi͑i* (of the Successor – *Sahabi* – of the Prophet), using the formula that "the Prophet said so and so". *Mursal* narrations are therefore regarded as weak by Islamic scholars, because they are not direct Prophetic reports, missing as they do the original link in the chain – that is, the Prophet's disciple/Companion (*Sahabi*). Consequently, it is difficult to accept a weak narration and give it authority and certainty, and it certainly cannot be considered as evidence especially when it contradicts the very essence of the Qur'anic message. That the Oneness of God is the very essence of the Qur'an's message is a fact beyond dispute, authenticated by all historical and scriptural proofs as discussed.

On the other hand, there have been many eminent historians and exegetes who have declared the story as utterly baseless. M. M. Ahsan

has provided a detailed list of distinguished Muslim scholars who have categorically "rejected the story as preposterous and without foundation."[241] For instance, the renowned exegete Ibn Kathir observed that, "Many exegetes have mentioned the story of swans..., but through links all of them are inauthentic. I have not found a correct version of this story with continuous links."[242] Muhammad ibn Ishaq, the writer of *Sirah* declared the story as "the work of *Zanadiqah* (atheists)".[243] Imam Abu Mansur al-Maturidi argued, that the story was "what the Devil inspired to his atheist followers so as to cause doubts about the authenticity of the religion (Islam) in the minds of the weak. The majesty of the Prophet is absolved from such a narration or act."[244] According to Ibn Khuzaymah, "This story had been invented by the heretics." Al-Qadi ʿIyad gave a detailed refutation of it arguing:

> The very fact that this narration has neither been narrated by any of the authentic collections of the hadith nor by any creditable narrator with continuous and authentic links, is a proof of its baselessness. It has been narrated frequently only by those exegetes and historians who are fond of going after all kinds of odd and obscure narration, and who seize upon any thing that comes their way without looking into its nature or truthfulness.[245]

The entire account is riddled with doubt. Detailing the variety of links involved and how they differ and contradict each other over the content, place and context of the story, ʿIyad declares such contextual variety enough to prove the story demonstrably false with no footing to stand on. He further points to the Muslim consensus that the Prophet was infallible, and so transcended the commitment of any such abhorrent act. Muhammad was sent as a mercy to mankind and his name is linked to Allah in the Qur'an, so for Muslims it is as much blasphemous to accept that the Prophet wished to be given verses praising gods besides Allah, as it is to accept that Satan was somehow able to dominate and so confuse him into projecting something non-Qur'anic as Qur'anic. It is also an act of profanity to accept the claim that the Prophet did not know of this alleged confusion until Gabriel warned him of it or to allege that the Prophet happened to pronounce

these words intentionally or forgetfully. Those chosen by God as His prophets and messengers do not succumb to Satan in any way, shape or form, neither are they duped by him. Lapses of this or in fact any kind would be impossible for a prophet let alone Muhammad the greatest of them all. Further it is inconceivable that the alleged incident would not have been mentioned either in the Qur'an, or the Hadith or indeed in any of the authentic sources. In fact the whole fabrication is so absurd, so sensationally riven with internal inconsistencies, so fully rejected, based on non-evidence, by scholars, that it's invention speaks for itself.

Al-Qadi also rightly observes that had the incident actually taken place, both the pagans of Makkah and the Jewish tribes would have made it a point to use it zealously against Muhammad disputing his truthfulness; further, the incident would also have resulted in some of the weaker Muslims apostatizing from the Faith (as was the case after *al-Isra*', the night journey of the Prophet to Jerusalem and ascension into Heaven), or at least to expressions of such a tendency as occurred in the incident of the *Hudaybiyyah Treaty*. So, why was the episode not publicized, discussed, and used to vilify Muhammad? The event had it occurred would have been a monumental scandal with every minute detail finding its way into the Hadith. The fact that no Muslim ever abandoned Islam as a result of this enormously damaging conciliatory act, and that none of the Prophet's foes incredulously ever made an issue of it even, (there is no historical report that they even discussed it), is sufficient to prove that the entire story was a later invention with no historical basis.[246]

Qadi Abu Bakr ibn al-ʿArabi puts forward ten separate arguments to refute the claim that the Prophet ever pronounced these alleged words which supposedly acknowledged the Makkan's pagan deities. As he concludes:

> The Qur'an very eloquently, and both explicitly and implicitly explains the infallibility of the Prophet… So we advise you to place the Qur'an in front of your eyes and read the words carefully, so as not to attribute to the Qur'an what does not belong there, or to connect to it meanings utterly unacceptable.[247]

In addition to the scholars discussed, Imam Fakhar al-Din al-Razi,[248] Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Qurtubi,[249] Muhammad ibn Yusuf al-Kirmani,[250] Mahmud ibn Ahmad Badr al-Din al-ʿAyni,[251] and al-Alusi have all rejected the account as baseless and absurd.[252]

Among modern Muslim scholars, Shibli Nuʿmani observes that "this story is evidently an absurd myth that deserves no comment."[253] Mawdudi furnishes a detailed refutation by focusing upon its internal and external evidence. For example, the story alleges that the incident took place after the first migration to Habasha (Abyssinia), referring to some of the migrants returning to Makkah after hearing of the event. The Abyssinian migration took place in the month of Rajab (the seventh month of the Islamic calendar) during the fifth year of Prophethood, with some of the migrants returning to Makkah three months later, i.e. in Shawwal of the same year. Verses 73–75 in Chapter 17 of the Qur'an in which the Prophet was supposedly "reproved" for the incident in question were revealed in the eleventh or twelfth year of Prophethood. Does it make sense that Allah would admonish him five or six years after the supposed incident took place? "[V]erse (52) in which the interpolation by Satan was abrogated was sent down in the first year of Hijrah, i.e. about two years after the reproof. Can a person in his senses believe that the Holy Prophet was reproved for the interpolation after six years, and it was abrogated after nine years?"[254]

After discussing the context of the verses, Mawdudi declares that even a casual reader would detect an obvious contradiction in the passage. The fabricated insertion of "[These are the high-flying ones, whose intercession is to be hoped for!]" is so clearly apparent and such a clumsy attempt at fabrication that no sensible person could accept it other than invention.

> Have ye seen Lat and ʿUzza, And another, the third (goddess), Manat? [**These are the high-flying ones, whose intercession is to be hoped for!**] What! for you the male sex, and for Him, the female? Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair! These are nothing but names which ye have devised, – ye and your fathers, – for which Allah has sent down no authority (whatever). They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls

desire! – Even though there has already come to them Guidance from their Lord! [Qur'an 53:19–23]

Looking at the insertion (in bold) the internal incongruity pointing to fabrication is glaringly obvious. Are we supposed to accept that immediately after supposedly praising the goddesses, Lat, ʿUzzah and Manat, Allah then in complete contradiction hits their worshippers hard, as if to say: "O foolish people! How is it that you have ascribed daughters to Allah and sons to yourself? All this is your own invention which has no authority from Allah."[255] Thus the internal evidence alone is enough to discredit the story as utterly absurd and meaningless.

Mawdudi also argues, that the revelation of these verses as asserted in the story does not "fit in with the chronological order of the Qur'an."[256] In connection with the relevant context of the passages he observes:

> We reiterate that no Tradition, however strong links it might have, can be accepted when the Text itself is a clear evidence against it, and when it does not fit with the wording, the context, the order etc. of the Qur'an. When the incident is considered in this background, even a skeptical research scholar would be convinced that the Tradition is absolutely wrong.[257]

The majority of Muslim exegetes such as Qutb, Mufti M. Shafi and Islahi view the story as theatrical nonsense, so baseless and contradictory to the fundamental principles of the Islamic religion and such an affront to the intelligence, that to discuss it in any way, shape or form is not appropriate,[258] in other words a complete waste of time.

Among modern historians, M. H. Haykal regards all arguments forming the basis for the veracity of the story as "false, incapable of standing any scrutiny or analysis."[259] For Haykal, "It is a story whose incoherence is evident upon the least scrutiny"[260] with the multiplicity of the tradition being proof of its lack of authenticity. Haykal claims that there were two motives for the Muslims to return from Ethiopia: (a) The conversion of ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab to Islam, and (b) The breaking out of a revolution against the Negus "in which his personal

faith as well as his protection of the Muslims were under attack."[261] He further argues against the story from the inverted evidence of the Qur'anic text:

> Another proof of the falsity of the story, stronger and more conclusive than the foregoing, is the fact that the contextual flow of *sura* "al-Najm" does not allow at all the inclusion of such verses as the story claims.... The contextual background in which the addition is supposed to have been made furnishes unquestionable and final evidence that the story of goddesses was a forgery.[262]

Haykal, like Shaykh Muhammad ʿAbduh, rightly points out that nowhere did the Arabs ever describe their gods or goddesses in terms such as *al-gharaniq*, neither in their poetry, speeches or traditions, and that the word *al-gharaniq* (or *al-gharniq*) was in fact the name of a black or white water bird, sometimes used figuratively to refer to a handsome blond youth. The fact is irrefutable that the Arabs never looked upon their gods in this manner. Arguing that the story contradicts Muhammad's candidness, he concludes:

> The forgers must have been extremely bold to have attempted their forgery in the most essential principal of Islam as a whole: namely, in the principle of *tawhid*, where Muhammad had been sent right from the very beginning to make proclamations to all mankind in which he has never accepted any compromise whatever; he was never swayed by anything the Quraysh had offered him whether by way of wealth or royal power.[263]

Muhammad never compromised the unity and transcendence of God even at the most difficult junctures of his prophetic mission. He did not entertain substantial offers of wealth, power and prestige at the most vulnerable stages of his life as they included compromise of the divine unity and otherness. So to impudently suggest that he would sacrifice *tawhid* to gain the approval of his adversaries is to fly in the face of historical fact.

Many Muslim scholars in addition to Haykal, have written extensively on the issue, M. Nasr al-Albani[264] and Zafar Ali Qureshi[265] are just a few examples.

If the story is an obvious forgery it could well be asked why not simply dismiss it and avoid any detailed discussion? One of the reasons is that this particular forgery strikes at the heart of the Islamic faith, specifically the fundamental dogma of the Unity (Oneness) of God and the infallibility of the Prophet, implying that to accept the authenticity of the tradition without proper qualification, as Watt has done, would mean the demolition of the very foundation of the Islamic religion and the debasing of its revelation from all kinds of claims to divine origin. It is, furthermore, all the more degrading to link the story as Watt has done with the bargain offers made to Muhammad. History is witness to the fact that bargains of such kind were repeatedly made to Muhammad, yet he never accepted these offers or compromised on the issue of the absolute Unity, Oneness, and Transcendence of God even during times of crushing opposition and absolute lack of resources.

Even the critic Rodinson is forced to quote the famous story of the offer made by the Makkan pagans to Muhammad, and its rejection, just before mentioning the story of the satanic verses. In response to Abu al-Walid ʿUtbah ibn Rabiʿah's offers of business, prestige, and sovereignty, Muhammad's answer was, and I quote Rodinson:

> to recite some verses from the Koran. ʿUtba listened carefully and went back to his companions with this advice: 'Leave him alone. By God, his words will have vast consequences. If the Arabs [that is, the Beduin] kill him, then you will be delivered from him by others. But if he triumphs over the Arabs, his sovereignty will be your sovereignty and his glory will be your glory, and through him you will be the most prosperous of men.'[266]

This incident of the bargain, in Rodinson's opinion, "had some foundation in fact"[267] and "had an element of truth in it".[268] Many other examples exist of the Prophet being offered enticing worldly bargains in return for compromise on the fundamental issue of God's Unity and Transcendence. All of which he resolutely refused. Even in

response to ʿUtbah's offer the Prophet recited, as Ibn Hisham narrates, the verses of surah 41 (*Fussilat*), containing the essential monotheistic message, "Say thou: 'I am but a man like you: it is revealed to me by inspiration, that your God is One God: so take the straight path unto Him and ask for His forgiveness.' And woe to those who joined gods with Allah..." (41:6). In certain other incidents Muhammad's response was even sterner. For instance, his reply to his uncle Abu Talib's plea was: "By God if they keep the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand to abandon this matter (call to the sincere worship of One God) I would not do so."[269] Therefore, it is extremely misleading and all the more unjust to attribute to this great Prophet an instance of such abject compromise – particularly in this fashion too of viewing him as supposedly attempting to appease the pagans for worldly benefit – given his absolute loyalty to God in the face of the most acute persecution. The history of the Prophet's early mission is filled with incidents of insult, intimidation, verbal and physical abuse, social, financial and political setbacks and impending dangers to his life. Neither were his handful of early Companions of much help to him being themselves the victims of these abuses. It would seem awkward and antithetical to the demeanor, disposition, nature and aptitude of Muhammad to accept the intercession of false gods simply to obtain the approval of his enemies at a later stage of his mission.

In conclusion to this part of the discussion it is enough to firstly end with the observations of two orientalists with regards to the story. According to John Burton, "those *hadiths* have no historical basis"[270] and as he further argues, "this story must be decisively rejected once and for all."[271] According to K. Armstrong:

> this story is in conflict with other traditions and with the Qur'an itself. We must remember that a Muslim historian like Tabari does not necessarily endorse all the traditions he records: he expects the reader to compare them with others and to make up his or her own mind about their validity. At this very early stage of his prophetic career, Muhammad was not interested in political power. So the story, as told by Abu al-Aliyah, is not very likely. The Qur'an... denies that Muhammad should have a political

function in Mecca at this point, and later the Prophet would turn down similar deals with leading Quraysh without a second's thought.[272]

Secondly, according to Islamic doctrine, Satan is a more manageable reality then usually perceived by some other faith groups, meaning that he has no authority over God's conscious people. The Qur'an explains: "For over my servants no authority shalt thou have, except such as put themselves in the wrong and follow thee" (15:42). Hence, if this is the case with God's righteous servants then how much more so for the Prophet. In other words, Satan would not at any level have been able to affect, play with or to confuse Muhammad. And this is worth repeating. If even common Muslims become immune from satanic impulses and temptations while reciting the Qur'an, then how impossible for the Prophet to be deceived, the original recipient of the revelation! This is an established principle within the Qur'anic conceptual framework.

Thirdly, we come to the more serious issue of Muhammad's monotheism. Rodinson has dubbed it as "henotheism". To Watt, "his monotheism was originally, like that of his more enlightened contemporaries, somewhat vague, and in particular was not so strict that the recognition of inferior divine beings was felt to be incompatible with it."[273] Neither in the Qur'anic text nor in the authentic traditions of Muhammad is anything found of henotheism or vague monotheism, no room whatsoever is allowed for inferior divine beings. The Qur'anic text is vociferous against such claims. The strict monotheism peculiar to the later Islamic tradition had been propagated by Muhammad from the very beginning of his mission in Makkah. Most of the Qur'an (about two thirds) had been revealed in Makkah. The earliest surahs of the Qur'an emphatically asserted the Oneness of Almighty God and declared worship of others besides Him as blasphemous and heretical. According to Stanley Lane-Poole:

> During the years of struggle and persecution of Mekka.... ninety out of the 114 chapters of the Koran were revealed, amounting to about two-third of the whole book. All these chapters are inspired with but one great design, and are in strong contrast with the

478

complicated character of the later chapters issued at Medina. In the Mekka chapters Mohammed appears in the unalloyed character of prophet; he has not yet assumed the functions of a statesman and law-giver. His object is not to give men a code or a constitution. *But call them to the worship of the One God. This is the only aim of Mekkan speeches.... Every chapter is directed simply to the grand design of the Prophet's life to convince men of the unutterable majesty of the One God, who brooks no rivals...*[274] [italics mine].

It is surprising that a scholar like Watt would have the audacity to claim that there is little concerning idols mentioned throughout the whole Makkan period and that acceptance of the Makkan goddesses as lower divine angelic beings capable of intercession on behalf of their admirers was something not incompatible with Muhammad's "vague monotheism".[275] This is akin to calling black, white, and vice versa. To attempt to establish a theory whilst ignoring every fact on the ground, beggars belief. It is illogical to even think that out of the two-thirds of the Qur'an revealed at Makkah, there is little concerning idols or idol worship. There is for instance, surah 112 *al-Ikhlas*, discussed earlier, which not only forms the cornerstone of strict Islamic monotheism and God's transcendence, but is also a measuring rod against all kinds of polytheism, henotheism and paganism. Noldeke places this surah in the very first Makkan period.[276] H. Hirschfeld writes, "I feel inclined to place it among the first revelations."[277] Muir argues that it was the 20th chapter revealed in Makkah hence putting it in the very early phase of Muhammad's mission.[278] The same is said by Muir and Noldeke with regard to *Surah al-Kafirun* (109), the mere recitation of which disavows Muhammad from all kinds of *shirk* (polytheism).

There is a consensus among Muslim scholars that *Surah Yusuf* (chapter 12) is without doubt a Makkan chapter. Muir, Noldeke, and Grimme also agree that it was revealed in Makkah.[279] We have had the opportunity of quoting verse 40 of *Surah Yusuf* wherein it clearly says:

Whatever ye worship apart from Him is nothing but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, – for which Allah hath sent

down no authority; the Command is for none but Allah: He hath commanded that ye worship none but Him: that is the right religion, but most men understand not... (12:40)

How else could the Qur'an have possibly stated its position with regards to idolatry and polytheism? There is no "vague monotheism" either in this verse or the entire Qur'an. Conversely, what there is in point of fact is a strict monotheism to the very definition of the term. In addition to those mentioned, there exist many other Makkan chapters which address the issue aggressively and comprehensively.[280] The case against those who would indicate otherwise is irrefutable.

Furthermore, what on earth was Muhammad being persecuted, tortured, and opposed for, by the Makkan pagans, if not for his strict monotheism and stern opposition to polytheism? The Prophet was constantly being ordered by the Makkans to stop opposing their gods and respect the religion of their forefathers.[281] It was undoubtedly his strict monotheism and stern opposition to worship of any person or object besides God that caused him such opposition in Makkah and such brutal, inhumane retaliation. Muhammad never compromised on the issue of the Oneness, Uniqueness and Transcendence of God, neither in Makkah nor in Madinah. T. Noldeke observes:

Muhammad's single aim in the Meccan suras is to convert the people, by means of persuasion, from their false gods to the one God. To whatever point the discourse is directed this always remains the ground thought; but instead of seeking to convince the reason of his hearers by logical proofs, he employs the art of rhetoric to work upon their minds through the imagination. Thus he glorifies God, describes His working in Nature and History, and ridicules on the other hand the impotence of the idols. Especially important are the descriptions of the everlasting bliss of the pious and the torment of the wicked: these, particularly the latter, must be regarded as one of the mightiest factors in the propagation of Islam...[282]

According to Julian Obermann:

> In early Surahs we have to do with oracle-like pronouncements of a prophet and visionary.... In contents, his early message is of extreme simplicity, it is marked by complete absence of either ritual or legal elements of any kind. What it offers is an outline, the barest rudiments of monotheistic theology. God is One, He has no equal; He is the creator of the universe and His care provides bountiful sustenance for man and beast (argument from creation): in the past He had punished people for their wrongdoing (argument from history); in the future He will judge man according to his deeds, rewarding obedience with the delights of paradise and requiting disobedience with the scourge of Hellfire.[283]

Reuben Levy:

> The earliest divine manifestations commanded him to "recite" what he heard. It was followed by others which bade him denounce the idolatrous beliefs and practices of his fellow townsmen, to whom he was to reveal a higher faith and a purer system of life. The central point of the new faith was that there is no God but Allah, a deity which was already known in the Arabian pantheon but who was henceforth to be not supreme, but unique.[284]

Francesco Gabrieli:

> ...In this, the earliest, and the following short, ecstatic revelations... are expressed in an enthusiastic and lyrical rather than a logical form the fundamental outlines of Muhammad's vision: one single omnipotent God (for whom the name Allah was the natural choice, not a new one to the pagan Arabs but filled with a new content and raised far above any polytheistic conception), author and ruler of creation, lord of the life of man, giver of blessing and chastisement, stern judge of the day of doom...[285]

Charles J. Adams:

> Muhammad's preaching in Mecca centered upon the one sovereign deity, Allah, who controlled the destiny of mankind. In place of the numerous powers recognized by the pagan Arabs, Muhammad proclaimed a unique God who created the universe, established its order, and encompassed its fate in his hand.[286]

Even Richard Bell, upon whom Watt depended heavily in his treatment of the Qur'an, did not deny the fact that the strict monotheism and refutation of paganism was the cardinal element of Muhammad's mission during the Makkan period. He wrote: "Muhammad claimed to be the Messenger of God to his people. He began by advocating monotheism, the worship of one God upon whose power and bounty man was dependent…"[287] going on to state that:

> More characteristic of the Qur'an is the reaction from pagan ideas. It was Muhammad's life-mission to overthrow the polytheism of his people… The fundamental doctrine of the Qur'an is that there is only one God. From that doctrine Muhammad *never wavered from start to finish of his mission….* For the most part it is directed against the polytheism of his own Arab people.[288] [italics mine].

Rodwell,[289] Grimme,[290] W. Irving,[291] P. de Lacy Johnstone,[292] E. Gibbon,[293] Hitti,[294] J. J. Saunders,[295] A. Schimmel,[296] Helmer Ringgren and A. V. Storm[297] and K. Cragg,[298] are also among those scholars who fully recognize the fact that Muhammad's monotheism and understanding of God's uniqueness and transcendence was never vague and that he never compromised the issue from the very beginning through to the very end of his prophetic mission. For instance H. Ringgern and A. V. Storm maintain:

> In a systematic summary of the contents of the Koran, the doctrine of the absolute oneness of God would undoubtedly come out as its principal tenet. 'There is no God but Allah, and Mohammad is his prophet'… so runs the Islamic creed, and it is, indeed, an apt

synopsis of the teaching of the Koran. God is one, and has no one by his side. Polytheism is fiercely attacked....[299]

It must by now be evident that Watt's hopeless allegations of Muhammad's vague monotheism are nothing more than a desperate attempt to portray a progressive element in the Qur'anic concept of the divine unity and uniqueness of God. Equipped and influenced by biblical historical criticism, Watt has no right to draw arbitrary, and one might add audacious, parallels between the biblical and Islamic monotheistic consciousness, attempting to divest Islam of its crowning element, transcendental monotheism, based on nothing more than a single flimsy fairy tale of dubious content and dubious origins.

Coming back to our original discussion, it must be emphasized that the Qur'an is not satisfied in merely attacking all kinds of polytheism but repeatedly emphasizes the point that false gods have no existence of their own, being nothing more than a product of their worshippers' imagination: "Behold! verily to Allah belong all creatures, in the heavens and on earth. What do they follow who worship as His "partners" other than Allah? They follow nothing but conjecture, and they do nothing but lie"(10:66).

> Say (O Muhammad): "Of your partners', can any originate creation and repeat it?" Say: "It is Allah who originates creation and repeats it: then how are you deluded away (from the truth)?" Say: "Of your 'partners' is there any that can give any guidance towards Truth?" Say: "It is Allah who gives guidance towards Truth. Is then He who gives guidance to Truth more worthy to be followed, or he who finds not guidance (himself) unless he is guided? What then is the matter with you? How judge ye? But most of them follow nothing but conjecture: truly conjecture can be of no avail against Truth. Verily Allah is well aware of all that they do." (10:34–36)[300]

Contrary to this, Henry P. Smith strangely claims:

> The proposition that Allah is the only God does not necessarily mean that the other so-called gods have absolutely no existence.

483

> This was too radical a step to take all at once. Mohammad conceded the existence of spirits or demons who had seduced men to their worship. The Arabic word for these beings is *Jinn* (collective)...[301]

Claims such as these, especially in the face of crystal clear Qur'anic passages such as those above, are not only unjustified but misleading.

Is there willful ignorance here? One wonders. It must be said at the outset that the Qur'an has never denied the existence of those who are worshipped by pagans, either human beings or the jinn, as realities that exist or have existed in the past, a good example being the person of Jesus, the son of Mary, worshiped as a triune God. So, the existence of God's creation being worshipped by certain people is not in question. What the Qur'an categorically denies is the fact of their existence as divinities capable of benefit or harm independently of God. When the Qur'an confirms the existence of spirit beings such as the jinn, devils, and angels it makes it categorically clear, leaving no stone unturned, that they are powerless creatures of God, under the supreme authority of God, owing all that they have to the power of God, without any power of their own, exercising only whatever is permitted to them by God and hence having no share in the divinity at all. For instance, concerning the jinn[302] the Qur'an states: "And the Jinn race, We had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind" (15:27). "And He created Jinns from fire free of smoke" (55:15). The jinn have been granted astonishing physical capabilities (27:39; 34:12–13; 21:82; 38:37) that differentiate them from ordinary human beings. On the other hand, just like human beings, they are created for the purpose of worshipping God. "I have only created the jinns and men, that they may serve Me" (51:56). There are among them who believe (46:29–32), and others who reject the truth (6:112; 7:38; 7:179; 41:29).[303] Likewise, the jinn will be held answerable (for their deeds) on the Day of Judgement (6:128; 11:119; 72:15).

The angels are also God's creation and His servants: "And they make into females angels who themselves are servants of the Most Gracious..." (43:19). In contrast to jinn and mankind, angels are obedient to God's commands, programmed to be so by their very nature: "They are (but) servants raised to honor. They speak not before

He speaks, and they act (in all things) by His command. He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, and they offer no intercession except for those with whom He is well-pleased and they stand in awe and reverence of His (glory)" (21:26–28). The difference between the jinn and the angels is the same as that between mankind and the angels, the jinn like man, are created with free will while the angels are otherwise. The Devil (Iblis) was "one of the Jinns, and he broke the Command of his Lord…" (18:50). Like the jinn, Satan was created out of fire (7:12). Due to acts of submission he was allowed to worship God in the company of the angels. Satan never possessed, neither before his rejection nor after his expulsion, any divine powers or abilities. The only power Iblis is allowed to exercise and that for a specified time only is the power of persuasion.

> (Iblis) said: "O my Lord! give me then respite till the Day the (dead) are raised." (Allah) said: "Respite is granted thee till the day of the Time Appointed." (Iblis) said: "O my Lord! because Thou hast thrown me out of the way, I will make (wrong) fair-seeming to them on the earth, and I will put them all in the wrong, except Thy chosen servants among them…" (15:36–40; also see 7:14–17)

God made it clear to Iblis that, "For over My servants no authority shalt thou have, except such as put themselves in the wrong and follow thee" (15:42). "No authority has he over those who believe and put their trust in their Lord. His authority is over those only, who take him as patron and who join partners with Allah" (16:99–100). In *Surah Ibrahim,* the Qur'an depicts a dialogue that will take place on the Day of Judgment between Satan and his followers:

> Satan will say, once the matter has been settled: "God has given you a true promise, while I have both promised you and then broken my word with you. I had no authority over you except that I appealed to you, and you responded to me. Do not blame me but blame yourself! I have no claim on you nor have you any claim on me…" (14:22)

485

It is evident that although the Qur'an does not deny the existence of angels and jinn, as creatures of God, subject to His power, discipline, and justice, it categorically rejects their claim to any power or ability as divine beings. Nothing is divine except the One Almighty God, Transcendent and Majestic (6:100–102). On the other hand, for those who worship these beings in the false belief that they possess divine powers and abilities, or have the least share in them, we are informed by the Qur'an that this act of worship is mere conjecture on the part of the worshippers. So Smith's other statement that, "Mohammad admitted that the false gods have a real existence. What he denied was not their reality but their divinity – their power to help or harm",[304] although is closer to the reality, is nevertheless still misleading. The statement must be qualified by the proper qualifier that the existence of such beings *as gods* is rejected, while their existence as God's creatures, worshipped wittingly or unwittingly by others, is affirmed. (See 5:116–118; 6:22; 10:28; 25:17; 34:40; 46:6).

The Qur'an modified the Arab conception of angels as superior jinn worthy of worship and veneration, allotting to angels a specific place in the hierarchy of supernatural beings. In the new Islamic theocentric system of reality the angels played a vital role but as created agents of God. The Qur'an classifies angels into several categories in accordance with their assigned duties and functions. Therefore within the universal hierarchy of created beings a specific angelic hierarchy was formed. The angels were still accepted as invisible, celestial beings belonging to a higher ontological order than man and jinn, but without any shade of divinity or adoration ascribed to them. They were the humble obedient servants of God. The source of their respect and veneration lay in their absolute servitude and obedience to God and not in their being divine in any way, shape or form.

It is evident by now that the Qur'an neither affirms nor allows any room to proclaim the existence of any god or divinity besides God. All that is other than God is His creation. No one possesses any iota of power or ability to benefit or harm human beings except by the permission of God. Those worshiped by humans other than God are mere creations of their followers' imagination. We conclude this part of the discussion with Izutsu who puts the matter succinctly:

In the Koranic system, too, there is the concept of aliha. We must not confuse the ontological order of things with the semantic one. In other words, the fact that the Koranic world is essentially monotheistic should not lead us into thinking erroneously that *semantically* as well as ontologically, Allah stands alone without any peers. On the contrary, there *are* concepts of "gods" and "idols" in the Koranic system. Only, all these stand in negative relation to Allah; they are there simply as something the existence of which must be denied most emphatically. Speaking in more semantical terms, they are there in the Koran to be connected with the concept of "falsehood" *batil*, while the concept of Allah is to be connected with that of "truth" *haqq*.[305]

In the realm of supernatural beings Allah stands alone as the "Real" depriving all other so called gods of all possible reality. These were now "mere names", not corresponding to any real entities existing outside of language. "In the terminology of modern semantics, we should say that in this conception the term *ilah* (pl. *alihah*), when applied to anything other than Allah Himself is nothing but a word having connotation but no denotation."[306]

Furthermore, the Qur'an brings the point home using various arguments from creation to establish the fact. Almighty God is the Creator. He has created the heavens and the earth and all that is in the universe. He is the sole Sustainer: " He it is who has created for you all that is on earth, and has applied His design to the heavens and fashioned them into seven heavens; and He alone has full knowledge of everything (2:29).

Praise be to Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, and made the Darkness and the Light. Yet those who reject Faith hold (others) as equal with their Guardian Lord. He it is Who created you from clay, and then decreed a stated term (for you). And there is with Him another determined term; yet ye doubt within yourself! And He is Allah in the heavens and in earth, He knoweth what you hide, and what ye reveal, and He knoweth the (recompense) which ye earn (by your deeds). (6:1–3)

It is Allah Who hath created the heavens and the earth and sendeth down rain from the skies, and with it bringeth our fruits wherewith to feed you; it He Who hath made the ships subject to you, that you may sail through the sea by His Command; and the rivers (also) hath He made subject to you. And He hath made subject to you the sun and the moon, both diligently pursuing their courses; and the Night and the Day hath He (also) made subject to you. And He giveth you of all that ye ask for. But if ye count the favors of Allah, never will ye be able to number them. Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude. (14:32–34)

"He has created the heavens and the earth with truth; far is He above having the partners they ascribe to Him" (16:3; also see 7:54; 7:185; 9:36; 10:3, 10:5; 10:6; 14:19; 25:2, 25:59; 30:8; 31:10).

The Qur'an then inquires "...*Such is the Creation of Allah: now show Me what is there that others besides Him have created: nay, but the transgressors are in manifest error*" (31:11).

Say: "Have ye seen (these) 'partners' of yours whom ye call upon besides Allah? *Show me what it is thay have created in the (wide) earth. Or have they a share in the heavens?* Or have We given them a Book from which they (can derive) clear (evidence)?- Nay, the wrong-doers promise each other nothing but delusions." (35:40)

Say: "Do ye see what it is ye invoke besides Allah? *Show me what it is they have created on earth, or have they a share in the heavens?* Bring me a Book (revealed) before this, or any remnant of knowledge (ye may have), if ye are telling the truth! And who is more astray than one who invokes, besides Allah, such as will not answer him to the Day of Judgment, and who (in fact) are unconscious of their call (to them)? And when mankind are gathered together (at the Resurrection), they will be hostile to them and deny that (men) had worshipped them." (46:4–6)

"Those whom they invoke besides Allah create nothing and are themselves created. (They are things) dead, lifeless: nor do they know

when they will be raised up" (16:20–21). This verse undoubtedly refers to human beings such as saints, prophets, emperors, and kings who having enjoyed political or spiritual powers in the past are ultimately consigned to the earth, to graves, after their death. This excludes Satan and the angels who are thought to be alive.

In *Surah al-Hajj,* the Qur'an makes the point succinctly:

> O Men! A parable is set forth [herewith]; hearken, then, to it! Behold, those beings whom you invoke instead of God cannot create [as much as] a fly, even were they to join all their forces to that end! And if a fly robs them of anything, they cannot [even] rescue it from him! Weak indeed is the seeker, and [weak] the sought! No true understanding of God have they [who err in this way]: for, verily, God is most Powerful, Almighty! (22:73–74)

The conclusion the Qur'an wants people to derive from this is simple and straightforward: "Is then He Who creates like one that creates not? Will ye not receive admonition?" (16:17).

Another contrast is that of response to prayers. The true and only God guides, listens and responds to prayers. He is the only one who helps those in need: "Our Lord is the One Who has given everything its own constitution; then guided it" (20:50; also see 2:143; 2:213; 6:90; 6:149; 7:43; 7:178; 16:9; 63:11; 35:8 etc.).[307] "When My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them): I respond to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me: Let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me: That they may walk in the right way" (2:186). Al-Tabari relates on the authority of Hasan al-Basari, that a man asked the Prophet, "Is our Lord near that we can pray to Him in private or is He far that we cannot cry out to Him?" The verse was therefore revealed.[308] Ibn Kathir relates, that some of the Prophet's Companions asked him, "Where is our Lord?" This verse was revealed in response to that question.[309] Al-Bukhari relates from Abu Mas'ud:

> We were in the company of the Prophet (peace be upon him) on a journey, and whenever we ascended a high place, we used to say Takbir (*Allahu Akbar* meaning God is the Most Great) (in a loud

voice). The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "O people! Be kind to yourself, for you are not calling upon a deaf or an absent one, but you are calling an All-Hearer, and an All-Seer...."[310]

Ibn ʿArabi gives this verse a great mystical significance *vis-à-vis* the man-God relationship and man's quest for Him:

> If my servants who are journeying toward me 'ask you concerning' knowledge of 'me,' 'certainly I am near' and manifest. 'I answer the prayers of the supplicant when he calls upon me' with the tongue of his state and potential by granting him what his state and potential require. 'Let them therefore answer my call' by purifying their potential with asceticism and acts of worship. For to myself do I call them in order that I may teach them how to journey to me. Let them behold me when they are in the state of purity so that I may manifest myself in the mirrors of their hearts. This, in order that they may be well guided in rectitude and achieve goodness in themselves.[311]

In *Surah Ghafir,* it is written: "And your Lord says: 'Call on Me; I will answer your prayer...'" (40:60). Abu Hurayrah narrates a *hadith qudsi* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad as revealed to him by the Almighty)[312] from the Prophet, that Almighty Allah says:

> I am as My servant thinks I am (another possible rendering of the Arabic is: "I am as My servant expects Me to be"). I am with him when he makes mention of Me. If he makes mention of Me to himself, I make mention of him to Myself: and if he makes mention of Me in an assembly, I make mention of him in an assembly better than it. And if he draws near to Me a hand's span, I draw near to him an arm's length, and if he draws near to Me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length. And if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.[313]

Therefore, narrates Anas ibn Malik, "To call upon God is the essence of worship." Unlike other gods, narrates Abu Hurayrah,

"Almighty God gets angry with the one Who does not call upon Him."³¹⁴ In contrast, false gods neither guide nor listen. They do not and cannot respond to prayers:

> To Him alone should all prayer be addressed, *for those to whom they do address their prayers besides Him are altogether powerless to respond to them. The example of praying to any other than Allah is that of a man who stretches out his hands to water, asking it to reach his mouth, although water has no power to reach his mouth. The prayers of the unbelievers are a sheer waste.* (13:14)³¹⁵ [italics mine]

> *And those whom you invoke besides Him own not a straw. If you invoke them they will not listen to your call, and if they were to listen, they cannot answer your (prayer). On the Day of Judgment they will reject your "Partnership". And none, (O Man!) can inform you like Him who is All-Aware.* (35:14) [italics mine]

"And who is more astray than one who invokes, beside Allah, such as will not answer him to the Day of Judgment, and who (in fact) are unconscious of their call (to them)" (46:5). Izutsu observes that:

> The Divine response to the human *duʿa* is signified in the Koran by the word *istijabah* meaning literally "answering" being ready in response. Semantically we may describe this by saying that the concept of *duʿa* stands in correlation with that of *istijabah*. Unlike *duʿa*, which is essentially verbal, *istijabah* is non-verbal. In the Koran, God Himself declares positively that He is always ready to "answer" if only men call upon Him sincerely.... Moreover, the Koran attaches the highest importance to the concept of *istijabah*, as is evident from the fact that it makes the incapacity for *istijabah* one of the most salient marks of a false god. The gods whom the Kafirs worship apart from Allah *cannot* respond to their *duʿa*, however much the worshippers call upon them. They do not hear the Kafirs prayer, and even if they did, they would not able to answer anything.³¹⁶

The true God is the true sovereign. He helps whomsoever He pleases, benefits whomsoever He wants, and causes harm to whosoever deserves so. "There is no victory except from Allah, the Exalted, the Wise" (3:126). "If Allah helps you, none can overcome you: if He forsakes you, who is there, after that, that can help you? In Allah, then, let Believers put their trust" (3:160). "If Allah touch thee with affliction, none can remove it but He; if He touch thee with happiness, He hath power over all things. He is Irresistibly Supreme over His servants. And He is the Wise, Acquainted with all things" (6:17–18). "If Allah afflicts you with any hardship, none other than He can remove it; and if He will any good for you, none can avert His bounty. He bestows good upon whomsoever of His servants He will. He is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful" (10:107). "What Allah out of His Mercy doth bestow on mankind none can withhold: what He doth withhold, none can grant apart from Him: And He is Exalted in Power, Full of Wisdom" (35:2). The Prophet said:

> Be mindful of Allah, and you will find Him in front of you. If you ask, ask of Allah; if you seek help, seek help of Allah. Know that if the Nations were to gather together to benefit you with anything, it would benefit you only with something that Allah had already prescribed for you, and that if they gather together to harm you with anything, they would harm you only with something Allah had already prescribed for you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.[317]

In contrast, false gods can neither benefit nor cause harm: "They call upon such deities, besides Allah, as can neither hurt nor profit them: that is straying far indeed (from the Way)! They call on one whose hurt is nearer than his profit: evil, indeed, is the patron, and evil the companion (for help)!" (22:12–13). "Say: 'Call on those – besides Him – whom ye fancy: they have neither the power to remove your troubles from you nor to change them'" (17:56) "Say: 'Call upon other (gods) whom you fancy, besides Allah: they have no power, – not the weight of an atom, – in the heavens or on earth: no (sort of) share have they therein, nor is any of them a helper to Allah.'" (34:22) "They serve,

besides Allah, what can hurt them not nor profit them, and they say: 'These are our intercessors with Allah.' Say: 'Do ye indeed inform Allah of something He knows not, in the heavens or on earth? – Glory to Him! and far is He above the partners they ascribe (to Him!)'" (10:18). "And those whom they invoke besides Allah have no power of intercession; – only he who bears witness to the Truth, and with full knowledge" (43:86; also see 10:106; 25:55; 21:66; 6:71; 5:76). Actually false gods do not possess the power to benefit or harm themselves:

> Say: "Do ye then take (for worship) protectors other than Him, such as have no power either for good or for harm to themselves?" Say: "Are the blind equal with those who see? Or the depths of darkness equal with Light?" Or do they assign to Allah partners who have created (anything) as He has created, so that the creation seemed to them similar? Say: "Allah is the Creator of all things: He is the One, the Supreme and Irresistible." (13:16)

"Yet have they taken, besides Him, gods that can create nothing but are themselves created: that have no control of hurt or good to themselves; nor can they control Death nor Life nor Resurrection" (25:3). If they are unable to help themselves, how could they help anybody else?

> Do they indeed ascribe to Him as partners things that can create nothing, but are themselves created? No aid can they give them, nor can they aid themselves....Verily those whom ye call upon besides Allah are servants like unto you: call upon them, and let them listen to your prayer, if you are (indeed) truthful!... But those ye call upon besides Him, are unable to help you, and indeed to help themselves. (7:191–197; also see 21:42; 36:75)

From the above discussion it becomes evident that the Qur'an has categorically refuted all kinds of polytheism, henotheism and associationism, in addition to vigorously affirming the transcendental otherness and Godhead of the One God. In the Qur'an just as the concept of *tawhid* is presented with strong and convincing arguments, likewise that

of polytheism, henotheism and associationism is rejected with strong and irrefutable evidence. The Qur'an does not confine itself to mere assertions of God's Oneness, Unity, and absolute Sovereignty. It uses various arguments both logical and cosmological to substantiate such claims. The Qur'an implies a variety of methods, processes, techniques, thought processes and cognitive categories to drive home the point of the transcendental uniqueness of God Almighty. It safeguards an already self-explaining and convincing concept with additional measures and parameters so as to allow no doubt or confusion to enter concerning it. As belief in a strict monotheism is the primordial act needed for the salvation of humanity in its entirety, the Qur'an presents this belief in a very simple, straightforward and logical way. The countless Qur'anic passages which delineate this belief are so simple and clear that no external help is needed to elaborate the point of their emphasis. They are self-explanatory and self-sufficient in this regard. They are also coherent, systematic and methodical. Unlike the Old Testament, there exist no layers of progressive or evolutionary revelation or conflicting tendencies in the Qur'an. Qur'anic monotheism is thorough, transcendental, unique and systematic to the core.

The Qur'anic Concept of Monotheism: *Al-Tawhid*

The external as well as internal unity of God is described in Islam by the word *al-tawhid*. *Tawhid* is the verbal noun of the second form of the root *w-h-d*. It indicates the action of unifying and of conferring unity. Etymologically it designates the knowledge one has of the unity of a thing. Although the word *tawhid* is non-Qur'anic, it does appear in the authentic sayings of the Prophet Muhammad.[318]

When the religious sciences later came to be developed in the Islamic community, the particular science of ʿ*Ilm al-Kalam* (meaning the science of the word of God or about God, to be discussed later in the chapter) was also called ʿ*Ilm al-Tawhid* (the science of divine unicity). However, when the term *tawhid* is used in reference to God Almighty it means realization of the divine unity and transcendence in all of man's actions directly or indirectly related to God. It is the belief that Allah is One and Unique, without partner in His dominion and His actions (*rububiyyah*), One without similitude in His essence and attributes

494

(*asma' wa sifat*), and One without rival in His divinity and in worship (*uluhiyyah/ʿibadah*). The science of *Tawhid* revolves around these three constituent elements so much so that omission of any of these at times overlapping categories will nullify the essence and mission of the science as well as the creed.

These three categories of *tawhid,* are sometimes referred to as *Tawhid al-Dhat* (unity of the Being), *Tawhid al-Sifat* (Unity of the Attributes) and *Tawhid al-Afʿal* (Unity of the Actions). The Unity of God, according to the Qur'an, implies that God is the Absolute One in His person (*dhat*), Absolute One in His attributes (*sifat*) and Absolute One in His works (*afʿal*). The Oneness of His person means that there is neither plurality of gods, nor plurality of persons in the Godhead; the Oneness of attributes implies that no other being possesses one or more of the Divine attributes in the absolute sense; His Oneness in works implies that none can do the works which God has done, or which God may do. It may be added here, that this tripartite division of *tawhid* owes its origin to the Qur'an, as its material is wholly Qur'anic, though the specific names mentioned above have resulted from later theological expositions.[319]

We have already discussed several passages of the Qur'an that give detailed description of the concept of *tawhid* in Islamic Scripture without alluding to the aforementioned categories. Here we will expand upon these three aspects of *tawhid* and what they imply to demonstrate how meticulously the Qur'an has explained and safeguarded the absolute monotheism and divine transcendence of God, and how such an elaborated and transcendental concept of the Deity differs from other faith traditions.

1: *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah* or Oneness of Lordship: This kind of *tawhid* means to accept Almighty God as the only *Rabb*. The word *Rabb* combines two senses; that of fostering, bringing up, or nourishing, and that of regulating, completing, and accomplishing. The word *Rabb* signifies fostering of a thing in various stages and conditions until it attains perfection. Mawdudi quotes many examples from Arabic literature to conclude that the word *Rabb* entails the following meanings:

1. One who brings up, rears, fosters or nourishes, or is responsible for doing all or one or more than one of these;
2. Guardian, patron; one who supervises or is responsible for carrying out improvements;
3. One who occupies a central or focal position, who himself gathers people round himself of his own or round whom people gather of themselves;
4. Leader, head, chief, or lord; one whose word is obeyed, and whose supremacy or lordship acknowledged, and who has authority to dispose of men or things;
5. Owner; master.[320]

The Qur'an has used the word *Rabb* in all these five senses.

Tawhid al-Rububiyyah, then, means to accept Almighty God not only as the Creator but also the only Sustainer, the Nourisher, the Lord, the Master, the Sovereign, the Supreme authority. Therefore, when a Muslim is asked to affirm that, "There is no Deity but One God", he is being asked to state that there is no other Creator and Sustainer of the universe, no other Ruler nor Law-Giver, no other Reality that can harm or benefit, give or withhold, cause life or death, except with the permission of God Almighty. He creates and sustains creation out of His mercy, without any need for it. Nobody can challenge His sovereignty. He is an exalted Lord who is not accountable to anyone, while everybody else is accountable to Him, "He cannot be questioned for His acts, but they will be questioned (for theirs)" (21:23).

The passages expressing *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah* prevail throughout the Qur'an with the first Qur'anic revelation itself containing the very core of *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah*: "Read in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created, created man, out of a clot: Proclaim! and thy Lord is Most Bountiful, He Who taught (the use of) the Pen, taught man that which he knew not" (96:1–5). The first chapter of the Qur'an, called *al-Fatihah*, starts with the same message: "Praise be to Allah the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds: Most Gracious, Most Merciful" (1:2–3). The formula "Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds", occurs 41 times in the Qur'an in addition to its mention in *Surah al-Fatihah*:

> Say: "Truly, my prayer and my service of sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all) for Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds: No partner hath He: this am I commanded, and I am the first of those who submit to His Will. Say: "Shall I seek for (my) Lord other than Allah. When He is the Cherisher of all things (that exist)?" (6:162–64)

> Your Guardian Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then He settled Himself on the Throne: He draweth the night as a veil over the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession: and the sun, the moon, and the stars, (all) are subservient by His Command. Verily His are the creation and the Command, Blessed be Allah, the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds! (7:54)

Ibn Kathir narrates from Ibn ʿAbbas, Mujahid, and Ahmad ibn Hanbal, and al-Shawkani narrates from Ibn Abi Hatim, that the six days mentioned in verse 7:54 are not days of the week as known to man but rather "days" in accordance with God's scale where each day is equal to a thousand years. As the Qur'an itself informs us, "A Day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning" (22:47).[321] For Ibn Kathir and al-Shawkani the verse denotes that the absolute rule, supreme authority, sovereignty, and unrestricted right of disposal belongs to Almighty God alone.[322]

The main thrust of the verse is that God after creating the universe did not detach Himself from nor become indifferent to His creation. He effectively rules over the universe as a whole as well as every part of it. All power and sovereignty rest with Him. The universe is not on autopilot as some scientists seem to suggest. It is actively governed and administered by God Almighty. The verse dispels misconceptions of absolute human or cosmic autonomy. Two suppositions come into play when God is divorced from the cosmos. Firstly, beings other than God are considered to have the power to make or mar man's destiny. Man is bound to turn to these beings in devotion and subservience. The second possibility is for man to consider himself the master of his own destiny. In this case man considers himself independent of and

indifferent to any higher being. The vocabulary employed in the verse denotes divine kingship, dominion and sovereignty to dispel these suppositions. The absolute unity and transcendence of God is maintained with regards to authority and sovereignty.

So prevalent is the concept of God's absolute Sovereignty and Lordship in the Qur'an, so much the focal point, that no reader of the Qur'an can possibly miss it:

> Whatever is in the heavens and on earth, declares the Praises and Glory of Allah: for He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth*: it is He Who gives Life and Death; and He has Power over all things. He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Hidden: and Has full knowledge of all things. He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days, then He established Himself on the Throne. He knows what enters within the earth and what comes forth out of it, what comes down from heaven and what mounts up to it. And He is with you wheresoever ye may be. And Allah sees well all that ye do. *To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: and all affairs go back to Allah.* He merges Night into Day, and He merges Day into Night; and He has full knowledge of the secrets of (all) hearts. (57:1–6) [italics mine]

> He created the heavens and the earth in true (proportions): He makes the Night overlap the Day, and the Day overlap the Night: He has subjected the sun and the moon (to His law): each one follows a course for a time appointed. Is not He the Exalted in Power- He Who forgives again and again? He created you (all) from a single Person: then created, of like nature, his mate; and He sent down eight head of cattle in pairs: He creates you, in the wombs of your mothers, in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness. *Such is Allah, your Lord and Cherisher: to Him belongs (all) dominion.* There is no god but He: then how are ye turned away (from your true Lord)? (39:5–6; see also 2:107; 3:26; 3:189; 5:17; 5:18; 5:40; 5:120; 9:116; 17:111; 24:42; 42:49; 43:85; 45:27; 48:14; 64:1; 67:1; 85:9). [italics mine]

The same point is reinforced, underscored, and made perfectly clear with other examples:

> It is Allah Who causeth the seed-grain and the date-stone to split and sprout. He causeth the living to issue from the dead. And He is the One to cause the dead to issue from the living. That is Allah: then how are ye deluded away from the truth? He it is that cleaveth the day-break (from the dark): He makes the night for rest and tranquillity, and the sun and moon for the reckoning (of time): such is the judgment and ordering of (Him), the Exalted in Power, the Omniscient. It is He Who maketh the stars (as beacons) for you, that ye may guide yourselves, with their help, through the dark spaces of land and sea: We detail Our Signs for people who know. It is He Who hath produced you from a single soul: then there is a resting place and a repository: We detail Our Signs for people who understand. It is He Who sendeth down rain from the skies: with it We produce vegetation of all kinds: from some We produce green (crops), out of which We produce, close-compounded grain out of the date-palm and its sheaths (or spathes) (come) clusters of dates hanging low and near: and (then there are) gardens of grapes, and olives, and pomegranates, each similar (in kind) yet different (in variety): when they begin to bear fruit, feast your eyes with the fruit and the ripeness thereof. Behold! in these things there are Signs for people who believe. (6:95–99; also see 13:2–4).[323]

Almighty God is the Creator of mankind as He is the Creator of everything else in the universe:

> O mankind! if ye have a doubt about the Resurrection, (consider) that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a clot, then out of morsel of flesh, partly formed and partly unformed, in order that We may manifest (our power) to you; and We cause whom We will to rest in the wombs for an appointed term, then do We bring you out as babes, then (foster you) that you may reach your age of full strength; and some of you are called

to die, and some are sent back to the feeblest old age, so that they know nothing after having known (much).... (22:5; also see 2:21; 6:2; 16:4; 16:70; 30:20; 30:40; 35:11; 37:96; 40:67; 55:14 etc).

K. L. Moore, Professor of Anatomy at the University of Toronto, was "amazed at the scientific accuracy of these statements which were made in the 7th century AC"[324] Moore has discussed various verses from the Qur'an demonstrating their scientific accuracy. According to him, the stages of human embryos delineated by this Qur'anic verse in the 7th century were "not proposed until the 1940's (Streeter, 1942), and the stages used nowadays...were not adopted worldwide until a few years ago..."[325] He concludes: "The agreement I have found between statements in the Koran and sayings in the Hadith may help to close the gap between science and religion which has existed for so many years."[326]

Moreover, human beings are not left to the mercy of nature or any other agency. The Qur'an insists that after their creation, it is God and He alone Who provides for them: "It is Allah Who has created you; further, He has provided for you your sustenance..." (30:40), "For Allah is He Who gives (all) Sustenance, – Lord of Power, – Steadfast (for ever)" (51:58), "Allah enlarges the sustenance (which He gives) to whichever of His servants He pleases; and He (similarly) grants by (strict) measure, (as He pleases): for Allah has full knowledge of all things" (29:62). Also see 13:26; 16:71; 17:30; 28:82; 30:37; 34:36; 34:39; 39:52; 42:12. In His hand is power and honor:

> Say: "O Allah! Lord of Power (and Rule), thou givest Power to whom Thou pleasest, and Thou strippest off Power from whom Thou pleasest: Thou enduest with honor whom Thou pleasest, and Thou bringest low whom Thou pleasest: in Thy hand is all good. Verily, over all things Thou hast power. Thou causest the Night to gain on the day, and Thou causest the day to gain on the Night; Thou bringest the Living out of the Dead, and Thou bringest the Dead out of the Living; and Thou givest sustenance to whom Thou pleasest, without measure." (3:26–27)

He is the Irresistible, Supreme over His servants, and He sets guardians over you.... (6:61)

In short, to God belongs the creation, the dominion (*al-mulk*), the Command (*al-amr*) and the rule (*al-hukm* 6:57; 6:62; 12:40; 12:67; 13:41; 28:70; 28:88; 40:12). Nobody shared in the creation, "I called them not to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, not (even) their own creation: nor is it for Me to take as helpers such as lead (men) astray!" (18:51). No one can share His dominion and actions, "Say: 'Praise be to Allah, Who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) dominion: nor (needs) He any to protect Him from humiliation: yea, magnify Him for His greatness and glory'"(17:111).

Furthermore, the Qur'an insists that the idea of the Oneness of the Divine Lordship is ingrained in human nature, due to a covenant which human beings had made with God prior to their coming to this existence: "When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): 'Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' – They said: 'Yea! We do testify!' (This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: 'Of this we were never mindful'"(7:172). The best interpretation of this event is found in a statement made by Ubayy ibn Ka'b, who has probably given the substance of what he heard from the Prophet himself. Ubayy's reports that:

God gathered all human beings, divided them into different groups, granted them human form and the faculty of speech, made them enter into a covenant, and then making them witnesses against themselves He asked them: 'Am I not your Lord?' they replied: 'Assuredly you are Our Lord.' Then God told them: 'I call upon the sky and the earth and your own progenitor, Adam, to be witness against you lest you should say on the Day of Judgment that you were ignorant of this....' [327]

This covenant is the "*fitrah*" (nature), which the Qur'an refers to in verse 30:30 of *Surah al-Rum*: "The nature in which Allah has made mankind: no change (there is) in the work (wrought) by Allah: that is the true Religion: but most among mankind know not." The Prophet

emphasized the same when he said: "Every child is born with the nature (ʿala al-fitrah)...."[328] M. Asad observes:

> According to the Qur'an, the ability to perceive the existence of the Supreme Power is inborn in human nature (*fitrah*); and it is this instinctive cognition – which may or may not be subsequently blurred by self-indulgence or adverse environmental influences – that makes every sane human being "bear witness about himself" before God. As so often in the Qur'an, God's "speaking" and man's "answering" is metonym for the creative act of God and of man's existential response to it.[329]

Al-Shawkani interprets the event as allegorical,[330] and Ibn Kathir narrates from al-Hasan al-Basari a report that amounts to the same.[331]

In short, the Qur'anic sense of the Oneness of Divine Lordship means to accept Almighty God as the only Creator, and the Sustainer who after creating everything other than Him is continuously sustaining creation by active involvement in its affairs, including the world of men. All that exists or takes place is the expression of His power and will, from the behavior of each individual atom to the large-scale occurrences of human history to events of cosmic proportion. His is the creation and His is the rule and sovereignty. Nobody has any share in any of these acts of "Lordship". Izutsu rightly points out:

> In the Islamic system, on the contrary, creation marks just the beginning of the Divine rule over the created things. All human affairs even the minutest and apparently most insignificant details of life are put under the strict supervision of Allah. And the most important point about this is that this God, according to the Koran, is the God of Justice, who never does any wrong (*zulm*) to anybody.[332]

Therefore, it can be stated that the *tawhid* of Divine Lordship places God over and above this universe of man and matter, as its Creator, Sustainer, and Master, and not as someone bound to any of the limitations of this utilitarian sphere of here and now.

2: *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah* (The Unity of Worship or ʿibadah): To accept and believe that there is no *Ilah* (deity) other than God Almighty and to *worship Him alone* is the core of *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah*. As mentioned earlier, the word *al-Ilah* in the Arabic language means the one who is *al-ma'luh* meaning *al-maʿbud* (worshipped.) Worship or *al-ʿibadah* means utmost humbleness, extreme self-abasement, humility, submission, obedience, compliance and service to God. Ibn al-Qayyim defines it as, "the perfect love accompanied with total submission."³³³ Therefore, *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah* denotes sincere and unadulterated inner as well as external worship of God, an absolute sense of dependence upon and devotion to Him alone with the exclusion of everything other than Him. This second kind of *al-tawhid* eliminates all possibilities of associationism, trinitarianism and saintly worship. In spite of the wide range of implications contained in the first category o*f al-tawhid,* firm belief in the Oneness of the Divine Lordship is not sufficient to fulfill the requirements of the Qur'anic concept of *tawhid* or monotheism. It must be accompanied with a strong faith in the Oneness of Divine worship, devotion, and obedience in order for *tawhid* to be completed. This aspect of the Qur'anic monotheism is unique to Islam and distinguishes it from the Christian understanding of monotheism. Christianity in its various forms has historically allowed worship of Jesus, Mary and other saintly figures. Islam denounces such worship as an act of *shirk* or associationism.

To fulfil the transcendental monotheism of Islam one has to confess the divine lordship of God as well as one's worship in submission. This point is substantiated by the fact that the Qur'an vehemently attacked the Makkan belief system as one of associationism dubbing its followers as *Mushrikun* (polytheists) in spite of their confirming many aspects of the oneness of divine lordship. The Qur'an reports of the polytheists of Makkah that:

> If thou ask them, who it is that created the heavens and the earth. *They will certainly say, "(Allah)"*. Say: "Praise be to Allah." But most of them understand not. To Allah belong all things in heaven and earth: verily Allah is He (that is) free of all wants, worthy of all praise. (31:25–26)³³⁴ [italics mine]

Now it is interesting to note that the polytheists of Makkah did believe that God was Exalted in Power, full of Knowledge (43:9). Further, they also believed that other natural phenomena like the sun and moon were also the creation of God Almighty, "If indeed thou ask them who created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and moon (to His Law), *they will certainly reply, 'Allah'*. How are they then deluded away (from the truth)?" (29:61). They also confessed that God was the only source of rain and cultivation, "And if indeed thou ask them who it is that sends down rain from the sky, and gives life therewith to the earth after its death, *they will certainly reply, 'Allah'*! Say, 'Praise be to Allah!' But most of them understand not." (29:63). They also recognized the fact that they owed their own creation to God Almighty, "If thou ask them, *Who created them, they will certainly say, Allah:* how then are they deluded away (from Truth)?" (43:87). They understood that both sustenance, life, death, and the keys of affairs were all in the hands of God:

> Say: "Who is it that sustains you (in life) from the sky and from the earth? Or who is it that has power over hearing and sight? And who is it that brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living? And who is it that rules and regulates all affairs?" They will soon say, "Allah". Say, "Will ye not then show piety (to Him)?" (10:31)

They also confessed God to be the Absolute Lord of the heavens and the earth:

> Say: "To whom belong the earth and all beings therein? (say) if ye know!" *They will say, "To Allah!"* Say: "Yet will ye not receive admonition?" Say: "Who is the Lord of the seven heavens, and the Lord of the Mighty Throne? *"They will say, "(They belong) to Allah."* Say: "Will ye not then fear." Say: "Who is it in whose hands is the sovereignty of all things,- Who protects (all, but is not protected (of any)? (Say) if ye know." *They will say, "(It belongs) to Allah."* Say: "Then how are ye deluded?" (23:84–89) [italics mine]

So, given all this acknowledgement of the Creator why were the Makkans polytheists? Izutsu observes that though the Makkans believed in Allah as the Creator of the universe, this belief did not play a vital role in their daily life. The occurrence of

> words like *khalq* "creation", *khaliq* "creator", *bari* "originator" etc. in pre-Islamic literature should not mislead us into thinking that the concept of Divine Creation was playing a decisive role in the Jahili Weltanschauung... Unlike the Koranic system in which Allah the Creator governs the entire Weltanshauung Jahiliyyah did not attach great importance to this semantic field... This is tantamount to saying that the idea of Allah's being the very "source" of human existence, if it was there, meant very little to the minds of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And this is why the Koran tries so hard to bring home to them the very significance of this idea and to awaken them to the grave implication of it.[335]

Although Allah was conceived of as the divine lord, this fact didn't really amount to an awful lot for he was very much regarded as a distant God, put aside, relegated to the back burner as it were, in matters of daily life including society's social, financial and political dealings. God did not interfere in man's affairs. Thus there existed a clear distinction between what was thought to be religious and what was perceived to be mundane. The dualistic dichotomy of this strange mixture of the sacred and profane was so complete that Allah, as stated, despite being Lord, in fact was not given much of a role to play in the mundane affairs of day to day life. Hence, remote and really preferred out of the way He was relegated to the detached realms of heaven and abstract religious metaphysics. Izutsu elaborates:

> In the jahili system, the creative activity of Allah is both the beginning and the end of His intervention in human affairs. He does not as a rule take care of what He has brought into existence just like an irresponsible father who never cares for his children; the task is taken over…by another Being called Dahr. In the Islamic system, on the contrary, creation marks just the beginning of the Divine rule over the created things.[336]

Interestingly, this ancient Makkan conception of the Divine coincides closely with many modern secular trends. Much like the Makkans, God The Creator is perceived today as divorced from the world and the cosmos, with the universe and all that it contains somehow thought to run on autopilot. Ergo, the modern concept of "Nature" comes very close to the Makkans' understanding of the being, or force, they termed *dahr*. The *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah* aimed at purging God of any and every element of associationism, or multiplicity, in man's conception of the Divine Being, as well as establishing with full and clear force God's absolute control and running of the universe and His creation. Notions of God's practical divorce from nature and man were eradicated, putting God back in the driving seat as Ruler and Lawgiver, fully in control of man's daily affairs and surroundings.

Despite their view of God as a distant force, the pagans of Makkah used nevertheless to call upon Him in times of distress: "Now, if they embark on a boat, *they call on Allah, making their devotion sincerely (and exclusively) to Him;* but when He has delivered them safely to (dry) land, behold, they give a share (of their worship to others)!" (29:65). "When a wave covers them like the canopy (of clouds), *they call upon Allah, offering Him sincere devotion.* But when He has delivered them safely to land, there are among them those that falter between (right and wrong)..." (31:32). Izutsu calls this attitude a "temporary monotheism."[337] The Qur'an has elaborated upon this point in several passages:

> He it is who enableth you to traverse through land and sea; till when ye even board ships;-they sail with them with a favorable wind, and they rejoice thereat; then comes a stormy wind and the waves come to them from all sides, and they think they are being overwhelmed: *they pray unto Allah, sincerely offering (their) duty unto Him, saying, "If Thou dost deliver us from this, we shall truly show our gratitude!* But when He delivereth them, behold! they transgress insolently through the earth in defiance of right! (10:22–23)

In the time of difficulty "*Lo, it is to Him alone that you cry* and then, if He so will, He removes the distress for which you had cried to Him.

506

Then you forget the partners you had set up with Allah" (6:41). ʿIkrimah, the son of Abu Jahl was a disbeliever at the time of Makkah's conquest, a vehement opponent of the Prophet and the Muslims. He fled to Jeddah and sailed from there towards Abyssinia. During the voyage the boat ran into a threatening storm. As a result, people began calling on their gods and goddesses to save them. Later, when the storm grew even worse and the passengers were convinced that the boat would sink, they began to feel it was time to call on God alone, for He alone could save them. This occurrence opened ʿIkrimah's eyes, and his heart cried out that calling upon Allah alone was precisely what the Prophet had constantly told people. This experience proved to be a turning point in ʿIkrimah's life and he accepted Islam.

Furthermore, the Makkans used to fear and worship Allah in many ways. They honored the sanctity of the Kaʿbah, the Sanctuary in Makkah, faithfully devoted various types of worship to God, performed Hajj (pilgrimage), recited a kind of "*talbiyah*" (the monotheistic formula Muslims recite during days of Hajj),[338] served visiting pilgrims (9:19), offered a kind of prayer,[339] fasted certain days of the year,[340] offered charity in God's name (6:136), started their writings with the name of Allah,[341] and sacrificed animals using His name etc. Yet, in spite of all these seemingly monotheistic beliefs and actions, the Qur'an dubbed them as disbelievers (*kuffar*) and polytheists (*mushrikun*). The reason being their practice of associationism, which opened the door to multiplicity and compromise of the divine unity. In other words, they associated others as gods with God, invoking them, worshiping them and taking them as mediators and intercessors between God and His creation. "Instead of God they serve what neither harms nor benefits them, and they say: '*These are our intercessors with God*'" (10:18).

> Is it not to Allah that sincere devotion is due? But those who take for protectors others than Allah (say): "*We only serve them in order that they may bring us nearer to Allah.*" Truly Allah will judge between them in that wherein they differ. But Allah guides not such as are false and ungrateful. Had Allah wished to take to Himself a son, He could have chosen whom He pleased out of those whom He doth create: but Glory be to Him! (He transcends such things.) He is Allah, the One, the Overpowering. (39:3–4)

The Makkans lacked purity of worship. To the Qur'an this was paganism. That such a kind of religiosity prevailed in the Arabian Peninsula at the time of Muhammad is confirmed by historical research and by modern scholarship. Joseph Henninger concludes his famous work *Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion* with the observation that:

> Here then are the elements of this religion: Allah, creator of the world, supreme and undisputed lord, but relegated to the background in the cultic and practical life of the people; next, manifesting the rudiments of a polytheism, several *astral divinitie*s (at least that of the planet Venus) and *atmospheric divinities* (perhaps the attributes of a creator god which have been hypostatized); finally, ancestors and *jinn*, these last having more importance in the belief system than in the cult. All of this, moreover, is somewhat vague and far from being organized into a real pantheon or hierarchical system.[342]

Discussing the pre-Islamic formulas of *talbiyah* at length, M. J. Kister concludes that the formulas provide a clue towards a better understanding of the religious ideas of the tribes during the period of *jahiliyyah*. The tribes of course had their gods, and the places of worship of these gods were usually shared by other tribes allied with them or living in their neighborhood. "They believed however in a supreme God, who had His House in Mecca. On their pilgrimage to Mecca they directed themselves to this God, who held supremacy over their tribal gods." Kister further observes that when intending to perform the pilgrimage to the Sanctuary at Makkah, every tribe would come to (the abode of) their idol and pray there; then they would set out uttering the *talbiyah*...until they reached Makkah:

> This report demonstrates to what extent there prevailed harmonious co-existence and co-operation between the tribal deities and the supreme God of Mecca. The Jahiliyyah tribes cannot be said to have been straightforward polytheists; they were *mushrikun*, i.e. while accepting and admitting the existence and supreme authority of God, they associated other deities with Him.[343]

F. E. Peters observes that Allah was unquestionably neither an unknown nor an unimportant deity to the Quraysh when Muhammad began preaching his exclusive worship at Makkah. What is equally certain is that Allah had what the Qur'an disdainfully calls "associates," other gods and goddesses who shared both His cult and His shrine. Peter writes:

> The processional chant of the pagans of the "Era of Ignorance" was, we are told, "Here I am, O Allah, here I am; you have no partners except such a partner as you have; you possess him and all that is his." The last clause may reflect what was an emerging tendency toward henotheism, the recognition of Allah as the "High God" of Mecca... the Quraysh are relentlessly chastised for "partnering God," and from what we otherwise know of Muhammad's Mecca, the charge is not an unjust one.[344]

David Waines gives more details of the Makkans' belief system; for instance he explains that for the pagans Allah was the "High God"; neither the sole object of worship nor indeed the sole existent god. For Makkans Allah merely stood above, or apart from, all other tribal divinities. Despite this marginalization He nevertheless played a particular role in pagan life: first, as the giver of rain, to ensure the sustenance of life for the inhabitants of the arid desert. Second, as the guarantor of oaths, and therefore regarded as crucial to the binding nature of agreements, tribal or individual, sworn in His name. Indeed violation of such an oath was deemed a grave offense, as it involved serious consequences for social peace and order. Waines writes:

> In a somewhat vague way, too, Allah was viewed as the creator of the heavens and the earth, although in general no moral conclusions seem to have been drawn from this regarding an individual's behavior and future well-being.... Thus in matters of daily concern, Allah occupied a particular place, but alongside other gods in the Arab's pantheon.[345]

The other gods (*Lat, Manat, ʿUzza, Hubal* etc.) were consulted on various matters of domestic and other concerns. For instance the setting

of a date for marriage, confirmation of a child's parentage, the settlement of a quarrel etc. as well as the most propitious moment to embark upon a journey. Matters such as these all fell within the purview of the partner gods whose advice would subsequently be sought. In addition their help, as mentioned earlier, would also be sought whether for rain or assistance in battle against a rival tribe and so on. K. Armstrong notes that the "shrine [Kaᶜbah] was also surrounded by 360 idols, or effigies of the gods, that may have been the totems of all different tribes that came to worship there during the appointed month."[346] It was not only in Makkah and around the Kaᶜbah that other gods were being worshipped. They were celebrated all over the Arabian Peninsula.

What becomes quickly apparent is that modern western scholarship differs little from the Qur'anic depiction of the pre-Islamic Arab religion. The former also substantiates the claim made earlier that the Qur'anic concept of monotheism neither legitimizes nor allows worship, devotion and obedience to and of other gods besides Allah. The act of sole worship, absolute devotion, and utmost submission to the One God is more fundamental and intrinsic to the Qur'anic concept of the Deity than belief in Him as the sole Creator, Sustainer, and Master of the universe. For the Qur'an, *Tawhid al-Rububiyyah* without *Tawhid al-Uluhiyyah* is mere polytheism. Perhaps there would not have been much opposition to Muhammad's message had it not been for his uncompromising stance against any and every kind of associationism with Allah. The Qur'anic concept of the Deity was intensely stringent, approving nothing except the absolute pure worship of and total devotion to the One and Only God. This was the primordial issue and the demarcation line between the Qur'anic understanding of the Deity and that of the pagans' conception of God. And it is this that the Makkans recognized and disputed: "Has he made gods (all) into One? Truly this is a strange thing!" (Qur'an 38:5).

M. Watt, theorizes that the pre-Islamic pagan religion was the result of a long development. Prominent among the objects originally worshipped were stones and trees. These were sometimes regarded not as divinities but as divine houses or dwellings. The nomads appear to have had little serious belief in them, perhaps because they were originally the gods of agricultural communities. In view of the opposition to

Muhammad at Makkah it is conceivable that certain small groups there, especially those concerned with particular religious ceremonies, had a slightly higher degree of belief. Watt portrays the pre-Islamic Arabs as faithless heathens in an effort to emphasize the politico-economic nature of the conflict between the Makkans and the Prophet, and to insinuate that Muhammad's opposition to the Makkans was not primarily due to their associationism but mostly due to their faithlessness.

Perhaps it is too much to assume that the nomadic Arab tribes had little serious belief in their gods because they were originally the gods of agricultural communities. Rather, and a fact which even Watt recognizes, is their obvious commitment to these gods, evident not only from the intense animosity they displayed toward the Qur'anic message but also in the type of sacrifices they made to preserve the ways of their forefathers with regards to the worship of these deities. It was not only the Makkans who fiercely opposed the Qur'anic message fighting it with every means possible. In fact, the entire Arabic community, with very few exceptions, sided with them in their struggle against Prophet Muhammad and his religion. The issue of the gods always seemed to be the major concern continuously brought up in their dialogue with the Prophet or his aides. Even prior to the coming of Islam, what is clearly apparent is the majority of the Arabs' commitment to their various gods and goddesses in many aspects of their lives. K. Armstrong quotes a revealing incident in which Zayd ibn ʿAmr is expelled from Makkah by his very own brother Khattab for merely criticizing the Makkan goddesses. She expounds:

> The story is instructive. It eloquently expresses the questing spirit of some of the Arabs at this time. But it also shows the opposition that anybody who threatened the pagan religion could expect to face. There were many Quraysh like Khattab ibn Nufayl who were devoted to the faith of their fathers and could not bear to hear a word against the old gods and goddesses.[347]

However, this observation does not imply high and lofty claims about a developed intellectual system of belief regarding these deities on the part of the pre-Islamic Arabs. And the same was further not the

case everywhere in Arabia. Not all of the Arabs were such staunch supporters of, and unwavering believers in, these deities or their abilities to help or harm them, that they never violated their worship of them. Quite the reverse. There are several incidents where as a result of a failure or disaster, some of the gods are abandoned, disrespected, and even broken into pieces. Imru'u al-Qays is a typical example of this attitude. Hitti informs us that:

> Having set out to avenge the murder of his father he stopped at the temple of dhul-al-Khalasah to consult the oracle by means of drawing arrows. Upon drawing 'abandon' thrice, he hurled the broken arrows at the idol exclaiming, 'Accursed One! had it been thy father who was murdered thou wouldst not have forbidden my avenging him.'[348]

This sort of disbelief was not due to the fact of the gods being originally gods of agricultural communities or not taken seriously at all times. In reality, the reaction seems to have been due to the greater importance given to the respect and veneration of one's honor, tribe, and tribal ties, denoted by what was called *muru'ah* or "tribal humanism". Watt himself has observed that this was the effective religion of the Arabs of Muhammad's day.

In the presence of this pervasive attitude of status pride, it is easy to discern that the archaic religion or the gods would sometimes be abandoned or left unattended if the act of worship stood in the way of *ʿird* or personal honor, or the realization of some tribal goal or interest. Therefore, Hitti's observation seems to be more accurate than Watt's claims of the Arabs' faithlessness. Hitti notes that, "To spiritual impulses he (the pagan Arab) was luke-warm, even indifferent. His conformity to religious practice followed tribal inertia and was dictated by his conservative respect for tradition."[349] To Armstrong this was the reason that, "Muhammad is constantly accused by his enemies of being a danger to society, of neglecting the religion of the fathers and of atheism..."[350]

We can therefore infer that the pre-Islamic Arabs were "religious" in their own way yet different from modern connotations of the term

"religious". Their religiosity owed much to their enthusiasm for continuity with the past or traditionalism rather than the outcome of an intellectually thought out and developed system of belief. As such, this enthusiasm would fade if in conflict with their craze for tribal honor and pride, *muru'ah*. We can also infer that they worshipped idols made of wood and stone, angels, jinn, saints and other lesser deities as intercessors and intermediaries between themselves and Allah, regarding these deities as absolute, independent gods, autonomous from Allah, the supreme Deity, that is other than Him.

It was against such notions of divinity, and not mere faithlessness, that the Qur'an preached its exclusive transcendental monotheism, the strict monotheism which excluded the worship, mediation, intercession and help of anyone other than Allah in the absolute religious sense, regarding any such act as detrimental to the very core of monotheism. "And they have been commanded no more than this: *To worship Allah, offering Him sincere devotion*, being true (in faith)..." (98:5). "Say: '*I have been ordered to serve God sincerely, [making] religion exclusively His. I have been ordered to be the first of those who submit their will to Him.*' Say: "I fear the torment of an awful day if I should disobey my Lord.' Say: '*God do I worship sincerely; my religion belongs to Him...*'" (39:11–14).

To the Qur'an both categories of the doctrine of *al-tawhid* discussed thus far, are mutually inter-connected; two sides of the same coin. The Qur'an leads us from the Oneness of Lordship to the Oneness of worship and devotion: "O Men! Remember the grace of Allah unto you! Is there a Creator, other than Allah, to give you sustenance from heaven or earth? There is no god but He: how then are ye perverted?" (35:3):

> Or, who has created the heavens and the earth, and who sends you down rain from the sky? Yea, with it We cause to grow well-planted orchards full of beauty and delight: it is not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them. (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Nay, they are a people who swerve from justice. Or, who has made the earth firm to live in; made rivers in its midst; set thereon mountains immovable; and made a separating bar

between the two seas (can there be another) god besides Allah? Nay, most of them know not. Or, who listens to the distressed when he calls on Him, and Who relieves his suffering, and makes you (mankind) inheritors of the earth? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Little it is that ye heed! Or, who guides you through the depths of darkness on land and sea, and who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His Mercy? (Can there be another) god besides Allah?- High is Allah above what they associate with Him! Or, who originates Creation, then repeats it, and who gives you sustenance from heaven and earth? (Can there be another) god besides Allah? Say, "Bring forth your argument, if ye are telling the truth!" (27:60–64; also see 44:7–9)

"It is He Who is God in heaven and God on earth... And those whom they invoke besides Allah have no power of intercession; – only he who bears witness to the Truth, and with full knowledge" (43:84–86).

The conclusion the Qur'an draws from these elaborations is that nobody should worship, devote themselves to, call upon, depend upon, humble themselves or submit to (in the absolute sense of the words) anyone other than Almighty God i.e., not to take any *ilah* for worship except *the Ilah* (God): "Take not with Allah another god: or thou (O man!) wilt sit in disgrace and destitution"(17:22). "Take not, with Allah, another object of worship, lest thou shouldst be thrown into Hell, blameworthy and rejected" (17:39). This emphatic concentration upon the purity of worship and devotion to God Almighty, in Izutsu's opinion, is "undoubtedly the most 'dramatic' moment of the whole Koranic Divina Commedia."[351] Islamic transcendental monotheism leaves no stone unturned to drive home the fact that it is only Almighty God who is the Ultimate Reality and the ultimate concern of man and his actions. Absolute submission to the moral will of this God and peace with Him and with His creatures is the essence of the Islamic message. This, in short, *is* "Islam".

3: *Tawhid al-Asma' wa al-Sifat:* As Almighty God is One, Unique, and incomparable in His lordship, sovereignty, and worship, He is also

One and Unique in His names and attributes. In Judaism and Christianity, the conception of God is to a greater or lesser extent bound to the limitations of His creatures as seen in previous chapters. Islam emphatically proclaims that Almighty God, the Transcendent and Exalted Lord and Sustainer of all that exists, is far above possessing any of the creaturely attributes which have been ascribed to Him by man. He is not bound to any of the limitations of human beings or any other of His creatures. He has neither form nor body, nor corporeal or physical attributes, features, or characteristics. Rather His attributes are infinite and absolute. They are far above any sort of limitations, defects, and deficiencies, such as his having a beginning or an end, begetting or being begotten, having physical dimensions, or having needs such as requiring food, rest, or procreation etc. He is the One Who gives such dimensions and characteristics to His creations, while not sharing them in the slightest degree.

This third dimension of *al-tawhid* is specifically directed towards Judaic and Christian compromises of the divine transcendence. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam constitute successive moments of Semitic consciousness in their long march through history as carriers of a divine mission on earth. Identifying itself with the original pristine message sent by God to mankind, Islam as the final Revelation, notably protected from scriptural corruption, stands as a corrective element, finding fault with the Jewish and Christian conception and portrayal of God as delineated in the historical documents accepted by the two faiths as scriptures. Islam holds these documents accountable for compromising the divine transcendence and hence committing the most grievous error against the Semitic consciousness, polluting its once pure essence. As detailed in previous chapters, the biblical conception of God is anthropomorphic and corporeal. After criticizing a number of biblical passages portraying God in anthropomorphic terms, al-Faruqi asserts:

> Islam also charged that the relation Judaism claimed to bind God to "His People" straight-jacketed Him into granting them favors despite their immorality, their hardship and stiffneckedness (Deuteronomy 9:5–6). A "bound" god, bound in any sense or degree, is not the transcendent God of Semitic consciousness.[352]

Likewise, Christianity gravely misconceived the divine unity by reformulating it as a triune Godhead, using the incarnational gambit as justification to commit excesses against God and place countless limitations upon Him. According to al-Faruqi the "Christians have committed themselves to divine non-transcendence so resolutely that it had become with them an *idee fixe*, enabling Paul Tillich to declare *sub specie eternitatis* that the transcendent God is unknown and unknowable unless He is concretized in an object of nature and history."[353]

Equally improper has been God talk in Christianity including the language and terminology used to express creedal prepositions. Although Christianity has never ceased to claim that God is transcendent, nevertheless it has always spoken of Him as a real man, living in this earthly domain, walking and doing all the things men do, including suffering the agonies of death. So, to Christians, Jesus has always been both man and God. As discussed in chapter 3, this man-God statement is inherently flawed, more of a claim than a logical preposition substantiated by rational arguments or reasonable facts. This being so, Christianity has never been able to systematically articulate the God-man dogma in intelligible terms or take a consistent position on Jesus' humanity or divinity; and not surprisingly its turbulent history has been fraught with accusations of apostasy and heresy hurled back and forth. This also explains why Christian God language has always been confusing, at best, for confusion sows confusion. When pinned down, every Christian has to admit that the God he/she worships is both transcendent and incarnate. Yet this claim of transcendence to al-Faruqi is "*ipso facto* devoid of grounds. To maintain the contrary, one has to give up the laws of logic."[354] In sum, a wide gulf of conceptual differences regarding the doctrine of divine transcendence exists and separates Islam from both Judaism and Christianity.

Islam emphasizes that God by very definition of His reality cannot simply be a sort of supernatural or superhuman personality/being, directing worldly affairs from the heavens/soaring clouds whilst simultaneously sharing in creaturely attributes, needs, and qualities. For God is nothing less than the Creator, Originator, and Fashioner of this

vast universe, the One Who keeps it functioning in accordance with His infinite wisdom, knowledge and master plans. God infinitely transcends anything which the human mind can possibly perceive or comprehend, or the senses grasp, imagine, or explain. God is far, far above any similarity or comparability with any of His creatures. This special emphasis upon the Divine transcendence is what the third category of *al-tawhid* is designated for. God is One in His Names and Attributes. His Names, Actions and Attributes surpass human names, actions and attributes as much as His Being surpasses their beings. The Absolute Creator utterly transcends the relative actions and attributes of His creatures. This is implied in the first assertion of the Islamic creed that "There is no god but God". In addition to being a denial of any associates to God in His worship, rule and judgeship of the universe, it also contains a denial of the possibility of any creature representing, personifying, or in any way or form expressing the divine Being. The Qur'an says of God: "To Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: When He decreeth a matter, He saith to it: "Be," and it is" (2:117; 2:163). "There is no God but He, Ever-Living, Ever-Active" (3:2). "May He be glorified beyond any description!" (6:100). "... No sense may perceive Him" (6:103). "... Praised be He, the Transcendent Who greatly transcends all claims and reports about Him" (17:43). As a result of this stringent emphasis upon the divine transcendence, Muslims have been supremely careful never to associate, in any manner possible, any image or thing with the presence of the divine or with their consciousness of the divine. This fact is well reflected in Muslim discourse, speech, and writings concerning the divine. Indeed, Muslims have only ever employed the language of the Qur'an, and its terms and expressions, to present or describe God – the transcendental language and terminology chosen by God Himself in fact to depict Himself in the verses of the Qur'an.

The Qur'an prescribes the fundamental transcendental criterion in the following verses: "There is nothing whatever like unto Him" (42:11). "And there is none like unto Him" (112:4, which we have already had the opportunity to quote and explain in this chapter), and "knowest thou of any who is worthy of the same Name as He?" (19:65). After having established this criterion, the Qur'an represents God as having "the Most Beautiful Names":

> Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god:-Who knows (all things) both secret and open; He, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Allah is He, than Whom there is no other god;- the Sovereign, the Holy One, the Source of Peace (and Perfection), the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of Safety, the Exalted in Might, the Irresistible, the justly Proud, Glory to Allah! (High is He) above the partners they attribute to Him. He is Allah, the Creator, the Originator, the Fashioner to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names: whatever is in the heavens and on earth, doth declare His Praises and Glory: and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. (59:22–24)

This is a passage of great sublimity. It sums up the generic attributes and names of Allah. While establishing the fundamental principle of divine otherness by the words "nothing is like unto Him", the passage institutes the basis of a possible divine modality. The One and Unique God is the most Merciful, the Compassionate. His knowledge extends to everything seen and unseen, present and future, near and far, in being and not in being; in fact these relative contrasts do not even apply to the Absolute God. He is unknowable in His being yet knowable through His names and attributes. These beautiful names and attributes are the only source and basis of a possible divine modality. This is perhaps the reason why the Qur'an and Hadith have taken upon themselves to fix the boundaries of this modality to avoid confusion and excesses.

Due to their sheer significance, these Qur'anic verses have been explained and reflected upon by a great many Qur'anic exegetes, mystics and theologians. Mere recitation of this passage is highly encouraged and said to carry great merits, the merits being connected with the beautiful names of God contained in the passage. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said that "Allah has ninety-nine names, one hundred less one; and he who memorized them all by heart will enter Paradise." To count something means to know it by heart.[355] Ibn al-Qayyim observes that a Muslim is "firstly, to count them and memorize their words; secondly, to understand their meanings and intent; and thirdly, to call upon God with them, as God has said in the Qur'an: (The most beautiful names belong to Allah: so call on Him by them.) (7:180)"[356]

Al-Tirmazi gives a count of these ninety-nine names in a report from Abu Hurayrah.[357] Ibn Hazm argues on the basis of such narration that there are only ninety-nine beautiful names of God and "it is not permissible to add any more name to it because the Prophet said hundred less one."[358] But the consensus of Muslim scholars is against such a view. They argue that the number ninety-nine should not be taken too literally. It is easy to find more than the ninety-nine names of God both from the Qur'an as well as from the authentic sayings of the Prophet. Ibn Hajar reports such a consensus from al-Nawawi.[359] Part three (chapter one) of al-Ghazali's famous work *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, is titled: "On Explaining that the names of God most high are not limited to ninety-nine so far as divine instruction is concerned". In this chapter al-Ghazali contends that the Qur'an and Hadith literature contain names other than the ninty-nine and several lists of divine names could be formulated by combining various hadith reports on the subject.[360] Al-Ghazali, like Ibn Hajar, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim,[361] argues that the Prophet said:

> Whatever distress or affliction that befalls a person, let him say: "O God, I am Your servant, and the son of Your servant, and the son of Your bondsmaid: my forelock is in Your hand, Your judgment concerning me is done. I implore You by every name which is Yours, by which You have named Yourself, or which You revealed in Your book, or which You taught to anyone from Your creation, or which You appropriated to Yourself in Your knowledge of hidden things, that You might make the Qur'an a renewal of my heart, a light for my inmost thoughts, a way through my affliction, and the unraveling of my distress"; and God – Great and Glorious – will remove his distress and affliction, and replace them with happiness.[362]

Al-Ghazali argues that the Prophetic saying, "which You appropriated to Yourself in Your knowledge of hidden things" shows that the names are not limited to those mentioned in the well-known versions.[363]

Ibn al-ʿArabi has given a count of 146 names,[364] Ibn al-Wazir 173, and Ibn Hajar has narrated a report from al-Razi that there are 4000 names for God, with the qualification that such a statement cannot be substantiated from the Qur'an or Sunnah.[365] ʿUmar al-Ashqar has shown that 88 names are mentioned in the Qur'an itself and 22 more are mentioned in the Hadith.[366] These scholars argue that although to enumerate these ninety-nine names would suffice to grant a person entrance to paradise, in no way are the Divine names restricted to the number ninety-nine. It is, notes al-Ghazali,

> like the king who has a thousand servants: one could say that the king has ninety-nine servants, and were one to seek their assistance, no enemy could oppose him. What is specified is the number required to obtain the assistance one needs from them, either because of the addition of their strength, or because that number would suffice to repel the enemy without needing any more; it does not specify that only they exist.[367]

The beautiful names of God can be classified into three main categories. Some of them can be called the "Names of God's essence (*Asma' al-Dhat*)", others as the "Names of God's attributes (*Asma' al-Sifat*)", and still others as the "Names of His acts (*Asma' al-Afʿal*)".[368] The essence *(dhat)* of something is its reality, the innermost core that defines what it is. In the case of God, the question of *dhat* means what is God's very self? What is His essence that makes Him God and differentiates Him fundamentally from everything other than Himself? The typical Qur'anic answer is that God is so unique and transcendent that "Nothing is like unto Him" (42:11). Therefore, God's essence is what He is and what everything else is not. That is what the first category of names intends to explain. Among commonly employed Qur'anic names, Allah is the most frequently used name. It occurs in the Qur'an 2602 times: 980 times in the *marfuʿan* (nominative) case, 592 in the *mansuban* (accusative) case, 1125 in the *majruran* (genitive) case and 5 times with the formula *Allahumma*.[369] Many Muslim scholars and theologians argue that Allah is the proper name (*ism ʿalam*) that God has given to His (*dhat*), to Himself. Al-Ghazali observes:

it is a name for the true existent, the one who unites the attributes of divinity, is subject of the attributes of lordship, and unique in true existence…It is most likely that in indicating *this* meaning (Allah) is analogous to proper names, so everything which has been said about its derivation and definition is arbitrary and artificial.[370]

Other theologians like Ibn al-Qayyim, and philologists like the renowned Sibawayh, prefer to derive it from *ilah*, and hold that it means simply "the God".[371]

Among many others, al-Ghazali argues that Allah is the greatest of the ninety-nine names of God because,

it refers to the essence which unites all the attributes of divinity, so that none of them is left out, whereas each of the remaining names only refers to a single attribute: knowledge, power, agency, and the rest. It is also the most specific of the names, since no-one uses it for anyone other than Him, neither literally nor metaphorically, whereas the rest of the names may name things other than He, as in 'the Powerful', 'the Knowing', 'the Merciful', and the rest. So in these two respects it seems that this name is the greatest of these names.[372]

This is the reason that most Muslims prefer to use the name Allah instead of "God" while referring to the Supreme Being. This name transcends the sphere of time, space, and history, and is so specific that it is inconceivable that it could be shared, either metaphorically or literally.

The other names of essence are those that describe God's absolute transcendence and negate all kinds of imperfections. *Al-Quddus* is one of the names of essence. It occurs in the Qur'an twice (59:23; 62:1) and means "*the Holy*". Al-Ghazali observes that *Al-Quddus* is the One

who is free from every attribute which a sense might perceive, or imagination may conceive, or to which imagination may instinctively turn or by which the conscience may be moved, or which thinking demands. I do not say: free from defects and

imperfections, for the mere mention of that borders on insult; it is bad form for one to say: the king of the country is neither a weaver nor a cupper, since denying something's existence could falsely imply its possibility, and there is imperfection in that false implication.[373]

Human beings can praise God by ascribing to Him attributes taken from their perfections i.e., knowledge, power, hearing, seeing etc., and denying to Him attributes taken from their imperfections, while God, argues al-Ghazali,

> transcends attributes taken from their perfection as much as He does those reflecting their imperfections. Indeed God is free from every attribute of which the created can conceive; He transcends them and is above anything similar to them or like them. So if no authorization or permission had been given to use them, it would not be permissible to use most of them.[374]

Al-Salam is another name that describes God's transcendence in absolute terms. It means 'the Flawless'. Al-Ghazali explains it as "the one whose essence is free from defect, whose attributes escape imperfection, and whose actions are untarnished by evil; and given that He is like that, there is nothing flawless in existence which is not attributed to Him, and originates from Him."[375] Al-Maydani defines it as "the one who is absolutely free from all kinds of defects in connection with His essence, His attributes and His actions. He is free from all that which are logically not befitting to the meanings of Godhead and Lordship, like resemblance or comparability with the contingent *(al-hadith)*."[376]

Al-Subbuh, to al-Halimi, means the one "who transcends the defects and attributes that befall the contingent because of its contingency."[377] Al-Bayhaqi reports from the Prophet himself that "*al-Tasbh*" or "*Subhan Allah*" means, "God's absolute transcendence above and over all types of defects".[378] It means that God's glory, greatness, and transcendence is such that He is far beyond all creaturely understanding. *Al-ʿAl* (the Most High),[379] *Al-Ghani* (the Rich),[380] *Al-Samad* (the Self-Sufficient, the Eternal),[381] *Al-Wahhid* (the Unique),[382] *Al-Awwal* (the

First) and *Al-Akhir* (the Last),[383] are also among the names that denote God's transcendence in absolute terms.

If the names of essence tell us what God is not, the names of attributes tell us what God is. It must be said at the outset that through these attributes one cannot fathom God's self. Therefore, there is no contradiction between God's unknowability and knowability. When we describe some of the attributes of a person and say of him that he is this or that, in no way can we exhaust that person's reality. Likewise, to say that God is Merciful, or All-Knowledgeable, or All-Hearing etc., is neither to describe God's essence nor exhaust His reality. He is far above being exhausted by finite knowledge, imagination, or perception. The limitations of human knowledge and comprehension for instance are obvious in the sphere of scientific knowledge. As for God, "Nothing is like unto Him" is the Qur'anic dictum that clearly tells us that in no way or form can we understand His Being or essence. "God is the infinitely and absolutely Real, about which the relatively real can know but little. We can understand reality to the extent that we are real. And that raises the question of how real we are. That is what *Tawhid* is all about."[384]

Allah is *Al-Rahman*[385] (which occurs 57 times in the Qur'an and 170 times in the *basmalah*), and *Al-Rahim* (occurring absolutely for God 114 times in the Qur'an), the Infinitely Good and the Merciful. Both the names are derived from the root "*Rahmah*" meaning mercy. Mercy is one of the most frequently mentioned and discussed attributes of God in the Qur'an. "Thy Lord is Self-sufficient, full of Mercy" (6:133). "Your Lord is full of mercy all-embracing" (6:147). "He hath inscribed for Himself (the rule of) Mercy" (6:12). "Your Lord hath inscribed for Himself (the rule of) Mercy" (6:54; also see 7:156; 18:57; 40:7). God is in fact "the Most Merciful of those who show mercy" (12:64; 12:92; 21:83; 23:109; 23:118). In addition to these great many verses of the Qur'an, the *shahadah* itself is one of the great witnesses to this Divine attribute. The *shahadah* tells us that all mercy is the gift of the Merciful. "There is no god but the Merciful" which means that "There is no mercy but God's mercy," or "There is none merciful but the Merciful." God's mercy overshadows all the mercy in the universe. His mercy is the true and real mercy and others' mercy is relative. The Prophet expressed this idea in the following hadith:

> God created a hundred mercies on the day He created the heavens
> and the earth, each mercy of which would fill what is between the
> heaven and the earth. Of these He placed one mercy in the earth.
> Through it the mother inclines toward her child, and the birds and
> animals incline toward each other. When the day of resurrection
> comes, He will complete those mercies with this mercy.[386]

God's mercy is both inclusive and perfect. The act of mercy requires
an object of mercy. No one requires mercy until and unless one is
wanting. A compassionately merciful person may not be called truly
merciful if he or she accomplishes mercy without volition, intention or
sincere concern for the one in need. To al-Ghazali, perfect mercy is

> pouring out benefaction to those in need, and directing it to them,
> for their care; and inclusive mercy is when it embraces deserving
> and undeserving alike. The mercy of God is both perfect and
> inclusive [*tammah wa ʿammah*]: perfect inasmuch as it wants to
> fulfill the needs of those in need and does meet them; and inclusive
> inasmuch as it embraces both deserving and undeserving,
> encompassing this world and the next, and includes bare
> necessities and needs, and special gifts over and above them. So
> He is utterly and truly merciful.[387]

Moreover, the mercy in our sense is accompanied with a painful
empathy which effects the merciful and moves him to meet the needs
of the one in need. Therefore, the one who is merciful out of such
feelings of empathy and suffering comes close to intending to alleviate
his own suffering and sensitivity by his actions. Human mercy is relative
as well as a little selfish as humans by their acts of mercy look after
themselves also. God's mercy is absolutely perfect. It is one way traffic
as it is directed towards creatures and not vice versa. It does not relieve
God of suffering or sensitivity, as these negative passions do not exist
in God. He is the uniquely other. Hence, there are no anthropomorphic
implications of this attribute in God. The name *Al-Rahman* is more
specific than *Al-Rahim*. *Al-Rahman* is not used for anybody other than
God while *Al-Rahim* can be used for others. Always preceeded by the

definite article in the Qur'an the term *Al-Rahman* is considered a proper name of God because nothing is said of *Al-Rahman* that is not also said of Allah. Allah is then nothing but absolute Mercy. The term Allah focuses thought on the unfathomable unicity, while *Al-Rahman* focuses it on the depths of divine mercy and benevolence.

Many western scholars seem inclined to portray Allah as a fearful master, or tyrant, ever ready to mete out chastising punishments, a harsh God Who does what He feels like etc. Baillie, for instance considers that, "Islam is too moralistic.... Its God is too sheerly transcendent, the Lawgiver, but not the Gracegiver, not the indwelling source and author of the obedience which He demands."[388] Such a depiction of Allah seems quite arbitrary when reflected through the Qur'an's verses such as those regarding God's mercy and benevolence. The Qur'anic Deity is full of Grace. For instance, "Allah is Lord of abounding Grace", is a phrase which readers will frequently encounter even if flicking through the Qur'an (2:105; 3:74; 3:174; 8:29; 57:29; 62:4 etc.). "Allah is full of grace to mankind, but most of them are ungrateful" (2:243; 10:60; 40:61); "Allah is full of grace to all the worlds" (2:251); "Allah is full of grace to the believers" (3:152); His grace is manifest (27:16) and the highest (35:32; 42:22); He is Oft-Forgiving (*Ghafur*). This name occurs in the Qur'an 71 times in the nominative case, and 20 times in the accusative case. God loves to forgive all sins for He is the Oft-Forgiving, is the message communicated throughout the Qur'an (5:39; 6:54; 7:153; 15:49; 16:119; 39:53); "Your Lord is Most Forgiving, Full of Mercy" (18:58). This is why He has given Himself the name *Al-Ghaffar*, which means, that not only does He love to forgive, but that He also conceals and covers sins so as not to humiliate or embarrass the sinners. So in what sense can God's mercy or grace or benevolence as stipulated in the Qur'an be disputed? Western scholars tend to cling tenaciously to the idea despite the wealth of Qur'anic verses in front of them.

Additionally, God is *Al-Latif* (the Benevolent), *Al-Wadud* (the Loving-kind), *Al-Halim* (the Mild), *Al-Ra'uf* (the All-Pitying), *Al-ʿAfwu* (the Effacer of sins), *Al-Barr* (the Doer of Good) and possesses many other such names to express His infinite Love, Mercy, Grace, and Kindness towards all of His creatures. Fazlur Rahman observes:

> The immediate impression from a cursory reading of the Qur'an is that of the infinite majesty of God and His equally infinite mercy, although many a Western scholar (through a combination of ignorance and prejudice) has depicted the Qur'anic God as a concentrate of pure power, even as brute power – indeed, as a capricious tyrant. The Qur'an, of course, speaks of God in so many different contexts and so frequently that unless all the statements are interiorized into a total mental picture – without, as far as possible, the interference of any subjective and wishful thinking – it would be extremely difficult, if not outright impossible, to do justice to the Qur'an concept of God.[389]

It is enough to simply quote the Qur'anic data to substantiate this claim. In the Qur'an the names referring to God's mercy are much more frequent than those describing him as a fearful master. In the Qur'an, God is called *Al-Qahhar* (the Fearsome) four times and once as *Al-Jabbar* (the irresistibly Terrible or the Awesome, 59:23). This is how he would appear to criminals, immoral hypocrites or impious disbelievers. In cases where the more stern names are used this is almost always with reference to an admonition against sinners, and yet despite the warning the admonition is generally followed by a salve, the wish that the sinner perhaps may return to God: "maybe he will return [unto God]"(48:43; 27:46) since God is both "Lord of majesty and of generosity" (55:78). For those who serve Him and are faithful He is the Most Indulgent One who never ceases to pardon, the continual Giver, the Dispenser of all that is good, the Generous, the Consenter, the Answerer, the Friend and Protector, the Pitying, the Guide and Leader, and the Most Patient who is slow to punish. All these are Qur'anic names that emphasize and clarify *Al-Rahman Al-Rahim,* the Merciful, the Compassionate. The attributes of mercy and omnipotence appear to be contradictory while in reality they are not. The Qur'anic dictum is that God's mercy is an expression of His omnipotence and hence inseparable from it. These two perfections represent the two poles of divine action and complement each other.

B. F. Skinner and many other leading psychologists and students of behaviorism have shown that, "When it is possible to arrange a

situation so that punishment immediately follows the undesirable behavior, but does not occur at other times, it may be effective in suppressing undesirable behavior without producing harmful side effects."[390] Therefore the point can be made that the Qur'an's promises of severe punishment as an admonition to those who sin, could be a positive stimuli, suppressing the undesired behavior of sinners, without the harmful side effects of their despairing or losing sight of God's surpassing mercy. These two polar aspects (Omnipotence and Mercy) of the Divinity mutually strengthen each other, encouraging and fortifying the desired behavior. On the other hand, their correlativity is such a positive factor that it can be helpful in checking wrongful human attitudes or inclinations.

Unlike the Qur'an, the Muslim theological dispositions and treatises may not place enough emphasis upon God's mercy to strike a balance between the two correlative Divine aspects of omnipotence and mercy. However, the Qur'anic approach is quite balanced in this regard. The Qur'an indeed is very emphatic about the grace and mercy of God Almighty. Bishop K. Cragg rightly notes:

> Despite its uncompromising severity, however, it is throughout an understanding about mercy and compassion. Somehow these elements were less exposed to the issues which needed such vigilance from the theologians in respect of sovereignty and will. As befits its emphasis the classic theology of Islam is less concerned about the "comfort" of man than it is about the majesty and immunity of God, since these must be seen as, in every event, a prerequisite of the mercy. In its own urgent way, the Qur'an is warmer, kindlier, more compassionate than the theologians. While the Book of Islam underwrites and prompts the latter in many of their concerns and something of their temper, its vitality and fervor, its mission and movement, bring the reader into a different world from the aridity and calculation of the dogmatists.[391]

God's absolute Omniscience is expressed by the names *'Alim al-Ghayb wa al-Shahadah* (the Knower of the hidden and the manifest), and by *Al-'Alim* (the Omniscience). The name *'Alim al-Ghayb* occurs

in the Qur'an 13 times (10 times with the combination of both i.e., *ᶜAlim al-Ghayb wa al-Shahadah*), (6:73; 9:94; 9:105; 13:9; 23:92; 59:22). "Verily Allah knows (all) the hidden things of the heavens and the earth: verily He has full knowledge of all that is in (men's) hearts" (35:38; 3:119; 5:7; 8:43). "He knows what they conceal, and what they reveal: for He knoweth well the (inmost secrets) of the hearts" (11:5; 67:13). "Does not Allah know best all that is in the hearts of all creation?" (29:10). "He knows the treachery of the eyes, and all that the hearts (of men) conceal" (40:19). "And verily your Lord knoweth all that their hearts do hide, as well as all that they reveal" (27:74; 28:69). "He knows what is hidden and what is open: too high is He for the partners they attribute to Him"(23:92). This is why He is called the Omniscient *Al-ᶜAlim*. This name occurs 140 times (nominative case), 22 times (accusative case), and 4 times as *ᶜAllam*. The perfection of this name lies in that Allah comprehends everything by knowledge – manifest and hidden, small and large, first and last, inception and outcome. His knowledge is the infinite as well as the perfect. Additionally, it is not derived from things known; rather things known are derived from it.

He is also *Al-Khabir*, the All-Aware (33 times in the nominative and 12 times in the accusative case). *Al-Khabir* is the one from whom no secret information is hidden, for nothing goes on in the realms of heaven or earth, no atom moves, and no soul is stirred or calmed, without His being aware of it. It has the same meaning as 'the Omniscient', yet when knowledge [*ᶜilm*] is related to hidden secrets it is called 'awareness' [*khibrah*], and the One who possesses it is 'He who is aware of everything.' The Qur'an informs us that:

> With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in a Record clear (to those who can read). (6:59)

Also, "... by Him who knows the unseen, from Whom is not hidden the least little atom in the heavens or on earth: nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in the Record Perspicuous" (34:3; 10:61).

He is also *Al-Samiᶜ* (the All-Hearing). This name occurs in the Qur'an a total of 47 times (43 nominative and 4 accusative case). *Al-Samiᶜ* is the One from whose perception nothing audible is removed, even if it be hidden. So He hears secrets as well as whispers, and what is subtler and more concealed than these. He hears the praise of those praising Him and rewards them, as well as the entreaties of those praying, and responds to them. Al-Ghazali writes that,

> He hears without any auditory organs or ears, as He acts without limbs and speaks without a tongue; and His hearing is free from accidents which could befall it. When you elevate the All-Hearing above changes which happen to Him when audible sounds occur, and exalt Him above hearing by ears or by instruments and devices, you will realize that hearing, so far as He is concerned, is tantamount to an attribute by which the perfection of the qualities of things heard is dissolved. Whoever does not take care in considering this matter will inevitably fall into pure anthropomorphism. So be wary about it, and be precise when you consider it.[392]

The Qur'an requires the Prophet to witness this attribute of God with the following words: "Say: 'My Lord knoweth (every) word (spoken) in the heavens and on earth: He is the One that heareth and knoweth (all things)," (21:4).

He is also *Al-Basir*, the All-Seeing (occurring 51 times, 36 nominative and 15 accusative case). God is the One who witnesses and sees in such a way that nothing is remote from Him, even what is under the earth. His seeing is also above having dependence on pupils and eyelids, and exalted beyond reference to the impression of images and colors on His essence, as they are impressed on men's pupils, for that is a form of change and influence which requires coming-into-existence. Since He is above this "seeing in His case is equivalent to an attribute through which the perfection of qualities of visible things is disclosed. And that

529

is clearer and more evident than what may be grasped by perception on the part of a sight limited to the appearances of visible things."[393] The Qur'an states: "Verily Allah knows the Unseen of the heavens and the earth: and Allah sees well all that ye do" (49:18). This message is driven home by a great many Qur'anic verses (83 times as "He knows what you do 'ta*malun*'", and 56 times as "they do '*ya*malun*'".) "He knows what enters within the earth and what comes forth out of it, what comes down from heaven and what mounts up to it. And He is with you wheresoever ye may be. And Allah sees well all that ye do" (57:4).

> Seest thou not that Allah doth know (all) that in the heavens and on earth? There is not a secret consultation between three, but He is the fourth of them,-nor between five but He is the sixth,- nor between fewer nor more, but He is with them, wheresoever they be: in the end will He tell them what they did on the Day of Judgment. For Allah has full knowledge of all things. (58:7)

"It was We Who created man, and We know what suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein" (50:16).

In short, God is Omniscient as much as He is Omnipresent. He is too exalted to be contained in any one place and too holy to be determined by time; for He created time and place. There is nothing like unto Him in His essence nor is there of His essence in any other besides Him. He changes not as He is far beyond contingencies. He abides through all generations with His glorious attributes, free from all imperfection. Therefore, the examples discussed of the Divine names and the related Qur'anic passages speak for themselves proving that the Qur'anic Deity is absolutely Omniscient and Omnipresent. God is absolutely free, in terms of His Omniscience and Omnipresence, of the limitations which we have seen are ascribed to Him in some biblical passages. Moreover, the Qur'anic representation of God's attributes of omniscience and omnipresence are abstract in the sense that they are not connected with any physical organs or corporeal qualities. His knowledge and power is felt but not imagined or represented in any way or form in human or material categories.

There are a number of names that denote God's absolute Omnipotence. *Al-Qadir* (the All-Powerful), *Al-Qawi* (the Strong), *Al-Matin* (the Firm), *Al-Muqtadir* (the All-Determiner), *Al-Wajid* (the Resourceful), *Al-ʿAziz* (the Eminent), *Al-Muqit* (the Nourisher), *Malik al-Mulk* (the King of Absolute Sovereignty), and *Al-Malik* (the King), are a just a few of them. The name *Al-Qadir* occurs in the Qur'an 7 times, *Qadir* 45 times (39 nominative and 6 accusative case), and *Al-Muqtadir* 3 times. "To Allah belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth; and Allah hath power over all things" (3:189), is the thread which weaves through the Qur'anic fabric. The Divine omnipotence is extolled by frequent reference to the acts of creation, annihilation, sustenance, preservation, and unparalleled Lordship, "the Lord and Creator of all things" (6:164; 13:16). He is the absolute initiator (*Al-Badiʿ*) and creates whomsoever He wishes and causes death to whomsoever He wishes. When He wills something to be, it simply is: "When he decrees a thing, he but says to it 'Be' and it is" (2:117; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82: 40:68). Al-Ghazali observes that the names All-Powerful and the All-Determiner,

> both mean 'one who possesses power', but 'the All-Determiner' is more emphatic. Power is equivalent to the intention by which a thing comes into existence according to determined plan of will and knowledge, and in conformity with both of them. The All-Powerful is one who does what he wills, or does not act if he so wills, and is not so conditioned as to will necessarily. So God is all-powerful in that He could bring about the resurrection now, and He would bring it about were He to will it. So if He does not bring it about, that is because He has not willed it, and He does not will it to happen now inasmuch as His knowledge had previously fixed its appointed time and moment according to plan, which hardly detracts from His power. The absolutely powerful is He who creates each existent individually without needing assistance from anyone else, and this is God most high.[394]

God cannot be dominated by anybody or anything from His creation as He is *Al-Qawi* and *Al-Matin*, the Strong, the Firm. In God, strength

indicates perfect power, while firmness indicates intensification of strength. He transcends creaturely weaknesses: "We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in Six Days, nor did any sense of weariness touch Us" (50:38). Hence, God could not have been dominated by Jacob or any other being, as depicted in the Hebrew Bible. He further did not require rest, needing to be refreshed, on the seventh day of creation as reported in the Bible. He is the Strong and the Firm.

All this emphasis upon God's Omnipotence is geared towards showing God's close proximity to His creatures. He is directly and intimately related with His finite creatures through His all comprehensive mercy, sustenance, guidance and knowledge.

Among this category of names, *Al-Malik* (the King), perhaps seems to give the most tangible impression about God. Just like the other divine names it is neither anthropomorphic nor pictured in concrete terms. It means that God's kingship is so absolute and real that nobody other than Him really deserves to be called a king. He is eternally King and His kingship never fades away. Humans gradually acquire kingship, work for it and then relinquish it at death. Real power, authority and sovereignty belong only to God while earthly rulers, presidents and kings at best represent pale reflections of God's kingly power. In reality the term is used in its metaphorical sense with regard to earthly rule while primarily denoting God's transcendental kingship. There is no king but the King. Likewise, any divine name can be placed in the sentence of *tawhid* "there is no god but God." Thus the Muslim confession can be utilized as a quick formula for stating the various implications of *divine unicity and transcendence*.

It is evident that the names of God's attributes maintain God's transcendence as vehemently as do the names of God's essence. The Qur'an has denied God all the limitations and imperfections of mortals (as well as all limitations and imperfections, period) while emphasizing His absolute attributes as the Ultimate Reality. The category of names discussed and the connected attributes perform another important function i.e., the immanence of God. They produce a kind of modality for human imagination, but soon the imagination is reminded of its limitations when clearly told that these names and attributes are not

relative like the attributes of human beings or any of God's creatures. They are the attributes of the transcendent God who is absolute, hence His attributes know no bounds and transcend the utilitarian sphere of time and space as much as God Himself transcends His creatures. Furthermore, the relation of these predicates to their subject cannot be analyzed in the sense of the empirical world as all the human categories of expressions are finite while God and His attributes are infinite. Therefore, the pervasiveness of these names and attributes in the Qur'an and their commonly known and understood lexicographic meanings make the Qur'anic Deity very vivid, alive, and immanent, but at the same time infinitely mysterious, awesome, and transcendent. Such a presentation of the Deity gives enough opportunity for a kind of modality to exist allowing for a man-God communication, denying at the same time any similarity, comparison, and concrete image or images of the divine. Establishment of a meaningful, respectful and also a sort of demanding relationship is encouraged between God and man yet the limitations are always prescribed fervently so as to maintain the divine transcendence and otherness of God in all times and situations. The Qur'an very successfully establishes this immanence of God by bringing the beautiful names or related attributes of God as epilogues of a great majority of the Qur'anic passages. The use of these names and attributes is not arbitrary, it is wonderfully meaningful and closely contextual. The divine names are always connected with the subject matter of the passage under discussion. The names of mercy, love, and forgiveness, for instance, are brought as epilogues to those verses encouraging repentance or emphasizing God's love, mercy and grace.[395] "Say: 'O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He **is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful**'" (39:53).

> Whatever is in the heavens and on earth, doth declare the Praises and Glory of Allah: to Him belongs Dominion, and to Him belongs Praise: and He has power over all things…He knows what is in the heavens and on earth; and knows what ye conceal and what ye reveal: yea, Allah **knows well** (*'Alim*) the (secrets) of (all) hearts. (64:1, 4) [emphasis mine]

533

... Allah is **Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom**. But if the thief repents after his crime, and amends his conduct, Allah turneth to him in forgiveness; for Allah is **Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful**. Knowest thou not that to Allah (alone) belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth? He punisheth whom He pleaseth, and He forgiveth whom He pleaseth: And Allah **hath power over all things (*Qadir*)**. (5:38–40)[396] [emphasis mine]

The third category of the Divine Beautiful Names, denotes God's actions towards His creatures. The names of attributes do not need anybody or anything other than God Himself as they describe perfections of God. On the other hand, the names of acts are distinguished by the fact that they make sense only in terms of God's creatures, and that they have opposites that are also divine names. Examples are *Al-Muhyi* (the Life-Giver) and *Al-Mumit* (the Slayer), *Al-Mu'izz* (the Honourer) and *Al-Mudhil* (the One who humbles) etc. So God is *Al-Razzaq* (the Provider), *Al-Bari'* (the Producer), *Al-Musawwir* (the Fashioner), *Al-Khafid* (the Abaser) and *Al-Rafi'* (the Exalter), *Al-Mujib* (the Answerer of prayers), *Al-Wakil* (the Guardian), *Al-Mani'* (the Protector) and *Al-Darr* (the Punisher) etc.

It is pertinent to reiterate that all of God's names are derived from the Qur'an and the Hadith; they are *tawqifiyyah meaning that they are preconcertedly determined either by a Qur'anic text or an authentic prophetic report*. Nothing can be added to them or subtracted from them. The reason being to confess utter dependence upon God regarding the proper knowledge of and about His being. Such sheer dependence upon the revelatory knowledge is in fact a recognition of the impossibility of knowing God except through what He has decided to reveal to us. Another established criterion among all mainstream Muslim scholars is that God possesses all these perfections from eternity. God cannot be characterized by names insinuating that He acquired these perfections, or by blemish or bad names such as poor, cruel, cheat etc. He cannot be given any evil quality or attribute. The scholars also agree that diminutives of God's names are prohibited as are words alluding to dual meanings such as those conveying praise as well as condemnation. The other established criterion is that God's

absolute transcendence and exalted majesty must be maintained at all costs. All ideas, concepts, imaginations, and even perceptions leading to resemblance, similarity, comparability, corporeality, and anthropomorphism must be denied of Him.

It is important to realize that the presence of some of these names and qualities in humanity is neither here nor there. Firstly because their presence does not make these attributes and qualities of God anthropomorphic or corporeal; and secondly because in God they are perfections and absolute, while in humanity they are imperfect and relative. God is the First and the Everlasting. These attributes are non-corporeal and are first present in Him and then in human beings. So, to describe God utilizing these non-physical attributes and absolute qualities in no way makes Him similar or comparable to man. They are simply expressions which pave the way for man to try to know God as much as human limitations allow. Al-Ghazali rightly observes:

> So if God had an attribute or a specifying property, and there were nothing in us corresponding to it or sharing its name – even so much as the sweetness of sugar shares in the pleasure of intercourse – it would be inconceivable that we would ever understand [the attribute or property] at all. For each person only understands himself, and then compares his own attributes with those of God the most high. Yet His attributes are too exalted to be likened to ours! So this will be an inadequate knowledge in which imagining and resemblance are preponderant. So it needs to be complemented by the knowledge which denies any likeness, and which rejects any grounds for commensurability, even though the name be shared.[397]

Therefore, God is unknowable, as "knowing something is to know its reality and its quiddity, not the names derived from it."[398]

Consequently, all efforts should be directed towards reflecting upon the creatures of God instead of reflecting upon His essence, for there is no other way that one can comprehend it. "He knows what is before or after or behind them: but they shall comprehend Him not" (20:110). The Prophet pinpointed this fact by encouraging reflection upon God's creation and not upon God Himself.

535

In short, the Transcendent God has not the least resemblance to the limited, deficient, and imperfect creatures of His creation. Entirely out of the question is His resemblance to any and all other gods and of course their semi-human nature; deities fashioned by the minds of men, whose lack of knowledge and understanding, and need to supply the deficiencies of their own comprehension, caused such inane inventions. Contrary to this, God enjoys all attributes of perfection appropriate to His Divine Majesty and Exalted Power. Contemplation upon these and His beautiful names is the only recourse to grasp the barest glimpses of His Divine majesty.

In the light of what has been discussed so far, we can conclude that the Qur'anic concept of God is straightforward and self-explanatory. It consists of the absolute denial of the existence, authority, rule, sovereignty, and abilities to harm or benefit, of other gods (completely and utterly rejecting their worship and the representation of God in any way or form) whilst simultaneously restoring all these attributes and qualities in God Himself. Accordingly, God's attributes and qualities are absolute and are never connected with any physical object, body part or organ. For instance, God can speak through inanimate things such as a bush or a tree, as in the case of Moses (28:30) and in fact, "It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by sending of a Messenger to reveal, with Allah's permission, what Allah wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise" (42:51). God does not have a body. Nobody can see Him. Moses' request for a glimpse of God was answered in the following words:

> Allah said: "By no means canst thou see Me; But look upon the Mount; if it abides in its place, then shalt thou see Me." When his Lord manifested (revealed) Himself to the Mount, He made it as dust, and Moses fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses he said: "Glory be to Thee! To Thee I turn in repentance, and I am the first to believe." (7:143)

The reason being that, "No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision; He is the Subtle, Well-Aware" (6:103). In short, the

Qur'an has explained its monotheism in simple, logical, and intelligible terms and categories, elaborated it with additional logical ways, methods and examples, and protected this concept well from possible violations. The Divine transcendence is an intrinsic part of the Qur'anic concept of the Deity. The transcendent God is immanent by dint of His countless absolute attributes expressed through His Beautiful Names and many other signs and manifestations throughout His creation. Moreover, the Qur'an makes special efforts to safeguard against all possible violations, confusions, and ambiguities, the immensely important concept of the Divine Unity, Uniqueness, and Transcendence of God. This original alertness, observes Bishop Cragg,

> against all false theologies accompanies the whole elaboration of Muslim religion. It is, as it were, a supreme "Protestantism" in its very genesis, a cry of heart and a mission of will against all that violated the Divine unity or distracted men from the single direction of their love, their loyalty, and their obedience.

Cragg continues that the

> ringing shout of praise that echoes through all Islamic ritual and dogma: *Allahu akbar*, "Greater is God," which, grammatically, is a comparative form made all the more striking by its refusal, indeed its inability, to enter any stated comparison. "God is greater" than all that could conceivably be set in any clause after "than." The idea of framing such a clause is itself unthinkable. Yet the superlative ("God is the greatest") is not preferred, for this could imply approximate equality and would, as such, be open to ambiguity, as the psalm is which declares: "He is a great king above all gods." Are we to understand that the gods exist, if only as underlings? Or do we mean that the Lord reigns in utter majesty alone? Islam has no truck with such double possibility of intention. It was not the existence of *Allah* that Muhammad proclaimed. The tribes knew Him by His name. It was His *sole* existence, negating all pluralism. God is exalted above all that might – though always impossibly – compare with Him.[399]

It is this notion of the absolute transcendence of God that has been reflected in Islamic art, language, and indeed so many other aspects of Islamic civilization and culture. Islam is, and always has been, unceasingly on guard, constantly on high alert against any corporeality, anthropomorphism or any form of comparability, injecting the divine with the non-divine. Unlike Christian art, Islamic art has always avoided sensory images, anthropomorphic depictions or corporeal portrayals of God in all times and places. No mosque has ever contained any object, depiction or statue even remotely connected with divinity. Students of religious art are amazed to see mosques devoid of any decorative pictures, depictions or iconography, aside from lace-like Qur'anic verses and abstract arabesques adorning walls and ceilings. The latter are in-themselves simply motifs, designs made of stylized stalk, leaf and flower, deliberately denaturalized and symmetrically repeated to dispel any suggestion of the creaturely natural being a vehicle of expression for the divine. Al-Faruqi writes that all the "arts in Islam developed in fulfillment of divine transcendence acting as supreme principle of esthetics..."[400]

The same strict precautions have been taken with regards to the Islamic language. Islamic theological discourse (God-talk) revolves strictly around Qur'anic terminology, despite the existence of, and in fact serving as an interface between, the tremendous geographical, linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversities that span the Muslim world. This is the objective of the Qur'anic dicta, "We (God) have revealed it as an Arabic Qur'an" (12:2; 20:113). So, any God-talk by Muslims is predominantly scriptural or Qur'an-talk, utilizing Arabic categories, terms, literary forms and expressions peculiar to the Qur'an. Muslims have always avoided the use of phrases such as father and son regarding the God-man relationship. Hence, phrases such as "God the Father", "Mother of God", "Son of God", "Crucified God" or "Sons of God" or their equivalent etc., will not be found in Islamic literature. They are utterly banished from the Islamic lexicon, and religious vocabulary, to eliminate and prevent the rise of any consciousness that could lead to pernicious confusion and difficulty with regard to the essence of God, as occurred with regard to Judaic and Christian conceptions of the Divine. The Qur'anic transcendental axiom is uncompromising in

separating the divine realm from the non-divine creaturely one. For the sake of analogy, God stands on one side of the boundary, alone and unique, whilst everything other than He stands on the other, dividing the transcendent from the natural. This is the necessary criterion of Muslim God talk and a presupposition of God's axiological ultimacy. On the other hand, however, terms such as 'Lord', 'Master', the 'Most Merciful', the 'Compassionate', are frequently used to denote God, while phrases such as "servant" (*ʿabd*), "mankind" (*al-nas*), "human being" (*al-insan*), "creation" (*khalq*) etc., are used to denote man and creation.

Al-tawhid, with all its multiplex emphasis, is not meant merely to exalt God and chant His glories. It is also not meant to claim special privity with God, enjoy special privileges in His name or assert superiority over His creatures. None of these elements are implied in the Qur'anic understanding of monotheism. It is a responsibility rather than a privilege. It is meant to create the proper response in man, the response that is essential to encourage man to work towards transforming the human society of time and space in accordance with divine moral rules. The unity of God leads to the unity of His creation. No superiority is granted based upon origin, ethnicity, color, creed or financial or social status. The basic human rights of dignity, freedom, equality and justice are universally granted to all human beings because of their humanity. A right relationship with God is the sole guarantee of a just and right relationship between men. A loving connection between man and his God will assure a morally equipped caring human society. On the hand, any wrong understanding of who God is or a wrong relationship with Him will cause imbalance in man to man relationships. The Islamic transcendental monotheism if understood properly and applied in spirit, can warranty an ethically balanced and caring human society. It is grounded in human responsibility, socio-political and economic accountability and universal justice.

The essence of *al-tawhid* can be summarized in the following five terms:

(1) **Duality of reality** (God and non-God) and God as the moral normativeness: meaning the Being who commands (moral will of God) and whose commandments are ought-to-be.

(2) **Ideationality**: meaning that the relationship between the two orders of reality is ideational in nature. Man can understand this relationship and its demand easily through the faculty of understanding.

(3) **Teleology**: that the nature of the cosmos is teleological; that it is purposive, serving a purpose of its Creator, and doing so out of design. Man also has a purpose and that is to be God's vicegerent on earth.

(4) **Capacity of man and malleability of Nature**: since the nature of the cosmos is teleological, hence the actualization of the Divine purpose must be possible in space and time.

(5) **Responsibility and Judgment**: i.e., that man stands responsible to realize the moral will of God and change himself, his society, and environment so as to conform to the divine pattern. To do so is success and to disobey Him is to incur punishment and failure.

The forgoing five principles, argues al-Faruqi, are "self-evident truths. They constitute the core of *al-tawhid* and the quintessence of Islam."[401]

Therefore, the Qur'anic message is squarely aimed at man and his well-being. Indeed, it calls itself "guidance for mankind" (*hudan li al-nas* [2:185] and numerous equivalents elsewhere). Even though the divine names and attributes are the subject of countless Qur'anic verses, the Qur'an is not a treatise about God and His nature. The divine existence is functional. He is the Creator, Sustainer and Cherisher of man and his cosmos. He has created the universe to serve man. He is keen to guide man. He loves man and cares about his salvation. Finally He will judge man individually and collectively and mete out loving justice again for the sake of man. He has taken upon Himself that He will not forgive human violations until the man violated against is compensated for and satisfied. Izutsu presents the point in the following words:

For among all these created things "man" is the one to which is attached so great an importance in the Koran that it attracts at least the same amount of our attention as God. Man, his nature,

conduct, psychology, duties and destiny are, in fact, as much the central preoccupation of the Koranic thought as the problem of God Himself. What God is, says and does, becomes a problem chiefly, if not exclusively, in connection with the problem of how man reacts to it. The Koranic thought as a whole is concerned with the problem of salvation of human beings. If it were not for this problem, the Book would have not been "sent down", as the Koran itself explicitly and repeatedly emphasizes. And in this particular sense, the concept of man is important to such a degree that it forms the second major pole standing face to face with [the] principal pole, that is concept of Allah.[402]

Consequently, *tawhid* is directly connected with the moral sphere of human life. Its essence cannot be achieved without actualizing its demands of unity and universality of truth, unity, equality, and equity among the human race, and all that has to take place here and now i.e., practically in human society. Al-Faruqi expresses the point succinctly:

Al-tawhid commits man to an ethic of action; that is, to an ethic where worth and unworth are measured by the degree of success the moral subject achieves in disturbing the flow of space-time, in his body as well as around him. It does not deny the ethic of intent where the same measurement is made by the level of personal values effecting the moral subject's state of consciousness alone, for the two are not incompatible....

He continues:

Having acquiesced to God alone as his Master, having committed himself, his life and all energies to His service, and having recognized His Master's will as that which ought to be actualized in space-time, he must enter the rough and tumble of the market place and history and therein bring about the desired transformation. He cannot lead a monastic, isolationist existence unless it be as an exercise in self-discipline and self-mastery.[403]

541

This moral function of man, justifies his creation in God's moral image, in the best of form, as the vicegerent of God on earth. Therefore, Islamic understanding of monotheism is moralistic through and through.[404] This explains why the Qur'an almost always combines both faith (*iman*) and good deeds (*ʿamal salih*) together, the one reflecting the other (2:25; 2:82; 2:277; 3:57; 4:57; 4:122; 4:173; 5:9; 5:93). The Qur'an also vehemently stigmatizes those who disobey God's moral will and follow their own desires, inclinations, and moods as gods. The word the Qur'an employs to denote this tendency is *hawa* (occurring 17 times), which can be translated as "caprice or whim." "Have you seen him who has taken his own caprice to be his god?" (25:43; 45:23). This moralistic understanding of *al-tawhid* along with its notion of the Day of Judgment is reflected in the very early Makkan chapters of the Qur'an. Such a concept of the Divinity is revolutionary and plays a vital role in Muslim life. The following early Makkan chapter (107 *al-Maʿun* "Neighborly Needs"), is sufficient to give an example of the Qur'anic correlation of belief in God and the Day of Judgment and efforts to transform one's surroundings: "Seest thou one who denies the Day of Judgment. Then such is the one who repulses the orphan and encourages not the feeding of the indigent. So woe to the worshippers who are neglectful of their prayers, those who (want but) to be seen, but refuse (to supply even) neighborly needs."[405] It can therefore be claimed, clearly, loudly and unequivocally, that the Qur'an connects human salvation with morality, and not solely with family lineage or belief in or confession of a specific set of doctrines or dogmas. Our own actions in this earthly domain define and govern our existence in the Hereafter. The Qur'anic message of unity diametrically opposes tribalism, racism, nationalism, ethnic discrimination, human differentiation, cultic veneration, divine domestication, trinitarianism, superstitious dogmatism and secularism. Islam is less of an orthodoxy and more of an orthopraxy.

Furthermore, the Qur'anic concept of monotheism is not evolutionary. It is original and universal. The Qur'an gives this moralistic understanding of monotheism a universal dimension by claiming that this was the same message revealed to all the prophets and nations since the beginning of time: "For We assuredly sent

amongst every People a Messenger, (with the Command), 'Serve Allah, and eschew Evil'" (16:36; 35:24). The message is timeless, unchanged, and universal. So Noah for instance, one of the most ancient of prophets, was sent to his people with the message: "Worship Allah! Ye have no other god but Him" (7:59). All subsequent prophets and messengers of God received and communicated the same message (7:65–93). This theme occurs very frequently in the Qur'an.[406] The Ten Commandments given to Moses were rehearsed by Jesus on the Mount and reiterated by Muhammad in the Qur'an. The *Shalome* of the original Hebrews is the *Salam* and Islam of the Qur'an. Jesus' original message of salvation was nothing but "follow the commandments". Love your God and love your neighbor we can therefore state is the essence of this universal monotheistic consciousness.

ANTHROPOMORPHISM: THE QUR'AN, HADITH AND SOME MUSLIM SECTS

In spite of its strong emphasis upon the transcendence, uniqueness, and inaccessibility of God, sometimes even to the point of jealousy, the Qur'an contains only *a few* verses whose somewhat picturesque style, if taken absolutely literally, could seem to ascribe certain human attributes or acts to God. This group of verses is often termed *mutashabih* meaning "ambiguous" verses, in contrast to the verses termed *muhkam* whose meanings are firm and clearly established. The Qur'an says:

> He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: in it are verses basic or fundamental clear (in meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are not entirely clear. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is not entirely clear. Seeking discord, and searching for its interpretation, but no one knows its true meanings except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: "We believe in it, the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding. (3:7)[407]

This set of ambiguous verses has been the subject of much exegetical as well as theological dispute in later Islamic theological thought. Although mainstream Muslims have always denied and refuted any anthropomorphic conceptions of God, certain individuals and sects have fallen prey to an anthropomorphic conception of the Deity. And it is only because of this attempt at pernicious confusion that we are forced to give a detailed account of the responses *vis-à-vis* these Qur'anic verses and phrases.

It must be noted from the outset that the anthropomorphic tendency under discussion is neither crude nor graphic; nor is the problem, in addition, one of absolute corporealism or physical anthropomorphism (for the Muslim sects or individuals involved at least), which would have been dealt with rather summarily. What we have rather is a sort of relatively refined anthropomorphism, which crept into the thoughts of certain traditionalists such as Muqatil ibn Sulayman and some early Shiite figures such as Hisham ibn al-Hakam (discussed later). In spite of his literal disposition Muqatil metaphorically interpreted many Qur'anic phrases that could have lead to corporeal depictions of God if taken literally. For Binyamin Abrahamov the case of Muqatil's alleged corporealism "needs further examination, because it demonstrates the unreliability of the sources where we learn about his views. His exegesis of the Qur'an which is now available presents him in a different way. Muqatil had different notions concerning anthropomorphic expressions in the Qur'an."[408] According to Hisham God had a body but one unlike other bodies, meaning that no resemblance or likeness exists between the divine body and non-divine ones. Proponents of this supposed anthropomorphism rationalized their speculation with the assumption that as all things existent have bodies, proof that God exists can be done through assigning Him a body, but one of course unlike other bodies.[409] We are hardly in the realms of marked anthropomorphism here, for in no way or form have these theorizers compared God with His creatures or completely blurred the line between the divine and non-divine realms. The only thing they are guilty of is to have seemingly slightly muddied the strict demarcation lines dividing the two realms, and this largely due to their literalism prone disposition and a sense of needing to prove God's existence. The result of this faulty speculation was severe

chastisement by mainstream Muslims who dubbed them as corporealists, defending and underscoring with great fervor the well presented, guarded and uncompromising transcendental nature of the Qur'anic message.

It is significant and worth noting that the term "anthropomorphism" is used here as a rough equivalent for the Muslim use of the terms *tashbih* and *tajsim*. The two possibly interchangeable terms take material or sense perceptions as their point of reference, and can also be differentiated on a higher more refined level. The term *tashbih* denotes the act of comparing God with non-God beings while *tajsim* mainly focuses upon the object of the comparison. The Muslim concept of *tashbih* and *tajsim* is also at variance with the contemporary western use of the term "anthropomorphism". The western usage generally covers all attempts to conceive of God in human categories whether corporeal, emotional or rational. The Islamic terms focus more upon the sensual, material and corporeal aspects of the term though not completely ignoring the rational or emotional similarities. God's emotional or rational attributes are absolute while the same in humans are relative and finite. They are used regarding God for the sole purposes of existential confirmations, modality and a meaningful relationship between man and God. They are linguistic necessities, the result of human limitations, and must be taken as metaphorical expressions or figures of speech rather than reflections upon the divine essence.

An example of this category of Qur'anic passages and phrases is the Qur'anic usage of the word *wajh,* literally meaning "face," with regards to God, which occurs in a total of 11 verses (5 times as "the face of Allah" 2:115; 2:272; 30:38; 30:39; 76:9; once as "the face of their Lord" 13:22; once as "the face of your Lord" 55:27; once as "the face of his Lord" 92:20; and 3 times as "His face" 6:52; 18:28; 28:88). It is interesting to note the context in which the phrase occurs in several Qur'anic verses. For instance in 2:272 it says: "Whatever of good ye give benefits your own souls, and ye shall only do so seeking the 'Face' of Allah (*li wajhillah*)." In 13:22 it says: "Those who patiently persevere (*li wajhi rabbihim*) 'for the face of their Lord'." From all these verses and others such as 30:30, 30:43 etc. it seems clear that the usage of the

word "face" regarding God is more symbolic than literal, consequently leading many Muslim exegetes and scholars to interpret it as the *dhatillah* that is, the being of Allah, or "for His sake".[410] This interpretation is substantiated by the other Qur'anic verses where it says: "And call not, besides Allah, on another god. There is no god but He. *Everything (that exists) will perish except His face*. To Him belongs the Command, and to Him will ye (all) be brought back" (28:88). In 55:26–7 we read: "All that is on earth will perish: but *will abide (for ever) the face of thy Lord*, – full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour." It is impossible to interpret this verse literally, and it will not make sense to state that everything will perish except God's face. Qur'anic exegetes agree that the word "*wajh*" (face) mentioned here refers to God Almighty Himself and not to any organ or body whatsoever.[411] The otherwise literalism prone Ibn Hazm observes that, "*wajhillah* means Allah Himself."[412] Ibn Qayyim and Ibn al-Jawzi report a kind of consensus among the exegetes that this verse means: "your Lord will abide forever."[413]

Al-Bayhaqi observes that verse 28:88 stipulates that the "*wajh* means the being and not, in any way or form, denotes an attribute or an organ..."[414] Al-Bayhaqi discusses in detail the *ahadith* referring to God's face i.e. "pride and majesty as the cloak or mantle of His face",[415] or the supplication that "O Allah Grant me the bliss of a glance at Your face",[416] or that "the veil or cover of His face is light" [417] etc. to prove that the phrase *wajh* refers to God's being rather than any organ, body or body part belonging to Him.

This demonstrates that the Qur'an contains some phrases that cannot be given ostensibly literal meanings. The scripture clearly poses a hermeneutic challenge. Therefore rational faculties, and consideration of the overall scriptural scheme, and specific context and intention behind these expressions, must be employed properly to decipher the true meanings of these poetic expressions. The seemingly anthropomorphic expressions are used merely to emphasize the reality and existence of God especially to individuals such as the Makkan polytheists who had been immersed in the worship of idols and corporeal conceptions of divinity. A bare transcendental conception of the deity would have been irrelevant and incomprehensible to them. These expressions

provide a vague departure point and a divine modality with the senses soon sharply reminded of the sheer limitations of human perception and understanding by the statement "nothing is like unto Him." A literalistic approach will merely accent the corporeal aspects of these scriptural phrases, as literalism is usually prone to taking sense experience as its frame of reference. Consequently, any face value literal interpretations of these anthropomorphic expressions only serves to reduce the Qur'anic God to the status of an idol, nullifying the Qur'anic intent of purging faith of idol worship. Phrases such as these have to be interpreted figuratively in light of the other Qur'anic verses and in accordance with the established rules of the Arabic language. Lack thereof would lead to a logical as well as a theological impasse.

Metaphorical delineation or *ta'wil* is the mode of exegesis which transcends the elemental, literal and surface meaning of the text to replace it by a secondary and metaphorical sense. Human languages frequently admit of at least two levels of meaning i.e., the literal and the metaphorical. The Arabic language is heavily rich in these two levels of meanings i.e., the obvious (*haqiqi*) and the metaphorical (*majazi*). The need for a metaphorical meaning arises when a logical or theo-logical impasse occurs such as when some few individuals decide to interpret as corporeal certain verses concerning the transcendental God. As reiterated earlier this fact was unknown to early Muslims because it was clearly obvious what was being referred to in the verses i.e. not literally the face of God but His Being and had never been an issue for the first generation of Muslims. Rather, Allah's Revelation was crystal clear, with *tawhid* so clearly spelled out that it could not be challenged on any level. The categories arose as a result of a few tending without any evidence to adopt a literalistic perspective, despite the context of the verses as well as the nuances of the Arabic language categorically demanding otherwise. So for instance Allah's throne or ᶜ*Arsh* is referred to but He clearly does not "sit down" or have a "seat" to sit on. Islamically *haqiqi* and *majazi* are two polar tendencies and antithetical to each other.

The question arises as to why the Qur'an or Hadith would employ phrases such as these which could possibly create unnecessary tension with regard to meaning. The simple and straightforward answer is that

linguistic and human limitations require this to be so. The Qur'an is a book of guidance for mankind and not a book of isolated metaphysics. To ensure human relevancy it has to employ phrases suitable to human understanding and imagery. This is perhaps a better option than a bare transcendental unity void of human imagination, relevancy and interaction. It must be kept in mind that the scripture does not always have multiple meanings. It is the context and the intention of the language that will determine, providing the clues, for a metaphorical or not interpretation. No violence to the established semantic, grammatical and philological nature of the text is permitted in the process of metaphorical interpretation, a tedious process of linguistic and textual analysis must be followed, conforming to the leads of lexicographers, grammarians, philologists, literary exegetes, poets and literary critics. Absolutely forbidden are arbitrary allegorical interpretations which do not follow a careful and thorough analysis, which lack scholarly tools or which render the text to arbitrary fanciful interpretations, without much linguistic or textual support. Human reason and rationale should follow the revelation and not supersede, supplant or nullify it.

It is clear from the examples quoted and ensuing discussion that the Qur'an and Hadith both contain poetical expressions which, if taken absolutely literally, could lead to anthropomorphism. In the words of I. R. Netton, "Islam too has had a problem of divine 'faces': not in the sense of a single deity divided up among, or represented by, many gods but simply in the fact that Muslims over the ages have regarded their one God in several widely differing ways."[418]

The Qur'anic expressions involved did not, as mentioned earlier, cause much problem to the first generation of Muslims. From a socio-phenomenological viewpoint it is apparent that the original sacred text of scripture is usually given a normative value in terms of religious thought with early believers very often hesitating to rationalize or free themselves from the explicit terms and phrases (terminology) of the message accepted as normative. And this was exactly the case with the first generation of Muslims. The ethico-practical nature of the Islamic faith, the simplicity and clarity of its basic creed, and the engagement of its followers in political solidification as well as territorial expansion from the very beginning did not leave much room for speculative and

theoretical thinking among the generation of *Sahabah*, the Disciples or Companions of the Prophet. Although not discouraging logical thinking, the Prophet himself and his immediate successors are reported to have discouraged speculative inquiry into theoretical issues having little practical significance to the community. ʿUmar, the second Caliph, has been reported to have appropriated severe physical punishment upon individuals like ʿUbayd Allah ibn Sabigh, who vainly engaged themselves in inquiry about the *mutashabih* or ambiguous verses of the Qur'an. This is perhaps the reason why until the last years of the third Caliph ʿUthman's reign, nobody discussed speculative or theological issues such as the attributes of God.[419] Due to the mass conversion of non-Muslims (some of them Christians and Jews), in addition to political unrest in the later part of ʿUthman's government, and civil wars in the fourth Caliph ʿAli's period, several theologically oriented and politically motivated attempts at theoretical speculation found their way into the Islamic community.[420]

Interestingly, anthropomorphism and corporealism were the first importees. Most Islamic historical and theological sources connect this development to ʿAbd Allah ibn Saba', a Jew from Yemen, who, according to these sources, converted to Islam with a secret agenda to destabilize it.[421] Ibn Saba' was the first to exalt ʿAli, the son-in-law of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph, to the level of divinity by addressing ʿAli with phrases such as, "'Thou art Thou', that is, 'Thou art God'."[422] ʿAli is reported to have deported Ibn Saba' to al-Madayn and punished many of his followers who attributed divinity to ʿAli. Ibn Saba', on the other hand, continued exalting ʿAli even after ʿAli's death attributing to the Caliph several of the divine attributes and the second coming. Most of the extreme Shiite sects such as the *al-Bayaniyyah*, *al-Mughiyriyyah*, *al-Mansuriyyah*, *al-Yunusiyyah*, *al-Hishamiyyah*, and many others assimilated Ibn Saba's corporeal thoughts travelling far on road of corporealism. Most Muslim historians count such extreme sects among the corporealists or *Mujassimah*.[423] A great majority of Muslim scholars also argue that the issue of anthropomorphism was introduced into Islam by Judaic influence for the latter were accustomed to such anthropomorphic tendencies with regards to God. Al-Shahrastani, al-Razi, al-Asfara'ini, al-Ghurabi, al-Nashshar, Suhayr Mukhtar, Fathi M.

al-Zaghi and many others have emphatically argued that anthropomorphic and corporeal thought crept into Islamic circles through individuals such as Ibn Saba' and extreme Shiite sects in which they crystallized.[424] Goldziher attributes such a tendency to the Gnostic influences.[425] Some other Muslim scholars attribute this development to internal factors such as the literalism of Muslim literalists such as the *al-Hashawiyyah* and some traditionalists, and to their literal interpretations of the Qur'anic verses.

The fact is that literalists like Muqatil ibn Sulayman, to whom most of the anthropomorphic interpretations of the Qur'anic expressions are attributed, died in 150 AH,[426] while Ibn Saba' propagated his corporealism in the late fifties and early sixties (AH of the Islamic century) as ʿAli was killed in 61 AH. Matti Moosa observes that Ibn Saba' was the

> first [who] ascribed divinity to him. Ibn Saba preached that Ali would one day return in the clouds, with thunder as his voice, and lightning as the radiance of his whip... Ibn Saba and his followers never ceased to deify Ali, however. When Ali was assassinated in 661, they did not acknowledge his death but preached that he would return one day in the clouds.[427]

J. Wellhausen contends that "one is led to a Jewish origin of the sect. Certainly many things are called Jews and Jewish by the Muslims without any reason. But in fact the dogma of Shi'ism, the founder of which is considered to be Ibn Saba', seems to stem more from the Jews than from the Persians."[428] Al-Shahrastani has long ago argued that:

> A strict form of anthropomorphism had existed amongst the Jews; not indeed all of them, but in a section of them...some of the Shiʿa also fell into one of two extremes: one was to make some of the Imams like God, the other to make God like a man. When the Muʿtazilites and scholastic theologians arose, some of the Shi'ites abandoned their extreme views and adopted Muʿtazilism; some of the early leaders, on the other hand, adopted a literal interpretation and became anthropomorphists.[429]

Contrary to Watt and Goldziher's viewpoint, the Muslims did not seem to have much contact and interaction with Gnostics by that time. On the other hand, contacts and interaction with the Jews, first in Madinah and then through mass conversion, were frequent and immanent. The influx of biblical stories and interpretations into Islamic circles and sciences through known Jewish converts to Islam such as Kaʿb al-Ahbar,[430] could easily have brought many Muslims face to face with the Qur'anic poetical expressions. It is highly likely that such encounter with Judaic material and thought could have resulted in anthropomorphic interpretations of the Qur'anic and hadith expressions under discussion. In sum, it would seem that external Jewish influence and internal literalism, pervasive in some early Muslim circles, appear to have played a major role in introducing and developing anthropomorphic thought in certain Muslim sects.

We now come to the issues of free will, predestination (*al-qada' wa al-qadar)* and the divine attributes, which are connected with the other extreme, that is, the abstract transcendental tendency among Muslims. This was a reaction to the anthropomorphic tendency of some early Muslim groups. Discussion on these issues began in the Muslim community during the time of the later Companions such as ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿUmar, ʿAbd Allah ibn ʿAbbas, Anas ibn Malik, Abu Hurayrah, and Jabir ibn ʿAbd Allah. Jaʿad ibn Darham,[431] Jaham ibn Safwan,[432] Maʿbad al-Juhani,[433] and Ghilan al-Dimashqi were pioneers in this area of theological debate. Jaʿad is reported to have initiated the issue of negating the attributes of God such as speech and others, in order to avoid anthropomorphism. Ibn Kathir reports Jaʿad to be the first to claim that "the Qur'an was created", to avoid the presence of two eternal and uncreated beings.[434] Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Darimi, Ibn al-ʿImad, and al-Kawthari regard Jaʿad as being the first to negate the divine attributes and actions, and to metaphorically interpret those Qur'anic verses which emphasized them.[435] He denied that God had talked with Moses or taken Abraham as a friend, as is commonly understood from the Qur'anic passages. Ali Sami al-Nashshar argues that Jaʿad denied the eternal speech and not the contingent speech of God.[436] Madelung explains Jaʿad's position as follows:

God, in other words, does not speak in a literal sense. In order to communicate he creates the sound of speech which can be heard. This sound is figuratively called speech, although it is not genuine speech. It is easy to understand why the case of Moses is singled out for special mention. For Moses, according to Koranic doctrine, was the only prophet who heard God speaking directly, without an intermediary, to himself. The rule is, however, general. All "speech" of God, including the Koran, is created, not spoken, by God.[437]

It is evident that Ja'ad did not intend to deny the Qur'anic passage concerning this incident, but the anthropomorphic implications of accepting God as talking directly to Moses. God, in Ja'ad's view, was also exalted above being the friend of any creature. He interpreted the word *khalil* in the Qur'anic verse 4:125: "God has taken Abraham as a *khalil*", to mean needy, derived from *khalla*, need, rather than friend, derived from *khulla*, friendship. According to Madelung, Ja'ad's emphatic stand on the issue of divine attributes "constituted an attack on the anthropomorphic, personifying concept of God of traditionalist Sunnism."[438] This fear of anthropomorphism and similarity between God and His creation led Ja'ad also to emphasize predestination, in that the true creator of human actions was God and not human beings themselves.

It was Jaham ibn Safwan (d.127/745) who treated the issue of divine attributes at length. He met Ja'ad at Kufa and followed his theology. Like Ja'ad, he emphasized the absolute transcendence of God by refuting all possibilities of anthropomorphism and metaphorically interpreted all the Qur'anic verses (*ta'wil*) that could remotely lead to an anthropomorphic depiction of God. Al-Ash'ari reports that Jaham even denied that God was "a thing (*shay'*) because that is similarity with other things."[439] Ahmad ibn Hanbal reports Jaham arguing that the Qur'anic verse "there is none like unto Him" meant that

there is nothing from all the things which is like unto Him. He is under the seven earths as He is above the Throne. There is no place where He is not. He cannot be present at a specific place and

absent from the other. He did not and does not speak. Nobody
has seen Him in this world and nobody will see Him in the
hereafter. He cannot be described or known by any attribute or
action.... No mind can apprehend Him...⁴⁴⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah reports that Jaham even denied the Beautiful Names
of God mentioned in the Qur'an and Hadith (discussed earlier) and,
according to Ibn Taymiyyah, this was the reason that Jaham's followers
were called "Extremists or absolute deniers".⁴⁴¹

A detailed study of Jaham's position on the issue of divine attributes
and names seems to indicate that he was not an absolute denier of the
divine attributes as is usually asserted. Jaham absolutely denied only
those attributes that could lead to any similarity or comparison between
God and His creation. He divided the divine attributes into two
categories: those specific to God only such as Powerful, Creator, the
Giver of life and death; and those common to both God and man such
as life, knowledge, intention etc. Al-Shahrastani reports that Jaham,

> agreed with the Muʿtazila in denying the eternal attributes, but he
> also added other doctrines. These are as follows: (1) It is not lawful
> to apply to God an attribute which is also applicable to creatures,
> because this would imply likeness between God and creatures. He,
> therefore, denies that God is living and knowing, but maintains
> that he is powerful, an agent and a creator, because to no creature
> can be attributed power, action, and creation.⁴⁴²

The motivation of Jaham's doctrine is quite obvious. God cannot be
described with any human attributes for He is ontologically other than
creatures. Only the attributes which are exclusively God's can be
ascribed to Him. Only God is *faʿil*, truly acting, Giver of life and death
and nothing else can be described by these terms. This is why Jaham
argued that "man is determined in all actions by divine power, including
the acts of faith and virtue or faithlessness and vice."⁴⁴³ He further
argued that

> a man does not have power over anything, nor can he be said to
> have capacity [to act]. Man is absolutely determined in his deeds.

> He has neither power, nor will, nor choice. God creates deeds in man just as he produces actions in all inanimate objects, and it is only in a metaphorical sense that, as with inanimate objects, deeds can be ascribed to man...[444]

Due to such emphasis upon the absolute divine transcendence to the exclusion of everything else, the followers of Jaham have been called *al-Jabariyyah* or determinists.

Consequently, to al-Nashshar, Jaham was not an absolute denier of God's attributes or their eternity, but just an adventurous soul emphasizing the need to "purge God of all shadows of similarity and anthropomorphism."[445] Jaham even went so far as to deny the everlasting nature of Paradise and Hell because presumably nothing is everlasting except God. He did so to maintain the absolute divine transcendence of God. Al-Shahrastani reports Jaham as arguing that, "All motion in heaven and hell will come to an end. Paradise and hell will both pass away after those who have gone to paradise have enjoyed its bliss, and those who have gone to hell have suffered its torments."[446] Jaham argued that the time would come when everything other than God would perish. This transcendent God of Jaham's to the exclusion of everything else, argues Seale, "was closer to the Greek Absolute than to the God of the Qur'an."[447] Due to the later influence of Jaʿad and Jaham's theological positions over the Muʿtazilites as well as others, Madkur crowns them with the title of "the founders of philosophical theology in Islam."[448] Seale describes Jaham as the real founder of the Muʿtazilites instead of Wasil ibn ʿAta'.[449] Watt, on the other hand, argues against this accolade.[450]

Maʿbad ibn Khalid al-Juhani (79/699) disagreed with Jaham over the issue of predestination, maintaining that man is free and capable to act. So, man was author of his deeds, whether good or evil. Even though Maʿbad and his follower Ghilan diverged from Jaʿad and Jaham on the issue of predestination they converged with them in refuting anthropomorphisms. It was their contention that attributes pertaining to the divine person such as hand, sight, and hearing were to be taken figuratively, so that the transcendence of God could be preserved. "Predication of the attributes to God is unlike that of an accident or

quality of the substance to which it adheres. For the attribute, they claimed, is another index for the divine self."451

There is a difference of opinion among scholars as to how abstract transcendental thought and the tendency to negate the divine attributes came to be introduced into *Jabariyyah* and *Qadariyyah* circles. A group of scholars attribute the development to Christian influences. For instance, De Boer argues that the Islamic

> doctrinal system has certainly been determined the most by Christian influences. In Damascus the formation of Muslim Dogmas was affected by Orthodox and Monophysite teachings, and in Basra and Baghdad rather perhaps by Nestorian and Gnostic theories. Little of the literature belonging to the earliest period of this movement has come down to us, but we cannot be wrong in assigning a considerable influence to personal intercourse and regular school-instruction. Not much was learned in the East at that time out of books, any more than it is today: more was learned from the lips of the teacher. The similarity between the oldest doctrinal teachings in Islam and the dogmas of Christianity is too great to permit any one to deny that they are directly connected.452

He further argues that the issue of divine attributes received the greatest prominence "under the influence assuredly of Christian dogmatics..."453 D. B. Macdonald argues that

> in the development of the Murji'tes and Qadarites it is impossible to mistake the workings of the dialectic refinements of Greek theology as developed in the Byzantine and Syrian schools. It is worth notice, too, that, while the political heresies of the Shi'ites and Kharijites held sway mostly in Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia, these more religious heresies seem to have arisen in Syria first and especially at Damascus, the seat of the Umayyads.454

Emphasizing the significance of the polemic treatises of John of Damascus and his pupil Theodorus Abucara, Macdonald further argues:

> The close agreement of Murji'ites and Qadarite ideas with those formulated and defended by John of Damascus and by the Greek Church generally can only be so explained... In this case, also, we are not to think of the Muslim divines as studying the writings of the Greek fathers, but as picking up ideas from them in practical intercourse and controversy.[455]

Macdonald concludes that "so far it is clear that the influence of Greek theology on Islam can hardly be overestimated. The one outstanding fact of the enormous emphasis laid by both on the doctrine of the nature of God and His attributes is enough."[456] Seale,[457] Gibb and Kramers,[458] and Wolfson[459] are just a few more examples of this line of approach. Among Muslim scholars, al-Ashʿari,[460] al-Shahrastani,[461] and al-Taftazani,[462] have emphasized the resemblance between Christian theology represented by the Greek Church Fathers and the Jahmites' and Qadarites' approach regarding the divine attributes.

A good number of Muslim scholars attribute the transcendental tendency (discussed above) to Judaic influences. Ibn al-Athir,[463] al-Khat ib al-Baghdadi,[464] Ibn Kathir, and Ibn Nubatah al-Masri are just a few examples. Ibn Kathir and Ibn Nubatah al-Masri even pinpoint the names of Jewish individuals such as Aban ibn Samʿan and Talut ibn al-'Aʿsam who, according to them, taught Jaʿad ibn Darham doctrines such as that of the "created Qur'an", and hence the abstract approach regarding the divine attributes.[465]

A. J. Wensinck, on the other hand, contends that "neither orthodox Islam nor any of the sects merely took over the views of Christianity. There is no intellectual compulsion in any quarter, nor a special openness to foreign influence."[466] He also observes that "the history of Muslim dogmatics follows a logical course – that is to say, the sequence of the ideas is not of foreign origin, but is indigenous. At the same time, however, something must be attributed to the influence of Christianity."[467] Watt also argues that:

> The parallel, however, is not quite so close as it appears to be... Even if the similarity were to be closer than this, it does not necessarily follow that there was any direct influence. Islamic

theology is now seen to have been brought about by inner tensions. It is thus not to be supposed that Muslim theologians copied Christian conceptions simply for the sake of copying. What is possible is that, having some awareness of Christian conceptions, they found among them items which were useful to them in maintaining their position against Islamic rivals.

Watt further observes:

This awareness might come about in two ways. There were many Christians who had become Muslims without completely forgetting their Christian ideas; some may have become theologians, or at least talked with theologians. Also a number of religious discussions between Muslims and Christians are known to have taken place. It is only in this indirect way by providing suitable materials or lines of argument that Christian or any other extraneous thought can have influenced Islamic theology. What in the first place made men want to argue came entirely from within Islam.[468]

The views of Wensinck and Watt seem to be a more logical interpretation of the absolute transcendental tendency among some of the Muslim circles than the previous ones; therefore, the same views are held by many modern Muslim scholars such as Abd al-Halim Mahmud,[469] Irfan,[470] al-Nashshar,[471] and Madkur.[472]

It was the Muʿtazilite school which took over most of the Qadariyyah ideas such as free will, refutation of anthropomorphisms, negation of most of the divine attributes and the method of metaphorically interpreting the texts to meet their ends. So strongly, observes Wensinck, "was the likeness between the two sects felt, that their names are often used without discrimination. Yet the distinction between them is historically well documented."[473] Gibb and Kramers count Ghilan, the founder of the Qadariyyah, as "among the fathers of the Muʿtazilah."[474] The recognized founder of the Muʿtazilites, Wasil ibn ʿAta', on the other hand, was a contemporary of Jaʿad and Jaham. Jaham's theology, argues Gibb,

557

left distinct traces on that of the Muʿtazilah; the doctrine of the created Kur'an which was later to become a fundamental Muʿtazilah thesis was probably formulated by Djahm and in the doctrine of the divine attributes there are coincidences on both sides which cannot be accidental. On the other hand, there are many serious differences which are probably practical and political in their nature. Djahm professed in the most extreme form the doctrine of predestination (*djabr*). All the actions of man are involuntary. Wasil maintained the opposite thesis of free will.[475]

These historical realities tell us that the Muʿtazilites did not simply copy or blindly follow one person or a sect. They arrived at a time when rational inquiry and speculative argumentation as well as Greek philosophy and logic had already entered Islamic theological debate; picking and choosing from already existing religious ideas and theological expositions, they helped to create a systematic and speculative discourse among the Muslim community. This movement, observes Netton, "never produced a synthetic scheme of thought, nor even an eclectic system... but rather the interpretation of certain inherited doctrines in favor of a particular view of divine nature and human destiny..."[476]

It is commonly argued that the Muʿtazilites were liberals and free thinkers. Contrary to this view, Watt observes that their religious vigor, piety, missionary zeal, and commitment is proof, that they were "quite definite Muslims."[477] Gibb and Kramers contend:

> Nothing could then be less justifiable than to regard Muʿtazila as philosophers, free thinkers or liberals. On the contrary, they are theologians of the strict school; their ideal is dogmatic orthodoxy; philosophy for them is only an *ancilla fidei*; they are nothing less than tolerant. What they created was Muslim scholasticism.[478]

It must be noted that the Muʿtazilites utilized, in the first place, Greek logic and rationalism to support Islamic belief and revelation to convince non-Muslims of their vitality, but then later went to the extremist position of giving priority to reason (*al-ʿaql*) over revelation

(*al-wahy*), as Jarallah observes,[479] in effect subordinating the latter to the former. While the Qur'an, argues Rippin,

> had its place in the discussions, it was not so much a source, when used by Muʿtazila, as a testimony to the veracity of the claims which they were making. The basic assumptions of the Greek philosophical system (as understood and transmitted through Christian scholars) was the fundamental element underlying the whole position; it was argued that reason, and not only traditional sources, could be used as a source of reliable knowledge for human beings.[480]

This view of the role of reason, Rippin further argues, "is significant in terms of the ultimate fate of the Muʿtazila, for it implied that the legal scholars of Islam had, in fact, no particular claim to sole possession of the right interpretation of all Muslim dogma."[481] In addition, the Muʿtazilites became militant once given political authority. F. M. Denny states that the Muʿtazilites "far from being liberal intellectuals who wanted to accommodate the world to [a] vision of rationality and cooperation, were proponents of a strict and militant Islam which they sought to impose uniformly on their wayward coreligionists and to spread to the non-Muslims by means of propaganda."[482] This militant attitude along with many other factors brought about their downfall.[483]

The Muʿtazilite doctrine was founded on five axioms.[484] The first two i.e., *al-tawhid* (the unity of God) and *al-ʿadl* (the justice of God), were directly related to the nature of God and His actions. Like the *Qadariyyah*, the Muʿtazilite emphasized the uniqueness, transcendence, and unicity of God at all costs. If the Orthodoxy believed that the divine attributes were not God and were eternal, then, to the Muʿtazilites, transcendence could no longer be maintained. The Muʿtazilites asserted:

> Divine knowledge is either eternal or it is created. If eternal, it is either in God, outside of God, or nowhere. If in God, then God is a theater where change takes place. If outside of God, then God is not omniscient and someone else is. And knowledge cannot be nowhere. It is somewhere and eternal. But it cannot be outside of

God for that involves polytheism. It must therefore be in God and intrinsic to Him.[485]

When Wasil ibn ʿAta', the founder of the Muʿtazilites, first negated the attributes, according to al-Shahrastani,

the doctrine was undeveloped and was explained by Wasil b. ʿAta in simple terms as follows: It is universally agreed that the existence of two eternal gods is impossible; so to assert the existence of an eternal entity, or an eternal attribute [in God], would be to say that there were two gods.[486]

Wasil, in Macdonald's view, "reduced God to a vague unity, a kind of eternal oneness."[487] The later Muʿtazilites, like Abu Hudhayl M. al-ʿAllaf (d. 226), made great advances regarding the issue of divine attributes utilizing the rational devices of the ancient philosophy. Al-ʿAllaf taught that

the qualities were not *in* His essence, and thus separable from it, thinkable apart from it, but they *were* His essence. Thus, God was omnipotent by His omnipotence, but it *was* His essence and not *in* His essence. He was omniscient by His omniscience and it *was* His essence. Further, he held that these qualities must be either negations or relations. Nothing positive can be asserted of them, for that would mean that there was in God the complexity of subject and predicate, being and quality; and God is absolute unity... He endeavored – and in this he was followed by most of the Muʿtazilites – to cut down the number of God's attributes.[488]

Al-Shahrastani reports al-ʿAllaf as arguing that, "the attributes they are not additional to his essence in the form of entities subsisting in it, but his essence itself. They may be regarded either negatively or as concomitants..."[489] Al-Ashʿari reports that al-ʿAllaf observed:

if you say: "God has knowledge" you affirmed knowledge of God which is He Himself and negated ignorance. When you said, "God

is alive" you affirmed life which is Allah Himself and negated the death from Him. (Same is the case with all the attributes). He used to say that God has [a] face but His face is His ownself... He metaphorically interpreted the verses containing the word "*yad* [meaning hand]*" as meaning His bounty, and interpreted the verse (made under my eye) [20:39] as meaning his [God] knowledge.[490]

Al-Ash'ari also reports Dirar as arguing that "the statement 'God is knowledge' means that He is not ignorant... He is alive means He is not dead."[491]

Al-Nazzam (d. 231), according to Macdonald has the

credit among later historians of having made use, to high degree, of the doctrines of the Greek philosophers. He was one of the Satans of the Qadarites, say they; he read the books of the philosophers and mingled their teachings with the doctrines of Mu'tazilites. He taught, in the most absolute way, that God could do nothing to a creature, either in this world or in the next, that was not for the creature's good and in accordance with strict justice. It was not only that God could not do it; He had not the power to do anything evil. Evidently the personality of God was fast vanishing behind an absolute law of right.[492]

Like Dirar, he argued that "the statement that 'God is knowledge' means affirming His essence and negating ignorance from Him...Same is the case with all attributes of His essence."[493] The difference between al-'Allaf and al-Nazzam was that al-'Allaf did not negate the attributes altogether. He affirmed them in the essence of God. Al-Nazzam, on the other hand, was closer to the philosophers in denying the attributes absolutely and replacing instead the essence of God itself. Al-Shahrastani noted:

The difference between saying that God is knowing with his essence and not by knowledge, and that he is knowing by knowledge which is his essence, is that the first proposition denies the attributes, while the second affirms either an essence which is

identical with his attributes, or an attribute which is identical with the essence.[494]

Abu Hashim al-Jubba'i (850–915) did a "subtle refinement of the doctrine of the divine attributes"[495] by contending that these attributes were "*ahwal*" states "of the being of the entity of which they are attributes. In order to do that, he turned to the grammarians and grammatical theory."[496] He held that,

God is knowing by his essence, is powerful, living and so on by his essence. The meaning of the expression 'by his essence' is that God does not need in his knowing either an attribute which is knowledge, or a 'mode' by which he is knowing. According to Abu Hashim, on the other hand, God is knowing by his essence in the sense that he has a mode, which is an attribute, recognizable over and above his being an existing essence. The attribute, however, can only be known along with the essence and not apart from it. Thus he maintained that there are modes which are attributes neither existing nor non-existing, neither known nor unknown; that is, in themselves they are not known as attributes, but are known only with the essence. Reason recognizes a necessary distinction between knowing a thing in itself and knowing it with an attribute. So one who knows the essence of God does not ipso facto know that he is knowing. Similarly, One who knows substance does not ipso facto know that it is in a place and is a substrate of accidents.[497]

Al-Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar reduced the attributes to only three i.e., knowledge (*al-'ilm*), power (*al-qudrah*), and perception (*al-idrak*). He insisted, like his predecessors, that these attributes were not other than God's essence.[498]

Al-Faruqi summarizes the Mu'tazilite's position on the issue of attributes as follows:

all divine attributes must be declared either negative, denying that their opposites are predicable of God; or positive, affirming a facet

562

of the divine self, not an accident or quality. The Islamic notion that the Qur'an was the eternal word of God invited the same kind of argument. The Muʿtazilah maintained that the Qur'an was created by God in time to fulfill a purpose He had for man and creation. The evidence they adduced was that the Qur'an was composed of language, of sound and meanings established by human custom, that it was kept in ink and paper and memorized completely by humans. It cannot be "in" or "of" God. On the other hand, to hold that the Qur'an is "outside" of God and eternal is to affirm the existence of another eternal being besides God.[499]

Rahman observes:

> with that of the Divine Attributes, the Muʿtazila went to extreme limits. Starting with a genuine anxiety to safeguard the idea of Divine transcendence, they explained away all expressions of Scripture and the Hadith that contained anthropomorphism in a rational spirit and ended up by negating all the Divine Attributes.[500]

The Muʿtazilite also refuted the orthodox dogma of the beatific vision of God in Paradise. God, they claimed, "cannot be beheld by the human eye, even in Paradise, for only material bodies can be seen. Hence, the Qur'anic verse affirming [the] same (75:22) must be interpreted to mean something else, such as consciousness of the divine presence."[501] They interpreted the Qur'anic verses related to this metaphorically and even rejected *ahadith* claiming the same by discrediting some of the narrators in their link. Al-Khayyat reports Abu Musa al-Murdar as declaring that anybody claiming that, "Allah will be seen by the eyes without how (*bila kayf*) is a disbeliever. Same is the one who doubts him being a disbeliever..."[502] This ultra strict position was taken by the Muʿtazilite to avoid any similarity between God and His creatures, and to avoid any anthropomorphic understanding of the Divine, which to them was equal to disbelief.

Finally, the Muʿtazilite metaphorically interpreted all verses of the Qur'an that refer to the face, hands, eye of God etc., and tried to impose

such interpretations upon other Muslims. Despite "their several disagreements on points of doctrinal details", observes Netton, "most of the Muʿtazilites were agreed on a non-literal mode of interpretation of much of the anthropomorphic data about God in the Qur'an."[503] Thus, they interpreted the word "face" in the verse: "Everything (that exists) will perish except His own Face" (28:88) to mean the being of God Himself.[504] God's hand was interpreted as referring to His "favor or bounty"[505], God's eye as referring to His "knowledge", and God's settlement upon the Throne (*istiwa'*) as His "dominance", and His coming down in the later part of the night as meaning the closeness of His "mercy".[506] Watt observes that the Muʿtazilite dealt

> with the anthropomorphisms by the method of *ta'wil* or 'metaphorical interpretation'. More precisely this meant that they claimed they were justified in interpreting single words in the Qur'anic text according to a secondary or metaphorical meaning found elsewhere in the Qur'an or in pre-Islamic poetry. Thus, in the phrase (38:75) about God 'creating with his hands' they said that hands meant 'grace' (*niʿma*), and justified this by a usage roughly parallel to our colloquial phrase 'I'll give you a hand'. Similarly *wajh*, usually 'face', was said to mean 'essence'. Verses which spoke of God being seen in the world to come were interpreted in the light of other verses where 'see' did not mean physical sight. In some ways this method of interpretation is artificial; but at least it keeps thinkers at the 'grass roots' of religious experience and away from an abstract academic discussion of relations between attributes and essence.[507]

In a similar vein, Anawati observes, "hadith that go the wrong way will be rejected. It is necessary to maintain, at whatever cost, the absolute divine unity, strict monotheism."[508]

The central purpose and sole raison d'etre of the strict Muʿtazilite creed was to strictly stress and preserve the transcendence, uniqueness, and otherness of God, as well as His sheer incomparability with anything other than Himself. This is clearly evident from analysis of the vehemently upheld Muʿtazilite position with regard to God's divine

attributes and interpretation of Qur'anic anthropomorphic expressions. God's absolute divine transcendence was for the Muʿtazilites the essence of the Islamic Faith, to be emphatically preserved at all costs. With this in mind it becomes easy to understand al-Ashʿari's long account of the Muʿtazilite creed, each word and phrase of which seems to be an effort to affirm. Al-Ashʿari declared:

> The Muʿtazila agree that God is one; there is nothing like him; he is hearing, seeing; he is not a body (*jism, shabah, juththa*), not a form, not flesh and blood, not an individual (*shakhs*), not substance nor attribute; he has no color, taste, smell, feel, no heat, cold, moisture nor dryness, no length, breadth nor depth, no joining together nor separation, no movement, rest nor division; he has no sections no parts, no limbs nor members; he is not subject to directions, left, right, in front of, behind, above, below; no place comprehends him, no time passes over him; inadmissible for him are contiguity, separatedness and inherence in places; he is neither characterized by any attribute of creatures indicating their originatedness, nor by finitude, nor extension, nor directional motion; he is not bounded; not begetting nor begotten, magnitudes do not comprehend him nor veils cover him; the senses do not attain him; he is not comparable with men and does not resemble creatures in any respect; infirmities and sufferings do not affect him; he is unlike whatever occurs to the mind or is pictured in the imagination...eyes do not see him, sight does not attain him, imagination does not comprehend him; he is heard by hearing; (he is) a thing, not as the things, knowing, powerful, living, not as (men are) knowing...[509]

According to Watt, "This passage expresses very well the otherness and transcendence of God which has always been [a] prominent strand in Islamic thought. This has, of course, a Qur'anic basis, and indeed some of the phrases in the passage...are from the Qur'an..."[510]

In spite of their great contributions to the intellectual life of Islam and despite being "founders of the discipline of speculative or philosophical theology",[511] the Muʿtazilite went far from the spirit of

Islamic revelation and hence from the outlook of the ordinary Muslim. "To insist on the bare unity of God", argues Watt, "was a tidy rational theory, but it did not do justice to the fullness of religious experience. The negative statements of Dirar and an-Nazzam are unsatisfactory to the ordinary worshipper..."[512] The Muʿtazilite reduced the vivid and living God of Muhammad, as Macdonald puts it, to "a spirit, and a spirit, too, of the vaguest kind."[513] To Rahman they "denuded God of all content and rendered Him unsatisfactory for religious consciousness."[514] To Netton they "made God more unknowable rather than less, and dug a wider gulf between man and his Creator. A dry hermeneutic intellectualism restricted the former's mental image of his Deity..."[515] Their creed, observes Watt, "leads to an abstract, bare and featureless conception of God, which robs the religious consciousness of much that is precious to it."[516] Or in the words of Gibb turning God into "a vast old monument, beneath which the element of personal religious experience seemed to be crushed out of existence. Fortunately for Islam, it was not to be so."[517] According to Gibb, the simple and minor anthropomorphism of the Islamic faith, which speaks of God in terms of some of the categories and attributes of the human being, "was far less dangerous than anthroposophism which reasons about God in terms of human wisdom."[518] The Muʿtazilite however,

> exercised an influence indirectly. An important role was played by al-Ashʿari who, after being trained as a Muʿtazilite, was 'converted' to a form of Hanbalite view. There were other channels, however, by which [the] Muʿtazilite's ideas entered the main stream... It was then left to other men to sift these ideas so as to discover which were genuinely assimilable. In the end a great many ideas were retained, though seldom in precisely the form in which Muʿtazilites had presented them.[519]

A good example of the assimilation process cited was the method of metaphorical interpretation, bequeathed by the Muʿtazilite and later adopted by Sunni theologians such as al-Baghdadi, al-Juwayni, and al-Ghazali. Al-Razi noted that "all the Islamic sects affirm that metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wil*) is a must with regards to the few (apparent words) of some Qur'anic verses and Prophetic reports."[520]

A further development came with religious philosophy and Islamic Hellenistic philosophers, as well as later with the Isma'ilites, who once again in the name of God's unity and transcendence, absolutely negated the attributes of God. Religious philosophers for instance like al-Farabi (870–950), Ibn Sina (979–1037), and Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) in essence stripped God of all possible attributes ascribed to Him in the Qur'an.[521] Al-Farabi's First Cause and necessarily existent One is indivisible in His substance and indefinable or ineffable.[522] He is simultaneously Intellect (*'aql*) and the Discernment of the Intellect (*ma'qul*). He is eternally the All-Knowledge because He knows His Being (*ya'lamu dhatahu*).[523] Al-Ghazali accuses both al-Farabi and other philosophers of denying God's knowledge of the particulars and details of things. Ibn al-Jawzi accuses Ibn Sina of the same.[524] According to al-Ghazali, who railed against Islamic Hellenistic philosophy, the philosopher philosophizing about God is more closer to ignorance than knowledge.[525] However, Ibn Rushd and many modern scholars such as Abu Raydah and A. Mahmud free al-Farabi and Ibn Sina of this charge.[526] In point of fact, in his writings, al-Farabi disagrees with Aristotle on the issue of God's knowledge with regards to the *juz'iyyat* (details of things) pointing out that God's knowledge was eternal and therefore He knew everything. Al-Farabi refers to the Beautiful Names of God recognizing them as pathways leading to a knowledge of His Exalted Majesty without adding or allowing anything additional or external to His being or essence.[527] For al-Farabi, these Names merely denoted God's relationship with His creatures.[528] I. R. Netton observes that, "In his second mode al-Farabi emphasized among other things the different facets of perfection of the Deity, while underlining the fact that all His attributes were subsumed in, and not distinct from, His essence."[529] Madkur sees in al-Farabi the origination of all the later theological debates regarding the divine attributes.[530] Al-Farabi to a large degree defines God in negative propositions and statements to maintain His absolute transcendence. He renders God to a mere intellect or *'aql*, as Netton observes, "The logic of al-Farabi's identification of attribute and essence means that God is intellect in action (*'aql bi al-fi'l*) as well as wisdom, truth, and life themselves."[531] Unlike many others, Abd al-Halim Mahmud does not see in al-Farabi's approach an

un-Islamic, excessive or extravagant immersion in the divine transcendence, but rather his emphasis upon the divine transcendence as an off shoot of the Islamic concept of God's otherness.[532]

Ibn Sina's Necessary Being[533] is essentially one. According to Netton:

> Ibn Sina admits that it is possible for God to have a variety of characteristics (Persian: *sifat-ha*) without there being any kind of resultant multiplicity in His essence (*dhat*). But this admission implies no desire to indulge in a Mu'tazilite exercise of allegorizing the attributes out of all recognition into something else. The key is rather a very Neoplatonic urge towards negativity, similar to that which was previously encountered in the work of al-Farabi."[534]

Ibn Sina argues that:

> Since it is established that God is a Necessary Being, that He is One in every respect, that He is exalted above all causes... since it is further established that His Attributes do not augment His Essence, and that He is qualified by the Attributes of Praise and Perfection; it follows necessarily that we must state that He is Knowing, Living, Willing, Omnipotent, Speaking, Seeing, Hearing, and Possessed of all the other Loveliest Attributes. It is also necessary to recognize that His Attributes are to be classified as negative, positive, and a compound of the two: since His Attributes are of this order, it follows that their multiplicity does not destroy His Unity or contradict the necessary nature of His Being. Pre-eternity for instance is essentially the negation of not-being in the first place, and denial of causality and of primality in the second place; similarly the term One means that He is indivisible in every respect, both verbally and actually. When it is stated that He is a Necessary being, this means that He is a Being without cause, and that He is the Cause of other than Himself: this is a combination of the negative and the positive.[535]

All these attributes boil down to "... nothing but (1) union, where 'union' is an idea in the intelligence rather than in essence, or

(2) negation (*nafy*) and denial. In so doing they do not imply existence of many characteristics, but rather an omission of many characteristics."[536] To further emphasize the otherness of God, Ibn Sina insisted upon emanation of the First Intelligence, "Since the first thing to emanate from God was not a body, it follows that it was an abstract substance, namely, the First Intelligence."[537]

In short, the philosophers campaigned for an abstract and absolute divine transcendence which differed markedly to both Muʿtazilite and Orthodox understanding of the deity, being very close, as Madkur observes, "to Aristotle's Metaphysics."[538] The Ismaʿilites followed the philosophers in stripping God of all the attributes ascribed to Him, and then in ascribing all of the divine attributes to the First Intelligence.[539] And because the God of the Ismaʿilites and philosophers was recast as a bare Reality and an absolute unknowable One, this First Intelligence thus rather than God Himself seemed to be the true Deity. God appeared to need the First Intelligence to create, sustain, protect, and love. In an effort to exalt God beyond all possible limitations and needs, the Muslim philosophers ended up binding Him too tight to their theory of emanation and hence with several of its inherent limitations. Netton differentiates between the Muʿtazilite's deity and that of the Neoplatonic deity of the philosophers in the following words:

> The transcendent Deity of the Muʿtazilites, whose several Qur'anic attributes were metamorphosed by allegory, was not bound up with ideas of emanation, nor with hypostases such as the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿAql al-Kulli*) and the Universal Soul (*al-Nafs al-Kulliyya*). But the unknowable God of medieval Neoplatonic Islam was. The end result was the development of a transcendental theology in Islam, with the Ismaʿili sect as its political and spiritual apotheosis, which was far more complex than anything of which the Muʿtazila could have dreamed.[540]

There was nothing in the Qur'an allowing for the existence of this hierarchy of beings or hypostases as is required by emanation. The philosophers' emanation scheme, as Madkur observes, did not realize the goal assigned by the Qur'an to the creation. The philosophers'

creation was not dependent upon God's will or power. Such a scheme was totally non-Qur'anic and closely related to the emanation theory of Neoplatonism. In this process, as Netton observes, "the simple monotheistic model or 'face' of the *Qur'anic* God was remolded to an image and likeness of which Plotinus might only sometimes have approved, and of which Muhammad would have assuredly despaired, even if he had understood it."[541] By this "alienation and Neoplatonism", the "old paradigm was transformed into another full and new paradigm, the 'Paradigm of Islamic Transcendence.'...And the transformation meant that all words used of 'God' were similarly transformed and could only be used as analogical signs, however inadequately."[542] Netton concludes his book by observing that, "For the stress on transcendence among some thinkers in medieval Islam, if pursued to its ultimate point, leads semiotically, logically, and inexorably to the 'death' of the word 'God,' though none, of course, articulated it like that."[543] Netton's conclusion may seem extreme, but in a sense it is true, for the philosophers so practically removed God from the day-to-day affairs of the world that He became a mere abstract idea. This concept of God was too abstract to generate the response intended by the Qur'an, especially with regard to common believers. On the other hand, it must be noted that this abstract transcendental tendency among many Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, did not spring from apostasy or rebellion against the Qur'an or the Islamic concept of the Deity. It was perhaps their commitment and devotion to the divine transcendence that was the driving force behind their journey into deep abstraction. And as a consequence, their views regarding the divine transcendence as a whole cannot be dubbed as absolutely un-Islamic or non-Qur'anic. Although their ideas lacked the proper balance needed between the divine transcendence and immanence as stipulated in the Qur'an, still their concerns regarding God's absolute divine transcendence were an offshoot of the Qur'anic emphasis upon the divine otherness and hence a great sign of the philosophers' faith and trust in the Qur'an. Certainly they represented the utmost extreme of transcendental thought in Islam.

The *Al-Hashwiyyah*[544] followed a hugely controversial creed. So extreme was their interpretation of the nature of God that they were

labelled *Mujassimah* or corporealists by their opponents, from the root word *jism* meaning body in the Arabic language. Seemingly anthropomorphic phrases of the Qur'an and hadith were given a highly literal interpretation to the extent of *sometimes* even comparing them to equivalent human counterparts. Although the trend was not confined to any specific sect or group, we can point to the following as examples, albeit a few, of its practice among the traditionalists: Madar ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid ibn al-Walid, Abu Muhammad al-Asadi, Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Basari, Ahmad ibn ʿAtaʾ, Kuhmus ibn al-Hasan al-Tamimi (d. 139), and Muqatil ibn Sulayman (d. 150). The latter opposed a metaphorical interpretation of the Revelation advocating a strict and literal following of the text to insist that revelation rather than reason was the only true source of religious understanding. Al-Shahrastani notes:

> According to them God has a form and possesses limbs and parts which are either spiritual or physical. It is possible for him to move from place to place, to descend and ascend, to be stationary and to be firmly seated... Ashʿari has reported on the authority of Muhammad b. ʿIsa that Mudar, Kuhmus, and Ahmad al-Hujaimi allow the possibility of men touching God and shaking his hand; also that sincere Muslims may embrace him in this world as well as in the next, provided they attain in their spiritual endeavors to sufficient degree of purity of heart and genuine union with God.

He further observes:

> Kaʿbi reports of some of them that they say that God can be seen even in this life, and that God and men may visit one another. Dawud al-Jawaribi is reported to have said: 'Do not question me about the pudendum or the beard, but you may ask me about anything else'. He said: "God is body, flesh and blood. He has members and limbs, such as hands and feet, head and tongue, two eyes and two ears; nevertheless, he is a body unlike other bodies, with flesh unlike other flesh, and blood unlike other blood. This is true also of his other attributes: he does not resemble any creature, nor does any creature resemble him."[545]

In spite of their emphasis upon the incomparability and non-resemblance of God to creatures, these literalists nevertheless also ascribed to God the attributes and qualities of mortal bodies. Al-Shahrastani reports that they took Qur'anic words such as *istiw*a' (settling down) and *wajh* (face) etc. literally,

> as they are understood when used of bodies. The same applies to words found in traditions, such as the word 'sura' (form) in the saying of the Prophet: 'Adam was created in the form of the Most Merciful'; or his other sayings: 'Till the Most Powerful puts his foot in the fire...' These and the like they understood in the same sense as would be understood of bodies. The Anthropomorphists have invented lies and added them to the traditions, attributing them to the Prophet; these were taken mostly from the Jews to whom anthropomorphism is natural... The Anthropomorphists also report that the Prophet said, 'God met me, shook hands with me, wrestled with me and put his hand between my shoulders, until I felt the coldness of his fingers.'[546]

It is entirely indisputable that the notion of God which the literalists had in mind was of a corporeal and anthropomorphic Deity, whatever the claims they would made as to His non-resemblance and incomparability. *Al-Karamiyyah*, the followers of Muhammad ibn Karam (d. 255 AH), followed the corporeal concept of *al-Hashwiyyah* to such a degree that Ibn Karam came to be regarded as an "upholder of corporealism and anthropomorphism."[547] According to al-Shahrastani, Ibn Karam declared that,

> God is firmly seated on the throne and that he is in person on the upper side of it. He uses the word 'corporeal' of God, and says in his book, '*Adhab al-Qabr*, that God is one in his essence and one in substance, and that he is in contact with the upper side of the throne. In his view, it is possible for God to move, change his position and descend. Some of the Karramites say that God occupies part of [the] throne, but others say that he occupies the whole of it.[548]

It was in response to these two extremist positions (the Muʿtazilite and their somewhat abstract interpretation, and the *al-Hashwiyyah* and their anthropomorphism), that the early Orthodox fathers or *Salaf* developed the formula *bila kayf*. These early scholars were often called the People of Tradition (*Ahl al- Hadith)*, or *Salaf* and comprised *fuqaha'* such as Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 767),[549] Imam Malik (715–795),[550] Imam Shafiʿi (767–820),[551] and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855).[552] They left the verses of the Qur'an in question as well as the related *ahadith* simply as they were, accepting the poetical statements just as they occurred, without applying much reason either to criticize or expand upon them. These conservatives observes Majid Fakhry, "tended to repudiate the use of any deductive method."[553] Their position was that these ambiguous verses must be understood in light of the Qur'anic dictum that, "there is nothing like unto Him" hence negating all possibilities of anthropomorphism. At the same time, they used and maintained the same phrases or terminology implied by the Qur'an with regards to God such as *wajh Allah* without looking further into their meaning or exegesis. And this is what is being referred to by use of their phrase *bila kayfa wa la tashbih*, meaning without inquiring how and without anthropomorphism or comparison. Binyamin Abrahamov observes that "on the one hand, this method manifests God's incorporeality (against *tashbih*) and the authority of the Qur'an (against *taʿtil*), and on the other hand, it attests to man's inability to know God's essence."[554] Abu Hanifah puts the matter succinctly:

> All His qualities are different from those of creatures. He knoweth, but not in the way of our knowledge; He is mighty, but not in the way of our power; He seeth, but not in the way of our seeing; He speaketh, but not in the way of our speaking; He heareth, but not in the way of our hearing. We speak by means of organs and letters, Allah speaks without instruments and letters. Letters are created, but the speech of Allah is uncreated.[555]

He further declares that,

> Allah is [a] thing, not as other things but in the sense of positive existence; without body, without substance, without accidents. He

has no limit, neither has He a counterpart, nor a partner, nor an equal. He has hand, face and soul, for He refers to these in the Kuran; and what He saith in the Kuran regarding face, hand and soul, this belongs to His qualities, without how (*bila kaifa*). It must not be said that His hand is His power or His bounty, for this would lead to the annihilation of the quality. This is the view of the Kadarites and the Muʿtazilah. No, His hand is His quality, without how. Likewise His wrath and His good pleasure are two of His qualities, without how.[556]

Both Malik ibn Anas and al-Shafiʿi's views were absolutely the same in this regard.

Very often this doctrine and formula of *bila kayf* is connected with the name of Ibn Hanbal. But as just mentioned it was in fact Abu Hanifah who initially used the phrase. Watt highlights this historic fact by stating that Ibn Hanbal "was doubtless building on the foundations of earlier men."[557] I. R. Netton observes the same of certain Muslim theologians who came later than Ibn Hanbal, noting that the seemingly anthropomorphic statements made of the face of God in the Qur'an were

to be accepted as realities without further inquiry into their modality (bila kayf). It was sufficient to realize that the exact nature of such features as God's hand or eyes would be quite unlike any earthly hands or eyes. This was the classic stance of such theologians as Ahmad b. Hanbal (AD 780–855) and al-Ashʿari (AD 873/4–935/6). Both were concerned to stress the reality of the anthropomorphic descriptions found in the Qur'an. But logically, their attitude of *bila kayf*, or refusal to examine the mode of these descriptions, resulted in an intellectual cul-de-sac in which acceptance triumphed over analysis and incomprehension over reason.[558]

Was it 'acceptance' or 'incomprehension'? One could argue and in my opinion quite rightly, that it was in fact the triumph of wisdom over theorizing, for anything else would not have been 'analysis' but

speculation and of a most dangerous sort in terms of its ramifications. Neither was it an absolute intellectual cul-de-sac, by which I mean that it allowed for a specific modality of the divine nature and reflection upon it, but with certain strict conditions and qualifications attached. James Pavlin observes:

> Thus using verses of the Qur'an and authentic Hadith, the traditional scholars maintained the reality of God's Names and Attributes without questioning how they exist in Him. In this way, a complete picture of the nature of God was formulated. For example, it is confirmed that God has an Essence (*Dhat*) and a Self (*Nafs*), that He has ninety-nine beautiful Names, that He interacts with His creation through actions and words, that He knows all things and wills all things into existence, and that He is beyond comprehension and is only known by the descriptions He has revealed. For the traditionalists, this was accepted based on the prohibition of asking how God's Attributes exist.[559]

This supposed cul-de-sac was moreover not the result of, or directed specifically to, any anti-intellectualism or use of reason, but the outcome of a specific religious rationale. Watt explains:

> Orthodoxy has been accused of making God similar to man. This charge they indignantly denied, and they inveighed against *tashbih* as vehemently as the Muʿtazila. They agreed that God was not corporeal and that He transcended and was different from all creatures; and in this they were quite genuine, for it was one side of the traditional Islamic outlook. At the same time, however, they clung to the text of the Qur'an, which they regarded as the very words of God. If the Qur'an spoke of God's hands and face, then God must have hands and face. How God Who is incorporeal has hands and a face may be difficult to understand, but this difficulty is not a valid reason for rejecting the phrases of Scripture or explaining them away by the method of *ta'wil*. One must maintain both the authority of Scripture and the incorporeality of God, even if one cannot reconcile them intellectually. In the doctrine of

balkayfiyya this position was regularized and a formal acknow-
ledgment made of the limits of the human intellect.[560]

To Oliver Leaman and Binyamin Abrahamov the *bila kayfa*
"doctrine is a moderate position, between that of the literalists (who
hold that God really has a body) and that of the demythologizers (who
think we need to interpret these verses allegorically)."[561]

That such a formula was intended to acknowledge sheer human
dependence upon the Word of God, to maintain its authority over
reason, and to block any attempt at anthropomorphism, is substan-
tiated by the position taken by Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Although Ibn
Hanbal's opponents often accused him of literalism and corporealism
with regard to the seemingly anthropomorphic Qur'anic expressions,
he did not in fact take an absolute literal approach to them. Quite the
reverse, Ibn Hanbal's strong opposition to any anthropomorphic
interpretation of these Qur'anic phrases is evident of his stern and
classical stance against anthropomorphic conceptions of God. Al-
Shahrastani reports that Ibn Hanbal stated:

> Whoever moved his hand while reading the Qur'an (xxxviii. 75),
> "I created with my hands," ought to have his hand cut off; and
> whosoever stretched forth his finger in repeating the saying of
> Muhammad, "The heart of the believer is between two fingers of
> the Merciful," deserved to have his fingers torn out.[562]

Watt rightly observes elsewhere that:

> There were naive anthropomorphists among the Traditionists, but
> he (Ibn Hanbal) opposed these as vigorously as he opposed the
> Muʿtazilites; he insisted that the anthropomorphic expressions of
> the Qur'an are to be understood "without stating the precise
> manner of their existence" (*bi-la kayf*, literally "without how").
> The strength of Ibn Hanbal's feelings on this matter may be gauged
> by the fact that he broke off relations with a follower who
> attempted to refute the Muʿtazilites by their own methods of
> argument.[563]

This helps to show that, "the Hanbalites position was based on an awareness of the limitations of reason in this sphere, coupled with an understanding of the need to retain the concrete and "poetical" language of the Qur'an and the Traditions."[564] In the words of Armstrong, Ibn Hanbal was not anthropomorphist but was "stressing the essential ineffability of the divine, which lay beyond the reach of all logic and conceptual analysis."[565]

Consequently, it can certainly be claimed that the *Salaf's* insistence upon an understanding and acceptance of these Qur'anic expressions employing the caveat *without how* was neither literal nor anthropomorphic. They simply didn't want to traverse or trespass into territory specified for the Divine, which is why they confined themselves to the terms implied by the Qur'an and the Sunnah with proper qualification that no similarity or resemblance ever existed between God and His creatures. Al-Shahrastani reports that one of the reasons the *Salaf* refrained from *al-ta'wil* (metaphorical interpretation) was that an interpretation was "an opinion, and it is not lawful to give an opinion about the attributes of God; for we may sometimes interpret the verse in a way not intended by God, and thus we would fall into perversity."[566]

We need to differentiate between two later understandings of the *Salaf's* position which came into being. A group of Sunni, mostly Hanbalite, scholars apprehended it to mean that the ambiguous verses should be understood in light of the fixed rules of the language. Thus phrases like 'face of God' or 'hands of God' were to be understood in accordance with their common, daily, linguistic usages, as for instance we understand the meaning of the word 'face', without giving it a metaphorical interpretation. This comprehension, in their view, did not imply any comparison, corporeality, or anthropomorphism, for the level of these attributes in God is absolute while in His creation it is relative. God has already explained that none is like unto Him, but He is at the same time hearing and seeing. So if acceptance of His attributes such as those of hearing and seeing as well as many others, that are also shared by human beings, does not make Him similar to man, likewise acceptance of attributes like face and hand would not be anthropomorphic. For they would also be different from human hands and

faces.[567] Therefore, when we say "God has a face or hands", it must be qualified with the qualifier "*not like our face or hands*" and *without how*. This is the position of Ibn Qudamah (d. 620 / 1223),[568] Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 / 1328),[569] and many other traditional scholars. In their footsteps and following them come the "Salafi" groups of modern times such as the followers of Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhab (1115–1201 / 1703–1787) who closely follow Ibn Taymiyyah's approach regarding the divine attributes.[570] In his discussion of God's attributes, Ibn Taymiyyah

> attempts to give greater depth of explanation to the traditionalist view of the nature of God. His main tool for this is the Arabic language. He sees Arabic as the unique vehicle of revelation, and thus all of its nuances must be understood properly and clearly. In addition to the Arabic language itself, one must read and understand the verses of the Qur'an within their natural setting, i.e., the Qur'an must be interpreted by the Qur'an. The examples, parables and linguistic usages of the Qur'an must be analyzed for their rules and principles, which in turn must be applied in a consistent and uniform manner. In this way, Ibn Taymiyyah does not reject the rational faculties of the mind (ʿaql), but uses them in submission to revelation in order to explain revelation.[571]

All this emphasis upon the linguistic meaning of the Qur'anic verses, argues Watt, "grew out of a realization that the concrete, "poetical" language of the Qur'an kept men closer to the deep springs of religious vitality than the abstractions of philosophical thinking."[572]

Ibn Taymiyyah argued that the *Salaf's* attitude towards the Names and Attributes of God was to "attest and confirm whatever has been affirmed by God for Himself in the Qur'an and the Sunnah of His Prophet, without alteration (*tahrif*) or suspension (*taʿtil* i.e., stripping God of those attributes) and without how (*takyif*), or comparison (*tamthil*)."[573] He contended that the words used by God for Himself in the Qur'an or those used by His Prophet to denote Him are realities carrying real meanings appropriate to God's Exalted Majesty. The

meanings of these terms when used of God carry different realities to the meanings and corresponding realities they describe while used in the human context or sphere. Though the terms are the same, the corresponding realities are utterly different in accordance with the nature and essence of the two parties denoted and described by them. God is hearing, seeing, living, and some of His creatures are also hearing, seeing, and living. Such a concord of names does not "require resemblance of the Creator with the creation, but only denotes a kind of commonality or shared value between them both. The distinctive factors distinguishing one [God] from the other [creature] utterly outweigh and outnumber the factors common between them."[574] God was hearing and living long before the existence of creatures and He will be so eternally; therefore, the names and qualities ascribed to him were "realities about God without any of the creatures having any share of them, and without any doubt of resemblance or comparability."[575] Hence to accept the reality of these Qur'anic names, phrases, and attributes *vis-à-vis* God, is according to Ibn Taymiyyah, not to signify any corporeality, anthropomorphism, or resemblance existing between God and His creatures, for they denote realities utterly different and extremely disparate between the Sovereign God and His creation. The only condition that such an ascription can be allowed is that the names and the attributes so ascribed must be appropriate to the Divine Exalted Majesty and must have the stamp of revelation. And even then no one will ever be able to know the reality or how of these attributes.

Ibn Taymiyyah viewed any meaning of these phrases other than the literal to be alteration or *tahrif*; therefore, he vehemently opposed '*al-ta'wil*', the method of metaphorical interpretation. For instance, according to Ibn Taymiyyah the term *yad*, cannot be interpreted as power or bounty because the power of God is one and cannot be denoted with a dual noun such as the Qur'anic *yad*.[576] Likewise the bounties of God are many and therefore cannot be denoted by a dual noun such as the Qur'anic *yadahu* (two hands of God i.e. Qur'an 5:64) also used in the hadith. To Ibn Taymiyyah the Qur'anic phrase "*istawa' ʿala al-ʿArsh*", meant God "establishing Himself over and above the Throne":

> Although God's '*istawa ʿala ʿArshihi*' is so real as the reality of a man's [servant] *istawa* upon and over the boat, the *istawa* of the Creator is not like the *istawa* of the creatures. God does not depend upon or need any thing; He is free from need of all the things [Self-sufficient]... If somebody argues that the acceptance of the reality of God's *istawa* necessitates that it be like the *istawa* of a man upon the boat, then let him claim that to accept the reality of God's knowledge, hearing, seeing, and speaking necessitates that such divine qualities be like [or resemble] the qualities of knowledge, hearing, seeing, and speaking among the creatures![577]

Ibn Taymiyyah further maintained that God's establishing of Himself upon the Throne did not require Him to touch it because He was not a body to occupy space:

> His establishing Himself over the Throne is confirmed by the revelation, while His exaltedness, highness, and otherness than everything other than Himself is confirmed by logic (*al-ʿaql*) as well as the revelation... All the arguments brought by the deniers... would come into effect if God were a body occupying space. But if He were above and over the Throne, and not a body or a space occupant, then none of these exigencies and anthropomorphic requirements or implications would come into effect.[578]

Ibn Taymiyyah insisted on confirming the revelation without anthropomorphic or corporeal implications. Moreover, he declared the metaphorical meanings of the term '*istawa*" such as "*istila'*" meaning "appropriation, seizure, or taking possession", as tantamount to changing the intended meaning of the revelation. To say that God did not have hands or face was *taʿtil,* and to compare to, or give, the divine hands or face human or creaturely equivalence was *tamthil.* Ibn Taymiyyah declared that the first part of the Qur'anic verse, "There is nothing like unto Him", automatically negated anthropomorphism and comparison; while the second part, "And He is the One that hears and sees" (42:11), was negation of heresy and suspension of the attributes.

He further stressed that the *Salaf* following the Qur'anic model confirmed the attributes in details, but confined themselves to a wholesale and comprehensive negation of any anthropomorphist element and comparison not appropriate to be attributed to God Almighty. In Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion, the *Salaf* believed in the commonly accepted meanings of these Qur'anic terms, in the way appropriate to the exalted majesty of God. Those meanings being absolutely different from their corresponding creaturely realities.

Unfortunately, despite all Ibn Taymiyyah's efforts to avoid anthropomorphism, and his categorical rejection of any resemblance between God and His creatures, and his genuine belief that God was not a corporeal or anthropomorphic being, it was his insistence upon giving literal meanings to Qur'anic anthropomorphic expressions, which became the focal point of simple minded fanatics allowing for the possible development of anthropomorphic shades of thought. There was no need for Ibn Taymiyyah to insist upon the literal sense of these expressions given that he was anti-anthropomorphism and categorically believed them not to denote their equivalent in the non-divine human realm, yet it was precisely this which led to the birth of certain suspicions and anecdotal narratives concerning him. The language, to use Netton's term, "is ruptured",[579] whether one calls it literal or metaphorical, it is a rupture of the language. In explaining the report of God's descent in the later part of the night Ibn Taymiyyah is supposedly reported to have said: "'God comes down from heaven to earth, just as I am coming down now,' and he (Ibn Taymiyyah) came down one of the steps of the pulpit staircase."[580] The same charge of corporealism incidentally was leveled at another Hanbalite, Abu ʿAmir al-Qarashi, with similar anecdotal reports of his anthropomorphism circulating, such as his supposedly pointing to his leg and saying, "it is exactly the same as this [leg]" in explaining verse 68: 42 of the Qur'an. And it is in view of reports such as these, taking them at face value, that al-Nashshar,[581] Madkur, and Goldziher[582] have accused Ibn Taymiyyah of anthropomorphism and corporealism. Gibb and Kramers observe:

> An inveterate anthropomorphist, Ibn Taymiyyah interpreted
> literally all the passages in the Kur'an and tradition referring to

the Deity. He was so imbued with this belief that, according to Ibn Battuta, he said one day from the pulpit in the mosque of Damascus: "God comes down from heaven to earth, just as I am coming down now", and he came down one of the steps of the pulpit staircase.[583]

As a result, Gibb counts Ibn Batutah, Ibn Hajar al-Haytami, Taqi al-Din al-Subki, and Abu Hayyan al-Zahiri among those who do not "agree on the orthodoxy of Ibn Taymiyyah."[584] Raghib al-Tabbakh, Muhammad Bahjah al-Baytar, and Muhammad Nasr al-Din al-Albani however have rejected these reports as mere fabrications and absurdities[585] defending Ibn Taymiyyah against all accusations of anthropomorphism and corporealism. Gibb observes: "However, those who praise are perhaps more numerous than his detractors..."[586]

It must be said that Ibn Taymiyyah, at least from his own writings, seems to be decidedly anti-anthropomorphic and anti-corporealist, as evidenced by his ceaseless emphasis upon the dissimilarity between God's attributes and man's attributes and his denunciation of any sort of resemblance existing between God and His creatures. Ibn Taymiyyah stresses that

> the statement about God's attributes is just like the statement about His essence (*Dhat*). There is absolutely none like unto Him either in His essence, or attributes, or actions... The knowledge of God, His coming down, and establishing Himself over the Throne, all [of these attributes and actions] are in a fashion appropriate to His essence, as the attributes of a servant [man] are suitable to him and appropriate to his human essence...; therefore, if anybody asks how God descends, or establishes Himself, knows, talks, measures, or creates, he should be replied: 'how is He in His being [essence]?' If the answer to this question is that, 'I do not know how of His being', then you should say: 'I do not know how of His attributes.' The knowledge of the how (*kayf*) of the attributes follows the knowledge of the how (*kayf*) of the one they are attributed to.[587]

Ibn Taymiyyah further argues that "the attributes of God are indeed different from and superior to the attributes of the creatures. Nobody

knows the difference and the level of superiority except God Himself."[588] Even in explaining the reports of God's descent in the later part of the night, he is careful to point out that God's coming down did not consist of any movement or change of position that would make the Throne above God. For God is far beyond such creaturely attributes or propositions. Also, that "God descends to the heaven of the earth without the Throne being devoid of Him."[589] In short, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, God is God and not a creature. There is nothing like unto Him. Ibn Taymiyyah literally accepted God's reported attributes of face, hand, descent etc., but in a sense that was appropriate to His Exalted Majesty; and the nature of these attributes is unknown to humanity. This is the reason why many scholars including al-Dhahabi, Ibn Qudamah, Ibn al-Wardi and ʿAli al-Qari (to name a few) and his own students including the renowned Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah 1292/ 1350) refuted any accusations of anthropomorphism leveled against Ibn Taymiyyah, and moreover took him as a competent religious authority and a model to be followed in matters of faith and religion. Ibn al-Qayyim, for instance, followed his teacher literally with regards to the seemingly anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur'an and Sunnah. And there is no doubt that both by transmitting his teacher's works and faithfully publicizing his ideas in his own works, Ibn al-Qayyim did much to spread and perpetuate the influence of Ibn-Taymiyyah. Many other Hanbalites did the same with regards to Ibn Taymiyyah's teachings.

The debate raged on with the Hanbalites under fire. Despite their outward affinity with the Qur'anic expressions and claims to follow Ibn Hanbal's interpretive methodology, the literal position of many Hanbalites (discussed earlier) was severely attacked by other Muslim scholars who dubbed it as *Hashwiyyah* in the garb of *bilkafa*.[590] Ibn Hazm for instance declared literal understanding to be "an opening to the road ending in anthropomorphism."[591] Hanbalites such as ʿAli ibn ʿUbayd Allah al-Zaghuni, al-Qadi Abu Yaʿla, Abu ʿAmir al-Qarashi, who followed a literal route to interpreting Qur'anic poetical expressions, were also severely censured. In contrast, other Hanbalites such as Ibn al-Jawzi al-Hanbali and Ibn ʿAqil vehemently opposed literalist interpretation, and seemed to have inclined towards a sort of rationalism closer to that of the Ashʿarites (discussed later in the chapter). They

forbade discussion of ambiguous verses encouraging their acceptance without recourse to anthropomorphism or allegory.⁵⁹² Ibn al-Jawzi claims to have written his treatise *Dafaʿ Shubhah al-Tashbih* against those who "have fallen in the traps of anthropomorphism, but scorn its attribution to them. They claim to be from Sunnis but their statements are clear-cut anthropomorphisms."⁵⁹³

The second group of scholars argued that the *Salaf's* true position was not that of the ascription of a face or hands to God in their literal meaning *bila kayf*, but rather the position of *al-tafwid*. By *tafwid* was meant acceptance of Qur'anic phrases without anthropomorphism, corporealism, or further inquiry into their meaning or realities, and to entrust true knowledge of this to God Himself. Al-Bayhaqi reports Sufyan ibn ʿUyaynah as saying, "Whatever expressions God has employed in the Qur'an to describe His attributes, their elucidation (*tafsir*) is their reading. It is not permissible for anybody to explain them either in the Arabic or in the Persian language."⁵⁹⁴ Ibn Hanbal is reported to have said, "We believe in these expressions and affirm them without how and without [further inquiry] into their meanings (*wa la kayf wa la maʿnah*)." According to this understanding of the *Salaf*, Qur'anic expressions such as the 'face' or 'hands of God' did not carry a literal meaning comparable to their equivalent in human beings. That is, they did not literally mean the face or hands, or organs of God, as humans perceive them with regard to themselves, but rather attributes or qualities of God. There is no human being who knows the details or the how of these divine qualities just as nobody knows the essence of God's being. According to this group, the *Salaf* acknowledged their sheer ignorance of the divine realms, entrusting true knowledge of the meanings of these terms to God. Al-Razi, al-Shahrastani, al-Ghazali, Abd al-Halim Mahmud and M. Zahid al-Kawthari are just a few examples of the many who interpreted the standpoint of the *Salaf* in terms of *al-tafwid*. Both Abu al-Hasan ʿAli al-Ashʿari (according to one dominant opinion) and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi's (d. 331 AH) as well as al-Baqillani's (d. 403 AH)⁵⁹⁵ position with regard to the Qur'anic expressions are quoted as examples of this *Salaf* line of approach.⁵⁹⁶ For instance al-Razi observes that the *Salaf's* attitude to these ambiguous Qur'anic expressions was to "accept them without their

literal meanings and to entrust the knowledge of their true meanings to God. Indulgence in their explanation (*tafsir*) is not permissible."[597]

Al-Ashʿari (873–935) studied the Muʿtazilite doctrines with al-Jubbaʿi, the head of the Basrian school of the Muʿtazilites, and converted to Sunnism or traditionalism as a result of a dream he had.[598] Watt observes that al-Ashʿari "worked out his new theological position which may be described as the support of revelation by reason. This implies of course a subordination of reason."[599] In his early work *al-Ibanah*, al-Ashaʿri declared that he was following in the footsteps of "Abu ʿAbd Allah Ahmad ibn Hanbal."[600] In this work, he sticks to the theological positions of Ibn Hanbal to such a degree that to Wensinck and Goldziher, he seems to be "the spiritual son of Ahmad ibn Hanbal."[601] In his later works such as *Maqalat* and *al-Lumaʿ*, al-Ashaʿri seems to have inclined more towards rational interpretations in support of revelation although Goldziher suspects his rationalism.[602] Watt remarks:

> The reader who now turns to translations of the works of al-Ashaʿri may at first find it difficult to discern any traces of "rational method" in them. They mostly consist of arguments from Qur'anic verses and Traditions. Yet even here a knowledge of the writings of men in the strict Hanbalite tradition shows that al-Ashaʿri really argues about these matters to a far greater extent. In addition other arguments are based on points of observation or of common knowledge, or on what the Muslims are agreed upon. Despite appearances, then, al-Ashʿari really introduced rational arguments; and this little piece of leaven quickly spread through the lump of Islamic theology.[603]

Al-Shahrastani reports, that al-Ashʿari "follows the early community in not attempting to interpret them [verses and ahadith], though according to one opinion reported of him he allows interpretation."[604]

Al-Ashʿari attempted to straddle a middle position, between anthropomorphic literalism and Muʿtazilite neutralism, although Goldziher does not agree labelling al-Ashʿari's position as "conciliatory".[605] Al-Ashʿari argued:

> God is knowing with knowledge, powerful with power, living with life, willing with will, speaking with speech... These attributes...are eternal and subsist in the essence of God. It cannot be said that they are he or other than he; nor can it be said that they are not he, nor that they are not other than he.[606]

In *al-Ibanah*, al-Ashaʿri dealt with the issue of both the Qur'an and the Sunnah's anthropomorphic expressions at length. There, he literally and faithfully followed the pattern set by the *Salaf*. He argued that God had a face, two eyes, two hands etc., but that these were "two hands not like hands."[607] He affirmed the reality[608] of these attributes with emphasis upon their dissimilarity with creatures and their acceptance under the clause of without how.[609] Watt notes that al-Ashʿari "insisted that such Qur'anic phrases must simply be accepted "without specifying how.""[610] Wensinck states that in *al-Ibanah* al-Ashʿari produces arguments in favor of the view that Allah has a face and two hands, knowledge, power and speech: "In all this there is scarcely a word that could not have been written by Ahmad ibn Hanbal."[611] Goldziher comments:

> Indeed, when he comes to speak of the anthropomorphist question, he heaps all his scorn on the rationalists who seek figurative explanations for the concrete terms of the holy scriptures. Not satisfied with the rigor of the orthodox theologian, he also shows himself a grammarian. God Himself says, after all, that He revealed the Qur'an in "clear Arabic"; it follows that the Qur'an can only be understood in the light of correct Arabic usage. But when in the world had any Arab ever used the word "hand" to mean "benevolence," and so on? What Arab has ever employed all those tricks of language that rationalist interpreters want to read into the clear text in order to despoil the idea of God of all content?[612]

Goldziher further argues:

> To escape crass anthropomorphism, he does, to be sure, insert into his creed the clause that by face, hand, foot, and so on, we are not

586

to understand members of a human body, that all this is to be understood bila kayfa, without asking how... But to add this clause is not to be mediate; for traditional orthodoxy had held the same view. This was no mediation between Ibn Hanbal and the Muʿtazila; this was – as we could see from al-Ashʿari's prefatory declaration – the Muʿtazilite renegade's unconditional surrender to the standpoint of the traditionalists' inflexible *imam* and his followers. By his far-reaching concessions to popular belief, al-Ashʿari caused the loss to the Muslims of important Muʿtazilite achievements.[613]

This close similarity to and affinity with Ibn Hanbal has led many scholars (convinced that Ibn Hanbal was a literalist) to believe that al-Ashʿari likewise took a literal position with regards to these anthropomorphic expressions, i.e., in Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion this was definitely the case.[614] However, M. Zahid al-Kawthari vehemently opposes this interpretation arguing that al-Ashʿari never regarded the expressions in a literal sense and never once claimed that God had two hands, two eyes etc. and that all words denoting such anthropomorphic implications were later inventions and inserted into his writings.

Abu al-Maʿali ibn ʿAbd al-Malik al-Juwayni, Imam al-Haramayn, argues that al-Ashʿari admitted the existence of these divine qualities with the qualification of *tanzih*: "Knowledge, but not like human knowledge... Hand and face are hand as a quality and face as a quality, just as hearing and sight. Concerning Allah's descending to the lowest Heaven, al-Ashʿari said that descending is a quality; likewise His sitting on the throne is a quality."[615] Al-Shahrastani reports that al-Ashʿari

maintains that hearing and seeing are two eternal attributes of God. They are perceptions beyond knowledge, connected with their proper objects provided they exist. He holds also that hands and face are attributes that are reported of God; for, as he explains, revelation speaks of them, and, therefore, they must be accepted as they are revealed. He follows the early community in not attempting to interpret them, though according to one opinion reported of him he allows interpretation.[616]

M. Zahid al-Kawthari argues that al-Ash'ari's *al-Ibanah* was according to the way of the *Salaf's* '*tafwid*' entrusting God with the meaning and "abstinence from fixation and specification of the intended meaning."[617] Therefore in Armstrong's opinion, al-Ash'ari was different in that he

> opposed the literalists by pointing out that the Koran insisted that we could talk about God only in symbolic language. But he also opposed the Traditionist wholesale rejection of reason. He argued that Muhammad had not encountered these problems or he would have given the Muslims guidance; as it was, all Muslims had a duty to use such interpretive tools as analogy (*qiyas*) to retain a truly religious concept of God.[618]

Unlike the traditionalists, argues Watt:

> a thinker like al-Ash'ari who admitted a proper theological use of reason could not rest content in the acceptance of this disharmony in our theological conceptions. He, himself, though admitting *balkayfiyya*, never, as far as I am aware, went so far as Ibn Qutaybah in emphasizing the disharmony of the Scriptural conceptions; and the development of doctrine among his followers was largely guided by the ideal of finding harmony and system in the main conceptions of Scripture.[619]

Therefore, argues Armstrong, "Unlike Ibn Hanbal, Al-Ash'ari was prepared to ask questions and to explore these metaphysical problems, even though ultimately he concluded that it was wrong to try to contain the mysterious and ineffable reality that we call God in [a] tidy, rationalistic system."[620] Wensinck also observes the fact that "he adopted *kalam* as a method is certain."[621]

It must be added here that al-Asha'ri, at least from what is available of his writings, seems to have adopted a position very close to that of taking these terms literally without how and not metaphorically. He refutes metaphorical interpretations of terms such as *yad* and *wajh*[622] whilst confirming the "two hands of God in reality (*fi al-haqiqah*)."[623] Rippin observes:

588

God's attributes are real for al-Ash'ari because the Qur'an clearly states them and so it must be meaningful to speak of God's hand and God's face; de-anthropomorphization was one of the central elements of Mu'tazilites' thought which al-Ash'ari denounced, for he saw it as a symbol of rationalist excess and willful ignorance of the sense of the Qur'anic text. Still, he did not wish to deny that reason indicates that speaking of these attributes of God would seem problematic when put in conjunction with an infinite God. His solution was to speak of the reality of the attributes but that these are not attributes in the same way that humans have such: God does have a hand, but we just 'do not know how' this is to be conceived. The phrase *bila kayf*, 'without knowing how', became a key term in Ash'arite theology, to be used whenever reason and the Qur'an or *hadith* met head-on in conflict.[624]

On the other hand, al-Asha'ri's somewhat deductive theological style differs to certain degrees from the traditionalists. His usage of terms such as "hands not like hands" as well as the existence of certain reports that he allowed metaphorical interpretation (*ta'wil*), like that of al-Shahrastani quoted above, all are factors combined to give the impression that he was what the later Asha'rites made him out to be. Otherwise, as far as his own writings are concerned, he was close to maintaining a literal understanding of these problematic expressions with the clause *bila kayf* although he does not seem to have pushed for their literal meaning to the degree of Ibn Khuzaymah or Ibn Taymiyyah. In other words, a language rupture much more dense and intense can be granted to al-Asha'ri rather than the intensity of traditionalists like Ibn Khuzaymah and Ibn Taymiyyah. This was solely due to his background, training, and usage of *kalam* methodology and style, and not due to vocabulary employed in his books to explain these expressions. George C. Anawati observes that regarding Qur'anic anthropomorphism:

al-Baqillani remains very close to al-Ash'ari': he affirms that God really has a face, and hands, that he is really on his throne. He refuses to interpret these expressions either in a realistic fashion (like the Hanabilah) or in an allegorical fashion (like the

Mu'tazilah). Similarly, for the "vision of God" (pp.226–279), al-Baqillani insists on God's transcendence: there is no possible explanation for the way that vision will take place any more than there is for the way that divine speech is to be understood.[625]

Al-Baqillani argues that the ambiguous mention of God's attributes such as hand and face in certain Qur'anic verses should not be taken literally in terms of common human perception and usage. The eternal God cannot be assigned attributes or described in terms contingent on His creatures for He states in the Qur'an that, "There is none like unto Him" (42:11; 112:4). Therefore attributing to God transmutation, movement, staying at a place, standing, sitting and other items of this nature, is not permitted. Such attributes mark contingency and God transcends such attributes. To al-Baqillani, God's "*istawa' 'ala al-'Arsh*" means "neither establishment upon the Throne nor any direction... because the Throne is contingent."[626] And, it does not mean "manner or mode or proximity because He is God in heavens as much as He is God on the earth."[627] God is eternal and everlasting while the Throne is not. Likewise God's hands are not "two hands i.e., organs and do not have any form, shape or appearance...,"[628] the same applying to other Qur'anic anthropomorphic expressions, underscored by the clause, we do not know the how of them.[629]

The third group, the "*Khalaf* or successors", most of them Ash'arites, started with Ibn al-Furak al-Isfahani (d. 406 AH) and ended with al-Shahrastani (d. 548 AH). It was their contention that the metaphors were a reality recognized and used by the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and that there existed consensus among all mainstream Muslim scholars that the literal meaning of these phrases was not the intended meaning of the revelation because such meanings would lead to anthropomorphism. Hence, a metaphorical interpretation of Qur'anic anthropomorphic expressions substantiated by the fixed rules of the Arabic language and appropriate to the Exalted Majesty of God would be acceptable and immanent to avert any anthropomorphic implications.[630] Following this line of thought the *Khalaf* metaphorically interpreted anthropomorphic expressions by deriving or substantiating these interpretations with other Qur'anic verses or with the help of ancient pre-Islamic Arabic poetry or prose. Within a century of the

death of al-Ash'ari, observes Watt, "in 324/935 the school which took his name had abandoned the doctrine of *balkafiyya* on most of the points on which al-Ash'ari had contended for it and had adopted views similar to those of his opponents among the Mu'tazila."[631] Regarding the Divine Attributes, observes Gibb, "the scholastics maintained the doctrine of their eternity, but only by applying the Mu'tazilite principle of negation of anthropomorphic concepts."[632] Al-Baghdadi (d.429/ 1037),[633] al-Taftazani,[634] al-Juwayni (d.478/1085),[635] al-Ghazali (505/1111),[636] al-Shahrastani (548/1153),[637] and al-Razi (606/1209)[638] are just a few examples of this tendency.

These Ash'arite theologians agreed that by the hands of God was meant His power, by His eyes was meant His seeing, and by his face was meant His essence or existence; and none of them took sitting on the throne literally or *bi-la kayf*. On the other hand, they held that God would be seen by the faithful on the day of resurrection, even considering that they could give a rational proof of the possibility of God's being seen; this alleged proof presupposed, of course, that God was not corporeal.[639]

The Ash'arite theologians rendered all the divine attributes into seven major attributes: Power, Knowledge, Life, Will, Hearing, Seeing and Speech. In their rational or metaphorical interpretations of Qur'anic anthropomorphic expressions, these later Ash'arites came closer to "Mu'tazilah and even closer to philosophers", as Madkur argues.[640] Watt observes that the *Mawaqif* of al-Iji (d. 756/1355) as commented upon by al-Jurjani (d. 816/1413), "perhaps comes back closer to the al-Ash'ari of the *Ibana*, but definitely does not return to the doctrine of *balkafiyya*."[641] Ash'arism in its later manifestation along with its closest ally al-Maturidiyyah is still dominant in most parts of the Islamic world. Like al-Ash'ari, observes Rippin, "al-Maturidi followed a middle path between Traditionalism and rationalism, forging an Islam which saw the written sources of the faith dominate but which found a place for the activities of the human mind."[642]

For instance, al-Ghazali, the most known of the *Khalaf,* divides people into two categories: common people and scholars ('*ulama'*), advising the former (common folk) not to engage in interpretation of ambiguous Qur'anic expressions but,

to eliminate from their belief system all that leads to anthropo-
morphism or contingency and to determine that God is such an
existent there is none like unto Him and He is the hearing and the
seeing. And if they happen to inquire about the meanings of the
ambiguous Qur'anic verses, they should be warned about doing
so.[643]

On the other hand,

it is appropriate for the scholars to know and understand such
verses. I do not say it is incumbent upon each individual scholar
to know the true meanings of these expressions. The knowledge
of their true interpretations is not required, it is voluntary. The
obligation is confined to declaring God's transcendence above all
that has any comparison or similarity...We do not agree with those
who claim that such verses are ambiguous [al-mutashabihat] like
the words at the beginning of some Qur'anic chapters [suwar].[644]

Al-Ghazali viewed the alleged anthropomorphic expressions of the
Qur'an and Hadith as consisting of phrases commonly used and clearly
understood by the Arabs, unlike those occurring as letters at the
beginning of certain chapters of the Qur'an. And either the phrases
carried literal meaning or they had to be understood in terms of their
metaphorical set up and context. Now, as all parties were in agreement,
argued al-Ghazali, that God was neither a body nor a contingent and
that the literal meanings of the anthropomorphic phrases could not and
cannot be attributed to Him, the only option left would be to accept
their metaphorical meanings.[645] Al-Juwayni, the teacher of al-Ghazali,
points to the contradiction that lies between the conception that God is
"with you whereinsoever you are" (57:4) and that "He established
Himself upon the Throne" (57:4), reasoning that if God was on the
Throne He could not be with all human beings. From this contradiction,
as Watt observes,

al-Juwayni draws the conclusion that the method of ta'wil cannot
be avoided in some cases, and in particular that God's presence
with the believers must mean His knowledge of their secrets. In

this he is assuming that there must be harmonious rational interpretation of the Scriptural phrases, and apparently his opponents were not capable of defending the opposite view.[646]

What needs mentioning at this juncture is that the nature of these metaphorical interpretations differed markedly to the allegorical interpretations of certain Christian sects discussed in previous chapters lest comparison be made. The later Ashᶜarites' metaphorical interpretations, unlike Christian allegorism, were bound by strictly fixed linguistic rules with regards to the language, to which they had to adhere, and their metaphorical interpretations were further limited by the fixed number of linguistic meanings governing each term. In other words interpretation was controlled by clearly defined linguistic parameters, forcing the Ashᶜarites to employ one of the already existing linguistic meanings of the term under question as an appropriate or intended meaning, preventing the invention of far-fetched facts or speculative suppositions to fit or prove whatever was wanting proven from the text. Moreover, this fixation was further substantiated by the usage of the same meanings in established Arabic metaphors.[647] Although there was scope to arrive at a number of different yet mutually related interpretations with different scholars perhaps emphasizing different aspects or meanings out of the few commonly used meanings of a phrase, nevertheless this was a far fry cry from free and open speculation, closing the doors to fanciful and absurd interpretations. Watt rightly notes:

> We must be careful, however, not to exaggerate the liberty in interpretation claimed by men like al-Juwayni. The conceptions which they interpreted metaphorically were few in number, and even to these they applied the metaphorical interpretation only in order to bring them in harmony with principles which long discussion had convinced them were thoroughly in accordance with the sacred texts.[648]

Therefore, we see a kind of consensus existing among most of the interpreters over the meanings of several of these problematic Qur'anic

expressions. Having said this, the method of metaphorical interpretation or *ta'wil* employed by the Ashaʿrites was in contrast with that of other exponents of the method such as the Muʿtazilites or the *Jahmiyyah* in the sense that:

> It was not a rationalism in which reason was set above the revealed Scriptures, but one in which reason was assumed to be competent to understand and interpret the main truths contained in the Scriptures, and with these as basis to fathom the mystery of the Divine nature. That is to say, it was argued that, though the conceptions of religious intuition could not be reached by purely rational procedures yet, once they reached, they were thoroughly rational conceptions, forming [a] harmonious system.[649]

In light of these tendencies among Muslim theologians, let us go back to the Qur'anic verses and the *ahadith* themselves to see where they stand in terms of their anthropomorphism.

The word *ʿAyan* literally meaning "eye" occurs in a total of five Qur'anic verses in connection with God (once as my eye 20:39; and 4 times as our eyes 11:37; 23:27; 52:48; 54:14). After conferring favors upon Moses, God reminds him of these bounties by the following words:

> Behold! We sent to thy mother, by inspiration, the message: "Throw (the child) into the chest, and throw (the chest) into the river: The river will cast him up on the bank, and he will be taken up by one who is an enemy to Me and an enemy to him": but I endued thee with love from Me and (this) in order that thou mayest be reared *under Mine eye (wa li tusnaʿa ʿala ʿayni)*.
> (20:38–39)

God is reported to have commanded Noah to "construct an Ark under *Our eyes* and Our inspiration, and address Me no (further) on behalf of those who are in sin: for they are about to be overwhelmed (in the Flood)" (11:37 also 23:27). In 52:48 Muhammad is told: "Now await in patience the command of thy Lord: for verily thou art in *Our*

594

eyes" (or with Our eyes *bi 'a'yunina*), and in 54:14 Noah's Ark is reported to float under God's eyes. The very non-anthropomorphic, non-corporeal, and in a sense metaphorical nature of the expression *'Ayan* in these Qur'anic verses is evident from their context. Al-Bayhaqi explains how the *ahadith* discussing the one-eye of the Anti-Christ and God having not been one-eyed, emphasizes God's attribute of omniscience.[650] Ibn Hajar explains that in this particular hadith the Prophet pointed to his eye not as a symbol of God's *'Ayan* but as a symbol of the Anti-Christ's eye.[651] Ibn Hazm argues that "it is not allowed for anybody to ascribe to God two eyes because the text does not prove so."[652]

The term *yad* literally meaning "hand" occurs in the Qur'an a total of nine times with regards to God Almighty. Out of these the phrase "hand of Allah" is conspicuous as it occurs in four verses out of the nine verses (3:73; 5:64; 48:10; 57:29). The non-anthropomorphic nature of this phrase becomes evident from its context. "Say: 'All bounties (grace) are in the *hand of Allah*. He granteth them to whom He pleaseth: and Allah careth for all, and He knoweth all things'" (3:73 also 57:29). In 5:64 both God's hands are mentioned: "And the Jews say, 'God's hand is shackled!' It is their own hands that are shackled; and rejected [by God] are they because of this their assertion. Nay, *both His hands* are widely outstretched: He giveth and spendeth (of His bounty) as He pleaseth…" The verse does not qualify for an absolute literalist interpretation, the metaphorical meaning of the phrase in terms of context is entirely self-evident conveying God's attribute of infinite generosity, giving, and grace to those who do good as well as to those who are evil.[653] Another reference occurs with regards to the treaty of Hudaybiyyah, and in connection with the incident of the pledge of Ridwan (*Bay'ah al-Ridwan*): "Verily those who plight their fealty to thee plight their fealty in truth to Allah: *The Hand of Allah* is over their hands: then any one who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and any one who fulfills what he has covenanted with Allah, – Allah will soon grant him a great reward" (48:10). Here again context makes metaphorical interpretation self-evident, emphasis being upon the significance of the Muslims' plight and so God's hands referring to God's help. In verse 38:75 Allah questions Satan: "O Iblis! What

prevents thee from prostrating thyself to one whom I have created with *My hands*?" If taken literally, at face value, the verse would seem to indicate a sort of anthropomorphism, because human beings create with their hands, and transposing this understanding onto the use of God's hands in the act of Adam's creation would seem a plausible inference. Regardless however, a literal meaning is out of the question, primarily because this is the only place in the Qur'an where the act of creation is connected with God's hands while in several other places the Qur'an connects the act directly to God Himself.[654] This perhaps explains why many scholars including Ibn Furak, Ibn al-ʿArabi, al-Ghazali and others have interpreted the phrase "with My hands" to mean "with My power or authority or grace", i.e., without any other agent or any other means.[655]

Al-Ashʿari argued against such metaphorical interpretation contending that, "It is not permissible to say (two hands) mean two bounties as it is not allowed by the language itself that someone can say "I did with my both hands" intending my bounty." After refuting both the other meanings, of physical hands as well as power, he argues that the only remaining possibility is that "these mean two hands not like (creatures') hands excluding all the above three possibilities."[656] He is not alone. Even scholars like al-Harawi, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Qayyim, and al-Bayhaqi have avoided interpreting the term hands to mean power or grace whilst simultaneously rejecting any notion ascribing to them human equivalency, emphasizing that the two hands of God simply stand for the two divine attributes directly involved in Adam's creation and all the potential God bestowed upon him. It was their belief hence that the verse signified Adam's tremendous honor, dignity and distinction and not God having to physically create him making direct contact with Adam's anatomy. Ibn al-Jawzi al-Hanbali observed that certain people believed that God had hands and so "wrongly argue that God touches. They go that far as claiming that God touched with His hand the clay from which Adam was created... This is a slander and a white lie regarding God..."[657] The Qur'an itself dispels any anthropomorphic implications of this verse by putting Jesus' virgin birth on a par with Adam's creation: "The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: 'Be': and he

was."[658] In *Surah Al ʿImran* the Qur'an clearly states that the command-ment "Be" was conveyed to Mary through an angel and not by any direct contact to or from God (3:45–47), see also *Maryam*, 19:17–21.

In addition to the phrase two hands, the Qur'an also mentions the term right hand in connection with God:

> No just estimate have they made of Allah, such as is due to Him: on the Day of Judgment the whole of the earth will be His handful (*qabdatuhu* meaning grip, hold, handful), and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand: Glory to Him! High is He above the partners they attribute to Him! (39:67)[659]

Al-Alusi and al-Bayhaqi point to several examples taken from Arabic literature to illustrate the metaphorical use of the phrase *qabdah* to mean authority and the metaphorical use of the phrase *al-yamin* to mean absolute power.[660] In several prophetic narrations it has been claimed that both God's hands are right. But as al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Furak establish, the Arabs used the phrase right hand as an idiom to express generosity and perfection. So the statement "both God's hands are right", according to them, denotes His absoluteness and perfection.[661]

It is in hadith literature that we find the use of more daring expressions which, if taken absolutely literally, would seem to depict God in somewhat anthropomorphic terms. For instance, God's fingers are mentioned: "Verily, the hearts of all the sons of Adam are between the *two fingers out of the fingers* of the Compassionate Lord as one heart. He turns them to any (direction) He likes. Then Allah's Messenger said: O Allah, the Turner of the hearts, turn our hearts to Thine obedience."[662] Ibn al-Athir regards the fingers as symbolizing the swiftness with which God can transform and change hearts.[663] Ibn Hazm interprets fingers as denoting two of God's plans and bounties out of His countless divine plans and bounties.[664] Al-Nawawi observes that such Prophetic narration must be understood in light of the Qur'anic verse, "There is nothing like unto to Him" and that secondly, it can be interpreted metaphorically in accordance with the rules and regulations of language:

When it is said "such and such is in my grip or in the palm of my hand" it does not mean that the person is literally in my palm or hand. It means I have power over him. In the same manner it is said "such and such is between my fingers I can change him the way I want to" it means that he is absolutely under my authority. Therefore the hadith means that God has absolute authority upon the hearts of His servants and can change them whatever way He wants...[665]

There are other reports indicating that on the Day of Judgment, "Allah will put all the heavens on one finger, and the earths on one finger, and the trees on one finger, and the water and the dust on one finger, and all the other created beings on one finger. Then He will say, 'I am the King'..."[666] Such reports can also be understood in light of al-Nawawi's interpretation.[667] Ibn Furak argues that

the word "*al-asbaʿah*" is linguistically used for several mutually related meanings... It is also used for the organ, but is not specified for that purpose only. It is as much used to denote meanings other than organ as much as it is used to denote organ. And we have already explained and proved that God cannot be ascribed members, organs or other corporeal attributes. Therefore, the meanings other than organ or member must be the right meanings.[668]

Al-Ghazali is also of the opinion that all these expressions are not meant to be taken literally. They must be interpreted metaphorically to deny any similarity to the corporeal or anthropomorphism.[669]

God's foot is mentioned in the following Prophetic report: "Narrated Anas: The Prophet said, 'The people will be thrown into the (Hell) Fire and it will say: "Are there any more (to come)?" (50:30) till Allah puts *His foot* over it and it will say, *Qati*! *Qati*! (Enough! Enough!)'".[670] This text, observes Goldziher, "was troublesome for a refined conception of God. Such versatility of ingenious thought went into its interpretation that it represents a complete sampler of the hermeneutical arts cherished by the Ashʿarite school."[671] Al-Bayhaqi

interprets it metaphorically observing that by putting of the foot is meant a kind of reprimand to and pacification of Hell Fire as is said "I put such and such under my foot" meaning control, pacification, and extinction.[672] Al-Nawawi refers to the interpretation of al-Nadir ibn Shamil that *al-qadam* means *al-mutaqaddim* [673] meaning preceding i.e. those whom God knew by His eternal knowledge would be the people of Hell Fire.[674] Ibn Furak al-Isfahani gives many more explanations to conclude that "no explanation whatsoever can be accepted which would ascribe to God of members, organs, parts of body or any other corporeal attributes."[675] To Goldziher, on the other hand, such reports are evident examples of anthropomorphism and the interpretations given a mere "sampler of exegetical violence."[676]

The Qur'an uses the term "side of Allah" in a metaphorical sense when it says: "Turn ye to your Lord and submit to Him, before the Chastisement comes on you, after that ye shall not be helped... Lest the soul should (then) say: 'Ah! woe is me! in that I neglected (my duty) towards Allah (literally *in the side of Allah – janbillah*) and I was but among those who mocked'" (39:54–56). It seems clear that the phrase is not an anthropomorphic expression but stands, as argues al-Razi, for worship and obedience, which is why it has been translated as such.[677]

The coming of the Lord on the Day of Judgment is mentioned in the following verse: "Nay! When the earth is pounded to powder, and *thy Lord cometh,* and His angels, rank upon rank, and Hell, that Day, is brought, on that Day will man remember, but how will that remembrance profit him?" (89:21–23). It also says: "Are they waiting to see if the angels come to them, *thy Lord*, or certain of the Signs of thy Lord! The day that certain of the Signs of thy Lord do come, no good will it do to a soul to believe then..." (6:158). "Will they wait until *Allah comes to them* in canopies of clouds and angels and the matter is settled? But to Allah do all matters go back (for decision)" (2:210).

This coming of the Lord can be interpreted as the coming of His command and order in the shape of punishment as can be substantiated from other verses of the Qur'an which specifically state: "Will they wait until angels come to them or the Command (*amr*) of thy Lord comes?..." (16:33).[678] There is a famous saying of the Prophet that:

> Our Lord, the Blessed, the Superior, comes down (*yanzilu*) every night on the heaven of the world (*dunya* i.e. first Sky) during the last third of the night and He says: (Is there anyone) who invokes Me, so that I may respond to his invocation? Is there anyone who asks Me, so that I may grant him his request? (Is there anyone) who seeks My forgiveness, so that I may forgive him?[679]

Again this report can also be easily interpreted as a metaphor for, as al-Ghazali explains,[680] *al-nuzul* in the sense of movement or declining of position is impossible in connection with God, and therefore, it means His kindness, mercy and readiness to listen to and respond to the supplications of those who call upon Him at the later part of the night.[681] Badr al-Din al-ʿAyni and Ibn Furak argue that the word *nuzul* in the Arabic language is used with five different meanings. (1) to mean change of location, position or station as in verse 25:48 of the Qur'an, (2) to mean notification, information, advice, as in verse 26:193, (3) to mean statement, utterance, speech as in verse 6:93, (4) to mean attention or responsiveness to and interest in, and (5) to mean arrival of a verdict, judgment, decision etc. as known from common usage of the term. They further argue that the only logical interpretation would be God's readiness and responsiveness to mankind as God is not a body that moves or changes location.[682] Gibb and Kramers also observe that the report of "the nightly descent of God to earth, [is] in itself really soteriological and edifying, in which the exact point actually lies in the hearing of prayer."[683] Goldziher, on the other hand, argues:

> In this case the anthropomorphism was removed by means of a grammatical trick, made available by the nature of the old Arabic script, which does not contain any graphic expression of the vowels. Instead of *yanzilu*, "he descends," they read the factitive form *yunzilu*, "he causes to descend," namely, the angels. Thus the text's statement about God's change of place vanishes; it is not God who descends, but He causes angels to descend, who sound these calls in God's name.[684]

The same metaphorical interpretations of mercy, grace, and generosity could also be applied to phrases used in other Prophetic

reports to explain their correct meaning, i.e. the hadith which teaches that whosoever comes closer to God by the span of a hand, God comes closer to him by an arms-length; and whosoever comes to Him walking, He comes to him jogging/running (at quick pace).

Scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, on the other hand, argue against such an interpretation of the report and contend that it is God Himself who descends to the heaven of the earth and not His command or mercy. This does not mean that we should rush to depict Ibn Taymiyyah as an anthropomorphist simply because he refuted a metaphorical interpretation of *al-nuzul*. We know from his writings that he always claimed to follow the *Salaf* confirming attributes without anthropomorphism (comparison), depiction (portrayal), alteration (distortion), and suspension, arguing against an anthropomorphic understanding of such reports. Which is why he is careful, like other scholars, to often modify such reports with the qualifier that God descends in a mode appropriate to His Majesty, the mode of His descent being absolutely different from the mode of His creatures. After detailed discussion of the meaning of "*al-harakah*, meaning *movement*" including its philosophical as well as scholarly definitions, Ibn Taymiyyah contends that '*al-harakah*' is not confined to bodies only concluding that,

> the dictum to be definitely maintained is, that there is none whatsoever like Allah in all what He has attributed to Himself. So whosoever describes to Him anything of the creatures' attributes or qualities in any of the things or aspects, is absolutely wrong. Such is the one who says that God comes down i.e, moves or transmutes as a man comes from the roof to the lower part of the house or like the one who says [He comes down] and the Throne becomes devoid of Him. This makes His coming down mean emptying a place and occupying another which is absolutely absurd. Such understanding must be denied of God...[685]

He further argues that God is above everything, which does not mean that He is upon His Throne but that He is even above and over the Throne. Therefore, "the word '*al-nuzul*' and likewise are definitely interpreted because there is nothing there from where His coming down can be imagined."[686]

As explained it is clearly evident that Ibn Taymiyyah's insistence upon the literal meanings of these phrases is not due to any corporealism or anthropomorphism on his part but rather his insistence upon the superiority of revelation over logic and not otherwise. He vehemently refutes any similarity or comparison between God and His creatures by overwhelmingly emphasizing the fact that nobody knows the mode of God's coming, seeing or speaking for nobody knows the essence of God. Only one reality is known regarding God's *nuzul* and other attributes and that is, that *all of them* are not anthropomorphic, but appropriate to His exalted majesty.[687] Given Ibn Taymiyyah's strident emphasis upon the impossibility of any comparison or resemblance between God and creation, we can only conclude that the claims of Ibn Batutah as well as the accusations of corporealism leveled by al-Nashshar, Goldziher and others against him, are biased.

The mention of God established/settled on/above His throne *(istawa' ʿala al-ʿArsh)* occurs in the Qur'an in seven verses: "Verily your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and is firmly established on the throne (of authority), regulating and governing all things..." (10:3; also see 7:54; 13:2; 20:5; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4). This seemingly anthropomorphic Qur'anic expression has been the focus of many exegetical arguments and interpretations.[688] All mainstream scholars agree that *istawa'* does not mean sitting or physically touching the Throne whether in this or in any other anthropomorphic or corporeal sense.[689] Imam Malik, representing the *Salaf*, argued that "*al-istawa'* is not unknown and how (*al-istawa'* takes place) is unintelligible. To believe in this is essential and any inquiry into and question about it is innovation."[690] Rabiʿah bin Abi ʿAbd al-Rahman's (the teacher of Imam Malik) reply in response to a question concerning the meaning of the verse was: "[The] [h]ow of that is unknown, and *al-istawa* is unintelligible, and it is essential for you and me to believe in it."[691] This was the classical stance adopted by the *Salaf*, as already discussed, to maintain the superiority of revelation over reason and to maintain a sort of mystery and ineffability with regards to God. Al-Ashʿari remained very close to this position arguing that the Muʿtazilite's interpretation of the word *al-istawa'* as power and dominance did not go with the fact of God's power and dominance

extending to the whole of creation, the world and the universe. But no one

> from the Muslims [is] allow[ed] to describe Him as dominant over weeds and cells. Therefore it is not permissible to say that *al-istawa* means *al-istila'* (dominance) over the Throne as that is the case with everything else. So it is essential to accept it as meaning *istawa* specifically connected with the Throne with the exception of all other things.[692]

The phrase, to al-Ash'ari, meant that God is even over and above His Throne which is the most magnificent and the highest of His creations. Many scholars like Mujahid, Abu al-'Aliyah, and others followed the *Salaf* stance, taking *al-istawa'* to mean "raised above the Throne" and not settled upon it i.e., rejecting any conveying of a sense of sitting as a physical body would do.[693] Ibn Taymiyyah also argued that *al-istawa'* did not in any way or form convey a sense of God sitting upon or touching the Throne. Rather, it conveyed the attribute of "'*Uluww*" meaning highness and exaltedness over and above the Throne.[694]

The later Ash'arites, on the other hand, preferred metaphorical interpretations to avoid anthropomorphismic implications. For instance al-Ghazali argued that the literal meaning of the word *al-istawa'* leads to corporealism (and could lead certain people to confusion or anthropomorphism) which is denied by all the parties concerned; therefore it is not appropriate to ascribe it to God Almighty who is neither a body nor contingent.[695] Therefore, he reasoned the metaphorical meaning of "*al-isti'la'* that is, dominance", is the only logical interpretation.[696] Al-Ghazali even argued that Ibn Hanbal also knew that *al-istawa'* did not mean God establishing Himself upon the Throne physically and that *al-nuzul* did not mean God's physically descending, but he prohibited metaphorical interpretation anyway, so as not to open the door to exploitation of revelation and extremism.[697] The metaphorical, non-corporeal nature of the phrase has become so common among Muslims that Muslim scholarship is not hesitant to argue that nowhere does the Qur'an mention that God sits on an *'Arsh*; it is always God's controlling power that is mentioned in connection with this.

Finally, we have a hadith in which the Prophet is reported to have said, "God created Adam in his form, his height being sixty ells."[698] This report bears close resemblance to Genesis 1:26 ("Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness…'") if taken to mean that God created Adam in God's form. However, it differs from Genesis in that it does not include that critical phrase "in his likeness" meaning the hadith excludes resemblance. Abu Muhammad ibn Qutaybah took the hadith literally arguing that God has a "form but not like forms."[699] According to al-Qadi Abu Ya῾la, "The term form may be applied to God although it is not a form like other forms; the same is true of the term essence (*dhat*) when applied to God."[700] Such literalism, in Ibn Furak's opinion, leads to clear anthropomorphism which is contradictory to the Qur'anic dictum that there is none like unto Him.[701] And to Ibn al-Jawzi al-Hanbali such a literal interpretation was "repulsive and ugly,"[702] for it

> reflects serious confusion, for the term essence refers to the quintessential character (*ma'na*) of something whereas [the word] *form* (*sura*) implies a shape (*hay'a*) with limits (*takhatit*) and composition (*ta'lif*), and presupposes a fashioner or composer. Those who use the expression "a form not like other forms" face the same problem as those who say "a body not like other bodies" for [in both cases] they contradict themselves.[703]

In other words, if Adam was created in God's form (literally) then how in the world could someone simultaneously say God has a form unlike forms.[704] This is why traditionalists who stuck to a literal meaning of the Prophetic report were scolded by their colleagues as corporealists.

Trusted student of Imam Malik, Ibn al-Qasim reports that Malik strictly prohibited any discussion of the "image" reports preferring complete silence over them.[705] Others had no reservation in discussing and interpreting them metaphorically arguing that God did not possess a form. Therefore a literal interpretation of the report would certainly not be acceptable. Badr al-Din al-῾Ayni and many others have interpreted it to meaning that God created Adam "in Adam's form. This is a

better and the appropriate interpretation. It means that God created Adam as a full fledged man with full creation having a length of sixty ells unlike others who are first just a sperm, then a clot... go through stages."[706] This view was initially adopted by the famous hadith authority Abu Sulayman al-Khattabi and followed by many theologians especially the later Ash'arites such as al-Baghdadi, al-Juwayni and al-Ghazali.

Al-Bayhaqi contends that a form is a composition of various parts and as God defies all composition He cannot be ascribed any form (*surah*). Al-Bayhaqi quotes Abu Mansur Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn Ayub, the famous theologian, as stating that in this report "the Prophet wanted to explain that Adam's form did not change as happened to the Serpent when expelled from Paradise. He was created in his form which he had in Paradise without distortion or change in the creation."[707] Ibn Furak has given a detailed account of all of these interpretations[708] and Ibn al-Jawzi has discussed them at great length.[709] Watt observes that this metaphorical interpretation indeed could be

> construed as the denial of various views that were actually held, or might be held, within the Islamic world. It was a denial that Adam was changed, like the serpent or peacock, when he was expelled from the Garden; it was a denial that he came into being through natural process, whether physical or embryological, and had to undergo development in order to reach maturity. It could even be regarded as a denial that the form or conception of humanity was a mere abstraction of the human intellect. For the exponents of these views and for the more intellectual Muslims this might be a satisfactory way of dealing with what they felt to be objectionable in the assertion that God created Adam in his image or form; but such subtleties of interpretation could hardly have appealed to the ordinary man.[710]

Goldziher argues that "these examples demonstrate the very frequently applied method of using grammatical alterations to obviate theological difficulty."[711]

Other reports from the Prophet include: "Do not say, May God make foul his face and a face like his, for God created Adam in his

form" and one that says: "If you are beating anyone, avoid his face, for God created Adam in his form".[712] These reports were also interpreted in such a manner as to avoid anthropomorphic implications. Here the pronoun 'his' was said to naturally refer to the man cursed or beaten.[713] Al-Ghazali on the other hand argued that 'his form' can be taken to mean God's form. There are a few reports that attribute the "form" to *al-Rahman* (one of the beautiful names of God),[714] although not all of them are accepted as authentic.[715] But the form, to al-Ghazali, was "not the external visible form, but "the 'inner form' (*surah batinah*) belonging to the 'supernal world' (*ʿalam al-malakut*)...""[716] He also argued that 'his form' meaning 'God's form' can be justified in two ways:

> Firstly, if God's form means a form in God's possession, then man may be regarded as a microcosm, a universe in little; this is a favorite conception with al-Ghazali. Secondly, if God's form means something characterizing him, then that might refer to the fact that just as God is living, knowing, willing, so man is living, knowing, willing; and the complex of these attributes might be held to constitute the 'inner form'... when attributes are said to belong to God and also to man, the correspondence is only verbal, and similarly in saying that God has a form and man has a form the correspondence is only verbal. To suppose that God's form is external and visible would of course be anthropomorphism (*tasbih*).[717]

Abu Bakr ibn al-ʿArabi emphatically prefers the second interpretation. He states that God created Adam with His attribute of being living, knowing, willing etc. God the Most Merciful does not have a specific form. This leaves no other option but to conclude that Adam was created in the spiritual (*maʿnawi*) image of God.[718] To him the term *surah* or *form* denotes a divine attribute (*sifah*) as it is sometimes said that "this is the form of the matter" (*Surah al-Amr*). Ibn ʿAqil and Ibn al-Jawzi, the two known Hanbali scholars, also prefer this interpretation.[719]

In a detailed study of Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal's creed, Wesley Williams presents Ahmad as scolding those who interpret the above reports metaphorically and render the report to mean that God created Adam in Adam's form. He, on the authority of al-Qadi Abu Ya'la, quotes Imam Ahmad as stating that, "He who says that Allah created Adam according to the form of Adam, he is a *Jahmi* (disbeliever). Which form did Adam have before He created him?"[720] Williams concludes, "For Ibn Hanbal, to deny that God has a form is *kufr* (unbelief)."[721] He further quotes Ahmad's presumed understanding of the *Hadith al-Ru'ya*[722] (depicting God's sight on the Day of Judgment) and *Hadith al-Shabb*[723] (the reported weak narration of Prophet Muhammad supposedly having claimed to have seen God probably in his dream as a young man), to conclude that Imam Ahmad was a thorough corporealist and the "God of 9th–10th century Sunnism was Theophanous and Corporeal."[724] From here he reaches an even more provocative conclusion:

> Islam, apparently from its outset, played host to varying concepts of the divine, either of which – or, possibly, none of which – could claim true indigenousness. From a historical perspective, transcendentalism and anthropomorphism were two alternatives available to Muslim divines attempting to interpret the most important pillar of their faith, "There is no god but Allah," and there were times that anthropomorphism was the model preferred by Sunni Islam.[725]

All that Williams can point to are a few literal interpretations, challenged strongly in any case during their formulation, and even then the former strongly qualified with the there is none like unto Him statement, to draw a patently absurd conclusion based on scaling matters hugely out of proportion. It is astonishing that from these slim pickings he chooses to confidently assert dressed-up speculation as certainty, and ignoring facts on the ground as they historically existed. The strict non-anthropomorphic and monotheistic *tawhid* of Islam is unparalleled and indisputable. The most that can be said is that a certain blur, immediately qualified, surfaced, with debate really

revolving around a controlled focus on a blurred understanding of a few phrases. Anthropomorphism was hardly "the model preferred by Sunni Islam", if anything Islamic understanding and debate has always been marked by anti-anthropomorphism. This chapter has carefully and in some detail demonstrated the originality of the Qur'anic transcendental monotheistic paradigm by comparing it with Judaic and Christian conceptions of God. It has shown that the preferred method for orthodox Muslim scholars has been "*Imra'uha ka ma ja'at*" meaning literally "pass them on just as they have come down" period. Hence, the Qur'anic passages and Prophetic reports in question were transmitted to posterity exactly as received in Scripture, intact, without metaphorical interpretation or literal explanation, or the asking 'how' of them. Their recital was taken as their interpretation.

The four known imams, as also discussed, subscribed to this doctrine of *Imrar* and *bila kayf,* although some of their later followers were unable to maintain the mediate position blurring the line either by literal interpretation or metaphorical understanding. Those who metaphorically interpreted these poetical expressions contended that their literal meaning was not intended as this could lead to anthropomorphism, and further argued that the *Salaf* also did not accept or allow for their literal meaning otherwise they would have explained them using proper Arabic synonyms or allowed their translation into other languages.

In point of fact the literalists were quite a minority including the Hanbali school of thought. This minority sought approval for their views by subscribing the same to Imam Ahmad while in fact slanting towards literal interpretations against and over Ahmad's doctrine of *Imrar* and *bila kayf*. They somehow took Ahmad's fideism to extremes and, in their efforts to establish the supremacy of revelation over reason, ended up ascribing to revelation meanings which might not have been intended by Imam Ahmad. They demystified the mysteries upheld by Ahmad and others, and in this process of demystification blurred the demarcation line and lost the intended balance. These literalists were labeled by their colleagues as the "masses scholars" with clear lack of true scholarship. Their own fellow Hanbalis took them to task by establishing the fact that the ascription of their literal views to Imam Ahmad was wrong. A good example is Abu al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Rahman

ʿAli ibn al-Jawzi's (510–597 / 1116–1201) rebuttal of al-Qadi Abu Yaʿla Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Farra' (380–458 / 990–1066), Abu ʿAbd Allah al-Hasan ibn Hamid al-Warraq (d. 403 / 1012) and Abu al-Hasan ʿAli ibn ʿUbayd Allah al-Zaghuni (d. 527 / 1132), the three influential Hanbali scholars. He clearly stated in his book that, "I have come to the conclusion that a refutation of their views is essential if [the name of] Ahmad is not to be associated with such notions."[726] Al-Jawzi observed that:

> Imam Ahmad used to say: "Let the texts of scripture (*ahadith*) stand as they are." Some of his leading disciples followed this principle – men like Ibrahim al-Harbi, and Abu Dawud al-Ashram as well as some of the [latter] authorities of the school such as Abu'l-Hasan at-Tamimi, Abu Muhammad [at-Tamimi] Rizq Allah b.'Abd al-Wahhab, Abu al-Wafa b. 'Aqil.[727]

He blamed the likes of these three Hanbali figures for jeopardizing Ahmad's stance by taking "sense experience *(ʿala'l-hissiyat)* as its point of departure."[728]

The problem with Wesley Williams is the same. He has taken the literalism prone minority of Hanbalites such as al-Qadi Abu Yaʿla as his point of reference. They seem to be his sole lenses through which to decode Ahmad's inner feelings concerning these scriptural mysteries. There is a transmission problem involved also. Ahmad reportedly did not compile his opinions in written form and prohibited his students from recording them. So very often two diverging opinions are attributed to Imam Ahmad by the Hanbali authorities. This boils down to a matter of who to accept and who to reject when it comes to interpreting Imam Ahmad's theological positions. There is nothing in the written creeds of Ahmad which ostensibly substantiates Wesley Williams' controversial claims. Imam Ahmad quotes the scriptural expressions exactly as they have been revealed without the slightest change in the scriptural order of the words or the substitution of Arabic words imagined to be synonyms. And he manifestly prohibited their translation into any other language. He also strictly forbade moving one's finger, hand, eyes or any other human organ while reciting or

explaining the scriptural expressions which imply finger, hand or eyes for God.[729] His emphasis upon *Imrar bila kayf wa la ma'na* is so vivid and authentic that binding any anthropomorphic or corporeal interpretations to his name would fly in the face of reality.

Consequently, guaging Imam Ahmad's inner feelings through the narrow lens of those such as al-Qadi Abu Ya'la or even through that of Imam Ahmad's own son 'Abd Allah ibn Ahmad (d. 290 / 903 known for his weakness in hadith transmission as for example evidenced in his book *Kitab al-Sunnah* which contained outright flimsy chains and was hence frowned upon by many scholars), and to guage the Sunni doctrine of God through the sole lens of Ahmad ibn Hanbal whatever his influence may be, and then to declare the Islamic doctrine of God as Theophanous and corporeal based upon just Sunni interpretations to the exclusion of all other Muslims, is a far fetched, unwarranted and flawed scheme of argumentation. It is equally ludicrous to discard the entire Qur'an's absolute emphasis upon transcendental monotheism as well as ignore centuries of Muslim effort to either maintain the *bila kayf* balance or explain it metaphorically, whilst wildly jumping to the conclusion not grounded in the facts of history, that the Islamic God paradigm is corporeal just like Judaism.

The hadith of *al-Ru'ya* mentioned earlier talks about God's beatific vision in the life to come. The thing to note is that the rules of the hereafter are altogether different from those of this temporal material existence. The Qur'an differentiates between the two totally disparate realms even by name, this worldly life being "'*Alim al-Ghayb*" and the next life "'*Alim al-Shahadah*". There is a consensus among Muslim scholars that nobody has ever seen God in this worldly life. Dreams are dismissed as imagination and theological discourses are not based upon imagination. Additionally the hadith of *Shabb* mentioned earlier is so weak that none of the authentic books of hadith have ever reported it. Even Imam Ahmad who had a tendency to transmit some weak reports in his *Musnad*, categorically denied transmission of it in the *Musnad*. A clear repudiation of this hadith is also authentically reported from him. Therefore, Wesley Williams' controversial claims contain little if any merit. Orthodox Muslim scholars were neither anthropomorphists nor corporealists. Additionally, this clear tendency against accepting

anthropomorphic interpretations of Prophetic reports did not spring merely from Muslim intellectualism. This proclivity has its origin in the Qur'an. Watt observes:

> What seems to have turned the scale against acceptance of the conception of man in God's form is the way in which the word sura and its cognates are used in the Qur'an. There are two main points to be noticed. Firstly, God is referred to in the Qur'an as *musawwir*, 'the form-giver', 'the one who forms'; and the activity of 'forming' is closely connected with that of creating, even of creating Adam in particular. Now, if creating and forming are similar or closely connected, the word 'form' would have the suggestion of something created and would therefore not be appropriate for God. Secondly, the word sura or 'form' tends to connote something composite because the one verse of the Qur'an where it is used runs: "in whatever form he willed he constituted thee" (or 'set thee together'). Though Westerners may consider form a principle of unity, the Arabs, perhaps under the influence of this verse, seem to have thought of sura as something complex. In this way also it was inappropriate that God should have a sura.[730]

As this chapter has shown the seemingly anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur'an and Hadith have been a source of controversy among many Muslim scholars and sects. Had they been accepted literally without proper qualification, these expressions would have led to an anthropomorphic conception of God otherwise vehemently denied by the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Therefore, two main tendencies have historically dominated the Muslim approach, either to accept them *bila kayf* or to explain them with the help of genuinely accepted metaphors to avoid anthropomorphic implications. Abd al-Halim Mahmud views the first tendency as the true essence of Islam.[731] For most Muslims anthropomorphism is an unacceptable, unlawful, and mostly rejected doctrine. Some apparently literalist figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah also vigorously refuted accusations of anthropomorphism. Ibn Taymiyyah, who otherwise disagreed with later Ash'arites in terms of their claim

that the "*Salaf*" did not maintain the literal, commonly used meanings of these phrases under the clause 'without how', however agreed with them with regards to denying these expressions literal meaning if they paved the way to, or confused certain people into, anthropomorphism or corporeality. He only allowed such interpretation with the proviso "if the forbidden [anthropomorphic] meanings become evident or common with some people..."[732]

Moreover, extremists like Hisham ibn al-Hakam who otherwise are reported to have accepted these expressions literally and to have explained them corporeally, qualified their corporealism with phrases such as "not like bodies" or "things".[733] Even their understanding of God in a sense can be interpreted as non-anthropomorphic because their concept of 'body' or 'thing' is somewhat different to the literal meaning of the terms and their usages in the human sphere.

Al-Ashʿari has reported from Hisham and Wilfred Madelung has observed that Hisham ibn al-Hakam "and probably the doctrine of his school also defined God as a body, in the meaning that he is existent (*muwjud*)."[734] The reason for scholastic abhorrence of anthropomorphism and corporealism is rooted in the Qur'an, which emphasized in clear-cut and unambiguous terms, the absolute transcendence and uniqueness of God. Watt rightly observes that these issues introduce us

> to one of the deep tensions in Islamic thought – the tension between those who held God's absolute otherness and those who believed that there was an affinity between God and man. This study has also shown us... that the steady pressure through the centuries of the Qur'an had an important share in determining the final result.[735]

We can conclude with Gibb and Kramers who note:

> Yet when Muhammad speaks of Allah's two hands... or of his grasp... or of his eyes... or of his face... or describes him as settling himself upon his throne... we are not to regard that as due to an anthropomorphic theology but rather as the still plastic metaphor of a poet. To speak technically, we have here only *madjaz*; *tadjsim* and *tashbih* lay with the future exegetes.[736]

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the presence of seemingly anthropomorphic expressions in the scripture have been problematic to a certain degree, but mainstream Islam has always emphasized the unconditional transcendence of God, His uniqueness and otherness. Moreover, this transcendence did not signify a bare unity or an abstract idea of God, but rather the opposite. The God of the Qur'an is a vivid, personal, and very loving Creator, as reflected throughout the Qur'an's verses, so as to make it easy for believers to reflect upon and relate to Him. Netton rightly observes that:

> The God portrayed in the Qur'an has both a transcendent and an immanent aspect. On the one hand 'like Him there is naught'; on the other hand, God announces in His revelation: 'We indeed created man; and We know what his soul whispers within him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.'[737]

The immanent aspect was achieved by affirming the expressions and attributes of God discussed in this chapter under the clause of *bila kayf*, as al-Faruqi argues:

> once the lexicographic meaning of the predicate is acknowledged and understood and then denied, it acts as a springboard for the mind to create a new modality for the predication in question, other than the empirical. But now no new modality is possible. Therefore, the mind perceives the impossibility of empirical predication while the understanding is still anchored to the lexicographic meaning of the term.[738]

Al-Faruqi continues:

> The imagination is thus compelled to produce the needed modality once the denial of empirical predication and transcendence both are upheld. In this suspense, an intuition of transcendence is obtained, not unlike that of infinity and sensory inexpressibility engendered by the arabesque. The lexicographic meaning of the term serves as anchor while the imagination soars in search of an

applicable modality of the meaning in question, a modality that is impossible to reach. Indeed, the Qur'an likens the word of God to "a tree whose roots are firm in the earth, and whose branches are infinite and unreachable in the skies above" (14:24).[739]

Such a formula, according to Watt, was very much needed to maintain the divine mystery.[740]

We conclude this chapter with the claim that the Qur'anic Creator Paradigm does maintain a wonderful demarcation line between God and whatever is non-God by holding fast to the concept of His transcendence, uniqueness, and otherness. This concept is no bare unity or abstraction, but a vivid, alive, and demanding concept which makes God relevant to the 'here and now' by means of emphasizing His immanence through the modality it provides by the countless Qur'anic verses. The modality and the language are essentially structured in such a way so as to allow many possibilities of communication without making God resemble or disappear in the world He has created. This type of transcendental concept is pervasive throughout the Qur'an, the authentic Hadith literature, and also throughout the history of Islamic civilization. All mainstream Muslim thinkers, even the philosophers to an extent, seem to have followed the same line: the sense of and a belief in the transcendental Deity who is mysterious, ineffable, and unknowable in His essence, but at the same time very close to His creatures by dint of His knowledge, power, mercy, and love. Linguistically, observes Netton,

> such philosophers' employment of certain kinds of vocabulary to denote the transcendent marked a movement away from the familiar, almost cosy, language of the Qur'anic Creator Paradigm to [a] shifting evanescent area where language was often emptied of all normal meanings: the end result could be paradoxically and startlingly akin to that achieved by the theologies of al-Ashʿari and Ahmad b. Hanbal...[741]

This rupture of language, as discussed, was not meant to make God unknowable as Netton argues,[742] but quite the opposite. It was meant

to admit the inadequacy and imperfection of the human language, the ineffable mystery of God, and humanity's utter dependence upon God and His revelation to achieve any authentic knowledge of His being.

NOTES

[1] Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1993), p.42.

[2] Ismail R. al-Faruqi, *Towards Islamic English* (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1986), p.44.

[3] Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.24.

[4] The Qur'an, 29:50–51. The Qur'an has expressed such a claim and a challenge in several places. In 17:88 it claims: "Say: 'If the whole of mankind and jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support.'" In 11:13–14 it challenges them to produce ten chapters like those of the Qur'an: "Or they may say, 'He forged it.' Say, 'Bring ye then ten surahs forged, like unto it, and call (to your aid) whomsoever ye can, other than Allah – If ye speak the truth! If then they answer you not, know ye that this Revelation is sent down with the knowledge of Allah, there is no god but He! Will ye even then submit [to Islam]?" In 2:23–4, the challenge was reduced to one chapter: "And if you are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a surah like thereunto; and call your witnesses or helpers (if there are any) besides Allah, if you are truthful. But if you cannot – and of a surety you cannot – then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones, which is prepared for those who reject Faith."

[5] Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, A. T. Welch, trans. (Los Angles: University of California Press, 1976), p.31.

[6] Muhammad Khalf Allah, Muhammad Zaghlul Sallam, eds., *Thalath Rasa'il fi I'jaz al-Qur'an li Rummani wa al-Khattabi wa 'Abd al-Qahir al-Jurjani*, 2nd edn. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1968), p.27.

[7] Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani, *I'jaz al-Qur'an*, M. A. Khifaji, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1991), pp.120–58. For al-Baqillani's method of deducing Qur'anic *i'jaz* from his empirical, stylistic analysis of *nazm* and it's rhythm of *kalimat* (structural rhetorical units) within the Qur'anic verses see Angelika Neuwirth, "*Tariqat al-Baqillani fi Izhar i'jaz al-Qur'an*," *Studia Arabica et Islamica*

[Arabic Section], Wadad al-Qadi, ed. (Beirut: American University, 1981), pp.281–96.

[8] See Abu Bakr al-Jurjani, *Kitab Dala'il al-Iʿjaz*, Mahmud M. Shakir, ed. (Cairo: Matbaʿah al-Madani, 1992), pp.43–370.

[9] Introduction of Abu al-Qasim Mahmud ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhshari to his *Tafsir al-Kashshaf ʿan Haqa'iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa ʿUyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1966).

[10] Mustafa Sadiq al-Rafʿi, *Tarikh Adab al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, 1974), vol.2, pp.212 f.

[11] See Sayyid Qutb's, *al-Taswir al-Fanni fi al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2004), pp.33 ff; also his *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Shuruq, 1994).

[12] See for instance R. L. Atkinson, et. al, eds., *Introduction to Psychology* (New York; London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1990), pp.306 ff; Norman E. Spear, *The Processing of Memories: Forgetting and Retention* (New York; London: John Wiley & Sons, 1978), ch.2, pp.47 ff; Burrhus F. Skinner, *The Technology of Teaching* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968).

[13] Allan Paivio, *Imagery and Verbal Processes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971).

[14] Ismail R. al-Faruqi, Lois L. al-Faruqi, *The Cultural Atlas of Islam* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1986), p.102.

[15] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), pp.104–05.

[16] John L. Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.21.

[17] Hitti, *The Arabs*, p.46.

[18] Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p.28.

[19] Issa J. Boullata, "The Rhetorical Interpretation of the Qur'an: Iʿjaz and Related Topics," *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'an*, Andrew Rippin, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp.140–41. There were a few attempts made by some individuals to meet the Qur'anic challenge but in vain. See al-Baqillani, *Iʿjaz al-Qur'an*, pp.238–40; see also Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, S. M. Stern, ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971), vol.2, pp.363–65.

[20] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.102.

[21] Ali Dashti, *Twenty Three Years, A Study of the Prophetic Career of Mohammad*, F. R. C. Bagley, trans. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), pp.48–49.

[22] Al-Jurjani's entire book is meant to prove the eloquence of the Qur'an through its grammatical structures and meanings.

[23] Dashti, *Twenty Three Years*, pp.52–53.

[24] Ibid., p.57.

[25] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, p.105.

[26] Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1992), p.11.

[27] Quoted in Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (New York: Crossroads, 1985), p.66.

[28] Humphry Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture, Fully Displayed in the Life of Mahomet* (London: E. Curll, 1723), p.80.

[29] Quoted in Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), p.297.

[30] Thomas Carlyle, *The Best Known Works of Thomas Carlyle: Including Sartor Resartus, Heroes and Hero Worship and Characteristics* (Rockville, Maryland: Wildside Press, 2010), pp.191–192.

[31] Ernest T. Renan, *Studies in Religious History, History of the People of Israel and Religion of Antiquity* (London: Metheson & Co., 1886), p.132.

[32] James W. H. Stobart, *Islam and its Founder* (London: SPCK Press, 1901), p.231.

[33] Quoted from Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p.25.

[34] Tor Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and His Faith*, Theophil Menzel, trans. (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p.161.

[35] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Dero E. Saunders, ed. (London: Penguin, 1980), pp.657–58.

[36] Hartwig Hirschfeld, "New Researches into Composition and Exegesis of the Quran," *Asiatic Monograph* (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1902), vol. III, p.5.

[37] St. Clair-Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Quran* (London: SPCK, 1905), p.27; for more details see Anis A. Shorrosh, *Islam Revealed* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1988), pp.191–221. On p.198 the heading reads "Mistakes in the Arabic of the Quran" and on p.199 it reads "Poor Grammer". It is interesting to note that Anis finds fault with the Arabic of the Qur'an and doubts the grammatical structure of the Qur'anic text while other learned Christian scholars like Hitti and H. Lammens have concluded that the Qur'an is the masterpiece of the Arabic language and the standard of the national grammar. Father Lammens, a devout Christian missionary about whom E. Dermenghem writes: "Father Lammens, one of the most erudite of recent specialists, is unfortunately one of the most partial also." – Emile Dermenghem, *The Life of Mohamet*, A. Yorks, trans. (New York: Dial Press, n.d.), p. X. Even a partial writer like Father Lammens observes that the Qur'an "has served as the standard for fixing the rules of national grammer." – Henri Lammens,

Islam, Beliefs and Institutions, Sir E. D. Ross, trans. (London: Cass & Co., 1968), p.41. For Arabic sources about the issue see Abu Muhammad ʿAbd Allah ibn Muslim ibn Qutaybah, *Tafsir Gharib al-Qur'an*, Ahmad Saqar, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1978); and his *Ta'wil Mushkal al-Qur'an*, Ahmad Saqar, ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Turath, 1973); Abu Talib Muhammad Makki al-Qaysiyy, *al-ʿUmdah fi Gharib al-Qur'an*, Yusuf A. al-Marʿashili, ed. (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1981).

[38] Salomon R. Orpheus, *A History of Religion* (New York: Livercraft Inc., 1932), p.176; and for a recent book see Robert Morey, *The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1992), pp.108–09, 114–15.

[39] William M. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.52.

[40] William M. Watt, *What is Islam* (New York: Frederick Praeger Publishers, 1968), p.120.

[41] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p.21.

[42] Ibid., pp.80–85.

[43] William M. Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Stateman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.15.

[44] Ibid., p.73.

[45] James N. Anderson, ed., *The World Religions* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), p.5.

[46] Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), p.70; for refutation of this hypothesis and others see S. Vahiuddin, "Richard Bell's Dating of the Qur'an, A Critical Analysis," *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad: Deccan, 1956), vol. XXXX, no.3, p.264.

[47] Andrae, *Mohammed*, p.116.

[48] Arthur S. Tritton, *Islam, Beliefs and Practices* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966), p.21.

[49] Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, *Hagarism, The Making of the Islamic World* (London: Cambridge Univeristy Press, 1977), p.18.

[50] Andrew Rippin, *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs & Practices* (New York: Routledge, 1990), vol.1, p.27.

[51] Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955), vol.2, pp.10–13.

[52] Ibid., pp.10–11.

[53] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, Zafar I. Ansari, trans. and ed., (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1988), vol.1, p.9.

[54] Ibid., p.12.

[55] Ibid.

[56] See M. Mahmud Hijazi, *al-Wahdah al-Mawduʿiyyah fi al-Qur'an al-Karim* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Hadithah, 1970). Since then many books have been written on the subject.

[57] Rahman, *Major Themes in the Qur'an*, p. XI.

[58] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p.6.

[59] See details in Mustansir Mir, "Coherence in the Qur'an: A Study of Islahi's Concept of Nazm," *Tadabbur-i Qur'an* (Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1986), pp.38 ff.

[60] See Amin A. Islahi, *Mabadi' Tadabbur al-Qur'an* (Lahore: Dar al-Isha'at al-Islamiyyah, 1971).

[61] Mir, "Coherence in the Qur'an," p.62.

[62] Ibid., p.100.

[63] This is reffered to as the process of "Organization". See Atkinson, et al., *Introduction to Psychology*, pp.309 ff. This approach is presently being used in many academic circles, especially in language studies. Cambridge University's *Elementary Modern Standard Arabic*, Peter F. Abboud, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), is a good example of this approach.

[64] See a detailed study of the issue in Charles B. Ferster, Burrhus F. Skinner, *Schedules of Reinforcement* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1957); Winfred F. Hill, *Learning, A Survey of Psychological Interpretations* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990), pp.75 ff.

[65] Hill, *Learning*, p.79.

[66] Sachiko Murata, William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (New York: Paragon House, 1994), p. XVIIII.

[67] Ibid., pp. XVIII-XIX.

[68] Quoted by Ronald V. C. Bodley, *The Messenger: The Life of Mohammed* (New York: Doubleday, 1946), p.237.

[69] Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p.25.

[70] Dermenghem, *The Life of Mohamet*, p.249.

[71] George Sale, *The Koran, Commonly Called Al-Quran, with a Preliminary Discourse* (London: Fredrick Warne, 1899), p.47.

[72] John A. William, *Islam* (New York: G. Braziller, 1961), p.15.

[73] Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p.49.

[74] John Naish, *The Wisdom of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937), Preface, p. VIII.

[75] Bodley, *The Messenger*, p.237.

[76] Ibid., p.239.

[77] Hitti, *The Arabs*, pp.46–47.

[78] See Afzalul Rahman, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Seerah* (London: Seerah Foundation, 1981), vol.1, Book I, p.185.

[79] Arnold Joseph Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Edited by David Churchill Somervell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), v.2, p.31, 53.

[80] Hans Kung, et al., eds., *Christianity and the World Religions* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), pp.28–29.

[81] See Philip K. Hitti, *The Near East in History* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1961), p.194. Also, John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *Islam: the Straight Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[82] Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Bristol: Book Foundation, 2003), pp. VI-VII.

[83] Ibid., p. X.

[84] Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*, introduction, p. X.

[85] Charles J. Adams, "Islamic Religious Tradition," *The Study of the Middle East*, Leonard Binder, ed. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1976), p.65.

[86] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966).

[87] Kenneth Cragg, *The Mind of the Qur'an* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973).

[88] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*.

[89] Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1981). Hans Kung observes that "An apparently more solid and careful work than all the foregoing is Angelika Neuworth's *Studies on the Composition of the Meccan Suras* (1981). With her training in the form-critical approach to the Old Testament, Neuwirth can prove that, whatever the case with the rest of the Qur'an, the Meccan suras were put together by the Prophet himself for liturgical recitation, and that behind the text as we have it stands a single creative force, so that we are not reduced to postulating a mere editor who assembled variant readings with scissors and paste." Kung, et al., *Christianity and the World Religions*, p.34. Moreover, it is interesting to see how Neuwirth accepts the surahs as units and how she analyses the intricate patterns of rhythm, rhyme,

and assonance within each surah, and then structure of verses and their groupings within the surahs that lead to accept the surah as a unit.

[90] Angelika Neuwirth, "Images and Metaphors in the Introductory Sections of the Makkan Suras," *Approaches to the Qur'an,* G. R. Hawting, Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, eds. (New York; London: Routledge, 1993), pp.30–31.

[91] William A. Graham, "Qur'an as Spoken Word: An Islamic Contribution to the Understanding of Scripture," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, Richard C. Martin, ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), p.30.

[92] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.100.

[93] See Watt, *What is Islam*, pp.18–20.

[94] Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p.56.

[95] See William Muir, Thomas H. Weir, *The Life of Mohammad* (Edinburgh: John Grant, 1912).

[96] Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, p.24.

[97] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XVI.

[98] William M. Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), p.31.

[99] See Gibb, Kramers, "Al-Kuran," *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.273.

[100] Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, p.24.

[101] Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p.37.

[102] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XX.

[103] Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p.37.

[104] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XIX.

[105] John Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p.239.

[106] Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p.96.

[107] Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p.37.

[108] Guillaume, *Islam*, p.56.

[109] Tritton, *Islam, Beliefs and Practices*, p.15.

[110] Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, pp.40–44.

[111] Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, p.121.

[112] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XXI.

[113] Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, p.25.

[114] Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p.46.

[115] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XXV.

[116] Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, p.157.

[117] Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p.34.

[118] Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p.97.

[119] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.100.

[120] Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p.44.

[121] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.100.

[122] Adams, "Islamic Religious Tradition," p.61.

[123] Graham, "Qur'an as Spoken Word," p.158.

[124] See Geza Vermes' book *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*.

[125] John Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p.1.

[126] See ibid., pp.40 ff.

[127] See ibid., p.134.

[128] There have been previous efforts to show the Judeo-Christian background of the Qur'an. See Ricahard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London: Macmillan, 1926); and Charles C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1967); Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, [prolegomenon by Moshe Pearlman] (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1970); Abraham I. Katsh, *Judaism and the Koran* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1962).

[129] Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, pp.20 ff.

[130] Samuel M. Zwemer, *The Muslim Christ Oliphant* (London: Anderson & Ferrier, 1912), p.12.

[131] James Gardner, *The Faiths of the World: An Account of All Religions and Religious Sects, Their Doctrines, Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs* (London: A. Fullarton, 1858), vol.2, p.279.

[132] See David S. Margoliouth, *The Early Development of Mohammedanism* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914); and also his *Mohammedanism* (London: Butterworth, 1912).

[133] Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*.

[134] See Shelomoh D. Goitein, "Mohammad's Inspiration by Judaism," *Journal of Jewish Studies* (1958), vol.9, pp.149–62; also his *Jews and Arabs: Their Contacts through the Ages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1955).

[135] Anderson, *The World Religions*, p.57.

[136] Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, p. XX.

[137] Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, p.70.

[138] Johann Fueck, "The Originality of the Arabian Prophet," *Studies on Islam*, M. L. Swartz, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.88.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid., p.89.

[141] Ibid., pp.92–93.

[142] For Lot see Qur'an 21:74–75, 26:160–173; for David and Solomon see 21:78–82, 27:15–44, 38:17–4.

[143] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p.85.

[144] Fueck, "The Originality of the Arabian Prophet," p.88.

[145] Ibid., pp.94–95.

[146] Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p.160.

[147] Gardner, *The Faiths of the World*, vol.2, p.279.

[148] Fueck, "The Originality of the Arabian Prophet," p.89.

[149] John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p.58.

[150] See Wansbrough's, *Qur'anic Studies*, p.49.

[151] Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, pp.58–59.

[152] See Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of Qur'an, Tafsir, and Sira: The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies,* Richard C. Martin, ed. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), p.161.

[153] Crone, Cook, *Hagarism*, p.3.

[154] Ibid., pp.17–18.

[155] Ibid., p.18.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Robert B. Serjeant's, Review of "Qur'anic Studies," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1987), p.76.

[158] Ibid., p.76.

[159] Norman Daniel's, Review of "Hagarism," *Journal of Semitic Studies* (1979), vol.24, p.296.

[160] Richard C. Martin, *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985), p.231.

[161] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, p. XIII.

[162] Ibid., p.201.

[163] Ibid., p.199.

[164] Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam, The View From the Edge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp.23–24; also see Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Islam,*

Essays on the Nature and Growth of a Cultural Tradition (Chicago: American Anthropological Association, 1955).

[165] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XXII.

[166] Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, pp.239–40.

[167] Lammens, *Islam, Beliefs and Institutions*, p.38.

[168] Gatje, *The Qur'an and its Exegesis*, p.25.

[169] Burton, *The Collection of the Qur'an*, p.145.

[170] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XXIV.

[171] Lammens, *Islam, Beliefs and Institutions*, p.44.

[172] David Pinault, *The Shiites* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), p.27.

[173] Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *A Young Muslim's Guide to the Modern World* (Chicago: Kazi Publications Inc., 1994), p.10.

[174] Tritton, *Islam, Beliefs and Practices*, p.18. See also Ahmad Ali al-Imam, *Variant Readings of the Qur'an: A Critical Study of Their Historical and Linguistic Origins* (London: IIIT, 2006).

[175] Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XXIII.

[176] Graham, "Qur'an as Spoken Word," p.35.

[177] Henry P. Smith, *The Bible and Islam: Or, The Influence of the Old and New Testaments on the Religion of Mohammed* (New York: ARNO Press, 1973), p.25.

[178] Bodley, *The Messenger*, pp.234–35.

[179] Hitti, *The Near East in History*, p.194.

[180] Esposito, *Islam the Straight Path*, p.23.

[181] Rippin, *Muslims*, vol.1, p.24.

[182] Kung, et al., *Christianity and the World Religions*, pp.14–15.

[183] M. Arkoun is an example of such an approach to the Qur'an. It may be noticed here that the Qur'anic Science of the "*Asbab al-Nuzul*" i.e., the context of the revelation, is already a kind of historical approach to the text of the Qur'an. The traditional Muslim scholars should not be alarmed by such inferences. The Qur'anic text presents a different scenario and situation than the one discussed about the Bible in the previous chapters.

[184] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, p.33.

[185] Ibid., p.32.

[186] Ibid., p.39.

[187] Rippin, *Muslims*, vol.2, p.104.

[188] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, p.99.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Netton, *Text and Trauma*, p.79.

[191] Ibid.

[192] Sale, *The Koran*, p.84.

[193] See Muir, Weir, *The Life of Mohammad*.

[194] See G. M. Draycott, *Mahomet Founder of Islam* (London: Martin Secker, 1916), p.335.

[195] Selwyn G. Champion, Dorothy Short, *Reading from World Religions* (Greenwich, USA: Fawcett Publications, 1959), p.240.

[196] F. J. L. Menezes, *The Life and Religion of Mohammed, The Prophet of Arabia* (London: Sands & Co., 1911), p.158.

[197] See Maurice Bucaille, *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* (Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1978); and also his *What is the Origin of Man?*, 9th edn. (Paris: Seghers, 1983).

[198] See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (London: World of Islam Festival Pub. Co., 1976); and also his *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987).

[199] See Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, *Signs in the Heavens: A Muslim Astronomer's Perspective on Religion and Science* (Maryland: Writers' Inc. International, 1992).

[200] ʿAbd al-Majid al-Zindani, *Kitab Tawhid al-Khaliq* (Madinah: Maktabah Tayyibah, 1989); and his *Kitab al-Tawhid* (Madinah: Maktabah Tayyibah, 1990).

[201] Graham, "Qur'an as Spoken Word," p.29.

[202] Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p.52.

[203] Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*, Abu Asad, trans., 2nd edn. (Lahore: Islamic Publications Ltd., 1982), p.10.

[204] Muhammad Zakariyya Kandhalvi, *Faza'il-e-A'ama'l*, Abdul Rashid Arshad, trans. (Karachi: Darul Ishaat, n.d.), pp.111–12, there is a clear and very authentic hadith that declares the confession as the best of the formulas of remembrance of God. See Kandhalvi, *Faza'il*, p.109.

[205] The translation is from Abdullah Y. Ali, *The Holy Qur'an* (Madinah: King Fahd Holy Quran Printing Complex, 1989).

[206] Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, *al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1967), vol.2, p.268; the translation is taken from Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters* (Albany: SUNY, 1984), vol.1, pp.247–48.

[207] ʿImad al-Din Abu al-Fida Isma'il ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-ʿAzim* (Beirut: Dar al-Hilal, 1990), vol.1, p.336.

208 Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Muhammad Zahir ibn Nasir, ed. (Beirut: Dar Tawq al-Najat, 2001), vol.11, p.53, hadith no.3033.

209 Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, vol.1, p.196; see more details about the verse Ayoub, *The Qur'an and its Interpreters*, pp.245 ff.

210 L. Gardet, "God in Islam," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Mircea Eliade, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1993), vol.6, p.27.

211 Ismail R. al-Faruqi, *Al-Tawhid: Its Implications for Thought and Life*, 2nd edn. (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1992), pp.9–10.

212 The terms "*Allah al-Wahid*" and "*Ilah Wahid*" have been used in the Qur'an 21 times.

213 See S. Mahmud al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Maᶜani* (Multan: Maktabah Imdadiyyah, n.d.), vol.15, p.314.

214 Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn al-Husayn ibn ᶜAli al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma' wa al-Sifat* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-ᶜArabi, n.d.), p.32.

215 Gardet, "God in Islam", p.28.

216 Ibid.

217 Al-Ragib al-Isfahani, *Mu'jam Mufradat Alfaz al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1972), p.294.

218 Al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Maᶜani*, vol.15, p.314.

219 Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, p.1124.

220 Ibid.

221 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.15, p.365, hadith no.4593.

222 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.9, p.459, hadith no.2644.

223 Richard C. Martin, *Islam, A Cultural Perspective* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1982), p.92.

224 Sayyid Abul A'la Mawdudi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, Ch. M. Akbar, trans., A. A. Kamal, ed., 4th edn. (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1983), vol.7, pp.201–02.

225 The fact that the story has been recorded by historians like al-Tabari and Ibn Saᶜd does not make the story authentic by itself. See details in M. M. Ahsan, A. R. Kidwai, eds., *Sacrilege Versus Civility: Muslim Perspectives on The Satanic Verses Affair* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1991), pp.138–39.

226 See Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London; New York: Viking Penguin, 1988).

227 Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, pp.101–02.

228 Ibid., p.103.

229 Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p.61.

230 Maxime Rodinson, *Muhammad*, Anne Carter, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books [Random House], 1971), p.104.

231 Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p.104.

232 Ibid., p.101.

233 Rodinson, *Muhammad*, p.107.

234 Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, p.105.

235 Rodinson, *Muhammad*, p.107.

236 Ahmad ibn ꜤAli ibn Hajar al-ꜤAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Imam al-Bukhari*, Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, Muhammad F. ꜤAbd al-Baqi, Q. Muhibb al-Din al-Khatib, eds. (Cairo: Dar al-Diyan li al-Turath, 1987), vol.8, p.293; also Mawdudi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, vol.7, p.216.

237 Al-ꜤAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, vol.8, p.293.

238 Ibid.; also Shibli NuꜤmani, *Sirat-un-Nabi*, M. T. B. Budayuni, trans. (Lahore: Kazi Publications, 1979), vol.1, p.214; Akram Diya al-ꜤUmri, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah al-Sahihah* (Qatar: Dar al-Kutub al-Qatariyyah, 1991), vol.1, pp.171–72.

239 Al-ꜤAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, vol.8, pp.293–94.

240 Ibid., p.294.

241 M. M. Ahsan, "The Muslim Arguement: The 'Satanic' Verses and the Orientalists," *Sacrilege Versus Civility*, p.132.

242 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol.4, pp.170–71.

243 Al-Albani attributes the statement to Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Khuzaymah and not to Ibn Ishaq, the writer of "*Sirah*". See Muhammad Nasr al-Din al-Albani, *Nasb al-Majaniq fi Nafs Qissah al-Gharaniq*, 2nd edn. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1989), p.25.

244 Al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, vol.9, p.177.

245 Al-Qadi ꜤIyad ibn Musa ibn ꜤIyad, *al-Shifa' bi TaꜤrif Huquq al-Mustafa*, Ali Muhammad al-Bajawi, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ꜤArabi, 1977), vol.2, p.750.

246 Ibid.

247 Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad [known as Ibn al-ꜤArabi], *Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d.), vol.5, pp.431 ff. For details see al-Albani, *Nasb al-Majaniq*, pp.26 ff.

248 See Fakhar al-Din al-Razi, *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghayb* [known as *Tafsir al-Kabir*] (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1978), vol.11, p.135.

249 See al-Qurtubi, *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, vol.12, pp.80–84.

250 See al-ꜤAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, vol.8, p.498.

[251] Mahmud ibn Ahmad Badr al-Din al-ʿAyni, ʿ*Umdah al-Qari' Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), vol.9, p.47.

[252] Al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, vol.9, pp.177–86.

[253] Nuʿmani, *Sirat-un-Nabi*, vol.1, p.214.

[254] Mawdudi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, vol.7, p.217.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Ibid., p.218.

[257] Ibid., pp.218–19.

[258] Mufti Muhammad Shafi, *Ma'arif al-Qur'an* (Karachi: Idarah al-Ma'arif, 1990), vol.6, p.277; Islahi, *Mabadi' Tadabbur al-Qur'an*, vol.5, p.271.

[259] Muhammad H. Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, I. R. al-Faruqi, trans. (Indianapolis: North Trust Publication, 1976), p.108; also see Antonie Wessels, *A Modern Arabic Biography of Muhammad: A Critical Study of Muhammad Husayn Haykal's Hayat Muhammad* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), pp.57–64.

[260] Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p.107.

[261] Ibid., p.109; about the conversion of ʿUmar, Thomas W. Arnold observes: "While the result of the embassy to Abyssinia was being looked for in Mecca with the greatest expectancy, there occured the conversion of a man, who before had been one of the most bitter enemies of Muhammad, and had opposed him with the utmost persistence and fanaticism- a man whom the Muslims had every reason then to look upon as their most terrible and virulent enemy, though afterwards he shines as one of the noblest figures in the early history of Islam, *viz*, Umar b. al-Khattab.... The conversion of Umar is a turning-point in the history of Islam: the Muslims were now able to take up a bolder attitude. Muhammad left the house of al-Arqam and the believers publically performed their devotions together round the Kaʿbah...." Thomas W. Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1979), pp.16–17.

[262] Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp.111–12.

[263] Ibid., p.112.

[264] See al-Albani's, *Nasb al-Majaniq*.

[265] Zafar A. Qureshi, *Prophet Muhammad and his Western Critics* (Lahore: Idarah Ma'arif Islami, 1992), vol. II, pp.615 ff.

[266] Rodinson, *Muhammad*, pp.105–06.

[267] Ibid., p.105.

[268] Ibid., p.106.

[269] Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Malik ibn Hisham ibn ʿAyyub al-Hamiri ibn Hisham,

al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah [known as *Sirah ibn Hisham*], 2ⁿᵈ edn. (Cairo: Maktabah Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1955), vol.1, pp.265–66.

²⁷⁰ J. Burton, "Those are the High-Flying Cranes," *Journal of Semitic Studies* (1970), vol.15, no.2, p.265.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p.248.

²⁷² Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p.113.

²⁷³ Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p.104.

²⁷⁴ Stanley Lane-Poole, *Studies in a Mosque* (Beirut: Khayats, 1966), pp.127–88.

²⁷⁵ Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p.101.

²⁷⁶ See Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p.110.

²⁷⁷ Hirschfeld, "New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qur'an," p.35.

²⁷⁸ See Watt, *Bell's Introduction*, p.213.

²⁷⁹ See ibid., pp.206–07.

²⁸⁰ See for instance (35:3); (15:96); (38:5). Most of the Makkan chapters contain many verses denouncing polytheism, idolatry and emphasizing upon God's Unity and Transcendence.

²⁸¹ See Ibn Hisham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah*, vol.1, pp.265, 293–94, 417–19.

²⁸² Reynold A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p.160.

²⁸³ Julian Obermann's article "Islamic Origins," *The Arab History*, Nabih Amin Faris, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), pp.99 ff.

²⁸⁴ Reuben Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), introduction, p.1; also see Tritton, *Islam, Beliefs and Practices*, p.10.

²⁸⁵ Francesco Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, Virginia Luling, Rosamund Linell, trans. (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1968), p.49.

²⁸⁶ Charles J. Adams, "Islam," *Man and His Gods: Encyclopedia of World Religions*, Jeoffroy Parrinder, ed. (London: Hamlyn Publishing Co., 1971), p.394.

²⁸⁷ Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, p.22.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., pp.139–40.

²⁸⁹ See J. M. Rodwell, *The Koran*, (translated from the Arabic) with Introduction by Rev. G. Margoliouth, (New York: Everyman's Library, 1950), pp.3–4 of "Preface", pp.13–14.

²⁹⁰ See Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, p.102.

²⁹¹ See Washington Irving, *Life of Mahomet* (New York: Everyman's Library, 1949), p.46; also see Stobart, *Islam and its Founder*, p.65.

²⁹² Pierce de Lacy Johnstone, *Muhammad and His Power* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901), p.58.

²⁹³ Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol.II, p.660.

²⁹⁴ See Philip K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, 9ᵗʰ edn. (London: Macmillan, 1968), p.113; and his *Capital Cities of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973), pp.13–14.

²⁹⁵ John J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1965), p.24; also see Edward C. Hodgkin, *The Arabs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp.26–28; Anthony Nutting, *The Arabs* (New York: C. N. Potter, 1964), p.19; F. R. J. Verhoeven, *Islam: Its Origin and Spread in Words, Maps and Pictures* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1962), p.23; Bernard Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, 3ʳᵈ edn. (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1964), p.39; and also see George E. Kirk, *A Short History of the Middle East*, 2ⁿᵈ edn. (London: Methun, 1964), p.12.

²⁹⁶ See Jouco Bleeker, Geo Widengren, eds., *Historia Religionum* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), vol. II, p.12.

²⁹⁷ See J. C. G. Greig, ed., *Religions of Mankind Today and Yesterday*, Niele L. Jensen, trans. (Edinburgh; London: Oliver & Boyd, 1967), p.185.

²⁹⁸ Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p.79; also his *The Event of the Qur'an* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1971), p.14; also see Erich W. Bethman, *Bridge to Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1953), pp.23–24; Guillaume, *Islam*, p.29.

²⁹⁹ Greig, *Religions of Mankind*, p.185.

³⁰⁰ For more details see Mawdudi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, vol.4, pp.33–36.

³⁰¹ Smith, *The Bible and Islam*, p.103.

³⁰² The word "jinn" comes from the Arabic verb "*janna*" which means to hide. Therefore, the embryo hidden in the womb is called a *janin* and the heart hidden in the chest is called the *janan*. As the jinns are invisible to human eyes in their normal original state, they are referred to as jinns or hidden ones.

³⁰³ Ibn Taymiyyah has given a detailed account of the Islamic concept of jinn in his *Risalah*. See Ibn Taymiyyah's *Essay on the Jinn*, abridged and translated by Abu Ameenah Bilal Philips (Riyadh: Tawheed Publications, 1989), pp.1–31; also see al-ᶜAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, vol.6, p.344, vol.8, p.675.

³⁰⁴ Smith, *The Bible and Islam*, p.104.

³⁰⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran* (New Hampshire: Ayer Co. Publishers Inc., 1987), p.42.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p.15.

307 Translation is from Thomas B. Irving, *The Qur'an*, 3rd edn. (Vermont: Amana Books, 1988).

308 Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ay al-Qur'an*, Mahmud Muhammad, Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, eds. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1954), vol.3, pp.480–82; also see Abu 'Ali al-Fadl ibn al-Hasan al-Tabarsi, *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dar Maktabah al-Hayat, 1961), vol.2, p.225.

309 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol.1, p.317.

310 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.10, p.169, hadith no.2770.

311 Muhyi al-Din ibn al-ʿArabi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Karim*, Mustafa Ghalib, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1978), vol.1, pp.114–15.

312 For definitions of Hadith, Sunnah and the difference between Hadith *qudsi* and ordinary Hadith see Manna' al-Qattan, *Mabahith fi ʿUlum al-Hadith* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahabah, 1987), pp.10–13; Mahmud al-Tahhan, *Taysir Mustalih al-Hadith* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Maʿarif, 1987), p.127; Abd al-Ghani Abd al-Khaliq, *Hujjiyyah al-Sunnah* (Virginia: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1994), pp.43–70; also see Zain al-Din Abd al-Rahim ibn Husayn al-ʿIraqi, *Al-Taqyid wa al-Idah: Sharh Muqaddimah al-Salah*, Abd al-Rahman Muhammad Uthman, ed. (Madinah: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1969).

313 *Forty Hadith Qudsi*, 6th edn., selected and translated by Ezzeddin Ibrahim, Denys Johnson-Davies (Beirut: The Holy Koran Publishing House, 1990), p.78.

314 Muhammad ibn ʿAli al-Shawkani, *Nayl al-Awtar* [known as *Tafsir al-Shawkani*] (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1973), vol.4, p.499.

315 Translation from Mawdudi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, vol.4, p.230.

316 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p.196.

317 Ibrahim, Johnson-Davies, *Forty Hadith Qudsi*, p.68.

318 The word *ahl al-tawhid* has ocurred in the hadith of Jabir ibn ʿAbd Allah. See Imam Tirmazi, *Sahih Sunan al-Tirmazi*, M. N. al-Albani, ed., 1st edn. (Gulf States: Maktabah al-Tarbiyyah al-ʿArabi, 1988), vol.2, p.323; and Imam Tirmazi, *Sunan al-Timazi*, Ahmad Shakir, ed. (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-ʿArabi, n.d.), hadith no.2737. When the Prophet sent Mu'adh ibn Jabal as governer of Yemen in 9 AH, he told him, "You will be going to Christians and Jews (*ahl al-Kitab*), so the first thing you should invite them to is the assertion of the oneness of Allah (*Yuwahhidu Allah*)." See al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.22, p.363, hadith no.6824.

319 Very often this division is attributed to Ibn Taymiyyah and his school of thought and many scholars do not take it as a standard. But we see it in its embryonic stage

in a number of earlier works. It is not that elaborate as is the case with later theological treatises but its seed is very much visible. See for instance Abu Muhammad ʿAbd Allah ibn Abu Zayd al-Qayrawani (died 386 AH), *Kitab al-Jami' fi al-Sunan wa al-Adab wa al-Maghazi wa al-Tarikh*, M. Abu al-Ajfan, Uthman Battikh, eds. (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1983), pp.107–10; and also see Ibn Khuzaymah, *Kitab al-Tawhid* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Kulliyyat al-Azhariyyah, n.d.), Here we are adopting it to help us elaborate the point at discussion and not as the standard Islamic expression of the concept of *tawhid*.

320 Mawdudi, *Four Basic Qur'anic Terms*, pp.31–32.

321 Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol.2, p542.

322 Ibid.

323 For scientific implications and explanations of the verse see al-Zindani, *Kitab Tawhid al-Khaliq*, pp.43–45.

324 Keith L. Moore, "Highlights of Human Embryology in the Koran and the Hadith," presented at the Seventh Saudi Medical Meeting at King Faisal University on May 3–6, 1982 [published by Muslim Students Association of US and Canada, Ottawa, Quebec, n.d.], p.51.

325 Ibid., pp.51–52.

326 Ibid., p.58.

327 Mawdudi, *Towards Understanding the Qur'an*, vol.3, p.97.

328 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.5, p.182, hadith no.1296.

329 Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, p.261.

330 Al-Shawkani, *Tafsir*, vol.2, p.262.

331 See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, pp.605–06.

332 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p.129.

333 Ahmad ibn Ibrahim ibn ʿIsa al-Sharqi, *Sharh Qasidah ibn al-Qayyam*, 1st edn. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1962), vol.2, p.259; also see Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr al-Zarʿi al-Damashqi ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Ighathah al-Lahfan min Masayid al-Shaytan*, Muhammad S. Kaylani, ed. (Cairo: Matbaʿah Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1961), vol.2, pp.128–29.

334 The translation is from Irving, *The Qur'an*.

335 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p.123.

336 Ibid., p.129.

337 Ibid., p.103.

338 Ibn al-Kalbi has narrated the formula of *talbiyyah* recited by the pagans of Makkah. It said: "*Labbayka Allahumma labbayaka, la sharika laka illa sharikun huwa laka, tamilkuhu wa-ma malaka*" ("Here I am, O God, here I am: Thou hast

no partner except such partner as Thou hast; Thou possesseth him and all that is his."). For a detailed study of this issue see M. J. Kister, *Society and Religion from Jahiliyyah to Islam* (London, UK: Variorum; Vermont, USA: Gower Publishing Group, 1990), ch.1 "*Labbaka, Allahumma, Labbayka... On a monotheistic aspect of a Jahiliyyah practice*", pp.33–57.

[339] Imam Muslim narrates Abu Zar's words, "I used to observe prayer three years before my meeting with Allah's Messenger". See Imam Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*: *al-Jamiᶜ al-Sahih*, Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, trans. (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1987), vol. IV, p.1316.

[340] Al-Bukhari narrates from 'A'ishah that "Quraysh used to fast on the day of ᶜAshura in the Pre-Islamic period..." al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.6, p.7, hadith no.1489; also see Abu ᶜAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr al-Zarᶜi al-Damashqi ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zad al-Maᶜad*, Shuᶜayb al-Arnut, Abd al-Qadir al-Arnut, eds. (Beirut: Muᶜassassah al-Risalah, 1982), vol.2, p.67.

[341] For instance the story of al-Matᶜam ibn ᶜAddi when he went to the Kaᶜbah to tear apart the social bycott contract paper that was hung on the door of the Kaᶜbah against Banu Hashim. He found it eaten away by insects except the word "*Bi-ismika Allahumma*" (with your name O Allah). See Safi-ur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, *al-Raheeq al-Makhtum: The Sealed Nectar* (Makkah: Rabitah al-ᶜAlam al-Islami, 1991), p.128.

[342] Joseph Henninger, "Pre-Islamic Bedouin Religion," *Studies on Islam*, Marlin L. Swartz, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p.15.

[343] Kister, *Society and Religion*, pp.47–48.

[344] Francis E. Peters, *A Reader on Classical Islam* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.39.

[345] David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.8–9.

[346] Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p.62.

[347] Ibid., p.71.

[348] Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p.96.

[349] Ibid.

[350] Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p.110.

[351] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p.203.

[352] Al-Faruqi, *al-Tawhid*, p.21.

[353] Ibid., pp.22–23; here he refers to Paul Tillich's, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1957), vol.2, p.40.

354 Al-Faruqi, *al-Tawhid*, p.23.

355 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.22, p.393, hadith no.6843.

356 Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr al-Zarʿi al-Damashqi ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Badaiʿ al-Fawa'id* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabi, n.d.), vol.1, p.164.

357 See al-Tirmazi, *Sunan al-Tirmazi*, Ahmad Shakir, ed., vol.5, p.530, hadith no.3507.

358 Abu Muhammad ʿAli ibn Ahmad ibn Hazm al-Zahiri, *al-Mahallah: Al-Kitab al-Muhalla bi al-Athar*, Ahmad Shakir, ed. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Tijari, n.d.), vol.1, p.30.

359 Al-ʿAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, vol.11, p.220.

360 Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, David B. Burrell, Nazih Daher, trans. (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), p.167.

361 See al-ʿAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, vol.11, p.220.

362 Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad al-Imam Ahmad* (Cairo: Mu'assasah Qurtubah, n.d.), vol.8, p.63, hadith no.3528.

363 Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p.169.

364 Abu Bakr ibn al-ʿArabi, *Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Maktabah ʿIsa al-Babi, 1967), vol.2, p.805.

365 See al-ʿAsqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, vol.11, p.220.

366 See a very good discussion in Umar S. al-Ashqar, *al-Asmaʿ wa al-Sifat*, 1st edn. (Amman: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1993), pp.66–79.

367 Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p.171.

368 This is only one of the ways to classify the names. There could be several ways to classify them. Al-Sanʿani classified them into four kinds. The only difference between our classification and his classification is that he has further divided the names of essence into "Proper Name" which is Allah and "Negative Names" like *al-Quddus*. (See Muhammad ibn Ismaʿil al-Amir al-Sanʿani, *Subul al-Salam fi Sharh Bulugh al-Maram* (Cairo: Maktabah ʿIsa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1938), vol.4, p.209). We have modified it a little just for the purpose of convenience. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah divides them into six categories (see *Badaiʿ al-Fawa'id*, vol.1, p.160), al-ʿAsqalani into five (see *Fath al-Bari*, vol.11, p.223) and scholars of al-Kalam into four. See Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad fi al-Iʿtiqad* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1983), pp.19–83 for more details.

369 See al-Ashqar, *al-Asmaʿ wa al-Sifat*, p.89.

370 Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p.51; also see Abd al-Rahman Hasan H. al-Maydani, al-ʿAqidah al-Islamiyyah, 3rd edn.

(Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1983), p.157; for details see Gibb, Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.33.

[371] See Abd al-Rahman ibn Hasan Al al-Shaykh, *Fath al-Majid Sharh Kitab al-Tawhid* (Makkah: Matbaʿah al-Hukumah, 1967), p.11; M. Yasin, *al-Iman* (Amman: Dar al-Furqan, 1985), p.35.

[372] Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p.51.

[373] Ibid., p.59; also see al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, pp.37–38.

[374] Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p.60.

[375] Ibid., p.61.

[376]Al-Maydani, al-ʿAqidah al-Islamiyyah, p.197.

[377] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.37.

[378] Ibid.

[379] See Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, pp.102–05.

[380] Ibid., p.143.

[381] See Ibid., pp.131.

[382] See Ibid., pp.130–31.

[383] See Ibid., pp.133–34.

[384] Murata, Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, p.65.

[385] The fact the the name *al-Rahman* has been used as the proper name for God in several verses of the Qur'an has led some orientalists to conclude that "Muhammad derived the formula from South Arabia seems proved..." (Gibb, Kramer, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.35). Andrew Rippin in his article "Rahman and the Hanifs" tries to prove the same. See Andrew Rippin, "Rahman and the Hanifs," *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles Adams*, W. B. Hallaq, D. P. Little, eds. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), pp.153–65. It may be added that the arguments presented in favor of this thesis are good guess works without much historical basis.

[386] Murata, Chittick, *The Vision of Islam*, p.66.

[387] Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p.52.

[388] Baillie, *God was in Christ*, p.123.

[389] Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, pp.1 ff.

[390] Hill, *Learning*, pp.72 ff.

[391] Kenneth Cragg, *The House of Islam* (California: Dickenson Publishing Co. Inc., 1969), p.7.

[392] Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, pp.83–84.

[393] Ibid.

[394] Ibid., pp.131–32.

[395] The books on *'Ijaz al-Qur'an* give a detailed account of the relationship between these names and the subject matter of the passages.

[396] The verse 38 should not confuse the reader that the Islamic Law recommends such a severe punishment for small acts of theft. There are many strict prerequisites like proper investigation, enough eye witnesses, a big amount of the stolen commodity involved, etc. The books of fiqh in general and the books on *Fiqh al-Janai* (Islamic Criminal Law) in particular give details of the requirements as well as the process. See ʿAbd al-Qadir ʿAawdah, *al-Tashriʿ al-Jana'i al-Islami* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1986), vol.1 p.2; ʿAbd al-Rahman al-Jazayri, *Kitab al-Fiqh ʿala al-Madhahib al-Arbaʿah* (Beirut: Dar al-Irshad li al-Tibaʿah wa al-Nashr, n.d.), vol.5, pp.124 ff; Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd, *Bidayah al-Mujtahid wa Nihayah al-Muqtasid* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), vol.2, pp.372 ff. Due respect is given to the requirements of a fair and just trial. Moreover, the circumstances of the crime play a vital role in determining the punishment. The above mentioned capital punishment cannot be implemented if the individual was forced by his circumstances. For instance, ʿUmar refused to cut off the hands of those who stole during drought in Madinah in view of their circumstances. See Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, vol.2, pp.882–86.

[397] Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ghazali on The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p.40.

[398] Ibid., p.37.

[399] Cragg, *The House of Islam*, p.7.

[400] Al-Faruqi, *al-Tawhid*, pp.24–25; also see his artical "Islam and Art," *Studia Islamica*, fasciculi XXXVII (1973), pp.81–109; and his "Misconceptions of the Nature of the Work of Art in Islam," *Islam and the Modern Age* (May, 1970), vol.1, no.1; and his "On the Nature of Art in Islam," *Islam and the Modern Age* (August, 1976), vol.1, no.2,; and his "Divine Transcendence and Its Expression," *World Faiths* (Spring, 1979), vol.17; Thomas W. Arnold, *Painting in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928); Richard Ettinghausen, *The Characted of Islamic Art in the Arab Heritage*, N. A. Faris, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944).

[401] Al-Faruqi, *al-Tawhid*, p.14; I am heavily indebted to al-Faruqi in aspect of *al-Tawhid*'s discussion. See for details ibid., pp.9–16.

[402] Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, p.75.

[403] Al-Faruqi, *al-Tawhid*, p.33.

[404] See John E. Kelsay's doctoral thesis titled "Religion and Morality in Islam" (Chalottesville: University of Virginia, 1985); F. Carney, "Some Aspects of Islamic

Ethics," *Journal of Religion* (1983), vol.63, part.2, pp.159–74; Richard M. Frank, "Moral Obligation in Classical Muslim Theology," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (1983), vol.11, no.2, pp.204–23; for a general study Paul Helm, ed., *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), vols.1–2; Janine M. Idziak, ed., *Divine Command Theory* (New York: Mellen Press, 1979); Wilferd Madelung, "Early Sunni Doctrine Concerning Faith," *Studia Islamica* (1970), vol.32, pp.233–54; Fazlur Rahman, "Some Key Ethical Concepts of the Qur'an," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (1983), vol.11, no.2, pp.170–85; and A. Kevin Reinhart, "Islamic Law as Islamic Ethics," *Journal of Religious Ethics* (1983), vol.11, no.2, pp.186–203; Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore: The John Hopkin University Press, 1984).

[405] See for details Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, chs.1–3.

[406] See for details Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Musa al-Shatibi, *al-Muwafaqat fi Usul al-Shariʿah*, 3rd edn. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijariyyah al-Kubra, 1975), vol.3, p.118; Mahmud Shaltut, *al-Islam ʿAqidah wa Shariʿah* (Cairo: Dar al-Qalam, 1966), p.29; M. Qutb, *Madhahib Fikriyyah Muʿasarah*, 1st edn. (Beirut: Dar al-Sharq, 1983), p.13.

[407] This verse has been interpreted in two ways. Many scholars make a stop at "no one knows its true meanings except Allah" while, others, especially rationalists like Muʿtazilite, pause at "no one knows its true meanings except Allah and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge", implying permission for speculations about and allegorical interpretations of these verses. See Abu Muhammad Abd al-Haqq ibn Atiyya, *al-Muharrar al-Wajiz fi Tafsir al-Kitab al-ʿAziz*, Abdullah ibn Ibrahim al-Ansari, al-Sayyid Abd al-Al, M. al-Shafʿi, eds. (Qatar: The Government of Qatar Edition, 1982), vol.3, p.24.

[408] Binyamin Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'an in the Theology of al-Qasim ibn Ibrahim* (Boston: Brill, 1996), p.4.

[409] Ibid., p.3.

[410] See various books of tafsir in regards to this phrase. For instance see al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, vol.2, p.46.

[411] See Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol.4, p.415; al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, vol.11, pp.130–31.

[412] Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri, *al-Fasl*, vol.2, p.127.

[413] Merlin Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism: Ibn al-Jawzi's Kitab Akhbar as-Sifat* (Boston: Brill, 2002), p.139; Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.301.

[414] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.301.

[415] Ibid., p.302.

[416] Ibid., p.305.

[417] Ibid., p.309.

[418] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.2.

[419] Abd al-Halim Mahmud, *al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1984), pp.88–93; also see Ahmad ibn ʿAli al-Maqrayzi, *al-Khitat wa al-Athar* (Cairo: Matbaʿah al-Nil, 1907), vol.4, pp.180 ff.

[420] See Ali ibn al-Hasan Abu al-Qasim ibn ʿAsakir, *Tahzib Tarikh*, 1st edn. (Damascus: al-Maktabah al-ʿArabiyyah, n.d.), vol.1, p.299; Muhammad ibn al-Murtada al-Yamani ibn al-Wazir, *Ithar al-Haq ʿala al-Khalq* (Cairo: Matbaʿah al-Adab wa al-Mu'ayyid, 1900), p.97; Abu Naʿim al-Isfahani, *Hilyat al-'Awliya' wa Tabaqat al-Asfiya'* (Cairo: Matbaʿah al-Saʿadah, 1932), pp.72–73.

[421] See Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal* (Cairo: al-Halbi, 1968), vol.2, p.11. The Shiite scholar Murtada al-Askari doubts the historical existence of Ibn Saba'. He argues that most of the reports about him are narrated by Tabari through Sayf ibn ʿUmar al-Tamimi (d.170 AH). Sayf, to al-ʿAskari, was not an authentic narrator. Therefore, to him, Ibn Saba' was a mythical figure created by later historians to blame Shiism of these developments. See Murtada al-Askari, *Abdullah ibn Saba' and Other Myths* (Qum: Sharif al-Rida Publishing Co., 1944). Among the non-Shiite, it is Taha Husayn who doubts Ibn Saba's existence. See his *al-Fitnah al-Kubra*, *ʿAli wa Banuh* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1961), p.90.

[422] A. K. Kazi, J. G. Flynn, trans., *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal by Shahrastani* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), p.150.

[423] See Abu al-Hasan ʿAli al-Ashʿari, *Maqalat al-Islamiyyin wa Ikhtilaf al-Musallin*, M. ʿAbd al-Hamid, ed. (Beirut: al-Hikmah, 1994). It should be mentioned here that Hisham ibn al-Hakam argued that God is "a body but not like bodies." Al-Ashʿari, *Maqalat*, p.106; and Hisham al-Jawaliqi argued that God does not have "flesh and blood like us." Al-Ashʿari, *Maqalat*, p.108.

[424] Al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal*, vol.1, p.155.

[425] Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.212.

[426] See Ibn Saʿd, *Tabaqat*, E. Schau, ed. (Leiden: Brills, 1905), vol.7, p.105; M. Husayn al-Dhahabi argues that he died even before 150 AH. See *Mizan al-Iʿtadal* (Cairo: Tabʿah 'Isa al-Babi, 1907), vol.3, p.196.

[427] Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites, The Ghulat Sects* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1988), pp.69–70.

[428] Julius Wellhausen, *The Religio-Political Factions in Early Islam*, R. C. Ostle, ed., R. C. Ostle, S. M. Walzer, trans. (New York: North-Holland / American Elsevier, 1975), p.151.

[429] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.78.

[430] See for details M. Husayn al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafsir wa al-Mufassirun* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-ʿArabiyyah, 1962).

[431] See for details Ahmad ibn Yahya al-Balawazari, *Ansab al-Ashraf*, Hamidullah, ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, n.d.), vol.2, p.241; ʿImad al-Din Abu al-Fida Isma'il ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah* (Cairo: Matbaʿah al-Saʿadah, 1965), vol.9, p.350.

[432] See al-Dhahabi, *Mizan al-Iʿtadal*, vol.1, p.426.

[433] See Ibid., vol.3, p.183; Tash Kubrizadah, *Miftah al-Saʿadah* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, n.d.), vol.2, p.32.

[434] Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah*, vol.9, p.350.

[435] See Abu Muhammad ʿAbd Allah al-Darimi, *Kitab al-Radd ʿala al-Jahmiyyah* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1982), p.7.

[436] Ali Sami al-Nashshar, *Nash'at al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, 3rd edn. (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1965), vol.1, p.329.

[437] Welferd Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), p.506.

[438] Ibid., p.507.

[439] Al-Ashʿari, *Maqalat*, p.161.

[440] Al- Darimi, *Kitab al-Radd*, p.12.

[441] See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmuʿ al-Fatawa*, ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Qasim, ed. (Rabat: Maktabah al-Maʿarif, n.d.), vol.5, p.39.

[442] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.73.

[443] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.285.

[444] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.73.

[445] Al-Nashshar, *Nash'at al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, vol.1, p.337.

[446] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.74.

[447] Quoted from Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.3; See Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac & Co., 1964), pp.58 ff.

[448] Ibrahim Madkur, *Fi al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1976), p.29.

449 Seale, *Muslim Theology*, p.48.

450 William M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), p.147.

451 Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.284.

452 Tijitze J. De Boer, *History of Philosophy in Islam*, E. R. Jones B. D., trans. (London: Luzac & Co., 1970), pp.41–42.

453 Ibid., p.47.

454 Duncan B. Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (Beirut: Khayats, 1965), p.131.

455 Ibid., p.132.

456 Ibid.

457 Seale, *Muslim Theology*, pp.11–20, 50–74.

458 Gibb, Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.37.

459 Harry A. Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam* (London: Harvard University Press, 1976), p.62; also see his "Philosophical Implications of the Problems of Divine Attributes in the Kalam," *J.A.O.S.* (1959); and his *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979).

460 See Abu al-Hasan ʿAli al-Ashʿari, *al-Ibanah ʿan Usul al-Diyanah*, Fawqiyyah H. Mahmud, ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ansar, 1977), p.53.

461 See al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal*, vol.1, p.49.

462 See Saʿd al-Din al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-ʿAqaʾid al-Nasafiyyah* (Cairo: Dar Ihya al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah, 1955), p.78.

463 Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil fi Tarikh* (Cairo: Dar al-ʿIlm li al-Malayin, 1987), vol.7, p.49.

464 Abu Bakr Ahmad ibn ʿAli Ahmad, *Tarikh Baghdad* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʾarif, 1931), vol.7, p.61.

465 See Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidayah*, vol.9, p.350.

466 Arent J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (New York: Barnes & Noble Inc., 1965), p.70.

467 Ibid., p.52.

468 William M. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), pp.65–66.

469 Mahmud, *al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, p.155.

470 Irfan Abdul Hamid Fattah, *Dirasat fi al-Firaq wa al-ʿAqaʾid al-Islamiyyah* (Beirut: Muʾassasah al-Risalah, 1984), pp.231–32.

471 Al-Nashshar, *Nashʾat al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, vol.1, pp.330–31.

[472] Madkur, *Fi al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah*, vol.2, p.29.

[473] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p.52.

[474] Gibb, Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.423.

[475] Ibid.

[476] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.4.

[477] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p.46.

[478] Gibb, Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.424.

[479] See Zahdi Hasan Jarallah, *al-Muʿtazilah* (Cairo: al-Mu'assasah al-ʿArabiyyah li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1947), pp.33, 256; Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, pp.249–50.

[480] Rippin, *Muslims*, vol.1, p.65.

[481] Ibid., p.69.

[482] Frederick M. Denny, *An Introduction to Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1985), p.180.

[483] See Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, pp.58–63; for a detailed study see Walter M. Patton, *Ahmad b. Hanbal and the Mihna* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1897).

[484] See Qadi ʿAbd al-Jabbar, *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsah*, ʿAbd al-Karim ʿUthman, ed., 1st edn. (Cairo: Maktabah Wahabah, 1965); Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, pp.287–91.

[485] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.287.

[486] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.43.

[487] Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, p.136.

[488] Ibid., pp.136–37.

[489] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.46.

[490] Al-Ash'ari, *Maqalat*, p.74. (Translation is mine).

[491] Ibid., p.75.

[492] Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, pp.140–41.

[493] Al-Ash'ari, *Maqalat*, p.76.

[494] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.46; see for details, Wolfson, "Philosophical Implications of the Problems of Divine Attributes in the Kalam," p.73.

[495] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p.70.

[496] Richard M. Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes, The Teaching of the Basrian School of Muʿtazila in the Classical Period* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1978), p.19.

[497] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.67.

[498] Al-Jabbar, *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsah*, pp.151–75.

[499] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.288.

[500] Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p.89.

[501] Al-Faruqi, *Cultural Atlas*, p.288; al-Jabbar, *Sharh al-Usul al-Khamsah*, p.248; al-Zamakhshari, *Tafsir al-Kashshaf*, vol.2, p.54.

[502] Abu al-Husayn ʿAbd al-Rahim al-Khayyat, *Kitab al-Intisar* (Cairo: Dar al-Nahdah al-ʿArabiyyah, 1925), pp.67–68.

[503] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp.4–5.

[504] See al-Ashaʿri, *Maqalat*, p.74.

[505] Ibid.

[506] See a detailed discussion of these interpretations in J. M. S. Baljon, "Qurʾanic Anthropomorphism," *Islamic Studies* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1988), vol.27; also al-Ashʿari, *al-Ibanah*, pp.36–45; al-Jabbar, *Sharh Usul al-Khamsah*, pp.227 ff.

[507] Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, pp.248–49.

[508] George C. Anawati, "Attributes of God: Islamic Concepts," *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987), vol.1, p.514.

[509] Translation taken from Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, pp.246–47; see original in al-Ashaʿri, *Maqalat*, pp.65–66.

[510] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, p.70.

[511] Ibid.

[512] Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, p.246.

[513] Macdonald, *Development of Muslim Theology*, p.145.

[514] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p.89.

[515] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.5.

[516] William M. Watt, "Early Discussions about the Qurʾan," *Muslim World* (1950), vol. XL, p.31.

[517] Hamilton A. R. Gibb, *Modern Trends in Islam* (New York: Otagon Books, 1972), pp.19–20.

[518] Ibid., p.19.

[519] Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, p.250.

[520] Fakhar al-Din al-Razi, *Asas al-Taqdis* (Cairo: Matbaʿah Mustafa al-Babi, 1935), p.180.

[521] See details of their philosophical positions in Seyyed H. Nasr, Oliver Leaman, eds., *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), vol.1, pp.178–97.

[522] See for a detailed study Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp.106 ff.

[523] Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *al-Thamarat al-Mardiyyah* (Leiden: Brills, 1895), pp.57 f.

[524] Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn ʿAli ibn al-Jawzi, *Talbis Iblis* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.d.), p.48.

[525] Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falasafah*, Sulayman Dunya, ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1947), pp.179 ff.

[526] See Mahmud, *al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, pp.255 f.

[527] See details in ibid.

[528] Abu Nasr al-Farabi, *Mabadi' Ara Ahl al-Madinah al-Fadilah* (Leiden: Brills, 1890), pp.17–18; Richard Walzer has translated it into English. See *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985). See more details in al-Farabi's, *Kitab al-Millah wa Nusus Ukhra*, Muhsin Mahdi, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1968).

[529] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.104.

[530] Madkur, *Fi al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah*, vol.2, p.82.

[531] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.109.

[532] Mahmud, *al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, pp.252–54.

[533] See Arthur J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology* (Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1979), p.25; Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp.150–53.

[534] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.154.

[535] Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology*, p.32.

[536] Quoted from Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.154.

[537] Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology*, p.36; also see Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp.162 f.

[538] Madkur, *Fi al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah*, vol.2, p.82.

[539] See Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani, *Rahat al-ʿAql* (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-ʿArabi, 1952), p.46; also Arif Tamir, *Khams Rasail Ismaʿiliyyah* (Damascus: Dar al-Insaf, 1956); Adil al-Awa, *Muntakhabat Ismaʿiliyyah* (Damascus: Matbaʿah al-Jamiʿah al-Suriyyah, 1957); Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp.203–09.

[540] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.6.

[541] Ibid., p.16.

[542] Ibid., p.326.

[543] Ibid., p.332.

[544] See al-Ashʿari, *Maqalat*, pp.106–08; see also Abraham S. Halkin, "The Hashwiyya," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (December, 1934), vol.54, no.4, pp.1–28.

[545] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, pp.89–90.

[546] Ibid., p.92.

[547] Ibid.

[548] Ibid.

[549] Nuʿman Abu Hanifah, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar*, Mulla Ali al-Qari, ed. (Cairo: ʿIsa al-Babi, 1955). For English translation and commentary see Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*. Some scholars like Watt attribute this book to some later (between 900–950 CE) Hanafi sources.

[550] See Shams al-Din Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Dhahabi, *Mukhtasar al-ʿUluww li al-ʿAliyy al-Ghaffar*, M. Nasr al-Din al-Albani, ed., 1st edn. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1981), pp.140–41.

[551] See Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Sawn al-Mantaq wa al-Kalam*, Ali Sami al-Nashshar, Suad Ali Abd al-Razzaq, eds. (Cairo: Silsilah Ihya' al-Turath, Dar al-Nasr, 1970), vol.1, pp.47–49.

[552] See Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *al-Radd ʿala al-Zanadiqah wa al-Jahmiyyah* ʿAbd al-Rahman ʿUmayrah, ed. (Riyad: Dar al-Liwa, 1982).

[553] Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004) p.xix; also see Muhammad ibn ʿAli al-Shawkani, *al-Tuhaf fi Madhahib al-Salaf* (Cairo: Matbaʿah al-Imam, n.d.).

[554] Abrahamov, *Anthropomorphism and Interpretation of the Qur'an*, p.6.

[555] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p.189.

[556] Ibid., p.190.

[557] William M. Watt, *Early Islam: Collected Articles* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), p.88. Wesley Williams goes against the scholarly consensus and argues that Ibn Hanbal never implied the *bila kayf* formula in his writings. See his "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal: A Study of Anthropomorphism in Early Islamic Discourse," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (2002), vol.34, pp.448–49.

[558] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.4.

[559] Nasr, Leaman, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p.107.

[560] Watt, *Early Islam*, pp.88–89.

[561] Oliver Leaman, *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p.49; Binyamin Abrahamov, "The *Bi-la Kayfa* Doctrine and its Foundations in Islamic Theology," *Arabica* (November, 1995), vol.42, pp.365–79.

[562] Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal: Book of Religious and Philosophical Sects: Part 1*, William Cureton ed. (London: Society for the Publication of Oriental Texts, 1842), p.76.

[563] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p.80.

564 Ibid.

565 Armstrong, *A History of God*, p.165. Wesley Williams, a University of Michigan graduate, argues against an established scholarly consensus and declares Ibn Hanbal as "an anthropomorphist. He affirmed for the divine a human form, including a face, eyes, curly hair, mouth, voice, breath, chest and two elbows, back, arms, hands with a palm, five fingers and fingertips, legs, shin, feet, soul, physical beauty, a limit, and even, shockingly, loins. He affirmed the external meanings of these attributes and refused to qualify them with bilkafa." Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal," p.449.

566 Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p89.

567 See details in Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa,* vol.5, pp.323 ff.

568 See Muwaffaq al-Din ʿAbd Allah ibn Ahmad ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi, *Tahrim al-Nazar fi Kutub Ahl al-Kalam: Censure of Speculative Theology*, George Makdisi, trans. (London: Luzac, 1962).

569 See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhaj al-Sunnah fi Naqd Kalam al-Shiʿah wa al-Qadariyyah*, Muhammad ibn Rashad Salim, ed. (Riyadh: Islamic University of al-Imam Muhammad bin Saud, 1985); *Naqd al-Mantaq*, 1st edn. (Cairo: Matbaʿah al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyyah, 1951).

570 See for instance Umar S. al-Ashqar, *Asal al-Iʿtiqad*, 1st edn. (Kuwait: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1990); and his *al-ʿAqidah fi Allah* (Amman: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1995); also see Muhammad Nasr al-Din al-Albani, *Sharh al-ʿAqidah al-Tahawiyyah* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1984).

571 Nasr, Leaman, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, vol.1, pp.116–17.

572 Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p.162.

573 Mohammad ibn Salih al-Uthaymin, *al-ʿAqidah al-Wastiyyah li Ibn Taymiyyah* (Virginia: Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences, 1991), p.6; Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa*, vol.1, p.324.

574 Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa*, vol.5, p.202.

575 Ibid., p.207.

576 See details of the arguement in Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Risalah al-Madniyyah fi Tahqiq al-Majaz wa al-Haqiqah fi Sifat Allah Taʿala*, 2nd edn. (Makkah: al-Matbaʿah al-Salafiyyah, 1932), pp.7–10.

577 Ibid., p.199. (Translation is mine).

578 Ibid., pp.284–85.

579 Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.325.

580 Arthur J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965), p.22.

[581] Al-Nashshar, *Nash'at al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, vol.1, p.641.

[582] Madkur, *Fi al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah*, vol.2, p.34; George Makdisi, "Hanbalite Islam," *Studies on Islam*, M. L. Swartz, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.216–74, see especially, pp.226, 253.

[583] Gibb, Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.152.

[584] Ibid.

[585] See details in al-Dhahabi, *Mukhtasar al-ʿUluww*, p.74.

[586] Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p.152.

[587] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa*, vol.5, p.330.

[588] Ibid., p.349.

[589] Ibid., p.243.

[590] See Abu Bakr Taqi al-Din al-Husni, *Dafʿu Shubah Man Shabbaha wa Tamarrada wa Nasaba dhalik ila al-Imam Ahmad* (Cairo: al-Halbi, 1931), p.16.

[591] Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri, *al-Fasl*, vol.1, p.166.

[592] See Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj ʿAbd al-Rahman ibn ʿAli ibn al-Jawzi, *Dafaʿ Shubhah al-Tashbih*, al-Kawthari, ed. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tawfiqiyyah, n.d.), p.8; also his *Talbis Iblis* (Cairo: al-Matbaʿah al-Muniriyyah, n.d.).

[593] Al-Jawzi, *Dafaʿ Shubhah al-Tashbih*, p.8.

[594] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.397.

[595] Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Baqillani, *Kitab al-Tamhid*, Yusuf al-Yasuʿi, ed. (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Sharqiyyah, 1957), see chapter on *tawhid*, chapter on *al-ism wa al-musamma*.

[596] See al-Ashʿari, *al-Ibanah*; and his *Maqalat*; for the English translation, see *The Theology of al-Ashʿari: The Arabic Texts of al-Ashʿari's "Kitab al-Lumaʿ" and "Risalat Istihsan al-Khawd fi ʿIlm al-Kalam,"* with briefly annotated translations and appendices by Richard J. McCarthy (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953).

[597] Al-Razi, *Asas al-Taqdis*, p.223.

[598] See details in Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, pp.84 ff.

[599] Ibid., p.85.

[600] Al-Ashʿari, *al-Ibanah*, pp.8–9.

[601] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p.90; Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p.105.

[602] Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, pp.104–05.

[603] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, p.85.

[604] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.85.

[605] Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, pp.104 f.

[606] Ibid., p.80; al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal*, vol.1, p.95.

[607] Al-Ash°ari, *al-Ibanah*, p.43.

[608] See ibid., p.45.

[609] See al-Ash°ari, *Maqalat*, pp.109–10.

[610] Watt, *Islamic Philosophy*, p.86.

[611] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p.92.

[612] Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p.105.

[613] Ibid., pp.105–06.

[614] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa*, vol.5, pp.90 ff.

[615] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, pp.92–93.

[616] Kazi, Flynn, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, p.85.

[617] See M. Zahid al-Kawthari's commentary on *Ibn °Asakar's Tabyin Kadhb al-Muftra* (Damascus: Matba°ah al-Tawfiq, 1954), p.28.

[618] Armstrong, *History of God*, pp.166–67.

[619] Watt, *Early Islam*, pp.89–90.

[620] Armstrong, *History of God*, p.167.

[621] Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, p.93.

[622] See al-Ash°ari, *al-Ibanah*, pp.40 f.

[623] Ibid., p.45.

[624] Rippin, *Muslims*, vol.1, p.70.

[625] Anawati, "Attributes of God: Islamic Concept," p.516.

[626] Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Tayyib al-Baqillani, *al-Insaf fi ma Yajibu I'tiqaduh wa la Yajuz al-Jahal bih* (Damascus: Izzat al-Husayni Publishers, 1950), pp.41–42.

[627] Ibid., p.25.

[628] Ibid., p.24.

[629] See another contemporary of al-Baqillani who was likewise an Ash°ari: Abu al-Muzaffar al-Isfra'ini, *al-Tabsir fi al-Din* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Khanji, 1955).

[630] For a contrasting view of *ta'wil* see Umar S. al-Ashqar, *al-Ta'wil: Khuturatuhu wa Atharuh* (Amman: Dar al-Nafa'is, 1992).

[631] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.90.

[632] Gibb, *Mohammedanism*, p.79.

[633] °Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq* (Damascus: Tab°ah al-Sayyid °Izzat al-°Attar al-Husayni, 1948).

[634] Al-Taftazani, *Sharh al-°Aqa'id al-Nasafiyyah*.

[635] See Abu al-Ma°ali ibn °Abd al-Malik al-Juwayni, Imam al-Haramayn, *Kitab al-Irshad ila Qawati° al-Adillah fi Usul al-I°tiqad*, Jean Dominique Luciani, ed. and trans. (Paris: E. Leroux, 1938).

[636] Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*; *Kitab Iljam al-'Awam 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Muniriyyah, 1933); *al-Munqadh min al-Dalal* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988).

[637] Al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*; and *Nihayah al-Aqdam fi 'Ilm al-Kalam* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004).

[638] al-Razi, *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghayb*; *Asas al-Taqdis*; *I'tiqadat Firaq al-Muslimin wa al-Mushrikin* (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahdah, 1938).

[639] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.90.

[640] Madkur, *Fi al-Falsafah al-Islamiyyah*, vol.2, pp.55–56.

[641] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.90.

[642] Rippin, *Muslims*, vol.1, p.71.

[643] Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*, p.36; also see his *Kitab Iljam al-'Awam* which was specifically written for this purpose.

[644] Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*, p.36.

[645] Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*, pp.36–41; also see *Kitab Iljam al-'Awam*, p.7 where he gives example of "Surah" in connection with God.

[646] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.91.

[647] See for definition of '*ta'wil*' in ibn Rushd, *Fasl al-Maqal*, pp.32–33; al-Razi, *Asas al-Taqdis*, p.182.

[648] Watt, *Early Islam*, pp.91–92.

[649] Ibid., p.93.

[650] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, pp.312–14.

[651] Ibid., p.395.

[652] Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri, *al-Fasl*, vol.2, pp.127–28.

[653] That is what is attributed to Ibn 'Abbas. See Nasir Khusraw, *Tanwir al-Miqbas Min Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas*, 1st edn. (Tehran: Intisharat Istiqlal, n.d.), p.97; also see Jalal al-Din Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Mahalli, Jalal al-Din 'Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr al-Suyuti, *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1993), p.97.

[654] See for instance (7:11); (15:28–29).

[655] See al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, vol.12, pp.225–26.

[656] Al-Ash'ari, *al-Ibanah*, p.43.

[657] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.401.

[658] Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah and al-Bayhaqi refute the hadith narrated by 'Urwah ibn Rawim specifying that Adam's creation was different from the rest of creation with the commandment "Be". They argue that this 'Urwah, who narrates this report from Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ansari, never had the opportunity to see or learn from

Jabir as he died before him. This is in addition to a number of other inauthentic reporters in the chain like ʿAbd Rabbih ibn Salih and Hisham ibn ʿAmmar. See al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.317.

659 Also see Qur'an 69:44–47.

660 See al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.331; al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma'ani*, vol.13, p.26.

661 See al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, pp.331–32.

662 Abu al-Hasan Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), vol.13, p.119; al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.340; al-Hafiz ʿAli ibn ʿUmar al-Daraqutni has colleted most of the *ahadith* in connection with attributes of God in his book *Kitab al-Sifat*, Abdullah al-Ghunayman, ed., 1st edn. (Madinah: Maktabah al-Dar, 1981).

663 See al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.340.

664 Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri, *al-Fasl*, vol.2, p.128.

665 Abu Zakariya Yahya ibn Sharaf al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim* (Riyad: Maktabah al-Riyad al-Hadithah, n.d.), vol.15, p.204.

666 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.22, pp.420, hadith no.6863.

667 See for more details al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, pp.333–34.

668 Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn al-Furak al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith wa Bayanuh*, Musa Muhammad Ali, ed., 2nd edn. (Beirut: ʿAlam al-Kutub, 1985), p.240.

669 See al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad*, pp.36–37.

670 Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.15, p.85, hadith no.4470.

671 Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p.108.

672 See al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.352.

673 Al-Nawawi, *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, vol.18, p.183.

674 For more discussion of this and other reports especially the one discussing "the Chair (*Kursi*) being the place of His two feet", see al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, pp.352–61. Al-Bayhaqi discusses the inauthentic nature of that report on page p.354.

675 Al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith*, p.131.

676 Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p.109.

677 See al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.361.

678 See ibid., p.448.

679 Al-Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, vol.4, p.139, hadith no.1262.

680 See al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad*, pp.39–40.

681 Ibid., p.40.

682 See al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith*, pp.199–211; and al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, pp.450 ff.

[683] Gibb, Kramers, "Tashbih," *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.583.

[684] Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, pp.107–08.

[685] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa*, vol.5, p.578.

[686] Ibid., p.579.

[687] See more details in al-Dhahabi, *Mukhtasar al-ʿUluww*, pp.191 f.

[688] See details in al-Alusi, *Ruh al-Maʾani*, vol.9, pp.153–61.

[689] See details of reports about the issue in Muhammad ibn ʿUthman ibn Abi Shaybah (d. 297 AH), *Kitab al-ʿArsh wa ma Ruwiya Fiha*, Muhammad ibn Hamd al-Humud, ed. (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1991); and Muwaffaq al-Din ʿAbd Allah ibn Ahmad ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi, *Ithbat al-ʿUluww*, Badar ibn Abdullah al-Badar, ed., 1st edn. (Kuwait: al-Dar al-Salafiyyah, 1986).

[690] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asmaʾ*, p.408.

[691] Ibid., pp.408–09.

[692] Al-Ashʾari, *al-Ibanah*, p.37.

[693] Al-Dhahabi, *Mukhtasar al-ʿUluww*, pp.49 ff.

[694] See Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa*, vol.5, pp.578 ff; see Abdullah al-Sabat, *al-Rahman ʿala al-ʿArsh Istawaʾ* (Kuwait: al-Dar al-Salafiyyah, 1978), pp.37–38.

[695] Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad*, p.35; *Ihyaʾ ʿUlum al-Din* (Damascus: ʿAlam al-Kutub, n.d.), p.95.

[696] Al-Ghazali, *Kitab al-Iqtisad*, p.35, 38; for more details see al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asmaʾ*, pp.405–15; Gatje, *The Qurʾan and its Exegesis*, p.149.

[697] Al-Ghazali, *Ihyaʾ ʿUlum al-Din*, p.92.

[698] Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, vol.11, p.107, hadith no.3079. Al-Isfahani has brought all the other narrations of this report and interpreted them metaphorically. See his *Mushkal al-Hadith*, pp.45–65.

[699] See al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith*, p.67; Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism*, pp.174–75.

[700] Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism*, p.175.

[701] Al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith*, p.67.

[702] See Ibn al-Jawzi, *Dafaʾ Shubah al-Tashbih*, p.60; Al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith*, pp.67–68.

[703] Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism*, pp.175–76.

[704] George Makdisi, *Ibn ʿIqil: Religion and Culture in Classical Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp.103 ff.

[705] See Ibn Taymiyyah, *Daqaʾiq al-Tafsir al-Jamiʾ li Tafsir Ibn Taymiyyah* (Damascus: Muʾassasah ʿUlum al-Qurʾan, 1983), vol.2, p.171.

[706] Al-ʿAyni, ʿ*Umdah al-Qari'*, vol.18, p.284; al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.290; see Watt, "Created in His Image: A Study in Islamic Theology," *Early Islam*, pp.94–95.

[707] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.290; Watt, *Early Islam*, p.95.

[708] Al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith*, pp.50 ff.

[709] Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism*, pp.170 ff.

[710] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.95.

[711] Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, p.108.

[712] Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.291; Watt, *Early Islam*, p.96.

[713] Al-ʿAyni, ʿ*Umdah al-Qari'*, vol.18, p.284; Al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.291; Watt, *Early Islam*, p.96.

[714] See for details, al-Isfahani, *Mushkal al-Hadith*, pp.62 ff.

[715] See Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism*, pp.173 ff.

[716] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.99.

[717] Ibid.; al-ʿAyni, ʿ*Umdah al-Qari'*, vol.18, p.284.

[718] Ibn al-Arabi, *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, vol.8, p.82; Al-Qurtubi also prefers this interpretation. See his *Ahkam al-Qur'an*, vol.20, p.114.

[719] Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism*, pp.174 ff.

[720] Williams, "Aspects of the Creed of Imam Ahmad," p.443.

[721] Ibid.

[722] Ibid., pp.443 ff.

[723] Ibid., pp.445 ff.

[724] Ibid., p.454.

[725] Ibid., p.455.

[726] Swartz, *A Medieval Critique of Anthropomorphism*, p.137.

[727] Ibid., pp.134–35.

[728] Ibid., p.137.

[729] Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah reports the same about the Shafiʿi jurist Abu al-ʿAbbas Ahmad ibn ʿUmar ibn al-Surayj. See Abu ʿAbd Allah Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr al-Zarʿi al-Damashqi ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Ijtima' al-Juyush al-Islamiyyah ʿala Ghazwi al-Mua'ttalati wa al-Jahmiyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1984), vol.1, p.101.

[730] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.100; for more details of the argument see al-Bayhaqi, *Kitab al-Asma'*, p.289.

[731] Mahmud, *al-Tafkir al-Falsafi fi al-Islam*, pp.98–106; and his *al-Islam wa al-ʿAql* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿarif, 1988), pp.128 ff.

[732] Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Fatawa*, vol.5, p.108.

[733] See al-Ash'ari, *Maqalat*, p.106.

[734] Madelung, *Religious Schools and Sects in Medieval Islam*, p.122.

[735] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.100.

[736] Gibb, Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p.34.

[737] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, p.22.

[738] Al-Faruqi, *al-Tawhid*, p.27.

[739] Ibid.

[740] Watt, *Early Islam*, p.93.

[741] Netton, *Allah Transcendent*, pp.27–28.

[742] Ibid., pp.331–32; unless Netton meant from the term that our language about God is always inadequate and imperfect.

Conclusion

This study has attempted to demonstrate how humanity has managed to envision God in human terms bending religion to the service of this cause, and the various strange dimensions this has led to with regards to perceptions of the Divine. The great defence has always been resort to scripture, highly questionable as I have shown, and theological debate as to whether the language used to illuminate God should be interpreted metaphorically or literally.

There are three main reasons for a strong objection to an anthropomorphized understanding of God: 1) With regards to scripture itself it is an indefensible position belying the message of the prophets 2) It is not a rational perspective, hence most writings and theological discussions take on an apologetic and/or controversial form, and a reasoned understanding of faith is conspicuous by its absence 3) The response particularly since the rise of literacy and the age of the enlightenment, has been one of growing alienation, if not outright skepticism and/or vacant understanding, as to who God actually is, rather than intellectual conviction and clarity of thought of the highest order.

Whatever the case, there seems to be a direct and inverse relationship between anthropomorphism, the ascription to God of human characteristics and emotions, the visualisation of God whether in verbal imagery or physical form, and strict monotheism. Meaning that notions of a transcendent and unique God together with an internalized consciousness of His Unity, become ever more diluted, to the point of nonexistence, the more corporeal aspects are introduced and legitimized.

And the more the attempt to "reveal" God is made, the more elusive "hidden" He becomes, accounting for the endless theological studies, and oftentimes heated debates, that have historically proliferated as to His nature, essence, and outward form. This inverse relationship is significant by its existence and should be noted.

Because ambiguity begets ambiguity, and dangers of a diffused understanding of God's unity and transcendence become amplified once ideas of anthropomorphism are introduced, the Qur'an adopted a clear, highly contained approach. So explicit are the Qur'anic verses that one of Islam's deepest fears has been to violate in any way, shape, or form the principles of *tawhid* as enshrined in the Qur'an and Hadith. Thus in Islam God stands alone, unique and majestic, and Muslims remain ever vigilant against weakening or adulterating their understanding of His Oneness and His transcendence.

It is my contention that in an age of intellect and scientific inquiry, an anthropomorphized God spells in fact, and as the opening lines of this study indicate, the death of God. Although couched in dramatic terms the statement is rather a matter of fact one, and fortunately not entirely true. For it is the anthropomorphasized God who has died but certainly not the monotheistic one. In my opinion the success of the secularist worldview largely resides in its apparent intellectual appeal when juxtaposed against a non-intellectual version of God, a God controlled by our five senses and one who constantly in the words of Nietzsche deserves our "pity". For any solution to the problem we have to admit that secularism is not the triumph of intellect over superstition but rather an indication of humanity's global alienation, its loss of the purpose and meaning of life, and its need for a transcendent God, something greater than man and the cosmos he lives in.

God created Man in His *moral image* meaning that He wished humanity to live a life marked by justice, equality, fair dealing, mutual respect, sympathy, love, compassion, and charity etc. Humanity on the other hand chose to violate even the most basic moral commandments of God and returned the favor by creating God in *Man's own image* rather crudely bringing the ineffable transcendental Other into the realms of structure and space, to serve nothing but hidden agendas and selfish desires. Indeed, the children of Abraham (by this is meant the

Semitic consciousness) so personalized, nationalized and anthropomorphized the transcendental Deity that He in effect became just a larger, more powerful and lethal version of themselves. As such humanity did not hesitate to impart onto God its varied individual, communal and national agendas, practices, ideas, likes and dislikes etc., to thereby create an absolute out of finite ideas of nationhood, ethnicity, race, polity, ideology and even theology.

Elevating to the highest levels of significance limited historical phenomena such as land, race, a historical person or a particular notion of divinity or law, what humanity ultimately managed to do was to replace the One and Only absolute with infinitely inferior erected multiple absolutes of an inherently finite nature and value beside Him. It was inevitable that this idolatrous venture, this man-made idea of a national or personalized God, would lead to heated response, violent resistance and eventually degenerate into nothingness. Enlightenment "Deism" followed by scientific agnosticism and finally atheism would be the fated outcome. As science inexorably developed, and a philosophy of secular humanism and materialism replaced ideas of religion and God, becoming the new cultural ethos, bold assertions such as those of Karl Marx that religion was the opium of the people, came to hold a deeper grip on imagination. The key to human happiness now lay in maximizing ones material needs in this life and not deferring gratification to some sort of paradise after death. Forgetting of course that the raison d'etre of religion was to solve the problem of meaning in life and prepare for life after death and not to satisfy man's immediate needs.

Meanwhile, that which could not be measured, quantified, or simply observed, was rendered obsolete. Hence, the transcendental Other Who stood against and beyond the utilitarian sphere and did not render Himself to an empirically demonstrable scientific fact was in turn rendered useless, with religion simply dismissed as the product of infantile fears and experiences. The result has been a tremendous and tragic loss of faith such that even American theologian Harvey Cox is able to declare in his bestseller, *The Secular City*, the death of God and the deification of humanity rather than a transcendent deity.

Yet statistics speak louder than statements. The brave new world of Western orthodoxy embodied in scientific rationalism and secular

humanism may have succeeded to some extent in eliminating both God, spirituality and religion from our immediate conscious, but it has not succeeded in eliminating human suffering, inequity and violence. Indeed some of the worst wars in human history have been fought under the banner of secular ideologies and dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini. Some would argue that the hopes of the Enlightenment died in Auschwitz, the romance of socialism and communism during the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the glamour of capitalism and science during the two world wars. Furthermore, atheistic ideas of the past few centuries are themselves becoming irrelevant to 21st century man or in the words of John D. Caputo, mere "perspectives… constructions, and fictions of grammar,"[1] just " one more story told by people with historically limited imaginations, with contingent conceptions of reason and history, of economics with labor, of nature and human nature, of desires, sexuality, and women, and of God, and faith."[2] Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80) once spoke of a God-shaped hole in the human consciousness by which he meant living in a universe devoid of meaning and purpose. The quest for God is intrinsic to human nature because it is the quest for meaning, for the purpose of our existence. A deified humanity is no solution to this universal longing. The true solution lies in the mysterious, ineffable and transcendent Other Who is the source of existence and the ultimate answer to humanity's craving for meaning. In the words of Caputo, "Whatever it is you say God is, God is more… the very formula that describes God is that there is no formula with which God can be described."[3] This is so true because "there is no God but One God" as the Islamic affirmation stipulates.

The true solution to humanity's suffering, anxiety and longing lies in a proper response to this transcendental source of being rather than worrying about His essence or just believing in His existence. Religion is a deeply subjective experience, and so God is known not through measurement but inner communication. This type of response requires involvement of the totality of our being, a set of spiritual exercises and a pious, dedicated, disciplined and moral lifestyle. And it is this compassionate lifestyle that will enable humanity to break free of the shackles of selfhood, greed, ego, and narrow identity to reflect the true unity of God Almighty by furthering the unity of humanity, existence and the cosmos.

Conclusion

In sum it is the opinion of this author that the postmodern and post-secular longing for God will not be quenched by pre modern anthropo-morphic and corporeal concepts of the Divine which have simply brought God down to this cosmos, with a precise historical function and a specified location, reducing Him to a lowercase god, and causing the soul to detract from the great sense of awe and reverence that it should and has been created to feel at mention of Him.

The primary assertions, findings and conclusions of this study are summarized below:

(1) THE GOD PARADIGM presented by the data of the Hebrew Bible is not consistent. Polar tendencies are quite visible. Although transcen-dental monotheism is present it is very much scattered throughout the books of the Hebrew Bible and not systematically presented, clearly elaborated or completely safeguarded against possible misconceptions, exploitation and violence. In practice this means that to derive a concept of the absolute otherness and transcendence of God from the text of the Hebrew Bible one has to sift through a great many contradictory statements and assertions, plough through an inordinate amount of in-formation, and face certain thorny problems in order to generate some level of understanding. And this cannot be done satisfactorily without external help.

In contrast an anthropomorphic conception of the Deity is strikingly evident. Crude and overt anthropomorphic descriptions, attributes, qualities, and portrayals abound and are so pervasive throughout the text that even a cursory read will leave the impression of the God of the Hebrew Bible as being undoubtedly anthropomorphic. Many of the biblical anthropomorphisms are naive, and at times powerfully concrete and corporeal. Yet, such graphic depictions are not essentially needed for the sort of modality intrinsic to proper religious communication except for the type of religious understanding which holds God as absolutely corporeal. God is presented as a body, walking, talking, searching after somebody, weeping and crying, resting, wrestling, repenting, lamenting etc. In certain incidents He is further shown lack-ing power, knowledge, mercy, justice, impartiality, universality and so on, the basic traits in other words of a transcendent God. On the other

hand, many human limitations, qualities and categories are ascribed to God such that He often appears like a human being albeit of a higher rank and/or gigantic in proportion. Many of these passages can be interpreted metaphorically but a great majority of them would not render to such an interpretation without violence to the text. At times it would ironically appear that what we have in front of us is man creating God in his own image, likeness and form rather than the other way around. Consequently, that image quite often suffers the finitude of its creator. In sum the God of the Hebrew Bible as painted by the scripture is not a Being one would deem to be the "Transcendent Perfect" Deity but one rather Who is weak suffering the many imperfections of human beings and really a supernatural mirror of themselves.

(2) THE HEBREW BIBLE's God paradigm seems to be progressive and evolutionary. The conception of God of the later prophets, especially those after 8th century BC, is more elaborate, systematic and unified than the earlier writings though not necessarily non-corporeal or non-anthropomorphic. This prophetic conception, as outlined in the scripture at least, is as much anthropomorphic as the earlier writings but in a different way. The anthropomorphic expressions utilized are, to certain degrees, refined and at times convey a sense of mystical experience or spiritual reflection. Many of them render to metaphorical interpretation more easily than their counterparts in the so-called books of Moses and other earlier writings. Nevertheless, they still ultimately convey nothing less than the concept and imagery of an anthropomorphic and imperfect deity.

(3) THE TRADITIONAL RABBINIC mind is very close to the God paradigm of the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, there are times when the Rabbinic God seems more anthropomorphic, corporeal, familiar and bound than the God of the Hebrew Bible.

(4) PHILOSOPHICAL AND TRANSCENDENTAL thinking, in the sense of non-corporealism or non-anthropomorphism, had been looked upon (by religious Jewry at large) as non-biblical. Such an understanding of God had not been very popular in Judaic tradition over the centuries

following the Rabbinic period. The few rational souls such as Philo and Maimonides, who attempted to incorporate philosophical transcendence into the Hebrew conception of the divine (mostly under foreign influence) failed unfortunately to convince the orthodoxy of their transcendental ideas. Their views were regarded as not in conformity with the written texts and the Hebrew legacy.

(5) IT IS NOT VERY HARD to determine the origins of anthropomorphic biblical passages and human nature. Human creativity seems to have played a vital role in the creation of these anthropomorphically oriented, corporeally constructed, and at times immorally tuned, passages of the Hebrew Bible. This human element, origin and nature of the Hebrew Bible, ignored over the centuries, has been highlighted by many biblical scholars since the 19th century. It has almost become a standard explanation, particularly in academic circles, of the many theological, moral and religious difficulties presented by the text of the Hebrew Bible.

(6) IT HAS BECOME IMPOSSIBLE to logically prove or rationally substantiate the traditional claims of the Hebrew Bible as being the inerrant word of God verbatim. Modern critical scholarship looks upon it as the word of man or at best an indirect inspiration with the word of God mixed up with the words of man. The presence of a labyrinthine maze of centuries old allegorical interpretations and polar and contradictory tendencies with regards to the Deity are not proofs of the depths and infinite mysteries of these problematic passages but rather the other way around, evidence of the sheer limitations and imperfections of their human writers and a descendency in thinking. The existence of all these problems, wittingly or unwittingly confessed by almost all biblical scholars, prove the point that the Hebrew Bible in its present shape and form cannot be taken as the inerrant word of God.

(7) THE NEW TESTAMENT seems to be far removed from the Hebraic universe of discourse and very close to Hellenistic thought patterns and world view. Furthermore, it is not theocentric but Christocentric. A greater variety of theologies (Christologies) is presented in the New

Testament than the variety one notices in the Old Testament and not all of them are mutually congruent. These theological models are more problematic, divergent and mutually dissonant.

(8) THE NEW TESTAMENT is not what Jesus said and wrote about himself, and probably not even what he understood about himself. It is what the Church and later Christians understood and interpreted that he was or should have been.

(9) TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY is a result of centuries of later reflections, controversies and developments. It is neither a necessary reflection of what the text of the New Testament presents nor a sole product of pure theological curiosity. In fact cultural realities, political motivations and personal agendas and vendettas have played a significant role in formulating its shape and content. Neither is incarnational theology clearly charted out in the New Testament in its developed, traditional, and literal sense. No one can prove it to be the essence of New Testament writings as a whole without external intrusions and arbitrary interpretations. It could possibly be construed from some New Testament writings but not without superficial efforts and violence to the text on the part of the one who intends to do so.

(10) CHRISTIAN INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY, especially in its literal sense, is absolutely corporeal and anthropomorphic and involves the fevered veneration of a triune Godhead. In point of fact it forms the epitome of corporeal thought in the religious consciousness of some Semites. In Incarnation, the practical separation between the divine and human becomes impossible. In reality it is the divine, the Logos, which is dominant, visible and worshipped, whilst the human Jesus is conceded and concealed somewhere in the shadows. Yet, God is often claimed but seldom given a true and natural existence of His own. In reality, God the Father, the supposed first person of the holy Trinity and the original source of all, seems to play second fiddle to Lord Jesus Christ, the supposed second person of the Trinity, who often is shown to be taking over in such a fashion that God the Father often becomes invisible. Christianity, in its traditional popular sense, is really what the

word "Christianity" literally means. It is a faith about Jesus Christ, and a deification of his person. Exalting this historical human figure to the status of full divinity represents a degeneration in Christian development. Incarnation is truly anthropomorphic and thoroughly corporeal and what Christianity has ultimately done is to bring down the "Sacred Transcendent Perfect", the holy Other, God of the universe to the realms of imperfection and profanity. It has bound Him to the chains of imperfection and in effect crucified Him twice, once physically and once conceptually, devaluing Jesus' message and fashioning it anew. This is the utmost violence against God and against Semitic monotheistic consciousness that has ever been conceived.

(11) INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY is not paradoxical. It is thoroughly and utterly contradictory. Centuries of theological debate, difficulties, developments, controversies and political interferences attempting to pin down the true nature of Christ and his relationship to God are manifest indicators and clear proofs of the contradictory nature of this Christian doctrine, all inevitable and unavoidable given that Incarnational theology poses serious challenges to the human intellect and rational thinking. One has to violate all logical categories and rational axioms to accommodate Incarnational claims and to present them in intelligible forms and categories. These logical impasses can only be averted if one accepts the dictum that the Gospel of Jesus has more to do with God the Father and our relation to our neighbors than to the person of Jesus himself. The Gospel dictum of love your God and love your neighbor is the only way out of these theological nightmares. Without such frank and honest confession even the metaphorical interpretations of the Incarnation in its traditional garb would be misleading and incomprehensible.

(12) THE COMPILATION AND CANONIZATION process of the New Testament was a long and convoluted affair. Spread out over centuries, covering many regions, persons and intentions etc., it naturally left a great many questions and impossibilities unresolved, calling into question the New Testament text being the inerrant word of God. Perjuries, insertions, textual violence and many other factors (as outlined in this

study) raise serious questions as to the textual purity and historical authenticity of the New Testament. All these difficulties are currently well recognized by a majority of New Testament scholars. Given this as well as the lengthy canonization process (in itself a major proof of human intervention, manipulation and exploitation of the New Testament text) it is time to accept and highlight the human origins and nature of the New Testament writings.

(13) UNLIKE THE BIBLE, THE QUR'AN was canonized from its inception. Its compilation process was not spread out over centuries but the small span of a few years and within the lifetime of its original recipients. The authenticity, purity and universality of its text is a historical fact admitted by both Muslim as well as non-Muslim scholars and sources. Many questions and objections concerning various aspects of the Qur'an have been raised by many non-Muslim scholars over the centuries. Currently, there seems to be a sort of consensus among those who are actively involved in the field of Qur'anic studies that the unity, universality and purity of the Qur'anic text is indisputable – a historical fact beyond doubt. Moreover, the Qur'anic challenge of producing a rival verse like that of the Qur'an still stands unmet after fourteen centuries, though efforts have been made. On the other hand, its claim of divine protection, preservation and purity of text, also made fourteen centuries ago, has not been violated. The textual purity, unity, integrity and universality of its text over these long centuries is witness to the fact of its divine status as the word of God.

(14) THE QUR'ANIC GOD PARADIGM is transcendental. Its monotheism is pure, strict and absolute. The Qur'an has a systematically well explained conception of God's transcendence, otherness, uniqueness and perfection. This is supported by countless Qur'anic verses and substantiated by a variety of methods and arguments. Unlike the Bible, this absolute transcendence and unity of God is safeguarded against any possible violation or corruption (such as the existence of other gods as true gods, their ability to harm or benefit without the leave of God, division of power, knowledge, or person or any other division within the Godhead etc.). Moreover, it is not a bare and

abstract notion of transcendence but a balanced, vivid and live concept of God. The transcendent God is immanent by dint of His infinite knowledge, power, love, mercy and other positive attributes spelled out in the text of the Qur'an. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'anic paradigm is consistent. There is only one transcendent God who is absolutely perfect in His names and attributes. Though unknown in His essence, He is known through His signs, attributes, qualities and actions. The idea of this magnificently transcendent God is consistently conveyed throughout the text of the Qur'an. Its strong ethical nature and egalitarian tone is also evident from the Qur'anic text itself. The Qur'an's ethical transcendental monotheism is systematic and self sufficient. The Qur'an does not need external help or arbitrary explanations to present, explain and safeguard its God paradigm from possible violation, infiltration or corruption.

(15) THE QUR'ANIC GOD PARADIGM is neither corporeal nor anthropomorphic. The few seemingly anthropomorphic expressions of the Qur'an readily render themselves to metaphorical interpretations, without invention of facts or metaphors not existent in the text itself. Such non-anthropomorphic explanations can be derived either from the context (or from within the Qur'anic text) or through metaphors commonly used in the language. This fact has been established by a great many Muslim scholars and theologians over the centuries. Additionally, these seemingly anthropomorphic phrases, if kept within Qur'anic parameters, help create a needed modality in the communication process between God and man. The Qur'anic paradigm is able to create this modality without recourse to graphic anthropomorphism or corporealism. Consequently Islam has been known for its strong anti-anthropomorphic stance, and except for the absolute literalists, mainstream Islamic thought has always shunned and rebuked corporeal and anthropomorphic depictions of God. This delicate balance is maintained by the well preserved text of the Qur'an itself.

This is perhaps the reason why the Islamic faith has not been secularized or shaken to the extent that certain other traditions have been over the past centuries. Ernest Gellner, a British Sociologist, observes that:

At the end of the Middle Ages, the Old World contained four major civilizations. Of these, three are now, in one measure or another, secularized. Christian doctrine is bowdlerized by its own theologians, and deep, literal conviction is not conspicuous by its presence. In the Sinic World, a secular faith has become formally established and its religious predecessors disavowed. In the Indian World, a state and the elite are neutral *vis-a-vis* what is a pervasive folk religion, even if practices such as astrology continue to be widespread. But in one of the four civilizations, the Islamic, the situation is altogether different.[4]

He further argues that "there is one very real, dramatic and conspicuous exception to all this: Islam. To say that secularization prevails in Islam is not contentious. It is simply false. Islam is as strong now as it was a century ago. In some ways, it is probably much stronger."[5] He attributes this stability and resisting power to its "emphatic and severe monotheism, the view that the Message received by the Prophet is so to speak terminal, and that it contains both faith and morals – or, in other words, it is both doctrine and law, and that no genuine further augmentation is to be countenanced."[6] Therefore, it can easily be contended that the Qur'anic God paradigm has the potential to stand the ground against modern atheistic challenges and avert the dangers that have shaken other civilizations to the very core of their essence.

The Qur'anic God paradigm is systematic, moral and transcendental. It is logical as well as simple to the core. It focuses more upon human salvation, piety, and socio, political and economic reformation than on the person of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam or even God Himself. It is homocentric rather than being theo-centric. It is also truly universal in its nature and moral implications and does away with all possibilities of racial bias, notions of chosen race, promised lands and other possible narrow identities. Its intrinsic Divine unity guarantees a universal human unity.

(16) MODERN MAN IS BECOMING further and further removed from God and seemingly ever more entrenched in faithlessness. One of the major reasons for this alienation is the existence of an exceedingly

anthropomorphic and corporeal concept of God along with insistence upon the Bible being the inerrant word of God verbatim. The irony of the fact is that instead of discarding the human aspects and interpretation of the Scriptures, modern man seems to be rejecting the Deity Himself, and this in favour of a nihilist philosophy that focuses on the physical world alone, with all else meaningless. People do not want to subscribe to the idea of guilt, redemption, suffering, denial of the world, the strange elevation of a man to God, the illogicality of a triune Godhead etc. Religion is not perceived as an intellectual exercise and becomes a depressing affair. Yet, all this death of God perception can be avoided by emphasizing the transcendent God, Who is beyond all shortcomings, imperfections, human qualifications, and does not seem to be created by man but is the Creator and Master of everything existing in the universe.

Such a notion of God has been aspired to by all three Semitic traditions though the text of the Bible is not consistent concerning it. By emphasizing the non-corporeal and non-anthropomorphic elements in the Deity one would not do terrible injustice to these traditions. Quite the reverse, one would very much be within the aspired goals of these faith traditions. With the help of this simple yet magnificent conception of the Deity, the wide gulf between alienated man and God can be narrowed and science and faith can be brought closer if not together. This is not fanciful for modern science and philosophy seem to be opening up to belief in God.[7] For instance Paul Charles William Davies (b. 1946), a physicist, cosmologist and astrobiologist working at Arizona State University, strongly argues against notions of the purposelessness and meaninglessness of the universe:

> Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strongly that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact. There must, it seems to me, be a deeper level of explanation. Whether one wishes to call that deeper level "God" is a matter of taste and definition.[8]

Davies further observes that, "Although many metaphysical and theistic theories seem contrived and childish, they are not obviously more absurd than the belief that the universe exists, and exists in the form it does, reasonlessly... We are truly meant to be here."[9] He believes that science offers a surer path than religion in search of God, and at the same time wants to distance himself from the "organizational-manipulative God" of theology. Davies does not believe in the anthropomorphically personal God of religion. His God is not a person in any simple sense. He emphasizes the need to think of God in less anthropomorphic ways and not to have a naive image of God but perhaps think of God as transcendent "universal mind", "supreme holistic concept" "Being-itself" or a "Creative Force" or as a "mathematician". He argues that only a God that transcends space-time and is above human manipulations can have any real meaning and relevance for the natural activity taking place all around us.

Sir John Leslie (1766–1832), a Scottish mathematician and physicist best remembered for his research into heat, wrote: "If God is real then his reality seems to me most likely to be as described in the Neoplatonist theological tradition. He is then not an almighty person but an abstract Creative force which is "personal" through being concerned with creating persons and acting as a benevolent person would."[10]

I am not saying that religion should follow the scientist's concept of God or subordinate revelation to science. Rather, what I want to emphasize is that a crude, anthropomorphic or corporeal notion of God is a great hurdle, standing resolute between modern intellectual thought and belief in God. It has at best weakened the authority of religion and God and at worst annihilated it. Human intellect is truly at a loss to digest or reconcile the idea of a man-God or a human looking God for what we worship cannot be within our purview but greater than the universe itself. Anthropomorphically corporeal concepts of the Divine are perhaps among the leading factors of modern atheism. This gulf between religious consciousness and intellectual thinking can be narrowed considerably by emphasizing and insisting upon the moral transcendent God. The difficulty in believing today is not due to belief as such but rather a concept of God that is anthropomorphic and corporeal, which does not appeal to the intellect and which appears at once

weak, without strength, vigour or transcendence. Yet there is a solution. The Qur'an provides the authority, God, that people are looking for and can accept, couched in a language and underscored by a logic that allows for an immediate, complete and intelligent understanding of the Divine. As such it is the Qur'an which can contribute more than the Bible to a revival of global belief in a transcendent Deity and religion itself. Its focused stress on the absolute Oneness, Unity, Uniqueness and Transcendence of God, in its highest and purest sense, and its unequivocal rejection of anthropomorphic imagery and depictions of God averting the dangers of corporeal notions, is unparallelled, and speaks to the highest intellect as well as the most average mentality. It is also testament to the vigour of the Islamic faith which has indisputably withstood the twin onslaught of complex atheistic philosophy and widespread disbelief in the fundamentals of religion. Nothing less will do than the reinstatement of God as majestic, unique, alone, and one, the Creator and Ruler of the cosmos and all that it contains.

NOTES

[1] John D. Caputo, *On Religion; Thinking in Action* (London: Psychology Press, 2001), p.59.

[2] Ibid, pp.59–60.

[3] John D. Caputo, Gianni Vattimo, Jeffrey W. Robbins, *After the Death of God, Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics and Culture*, edited by Jeffrey W. Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p.147.

[4] Earnest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), pp.5–6.

[5] Ibid., p.5.

[6] Ibid., p.6; see also Earnest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

[7] See details in Paul Badham's "Introduction" to *Verdict on Jesus*, p. XIXFF; see also Paul Johnson, "Peaceful Co-Existence," *Prospect London* (April, 1996), no.7, pp.34–38; Terry Miethe, Antony Flew, *Does God Exist?: A Believer and an Atheist Debate* (New York: Harper, 1991).

[8] Paul Davies, *The Mind of God: The Scientific Basis for a Rational World* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp.16 ff; see also his *God and the New Physics* (New

York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), pp.25 ff, 214 ff and his *The Edge of Infinity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), pp.171 ff.

9 Davies, *The Mind of God*, pp.231–32.

10 John Leslie, *Universe* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.2.