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GOD IN ISLÁM

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE MOSLEM
CONCEPTION OF GOD

BY THE

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اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ

*"God, there is no God but He, the Living,
the Self-subsisting."*

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INTRODUCTION

IN the final analysis, the worth of any religion will be decided, not by the magnitude of its conquests in the world or the number of its professors, but by its teaching concerning the person and character of God. This latter is fundamental, for upon it will depend the whole nature and value of its moral precepts, no less than of its social legislation. The question is not merely whether a certain religion is monotheistic or polytheistic, but it is one involving a definition of the character and attributes of God; for the abstract doctrine of one God can never, of itself, suffice to elevate humanity or inspire reverence; the *character* attributed to that God must ever be of fundamental importance.

The student who seeks to know what is the Muḥam-madan idea of God is shut up, broadly speaking, to four sources of information. First of all he has the Qur'án with its brief and pregnant watchword, "Lá iláha illa'lláhu," "There is no God but God"; then secondly he has the Traditions which represent much of the oral teaching of Muḥammad, and, perhaps, some

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ideas also of a later age; thirdly there is the Ijmá' or unanimous doctrinal opinions of the leading theologians of Islám, and, finally, there is Qiyás which represents the results of the analogical reasoning of Moslem divines with regard to the teaching of Islám. It is evident then, that, in order to a complete view of the Islámic conception of God, each of these witnesses must be examined and drawn upon for its quota of testimony, and it will be our endeavour in the following pages to let these speak for themselves, so that the reader may be in a position to judge whether the Islámic idea of God is a sufficient and worthy one.

Muhammad's conception of God must have been derived from many sources. Nature was, perhaps, his greatest teacher, and some of the finest passages of the Qur'án are those which describe the creative majesty of the Supreme. Even as a youth, Muhammad must often, as he tended the flocks of Mecca, have been struck with the evidences of a supreme Creator, and his attention must often have been drawn to the signs of an unseen power spread all around him. Thus in the silent passing of the stars and the orderly succession of day and night, no less than in the roll of the thunder as it pealed around the hills of Mecca, Muhammad must have beheld those "signs" of a divine wisdom and power which he afterwards rehearsed with such beauty to his idolatrous countrymen. Later on, those months of quiet

retirement in the cave of Mount Ijirá' must have furnished many a golden opportunity for the contemplation of the great Architect. To Muhammad, with his nervous and highly-wrought temperament, the great truth must often have impressed itself upon him that,

"The Almighty King

Not always in the splendid scene of pomp,
Tremendous, on the sounding trumpet rides,
Or sweeping whirlwind; nor in the awful peal
Of echoing thunder is He always heard,
Or seen in lightning's vivid flames; but oft,
When every turbid element is hushed,
In the still voice of nature stands confest
The Lord omnipotent!"

Thus Muhammad's earliest ideas of God were gained from the sublime wonders of nature round about him, and again and again in the earlier passages of the Qur'án, in eloquent and impassioned verse, he calls his Arab countrymen to the contemplation and worship of the great Cause of all causes; and the one dominant note in these earlier Súras is the matchless power and transcendent wisdom of the Almighty. A good sample of the "revelations" of this period is furnished in the early portion of Súratu'r-R'ad (xiii) where we read:—

”هُوَ الَّذِي يُرِيكُمْ الْبَرْقَ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَيُنشِئُ السَّحَابَ الثِّقَالَ .
وَيَسْتَبِیحُ الرَّعْدَ بِحَمْدِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةَ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِ وَيُرْسِلُ الصَّوَاعِقَ

فَيَصِيبُ بِهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُمْ يَجَادِلُونَ فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ شَدِيدُ
الْحِجَالِ .”

“He it is who shows you the lightning for fear and hope; and He brings up the heavy clouds. And the thunder celebrates His praise, and the angels too, for fear of Him. And He sends the thunder-clap and overtakes therewith whom He will;—Yet they wrangle about God! But He is strong in might.” (v. 13, 14.)

Another fine passage in *Súratu'l-Baqarah* (ii) runs thus:—

”وَ إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ . إِنَّ فِي
خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَ اخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفَلَكَ الَّتِي تَجْرِي
فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَأَحْيَا
بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَ بَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَ تَصْرِيفِ الرِّيْحِ
وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ .”

“Your God is one God: there is no God but He, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Verily in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and in the ship that runneth in the sea with that which profits man, and in what water God sends down from heaven and quickens therewith the earth

after its death, and spreads abroad therein all kinds of cattle, and in the shifting of the winds, and in the clouds that are pressed into service betwixt heaven and earth, are signs to people who can understand.” (*Súratu'l-Baqarah* [ii] 164-5.)

A second source of Muhammad's beliefs concerning God was undoubtedly the *Hanífs*,¹ a contemporary Theistic sect, who rejected the popular idols of the Arabians, and stood for the worship of one God alone. With these men Muhammad must often have come into contact, and any comparison of his teaching concerning God with the tenets of the *Hanífs* will make it clear that Muhammad was indebted to them not a little for his conception of the Supreme.

In the third place, Muhammad's ideas concerning God must have been largely shaped and modified by his contact with the numerous Jews and Christians who lived in Arabia at that time. One has only to read the many repetitions of Jewish tales, scriptural and legendary, which cover the pages of the *Qur'án*, and are pressed into service in order to enforce the teaching and claims of the Prophet, in order to realize to what a large extent Muhammad was indebted to the Jews for his views of God and His government of the world. Add to all this a fervid imagination combined with a true poetic

¹ See further in “The Origins of the *Qur'án*,” pp. 3-5.

genius, and one is in a position to understand some of the complex influences which were at work in combining to produce the Moslem conception of God.

All students of Islām are agreed that its strength lies in its doctrine of the unity of God. The polytheist who forsakes his idols and learns to say, "There is no God but Allāh" attains at once a self-respect—rather a fanatical pride—which gives him conscious power, and carries him triumphant over many difficulties; and yet, as we have already remarked, the abstract doctrine of one God cannot regenerate humanity or provide an adequate motive for holiness; everything will depend upon the character and attributes of that God. Let the Moslem reader, then, divesting himself of all prejudice, accompany us in our analysis of the Muḥammadan conception of God as it stands recorded in the writings of Islām; and let him remember that, if at times the language used seems harsh, it is directed, not against him, but against those dishonouring conceptions of God which every true worshipper must necessarily repudiate with righteous indignation.

As we proceed to take up and analyse this Moslem conception of God, both in its origin and development, we shall frequently find occasion to compare it with the Christian idea as based upon the revelation of God contained in the Taurāt and Injīl; and may He, the One without a second, lead us in the right path.

GOD IN ISLĀM

CHAPTER I

THE UNITY OF GOD

THE Qur'an abounds in passages, some of rare beauty, which teach the unity of God. By way of illustration we quote the 112th chapter, entitled *Sūratu'l-Ikhlās*, which runs thus:—

”قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ . اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ . لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ . وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ .“

“Say, He is God alone. God the Eternal. He begets not, and is not begotten; nor is there like unto Him any one.” Muḥammad was never tired of pointing to the *creation* as a “sign” of the unity of God, and the famous “verse of the throne” may well be quoted here as a specimen of such passages. It is found in *Sūratu'l-Baqarah*, (ii.) 255, and is as follows:—

”اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ .“

“God, there is no God but He, the Living, the Self-subsistent. Slumber takes Him not, nor sleep. His is what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. Who is it that intercedes with Him save by His permission? He knows what is before them and what behind them, and they comprehend not aught of His knowledge, but of what He pleases. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth, and it tires Him not to guard them both, for He is high and grand.”

In the Qur’ān the *unreasonableness* of polytheism is frequently dwelt upon as an argument for the unity of God, and in Sūratu’l-Mūminin, (xxiii.) 92, we are told that:—

“مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ وَمَا كَانَ لِعَمَةٍ مِنْ إِلَهٍ إِذَا لَذَهَبَ
كُلُّ إِلَهٍ بِمَا خَلَقَ وَلَعَلَّ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ سَابِقِينَ اللَّهُ عَمَّا
يَصِفُونَ.”

“God never took a son, nor was there ever any god with Him;—then each god would have gone off with what he had created, and some would have exalted themselves over others—celebrated by His praises above what they attribute (to Him).” Another passage to the same effect is found in Sūratu’l-Anbiyā’, (xxi.) 22, where it is argued that:—“Were there in both (heaven and earth) gods besides God, both would surely have been corrupted,” i.e., the whole creation would necessarily fall into confusion and be overturned by the competition of such mighty antagonists.

Muhammad’s denunciation of idolatry was unsparing, and, with the exception of one temporary lapse, consistent. The idols were “an abomination of Satan” and were constantly held up to reprobation and contempt as objects “which neither profit nor harm us,” whilst the punishment of those who

“أَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا إِلَهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَنَسُدَّتَا.”

call upon them is painted in realistic colors. Not only is pagan idolatry reprehended by Muhammad in the Qur’ān, but another system which the Prophet denounced with all the invective of which he was capable was that which ascribed to God wives and daughters from amongst the angels. “What!” exclaims the Prophet, “has your Lord chosen to give you sons, and shall He take for Himself females from among the angels?” (Sūratu Bani Isrā’il, [xvii.] 42). Another opinion, closely allied to this, which Muhammad denounced as opposed to the unity of God was that of ascribing to Him partners in His government. Thus in Sūratu’l-An’ām, (vi.) 101, we read:—“Yet they made the jinn partners with God, though He created them!”

But not only did Muhammad rightly denounce idolatry and the association of inferior gods and goddesses with God, but he also accused the Christians of polytheism, or rather tri-theism, on account of their doctrine of the trinity, including, as it does, the doctrine of the divine Sonship of Jesus Christ. Even the Jews are accused of calling Ezra the Son of God, though there is no record, either scriptural or profane, that they ever did so. The numerous references in the Qur’ān to the Christian trinity make it undeniably clear that Muhammad failed absolutely to understand the doctrine as held and taught by orthodox Christians, and he, more than once, mistakenly represents the Christian trinity as consisting of Father, Son and Virgin Mary! Thus in Sūratu’l-Mā’idah, (ii.) 77—99, we read:—

“لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ ... مَا الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ
مَرْيَمَ إِلَّا رَسُولٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِنْ قَبْلِهِ الرُّسُلُ وَأُمُّهُ صِدِّيقَةٌ كَانَا
يَأْكُلَنِ الطَّعَامَ.”

"They misbelieve who say, verily, God is the third of three. . . . The Messiah, the son of Mary is only a prophet; prophets before him have passed away, and his mother was a confessor; they used both to eat food." It is perfectly clear from the statements of the Qur'ān, that what Muḥammad mistakenly combatted was not the doctrine of the trinity as held by Christians at all, but an imaginary belief in three gods. Thus in Sūratu'l-Mā'idah, (v.) 116, we read:—

”وَإِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يَعْيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ مَا أَنتَ لِلنَّاسِ لِئَاتَّخِذُوَنِي
وَأُمَّيَّ إِلَهَيْنِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ.“

"And when God said, O Jesus, son of Mary! is it thou who didst say to men, take me and my mother for two gods beside God?" Muḥammad's mistake was thus a double one; first in substituting Mary for the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Holy Trinity, and secondly, in imagining that the Christians worshipped these as three separate Gods. What the Qur'ān denounces, therefore, is polytheism, a practice which Christians repudiate quite as indignantly as do Moslems. It is, indeed, difficult to see how sincere Moslems can reconcile these mistakes of Muḥammad with the belief that the Qur'ān is the word of God communicated direct to the Prophet by the angel Gabriel. The fact is worth noticing here that modern archaeological discoveries in Arabia fully corroborate the verdict of literature and of history, and show conclusively that the trinity of the Arabian Christians consisted of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; for on the Christian monuments found by Dr. Edward Glaser in Yemen, the Sirwah inscription (A.D. 542) opens with the words:—"In the power of the All-Merciful and His Messiah and the Holy Ghost."¹

¹ Zwemer, "Islām," p. 21.

The Christian conception of God is based upon the words used by Jesus Christ, "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (Mk. 12—29) and involves a triune conception of the one true God rather than a doctrine of three Gods; but Muḥammad's misunderstanding of the Sonship of Christ—a misunderstanding shared by his followers ever since—left him no alternative but to condemn what he considered the blasphemy of attributing a son to the Almighty. But the Sonship conceived of by Muḥammad was a purely carnal one, as his many references to the subject clearly show, and it is a purely imaginary physical generation of Christ which is so scathingly condemned in the Qur'ān. One or two passages will make this clear. In Sūratu'l-An'ām, (vi.) 101, it is written:—"The inventor of the heavens and the earth; how can He have a son when he has no female companion?" And in Sūratu'l-Mūminūn, (xxiii.) 92, we read, "God hath not taken a son."² Some idea of the Muḥammadan belief on this subject can be gained from the remarks of the famous commentator Zamakhshari. Commenting on verse 169 of Sūratu'n-Nisā' he says, "that which the Qur'ān here refers to is the clear statement of theirs (the Christians) that God and Christ and Mary are three gods, and that Christ is a child of God from Mary"! Little wonder, with such ideas of the trinity in their minds, that Moslems should consider that it detracts from the unity of God. Rightly understood it does not do so, and Christians believe quite as strongly as do Muḥammadans that God is one. To worship Mary as God is indeed blasphemy, and to call Jesus

”بَدِيعِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنِّي يَكُونُ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ
صَاحِبَةً.“

”مَا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ مِنْ وَلَدٍ.“

another God beside God is polytheism; but to say that there is only one living and true God who eternally exists in a three-fold selfness is not derogatory to the unity of God. Upon the other hand, this revealed truth helps to explain many things both in religion and philosophy, and throws not a little light upon the ascription to Jesus of titles such as "Word of God" and "Spirit of God," which certainly can be applied to no mere human being.

We cannot help thinking that if our Muhammadan brethren would only divest themselves of their pre-conceived ideas of a carnal sonship of Christ, and would, instead, strive to conceive of it as a spiritual doctrine, they would find nothing in the Christian doctrine of the trinity which conflicts with the unity of God. Let them, first of all, separate the one true God from all else, setting Him in all the majesty of His unique oneness on one side, as it were, and all creation on the other; and, then, after that, let them come with an open mind to the study of the nature of that one God. They may find a plurality within that nature as they certainly do within the attributes of God, but in neither case is His essential oneness violated: He will still remain, in essence, One without a second. Thus the real question of debate between Moslems and Christians is not whether God is one or more, but what is the nature of that one God, and what mysteries lie hidden within that nature. If Moslems would approach the subject of the nature of God in this manner, we feel certain that many of their difficulties would vanish. It should ever be remembered that the doctrine of the tri-uno nature of God is a matter of revelation, and Christians rest their belief in it on that fact. There may be difficulties connected with it, but these are certainly not greater than those connected with a sterile monism in which God is conceived as existing from all eternity in solitary oneness, a "Lover" without an object of love, and a "Knower" without an object of knowledge. It was this conception of God as a single

and solitary monad which called forth Shelly's sneer in his "Queen Mab" when, in alluding to the creation of the world he says, "from an eternity of idleness God awoke!" When the creation around us is so full of mystery, mystery, too, which often points to a trinity in unity, as in the light, power and heat of the sun, or the trinity of body, mind and spirit in the individual man, it should not be thought strange if there should be found a plurality of existences within the nature of the Godhead, the one knowing and loving the other. At any rate, when we cannot understand the mysteries of creation round about us, it is surely the height of presumption to claim a knowledge of the mystery of the Divine nature, and to dogmatically deny the possibility of a trinity within that nature.

On the other hand, there are many considerations which lead us to expect some kind of plurality within the unity of God. For example, one of the purest, divinest instincts of the human heart is to love and be loved by an equal. Shall we say, then, that this was at one time denied to God the Creator, and that, before the creation of the world and of the angels, He existed in solitary and loveless isolation! Such a God can scarcely be conceived of as a Person at all, for personality implies self-consciousness having both subject and object. Even pantheistic philosophy has recognized this, and has tried to construct a kind of trinity which is, of course, dependent upon the universe. That is, God is conceived of as distinguishing Himself from the world, and so finding the object of his self-consciousness. Thus Hegel says, "as God is eternal personality, so he eternally produces his other self, namely nature, in order to self-consciousness."¹ Christian philosophy finds this object of the eternal self-consciousness in Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God, and thus a true philosophy exists in fullest harmony with divine revelation.

¹ Quoted in Shedd's "Dogmatic Theology," vol. I, p. 185.

Let the Muhammadan reader compare what has been written above with the words of Christ as recorded in the Injil, and he will find a more complete and satisfying conception of the Supreme in this revealed doctrine of a tri-une God, than in the sterile monism of Islām. How full of meaning become the words of Jesus addressed to the Father in the great high-priestly prayer when He says, "O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." (John xvii. 5); and yet more emphatically, "For thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John xvii. 24).

One of the names given to God in the Qur'ān is "الْقَيُّومُ" "The Self-subsisting," but does not the very idea of God's self-sufficiency demand some plurality of existences within the divine nature or essence in order to the full expression of that nature? In one of the oldest mosques of Lahore there may be seen the inscription "Allāh Kāfi," "God is sufficient," which implies that God contains within Himself everything that is necessary for the full expression of His personality. Therefore as "الْوَدُودُ" "The Lover" He must have had within His own personality, and without any dependence on anything outside of Himself, all things necessary for the fullest expression of His own perfections. If God be "self-sufficient," He must have had within His own nature the object of His eternal love. In the sterile deism of Islām the highest form of love—a form, be it noticed, which is exercised by man himself—is denied the Creator; but this is unthinkable, for the mode of existence of the Supreme can never be inferior to that enjoyed by His sinful creatures.

Finally, the very fact that the doctrine of the Trinity seems to present difficulties at first tends rather to prove that it is not a product of the human imagination; and it should not be forgotten also, that the doctrine arose amongst monotheistic Jews whose personal predilections must have been

all the other way. Man must, after all that can be said is said, be dependent upon divine revelation for his knowledge of the nature of the Supreme, for he can never by searching find out God, or by the exercise of his own fallible reason fathom the depths of His infinitude. To know God fully we should require to be God, or, to reverse the figure, we may say that a God understood would be no God at all. Yet when, from the considerations adduced above, it is seen that some kind of plurality is required within the divine essence, and when the Holy Scriptures themselves reveal such a triune God, faith is strengthened and hope quickened. As the ascending Christ turned to leave His wondering disciples, He bade them go "and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name (not names) of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." It is this "name" which Christians preach: the Father, Fount and Source of all, the Son eternally co-existing with the Father, and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son—one God.

In Islām God, "sterile in His inaccessible height, neither loving nor enjoying aught save His own self-measured decree, without son, companion or counsellor, is no less barren for himself than for His creatures,"¹ and remains little removed from the pantheistic 'it' of the Upanishads. Thus Islām fails in its very definition of God, and contradicts the revelation of the Supreme made in the Taurāt and the Injil.

¹ Palgrave, "Central and Eastern Arabia," vol. I, p. 366.

CHAPTER II

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

THE attributes ascribed to God in the Qur'an and Traditions are commonly said to be eternal, and are popularly expressed in the famous ninety-nine names. Any study of the attributes, therefore, must include a consideration of the names which are used to set them forth. The essential name of God, or "Ismu'dh-dhāt," as it is called, is Allāh. This name is, strange to say, not included in the list of ninety-nine. The latter are called "Asmā' as-sifāt" or names of the attributes, and are divided into two classes called respectively the "Asmā'u'l-jalāliyah" or glorious attributes, and the "Asmā'u'l-jamāliyah" or terrible attributes. These names explain themselves; thus the name ar-Rahim, the Merciful naturally belongs to the first class, whilst the name al-Mustaqīm, the Avenger just as naturally takes its place in the second.¹ It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of these names of God in the theology of Islām, for they reveal, as in a mirror, the Moslem conception of the character and attributes of the Supreme. So meritorious is the act of repeating that list that we are gravely assured in the Mishkāt that, "مَنْ أَحْصَاهَا دَخَلَ الْجَنَّةَ." "Whoever repeats them will go to heaven"!

¹ Hughes, "Dictionary of Islām," p. 142.

It has been truly remarked that most religious systems err, not so much in what they affirm of God, as in what they ignore or deny. The truth of this aphorism in its relation to Islām will be clearly demonstrated by a reference to the ninety-nine names. The reader is referred to Zwemer's "Moslem Doctrine of God," pp. 47—49, for a detailed and careful analysis of this list. We must be content here, in the limited space at our disposal to simply note the fact that the "terrible" attributes are both more numerous and more strongly emphasized than the "glorious" attributes. In saying this we do not forget that at the head of every chapter but one of the Qur'an God is called "the Merciful," and that His compassion in the forgiveness of sin is again and again referred to in the Qur'an; but the stern fact still remains that it is the power and absolute sovereignty of God which is the predominant note in all the Qur'anic descriptions of the Supreme, and it is the fear rather than the love of God which is the ruling motive to obedience. "There are four terms used which may be said in a special sense to refer to the moral or forensic in Deity, although we admit that the Merciful attributes are in a sense moral attributes. Of these, only two occur in the Qur'an, and both are of doubtful significance in Moslem theology. While we find that the "terrible" attributes of God's power occur again and again in the Qur'an, the net total of the moral attributes is found in two verses which mention that Allāh is Holy and Truthful, i.e., in the Moslem sense of the words. What a contrast to the Bible! The Qur'an shows, and the Traditions illustrate, that Muḥammad had, in a measure, a correct idea of the physical attributes (I use the word in a theological sense) of Deity, but he had a false conception of His moral attributes or no conception at all. He saw God's power in nature, but never had a glimpse of His holiness and justice."¹

¹ Zwemer, "Moslem Doctrine of God," p. 49.

The Christian reader is startled, almost shocked, not to find the word "Father" amongst the ninety-nine names of God, and if he reads the Qur'ān and Traditions with care he will be struck by the absence of anything corresponding to the repeated declarations of the Bible that God loves the world. *A system which could not conceive of God as loving before the foundation of the world has little in it of God's love for the world after its creation.* The very term "Islām" signifies complete surrender to the all-powerful will of God, and the relation between God and man is ever that of master and slave rather than of father and child.

Some of the attributes expressed by the names of God will be dealt with in later chapters of this little book, it simply remains for us in closing this brief review to point out how powerfully these names, with the ideas they connote, have influenced the Moslem world. Next to the Kalimah "There is no god but Allah," no phrase is more upon the lips of Moslems than the cry "Allāhu akbār" "God is great." There is thus little in the Muḥammadan idea of God to call forth the warm glow of personal affection, and lead the worshipper to a free and spontaneous obedience to the will of God. Servile subjection to an arbitrary law is the dominant feeling called forth by the Moslem idea of God, and just because of this there is great danger lest filial affection become weak. Muḥammad rejected the sonship of Christ because he failed to interpret it in a spiritual manner, yet, as we shall see in our next chapter, his own portrait of the Supreme was essentially a physical one in which he pictured God as seated upon a material throne and writing with His own hand the decrees of good and evil. May we not rather say that it was just because of Muḥammad's gross idea of a corporeal Deity that he was led into the fallacy of imagining the Christian doctrine of the Sonship of Christ to consist of a carnal conception through the Virgin Mary.

CHAPTER III

ANTHROPOMORPHIC CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

No one can read the Qur'ān with attention without being struck by the bold literalism of its descriptions of heaven and hell; for Muḥammad's graphic power of description is never used to more purpose than when he is describing the sensual delights of heaven or the physical tortures of the damned. The descriptions of the enjoyments promised the faithful in paradise, as given in the Qur'ān and Traditions, are exceedingly minute, and rivers of wine which inebriate not, together with the Hūrīs with large black eyes, fill up the main outlines of the picture. Hell, on the other hand, is a place where "the damned shall have garments of fire fitted unto them" and where "boiling water shall be poured upon their heads; their bowels shall be dissolved thereby and their skins, and they shall be beaten with maces of iron." (Sūratu'l-Hajj, [xxii.] 21.) The food of the unhappy inhabitants of this place of torment will be "matter mixed with blood," whilst serpents and scorpions will sting and torment their victims. "Muḥammad's fancy could not reach beyond the common bodily burning for sage and fool alike which many a martyr has been able to support with a smile; the torment of the mind finds no place in his Gehennem, nor that most exquisite of punishments inferred in the words, 'He that is impure, let him be impure still.'"¹

¹ Stanley Lane Poole, "Studies in a Mosque," p. 310.

It is not strange that, with such conceptions of heaven and hell floating in his mind, Muḥammad should have carried the same literalism into his descriptions of the Deity Himself. Thus the Qur'ān contains many passages which speak of God's face, hands and eyes, and represent Him as sitting upon a throne, which, says the commentator Ḥusain, "has 8,000 pillars, and the distance between each pillar is 3,000,000 miles!" Those passages have caused no little difficulty to the commentators whose favorite method has been to accept them without comment. The famous remark of Mālik ibn Anas with regard to God's sitting upon the throne may be taken as a classic example. He says:—"God's sitting upon the throne is known; how it is done is unknown; it must be believed; and questions about it are an innovation." It is worth noting here that the whole Muslim doctrine of *ta'wil* or descent of a literal book, which was written upon a literal table in heaven, seems to demand a literal throne as its depository. Once let a literal throne be posited, and it becomes, manifestly, only a step to the idea of a corporeal Deity. Islām seems to have taken that step, and, as we shall show below, seems to conceive of God as having a material form and shape. Yet Muslim theologians have been greatly puzzled about the matter, as may be seen from the remark of the eminent juriconsult at-Tirmidhī, who, having been asked about the saying of the prophet that God descended to the lowest of the seven heavens, replied, "The descent is intelligible; the manner how is unknown; the belief therein is obligatory; and the asking about it a blamable innovation."¹

The Mut'azilas and other heterodox sects repudiated all such literalism, it is true, and interpreted all such anthropomorphic terms in a spiritual sense, but they were severely reprobated by the orthodox doctors, and not a few of them paid the penalty of their rashness with their lives. During

¹ Quoted in Osborn's "Islām under the Caliphs of Baghdād," p. 135.

their own exercise of power at Baghdād they in turn persecuted the orthodox. Of their severity a good illustration is furnished by Jalālu'd-din as-Syūṭī who tells us that the Khalifa al-Wāthiq summoned the Traditionist Ahmad bin Naṣru'l-Khufā'i to Baghdād, and questioned him regarding the creation of the Qur'ān, which he denied, and the vision of God at the day of judgment. Ahmad replied, Thus goes the tradition:—

”سَتَرُونَ رَبَّكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ كَمَا تَرَوْنَ الْقَمَرَ.“

"Ye shall see your Lord on the day of judgment as ye see the moon." Al-Wāthiq said, Thou liest; to which Ahmad replied, Nay, it is thou that liest. The Khalifa added, What! will He be seen as a circumscribed and corporeal form which space can contain and the eye observe? Then the Mut'azila leader arose and slew the offending Ahmad with his own hand.¹ Yet the orthodox party finally triumphed, and every good Muslim is, consequently, bound to believe that God will be seen literally on the day of judgment. This belief is based upon the distinct words of both the Qur'ān and the Aḥādith. Thus, in the former we read:—

”وَجُودٌ بِوَسْئِدٍ نَاصِرَةً إِلَى رَبِّهَا نَظَرَةٌ.“

"Faces on that day shall be bright, gazing on their Lord." (Sūratu'l-Qiyāmat, [lxxv.] 22.) The Traditions record many sayings of Muḥammad concerning the vision of God which are of a grossly literal nature, and leave no room for doubt as to what his ideas were on the subject. Thus in the Mishkātu'l-Muṣābiḥ, Kitābu'l-Fatan, Bābu'l-Royatu'llah we read:—

”قَالَ إِذَا دَخَلَ أَهْلُ الْجَنَّةِ الْجَنَّةَ يَقُولُ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى تَرِيدُونَ شَيْئًا أَرِيدُكُمْ فَيَقُولُونَ أَلَمْ تُبَيِّضْ وَجْهَنَا أَلَمْ تُدْخِلْنَا الْجَنَّةَ وَتُنَجِّنَا مِنْ

¹ Quoted in Sell's "Faith of Islām," (3rd Ed.), p. 197.

النَّارِ قَالَ فَيَرَوْنَ الْحَبَابَ فَيَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيَّ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى فَمَا أُعْطُوا
شَيْئًا أَحَبَّ لَهُمْ مِنَ النَّظَرِ إِلَيَّ رَبِّهِمْ .”

“ (The Prophet) said, when the people of Paradise enter Paradise, God most high will say, Do ye wish me to give you anything more? Then they will say, Hast Thou not whitened our faces, hast Thou not caused us to enter Paradise and saved us from hell fire? Then He will raise the veil, and they will look upon God’s face, nor shall they be given anything more dear to them than to behold their Lord.” One has only to read the Muhammadan descriptions of the Mirāj or night journey to heaven in order to learn to what lengths Moslem authors have gone in their endeavours to exalt the Prophet. Nor can these extravagances be put down to the fancy of the chroniclers alone, for they are based upon the authentic traditions of the Prophet. Thus we read, for example, “ My Lord came to meet me and stretched forth His hand to greet me, and looked into my face, and laid His hand upon my shoulders, so that I felt the coolness of His finger-tips.” On another occasion Muhammad related how his Lord came to him when he was asleep and:—

” وَضَعَ كَفَّهُ بَيْنَ كَتِفَيَّ حَتَّى وَجَدْتُ بَرْدَ يَدَيْهِ بَيْنَ ثَدْيِي .”

“ He placed the palms of His hands between my shoulders until I felt the cold of His fingers between my breast.” (Mishkātu’l-Masābih, Kitābu’š-Ṣalāt, Babu’l-Masājed wa Mawādha’š-Ṣalāt.)

That this is the orthodox teaching of Islām is clear from the following paragraph from the celebrated author of the Jowhara (pp. 107-112). Where he says:—“It is possible to see God in this world as well as in the next. In this world it has been granted to Muhammad only. In the future world, however, all believers will see him; some

say with the eyes only, others with the whole face, others with every part of their whole body.”¹

There is a famous passage in the Qur’ān dealing with the rewards of the faithful, in which the commentators, on the authority of authentic traditions of the Prophet, see a reference to this “vision of God.” It is found in Sūratu Yūnas, (x) 27, and runs thus:—

” لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا الْحَسَنَى وَزِيَادَةٌ .”

“To those who do what is good, shall be goodness and increase.” The term “goodness” here signifies Paradise and the forgiveness of sins, say the commentators; but the “increase” is nothing less than the beatific vision! Thus the author of the *Khālāsatu’l-Tafāsir*, commenting on this passage, (p. 334), says:—

” حسني سے مراد جنت اور مغفرت ... اور زیادتی دیدار الہی .”

“Goodness signifies paradise and the forgiveness of sins, increase means the vision of God.” ‘Abbās, commenting on the same passage, says:—

” الحسنی الجنة و زیادة یعنی النظر الی وجه اللہ .”

“Goodness (which means) Paradise; and increase, that is, looking upon the face of God.”

It may possibly be retorted that all the passages mentioned above may be matched by similar passages from the Bible which likewise speaks of God’s face, hands, and so on. This is, in a sense, true, but the grossly literal interpretation of such passages in the Bible is amply safe-guarded by clear and precise statements regarding the being of God which leave no alternative but to interpret all such passages in a purely spiritual and allegorical sense. Thus, for example, we have the express statements of Holy Scripture that “God is a spirit” (John iv. 24) and “No man hath seen God at

¹ Quoted in Klein’s “The Religion of Islām,” p. 55.

any time" (John i. 18,) whilst in another place (Col. i. 15) He is called the "Invisible God." Even in the theophanies of the Old Testament the needful corrective is provided in the express statement that it was the "Angel" of the Lord who walked and spoke with men. How different is this from the wild exaggerations and mad speculations of the Moslem commentators based upon the express words of Muhammad, who seems to have pictured both God and the devil as possessed of a material form. Concerning the latter a well-known saying of the prophet has been preserved to the effect that:—

”وَقْتُ صَلَاةِ الصُّبْحِ مِنْ طُلُوعِ الْفَجْرِ مَا لَمْ تَطْلُعِ الشَّمْسُ فَإِذَا
طَلَعَتِ الشَّمْسُ فَامْسِكْ عَنِ الصَّلَاةِ فَإِنَّهَا تَطْلُعُ بَيْنَ قَرْنَيْ
الشَّيْطَانِ.“

“The time of the morning prayer is from the opening of the dawn until the rising of the sun; but when the sun rises abstain from prayer, for verily it rises between the two horns of Satan”!! (Mishkāṭu'l-Maṣābiḥ, Kitābu's-salāt, chapter II, part I.)

Another authentic saying of Muhammad which contains grossly anthropomorphic conceptions of God, and at the same time teaches the boldest doctrine of fate, is preserved in the Mishkāṭ, and runs as follows:—

”قَالَ إِنْ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ آدَمَ ثُمَّ مَسَحَ ظَهْرَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ فَاسْتَخْرَجَ مِنْهُ
ذُرِّيَّةً فَقَالَ خَلَقْتُ هَؤُلَاءِ لِلْجَنَّةِ وَبِعَمَلِ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ يَعْمَلُونَ ثُمَّ مَسَحَ
ظَهْرَهُ بِشِمَالِهِ فَاسْتَخْرَجَ مِنْهُ ذُرِّيَّةً فَقَالَ خَلَقْتُ هَؤُلَاءِ لِلنَّارِ وَبِعَمَلِ أَهْلِ
النَّارِ يَعْمَلُونَ.“

“He (Muhammad) said, Verily God created Adam; afterwards He stroked his back with his right hand, and brought out from him descendants and said, These I have created for Paradise, and they will do the works of the people of Paradise. Afterwards He stroked his back with His hand and brought out descendants and said, These I have created for the fire (of hell), and they will do the works of the people of the fire.” (Kitābu'l-Imān, Bāhu'l-Qadar.)

From the above quotations, and they could be multiplied, it is difficult to see how Islām can escape the charge of gross anthropomorphism. It seems, indeed, a natural corollary to the exceedingly minute and literal descriptions of heaven and hell which are found in both Qur'an and Hadith. There can be no doubt that these descriptions, which all orthodox Muslims interpret literally, help to fix the idea of a localized God; and the exceedingly graphic account of Muhammad's celebrated night journey to heaven, where he is in turn introduced to Adam, Moses, Jesus and other Prophets, and at last is ushered into the presence of the Deity Himself to plead for a reduction in the prayers commanded his people, contributes not a little to the idea of a God far removed from His creatures and seated upon a literal throne in the highest heaven.

The practical fruits of this conception of the Supreme are clearly seen in the Muhammadan idea of worship. The “Lord of the Throne” has ordered prayers five times a day; it is, then, the believer's duty to obey, and, however irksome the task or weary the round, perfect obedience alone can secure a blessing. It matters not that the prayers are not understood; the Prophet has affirmed that they are “the Key of Paradise,” and he who is wise will enter in. The idea of *communion* with God is thus necessarily absent, and nowhere, we make bold to say, in either Qur'an or Traditions is there a sentence to compare with the words of the Apostle John, “Our fellowship is with the Father.” “God is love:

and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him." The God of the Bible is "not far from each one of us," and He "dwelleth not in temples made with hands" either in heaven or on earth "for in Him we live and move and have our being." When our Moslem brethren learn the great lesson taught by Jesus that, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship in spirit and truth," then, and not till then, will true spiritual worship take the place of mechanical routine, and heart fellowship with a God near at hand supersede the chilling conception of a Deity seated upon a distant throne in heaven. Then, too, will Moslems learn to conceive of the Sonship of Christ as a spiritual doctrine, and will find in the Trinity a solution to many of the dark enigmas which surround the Being of God.

CHAPTER IV

GOD IN HIS RELATION TO MAN

IN our previous chapters we saw what a distorted and unworthy view of the person of God is furnished by the Qur'ān and the Traditions, which picture Him as a sterile and unloving Monad, lacking in His own nature the essential attribute of self-sufficiency, and requiring the presence of something outside of Himself, viz., a created world, in order to the exercise of His own personality. The bold literalism and gross anthropomorphism which characterize the Islamic descriptions of God, whether of the Qur'ān or the Traditions, is still more dishonouring to Him, and proves one of the greatest hindrances to true spiritual worship.

When we examine the teachings of Islām with regard to God's relation to the created universe, and to mankind in particular, the picture is seen to be still more distorted, and one ceases to wonder at the backwardness of Moslem nations or the lethargy and despair which often seize Moslem communities in times of danger. God in Islām is not a heavenly Father Who pities His children and remembers that they are but dust, but He is a far-away Autocrat Who rules His slaves according to His own arbitrary and self-measured decree, acknowledging no standard or limit save His own absolute will. Man himself is but a puppet whose every act, both good and bad, has been pre-destined from all eternity and written down upon the preserved table long before the

creation of the world. This bold doctrine of fate, which, carried to its legitimate conclusions, makes God the author of evil, naturally tends to freeze the energies and paralyse the activities of all who believe in it, and the sad condition of all Moslem States to-day bears eloquent testimony to its petrifying and demoralizing power. That the picture here painted is not an exaggerated one, we now proceed to show from the authorities of Islām itself.

The Qur'ān and Traditions contain repeated illustrations of the Islāmic doctrine of fate, and again and again point out the absolute impotence of man for either good or evil. Thus in the Mishkāt, we read that:—

”قَالَ إِنَّ أَوَّلَ مَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ الْقَلَمَ فَقَالَ لَهُ أَكْتُبْ قَالَ مَا
أَكْتُبُ قَالَ أَكْتُبِ الْقَدَرَ فَكَتَبَ مَا كَانَ وَمَا هُوَ كَائِنٌ
إِلَى الْأَبَدِ.“

“(The Prophet) said, Verily, the first thing which God created was the pen. And He said to it, write. It said, what shall I write? He said, write down the divine decrees (qadar); and it wrote down all that was and all that will be to eternity.” (Kitābu'l-Imān, Bábu'l-Qadar.) Another saying of the Prophet to the same effect is found in the same book, and runs thus:—

”قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَدِيرَ الْخَلَائِقِ قَبْلَ أَنْ
يَخْلُقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِخَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ قَالَ وَكَانَ تَرْشَةً
عَلَى الْمَاءِ.“

“The Prophet of God said, Fifty thousand years before the creation of heaven and earth God wrote down the destiny of all creation. He said, and the throne of God was upon

water.” With these traditions agree the express words of the Qur'ān:—

”إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ ... وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَعَلُوهُ فِي الزُّبُرِ
وَكَُلُّ صَغِيرٍ وَكَبِيرٍ مُسْتَطَرٌ“

“Verily, everything have we created by decree, . . . and everything they do is in the books, and everything small and great is written down.” (Súratu'l-Qamar, [liv] 52-3.)

Another passage which teaches still more clearly the doctrine that God is the author of sin is that found in Súratu's-Saffāt, (xxxvii) 94, and which runs as follows:—

”وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ.“

“And God has created you and what ye do;” and yet again in Súratu Bani Isrá'il, (xvii) 14 we read that:—

”كُلُّ إِنْسَانٍ أَلْمَنَهُ طَائِرَةٌ فِي عُنُقِهِ.“

“Every man's fate (lit., bird) have we fastened on his neck.” There is also a mythical story concerning Moses and Adam and their disputes in Paradise which well illustrates the Muḥammadan belief concerning the absolute predestination of all human actions whether good or evil. It is recorded in the Mishkāt in the chapter on fate, and runs thus:—

“Adam and Moses were once disputing before their Lord, and Moses said, Thou art Adam whom God created with His hand and breathed into thee of His spirit and angels worshipped thee, and He made thee dwell in Paradise, and then thou didst make men fall down by thy sin to the earth. Adam replied, Thou art Moses whom God distinguished by sending thee with His message and His book, and He gave thee the tables on which all things are recorded. Now tell me, how many years before I was created did God write the Taurát? Moses replied, Forty years.

Then, said Adam, did you find written there that, Adam transgressed against his Lord. Yes, said Moses. Said Adam, Then why do you blame me for doing something which God decreed before He created me by forty years?" Another tradition which teaches the pre-ordination of some to heaven and others to hell has been handed down by 'Ali and preserved in the Mishkāt. It is as follows:—

”مَا مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا وَقَدْ كَتَبَ بِمَعْدَدٍ مِنَ النَّارِ وَمَعْدَدٍ

مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ.“

“There is no one amongst you whose place is not written by God, whether in the fire or in Paradise.” Yet another saying of the Prophet touching the same doctrine of hopeless despair is as follows:—

”إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّوَجَلَّ فَرَّغَ إِلَيَّ كُلِّ عَبْدٍ مِنْ خَلْقِهِ مِنْ خَمْسٍ

مِنَ أَجَلِهِ وَتَمَلُّهِ وَمَضْجِعِهِ وَأَثَرِهِ وَرِزْقِهِ.“

“Verily God most high has ordained five things on each of His servants from His creation: his appointed time, his actions, his dwelling place, his travels and his subsistence.” Little wonder that, with such a creed forced upon them, the Companions of the Prophet should ask in bewilderment “What use, then, of our striving at all!” To which the Prophet made the heartless rejoinder, “When God creates any servant for heaven, he causes him to go in the way of those destined for heaven until he dies, after which He takes him to heaven. And when He creates any servant for the fire of hell, then He causes him to go in the way of those destined for hell until his death, after which He takes him to hell!” (Mishkātul-Masābil, Kitābul-Imān, Bābu'l-Qadar.)

The same relentless doctrine of fate runs all through the Qur'an, and God is there also pictured as an almighty Despot subject to no rule but His own caprice, for:—

”يُضِلُّ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ.“

“He leads astray whom He will, and guides whom He will.” (Sūratu'n-Nahl, [xvi] 95.) Here, too, as in the Traditions, God is said to create some men specially for hell. Thus in Sūratu'l-A'raf, (vii) 180, we read:—

”وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِنَ الْبَشَرِ وَالْإِنْسِ.“

“We have created for hell many of the ginn and of mankind.” The reason for this un-Godlike proceeding is given in another part of the Qur'an, where it is said that:—

”وَأَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدًى وَنَسِيًا وَإِن كَانَتْ لَتَلْمِزُنَّ الْجِنَّ وَالإِنْسَ مِنْ الْجَنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ.“

“Had we pleased we would have given to everything its guidance; but the sentence was due from me:—I will surely fill hell with the gins and with men all together.” (Sūratu's-Sijda, [xxxii] 13.) Not only does this absolute decree of God determine the final destiny of every soul, but it affects every detail of life, and leaves man a passive machine in the hands of the great Machinist. Thus, for example, we are told that:—

”مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَفِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا.“

“No accident befalls in the earth, or in yourselves, but it was in the book before we created them.” (Sūratu'l-Hadid, [lvii] 22.) Man has thus no power of choice either for good or evil, and his very power to will is conditioned by the Supreme will of God. Thus, for example, there is a classic

passage, much used by the orthodox doctors in their discussions against the Mu'tazila heretics of Baghdād, which was supposed to effectually silence all arguments for free-will such as might be advanced by the Freethinkers of Islām. It runs thus:—

”فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ.“

“Whoso will, let him take unto His Lord a way. But will it ye shall not unless that God will.”¹ Such is the Muham-madan idea of God according to the repeated testimony of the Qur'ān and the Traditions. What a caricature! Man, in such a system, is doomed to hopeless despair, for no amount of self-abnegation on his part, no measure of striving to know and do the will of God, can alter the irrevocable decree which went forth ages before he was born. Could any system be devised by the ingenuity of Satan which would tend more to render hard and callous the heart of man, and lead him to a life of epicurean debauch! Well might 'Umar Khayyām write:—

“The moving finger writes; and, having writ,
Moves on: nor all your piety or wit
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it.”

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, may well be the motto of the Moslem, who has the satisfaction of knowing that however bad his life, he may yet be numbered amongst the favoured ones of Paradise; for has not the Prophet himself said that:—

”إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ لَيَعْمَلُ عَمَلِ أَهْلِ النَّارِ وَإِنَّهُ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ وَيَعْمَلُ

عَمَلِ أَهْلِ الْجَنَّةِ وَإِنَّهُ مِنْ أَهْلِ النَّارِ.“

¹ Sūratu'l-Insān (lxxvi 29, 30).

“Verily a servant may do the works of the people of the fire, yet he may be numbered amongst the people of Paradise; and he may do the works of the people of Paradise and yet he may be numbered amongst the people of the fire!” (Mish-kātu'l-Masābih, Kitābu'l-Imān, Bābu'l-Qadar.) The logical result of such a system, and of such a conception of God and His government of the world can only be apathy and stagnation; for if man is in the grip of a cruel and unrelenting fate which takes no account of his actions, and works out its pre-destined course with unerring and unflinching precision, then, manifestly, all effort upon the part of man, whether in the sphere of religion or morals, is vain and useless.

One is not surprised, after a study of the Islāmic doctrine of fate, to find the Prophet urging his people to a passive and apathetic submission to the ravages of plague, instead of using energetic measures of segregation for the eradication of the fell disease. Thus he says:—

”الطَّاعُونَ رِحْنٌ ... وَإِذَا وَقَعَ بِأَرْضٍ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا فَلَا تَخْرُجُوا
فِرَارًا مِنْهُ.“

“The plague is a punishment . . . and when it arrives at any place where you are, do not flee away from it.”¹ Modern sanitary science, no less than practical experience, teaches us that the ravages of plague may be much lessened by an early evacuation of infected localities; Islām says, stay where you are; your fate is fixed; and nought can delay the execution of a sentence which was passed in eternity.

We have not, in these pages, touched upon the Mu'tazila doctrine of free-will, or attempted even the briefest review of their historic struggles with the Ash'arians and other

¹ Mishkātu'l-Masābih, Kitābu'l-Jand'ja.

orthodox sects. The reason is obvious. The Mu'tazilas were a heterodox sect whose doctrines were repudiated and discredited by the orthodox; and this brief essay aims at no more than presenting a summary of the teaching of orthodox Islām with regard to the Being and attributes of God. To show that we have neither misunderstood nor mis-stated that teaching, we give below two extracts from the writings of authoritative Moslem theologians. In these dogmatic statements we have, in a nutshell, the teaching of Islām as based upon the explicit statements of the Qur'ān and the Traditions. The first quotation is from the writings of Muhammad-al-Barkavi and runs as follows:—"It is necessary to confess that good and evil take place by the pre-destination and pre-determination of God; that all that has been and all that will be are decreed from eternity and written upon the preserved table; that the faith of the believer and piety of the pious and good actions are foreseen, willed, pre-destinated, decreed by the writing on the preserved table, produced and approved by God; that the unbelief of the unbeliever, the impiety of the impious and bad actions come to pass with the fore-knowledge, will, pre-destination and decree of God, but not with His satisfaction and approval. Should any ask why God willeth and produceth evil, we can only reply that He may have wise ends in view which we cannot comprehend."¹ In the celebrated *Al-Maqsadu'l-Asna* of the great theologian Imām al-Ghazālī the doctrine is stated thus:—"He, praised be His name, doth will those things to be that are, and disposes of all accidents. Nothing passes in the empire, nor the kingdom, neither little nor much, nor small nor great, nor good nor evil, nor profitable nor hurtful, nor faith nor infidelity, nor knowledge nor ignorance, nor prosperity nor adversity, nor increase nor decrease, nor obedience nor rebellion but by His determinate

¹ Quoted in Sell's "Faith of Islām," (3rd ed.), p. 269.

counsel and decree, and His definite sentence and will: . . . there is no reversing His decree nor delaying what He hath determined."¹

Such is the Islāmic conception of God, a conception, we need scarcely point out, which inevitably leads to the obliteration of all moral distinctions, and undermines all sense of human responsibility; for if man's every act is necessitated by the express decree and will of an all-powerful God, then, manifestly, the real author of human actions is God Himself. Under such circumstances, to punish would be an act of gross injustice, and to condemn to hell torments the work of an inhuman monster. Truly did the Mu'tazilas retort that, if God be the causer of infidelity, then He is an infidel! To such blasphemous lengths does the doctrine lead us.

The Bible, it is true, contains passages, which, teach a doctrine of election; but the student is preserved from a false exegesis by the clear statements of scripture which exhibit the Divine will as desiring that all should come to a knowledge of the truth, and teach that salvation is obtained through the action of man's free-will. Thus, to quote one or two from a wealth of passages, the Bible states that God, "Willeth that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." (1 Tim., ii. 4.) He is "Long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. iii, 9.) "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) In the Bible God is pictured as a loving Father yearning over His children, and sending His only begotten Son to effect their salvation. In Islām God is represented as pointing out to Adam the spirits of his descendents yet unborn, and, dividing them into two

¹ Quoted in Hughes' "Dictionary of Islām," p. 145.

hands, ranking one company upon Adam's right hand and one on his left, He says:—

“هُؤْلَاءِ فِي الْجَنَّةِ وَلَا أَبَالِي وَهُؤْلَاءِ فِي النَّارِ وَلَا أَبَالِي .”

“These are for Paradise, and I care not; and these are for the fire and I care not.”

This is the picture of an oriental despot who, walking through the streets of the city, points to one and arbitrarily orders wealth and preferment, whilst to another he pronounces the dread sentence of death. It speaks of One of omnipotent power who plays the human pieces upon the chess-board of the world according to his own arbitrary will. But this doctrine of the “resistless sovereignty of an inscrutable God” which contains such unworthy, rather unmoral, representations of the Supreme is contradicted by the deepest instincts of the human heart, and gives the lie to those, who, in all ages, have been feeling after God if haply they might find Him. If the Muḥammadan doctrine of fate be true, then our prayers and our fasts, our temples and our worship are alike useless, and the human heart, as it sighs for reconciliation with God, is only met by a mocking echo. But the very existence of conscience proves our responsibility, and the consciousness of guilt which accompanies wrong-doing affords a silent testimony to human freedom. The Qur'anic doctrine of fate, if truly believed in, would bring all human relationships to a stand still; for it is the belief that man is free which animates us in all our dealings with one another, and lies at the basis of all human government. Take away the belief in individual responsibility, and the world would soon become a veritable saturnalia, with every man a law unto himself; but in our next chapter we shall see that the instincts of the human heart have proved stronger than the words of either Qur'an or Traditions, and deep down in the heart of man there remains the belief in the efficacy of prayer and the Mercy of God.

CHAPTER V

GOD IN HIS RELATION TO SIN AND SALVATION

ONE would think, after a study of God's relation to Man as unfolded in the Muḥammadan doctrine of fate, that Islām could have no doctrine of sin or plan of salvation; for if all human actions have been decreed and necessitated ages before the creation, then it would seem to logically follow that all distinctions between virtue and vice are at an end, and that the terms reward and punishment cease to have any meaning. Yet, far from this being the case, it is one of the paradoxes of Islām that it has a detailed doctrine of sin, and an elaborate scheme of rewards and punishments. What Carlyle called the “wearisome, confused jumble” and, may we add, the hopeless inconsistency of the Qur'an is nowhere more manifest than in its teaching concerning sin and salvation. On the one hand, as we have seen, Muḥammad taught a bold doctrine of fate which robbed man of all free-will and left him a piece of passive clay in the hands of the Potter, and yet, on the other hand, he found himself unable to suppress the longings of the human heart for reconciliation with God, or to quench its belief in the reality of Man's responsibility and freedom. The gross inconsistency of the whole doctrine of fate has been forcibly expressed by the immortal 'Umar Khayyūm in his Rubāiyāt, where he says,

“Oh Thou, who didst with pitfall and with gin
Beset the road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with predestined evil round
Enmesh, and then impute my fall to sin.”

In studying the Muḥammadan doctrine of God in His relation to sin, one is struck with the almost complete divorce between religion and morals which it reveals. It is not so much righteousness which God requires as ceremonial purity. Inner sanctification is little urged, but the performance of a mechanical routine of allotted works is all important; thus sin is not so much the violation of an eternal moral law of righteousness as the infraction of some arbitrary command. This is seen in the character of the Moslem trader, who often scrupulous to a fault in the observance of the daily prayers, will yet often continue meanwhile to lie and cheat without any sense of the inconsistency of his conduct. Generally speaking, the European who lies and cheats makes no pretence of piety at all; and his conduct at least has the merit of consistency.

One has only to take up a collection of the traditions of the Prophet, or a law-book of Islām, such as the *Hidāyah* or the *Fatāwā Alamgiri*, in order to see to what an extent the purely ceremonial has usurped the place of the spiritual, and how few are the calls to inner sanctification compared with the number of injunctions to the proper fulfilment of certain mechanical observances. All this has an important bearing upon the Moslem idea of God, and leads the worshipper further and further away from real spiritual worship. No better illustration of what we have written above could be obtained than that afforded by the liturgical prayer service of Islām. We have no hesitation in saying that, in that service, it is a scrupulous attention to every detail of a minute and often ludicrous ritual which is the first great requisite. Let the worshipper be ever so sincere, his motives ever so transparent, yet the efficacy of his prayer—which to the great majority of Moslems must be made in an unknown tongue—depends upon the correct performance of certain lustrations and genuflections, the slightest infraction of which will mar the efficacy

of the whole prayer. Upon this point the teaching of the Prophet is explicit that,

“ان الله لا يقبل صلاة بغير طهور.”

“Verily God accepts no prayer without ablution,” and,

“مَنْ تَرَكَ مَوْضِعَ شَعْرَةٍ مِنْ جَنَابَةِ لَمْ يَغْسِلْهَا فَعَلَّ بِهَا كَذًا

أَوْ كَذًا مِنَ النَّارِ.”

“He who leaves the place of the hairs impure and does not wash them it will be done for him in like manner with the fire (of hell).” It is striking that the necessity for moral purity is scarcely ever alluded to, whilst, on the other hand, all Moslem books of the description alluded to above contain page after page of minute instructions for the right performance of the prescribed ablutions. Prayer, in short, becomes a mere mechanical act as distinguished from a mental one; thus in a dozen places of the *Mishkāt*—to mention but one well-known collection of Traditions—it is clearly laid down that water will wash away sin. We can find space for only one illustration here; the reader may see others for himself in the chapter on *Ghusl* (bathing). In the *Kitābu't-Tahārat*, part I, we read:

“إِذَا تَوَضَّأَ الْعَبْدُ الْمَسْلُومُ أَوْ الْمُؤْمِنُ فَغَسَلَ وَجْهَهُ خَرَجَ مِنْ

وَجْهِهِ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ نَظَرَ إِلَيْهَا بِعَيْنَيْهِ مَعَ الْمَاءِ أَوْ مَعَ آخِرِ قَطْرِ الْمَاءِ

فَإِذَا غَسَلَ يَدَيْهِ خَرَجَ مِنْ يَدَيْهِ كُلِّ خَطِيئَةٍ كَانَ تَطَشَّتْهَا يَدَا

مَعَ الْمَاءِ أَوْ مَعَ آخِرِ قَطْرِ الْمَاءِ فَإِذَا غَسَلَ رِجْلَيْهِ خَرَجَ كُلِّ

خَطِيئَةٍ مَشَتْهَا رِجْلَاهُ مَعَ الْمَاءِ أَوْ مَعَ آخِرِ قَطْرِ الْمَاءِ حَتَّى يَخْرُجَ

نَفْسًا مِنَ الذُّنُوبِ.”

"When a Moslem servant or a believer performs his ablutions and washes his face, all the sins which he had looked upon with his two eyes come out from his face with the water or with the last drop of water; and when he washes his two hands, all the sins which his two hands have committed come out from his hands with the water or with the last drop of water; and when he washes his two feet all the sins towards which his two feet have walked come out from his feet with the water or with the last drop of water, until he comes forth cleansed from (his) sins."

The formal and legal character of Islām is nowhere more clearly seen than in its treatment of the subject of sin. *This failure to recognize the true character of sin which is such a prominent feature of Moslem theology may be directly traceable to its perverted idea of God.* In Islām God is depicted, not so much as a righteous Judge upholding the majesty of the law, as a fickle despot whose good-will can be gained by the punctilious observance of certain mechanical laws. Even the simple repetition of the famous ninety-nine names is sufficient, as we have already seen, to secure salvation. Another tradition, preserved by Tirmidhī and Nasāi, relates that the Prophet said:—

”مَنْ قَرَأَ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ مَاتِي مَرَّةً قُلَّ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ مُبْدِي عَنَّهُ

ذُنُوبَ خَمْسِينَ سَنَةً.“

"Whoever recites (the words) 'say, He is one God' two hundred times each day, the sins of fifty years will be blotted out from him." (Kitāb Fazāilu'l-Qur'ān.) The pernicious doctrine that the performance of certain ceremonial works will blot out sin is repeatedly taught, and a pilgrimage to Mecca is held up as a certain passport to heaven.

A saying of the Prophet preserved by both Muslim and Bukhāri, and recorded in the Mishkāt in the chapter on

the names of God, well illustrates the strange moral confusion which existed in the mind of Muḥammad on the subject of sin and its pardon. The tradition runs as follows:—

”قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ عَبْدًا آذَنَبَ ذَنْبًا فَقَالَ رَبِّ آذَنَبْتُ
فَاغْفِرْهُ فَقَالَ رَبُّهُ أَعْلِمَ عَبْدِي أَنْ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ غَفَرْتُ
لِعَبْدِي ثُمَّ مَكَتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ آذَنَبَ ذَنْبًا فَقَالَ رَبِّ آذَنَبْتُ
ذَنْبًا وَاغْفِرْهُ فَقَالَ أَعْلِمَ عَبْدِي أَنْ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ
غَفَرْتُ لِعَبْدِي ثُمَّ مَكَتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ آذَنَبَ ذَنْبًا قَالَ رَبِّ
آذَنَبْتُ ذَنْبًا آخَرَ فَاغْفِرْهُ لِي فَقَالَ أَعْلِمَ عَبْدِي أَنْ لَهُ رَبًّا يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ
وَيَأْخُذُ بِهِ غَفَرْتُ لِعَبْدِي فَلْيَفْعَلْ مَا شَاءَ.“

"The Prophet said, 'Verily a certain servant (of God) committed, a grievous sin and said, O, My Lord, I have sinned; forgive it. His Lord said, Doth my servant know that he hath a Lord who forgives the sins and also punishes. I have forgiven my servant. Afterwards he delayed as God wished, and then again he sinned a grievous sin and said, O, My Lord, I have sinned grievously; forgive it. He said, Doth my servant know that he hath a Lord who forgives the sins and also punishes; I have forgiven my servant; Then he delayed as God wished and again sinned grievously and said, O, Lord I have sinned grievously again, forgive it for me. Then He said, Doth my servant know that he hath a Lord who forgives the sins and punishes them; I have forgiven my servant; therefore let him do what he likes!' Such teaching constitutes a direct incentive to sin, and we do not wonder that, under the circumstances, Muslims have not felt the need of an atonement or realized the

heinousness of sin. Sin which is easily forgiven is lightly committed; but let a man realize, with the Christian, that forgiveness cost the death of Jesus upon the cross, and he will learn to hate and avoid it.

The fact is, one searches in vain in the authoritative writings of Islām for any reasonable or consistent theory of salvation. To the cry of the human heart which realizes its own sinfulness and cries out, "What must I do to be saved?" Islām makes no satisfactory reply. In that reply, indeed, one can see the utter incompleteness and inadequacy of the Moslem idea of God. *Without a true and worthy view of the character of God, it is not strange that Muhammad should have failed to conceive of a scheme of salvation worthy of Deity.* His answers to the question "What must I do to be saved?" are as numerous as they are mutually inconsistent. Thus it would be an easy matter, did space permit, to quote texts showing that salvation will be administered on a strict basis of justice, when man's every act will be weighed in the scales and judgment given accordingly. Other texts teach just as unequivocally that every man's salvation, Muhammad's included, depends absolutely upon the mercy of God. The Traditions, again, in contradiction to the Qur'ān, teach that the intercession of Muhammad is the great hope for sinners; and, finally, there is the great doctrine overshadowing and nullifying all others that the final destiny of every man for heaven or for hell was decreed and fixed long before the creation of the world. A gloomy creed indeed.

One of the names given to God in Islām is "al-'Adl" "the Just." In another place He is called "ar-Rahim" "the Merciful"; but Islām fails to explain how the Supreme can be, at the same time, both just and merciful. Justice demands the punishment of sin, and no scheme of salvation which does not provide for this can be either reasonable or true. On the other hand, room must be left for the exercise of the

mercy of God, so that both these attributes of the Almighty find full expression. Islām in failing to satisfy these two conditions has failed to satisfy the hopes of its votaries, and, in spite of a way "made easy" for believers, history shows us that the best and noblest of the Prophet's followers have approached the grave in fear and uncertainty. Thus of the Khalifa 'Ali it is related that a friend visited him and said, "How does the Prince of Believers to-day?" To which the Khalifa replied, "Like a poor sinner living the lot which has been assigned to him, and waiting its dreadful termination." Concerning 'Umar Ibn 'Abdu'llāh, one of the Companions, we are told that he was wont to fast the entire day, and spend whole nights in prayer. On such occasions he would be heard by his neighbours shrieking out in the stillness of the night hours, "Oh my God! The fire of hell robs me of sleep! Oh pardon me my sins. The lot of Man in this world is care and sorrow, and in the next judgment and the fire. Oh! Where shall the soul find rest and happiness?"¹

Islām brings no assurance of salvation because it offers no substitution for the sinner, and provides no remedy for sin; yet the human soul cries out for a propitiation, and longs for some assurance of forgiveness. The Biblical doctrine that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" finds a ready response in the human heart, and in the Shi'ah doctrine of the expiatory death of Hasan and Husain we see the expression of a deep-rooted conviction of the human soul.

When Islām is able to conceive of God as Love, then, and not till then, will the Moslem come to perceive the sweet reasonableness of the atonement of Christ. Islām admits the doctrine of original sin, and believes that through Adam's sin all men became transgressors; why, then, should Moslems think it unreasonable that by the obedience of

¹ Quoted in Osborn's "Islām under the Khalifs of Baghdād," p. 88.

one, Jesus Christ, all men should be made righteous? This is the great central truth of the revelation made by God in the Injil, nay rather it is the Injil, and in it millions have found peace. Let the Moslem reader, then, turn to the Holy Bible for God's revelation of Himself, and he will find that He is not an inscrutable Despot punishing man for the sins which He Himself compelled him to commit, but a loving Father who desires not the death of one of His creatures, and in words of sweet persuasiveness invites all to turn to Him and live. This God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, and it is only by the way of the cross of Jesus that sinful man can approach the holy God. On that cross the claims of justice were met, and the way prepared for the exercise of divine mercy, so that now whosoever will may come and take of the water of life freely. He who would know God must know Jesus Christ, the Word of God, for "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him." (John i. 18.) "He that hath seen me" said Jesus "hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9). "I am the way, and the truth and the life: no one cometh unto the Father but by me." (John xiv. 6.)