

Quaker Universalist Group

**ISLAM TODAY:
A MUSLIM QUAKER'S VIEW**

Christopher Bagley



QUG Pamphlet No. 34

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The Quaker Universalist Group

The Quaker Universalist Group (QUG) is based on the understanding that spiritual awareness is accessible to everyone of any religion or none, and that no one person and no one faith can claim to have a final revelation or monopoly of truth. We acknowledge that such awareness may be expressed in many different ways. We delight in this diversity and warmly welcome both Quakers and non-Quakers to join us.

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About the author

Christopher served in the Royal Navy until, becoming a Christian pacifist, he refused to obey orders and was imprisoned for 12 months. After a period as a journalist (writing for *Tribune*, the *Daily Worker*, and *Peace News*) he studied psychiatric nursing at the Quaker Hospital, The Retreat, York, later becoming a Member of the Religious Society of Friends. After university study in mental health, psychology and social work he became a research fellow at The National Neurological Hospital, and then a researcher at The Maudsley Psychiatric Hospital, both in London.

He later emigrated to Canada where, in the absence of a Quaker Meeting, he returned to Anglicanism. He has held research chairs in child welfare and applied social studies at universities in Canada, Hong Kong and Britain, and is currently Emeritus Professor of Social Science at Southampton University. Between 1990 and 2008 he worked with international research and aid projects in India, Nepal and The Philippines for the rescue and rehabilitation of sexually trafficked girls. Since 2008 he has been involved in networks of support and supervision for postgraduate Muslim students (mostly from Arabic countries) studying in Britain.

Today Chris describes himself as both a Quaker and a Muslim: he is a member of East Cheshire Area Quaker Meeting and also attends Cheadle and Didsbury Mosques in Manchester.

About this pamphlet

The Quaker Universalist Group is delighted to publish this pamphlet by Christopher Bagley. It fills a gap in our published literature in that it is an individual Quaker's view of Islam, from the inside: Christopher is both a Muslim and a Quaker.

Not all QUG members will agree with the views in the pamphlet, since it is a personal account, but readers will find it a fascinating insight into the life and beliefs of an individual Muslim Quaker.

We feel this pamphlet is very apposite at this time. In the international context so many conflicts seem to be between groups of different religious backgrounds and persuasions: for example, Christian and Muslim, Jewish and Muslim, Sunni and Shia. Terrorism is rarely out of the headlines and it is often associated with Muslims in people's minds. Within individual European nations, including the UK, there has been the rise of political groups which blame 'outsiders' for the nations' problems – and these 'outsiders' include our Muslim communities.

This pamphlet is relevant to a number of questions facing us today:

- The Quaker Universalist Group has in its core statement the words 'spiritual awareness is accessible to everyone of any religion or none, and that no one person and no one faith can claim to have a final revelation or monopoly of truth'. How does this square with the belief expressed in this pamphlet that God's final message to humanity was through the Qur'an, which gives us the fundamental rules which guide our lives?
- How is 'fundamentalism' understood today? Does it mean 'going back to the fundamentals' of a religion or does it mean emphasising particular aspects of a religion in an extreme and uncompromising way? What is a fundamentalist Muslim? What is a fundamentalist Quaker?
- How can an understanding of Islam and its relation with other religions help us to tackle the pressing problems in the world today, especially violence?
- What are the similarities and differences between Quakerism and Islam? Is there a 'core' to all religions or are there incompatible differences between them?

ISLAM TODAY: A MUSLIM QUAKER'S VIEW

Preamble: Fundamental Values of Quakers and Muslims

The paradox of Quaker fundamentalism is that nothing is compulsory: toleration of a plurality of ideas and actions is the hallmark of Quakerism. But the conduct of that tolerance is marked by implicit rather than explicit guides, as a reading of *Advices and Queries (AQ)*, and *Quaker Faith and Practice* will show. As Quakers we must listen to the promptings of love and truth in our hearts (AQ 1). We are enjoined to bring the whole of our life under the ordering of the spirit of Christ and treasure our experience of God, however it comes to us (AQ 2). Do we try to set aside times of quiet for openness to the Holy Spirit (AQ 3)? How do we interpret our life in the light of Quakerism's Christian heritage (AQ 4)?

When considering Islam or other faiths (in AQ 6): "Do you work gladly with other religious groups in the pursuit of common goals? While remaining faithful to Quaker insights, try to enter imaginatively into the life and witness of other communities of faith, creating together the bonds of friendship?" Yes, is my answer, I have entered the world of Islam, and in consequence I have submitted my spirit to Almighty God. I have not ceased to be a Quaker, but nevertheless have joyfully become a Muslim, accepting the revealed word of God in the Holy Qur'an, praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan, acting as

charitably as I can in line with the guides to civic behaviour given to us in the life and teaching of the Prophet Muhammad, and giving to charity in the Muslim manner of *Zakah*. In Quaker meeting I silently recite the Muslim prayers; after prayers in the Mosque I seek the spirit in myself and others in silent worship, as I do in Quaker meetings.

I have accepted the fundamentals of Islam, which are in several important ways similar to the fundamentals of Quakerism. But my Quaker fundamentalism leads me further, to be a pacifist. I have endured imprisonment because of this pacifism, to which I am fundamentally committed. *Hier stehe, ich kann nicht anders*: I stand as a pacifist, absolutely, like John Woolman who refused to assist in the business of slavery. In this, then, I am a Quaker fundamentalist, just as I am a Muslim fundamentalist in following the life and teachings of the Prophet Christ and the Prophet Muhammad.

Introduction

Deep assignments run through our lives. There are no coincidences. J.G. Ballard, 1992.¹

The humble, meek, merciful, just, pious, and devout souls are everywhere of one religion; and when death has taken off the mask they will know one another, though the divers liveries they wear here [on earth] makes them strangers. William Penn, 1693.²

For me, religion – no matter which one – is ultimately about people wanting to live humble, moral lives that create a harmonious community and promote tolerance and friendship. All religious rules should be in service of this goal, The Islam I learned and practice does just that. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, 2015.³

This essay is not simply “a” Quaker perspective of Islam. It is the subjective reflection of one who was born a Jew, became a Christian, then a Quaker, and finally a Muslim. All of these statuses, given me at birth or from my later choosing, are compatible with one another and lead to the brilliant sensations

¹ J.G. Ballard (1991). *The Kindness of Women*. London: Harper-Collins.

² W. Penn (1693/1995). *Quaker Faith and Practice*. London: The Society of Friends.

³ K. Abdul-Jabbar (2015). Paris was not about religion. *Time Magazine*, January 26, p. 15, commenting on the Paris “cartoon” massacres.

of being created by and loved by God, whose first level of paradise, the Kingdom of Heaven, has already spilled upon the earth from the Garden of Paradise. We are all children of Adam and Eve, custodians of a beautiful earth.⁴

Early Quakers and Islam

We owe an understanding of how early Quakers understood Islam to the careful historical research of Justin Meggitt,⁵ who shows that George Fox was the first charismatic Christian to read The Qur'an, and to take its message seriously. Quaker contemporaries of Fox visited Mediterranean cities in which captured seamen and traders were enslaved by Turkish Muslims, arguing that The Qur'anic message implied a much fairer treatment of captives. Many of these captives became Quakers by conviction, exercising a powerful message of non-violence within the Muslim world. In parallel, other Christian leaders were caught up in a fugue of anti-Muslim hatred which exceeded in venom even the Christian diatribes of the Crusades.⁶ Remarkable throughout its history, Islam has

⁴ C. Bagley (2014) Review of Farrow & Wildwood's *Universe as Revelation. Universalist: Journal of the Quaker Universalist Group*, 100, 31-34. See also C. Bagley "Islam, predestination and free will: a paradox resolved?" *Universalist: Journal of the Quaker Universalist Group*, 2015, 103, 7-11. Parts of this article are reproduced in the present essay.

⁵ See Jason Meggitt, in Recommend Books, below. See too J. Meggitt (2015) Labels. *The Friend*, March 13, p. 8, for a criticism of the over-romanticised selection of Qur'anic quotations.

⁶ An extraordinary "hysteria of knowledge" swept European writing for three centuries from around 1700, claiming that virtually all Muslim males were 'sodomites', a libel which justified, inter alia, imperial conquest, suppression and

been faithful to Qur'anic principle, and has been tolerant of Jews, Christians and certain other religious groups in countries where several religious groups co-dwell.⁷ Christianity, in contrast, has been profoundly intolerant of other religions, particularly Islam and Judaism, and has provided the ideological underpinning of centuries of pogroms and ultimately, the value substrate of the holocaust itself.⁸ Only since 1948 and the foundation of Israel, arbitrarily imposed on the traditional land of Palestine, has this trustful tolerance broken down, a situation discussed below.

Islam Today

Islam literally means “surrender”: surrendering oneself to the will of Allah, Almighty God, accepting God’s final message to humanity in The Qur’an, and believing that Muhammad is the

slaughter of these ‘infidels’: see N. Mater (1999) *Turks, Moors and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery*. New York: Columbia University Press. See also J. Goody (2004/2013) *Islam in Europe*. Cambridge: Polity Press; and New York: Wiley.

⁷ I. Lapidus (2002) *A History of Islamic Societies*. Cambridge University Press.

J. Esposito (1998) *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford University Press.

⁸ For evidence supporting this thesis see:

H. Maccoby (1998) *The Mythmaker: Paul and The Invention of Christianity*. New York: Sterling Publishers – Maccoby argues that from its very beginnings Christianity involved a profoundly anti-semitic ideology. For an elaboration of this thesis, particularly in the second millennium, see: W. Nichols (1995) *Christian Anti-Semitism: A History of Hate*. New York: Rowmont Littlefield.

On twentieth century social structure and the embeddedness of anti-semitism see: C. Bagley & G. Verma (1979) *Racial Prejudice, the Individual and Society*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

On Christian anti-semitism and the Holocaust, see: S. Heschel (2008) *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*. Princeton University Press.

final Prophet in a long line of prophets. Other obligations for the Muslim include prayer five times a day, from dawn until after sunset; giving a prescribed amount of personal wealth to charity each year; fasting during the month of Ramadan (the month in which The Prophet received the first of the Suras, i.e. books, of the Qur'an); and, if health and means allow, making the pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in a lifetime. Besides the five daily prayers (which are usually carried out with other family members, fellow workers in employment settings, or in The Mosque) male Muslims are also required to attend for one of their daily prayers at The Mosque each Friday and hear an address or sermon from the local Imam.

Large Mosques, such as the one I attend in Manchester, are busy places from dawn to late at night, with rich carpets upon which the faithful pray towards Makkah. Scattered around the Mosque will be worshippers reading The Qur'an, saying private prayers, while gleeful young boys expend energy racing along the carpet in their stockinged feet, in between bouts of learning the Qur'an by heart.

There are separate washing facilities for men and women, in which the ceremony of *wudu* (washing of feet, hands, nose, ears, mouth and head) is performed as ritual purification. Much food is served in anterooms, many study groups meet, brothers of the Ummah (the worldwide brotherhood of Muslims) greet one another, young sons (and often daughters too) accompany

their fathers in the main Mosque, but women and adolescent girls meet and pray separately. Men greet affectionately, shaking hands and embracing (the act of handshaking indicates a desire that each other's sins may be forgiven). Worshippers at Didsbury Mosque in Manchester are a mosaic of colours, ranging from the fair skin of the British converts and the Chechnya-heritage, through the medium brown of those of Arab, Iranian, Pakistani, Middle Eastern and Indian heritage, to the lovely richness of the dark skinned East and West African heritage groups. In Islam the concept of 'race' is meaningless, although national differences often prevail so that a Mosque may reflect the language of the majority of Muslims in the local community, such as Urdu or Arabic. The Qur'an was received from Almighty God in classical Arabic, and for this reason the Arabic language has remained largely unchanged since the first revelation to Muhammad in 610 CE. Some of the five daily prayers are publicly recited in Arabic, although longer prayers may be silently uttered in translation: translations of The Qur'an are numerous, but sometimes controversial.⁹

During the month of Ramadan no food or liquid is consumed during daylight hours. This becomes more demanding for those living in countries of the far north or south. In Manchester in 2015 the period of fasting was from about 3:15 in the morning until about 9:45 in the evening, so all food

⁹ S. Qudah-Refai (2014). *Dogmatic Approaches of Qur'an Translators: Linguistic and Theological Issues*. Leeds: University of Leeds doctoral thesis.

and liquid had to be eaten during early morning hours. Often the fast is broken in the late evening in the Mosque, followed by free food and special prayers. Ramadan (which begins on a different day each year, according to the moon's phase) is a time for specially nourishing and delicious food during the night hours. Islam is tolerant of those whose medical condition (e.g. diabetes, pregnancy) makes fasting inadvisable; children may fast for half of the fasting period, from about the age of 10. Ramadan too is a time for paying the *Zakat* contributions to charity (2.5% of one's material assets) since at this time the money is especially blessed. The *Zakat* incorporates the idea of "giving back" to the community the spiritual, personal and material gifts with which Almighty God has endowed us. Ramadan is also a special time for doing good deeds for the whole community, for reconciliation, and the forgiveness of debts, both emotional and material.

My fellow Muslims tolerate me as a vegetarian and have friendly debates with me about my (Quaker) pacifist beliefs. Islam has a special role for the "stay at homes": the men who prefer to do women's work rather than fight an external enemy.¹⁰ I am, praise be to Allah, accepted by my fellow Muslims as a pacifist, a vegetarian, and a Muslim-Quaker.

¹⁰ I am also heartened by Tariq Ramadan's proposal that Islam should at least tolerate gay partnerships (T. Ramadan (2010) *What I Believe*. Oxford University Press, pp 102-104).

How I became a Muslim

When I began researching Islam in order to compare Muslim and Quaker understandings of God, and the moral behaviours that such beliefs imply, I had not anticipated that this intellectual journey would lead me to actually become a Muslim. I should have been warned, though, by Brett Miller-White's experience, which led him to convert to Islam, but remain a Quaker.¹¹

Once I had embraced Islam my life changed in that a realisation of the nature of Allah, *the* God, set my heart and mind spinning in a flux of wonder and joy. The moment my forehead rested on the prayer mat in submission to Allah the whole Spirit of God flowed into my soul, that soul which Almighty God implants in each of us early in our foetal life. This was a moment of religious ecstasy, this new flowering of the spirit within my body: an ecstasy that is repeated five times each day as I recite the *fatihah*, the primary prayer of Islam on "the straight path" which I follow in my journey towards God. Now in Friends' Meeting I sit facing Makkah and silently repeat the (mid-day) prayers. And, of course, I act (silently) like a normal Quaker, which I hope I still am. Fortunately, Quakerism is a non-credal religion, although many Quakers believe, as I do, that Jesus was not the literal son of God, but a wise teacher, a Prophet in a long line of Prophets. And, of course, I

¹¹ B. Miller-White (2004) The journeyman – the making of a Muslim Quaker. *Quaker Theology*, 10, 1-4.

now accept that Muhammad is the Final Prophet, who received the final message from Almighty God, in the form of the Holy Qur'an.

Islam believes simultaneously in both free will and determinism, an interesting paradox that is resolved when we apprehend the Islamic understanding of Allah. First of all, Allah is The God, beyond and above, and different from the Christian idea of the friendly but ephemeral, shape-shifting creature who is now god, now man, now father, now son, now ghost. The God of Islam is more similar in concept to the Jewish God of my childhood. The final message given by Allah makes it clear that this genderless God is simultaneously the creator of all things, including all universes, known and unknown; and miraculously also the knower of all of the thoughts, feelings and actions of each member of humankind from the beginning of human creation, until the end of all human existence. For each of us Allah has ordained two angels who stand beside us at all times, recording both our good and our bad deeds. And at the final hour Almighty God will judge us: some will be found wanting, but some will achieve a life in paradise. I cannot know my fate in this regard: only Almighty God has knowledge of that final judgement. But Allah gives us numerous opportunities to earn forgiveness, in following the rules of conduct outlined in The Qur'an, through daily prayers, through fasting at the time of Ramadan, through pilgrimage, through giving to charity and

through doing good deeds. The Blessed Prophet, in the collected Hadith (sayings of The Prophet Muhammad), has given us numerous guides to such positive behaviours. Islam enjoins a life of moral purpose, of joyful commitment to all of humanity, Muslim and Non-Muslim.¹²

Allah knows every detail of our lives (and this is true of all human beings, believers and unbelievers alike), from the moment of our birth to the moment of our death. God knows in advance all of the choices I will make in my life, for good or ill. The crucial point is that although God knows what my choice will be, I will not know what my choice is until the moment after I make that choice. God has determined the choices my life course presents me with: but I have free will in making those choices, and God will not interfere with my choosing. Each choice I make directs my life path in a different direction, leading me to a fresh set of choices. It's as if, quantum-like, I am led by Almighty God into an infinite series of fresh universes. In the words of Robert Frost's famous poem: "Two

¹² See the Hadith collected by An-Nawawi, Sardah and Shehata, in the Recommended Books, listed at the end of this booklet.

For an account of Hadith scholarship in verification of Hadith, see M.H. Kamali (2009). *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*. Markfield, UK: Islamic Studies Centre.

See also for an extensive list of Hadith and their English translations:

M.B.I. As-Sanani (1996) *Bulugh Al-Maram Attainment of the Objective according to Evidence of the Ordinances*. Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, for the English text, and commentary on 1,358 Hadith, in the realm of law and social progress.

M.M. Khan (Translator and Editor) (1996) *The Meanings of The Ahadith Summarized by Al-Bukhari*. Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, for the English text, and commentary on 2,330 Hadith, in the realm of spiritual progress.

For an important account of Hadith influence on mediaeval and modern history see: J.A.C. Brown (2009) *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*. London: OneWorld Books.

roads diverged in a wood, and I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.”¹³

The Islamic approach to freedom of choice bears a resemblance to Hume’s “compatibilist” idea of free will: our choices are determined by our previous choices, which are part of our individually unique social matrix.¹⁴ Hume criticized the determinism implied by conventional religious beliefs (how can God, who ordains all, tolerate wrong choices?), but in the Islamic conception Allah’s knowledge of choice, before the human subject makes that choice, seems to overcome this dilemma. In Islam each individual is absolutely free in making choices, although there is an array of moral teaching to show each of us what the right choice is on the journey to “the straight path”. Like the Christian quantum physicist Don Page,¹⁵ who argues for the existence of free will, I intuit the infinite number of worlds in the quanta in which I have made different decisions: but in existential terms all I know is the now, my

¹³ Robert Frost’s poem “The Road not Taken” is included in numerous anthologies, and is freely available on the internet. For philosophical implications, see: M. Hollis (2014) Edward Thomas, Robert Frost and the road to war. *The Guardian online*, August 8, 2011.

¹⁴ D. Hume (1998) *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Ed. T. Beauchamp). Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ D. Page (2011) Consciousness and the quantum. *Journal of Cosmology*, online journal at:

www.journalofcosmology.com. I can also warmly recommend the books by the Anglican priest, quantum scientist and theologian John Polkinghorne for a brilliant insight into God’s miraculous power in moulding a complex universe: J. Polkinghorne (2005) *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion*. New York: Crossroad Books. For a Quaker-universalist perspective on quantum theory, see C. Isham (2013) Quantum theory and the concept of reality. *Universalist: Journal of the Quaker Universalist Group* 98, 36-49.

direct experience of the choices that Allah presents me with in the world in which I presently exist.

In the Islamic model Allah is continuously giving us fresh choices, and sometimes will test our faith with severe setbacks (as, for example, in the case of the Prophet Job). But, the Qur'an assures us that these tests will never be beyond our ability to bear: we will always have the God-given strength to make the right choice in any moral dilemma (Quran 7:39). Indeed, it is a privilege to be tested by Allah in this way, since it gives clear evidence that the Almighty Creator is taking a personal interest in us.

So, I remain a Quaker: a Muslim Quaker, rejoicing in the many points of convergence between Islam and Quakerism. I follow, in Rhiannon Grant's phrase " ... the practice of multiple religious belongings, which allows people to be deeply familiar with and committed to more than one religion at once."¹⁶ Or, put another way, there are different but compatible pathways to Almighty God. Islam has recognized this in the tolerance of Judaism and Christianity to the extent that each religion worships one God, and adheres to the core of their scriptural teachings (which in my understanding of Christianity means following Jesus as Prophet, not as God). Ziauddin Sardar¹⁷ in his account of Muhammad's life and teaching observes, of the Islamic sources: "The legacy of Jesus is gentleness,

¹⁶ Rhiannon Grant (2014) Naming the Mystery. *The Friend*, July 25, 2014.

¹⁷ See Ziauddin Sardar, in list of Recommended Books, at the end of this booklet.

compassion and humility. The ‘peace’ of which Jesus speaks, in the words of The Qur’an is this: Peace be upon me the day of my birth, on the day of my death, and on the day I shall be raised up alive.” Each human being may pray for such Peace.

The Bible and its Three Books

The Bible consists of three books: the Old Testament (OT), the New Testament (NT), and The Qur’an. The OT is a collection of historical truths and folk myths; sometimes the messages of The Prophets come through clearly, but oftentimes the details have been fudged or forged, for political and nationalist convenience.¹⁸

¹⁸ The evidence on forgery, confusion, conflation with folk tales and ideological and political obfuscation of Old and New Testaments seems overwhelming – see for example:

D.C. Allison (2005) *Resurrecting Jesus: The Earliest Christian Tradition and Its Interpretation*. New York: Wiley.

B. Ehrman (2003) *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and Faiths We Never Knew*. Oxford University Press.

B. Ehrman (2003). *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament*. Oxford University Press.

B. Ehrman (2009) *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible*. New York: Harper Collins.

B. Ehrman (2011) *Forged: Writing in the Name of God*. New York: Harper Collins.

R.L. Fox (1992) *The Unauthorized Version: Truth and Fiction in The Bible*. London: Penguin Books.

P. Jenkins (2001) *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way*. Oxford University Press.

C. Keith & A. Le Donne (Eds.) (2012). *Jesus, Criteria and the Demise of Authenticity*. London: Continuum Books.

J. Long (2005) *Biblical Nonsense: A Review of The Bible for Doubting Christians*. New York: iUniverse Books.

D.B. Martin (1995) *The Corinthian Body*. Yale University Press.

J.T. Tabor (2007) *The Jesus Dynasty*. New York: Harper Collins.

E. Pagels (2003) *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas*. New York: Vintage Books.

The case of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son is a case in point: the OT wrongly claims the son to be Isaac, when in fact we know from God's revelation that this son was named Ishmael, Abraham's first born (Qur'an 37:99-110).

The NT contains conflicting and often vague accounts of the life, teaching and apparent death of Jesus. Biblical scholarship shows that these accounts, written many years after the actual events, contain forgeries and obfuscations, and ideologies which served the needs of differing power groups in the four centuries after Christ's birth. In the first two centuries at least three Christian groups struggled to obtain power and control over NT contents: these were the Ebionites (Jews who believed that Christ was not in fact crucified, but remained a Jew, with a message for Jews alone); the Gnostics, who believed that the NT held special wisdom for an elect group; and the Paulites, who developed the ideology that Christ was

J. Wright-Kunst (2006) *Sexual Slander and Ancient Christianity*. Columbia University Press.

In criticizing "sacred texts" we should remember, in humility, that there are elements of truth in each of the texts, and it is this truth that we should seek – to quote Karen Armstrong: "... charity and loving kindness are essential to biblical interpretation. In our dangerously polarized world, a common hermeneutics among the religions should surely emphasize this tradition. Jews, Christians and Muslims must first examine the flaws of their own scriptures and only then listen, with humility, generosity and charity to the exegesis of others." K. Armstrong (2007). *The Bible: The Biography*. London: Atlantic Books. In Armstrong's exegesis, historical and cultural contexts of the text are important, a view taken by a modern team of Qur'anic translators: *The Qur'an: A Monotheist Translation*. Keighley: Islamic Books for Brainbow, 2007.

See also the texts proposed by Robert Funk and colleagues as the essential truth in the New Testament Gospels: R. Funk et al. (1993) on The Jesus Seminar, in the Recommended Books, at the end of this booklet.

crucified and was the son of God (and was also God himself), marrying his mother, begetting himself and causing himself to die of crucifixion. The Paulites won, tried to erase all memory and writings of the other Christian groups, and eventually merged with the Roman empire, with disastrous consequences.¹⁹ Only through modern archaeological discoveries do we now have an insight into the writings of the Christian groups eliminated by Paul's followers.²⁰ The Ebionites (with whom, as a Jew, I identify) were considerable in number and, to escape the Paulite pogroms, fled to the east, many eventually becoming Muslims.²¹

One can say that the OT and NT are mixtures of fact and fiction. Of the Qur'an this cannot be said. Either the Qur'an is true, in its absolute entirety, the final message of God to humanity – or it is a fabrication. If it is true (as I believe) then its every syllable must be taken with the utmost seriousness by anyone who believes in God. Fortunately for Jews and Christians, Islam asks that their scholars and theists merely respect Muslims and The Qur'an; there is no need to convert, since Islam will protect and mutually respect the minority monotheist groups in any Islamic state, provided that these Jews and Christians do not proselytize, respect local laws, and

¹⁹ E. Gibbon (2003). *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. New York: Random House (Chapter 15).

²⁰ See the books by Bart Ehrman listed in Foot Note, above [18]

²¹ B. Ehrman (2003) *Lost Christianities*. Oxford University Press; and O. Skarsaune (2007) *Jewish Believers in Jesus*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

pay taxes.²² Christians have not been so accommodating of minority religious groups (Jews, Muslims and others) within their Christian-ruled states. Of course, the modern deeds of “ISIS” stand in marked contrast to the noble ethics of the Qur’an, and with my fellow Muslims in the mainstream of Islam I would assert that ISIS is to Islam what fascism has been to Christianity: the perversion of a noble ideology and ethical tradition for violent ends. As an example, the Qur’an forbids both self-killing and the killing of innocent civilians: ‘suicide bombers’ transgress both of these Qur’anic principles.

The Qur’an

Compared with the other two books of the Bible, the Qur’an is rather short, with 6,236 verses arranged in 114 books or Suras. Conventionally the Suras are listed by length, the longest first. Each Sura has a characteristic name. Sura 19, for instance, has the title *Mary*, and its 98 verses give an account of Mary, the birth of Jesus, and incidents in the life of Prophet Jesus. The Message of the Qur’an was revealed by God’s agency in the form of Angel Gabriel to Muhammad over a 23-year period, beginning when Muhammad was engaging in religious contemplation when he was 40 years old, and ending in the year of his death. The Prophet was bewildered and anguished by the first revelation of the message, but with the support of

²² J. Esposito (1998) *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford University Press.

his wife Khadija repeated each segment of the message, which was in turn learned by heart by The Prophet's companions. The first complete transcription of the Arabic message into written form was made about 18 years after Muhammad's death in 632 CE, when various transcripts made in earlier years were gathered together.

The Message given to Muhammad comes from a stern yet compassionate and merciful God. The penalties for rejecting the Message and continuing with traditional polytheistic beliefs are severe, but for the faithful there is repeated assurance of forgiveness. Sincere repentance results in forgiveness of sins. The faithful, however, are enjoined to be humble, and no individual Muslim can be sure of entry to paradise: that decision is God's alone. Good deeds count for much; rank, wealth and privilege in this life count for nothing. Sincere scholars, however, have special rank, both in The Qur'an and in the Hadith. But scholars too must be humble, and simply reading the Qur'an will count as scholarship. We may not pray for the souls of the dead: only the good deeds of a person in their lifetime can assure entry to paradise, a place where we may meet those we have loved on earth, and where all earthly desires are fulfilled. There is in paradise full indulgence of the senses; there are delicious fruits of trees, cool water, non-intoxicating wine, and wonderful sexual companions. But in order for the believer to enter paradise they must follow the

straight path, and surrender their being to God (*Islam* means, literally, “submission”). Jews and those of other monotheistic religions are acknowledged in God’s revelation: but to be tolerated they must follow their own precepts faithfully. God approves of pluralism, the mutual tolerance of diverse groups with different beliefs who live peaceably together (Qur’an 2:6-7 and 9:5).

A dilemma exists concerning translation of The Qur’an into non-Arabic languages. God delivered his message in Arabic for a specific purpose, and Muslims the world over teach Arabic to their children, whatever their local language. But translations are frequently used, and herein lies a dilemma. Each act of translation is an exegesis, an act of both scholarship and theological interpretation. Scholars try to be faithful to the original, but sometimes, according to critics, fail.²³ Another problem of translation is that it cannot capture the beauty and the poetic cadence of the original Arabic: the exquisite poetry of The Qur’an is said to be *inter alia* evidence of its divine origin. Recited in Arabic, The Qur’an is often chanted, declaimed or sung: in the Sufi interpretation, this music itself is a pathway to God. For the adult convert to Islam, Arabic is a hard language to learn, and this writer, certainly, will never be able to speak or read classical Arabic. Nevertheless, some prayers, Qur’anic verses and Hadith can be learned by heart. The best

²³ See Foot Note [9], above.

experience for this writer is to listen to a recording of each Qur'anic verse sung in Arabic, and then declaimed in English. Translations struggle to capture the poetry of The Qur'an, and most fail. My favoured English translation is that by N.J. Dawood, who was born a Jew but died a Muslim.²⁴ careful scholarship has shown that his is both a beautiful and theologically faithful rendering of the original, and can be read as poetry.²⁵

The Idea of Jihad

Every Muslim, including myself, believes absolutely in submission to Almighty God our creator, and the final word of God revealed to the Blessed Prophet, containing the fundamental rules which guide our lives. Jihad is a spiritual struggle, a form of self-discipline in which we strive through divine assistance to reach a spiritual goal whose essence is derived from the study of holy scripture, the Hadith of the Prophet, and the example of the Prophet's life.²⁶ The Qur'an makes it clear the Prophet Jesus too brought a message and lived a life of goodness which we should follow. The Quaker jihad is to find the spirit of God in everyone we meet, to find the

²⁴ N.J. Dawood (Translator) (2003) *The Koran*. London: Penguin Books.

²⁵ See Foot Note [9], above.

²⁶ Z. Sardar (2012) *Muhammad* London: Hodder Educational.

K. Armstrong (2007) *Muhammad: Prophet for Our Time*. London: Harper.

T. Ramadan (2007) *The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad*. Oxford University Press.

answering light of God within ourselves in the silence of a Quaker meeting, and to act on the divine impulse within us to achieve good works in recognizing “that of God in everyone”.²⁷ The Muslim jihad is to follow the pillars of Islam (acknowledging One God and believing in the authority of the message to the final prophet; faithful prayers five times each day; giving to charity; fasting for a month each year; enabling oneself or another person to undertake the Haj pilgrimage; and being a good and dutiful citizen, helping and holding up fellow citizens whatever their religion or social status.) Those who insist that Muslims in order to “integrate” should abandon their personal jihad insult all Muslims. But that is probably their intention, in this age of Islamophobia.²⁸

The Prophets of Islam

All of the biblical Prophets belong to the nation of Islam, including the 25 mentioned in the Qur’an by name and many others whose existence is implied but who are not named. The first prophet was Adam, and God’s last prophet was Muhammad. A Prophet is one who brings aspects of God’s

²⁷ George Fox (1656) *Quaker Faith and Practice*, 19:32. London: Society of Friends.

²⁸ C. Allen (2011). *Islamophobia*. Aldershot: Ashgate. This is a rapidly expanding field of literature, and parallels the growing number of crimes of hatred directed towards the Islamic community in America and Europe. See the *Islamophobia Studies Journal* web contents page for current information. See too Nathan Lean’s book, cited in Recommended Reading.

On some of the effects of acts of racial and religious hatred directed toward European Muslims, see: C. Bagley & N. Al-Refai (2008). *Mental Health Issues for the Muslim South Asian Population in Britain*. In N. Al-Refai & C. Bagley *Citizenship Education*. Rotterdam: Sense Educational Publishers.

message to the people of earth. I mention here four of my favourite prophets: Adam, Joseph, Jesus and Muhammad.

The Prophet Adam in Islam is quite different from the Adam of the Jewish Old Testament and his nature and experience have profound theological implications. Adam and Eve were created simultaneously and equally by God, and were given the Garden of Eden as a form of indenture before they introduced the fruits of paradise to life on the whole of the earth. God instructed that all should bow before God's human creation, Adam and Eve. One creature, in the lust of pride, refused: this individual named Satan was expelled, and ever since has tried to tempt humankind from "the straight path". This idea of the straight path has a central place in Islam, and is like the road which Pilgrim treads in Bunyan's allegory of good and evil.²⁹ The first verse of the Qur'an which emphasizes the straight path is repeated many times in a Muslim's prayers, and is worth repeating here: *Praise be to God, Lord of the Universe, The Compassionate, the Merciful, Sovereign of the Day of Judgement! You alone we worship, and to you alone we turn for help. Guide us to the straight path, The path of those whom You have favoured, Not of those who have incurred your wrath, Nor of those who have gone astray* (Quran 1:1-7). This is the *Fatiha*, the *Exordium*, which every Muslim recites on

²⁹ John Bunyan (1678/2014) *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which is to Come*. Project Gutenberg, online.

waking at dawn, on preparing for sleep, and many times in between.

Adam and Eve, according to The Qur'an, were instructed in Eden by God in the management of all living things and of their environment: having served their apprenticeship they then set about recreating this heavenly garden upon earth. Crucially, the idea of 'original sin' is lacking in the Qur'anic account: Adam and Eve were born in a state of natural goodness, and they and their descendants remain in that blessed state. Early in foetal life God breathes a soul into each human: the spirit or knowledge of God dwells in everyone. In this regard, most Quakers too have no concept of original sin, believing rather in original grace through God's inward light:³⁰ in this they are at one with Islam, optimistically viewing the capacity of humans to achieve goodness in their lives, rather than evil.³¹

Islam nevertheless has a clear image of Satan, who continuously tempts humanity to commit sin. God forbade Adam and Eve from eating of the tree of knowledge; however, such transgression may have been part of the divine plan, and

³⁰ This view is derived from responses to the British Quaker Survey 2013 (Ben Pink Dandelion, personal communication); and J.M Hampton (2014) British Quaker Survey: Examining British beliefs and practices in the 21st Century. *Quaker Studies*, 19 (91), 7-136.

³¹ C.D. Spencer (2007) Early Quakers and divine liberation from the universal power of sin. In J.L. Scully & B.P. Dandelion (Eds.) *Good and Evil: Quaker Perspectives*. Aldershot: Ashgate. Calvinists accused early Quakers of being "atheists" for denying the doctrine of original sin: see H. Gillman (2014) Transformation, redemption, salvation. *The Friend*, October 31, 13. See D.G. Hart (2013) *Calvinism: A History*. Yale University Press, for a fuller explanation of why Calvinists might hold such a position.

God immediately forgave the penitent pair. This idea of the merciful God, ever ready to pardon the sins of all who ask for help and guidance, is a continuing theme throughout The Qur'an, and in the life and personal sayings (Hadith) of the Blessed Prophet Muhammad.

The Prophet Joseph is another of my favourites (the interested reader will study The Qur'an, selecting their own favourites - but make sure you include Jesus and Muhammad!). My childhood was full of the stories of Joseph, his jealous brothers, his dreams, and how he counselled the rulers of Egypt: The Qur'an too is full of these accounts. Prophet Joseph submitted himself to God, and prayed that he be allowed to worship God each day, and be admitted to the company of the righteous (Qur'an 12:101-7). This is the mark of a true Muslim.

The Prophet Jesus is revered and frequently mentioned in Islam. There are many Qur'anic passages on his mother Mary (within whose virgin body God created Jesus); and on John (also named as a Prophet), cousin of Jesus; and on Jesus himself, maker of miracles, preacher of forgiveness, and the receiver of God's holy spirit.³² Mary gave birth to Jesus beneath

³² In Islamic theology "receiving the spirit" means that the individual (like Prophet Christ) receives a message from God which invokes the soul already implanted in the individual. The idea of "spirit" and "word" from God are used in The Qur'an with similar meanings. See G. Parrinder (2013) *Jesus in the Qur'an*, London: OneWorld Books, pp 8, 49-50, 54, 68, 139. Each Muslim, in prayer, reaches out to God through the gift of spirit, as do Quakers in their ritual silence.

In a fascinating account of an interfaith journey Tony Philpott argues: "... if I listened to the Muslim Allah I would be expected to follow the five pillars of Islam ..." (p. 229). Fortunately, Tony (a Quaker) is wrong here: there is One God, who is

a date palm, and the tree bended and fed her fresh dates (putting the date of Christ's birth in early September, when dates ripen). Jesus, according to the Qur'an was "the anointed one" or "messiah", and thus earned the name Christ.³³

For Parrinder, who examines *Jesus in the Qur'an*, a crucial point of convergence between Christian and Islamic metaphysics is that of Light: "God guides to the light whomsoever God wills" (Qur'an 24: 35-37). The Qur'an does not mention the crucifixion of Jesus, but describes how he was *raised up alive*, and will assist God in making final judgements about admission to paradise. In this sense Christ the Messiah is a crucial figure in the prophets of Islam; Muhammad was the final prophet in a chronological sense, but in my understanding of The Qur'an, he stands on an equal footing with all of the blessed prophets.

The Prophet Muhammad was, by the detailed accounts of his life,³⁴ a warm and lovely man. He lived the Message given to him by God, in his numerous acts and advices concerning charity. He was kind and loving, frequently insulted and

accessible in a variety of ways, such as the silent contemplation and linking of spirits in a Quaker Meeting, as well as in reciting the daily prayers of Islam. I am certain that Allah accepts and responds to the spiritual contemplation of the Quaker, just as Almighty God accepts the sincere prayers of a variety of followers of monotheistic religions. See: Tony Philpott (2013) *From Christian to Quaker: A Spiritual Journey from Evangelical Christian to Universalist Quaker*. Quaker Universalist Group Publishing.

³³ See Geoffrey Parrinder in the "recommended books" above; M. Siddiqui (2013) *Christians, Muslims and Jesus*. Yale University Press; and T. Winter (2009) *Jesus and Muhammad: new convergences*. *Muslim World*, 99, 21-38.

³⁴ Ziaddin Sardar, in list of Recommended Books, below.

scourged, but forbade (as did Christ) his followers from retaliating. He was a trader by profession, illiterate but not innumerate. Not until his fortieth year did he begin to receive the Message from God. Why was Muhammad chosen? Clearly he was a wise and saintly person, but the occasion of the Message was not dependent on Muhammad as a supremely good person: many such good men exist, *Gott sei dank*. My theory of why Muhammad was chosen comes from a reading of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*³⁵ on the corruption of previous theologies and the spurning of God's prophets. The Roman takeover and distortion of Christianity as an imperial religion of organised cruelty and colonial enterprise (unfortunately inherited by many Christian heirs) led the Almighty to choose a Prophet at a particular time to receive the Final Message: a set of theologies and instructions for worship and good conduct that was absolute and unambiguous. To deny the truth of the Message is to deny the truth of God's existence. And the Qur'an unambiguously declares that all of the Prophets are equal in God's vision (Quran 2:136), although each Prophet had his own particular mission: thus the blessed Prophets Jesus and Muhammad deserve particular attention and study (Quran 2:253).

The character of Muhammad is endearing and his companions and wives record many instances of his sweet and

³⁵ See Foot Note [19] above.

gentle nature. I love the accounts of his kindness to animals and share his anger at those who mistreated or neglected animals. The story is told that, on waking to say his dawn prayer, Muhammad found his cat sleeping on the robe he wanted to put on. Rather than disturb his cat, he cut out the piece of his cloak on which the animal slept.³⁶ Cats have special status in Islam and any food which a domestic cat touches does not lose its Halal (blessed) status.

“He was beloved by God and an example among humans. He prayed, he contemplated. He loved, he gave. He served, he transformed. The Prophet was the light that leads to the Light, and in learning from his life, believers return to the Source of Life and find His light, His warmth, and His love.”³⁷

The Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad

We have several guides to worship and human conduct in Islam: the first is God’s word to humanity, given in The Qur’an; the second is The Hadith, verified sayings of the Prophet Muhammad; a third is the example of the life lived by Muhammad; a fourth are those sections of the Old and New Testaments which have either been verified by The Qur’an, or by careful scholarship can be seen as not at variance with Qur’anic text, or Hadith; and a fifth guide is the various writings

³⁶ See Ziaddin Sardar’s book, in the books listed at the end of this booklet.

³⁷ T. Ramadan (2007) *The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad*. Oxford University Press.

of scholars who wrote after the time of Muhammad (including, for example, the collected *Sayings of Jesus*, outlined below). In this latter realm, of course, there is much debate and much uncertainty concerning which of the many scholarly interpretations (which may conflict with each other) to accept. One such example is the writing of Abd al-Wahab, who three centuries ago³⁸ advocated the abandonment of venerated “relics” (the bones and tombs of saints etc.) and a return to the earliest principles of Islam: we might compare him in this regard with Martin Luther or John Calvin in the Christian tradition. The final guide to human conduct is The Shari’ah, a system of canon law derived from Islamic teaching and the Hadith. In Islamic republics, such as Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, aspects of Shari’ah law have been adopted in national law; but, in countries with Islamic minorities, national law (which is usually secular) prevails, and conformity with Shari’ah principles is voluntary.³⁹

³⁸ J. Esposito (1998) *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford University Press, Chapter 4. “Wahabbism” has a popular profile among Islamophobes who assume, falsely, that this puritan group of theologians is the source of evil across the world. *Inter alia*, Wahabbism shares with Quakerism a distaste for the Muslim equivalent of “steeple worship”. Followers of Abd al-Wahab’s theology dislike being called Wahabbists since they see themselves as “true Muslims”, returning to The Qur’an and The Prophet’s Hadith in a fundamentalist way. And this, of course leads them to follow the teaching on ethical and peace-loving relationships. See: I. Bowen (2014) *Medina in Birmingham Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam*. London: Hurst, Chapter 3.

³⁹ M.H. Deen (2012) *Shari’ah in Britain: The Biblical Forbidden Fruit*. Vienna: United Publishers. Deen advocates, as do others, forms of “legal pluralism” for British Muslims. Archbishop Rowan Williams has made somewhat similar proposals: R. Williams (2007) *Islam, Christianity and Pluralism*. London: Association of Muslim Social Scientists (UK).

See also the “legal Hadith” collection, referenced in Foot Note [12].

The Hadith (the Sunnah) are fascinating and inspiring to read, as is the scholarship which supports the selection of “verified” Hadith – here I follow the *Textbook of Hadith Studies* by Kamali.⁴⁰ “Verification” means that the saying of the Hadith was verified by the Prophet’s trusted companion, or wife, and was written down soon after the words were spoken. There have emerged in folk traditions many thousands of supposed Hadith which support one view or another, but whose attribution to a particular companion may have been forged. The number of extant Hadith probably exceeds 10,000, but, according to Khan⁴¹ who collects together and translates the collection by Al-Bukhari, the true number may not exceed 6,000. Khan states that the “true” purpose of all Hadith “... is to clarify and interpret the Qur’an and those aspects of Islam that can properly be said to be a necessary part of its belief structure and its *Shari’ah* ...” In other words, the Blessed Prophet in his Hadith was either rephrasing part of God’s Qur’anic message or was interpreting it. A supposed Hadith which does not do this is, in Khan’s

See too H.G. Eaton (2004) *The Concept of Justice in Islam*. London: The Book Foundation: “Believers are warned again and again that if they hope for mercy from their Lord – as all must – then they have to show mercy to their fellows and to ‘every creature that has a living heart’ including the beasts and the birds. ‘God gives a reward for gentleness which He will never give for harshness’, said the Prophet. It is clear that, for the Muslim, there is a powerful restraint upon justice if justice is understood merely as a weighing of relevant facts and that is why the human judge, fallible and himself in need of mercy, trembles when he gives judgement. In Islam mercy always has the last word.” (Eaton, 2004, p.8).

⁴⁰ M.H. Kamali (2009) *A Textbook of Hadith Studies*. Markfield, UK: Islamic Studies Centre.

⁴¹ M.M. Khan (1996) *The Meanings of the Ahadith*. Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications.

methodology, invalid, whatever the supposed chain of verification. Indeed, sometimes supposed Hadith contradict one another or contradict the Qur'an and have obviously been fabricated to serve the needs of particular groups.

Other scholars have selected groups of reliable Hadith on the basis of their direct relevance to everyday life and their popularity amongst the faithful. Two excellent examples are Shehata's selection of 55 Hadith⁴² and Ibrahim's translation of An-Nawawi's collection of 40 Hadith⁴³ (first published in about 1,250 CE), which are very familiar to Muslims. The two collections are both worthy of consultation, and there is little overlap in the Hadith translated. I give a few examples here:

- *Prayer is light; charity is a proof; patience is an illumination; and the Qur'an is an argument for or against you. Everyone starts his day and is a vendor of his soul, either freeing it or bringing it to ruin. (An-Nawawi, Hadith 23).*
- *...Oh my servants, you sin by night and by day, and I forgive all sins, so seek forgiveness of Me and I shall forgive you ... (part of a long Hadith, the 24th of An-Nawawi's collection).*
- *Narrated by Aisha [Prophet's wife] that she heard the Messenger of Allah say: There is not one person who seeks to make some night prayer and is overcome with*

⁴² See the reference to Shehata in the Reading List at the end of this booklet.

⁴³ See the reference to An-Nawawi in the Reading List at the end of this booklet.

sleep except that Allah writes for him the reward of the prayer that he intended to complete and the sleep that overcame him is a charity for him (from Allah to that person). (Shehata, Hadith 22). This is a comforting Hadith when I sleep through my alarm at 4 am, and miss the dawn prayer!

Many of the Hadith in these two popular collections concern doing good deeds, helping one's neighbour, not returning evil for evil, and seeking and receiving God's forgiveness: an Islamic "sermon on the mount".

My favourite Hadith concerns light which, reflecting the Qur'anic message of understanding God as light, has parallels with Quaker metaphors of "seeking the light in others" and "upholding others in the light". Here The Prophet prays for light from God to diffuse his spirit:

- *Allah, place light in my heart, and on my tongue light, and in my ears light, and above me light, and to my left light, and before me light and behind me light. Place in my soul light. Magnify for me light, and amplify for me light. Make for me a light and make me a light. Oh Allah, grant me light, and place light in my nerves, and in my body light and in my hair light and in my skin light.*⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Abu Dawud 4/325, a Hadith to be recited on entering a Mosque. Collected in Saiid Wahf Al-Qahatani (Editor): *Fortress of a Muslim: Invocations from the Qur'an and Sunnah*. Riyadh: Darussalam (reflecting Qur'an Book 24, *Light*.)

The Message of Prophet Jesus

The Qur'an makes it clear that Prophet Jesus transmitted an *injeel*, a Message: but The Qur'an gives only gives glimpses of that Message. We must turn to the four gospels, and to the gospels suppressed or ignored by the Paulite faction, for a fuller account of the Message of Jesus. Unfortunately, as scholars have shown,⁴⁵ the gospels were written many decades after the life of Christ on earth, and there are profound gaps, contradictions and problems in interpreting the gospels *according to* (not by) the main gospel writers (that is, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were not the authors of the gospels attributed to them). Much of the content of these gospels may have been distorted or actually forged to suit the ideologies of particular Christian factions.⁴⁶

With some hope of rescuing the core of the Message of Prophet Jesus I turn to the work of Robert W. Funk and his 24 colleagues (mostly professors of divinity at American universities), members of “the Jesus seminar”,⁴⁷ who compared no less than 22 gospels, or fragments of gospels, which list sayings and actions attributed to Jesus. Only 18 percent of the supposed events in the life of Jesus could be verified through logical and cross-textual analysis and many of the supposed

⁴⁵ See the references in Foot Note [18] above.

⁴⁶ See the references cited in Foot Note [18], particularly the writing of Bart Ehrman.

⁴⁷ R. Funk, R. Hoover & The Jesus Seminar (1993) *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* San Francisco: Harper.

events may have been folk stories added many years after Jesus died. Many sayings attributed to Jesus may have been forgeries by the Paulite faction, who successfully suppressed all but their own reconstructed four gospels. It was desperately important for the Paulite faction that Jesus should be seen as the divine son of God who sacrificed himself through voluntary suicide in order to “redeem” man’s original sin: but there is an eminent danger that the supposed events (and implications of Christ’s divinity) were reconstructed or fabricated in order to fit the Paulite ideology. Jesus did perform miracles (as The Qur’an affirms), and he did live a humble life, with profound teaching such as the Sermon on the Mount. The message of Jesus can be summed simply: love both friends and enemies; serve, pray to and obey God; nurture yourself and your family; love and serve your neighbour; and love the whole of humankind. Jews, Christians and Muslims, in receiving this Message, offer the Prophet Jesus their love, respect and obedience. As Parrinder observes: “The great importance of the message of Jesus is that the Gospel is recognized in the Qur’an. Its validity is nowhere denied, but rather confirmed. Christians possessed accurate copies of the original message ... for it is said that the Gospel is ‘in their possession’ so ‘let the people of the Gospel judge by what God hath sent down’, as The Qur’an says.”⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See the book by Geoffrey Parrinder in the Reading List at the end of this booklet.

Tarif Khalidi in *The Muslim Jesus*⁴⁹ has gathered together the sayings of Jesus which have survived in Islam in a “gospel” which parallels The Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad): “In its totality, this gospel is the story of a love affair between Islam and Jesus and is thus a unique record of how one world religion chose to adopt the central figure of another, coming to recognize him as constitutive of its own identity” (Khalidi, pp 5-6). Khalidi makes the important point that Christians and Jews who closely follow the teachings of their respective holy books are indeed “true Muslims” (p. 14). Many of these collected sayings are also found in the apocryphal gospels of Christianity.⁵⁰ Some of these Muslim “sayings of Jesus” are also close to Christ’s ‘Sermon on the Mount’.

Women and Islam

“No human society has ever succeeded in promoting complete equality between women and men. We still have a long way to go ...” Tariq Ramadan *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism*, 2010.⁵¹

My insights into the role and status of women in Islam owe much to my (biological) sister Marjana who has been a Muslim for 25 years, and with whom I discuss aspects of Islam almost

⁴⁹ T. Khalidi (Editor and Translator) (2001) *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature*. Harvard University Press.

⁵⁰ B. Ehrman (2003) *Lost Scriptures: Books that did not make it into the New Testament*. Oxford University Press.

⁵¹ T. Ramadan (2010) *What I Believe*. Oxford University Press (Chapters 9 to 11 on women and Islam).

every day. The Blessed Prophet Muhammad pronounced in a Hadith: “Every faith has an innate character. The character of Islam is modesty.”⁵² This idea of *modesty* means that both men and women must present themselves to the world in humble and non-flamboyant ways. Women’s modesty implies that limbs and body are covered, but the covering of face and head is voluntary. Many women like to wear the *hijab* (traditional head covering) but they often pay a price for this faithfulness to Islamic tradition: my sister, for example, is not alone in having had her *hijab* wrenched off, being spat on, and being told to “go back to your own f-g country, you Paki bitch, etc., etc.”

Men and women worship in different parts of the mosque, but come together in meeting halls and study groups within the mosque, usually sitting on different sides of the room. Despite this separateness, there is much gender equality. My recent familiarity with the Palestinian telecommunications industry has shown me significant numbers of well-educated, highly skilled, multilingual Arab women occupying at least middle level posts in technical and service organisations (and senior posts in educational, health and aid organisations), who simultaneously manage household and child care, albeit with help from their sisters. This is a growing and welcome trend. These women seem to have struck a reasonable balance between traditional

⁵² Sardar’s (2012) translation of selected Hadith of The Blessed Prophet. See Qur’an 24: 30-31, and 33:35, for sources.

Arabian values concerning family and childcare obligations, and pursuing high level careers.⁵³

Unlike Christianity and Judaism, in the Qur'anic account women have equality with men through the act of creation. Eve, mother of all women, was not created as a secondary creature from a spare rib, but was created equally and simultaneously with Adam to continue the stewardship of nature. Nor, in the Islamic account, was Eve the instigator of "original sin" and therefore destined to suffer more than man. The roles of man and woman are, from the first joyous act of the creation of humankind, equally important and complementary: women are described in The Qur'an as physically weaker than men, and therefore deserving of special love, respect and protection.

The Sisterhood of Islamic women is closed to men: but, according to my biological sister, it is a joyous and caring community, free of male intrusion and control. For men, myself included, the brotherhood, the *Ummah* (the worldwide community of Muslim men), is also a joyful community. As I

⁵³ M.A. Ghandanfar (2001) *Great Women of Islam* (trans. J.M. Qaqi). Birmingham: Darussalam Publications.

E. Kultab (2006) The paradox of women's work. In L. Taraki (Ed.) *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance and Mobility Under Occupation* (pp 231-270). Syracuse University Press.

A. Wadud (1999) *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

L. Taraki (Ed.) (2006) *Living Palestine: Family Survival, Resistance, and Mobility Under Occupation*. Syracuse University Press.

M. Abubaker & C. Bagley (2015). Work-Life balance and the needs of female employees in the telecommunications industry in a developing country: a critical realist approach to issues in industrial and social psychology. *Comprehensive Psychology*, in press.

stand and kneel in the prayer line shoulder to shoulder with my brothers, I experience a special metaphysic, a humility in which we are all, regardless of rank, profession, education or ethnicity, equal. Following Quaker tradition, the reaching out to that of God within my fellow worshippers, who stand in the prayer line with me, creates a spiritual experience of unity within the totality of divine wisdom. Women too, I am assured, in their separate prayers experience this gendered unity within the wisdom of God. We pray first to Almighty God, and then we pray for one another.

Men and women in Islam are indeed separate but they are also equal, and my feeling is that the benefits of the same-sex support within the Sisterhood and Brotherhood of the *Ummah* is one of Islam's strengths, and will not change.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ There is a welcome and growing literature on the Ummah sisterhood, and Islamic feminism. See, for an introduction to relevant issues:

A.M. Hudson & S. Rozana (2006) Special Issue on Islam, gender and human rights: Introduction. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29, 331-338.

K. Brown (2006) Realising women's rights: the role of Islamic identity among British Muslim women. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 29, 417-430.

S. Joseph & A. Najmabadi (2003) *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures*. Leiden: Brill.

M. Siddiqui *The Routledge Reader in Christian-Muslim Relations*. London: Routledge (on feminist dialogue on shared issues).

See also K. al-Dakkar (2012) Reconciling traditional Islamic methods with liberal feminism: reflections from Tunisia by Mohamed Talbi. In T. Lovat (Ed.) *Women in Islam: Reflections on Historical and Contemporary Research*. Dordrecht: Springer – for an exposition of the work of Talbi, a brilliant modernist in the debates on Qur'anic and Hadith interpretation.

See too Aminah Wadud's essay "The ethics of Tawhid over the Ethics of Qiwwamah" (and the several contributions by Islamic feminists) in Z. Mir-Hosseini (Ed.) *Rethinking Authority in Muslim Legal Tradition* (London: OneWorld Books, 2014) for lively contributions to this ongoing discussion.

Each male and each female may in weak moments be tempted by Satan⁵⁵ to “lust after their neighbour”. For some Christians this in itself is an adulterous sin. In Islam having such thoughts is not a sin: rather, resisting such sin is a positive act of charity, to be recorded as such by one’s guardian angel.

Islam and Education

It has been my privilege to work with Dr. Nader Al-Refai during the past decade on several projects concerning the education of Muslim children in state schools with a majority of Muslim pupils, and in secondary schools run by Muslims.⁵⁶ Islam holds education in high regard, since education in its broadest sense helps the individual unlock their spiritual and cognitive potential as a citizen. The Qur’an frequently enjoins us to observe and study the heavens, the earth, and the natural world: the Muslim

⁵⁵ Satan, in Islamic theology, is an evil spirit (not a ‘fallen angel’) who is constantly tempting humankind to commit evil actions. Accepting this idea seems to me to be a morally acceptable way of understanding why humankind commits sinful acts. Even whole nations (such as “ISIS”, and fascist and Stalinist regimes) can be in thrall to Satan.

⁵⁶ N. Al-Refai & C. Bagley (2008) *Citizenship Education: The British Muslim Perspective*. Rotterdam: Sense Educational Publishers.

N. Al-Refai & C. Bagley (2012). Muslim youth and citizenship education: idealism, Islam and prospects for successful citizenship education. In F. Ahmed & M. Siddique-Seddon (Eds.) *Muslim Youth: Challenges, Opportunities and Expectations*. London: Continuum Books.

C. Bagley & N. Al-Refai (2013) Citizenship education: a study of ten Islamic and state secondary schools. In C. Tan & Y, Suleiman (Eds.) *Reforms in Islamic Education*. London: Bloomsbury.

N. Al-Refai & C. Bagley (2015). *The Islamic Educational Curriculum: A Study of Six Muslim Secondary Schools in Britain*. Report available from adam.ben.dawood@gmail.com

C. Bagley (2014). Making good citizens. *The Friend*, April 25, p.12.

as a spiritual being is also a natural scientist. All of the Hadith collections include sayings of The Prophet praising education. “According to one tradition, the ink of a scholar’s pen is more precious than the blood of a martyr engaged in the task of defence, while an alim (scholar) builds individuals and nations along positive lines. In this way he bestows upon the world a real life treasure ... An especially vital factor is the freedom to conduct research ... This great emphasis placed on exact knowledge resulted in the awakening of a great desire for learning of Muslims of the first phase.”⁵⁷ This process was begun in Makkah, then reached Medina and Damascus, then Syria, and eventually Spain.

Muslim parents seek the best education for their children, whether it be spiritual, technical, literary or political instruction. Ideally all of this instruction should take place within an Islamic framework. The obvious solution for Muslim parents in Britain is to follow the example of Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Jews, some Quakers, and Hindus in seeking state aid for “voluntary aided” schools. Unfortunately, despite the provisions of the 1944 Education Act, there is clearly discrimination in not allowing many Muslim-run schools to access state funding.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See M.W. Khan (2012) *Principles of Islam*, p. 22. Birmingham: Islamic Vision.

⁵⁸ See the report on Muslim secondary schools by Al-Refai & Bagley (2015) cited in Foot Note [56]. Michael Gove, the government minister in charge of education assured Catholic schools in 2011 that they could escape “government meddling” by becoming academies (keeping state funding, but having more freedom over the curriculum, finance etc.), ensuring that they could “remain true to Catholic traditions.” *Catholic Herald*, February 16, 2011, p.1. Most Muslim schools (as of this writing,

The situation is getting worse, with the latest episode of hysterical persecution of Muslim educators in the “Trojan horse” affair in Birmingham, in which Muslim governors were accused

May, 2015 – see *Guardian*, March 10, 2015) have been consistently denied access to state-supported academy status, which would allow them both financial support and much greater freedom in school organization and curriculum design: only ten such schools serving Muslim pupils exist in Britain. To the writer’s knowledge there are more than 5,000 academies, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools associated with other religious groups in Britain. The danger here, so far as the authorities are concerned, is that pupils in Muslim-majority schools which designed their own religious education curriculum might be indoctrinated in the real values of Islam, learn The Qur’an, study Hadith, and engage in other such activities such as praying regularly, meaning that many might grow up to be critical of British values, however defined.

As a governor of a Muslim secondary school I am aware of the humiliating pressures imposed by the Government’s DfES before academy status can be considered, and the conceptually impossible task of teaching “British values” within the curriculum. What these schools can offer of course, is a comprehensive instruction and practice of “Muslim values”, devoting oneself to knowledge, and following the straight path in following divine instruction, dedicated to self-discipline (jihad) in helping others and one’s wider community, regardless of the religion of those served.

A Quaker view on “British values” has been well summarized by Chris Petrie and Alistair Thomas in a presentation to a Friends’ conference in March 2015 on “Quaker Values in Education”. Chris and Alistair (governors of Quaker schools) offer a detailed deconstruction of the governmental debacle of trying to define, institute and impose a set of “British values” which those who administer private or denominational schools in England are supposed (by law, as of 2015) to follow in their curricula. (Scottish and Welsh schools are absolved of this responsibility!). Chris and Alistair showed that the ideas of democracy and values have complex roots, and attempts by government to define and impose them are specious, pompous nonsense.

The hidden agenda, presumably, is to influence (and control) schools with a majority of Muslim pupils in order to force the adoption of a patina of Britishness, whatever that may mean. It was proposed by Quakers at this Conference that the only real British value was that of “interculturalism”, the tolerance of the national identities (of the Welsh, Scots and Irish and of the many descendants of “immigrants” in this country) alongside that of the indigenous English. The government attempt to engineer “British values” also fails to acknowledge the multi-faith nature of Britain and the shared values implicit in all faith positions, that of behaving towards others in the manner we expect ourselves to be treated: this is the mutual tolerance of multicultural pluralism that is (or should be) Britain today. (For a model of this drawing out of the mutual tolerance inherent in values of all religions, see K. Armstrong (2011) *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. London: Bodley Head.)

of introducing “fundamentalism” into Muslim-majority schools.⁵⁹ But, as I have argued above, if Islam does not follow the fundamental principles of Islamic belief and worship, and does not follow the pathway of spiritual jihad, then it is not Islam. Muslims in Britain are being criticized and persecuted for wanting to educate their children as Muslims: we are faced with a hysterical fugue of anti-Muslim propaganda concerning Muslims’ “failure to integrate” – but the integration demanded could mean the abandonment of Islamic beliefs and practices.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Extremist elements in the English community alleged in 2014 that Muslims were attempting to “take over” primary schools in which Muslim pupils were a majority, by implanting “Trojan Horse” governors and teachers who would impose Muslim regimes and values upon innocent “white minority” pupils, as well as radicalizing the “non-white” Muslim pupils. In the face of what appeared to be mass hysteria fostered by certain newspapers, the national government directed the former head of British counter-terrorism, Peter Clarke, to investigate, perhaps fearing that Birmingham primary schools were becoming breeding grounds for terrorism. This expert was unable to find any signs of “terrorist indoctrination” (*Muslim News*, July 25, 2014, p. 9). The head of OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, the government inspection unit) conducted a second investigation but again found nothing except a shortage of teachers in some of the 21 schools investigated. The *Muslim News* reported laconically “Inspections of Birmingham schools found no evidence of extremism” (June 27, 2014, p. 1).

⁶⁰ The strident chorus demanding that minority groups in Britain should “integrate” is actually a demand that they “assimilate”, giving up religious practices which are seen to be alien to British culture. I see the matter thus. Minority groups have simple obligations: to work hard, obey the law, educate their children for advancement, learn the host country’s language (English, French, Welsh, etc.) in return for the host country’s role in this social contract of ensuring the minority group’s security, its freedom of religion, its freedom from discrimination in accessing employment, promotion and services, and protection from prejudice and hate crimes.

For an account of the reciprocal rights and duties of immigrants and hosts see C. Bagley & L. Young (1991) The rights and duties of immigrants *Canadian Policy Options*, 12, 17-18. On the social contract between the state and Muslim minorities, see: M. Ceric (2008) *Toward a Muslim Social Contract in Europe*. London: Association of Muslim Social Scientists - Mustafa Ceric casts the mutuality of rights and duties in spiritual terms, drawing on Qur’anic sources. On philosophical and political assumptions in such a social contract, see the writings of a leading British Muslim: T. Ramadan (2010) *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism*. London: Pelican Books.

There is a profound irony here. Studies have been undertaken of how the Citizenship Education curriculum (which is a required element of the curriculum in maintained schools, but not in academies, including free schools) has been implemented in schools with varying proportions of Muslim pupils, and in a number of private or voluntary-aided Muslim-run schools. These studies show how pupils have received and internalised instruction in becoming “good citizens”, and have shown that Muslim and non-Muslim pupils alike receive such education positively. Moreover, Muslim pupils were significantly more likely to bring from home and mosque values that integrated well with National Curriculum values of what is a “good citizen”. Nader Al-Refai and I inferred that Muslim pupils were bringing positive elements of their religious education into their schools.⁶¹

Consider one of the many Hadith of The Prophet enjoining good behaviour: “Each person’s every joint must perform a charity every day the sun comes up: to act justly between two people is a charity; to help a man with his mount, lifting him onto it or hoisting up his belongings onto it is a charity; a good word is a charity; every step you take to prayers is a charity;

⁶¹ N. Al-Refai & C. Bagley (2012). Muslim youth and citizenship education: idealism, Islam and prospects for successful citizenship education. In F. Ahmed & M. Siddique-Seddon (Eds.) *Muslim Youth: Challenges, Opportunities and Expectations*. London: Continuum Books.

and removing a harmful thing from the road is a charity.”⁶² The recorded sayings of The Prophet abound with such good advice, about walking abroad and seeing everyone, Muslim or not, as deserving of God’s favour, engineered through human action: or, as Quakers say, “Seeking that of God in everyone.” The five-times daily prayer is not empty ritual, but is meant to keep the Muslim in a perpetual state of grace, reminding him or her to carry out God’s mission of good work on earth. Muslims take these teachings with the utmost seriousness. For example, at Cheadle Mosque close to my home in Manchester, there are monthly work groups who, following the Hadith, wander abroad “removing harmful things from the road” (i.e. picking up litter – the number of people requiring a hand loading their camel is in Cheadle rather small). Anyone who calls themselves a Muslim is a religious person who prays frequently, and is constantly seeking to do good actions in relation to family, friends, neighbourhood and community.

According to the 2011 census about five percent of the population are Muslim; and because of their low average age, this community is likely to double in number within a few years. This means that schools run by, and for Muslims, will remain a key issue in national debates about education.⁶³

⁶² Hadith 26, in An-Nawawi’s collection of Forty Hadith (see Foot Note [12] above).

⁶³ For a useful and balanced overview of educational and demographic statistics on Britain’s Muslim population, which may form a basis for current and future debates see: J. Kirkup, “British Muslims: integration and segregation are about economics, not values” *Daily Telegraph Online*, February 13, 2015.

Islam as a Minority Group: the Plural Society Debate

Islam has a long history as a minority group beginning with the movement from Makkah to Medina where, as refugees, Muslims were a minority and worked out ethics and procedures for conduct in relation to the majority population. Thus was born the *Fiqh of Minorities*, or law of minorities. Since then, in nations where Muslims have been minorities, they have tried to apply this fiqh, emphasising that in return for respect of Islam they will work hard to be self-sufficient and law-abiding. Muslims expect that the outcome of such mutual tolerance is that they will be allowed to worship and engage in the multiple religious practices of Islam: have access to halal food, be allowed to dress modestly as their religion requires, and have their children educated either in Muslim-run schools, or in schools which respect their religious aspirations. These include principles of modesty, so that pupils will not be required to undress or change clothes other than in private, and that girls may wear religious dress, and sit separately from males if they so choose.

Much is written about the “integration” of Muslims in British society by critics who fail to define what they mean by integration. Sociologically speaking, “accepted integration” means that members of a minority group are tolerated in their

customs of religion, dress, diet, clothing and personal language – and are legally protected from discrimination in access to services and employment, and from religious and racial hatred. Reciprocally, the minority group will live peaceably with neighbours, according them the tolerance which they themselves enjoy. In this reciprocal social contract, the minority group will maximise their talents through education and training, working hard to support their families and making (as all citizens should) minimal demands on state aid. Classic studies of “race relations” in Britain pointed to Jews as an “ideal” minority group in this regard.⁶⁴ In more recent decades, Muslims now seek this ideal form of integration, often in the same areas which Jewish immigrants once occupied, including the Bethnal Green of my Jewish grandparents.⁶⁵ Like Jews, Muslims seek upward mobility on the basis of stable adaptation, retaining traditional languages for use in home and mosque, wearing traditional religious dress, and seeking protection from discrimination through legal means. Like Jews,

⁶⁴ J.B. Rose & Associates (1969) *Colour and Citizenship*. Oxford University Press.

⁶⁵ T. Endelman (2002). *The Jews of Britain: 1656-2000*. University of California Press. For an interesting comparison of Jewish struggles against racial exploitation in the 1930s, and Muslim struggles of a similar nature in the 1970s in Bethnal Green, London, see: S. Glynn (2005) East End immigrants and the battle for housing: a comparative study of political mobilization in the Jewish and Bengali communities. *Journal of Historical Geography*, 31, 528-545.

On Muslim settlement patterns in London see: C. Peach (2006) Islam, ethnicity and South Asian religions in the London 2001 Census. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31, 353-370. Peach found that Muslims were “... much less segregated than Sikhs, Hindus and Jews”, even though pockets of ethnic density (such as the Bengalis) did exist amongst the Muslim population.

Muslims aspire to be hard working and law abiding, and draw on a set of values which is expressed through the duty of being ideal citizens, helping everyone, regardless of their religion, who occupy their local community.

That is an ideal, but xenophobic forces in British society often make it difficult to achieve. Much public dislike and even hatred seems to be expressed against Muslims (“the new Jews”) simply because they are different, often newcomers, and ideal scapegoats in times of economic stress.⁶⁶

The second form of adaptation is “assimilation”, in which the immigrant group seeks to adopt the language and values of their new culture. Usually these groups are Christian, although they may continue to worship in denominations they have traditionally known. The most assimilated ethnic groups in Britain are probably those from Europe (including Ireland), who have no problems in being stigmatized because of “racial” appearance. But African-Caribbeans are also assimilating rapidly, and at least a third of this group are in “mixed-race marriages”.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ R. Greenslade (2005) *New Jews: Scapegoating Muslims*. London: Institute of Public Policy Research.

See too S. Yaqoob (2014). Stigmatising Muslims won't solve problems in Birmingham schools. *The Guardian*, July 22, 2014. Guardian online at www.theguardian.com.

⁶⁷ “Mixed” marriages are increasing in Britain, so that now some 10% of the English population are in a “racially” mixed marriage (E. Dugan *Independent Online*, July 3, 2014). Children of ethnically mixed marriages are now the fastest growing minority group in England; ironically, the more ethnic mixing and marriage, the more the officially defined ethnic minority population increases, since children of such marriages (including my own three children) are counted as “non-white” rather than

Tariq Ramadan, the foremost writer on the adaptation of Muslims in Europe stresses that Muslims have choices in this matter: “It is up to Muslim individuals to be and become committed citizens, aware of their responsibilities and rights. Beyond the minority reflex or the temptation to see themselves as victims, they have the means to accept a new age of their history. For those who were born in the West or who are citizens, it is no longer a question of ‘settlement’ or ‘integration’ but rather of ‘participation’ and ‘contribution’.”⁶⁸ What Ramadan offers, with much brilliance, is a “post integration” role for Western Muslims who have “ ... multiple, moving identities, and there is no reason – religious, legal or cultural – why a woman or man cannot be both American, or Muslim ... Millions of individuals prove this daily. Far from the media and political tensions, a constructive, in-depth movement is under way, and Islam has become a Western religion ... Of course there is only one single Islam as far as fundamental religious principles are concerned, but it includes a variety of interpretations and a

“white”. In my local mosque there are many ethnically mixed couples and their “mixed race” children. These children regard themselves as “British” and “Muslim” first, while their officially ascribed “racial” identity seems to have little personal salience. This is certainly our finding from the Muslim Schools research project (see Foot Note [56] above).

⁶⁸ T. Ramadan (2012) *The Quest for Meaning: Developing a Philosophy of Pluralism*. London: Pelican Books, p. 6.

plurality of cultures. Its universality indeed stems from this capacity to integrate diversity into its fundamental oneness.”⁶⁹

Historically, Islam has been much more tolerant of other monotheistic religions than Christianity has been of Islam and Judaism. This history is important, since there is not a little irony in how some sectors of the “Christian” community today view Muslims with suspicion, and even with hatred.⁷⁰

Today some notable Muslim theologians elaborate with eloquence the doctrine of religious tolerance and pluralism. Foremost among these (including Tariq Ramadan, professor of Islamic Studies at Oxford, cited above) is the Algerian Mohamed Talbi, still preaching and writing in the tenth decade of his life.⁷¹ Talbi goes to the roots of Islam, to its earliest

⁶⁹ T. Ramadan (2010) *What I Believe*. Oxford University Press, p. 6.

⁷⁰ Even prior to 11/9 a strong current of anti-Islam ideology pervaded Christian countries of Europe and North America (Z. Strabiac & O. Listhaug (2008) Anti-Muslim prejudice in Europe: a multilevel analysis of survey data from 30 countries. *Social Science Research*, 37, 268-286).

In Britain a long-standing prejudice against foreigners in general, and Arabs in particular, evolved into a more coherent Islamophobia, even before 9/11, after which it increased markedly (S. Poynting & V. Mason (2007) The resistible rise of Islamophobia: anti-Muslim racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001. *Journal of Sociology*, 43, 61-86).

The purveyors of extreme prejudice are typically the “white” third of the population who are nominally adherents of Christian “values”, and have lower social status in society (J. Fetzer and C.Soper (2003) The roots of public attitudes towards state accommodation of European Muslims’ religious practices before and after September 11. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 42, 247-258).

⁷¹ M. Talbi (1998) Religious liberty. In C. Kurzman (Ed.) *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*. London: Oxford University Press. See too M. Talbi & M. Bucaille (1989). *Reflections on The Qur’an*. Paris (original in French). For an interpretation of Talbi’s contribution to Islamic scholarship see: R. Nettler (2004) Muhammed Talbi on understanding The Qur’an. In S. Taji-Farouki (Ed.) *Modern Muslim Intellectuals*. Oxford University Press.

Another well-known Muslim advocate of plural accommodation in the modern world is the South African Farid Esack (F. Esack (1997) *Qur’an, Liberation and*

practices in Makkah and Medina, and out of that puritan piety comes great wisdom, great tolerance, and much spiritual joy. Tariq Ramadan, another advocate of religious pluralism also goes to the roots of Islam in his biography of *The Prophet*, and advocates the role of a new Islam that is faithful to its roots (the authority of The Qur'an and The Hadith), and the five pillars: but designs a new and powerful role for the migrant Muslim in Europe and America.⁷² In this company I find joyful succour.

Science, Creation and Islam

Before I became absorbed with Islam, I reviewed the psychobiological literature on 'the altruistic impulse' in humans, based on their evolutionary biology, as a counter to Dawkins' views on 'the selfish gene'⁷³. There is a school of theology, through the Catholic schoolmen (Duns Scotus in particular) and reaching intellectually through Teilhard de Chardin and later Catholic scientists and philosophers (e.g. Thomas Berry, Brian

Pluralism. London: OneWorld Books). Needless to say, these liberal "political philosophers" have their critics amongst more conservative factions of Islam. But I respect (and indeed applaud, and sit at the feet of) Talbi, Esack and Ramadan, being in awe of their ability to return faithfully to the roots of Islam, and simultaneously forge a new political philosophy of plural accommodation without conceding to the Islamophobe call for assimilation and denial of basic Islamic principles.

For a cogent and well-reasoned statement of the implications of a more conservative interpretation of Islamic theology for the adaptation and integration of Muslims in Europe see: Judge Sheikh Faysal Maulawi (2012) *The Muslim as a European Citizen*. Dublin: Al Maktoum Foundation.

⁷² T. Ramadan (2007) *The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad*. Oxford University Press.

⁷³ C. Bagley (2006) Searching for the rainbow: Dawkins, evolution and God. *The Friends Quarterly*, April, 225-229.

Swimme, Matthew Fox), that argues that the divine will is unfolding in nature as humans follow their biological impulse to achieve noble acts of goodness, recognizing the divine breath of God in themselves and others.⁷⁴ This is not an easy path and the great deceiver is ever alert to divert us from this straight path: but by God's grace we can stay on that path to which Almighty God gently leads us, like a good shepherd pulling us by the forelock into the right way (Qur'an 11:56). I would go further, and rest with Tom Wright in the idea that the kingdom created by God, the paradise known by Adam, is achievable within human society through our acts of will.⁷⁵ This kingdom is not, of course, the paradise into which some may enter on the final day of judgement.⁷⁶

I am astonished by both the beauty and complexity of the world and of the human frame. Scientists, in my belief, have the duty of discovering the handiwork of God's creation, for human betterment: in this simple proposition all of the supposed conflict between science and religion falls away. The conduct of science is governed by ethical codes, and these are derived from both secular and religious value systems.

Darwin (who had rejected ideas of the divinity of Jesus), the father of modern biological sciences, prefaced the final,

⁷⁴ See too the references appended to the writer's review of J. Farrow & A. Wildwood *Universe as Revelation*, in *The Universalist: Journal of the Quaker Universalist Group*, 2014, February, 30-33.

⁷⁵ Tom Wright (2004) *Surprised by Hope*. London SPCK. See too: S. Kuhrt (2011). *Tom Wright for Everyone*. London: SPCK.

⁷⁶ J. Esposito (1998) *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford University Press.

revised edition of *The Origin of Species* with a reflection on “ ... the grandeur in this [natural selection] view of life with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being evolved ...”⁷⁷

This, in my reading, is also an excellent introduction to an Islamic view of how Almighty God created all living creatures, and then created humankind in a two stage process. This latter view I take from two Muslim scientist-theologians, Shanavas⁷⁸ and Bucaille.⁷⁹ A “day” in God’s time is not like human time: God is beyond the mortal dimensions of time and space. Each “day” in the genesis story is as many billion years in epoch, as God directs. On the last day of this first phase of creation the living creatures were formed and the process of evolution through natural selection continued. When humanoid evolution was sufficiently advanced, God created two new humans, but with a crucial difference: Almighty God breathed into Adam and Eve the Spirit of God, and the process of human civilization, still

⁷⁷ C. Darwin (1876). *The Origin of Species*. Sixth Edition. London: John Murray.

⁷⁸ T.O. Shanavas (2006) *Islamic Theory of Evolution: The Missing Link between Darwin and the Origin of Species*. Washington, DC: Brainbow Press.

⁷⁹ M. Bucaille (2005) *What is the Origin of Man?* Keighley: Islamic Books.

The West, of course, has benefited greatly from the Islamic preservation of the work of Greek scientists, astronomers and mathematicians, and the continued dedication of Islamic scientists to the pursuit of original knowledge, much of it Qur’anicly inspired. See for example, J. Freely (2011) *Light from the East: How the Science of Medieval Islam Helped to Shape the Western World*. London: IB Tauris.

evolving through and within the natural world, began. Evolution, in this Islamic account, is essentially a two-stage process.

I am constantly astonished at the beauty of the world that surrounds us, the tastes of fruit, the sensors of nature, the challenge and stimulus of climate, the brilliance of the human mind, the power of the arts, and the beauty and warmth of my fellow humans.⁸⁰ In my own field (personality genetics) a new and profoundly important discovery has emerged in the past 25 years: that of epigenetics, in which the evolution of human DNA is shown to have a plasticity, an adaptability to new circumstances in which latent genes are activated according to environmental triggers. Human biology and the nature which surrounds us are intensely beautiful, and intensely surprising. I am amazed when my fellow scientists account for old and new discoveries as the result of random combination of events, and continue with their dour, but vague, agnostic explanations.⁸¹

⁸⁰ W. Clyde Allee who develops this thesis was a Quaker biologist whose ethology stressed the foundations of altruistic behaviour (W.C. Allee (1949) *Principles of Animal Ecology*. Philadelphia: Saunders).

For an integration of theories of scientists (including Allee) whose work points to an evolving genetic basis for prosocial behaviour, see: L.A. Dugatkin (2006) *The Altruistic Equation: Seven Scientists Search for the Origins of Goodness*. Princeton University Press.

⁸¹ Scientists, whenever something “extraordinary” in nature is discovered, often marvel at the good luck involved – e.g. “Early life had good luck. The odds of a living organism spontaneously forming in a sea of molecules seem impossibly low, but a mathematical analysis now shows how to weight the dice just enough to get life started.” *New Scientist*, September 20, 2014, p.11. I know, and you probably know too, that this was not a matter of “luck”, it was how Almighty God ordered things.

On epigenetics and the non-random factors (God?) which cause (or give choices to) humans to be able to adapt successfully see: C. Brahic (2015) Map tells us how life nudges genes. *New Scientist*, February 21, p12.

Palestine, Israel and Islam

On a cold day in March 1876 my great grandfather, David Abramsky, stood with his wife and their two sons after disembarking on a dock at Tilbury, in East London. This was their final stage in a flight from the pogroms of Belarus, where numbers of their kindred had been killed. The two young boys, one of them my grandfather, took different paths of adapting: one took the Orthodox route, but my grandfather chose “assimilation”, and was not a practising Jew. I have three Jewish grandparents, but my gentile father chose the final route of complete assimilation: I was given a “Christian” name, and educated as an Anglican. But I still have a strong, subjective “Jewish identity”, and would love to see the Jews of Israel living in peace and harmony with all of the people of Palestine,

The New Scientist (and most scientists?) seems obsessed with the idea that chance probabilities order the creation and sustaining of “the universe”, but observes: “... The 13th century Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas insisted a perfect universe must contain randomness to allow humans their autonomy. But it was also there to limit them. God made humans with less than divine abilities, so there must be a sphere of events beyond our control ... Quantum theory is our ultimate theory of nature, and it seems to suggest the universe is random, but that is no guarantee that it is ... I don’t think we can ever prove it ... If so, randomness might still prove to be an illusion – and with it perhaps our free will.” M. Brooks (2015) Random reality. *New Scientist*, March 14, 28-31.

Interestingly, a noted atheist changed his lifelong scepticism to the belief that “there is a God” because of an evolving understanding of “A finely tuned universe ... a more detailed understanding of the laws of nature, and how life emerged from nothing ... and the discovery of DNA”: A. Flew & R.A. Varghese (2007) *There is a God*. New York: Harper Collins. The “big bang” account of the beginning of the universe is also an account of the marvellous energy of light in creation.

whose country they now occupy. My reading of history is that the international powers, in horror at the history of the holocaust, washed their hands of “the Jewish problem” by acceding to the demands of a Zionist minority, and resettled Jews in a land long occupied by Arabs, to the profound disadvantage of the latter. As the Muslim scholar Mehnaz Alfridi puts it: “The Holocaust was a crime inflicted by Europeans for which Palestinians paid the price.”⁸²

Conflict has reigned ever since, and a desperate Jewish population has fought strongly, and often brutally, to retain all territories taken in the struggles that ensued. I long for Israelis and Palestinians to live together in bonds of peace and social justice born of their respective religions: it is up to Israel now “to seize the moral high ground”, drawing on the long history of Jewish ethical behaviour⁸³ in treating Palestinians fairly. Today I am strongly involved with my Muslim brothers and sisters in Palestine, and know of the terrible destruction wrought on the lives of innocent women and children in this conflict. In the last conflict (2014) more than 400 Muslim children were killed, and

⁸² Mehnaz Alfridi has taken the bold step (as a Muslim) of teaching Jewish and Muslim history as an interwoven matrix, stressing that both Islam and Judaism have been historical victims of Christian imperialism: see her book *Shoah Through Muslim Eyes*. New York: White Cloud Press, 2014. See too Foot Note [8] above.

⁸³ On the “high ground” of Jewish values, see K. Armstrong (2011) *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. London: Bodley Head. For a comprehensive account of Jewish values see D. Novak (1992) *Jewish Social Ethics*. Oxford University Press.

For soul-stirring reason and rhetoric on this issue I warmly recommend the many books by Marc Ellis – for example: M.H. Ellis (2002) *Israel and Palestine out of the Ashes: The Search for Jewish Ethics in the Twenty First Century*. London: Pluto Press.

up to ten times that number permanently maimed.⁸⁴ One Jewish child was killed: one child killed, whether Jewish or Muslim is too many. Any warfare which kills children is morally wrong. Any warfare which kills is morally wrong.

The sad debacle that is Israel-Palestine cannot be cured by further violence: it is now impossible to know who 'cast the first stone'. The only solution is a pacific, non-violent strategy, and in this regard I am deeply impressed by the work of Quaker Accompaniers in Palestine, who quietly counsel, protect, and record events without taking sides, seeking the best from all of the parties in conflict. For many centuries Jews were tolerated and accepted in all Muslim countries, as required by God's Qur'anic message. But the foundation of Israel's state has disrupted this peaceful equilibrium, and now in many parts of the world Jews and Muslims face one another with needless

⁸⁴ Desperate little Gaza, struggling for survival in the crush between the bellicose nations of Egypt and Israel has, in my recent and much humbling experience, retained a quiet dignity in the face of massive attacks from all quarters: since 2000 one Palestinian child has been killed on average, every three days, by Israeli armed aggression (*AQSA News*, 2014, issue 55, p.1). In the Israeli onslaught of July and August, 2014, 1,462 civilians were killed, including 253 women and 495 children - (BBC News online, September 1, 2014; and K. Sengupta (2014) Israel-Palestine conflict: four months after the bombardment, Gaza's wounds are yet to heal. *The Independent Online*, December 21st, 2014.)

Truly, I am ashamed to be Jewish. Yet I still want Israel to survive, in peace and prosperity. (See too A. Ryan (2014) The worst enemy of the Jews? *The Friend*, June 27, p.7). Despite the ranting of the extremists on either side, Israel needs to make very few concessions, in line with international law, for this violence to end.

hostility. This hostility is at variance with the teachings of both religions.⁸⁵

Islam and Non-Violence

If, having been treated with bitterness by neighbours or acquaintances, or after suffering any other kind of provocation, one refrains from reaction and retaliation and maintains pleasant relations unilaterally, this will also be a form of jihad. (Khan, Principles of Islam, 2012).⁸⁶

In its higher principles, “Islam is a religion of peace. And according to Islam peace is a universal law of nature. That is because God loves the condition of peace, and disapproves of

⁸⁵ Many Jews were officially persecuted in Spain since 1492, and were finally expelled in 1609, taking refuge in Muslim nations of North Africa and the Middle East. According to Qur’anic and Hadith instruction, practising Jews (as well as Christians) must be tolerated, on payment of a tithe applicable to males of working age; they are absolved, however, from the obligation of service in the military (I.R. al-Faruqi (1998) *Islam and Other Faiths*. Markfield, UK: The Islamic Foundation, especially Chapter 6 on Christianity; and B. Lewis (1984) *The Jews of Islam*. Princeton University Press.)

In the face of Christian anti-Semitism, Muslim nations have been a safe haven for Jews for many centuries - see M.R. Cohen (1994) *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*. Princeton University Press. See also the citations in Foot Note [7]. This peaceful accommodation of religious minorities in Islamic states lasted right up to the founding of the State of Israel, when the pacific accommodation of religions was ended by Muslim nations trying to reverse the expulsion of Palestinians from large swathes of Palestine - see A. Bregman & J. El-Tahri (1998) *The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs*. London: Penguin Books. We must believe, of course, advised by Tariq Ramadan, that “anti-Semitism is un-Islamic” (T. Ramadan (2009) *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*. Oxford University Press).

Consider too the views of radical Jews (including some Israelis): A. Shavit (2015) *My Promised Land – The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*. London: Quaker Centre Books.

⁸⁶ Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (2012). *Principles of Islam*. New York and Birmingham UK: Goodword Books and Islamic Vision Distributors.

any state of unrest. God's predilection for peace is quite enough reason for the believer also to love peace. In no circumstances will the true believer ever tolerate the disruption of peace."⁸⁷ In making this statement, Maulana Wahiduddin Khan draws on several Suras of God's word. Almighty God permits warfare only to repel attackers who are threatening the lives of one's family. Thus only defensive warfare is permitted, and in the conduct of war prisoners must be treated well, and the lives of non-combatants must not be threatened. The teaching of Qur'an and Hadith is that of tolerance for others, forbearance in the face of insult, slowness in becoming angry and swiftness in forgiving (Qur'an 4:70 6:190-3 8:602, 9:5-9).

There are, however, passages in The Qur'an which seem to justify the taking of life.⁸⁸ Liberal Muslims such as Ramadan⁸⁹ argue that the context of the message should be taken into account: today Islam should not tolerate capital punishment and should accept warfare only as a last resort, when a nation or group is under attack and threatened with extinction. Karen Armstrong in her extensive survey of "religion and the history of violence"⁹⁰ discusses these circumstances in a chapter on "the Muslim dilemma". Drawing on Armstrong, I

⁸⁷ M.W. Khan (2012) *Principles of Islam* (Chapter 24). Birmingham: Goodword Books.

⁸⁸ Justin Meggitt offers an appropriate caution concerning partial or naïve Qur'anic quotation and interpretation: J. Meggitt (2015) Labels. *The Friend*, March 13, p. 8.

⁸⁹ T. Ramadan (2010) *What I Believe*. Oxford University Press.

⁹⁰ K. Armstrong (2014) *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence*. London: Bodley Head.

perceive random acts of terror in the West by Muslims as acts of self-destructive despair in the face of the war machines of Western states (and of Israel) which have rendered so much disaster through the taking of innocent lives in the past three decades in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon and Afghanistan. These incursions by strongly armed states have resulted in the deaths of at least a quarter of a million innocent civilians, many of them children (in this view, the unleashing of the ISIS monster is to a large degree attributable to failed Western interventions in the Middle East).

Again, I emphasise that the only solution is that of pacifism, whether Secular, Muslim, Christian or Jewish. Loving peace, as Armstrong urges, is a transcendent human value.⁹¹ So long as Christians (and those of other religions) condone violent warfare, “terrorism” (the warfare of the weak) will continue.

Modern Challenges for Islam

In addition to the choices between peacefulness and warfare, outlined above, Islam is faced with a number of related dilemmas.

Warring groups within Islam. The old sunder, between Sunni and Shi’ah, still prevails in parts of the Muslim world.

⁹¹ K. Armstrong (2011) *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*. London: Bodley Head.

People ask me: “Are you a Sunni or Shi’ah?” I reply: “Neither, I’m a Muslim.” The theological differences between the two main branches of Islam are, in the present era, bewilderingly slight. At my local mosque, Sunni and Shi’ah stand together in the prayer line, saying exactly the same prayers, worshipping Allah in exactly the same way. There are some differences in Shari’ah law assumptions, but that, in plural, multicultural Britain, seems to be all.

How did the two groups evolve? The Prophet did not name a successor, and I intuit that this was a wise and spiritually informed decision. He did not set out to found a religious empire: rather the Message of The Qur’an would do that. All that was needed were industrious Imams, or teachers. But there was bitter fighting for leadership after Muhammad’s death: one group (Sunnis) formed around The Prophet’s ‘faithful companions’, but others (Shi’ah) grouped around Muhammad’s closest relatives (he left no son).⁹² The irony and tragedy was that the angry and often genocidal factional fighting (the killing of one Muslim by another) that has survived into the present century is contrary to Qur’anic teaching, and was not sanctioned in any of the Hadith. The core message of Islam is of peace and doing good to one’s neighbour, not of warfare, hatred, and hunting for supposed heretics. Read as an organic whole, rather than taking isolated passages out of

⁹² J. Esposito (1998) *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford University Press.

context to prove negative points, the Holy Qur'an offers a complete and profoundly informed spiritual blueprint for ethical living, in peace and harmony with God, oneself, one's neighbour Muslim and Non-Muslim, and the polity in which one finds oneself.⁹³

The Problem of Islamophobia. Muslims in America, mainland Europe and Britain are subject to hatred and discrimination by a significant sector: they are “the new Jews” whom the demagogues love to accuse of subverting society and of corrupting British values in their failure to “integrate”. The forces which foster anti-Islamism are structurally similar to those which have fostered anti-Semitism, argues John Esposito.⁹⁴ Nathan Lean (writing about America) concludes: “... Muslims and Islam are not to be feared, nor are blacks, Jews, Catholics or any other group to be feared, nor are any other group that faces systematic discrimination. Rather there is great urgency in the need to resist and counter those whose aim is to chop up humanity into different minority groups, putting them against one another.”⁹⁵ In the British context, vile campaigns against Romanies, Muslims and “European migrants” seek to subvert political energies which might have been used to create a more just, equal and harmonious society.

⁹³ T. Ramadan (2009) *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*. Oxford University Press.

⁹⁴ J. Esposito (1998) *Islam: The Straight Path*. Oxford University Press.

⁹⁵ N. Lean (2012) *The Islamophobia Industry*. London: Pluto Press.

“Multiculturalism” is criticized for allowing minority groups to grasp an identity; but multiculturalism will not work properly until each group has equal status within a non-discriminatory social structure.⁹⁶

Quakers, Catholics and Islam

The assumptions of Quakers and Muslims often differ profoundly, yet in practice there are a number of similarities. *Quaker Faith and Practice* offers the testimony of a Quaker who dwells on a marked Muslim-Quaker difference: a Muslim colleague noted the almost casual approach of Quakers to the idea and assumed presence of God (QFP 27.08). There is some truth in this observation: Muslims mention the name of God bowing or prostrating in prayer; Quakers, if they mention God at all, have a range of assumptions about the divine being, ranging from God as a personal friend to a non-theist assumption in which ideas of divinity do not involve “God” in any traditional sense. The best point of contact between Quakers and Muslims is the assumption by many Friends that Jesus was a wise and noble teacher, possessed of a word and spirit, specially endowed by God. But he was not the literal or

⁹⁶ C. Joppke (2009) Limits of integration policy: Britain and her Muslims. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35, 453-472.

biological son of God: for Muslims too Jesus was not divine, but a noble prophet, and teacher.⁹⁷

Muslims and Quakers will disagree on the notion of “Hell” which for Muslims was a real possibility for those who continued to “worship idols” – but what that means today is unclear. Muslims use the term “Gehenna” for hell: in biblical times this was an actual place, a valley where rubbish was left to burn, a place of eternal fire and eternal waste.⁹⁸ In this theology the “useless” soul ceases to exist, and is discarded and burned, like rubbish. I prefer to think that a merciful God will always allow the soul, whatever that soul’s state, the opportunity to be forgiven in the present life. Certainly Allah will tempt whom He wishes, and will “guide unto His Light whom He will” (Qur’an 24:35). For Ziauddin Sardar, a ‘modern Muslim’, hell is a “fundamental metaphor” whose portrait is the very opposite of paradise.⁹⁹

“Forgiveness” is an outflow of love in the Christian canon, and Quakers who do not perceive original evil as corrupting the human soul should find both the currency and practice of “love” a joyous cross to bear. Muslims and Quakers are enjoined by

⁹⁷ J.M. Hampton (2014) British Quakers Survey: examining religious beliefs and practices in the 21st century. *Quaker Studies*, 19, 7-136. Only 14% saw Jesus as the literal “son of God”. Based on this sample, about 40 members of the Society of Friends in Britain would also describe themselves as “Muslim”.

⁹⁸ Gehenna (Jahannam in Arabic) seems to be the generic name for the burning rubbish pit located outside of many ancient cities, and was frequently used as a metaphor for spiritual hell, the place for discarded souls, in both Old Testament and The Qur’an – see A.K. Turner (1995) *The History of Hell*. New York: Harcourt Brace.

⁹⁹ Z. Sardar (2004) *Desperately Seeking Paradise: Journeys of a Sceptical Muslim*. London: Granta Books.

their respective theologies to be truth-telling, helpful, peaceful, conflict-avoiding and mediating. Numerous accounts are given of The Prophet who forgave his detractors and spiteful deceivers who made false accusations.¹⁰⁰

Islam, in the Qur'anic account of Adam the first prophet, argues that humankind was not born with original sin. Rather, humans, through God's implant of the soul, are born seeking knowledge of and achievement of goodness. Humans in the Islamic message (as Quakers also generally believe) are born "naturally good", seeking the light that is Almighty God's loving will and forgiveness. There are parallels too in the mystical insights of Quakerism and Sufi Islam in the evocation of God-awareness through accessing the inner meaning of soul or spirit, in self and others.¹⁰¹

In Quaker theology "that of God within us" has a major role: through contemplation (in a silent meeting for worship) and through human interaction we reach out to "that of God in

¹⁰⁰ A supreme example of forgiveness occurred when The Prophet's wife Aisha was falsely accused of adultery. Muhammad forgave the slanderers "because of God's grace and mercy" (Qur'an 24:11-20).

¹⁰¹ A.E. Morgan (2010) Islam from a Quaker perspective. www.LAQuaker.blogspot.com

For an introduction and overview of Sufism's spiritual nature, see: J. Baldick (2012) *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*. New York: I.B. Tauris; and A.J. Arberry (2002) *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*. London: Dover Publications.

My favourite Sufi singers are those in India and Pakistan, such as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, and Ragini Raunu – samples of their performances can be accessed on YouTube.

There is also a tradition of "Silent Sufis" which may appeal to many Quakers: see www.goldensufi.org for a description of these practices, and relevant literature.

everyone”, to the natural goodness that God has embedded in humankind. The Qur’an does not reveal much about “the spirit” or “the soul”: that understanding is cloaked in the message to The Prophet. It is clear from the Qur’an that God breathes a spirit or soul into each developing child soon after conception: humans cannot presume that this is part of God. Rather, the spirit comes *from* God: it has never been, nor ever will be, a “part” of God (Qur’an 70:1). It is the means by which we understand goodness in self and others, and communicate with God. So, for Prophet Jesus, “... we supported him by the Spirit of Holiness” (Qur’an 2:223-5).

In contrast, Quakers assume that spiritual intuition has a power which transcends any instruction of scripture or sermon (QFP 19:22). This “inward light” is a powerful guide for Quakers (QFP 19:23-28) and early Friends took much inspiration from Paul’s theology in this regard. “The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God” (I Cor 2:10): that is, the spirit which comes from God enables us to intuit the will of God for human life. This raises the interesting question in Quaker history of how a Paulite-inspired theology has evolved within a group which (in Britain at least) also provides an ideologically comfortable home for Unitarians, non-theists, theistically-inclined humanists and interfaith individuals who (like myself) seek to integrate the theological insights of other faith groups such as Catholics, Daoists, Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims.

All I can say is that we are joyfully spirit-led in a quest cradled in curiosity and love. There is a mystical theology at the heart of Quakerism in which “life itself is the miracle”.¹⁰² For Muslims this miracle encompasses the whole of nature (whose flourishing honours God), including the human spirit which strives to serve God through acts of will, within a realm which, for me, is the first tier of paradise.¹⁰³

The symbol of the cross is a major challenge for the Christian-Muslim. In Qur’anic theology Jesus did not die on a cross, although a recent Muslim historian suggests that there may have been a crucifixion, but not a death.¹⁰⁴ The account of Christ (the Messiah) being raised up alive is remarkably similar when New Testament and Qur’anic accounts are compared.¹⁰⁵ Stuart Masters writes of “the inward cross” which inspires Quakers.¹⁰⁶ I like this idea: it is a symbol of service which makes few theological assumptions about the deity or death of Christ, but acknowledges his teaching as a force within our lives. This “inward cross” may be symbolic rather than a

¹⁰² H. Gillman (2014) Everyday mysticism. *The Friends Quarterly*, 41, 28-39.

¹⁰³ “Quakers ... need to be extraordinary in saying that we are living as if the Kingdom of God is already here.” Simon Best (2012) Quakerism: A radical sustainable faith. *Friends Quarterly*, 1. In this theology, the garden of paradise of which Adam and Eve had stewardship is the equivalent of the first tier of heaven.

¹⁰⁴ R. Azlan (2013) *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. New York: Random House.

¹⁰⁵ Geoffrey Parrinder (2013). *Jesus in the Qur’an*. London: Oneworld Books.

¹⁰⁶ Stuart Masters (2014) The transformative power of God: the cross in Quaker faith and practice. *The Friends Quarterly*, 41 (2) 4-16. Stuart, in reviewing my interpretation, assures me that as a “Liberal Quaker” he does follow the principle of “a true cross”, believing that Christ endured death through crucifixion. My interpretation of Stuart’s theology (and of Penn’s original ideas) is, therefore, a highly subjective view.

reflection of an actual, crucifying cross. As William Penn wrote in 1699, there is no cross but the inward cross, which contains our inner submission to the divine message, in following the straight path towards God.¹⁰⁷

Catholics and Muslims have interesting parallels. The Five Daily Prayers of Islam are a form of spiritual discipline retained today only in parallel form by sisters and brothers in Catholic religious communities who observe the *Officium*, from matins to compline. Like monks and nuns, billions of Muslims across the world say their prayers daily, anchoring themselves to a spiritual world in which every action, thought and feeling throughout the day is meant to be an act of charity which worships Almighty God. It is as if Islam has succeeded in this prayerful anchoring of the self in a way which Catholics have mostly lost.

There is an interesting strand in Catholicism which views the spirit of God unfolding in life day by day, and in wonderfully progressive directions (assuming humankind's natural goodness, as opposed to "original sin"): this is captured in the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, and the theology of Teilhard de Chardin.¹⁰⁸ The Ignatian practice of *examanen*, imagining oneself into a Bible story, which I have found profoundly

¹⁰⁷ William Penn (1699/2014). *No Cross, No Crown*. Gutenberg E-Books, online.

¹⁰⁸ See the references appended to: C. Bagley (2014) Review of Farrow & Wildwood's *Universe as Revelation*. *Universalist: Journal of the Quaker Universalist Group*, 100, 31-34.

inspiring,¹⁰⁹ has its parallels in Sufi mysticism, and (occasionally) in the spiritual awareness which emerges in a Quaker Meeting.

The Franciscan view of the natural world also has interesting parallels with the Qur'anic account.¹¹⁰ And Islam is constantly forgiving sins privately confessed to God: Catholics forgive sins secretly confided to a confessor.

There is one point of contrast between Catholic and Islamic daily prayer: in Catholicism prayer (and celebration of the Mass) is led by priests, part of a powerful hierarchy who control the liturgy; in contrast, Islamic worship is surprisingly independent and private. Most often the five daily prayers are said silently, at home in solitude or with family (although group prayer in the Mosque is encouraged). But even in this group prayer the worshipper remains silent: the *Fatihah* (Qur'an 1:1-7), for example, is silently recited by all practising Muslims 17 times a day.

It is through these prayers silently uttered by the kneeling worshipper that we have direct access to God, asking for help and forgiveness. It is God who forgives us, not some mediating

¹⁰⁹ G.W. Hughes (2004) *God in All Things*. London: Hodder; and K. Burke, E. Burke-Sullivan & P. Zagano (2009). *The Ignatian Tradition: Spirituality in History*. Minnesota: Liturgical Press.

¹¹⁰ Islamic thought, well-established in Qur'anic and Hadith teaching, predated the Franciscan concerns for animal welfare, and ideas about the sacredness and abundance of God's gift in our "natural Eden": E. Kula (2001) Islam and environmental concern. *Environmental Conservation*, 1, 1-9. See, especially: Natan Levy, David Shreeve & Harifiyah Haleem (2012) *Sharing Eden: Green Teachings from Jews, Christians and Muslims*. Markfield: Cube Publishing – for an inspiring account of shared understandings between the Abrahamic faiths.

priest. Moreover, we are enjoined to pray and seek God's mercy and promptings at every moment of the day in our numerous interactions, in our leisure, and in waking during the night. God, for the Muslim, is ever watchful, and ever helpful. Muslims, in my understanding, enjoy freedoms of personal thought and action which Catholics and other Christians may not experience. Muslims (like Catholics) see the developing child *in utero* as having special rights, as being part of God's creation. Surprisingly, Muslims in my experience constitute a "priesthood of believers" engaging in personal worship, and reading and reflecting on The Qur'an and The Hadith, in a way which is unique for each individual.

I dream of a time when every Quaker Meeting will have a Muslim member, who links across the religions, and occasionally ministers in Quaker meeting through reading a Hadith, or reflecting on the Quaker jihad of walking "cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one."¹¹¹

I now believe that the life-path of each one of us has been ordained by God as we are presented with numerous choices, leading to uniquely different pathways as we grow older. Nothing in our lives happens by chance. My first major challenge occurred when I was a 17-year-old naval rating, reading the Bible seriously for the first time, and deciding that preparing for war was incompatible with the teaching of Christ. I

¹¹¹QFP 19.32

acted with determined impulsiveness (my personality style) and as a result endured twelve months in a naval jail, and much joy in Christ. In that journey I was entirely alone, apart from God's company. The second major challenge occurred when I became a Muslim, and this time I have joyous companionship, as well as friendly support from my Quaker brothers and sisters. Yet I continue to plough a unique, personal furrow on the straight path. My integration of ideas and sources of spirituality is unique, and I thank God for the liberal traditions of Islam and Christianity, which tolerate this uniqueness and independence of thought.

I am in awe of, and sit at the feet of, liberal Islamic writers – John Esposito, Farid Esack, Mohamed Balbi, and Tariq Ramadan – whose politically engaged but reformed Islamic view of the world nevertheless returns to the roots of Islam, The Qur'an and The Hadith. As John Esposito commends, I am a religious journeyman with “multiple religious identities”.¹¹² These multiple identities are not simply additive, but synergistic

¹¹² On such “multiple identities” see P. Gottschalk (2000) *Beyond Hindu and Muslim: Multiple Identity in Narratives from Village India*. Oxford University Press; and the commentary on this book by John Esposito, Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University.

There is an interesting variation of these ideas in Tom Wilson's idea of “translation” of faith traditions in his study of Church of England primary schools with a high proportion of Muslim pupils: T. Wilson (2015) *Hospitality and Translation: An Exploration of How Muslim Pupils Translate their Faith in the Context of an Anglican Primary School*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press. Tom uses Tariq Ramadan's ideas of “contextual relevance” in applying Muslim values in his school.

On these fascinating themes see also Hans Schwartz (2011) *The God Who Is: The Christian God in a Pluralistic World*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, who argues that salvation comes to Christians, Jews and Muslims in parallel (but joyfully linked) pathways in journeys towards the same God.

in nature. I pray that many Quaker Universalists lead lives which are enriched in this fashion.

Finally: “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth; the likeness of His Light is a niche wherein is a lamp (the lamp in a glass, the glass as it were a glittering star) kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil well nigh would shine, even if no fire touched it; Light upon Light.” (The Qur’an, Sura 24 *Light*, verse 35).

“The way, like the cross is spiritual: that is, an inward submission of the soul to the will of God, as it is manifested by the light of Christ in the consciousness of men.” (William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, 1699/2014).¹¹³

“The eye is the lamp of the body. For, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.” (Matthew 6:22)

¹¹³ William Penn (1699/2014). *No Cross, No Crown*. Gutenberg E-Books, online.

Recommended Books

An-Nawawi's *Forty Hadith* (translated by E. Ibrahim & D. Johnson-Davies, 1976). Lebanon: The Holy Koran Publishing House.

Karen Armstrong (2001). *Islam: A Short History*. London: Orion Books.

Karen Armstrong (2007). *Muhammad: Prophet for Our Time*. London: Harper Press.

Michael Cook (2000). *The Koran: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.

N.J. Dawood (2003) (Translator). *The Koran*. London: Penguin Books.

Robert Funk & The Jesus Seminar (1999). *The Gospel of Jesus*. Santa Rosa, CA: Polegate Press.

Paul Hedges (Ed.) (2015). *Contemporary Muslim-Christian Encounters: Developments, Diversity and Dialogues*. London: Bloomsbury.

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (2012). *Principles of Islam*. New York and Birmingham, UK: Goodword Books and Islamic Vision Distributors.

Justin J. Meggitt (2013). *Early Quakers and Islam*. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.

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Tariq Ramadan (2007). *The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad*. London: Penguin Books.

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Ziauddin Sardar (2012). *Muhammad*. London: Hodder Education.

Ali Shehata (2007). *The Trade Which Shall Never Fail: A Collection of 55 Hadith on Actions with Immense Rewards*. Houston: Hedaya Publications.