

THE NEW AGE FRONTIERS

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1309 Masonic Ave.
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the Introduction to Gospel of John

Gordon Ross

Many Christians feel that having accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior they must also accept the Bible as the ultimate Truth. In their enthusiasm at being freed from feelings of guilt, purposelessness and inadequacy, they forget that the Bible is a collection of sayings and writings composed by many people with greatly different points of view and backgrounds over a period of roughly one thousand years. It is true that Jesus and the Holy Spirit have given renewed life and hope to the believer and have made possible a closer relationship to God, Our Father, but a Christian's feelings of comfort and joy and of from guilt do not require him to accept every word of the Old and New Testaments as the final Authority in his life. The living God is man's authority, and He has revealed Himself in many ways. Men must determine from their own experiences, from the "fruits" in their lives how much Truth they have about God and how close their relationship is to Him.

We have now received a new revelation from God. All of us who have accepted this revelation wholeheartedly have seen in ourselves a change in the direction of greater love, obedience, humility, gratitude, strength, trustworthiness and a closer relationship to God. We see by our fruits that the revelation is most certainly true!

Our responsibility, however, does not end with our own growth to perfection, to maturity in spirit. We are obligated to witness to others of God's revelation. In fact, when we know this great Truth and feel so much love for others, how can we not tell others of our joy? We must in some way communicate to them the glory of the Age in which we now live and convey to them the utmost importance of their understanding and accepting God's new Dispensation.

How can we do this?

One very important way is to testify to our own conviction, to give our testimony. Another way is to let people see the fruits we have produced -- Love, obedience, humility, wisdom -- through accepting and practicing the Principles revealed in God's message. The most effective way, however, is to teach the message itself, the Divine Principles, for only by knowing God's Word can they come to know God Himself.

In order to carry out our responsibility of teaching well, we must know not only the Divine Principles but also the Bible, since it has been up to now the principle source of man's knowledge about God. We should know how and when it was composed and for what purpose. We should recognize that the Bible has not been dictated by God and that it is not infallible; there are errors and contradictions. Since we in America are primarily concerned with communicating the Divine Principles to Christians, we must focus our attention on the New Testament and especially on the life and teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels.

In past newsletters, Douglas Burns presented a synopsis of Goodspeed's comments on the Gospels. Some people, however, have found these accounts too brief for full comprehension. Therefore, we are presenting a lengthier introduction to each Gospel; in this newsletter, we shall examine the Gospel of John and in later newsletters the other three, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Exactly what are the four Gospels? These four writings (called Gospels meaning "good news") relate excerpts from the life and teachings of Jesus, but their lack of completeness and their obvious eagerness to convince the reader set them apart from ordinary biography. To complicate matters still further, the writers of these accounts begin them at different points and differ on the order and circumstances of the events of Jesus' life. For example, Matthew and Luke start their narrative with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. Mark's Gospel begins the account with Jesus as an adult submitting himself to baptism by John. The last of the four, John, opens with a magnificent, semi-philosophical prologue that relates Jesus to the eternal Word of God, which has existed from before the creation of the universe. Not only do the Gospels start at different points; they also differ in content, both in major matters and in details. Why are there these differences?

The Christians of the generation after Jesus followed the Jewish oral tradition by transmitting the life and teachings of Jesus from person to person by word of mouth. In fact it was a point of pride with all the Jews not to commit sacred teachings to writing but to preserve them unwritten. Thus it was entirely natural to treat the earliest account of Jesus'

deeds and words in just this way. The oral composition of the original Gospel probably came from some personal follower of Jesus, like Matthew, and was in Aramaic (a development of Classical Hebrew, just as modern English is a development of the English of Shakespeare's day), the language Jesus used. Missionaries, like Paul, Peter, etc., to non-Jewish, or Gentile, lands had to preach this Aramaic oral Gospel in the tongue of the hearer, generally Greek. Of course, each missionary preached of Jesus according to his own interpretation and understanding of Jesus' life. In this way, a number of oral gospels began to circulate, but in time the four we have today were accepted as standard and were written down. It is important to understand that each author composed his Gospel from a different point of view and for a different purpose. The authors were not interested in setting down mere facts about Jesus but in conveying "What does his life mean?". The writers include, therefore, those oral accounts which they feel are significant in conveying their viewpoint.

The style and content of the Gospel of John indicate that the author was certainly not the apostle John, who associated with Jesus, but that he was a Greek who probably wrote the Gospel at the beginning of the 2nd century A. D. The Gospel was written to acquaint the Greek world with the author's (whom we shall call "John" for convenience) interpretation of the nature of Jesus' life and mission. To meet the needs of this Greek public some adjustment in the typical Jewish presentation had to be made. A Greek who felt like becoming a Christian was called upon to accept Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. He would naturally ask what this meant and would have to be given a short course in Jewish apocalyptic messianic thought. Was there no way in which he might be introduced directly to the values of the Christian salvation without being forever routed through Judaism? Must Christianity always speak in a Jewish vocabulary? The times demanded that ~~of~~ Christianity be transplanted to Greek soil and translated into universal terms. The Gospel of John is the response to this demand, John attempted to interpret the Christian gospel in language and concepts that were more meaning-full to his Gentile readers than more purely Jewish terms would have been.

John's subject was the same as the other three Gospels; Jesus Christ and the eternal life he had brought to men. But the differences between John and the other three are quite striking. For one things, John changes the chronology of events. He puts the Cleansing of the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry rather than at the ~~g~~ close, and he has the last meal with the disciples take place a day earlier than in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). In John, the ministry of Jesus lasts about three years rather than one or two, as implied by the Synoptics, and the scene of much of Jesus activity is shifted from Galilee to ~~Judea~~ Judaea and Jerusalem.

Even more noticeable are the changes that John makes in the form and content of Jesus' teaching. The parables, similes, and short prophetic utterances are gone, and in their place we find long discourses on recurring themes. These are not the familiar ~~these~~ themes of the Synoptic Gospels: the kingdom of God, righteousness, repentance, forgiveness, and so forth. Rather, they are the themes of eternal life, light, truth, blindness, darkness, sight, and glory. John prefers symbolical language, and he gives words and events a double meaning. John views Jesus' work on earth as finished, not postponed, but this view conflicts with that of Paul who believed that Jesus would return to complete his messianic work. John records Jesus as saying (John 17:4) that he ~~w~~ has accomplished God's work! If Jesus had accomplished his work, the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, why aren't we living in it today and why did Jesus say the Second Coming was necessary? John's account has Jesus impart the Holy Spirit to disciples (John 20:20) in contrast to Luke's account, where it comes upon them at Pentecost after Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 2:4). John believes the judgment of the world to be in progress (John 12:31) in direct contrast to Paul's and Matthew's account of the Final Judgment. John ~~say~~ says nothing of Jesus' baptism, temptation, or agony in the garden. Jesus' human qualities disappear, and he moves through the successive scenes of the gospel perfect master of every situation, until at the end he goes of his own accord to his crucifixion and death.

How can we account for these differences? In the first place, we must realize that John wanted to write a theological interpretation of the life and death of Jesus. Though he makes ~~u~~ use of the gospel as a literary form his main concern is not to repeat the story of the ministry of Jesus as found in the Synoptics. Rather, he aims to REINTERPRET the ministry in the light of his faith that Jesus was the Eternal Son of God. John assumes that his readers are familiar with the total ministry of Jesus, and then proceeds to reinterpret the words and deeds of Jesus as remembered in the tradition, in order to find a deeper meaning. This is an important point for one to keep in mind, for a first glance John's use of the gospel form suggests that he meant simply to record events, rather than an interpretation of those events.

In the second place. John draws more heavily than do the Synoptics on the terminology

and concepts produced by the syncretism of Greek and oriental religions in the hellenistic age. In particular, he reflects the dualism of Iranian religion and of popularized Platonic thought. The approach to the gospel reflects the characteristic Greek disposition to announce the theme of a book in its opening lines. In a lofty and somewhat abstract Prologue, John seeks to place Jesus in philosophical, eternal, and cosmic relationships. The eye-witness testimony to what happened here or there is subordinated to the testimony of religious experience. John's head was among the stars. He was seeking to determine the place of Jesus in the spiritual universe and his relations to eternal realities. These were the matters that interested and absorbed him, not what Jesus actually said or did.

It is evident that the author of John's Gospel understood little of Jesus' true historical mission, or if he did, he certainly made little mention of it. When he writes of Jesus saying "I am the bread that gives life," "I am the Good Shepherd," "I am the door," etc., he is using the so-called "I STYLE," religions of Jesus' day. The statements are not necessarily those of Jesus but only an expression of the author's BELIEF about Jesus. Various inscriptions exhibit the same use of the first person in describing the Egyptian goddess, Isis: "I am Isis, the mistress of every land... I gave and ordained laws... I divided the earth from the heaven. I showed the path of the satrs... I brought woman and man together... I revealed mysteries to men..." (A. Deissmann, "Light From the Ancient East", 1927; pp. 139-140.)

Many of Jesus' statements in John are beautiful and profound, but they do not give much insight into Jesus' intention to establish a kingdom on earth or his human struggle to fulfill God's ideal of restoration. We can readily see that although the Fourth Gospel may serve as great devotional material and as an expression of the great love the author felt for Jesus and for his fellow men, IT CANNOT BE USED AS A HISTORICAL, FACTUAL source for what Jesus did and said!

STUDY OF COMPARATIVE RELIGIONS

Y. O. Kim

ISLAM, OR MOHAMMEDANISM

(The Religion of Submission to the World-Potentate)

1. Introduction:

According to a recent Muslim report, Islam now claims more than 400,000,000 adherents. Islam now stands next to Christianity and therefore second among the religions of the world in the number of believers. Also next to Christianity it is the fastest growing in the whole family of religions.

As regards its outlook on the world, Islam is one of three universal religions - along with Buddhism and Christianity. As regards theology, Islam is one of four monotheistic religions -- along with Judaism, Sikhism, and Christianity.

Chronologically, Islam is the latest among the world's religions -- with the exception of Sikhism,

It is the only religion which started in conscious opposition to Christianity. Yet it has not contributed a single new germinal idea to the religious thought of the world. The name which the founder himself used to for designating this faith expresses exactly the central principle - "Islam," meaning "submission" to God. Another word derived from the same Arabic verbal root is the particle, "Muslim," or "Moslem," which means "submitters."

The religious ideals of a supreme ruler as exercising absolute authority and of a devout religionist as yielding humble submission have naturally tended toward an autocratic form of government. Muslims in the course of their history have set up some notable dominions in various countries. However, at the present time, nowhere in the world is there a notably successful self-governing national administration which has been started by Muslims. The largest and most flourishing group is in India.

In 1947, the nearly 90,000,000 Muslims in India demanded a separate autonomous state, and so was born the largest Muslim state in the world, Pakistan, independent, but choosing to retain membership in the British Commonwealth of Nations. At present there are over 70,000,000 Muslims in Pakistan, while nearly 40,000,000 remain in Hindu India. In addition, a strong nationalist spirit has developed in such predominantly Muslim nations as the newly formed Indonesia, as well as in the North African states and these in Asia Minor,

A new sense of Muslim solidarity has appeared around the world, though national self-interest on the part of individual countries often enough interferes with a complete unity of spirit and action as Muslims. There is not a little rivalry among Muslim nations and outstanding leaders for leadership of the world of Islam, or Pan-Islam.

2. The Lord of The Founder, Mohammed (570-632 A.D.)

The sources of information are partly in the Koran and partly in several early Arabic Lives and traditions.

(1) An Ordinary Arab (Age 1-40) Mohammed was born in Mecca, the most important city in Arabia.

Perhaps the really determinative factor in making Mohammed a prophet was the fact that he early became an orphan. According to tradition, his father died before his birth and his mother when he was 6 years old; he then became a ward of two leading Koreish chiefs, first of his grandfather 'abd al-Muttalib, and then of his uncle, Abu Taiib. Under the guardianship of these two men, he grew up in an atmosphere of religious excitement and responsibility; for both men were prominent members of the Koreish tribe, and that tribe held the position of trustee of the Ka'bah, its idols, its Black Stone, the nearby sacred well, and all the properties connected with them, and discharged the hospitable office of providing food and water, at a price, for the pilgrims who thronged to Mecca. But his loyalties were not fully enlisted: his orphaned state seems to have given him a certain objectivity and detachment of judgment. As he came to maturity, he began to look on many of the beliefs and customs of his community with a critical appraisal born of questioning and distaste. He was disturbed ~~very~~ by incessant quarreling in the avowed interests of religion and honor among the Koreish chiefs. Stronger still was his dissatisfaction with the primitive survivals in Arabian religion, the idolatrous polytheism and animism, the immorality at religious convocations and fairs, the drinking, gambling, and dancing which were fashionable, and the burial alive of unwanted infant daughters practiced not only in Mecca but throughout Arabia. He must have been puzzled by the senseless bloodshed and inter-tribal anarchy which occurred during his youth.

Some of his moral and spiritual emancipation from the more objectionable practices of his people came during caravan trips to Palestine and Syria. A journey to Syria when he was 25 years found him receptive to new insights. Greater importance should be attached, however, to the fact that some of his closest acquaintances in Mecca were well versed in the traditions of the Jews and Christians, and were perhaps critical of native Arabian beliefs. He also had come into contact with Jews and Christians at commercial fairs, where representatives of these faiths used to address the crowds; his curiosity and admiration were aroused by the exposition of these faiths which he so heard.

His need to resolve his religious doubts only grew during the leisure which his marriage to Khadijah, a rich Koreish widow, brought him. She had employed him to manage a caravan for her, and then fell in love with him. Fifteen years his senior, she mothered as well as loved him, and encouraged his religious interests.

(2) Religious Awakening (Age 40-52)

Muhammad now entered a period of spiritual stress. He had apparently been struck by the belief common to both Jews and Christians that there would be a Last Judgment and a punishment of idolaters by ever-lasting fire. The one true God, they said, could not be represented by any image, but only by prophetic spokesmen. Such spokesmen had in times past appeared in Palestine, but had not yet been sent to Arabia. But why not?

His private thought during this period was quickened by persons brought close to him by marriage. A cousin of his wife, the blind Warakah, a wise old man who had some influence in her household, may have been a Christian, and though his information was apparently at many points misleading, Muhammad found him a useful source of knowledge concerning matters of faith and conduct. Less information was perhaps provided by a Christian slave boy called Zaid, whom Muhammad liberated and adopted as a son. The thought that the Last Day and the Last Judgment might be near at hand began to agitate him. We wandered off to the hills about Mecca to meditate. He was now about forty years old.

According to Moslem tradition, he visited a cave for prayers, a few miles north of Mecca, for days at a time. Suddenly one night there rose in vision before him the archangel Gabriel, the Messenger of God, at about "two bows' length," crying "Recite!"

Recite thou in the name of thy Lord who created; - Created man from Clots and Blood:-

Recite thou! For thy Lord is the most Beneficent. Who hath taught the use of the pen:-

Hath taught Man that which he knoweth not.. .

When the vision ended, Muhammad was able to reproduce the whole revelation. He rushed home in great excitement, half doubting, half believing. Later, he was to defend the authenticity of his experience, he spent many hours alone in the cave and there experienced repeated visions.. It was as a result of these experiences that Muhammad felt himself called to go forth and preach a religion of one absolute God, Creator, Potentate, and Judge of the world. He came to believe that Allah was using him as a mouthpiece; the verses he uttered, half in trance, were real revelations. Chapter 96 in the Koran is usually considered as containing his first vision and appointment as a prophet of Allah. For 12 years he continued to have visions.

(3) The Meccan Ministry (Age 52)

After a short period of consultation with relatives and friends, he appeared in the streets and in the courtyard of the Ka'bah, to recite "in the name of the Lord" the verses of the revelations. The listening Meccans gaped, and then, bearing strange doctrine, broke into ridicule. The man must be mad! His preaching of monotheism and future judgment and his denunciation of idolatry and infanticide won only slight success either in Mecca or in the neighboring city of Taif.

(4) The Flight or Migration, Hijra (22 A. Age 52)

Some people from Yathrib (Medina) thought that Muhammad might be their man to be able to impose a firm rule over them and they agreed to prepare their town for the Prophet's coming. At the last moment the Meccans got wind of the secrecy, and the hostile Koreish determined to strike and strike quickly. But Muhammad with one sole companion fled for his life away from his native city. Hiding in a cave 3 miles north of Mecca, he experienced a narrow escape from his pursuers. When the pursuit died down, Muhammad mounted camels, and successfully made the Hijra (the Withdrawal) to Yathrib, ordinarily 11 days, in the short time of 8 days. That year, 622 A.D., which marks the lowest point in the personal fortunes of Muhammad and also the beginnings of his remarkable success, has been adopted as the starting-point of the Islamic calendar in Latin "Anno Hijra", regularly abbreviated to A.H. "

(5) Establishment of the Theocracy at Medina (52-60)

Given astonishingly unrestricted power over the town, whose name was changed in his honor to Medina (the City of the Prophet), Muhammad immediately set up the rule of Allah, with himself as the immediate dictator upon the basis of the sixfold Pledge of Akaba.

We will not worship any but the one God, We will not steal. Neither will we commit adultery,

Nor kill our children, We will not slander in any wise. Nor will we disobey the Prophet in anything that is sight.

He built a mosque for daily prayers and for the ~~weekly~~ weekly congregation worship every Friday. He drilled his followers in devotions, religious education, and zealous aggressiveness. The ardent prophet of a God of power found his own power and his followers increasing. To his previous preaching propaganda he added an entirely new method of military campaigning. He acknowledged that only the help of Allah enabled him to win against overwhelming foes the battle of Badr, and also the battle of the Ditch. Other noticeable changes took place in his policy and in his own manner of life during this period, when he was becoming powerful and independent as a religious and warring leader. The "qiblah," or "facing" in prayer, which formerly had been toward Jerusalem, he changed toward the Arabian center, Mecca. The fast which formerly had been observed on the Jewish Day of Atonement was changed to a new distinctly Mohammedan fast, covering the month of Ramadan, or Ramzan. His former policy of general friendliness toward the Jews was changed to persecution and killing. After the death of his first wife, he took unto himself an increasing number of wives, eleven in all.

(6) Absolute Sovereignty at Mecca (Age 60-62)

Mecca capitulated, and thenceforth Mohammed exercised political sovereignty over all Arabia. He determined to abolish idolatry, and to reduce Judaism and Christianity to a position of dependence. He had sent embassies to Greek, Persian, Egyptian, and Abyssinian kings, demanding their acceptance of his faith. Active opponents near at hand were conquered by the sword, and tribes far away were invited sternly to send delegations offering their allegiance. He saw "men entering the religion of Allah by troops". Before his sudden death in 632, he knew he was well on the way to accomplish his divine mission of unifying the Arab tribes under a theocracy governed by the will of the one God, Allah. He died after a short fever in the arms of Aisha, the favorite wife in his harem. His last words were a prayer.

"Lord, grant me pardon! Join me to the companionship on high!"

Pardon! The blessed companionship on high!"

3. The Character of Muhammad.

(1) ^{Certain} Admirable Characteristics

He was a man of unquestionable religious experience. He was transformed by a compelling personal conviction of an omnipotent God from an ordinary business man into a flaming prophet of religion. Himself a man of prayer, he enjoined his followers also to pray unto the Almighty; and they have been wonderfully faithful in this respect. Muhammed was a man of utter devotion to the religious ideal as he conceived it. He risked his life repeatedly for his religion. And his followers have continued absolutely confident in the controlling power of God.

Muhammad was an attractive leader and an efficient organizer. He succeeded in uniting the various warring Arab tribes on a new religious basis, and his followers have continued to be bound together closely by their religion.

(2) Certain Reprehensible Characteristics

To persons with a Christian background there are seemingly very contradictory elements in the character of the Prophet. Sometimes he was vindictive. Sometimes he was very kind even to enemies or rivals. He revenged himself upon the Jews in Medina, yet he acted with magnanimity toward his former enemies when he returned in triumph to Mecca.

Muhammad was a domineering, warring autocrat. We prescribed war, and advocated violence toward non-Muslims. {Fight those who believe not in God...until they pay the tribute by their hands, and be as little ones,} Verily, God loves those who fight in His cause." Yet, he could also say, "There is no compulsion in religion."

He had great respect for the "Religions of the Book," Judaism and Christianity, which he distinguished from other faiths of "unbelievers."

On no other point is the Prophet more severely condemned by Christians than in his attitude toward women and marriage.

Muhammad's behavior with his numerous wives caused trouble more than once. It all seems quite justifiable to his followers, even at the present time. Certainly, the sacred scriptures of no other religion intimate that the undesirable wives of the founder might be divorced with the prospect of his obtaining more and better wives through the help of God. He married Zainab, the divorced wife of an adopted son, Zaid; and justified his action by a special dispensation revealed to him from Allah: He had set four as the limit on the number of wives for Muslims. Yet this limit was removed later for him alone by a special dispensation.

Yet modern Muslims as well as some objective scholars point out that on the whole Mohammed definitely improved the status of women; that he gave them a degree of economic freedom not yet attained in some Western, so-called Christian lands; that he set a limit to unregulated polygamy which was highly salutary; that he completely did away with the custom of female infanticide, common in the Arabia of his day; and that in his prescription that plural marriage was permissible only on condition that the husband treat his wives with exact equality, he really laid the basis for monogamous marriage.

It is noteworthy that Muhammad has come to be regarded among some Muslim sects as a wholly exemplary character, much as Jesus is to Christians, and considerable literature has appeared in recent years which presents him in this light.

4. The Veneration of Muhammad.

The Koran contains many passages which express a rather humble estimate of Muhammad himself. In the early part of his career he presented himself more than a dozen times as simply a mortal man, one of the common folk, who had been sent by God as a warner.

In two verses he is characterized as "the illiterate Prophet," even though an apostle from Allah. At least five times he is directed to ask for forgiveness from God. Muhammad explicitly disclaimed miracle-working power, even though he was challenged to give some sign that he really was a prophet and not merely an ordinary man.

Yet in a still larger number of verses Muhammad is closely associated with Allah, so that obedience to the Prophet is part of submission to God.

The later estimate of Muhammad was that he was superhuman. Mirkhond's

Life, written in the 15th century, contains 50 pages of miracles attributed to him.

5. Scriptures of Islam, the Koran

Islam is unique among the religions of the world in that its sacred scriptures are avowedly the revelation of God to one man, the founder. The main speaker in

the Koran is Allah. Sometimes he is represented as simply speaking to Muhammad, and sometimes as bidding Muhammad to speak as the mouthpiece of God.

Bet the historic facts seem to be that Muhammad himself did not write one word of the Koran as the document has come down in its present form. About a year after his death, Abu Bekr, his successor, ordered a compilation of the teachings of the prophet, which could be remembered accurately, or which otherwise had been preserved by devoted disciples. Eleven or twelve years after the death of Muhammad, on account of the ~~var~~ variations and confusions which had arisen among the reported sayings of Mohammed, the third caliph, Othman, ordered a revision to be made, and all existing ~~a~~ copies of the previous compilation to be destroyed. Thus, the present text of the Koran is not the first edition, but a second edition, which had been made in order "to stop the people before they should differ regarding their scriptures, as did the Jews and Christians,

From the point of view of literary criticism, material from many sources had entered into the mind of Muhammad before he uttered these teachings. Some traditional Arabic beliefs and folklore can be recognized in the Koran. Some elements may have been originally Zoroastrian, for example, the devil, angels, the judgment-day, the resurrection. There are many references to persons and events of the OT. Some rabbinical remnants from the Jewish Talmud may be identified. There are many allusions to the NT evangel, and ~~the~~ to Christianity, including at least eight references to the Messiah and 25 to Jesus Christ. Indeed: there is a curious resemblance between the meaning of the Greek word "Paraclete" and the Arabic word "Ahmed," which is a synonym for "Mohammed," so that ~~a~~ the ~~found~~ founder of Christianity is represented as predicting: literally, the future founder of Islam. "Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "O children of Israel! Verily, I am the apostle of God to you, verifying the law that was before me, and giving you glad tidings of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmed."

The structural arrangement of the Koran is in 114 ~~d~~ chapters totalling slightly less than the NT, and about one-quarter of the size of the QT.

Every one of the chapters, except the ninth, begins with a stereotyped formula: "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful". Many passages represent that the Koran had been revealed by Allah direct to Mohammed. The authority of the Koran is absolute for Muslims. Their theologians have propounded dogmas of plenary inspiration, verbal infallibility, and self-attesting truth.

Historically, the Koran has been the most influential book in all Arabic literature. Hardly an Arabic book of any importance has been written subsequently without making allusions to, or quoting from, the Koran. It is the chief text-book in the modern Islamic university of Al-Azhar at Cairo,

6. The Conception of The Supreme Being, Allah

Monotheism is Mohammed's pre-eminent religious message.

The historical origin of Islamic monotheism was threefold: partly in Mohammed's own insight into an ultimate unity in the Supreme Being of the universe, partly in his learning this great idea directly from Jewish monotheism, and partly in his conscious reaction against the crude tritheism of the Syrian Xns.

The Koran contains some noble descriptions of the omnipotent and beneficent Creator, which are entirely acceptable to Jews and to Christians.

Seven important characteristics of Allah have been analyzed and classified in orthodox Islamic theology. Absolutely unitary, the main attribute repeatedly asserted, All-seeing; All-hearing; All-speaking; All-knowing; All-willing, inscrutably irresistible; All-powerful

Other names for Allah which occur in the Koran are: The One, the Mighty, the Powerful, the King, the Overcomer, the Avenger, the Dominator, the Slayer, the Provider, the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Forgiving, and also "Loving".

Mohammed's main practical message about God was that He would punish the wicked and reward the good people. Equally explicit are statements that Allah misleads certain people and both punishes and forgives, according to His own inscrutable, unquestionable good pleasure. On the whole, Allah is represented as a magnificent, opulent, irresistible World-Potentate - an Arab sheikh glorified and magnified to cosmic proportions.

Salvation, according to such a faith, is expressed explicitly in the simple word which Mohammed used for designating this religion, "Islam" (Submission to God)

7. The Essential Islamic Beliefs

(1) Belief in the One God, Allah

The first and foremost item in Islam is monotheism. This is taught ~~a~~ repeatedly in the Koran, and forms the first half of the Muslim creed,

(2) Belief in Angels

They intercede with Allah for the forgiveness of men. Eight angels support the throne of Allah. Nineteen angels guard hell, Gabriel is the archangel. He is called "the Holy Spirit." Jinn, genii, are a group of spirits midway between men and angels; they are both good and evil. Some of them have "submitted themselves," and thereby have become Muslims. One of the jinn is the devil or Satan. He is accompanied by a group of especially rebellious spirits, devils,

(3) Belief in the Koran

Allah has sent down various books, among them the Hebrew Law, to Moses; the Psalms to David; the Evangel to Jesus; and lastly the Koran to Mohammed.

(4) Belief in the Prophets of Allah

Twenty-eight such are named in the Koran. Twenty-two of them are from the OT, including Adam, Enoch, Methusaleh, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, and Jonah. There are three from the NT—Zechariah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Among the Islamic prophets outside of the Bible is Alexander the Great. Mohammed is the last and greatest of the prophets. He has been prepared for, and attested by, all the preceding prophets.

(5) Belief in Judgment. Paradise. and Hell.

At the end of the world there will be a resurrection of all the dead on "the day of coming forth".

The great judgment-day of Allah and the unity of God are the two messages of Mohammed from the beginning to the end of his preaching. In at least 852 verses Mohammed like some of the Hebrew prophets, delivered thunderous warnings of doomsday impending with decisive rewards and punishments.

Paradise, with abundant pleasures for the senses, is pictured awaiting the pious believers in Allah. More than a score of passages, almost without exception, refer to gardens and flowing rivers, luxurious food and ease, and varied sensorious pleasures.

Hell for the wicked unbelievers is presented repeatedly with vivid gruesome pictures.

(6) Belief in the Divine Decrees

Everything is predestined by Allah's appointment, even men's belief and unbelief.

8. The Essential Islamic Duties

These are called "the Five Pillars of Islam."

(1) Repetition of the Creed

Every Muslim is required to repeat the Confession of Faith, or Watchword, every day in the original Arabic. "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah." This formula is not to be found in the Koran in this form, but its two parts recur frequently. Simply the repetition of this creed is accepted as a test of conversion to Islam.

(2) Prayer

The Koran frequently enjoins the duty of praying. The call to prayer may be heard from the minaret of every mosque five times every day. The Koran requires prayer at three stated times -- daybreak, noon, and night. It must always be directed toward the Sacred Mosque at Mecca:

(3) Almsgiving

This is a duty explicitly enjoined upon faithful Muslims. Conversion to Islam definitely includes the paying of this impost, "When ye have taken any booty, a fifth part belongeth to Allah and to the Apostle and to the near of kin and to orphans and to the poor and to the wayfarer." It came to be expected that the faithful would give 2 1/2 per cent yearly, not of his income, but of his capital. Of course, during the centuries that Islam was a theocracy, i.e., at the same time both a religion and a government, this proportion covered not only his benevolent giving, but what among other people is regarded as taxes to support the government. It served not alone to pay the expenses of the religious establishment, the care of the poor, etc., but to support the army and the other functions of the state.

(4) Fasting During the Days of the Month of Ramadan

"O believers, a fast is prescribed for you...the month of Ramadan...As soon as any of you observeth the moon, let him set about the fast..,"

There were other fasts, also, though they were not compulsory. Mohammed fasted frequently during the months of the year. In this many loyal Mohammedans follow his example. There is a Tradition that the Prophet once said: "Every good act that a man does shall receive from ten to seven hundred rewards, but the rewards of fasting are beyond bound."

(5) The Pilgrimage to Mecca (Haj)

Every Muslim is required ~~of~~ ^{once} in his lifetime to go to Mecca, to circumambulate the Sacred Mosque, and to kiss the Kaaba Black Stone seven times. This was easily possible as long as Islam was limited to Arabia, or even the Near East. It became literally impossible for millions of Muslims in the Far East or other distant parts of the world. It came to be accepted that in ~~a~~ ^{case} of inability himself to go, a muslim might send a substitute, but the low economic status of multitudes of Muslims in faraway lands made this also impossible. It is now the custom for many to contribute the small sums they can to the expense of one who with help may be able to go, and by so doing, they gain merit.

The pilgrimage is to be performed within certain lunar months, and according to certain other details.

During years in which travel suffers no interference because of international unrest or war, an enormous number of pilgrims arrive afoot, by camel, by automobile, by truck, by steamer at the Red Sea port of Liddah, or by air, from all over the Muslim world. In a recent year, 200,000 pilgrims were reported.

9. The History of Islam

Mohammed died without leaving a son or any appointed "successor" (Caliph). Then for 28 years the leadership was maintained in turn by 4 valiant personal comrades of the Prophet: Abu Bekr, who ordered the collecting of Mohamed's sayings; Omar, who ~~de~~ conquered Syria and Persia; Othman, who ordered a revision of the Koran and the insertion of the vowel-points into the consonantal text; and Ali, Mohammed's son-in-law, with whose assassination Islam became permanently divided into sects. Then there arose a series of different caliphates, some of them simultaneous, and warring against each other.

(1) Political Divisions in Islam

The Omayyad Caliphate (660-750 A.D.) at Damascus started the method of an hereditary succession, and extended Islam forcefully over all north Africa and Spain. The westward aggression of Islam continued rapidly far into Europe until it was stopped by Charles Martel, at the battle of Tours, or Poitiers, in France in 732 A.D., exactly one hundred years after the death of Mohammed.

The Abbaside Caliphate (750-1258 A.D.) traced itself back to Abul Abbas, an uncle of Mohammed. It included the most famous of all the Muslim caliphs, Harn-al-Raschid, whose capital was at Baghdad.

A Spanish caliphate held sway at Cordova (755-1236 A.D.), and a Moorish caliphate at Granada (1238-1492 A.D.).

The Fatimite Caliphate (910-1171 A.D.) rules Egypt and north Africa.

The caliphate of the Ottoman Turks began its power in 1299 A.D. It captured Constantinople in 1453 A.D. and Egypt in 1517 A.D. This continued as the chief Muslim power for about 600 years. In 1922 the sultan, at Constantinople, was deposed by the Turkish National Assembly, at Angora.

(2) Sectarian Divisions in Islam

Along with the external political separations, there have arisen within Islam certain notably distinct types of religious experience and of theological formulas.

The Sunni sect constitutes the main body of Muslims. They are pre-eminently the traditionalists. They insist upon the Sunna (or Way), which has come down continuously from the founder. The Turkish Muslims are mostly Sunnis.

The Shia sect split off early in the history of Islam. They contend that the first really legitimate "successor" was Ali, who, as being personally in the family of Mohammed, was the one to continue the true succession from M. Ali and both of his sons, Hasan and Husein, were religious martyrs, and have been venerated by the Shia Muslims. The various subdivisions of Shia Muslims differ among themselves concerning the number of Imams (divinely appointed leaders), and also concerning the identity of the latest Mahdi, or Guided One. The Shia Muslims are located chiefly in Persia and Africa. Their tendency is toward liberalism, mysticism, even pantheism. They have been much influenced by other systems, especially Zoroastrianism.

A common belief among Shia Muslims is that the 12th Imam disappeared, but that he will return again, a belief somewhat similar to the Christians belief in the Second Coming of Jesus. This expectation of one to come has given rise to two notable modern movements in Islam, one in Persia. the other in India.

About the middle of the last century, there arose a figure in Persia claiming not to be the expected one, but the forerunner of his appearance. He was known as

the Bab, and soon gathered a substantial following. The new movement fell under the suspicion of the Persian government and the Bab was put to death. Not long afterward a member of the Bab's following, a man of some wealth and social standing, proclaimed that he was the expected one. He was accepted by at least a part of the Bab's followers, and his movement came to be known as the Bahai faith. He was called Baha 'Ullah, the "Splendor of God." His teachings and those of his successor, Abdul Baha, are regarded as the revelation of God, and constitute the scriptures of Bahai.

Baha 'Ullah was a prisoner most of his active life, the latter part of it at Akka on the Mediterranean coast, after periods of prison in Baghdad, Constantinople and Adrianople. After the rise of the Young Turks, Abdul Baha, son and successor of Baha 'Ullah was given freedom to travel abroad, and succeeded in establishing the new faith in both Europe and America.

The group no longer considers itself a branch of Islam, but a new world religion. It is now found actively at work over most of the world. It believes that God is one; that He has revealed Himself in all the nine great religions of the world -- they do not consider Jainism and Sikhism as separated religions -- through successive prophets each to his own age. Jesus was the prophet for his time; Mohammed for his epoch, and Baha 'Ullah is the prophet-revealer for the present age. Estimates of the number of Bahais in the world run as high as five million, which is much greater than that of either the Jains or the Zoroastrians.

The other movement was founded by The Promised Messiah who appeared in India in the latter part of the 19th century. As in the case of Bahai, there is in it a degree of syncretism. The promised Messiah claimed to be not only the returning Imam of the Shiah Muslims, but also an incarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu; the long awaited Jewish Messiah; the Zoroastrian Saoshyant; the Maitreya or Buddha to come; and the returning Christ of the Christians.

The movement took root in Northwest India, one sect of it at Qadian, the other at Lahore. At the time of the partition of India, Qadian was destroyed, and a little later the Qadian sect re-established headquarters at Rabwah, Pakistan, a completely new city founded at a site some miles to the north of Lahore, chosen by revelation by the Successor to the Promised Messiah, the present head of the movement. The sect is known as the Ahmadiyya. It is probably the most missionary-minded group in Islam. Copying the methods of Christian missions, it sends out missionaries to various parts of the world. Its American headquarters are in Washington, D. C., where it has a mosque and carries on an active program of publication and distribution of propaganda literature. It has groups with resident missionaries in a number of the larger cities of the United States.

Islam, like the other great religions, has its mystics. The Muslims call them "Sufis." In the course of time Orders of Sufis grew up around outstanding mystics, very much as in Catholic Christians, each with its monasteries and resident monks, to which were usually attached a numerous lay brother-hood. Sufism is sometimes thought to have had its origin in Christian mysticism, in Neo-Platonism, or in Hindu mysticism. It has been explained by Muslim mystics themselves as arising directly out of the experience of the Prophet himself, who was given to mystic experiences. Indeed it was probably these which caused him to believe that he was called to be a Prophet of God. Sufism has produced a mystic literature that has been unsurpassed in any religion.

The Sufis, so named from their original clothing of Suf, or coarse wool, exhibit still another religious trait. The idea of the Shias, that the deity could in any approximate way become man, would have been abhorrent to the austere transcendentalism of Mohammed, although he did experience some of the mystics' sense of divine rapture, or of possession by the Divine. However, this new idea of incarnation has been still further developed by the Sufis. They are characterized by the pantheistic tendency that even ordinary men may almost become divine by a process of asceticism and mysticism. The Sufi Muslims have been located mostly in Persia and India. The most famous Sufi was the Persian mystic Jalal-ud-Din Rumi (1207-1273 A. D.). The most famous religionist, revivalist, and author in the whole history of Islam was Al-Ghazali, who died in 1111 A. D.

Sufism is said to have fallen into decay in recent centuries, though some of the Sufi orders continue to exercise not a little influence in the political realm today.

At the present time among Muslims there exist some seventy-two distinct divisions, sects, or denominations. These exhibit a tendency which is in marked contrast with the warning in the Koran with regard to the heinousness of sects.

"Take tight hold of Allah's rope all together. And do not part in sects." Be not like those who parted in sects and disagreed, after there came to them manifest signs. Be steadfast in religion, and not part into sects therein."

10. Modern Tendencies in Islam.

Islam has not escaped the common fate of all religion in the modern age of science. It has not yet come to terms with science in respect to its Sacred Scriptures. While there has been some tendency to subject the Koran and the Traditions to critical scrutiny, this has not yet been generally done. The rigid doctrine of inspiration held by orthodox Muslims is bound to produce conflict when this is attempted, just as it has occurred among conservative Christians.

On the political side, the situation has changed notably in the last two decades. The partition of India brought about the formation of Pakistan as an independent state, the largest Muslim group in the world. The rise of Egypt and its attempt to unify the Muslim world; its defiance of the Western in the nationalization of the Suez Canal; and the new importance given the whole Near East and North Africa by the discovery of enormous deposits of petroleum and valuable minerals, have stirred the whole Muslim world and at the same time created formidable new problems for the Islamic faith. How can Islam fit into the new development of the world ~~all th~~ with all the stresses and strains involved?