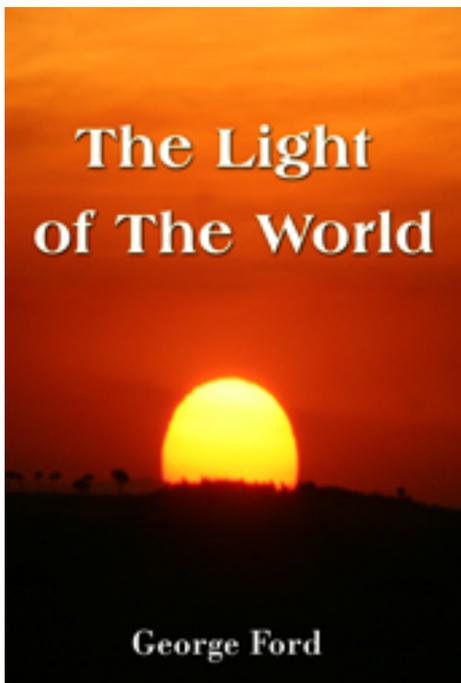


# THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

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## 1. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Every intelligent person understands that the public good, the prerequisites of progress, the basis of civilization and the true principles of religion all demand attention to that which unites different faiths and what separates them.

Belief in the unity of God is the foremost unifying factor between the three groups known as the "People of the Scripture". For the Jew and the Christian proclaim it as loudly and clearly as the Muslim. The two former will never accept the notion that the Muslim should be regarded as holding more firmly to his essential and basic tenet, which must in the long run prevail over all erroneous views advocating polytheism or idolatry.

A sincere Christian, while not sharing the second part of the Muslim testimony that "Muhammad is the Apostle of God," will, however, for the same reason as the

Muslim, definitely share in the first part; "There is no other God than God," and contend for it with all his might. He takes pride in approving any genuine reformist movement aimed at eliminating polytheism of the kind existing when Islam was founded.

The second great unifying factor between the groups known as the "People of the Scripture" has, so far, not been given its due share of importance and attention. This is the person of Jesus Christ, or "Isa" son of Mary, and His example and teaching. Therefore, our intention is to discuss sincerely and frankly the various aspects of His glorious unifying factor with the sincere Muslim who is zealous for his religion.

It is accepted that facts can only be clarified through tests and research. Once so discovered and agreed on, harmony - that desirable goal in this age - is established between those discussing these matters.

We trust the results of this research will not merely contribute to lessening the alienation which a religious Muslim feels towards certain Christian issues, but, by explaining them, totally eliminate such feelings from his heart. We refer in particular to those issues which relate to the person of Jesus Christ who, in debate with some Jewish leaders, proclaimed, "I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."

This statement that this person, Jesus, is the second unifying factor between the "People of the Book" is based on the fact that they agree in honouring Him, an accord not reached throughout human history in connection with any other prophet. These groups make up no less

than half the world's population, a half of which is well advanced in all spheres of progress.

The Jews, as is well known, consider that the Messiah (whose coming they eagerly await) occupies a much higher place than the greatest prophet. This is apparent from many of the texts in their Torah from which the following has been selected:

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end... from that time on and forever." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

The Christians' reverence for Jesus Christ is not only outstanding but unique and sublime and far exceeds their esteem for the greatest of the apostles and prophets. They consider Him to be the same Messiah promised to the Jews in the Torah and above all to be the only begotten Son of God. This is clear from a number of texts in the Gospel which, because of their power and strangeness, strikes a non-Christian as most difficult. We select the following:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men." (John 1:1-4)

"The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." (John 1:9)

"The Word became flesh and lived for a

while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

"Which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at the right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church." (Ephesians 1:20-22)

"That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." (Philippians 2:10-11)

Then, when we open the scripture of the Muslims, we find that those verses which refer to Jesus, son of Mary, elevate Him to a position higher than all prophets after their prophet Muhammad. Some of these verses are:

"The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, that was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him." (Sura Al-Nisa 4:168)

"When the angels said, 'Mary, God gives thee good tidings of a Word from Him whose name is Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary; highly honoured shall He be in this world and the next, near stationed to God.'" (Sura Al Imran 3:40)

"That is Jesus, son of Mary, in word of truth." (Sura Maryam 19:35)

"And We sent next, Jesus, son of Mary, and gave unto Him the Gospel. And We sent in the hearts of those who followed

Him tenderness and mercy." (Sura Al-Hadid 57:27)

"And We gave Jesus, son of Mary, the clear signs, and confirmed Him with the Holy Spirit." (Sura Al-Baqara 2:27)

"When God said, 'Jesus, son of Mary, remember My blessing upon thee... when I confirmed thee with the Holy Spirit.'" (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:109)

In addition to the above verses there are other proofs which support the position of Christ among Muslims. Of these we quote from the prophetic tradition cited in "Mishkat al-Masabih", a book held in high esteem especially among the Muslims of India. This narrative depicts the believers repairing on the Day of Judgement to the prophets in turn, beginning at Adam, seeking their intercession. Each prophet, according to this narrative, expresses regret for his unworthiness, owing to sins he has committed which are mentioned in Israel's history, and points them to another. When they come to Moses he too confesses his shortcomings and says, "Go to Jesus who is the Servant of God, the Apostle of God, the Spirit of God and the Word of God." Jesus does not apologise, however, for no sin was attributed to Him but tells them, "Go to Muhammad bin Abdullah whom God has forgiven first and Last." (Mishkat al-Masabih: 23:12)

The Islamic religion admits that Jesus, son of Mary was the only one born of a virgin and translated from the world without the corruption of physical death in the grave. He has no grave on earth.

This amazing agreement among the parties, "The People of the Scripture," in superlatively honouring the person of Christ is a very important link,

unsurpassed except by the belief in the unity of God. It should bring them together in love and mutual respect.

Nothing remains except that the Jews should be convinced that this is their real Messiah, and the Muslims accept that the Gospel, which contains the good news of Jesus, son of Mary and His teachings, is the same Gospel vouched for and revered in the Quran. The way would then be open for a profitable and stable relationship between these three groups who hold the reins of the world power.

The relationship first of all requires understanding. On the one hand, by virtue of the place Christ occupied in their scheme of things, the Muslims would come closer to an understanding with the Christians. On the other hand, the Jews would come closer, because the Christians have embodied their Torah literally in their Holy Scriptures, along with the Gospel (*Injil*).

Understanding demands the removal of fantasies from the minds of one group concerning that which the others believe. This makes it necessary for each group to make their Scriptures accessible to the others. If hoarding material necessities of life is wrong and in enlightened countries considered a crime, how much more reprehensible (blameworthy) would be the hoarding of fundamental religious matters on which depend divine favour and eternal salvation or doom. A Muslim who loves his own people will not be satisfied with such a situation, but would seek to spread the religious benefit which he has obtained. He will also desire to obtain his share of any new blessing which may come to him from the people of other faiths.

If the One who said, "I am the Light of the World," is truthful, we must examine His statement sincerely and carefully, in order to understand its implications. Would not the conclusion be that the One who is truly "the Light of the world" would also be the Light of the Islamic peoples, who comprise one seventh of the world's population?

The intelligent Christian warmly welcomes the honour given in the Quran to the person of Christ, Jesus the son of Mary, and to the Christian scriptures (Torah and Gospel). He also appreciates that the Quran enjoins respect towards Him, because He is one of the "People of the Scripture". He finds in this respect a significant opening for agreement between Him and the Muslim.

Earlier some Quranic verses relating to the person of Christ were mentioned. The following are some concerning the Christians:

"And thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say, 'We are Christians', that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud." (Sura Al-Ma'ida)

"When God said, 'Jesus I will... set they followers above the unbelievers till the Resurrection Day.'" (Sura Al Imran 3:48)

"Surely they that believe... and those Christians, whosoever believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness - no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:74)

"And We sent none before thee, but men to whom We made revelation - question the People of the Remembrance, if you do not know." (Sura Al-Anbiya 21:7)

"And We sent, following, Jesus son of Mary, and... set in the hearts of those who followed Him tenderness and mercy," (Sura Al-Hadid 57:27)

Beyond all this, every enlightened person knows and admits that fidelity to the truth is of utmost importance. He will not sacrifice truth in order to defend his own group in their error.

Fair-mindedness, therefore, demands that Christians should not only pay attention to verses of commendation quoted above, but also to those which are derogatory. Some of these are:

"The Jews say, 'The Christians stand not on anything;' the Christians say, 'The Jews stand not on anything...'" (Sura Al-Baqara 2:107)

"People of the Book, ..say not, 'Three'... God is only one God." (Sura Al-Nisa 4:169)

"They are unbelievers who say, 'God is the Third of Three.' No god is there but One God." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:77)

"And when God said, O Jesus, son of Mary, didst thou say unto men, 'Take me and my mother as gods, apart from God'?" (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:116)

"They have taken their rabbis and their monks as lords apart from God." (Sura Al-Tawba 9:31)

The censure expressed in these verses is certainly due to the religious decadence of the Christians at that time, a fact which made such censure reasonable. When a people stray from their religious principles and the divine commandments contained therein they lose the right to be respected. By following human traditions instead of

divine revelations and stupid superstitions instead of sublime and permanent truth revealed from heaven such people deserve severe rebuke. Advocates of religious reform and those whose aim it is to abolish every form of worship other than that of the only Living God, the Eternal Spirit, cannot remain silent in the face of such errors. It is probable that reform was the motive for the foregoing derogatory and censoring remarks.

Muslims who are luke-warm towards Christian matters, or feel aversion to them or ridicule them, may argue that the wars known as "the Crusades" sowed the seeds of ill-will and rejection. The Christian would readily admit the wrong done by his people in those wars, knowing that these were contrary to Christian teaching and the Spirit of Christ. Those Christians who make the excuse that these were not due to religious hatred toward Muslims but the result of Christian zeal to repossess the holy places are not thereby absolved from the judgement passed by the apostle Paul on some of his own Jewish people. He said, "For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they do not know the righteousness that comes from God... they did not submit to God's righteousness." (Romans 10:2-3)

Zeal without knowledge is blind fanaticism which misleads those who have found the truth, and confuses those already misled.

Christendom's error on that occasion would not have occurred but for the neglect of Christians, and even their leaders, of the Holy Bible, the basis of their religion. When human traditions took the place of their divine constitution, those

bloody and shameful wars flared up, contrary to the express commandments of their Lord and Master, Christ.

These commandments declare that religion exists in the soul before appearing in works. Its basis is a sincere heartfelt relationship with the Creator and with fellow created beings. It was decreed first in the Torah and later clarified in the Gospel in the saying of Christ that all the law and the commandments are summarized in two great commandments, namely to love God with the whole heart, and love one's neighbour as one's self. (Matthew 22:37-40)

According to the Christian code, whatever is contrary to love of God and mankind is inconsistent with religion. True religion is not established by the sword but by proofs and the good which issues from it. That which is established by the sword depends upon the sword for its continuance. Christians have found by experience that the success they gained by the sword in their Crusades was short-lived, because, though acting in the name of Christ, they contradicted the Spirit and commandments. They forgot that one of the noblest of His titles, used by the prophet Isaiah seven hundred years before Christ's birth, was "Prince of Peace." One of His most important commandments is, "Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Matthew 5:39-40 and 44-45)

He who gave His followers such commandments, acted according to them while He lived amongst men and, at the conclusion of His earthly life, uttered this prayer for those who crucified Him, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34)

A just Christian admits he should require his people to pay more attention to the teachings of their religion and keep its commandments, if they are to deserve the love and respect of Muslims, whether for themselves or for their Scripture and beliefs, and if they desire to convince the Muslims of the truth of the saying of their Lord, "I am the Light of the world."

A Christian versed in his religion notices another reason that explains Muslim aversion, which causes him much sorrow. He realizes that the treatment of this chronic malady will not be affected by merely sheathing the sword and relying instead on love and righteousness. Rather, it requires understanding the real meaning of the Christian calling and how to present it to Muslims.

Everyone who, through careful study, has become well versed in the content of the Gospel knows that the main object of the Christian message is not to call people to a change of faith, because the Gospel ignores the matter of denominational shades of opinion. Neither is it a call to change of name, because the name "Christian" occurs only three times in the New Testament as a title by which Christians came to be known. Furthermore, it is not a call to practise certain ordinances such as baptism, for even the most important of outer practises are secondary.

The principle object of the Christian message is a call to a personal living faith, emanating from the heart, in a living Person who is spiritually present, whom God has raised as the only Saviour equally adequate for all mankind. As for Christian ordinances, some of them need not be performed, whilst the practise of others is only profitable after a heartfelt response to this inward spiritual call. Openly embracing the Christian faith and taking the name of Christian is not admissible, if done hypocritically and for empty show. When done honestly and uprightly they are of no benefit except as a preparation for the first essential object of Christianity. When a Muslim realises this truth, much of his aversion to the Christian message will disappear.

Anyone probing deeper will notice that Jesus Christ did not say, "I am one of the lights of the world." He spoke as being the Light of the whole world, and so anyone else who has shed, or will shed light in the world, draws his light from Him, just as the moon and stars draw their light from a sun which is far greater than they and cannot be matched.

An honest Muslim, whose loyalty to his faith prevents him from instantly accepting the truth of Christ's saying, "I am the Light of the world," will no doubt admit that discovering the truth cannot be accomplished without a long search, study and thought, undertaken in total sincerity. In consequence he does not reject discussion with those of another faith. Neither does he spurn accepting proof of any matter merely because it disagrees with what he inherited from his forebears and with what he was raised. He will heed the lesson from the well known Quranic verse which upbraids those who so behave,

saying, "‘We found our fathers upon a community and we are guided upon their traces.’ Even so We sent never before thee any warner into any city, except that is men who lived at ease said, ‘We indeed found our fathers upon a community, and we are following upon their traces.’ Say, ‘What, though I should bring you a better guidance that you found your fathers upon?’" (Sura Al-Zukhruf 21:23)

He realises that if Jesus, son of Mary had restricted Himself to His original faith, clinging to that which He inherited and learned as a Jew, there would be no trace of Christianity, and the Gospel of Christ would not exist. The same could be said of Muhammad bin Abdallah of Quraish who, in his endeavour after the truth, did not restrict himself to that which he inherited and was used to, but opened up new avenues and linked them to what he had inherited and practised from the contents of the Torah and the Gospel. The intellectual independence is an essential safeguard against straying.

There is no doubt that every mature person accepts the need to respect established truth, and to search for it with perseverance, exactness, and diligence, not only in his own scripture but in those of others, knowing that the truth is invincible. He remembers the significance of the words "the Truth" which is one of the most illustrious names of the Divine Person. Such a person confirms the statement of the prophet David, who said, "I have chosen the way of truth" (Psalm 119:30) and the statement of Solomon the Wise, David's son, who said, "Buy the truth and do not sell it." (Proverbs 23:23)

No doubt such an investigator will use his intelligence to study matters pertaining to

inspired religion in order to understand what is true, and reject the false. He will be loath to accept childish superstitions and idle talk, which control the minds of many adherents of all faith. He will, likewise, reject any texts and miracles which are not authenticated by inspiration. In this he commends Zamakhshari's statement that, "Any method not supported by logic is unsound."

The fair-minded will understand that even as the goodness of water cannot be judged by testing a muddied sample from the river, but only by drinking clear water at its source, so judgement on the status of Christianity, whether in the past or the present, cannot be based on what is seen in Christians who fall short both then and now. Such judgement must be found on what is seen in their inspired scriptures and in the person of their great Leader and Guide, the Source of their teaching and their perfect example.

A thoughtful person of integrity steers away from blind religious fanaticism, which binds one's mental powers, because it veils the light even though it may shine around him. He who avoids religious prejudice in search of the truth will realize that a religious dogma, though good and necessary, cannot be a basis for judging the balance of truth. Rather, it is like the clothes a person wears. These, though good and necessary, are not deemed the true measure of the person who is wearing them. As the worth of a person depends on his qualities and not on his clothes, so the status of religion does not depend on the name but on the principles it enshrines; not on the dogma, but on the life-giving content which is the true criterion in religion.

Religion can be likened to a garden with fruit trees and the various doctrines to the trees themselves. Mere correct religious belief is like a fruitless tree. The fruit of true faith is righteousness and no trees would be planted if there was no hope of fruit. If a tree continues without bearing fruit it is cut down and burnt. The world is not satisfied or pleased with mere correctness of doctrine which brings neither satisfaction nor joy from its fruit, seen in good character and works of righteousness. Judgement for neglecting these is more severe than that for neglecting sincere conviction, so much so that punishment of atheists may be lighter than punishment of believers whose way of life contradicts their beliefs.

Religious competition between mature and enlightened people focuses on good character rather than superiority of doctrine. The first is the more honourable arena for contest between groups as it is between individuals and is surely the most profitable and yields the best result. This is because controversy over convictions often breeds hatred and differences, while debate concerning righteousness increases it in both parties and brings them closer to each other.

General principles on which there is agreement are more important than particular principles on which a difference exists. The object of this discussion is to avoid sectarian bias and steer clear of any controversy which aims at building up a sect on the ruins of another. To participate, as sincere friends, in a study of the status of the person of Christ and the Bible, is a rule for his people.

It is advisable, first of all, to look into the support which the Quran lends to the

inspired Bible, which in both its parts, the Torah and the Gospel, preceded the Quran. Such support is to be found in many verses of the Quran but we will be content with some which refer to the Torah and the Gospel in general terms.

"You who have been given the Book, believe in what We have sent down, confirming what is with you." (Sura Al-Nisa 4:50)

"There shall come to you a Messenger confirming what is with you." (Sura Al Imran 3:75)

"And we have sent down to thee the Book with the truth, confirming the Book that was before it, and assuring it." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:52)

"But those of them that are firmly rooted in knowledge, and the believers believing in what has been sent down to thee, and what was sent down before thee." Sura Al-Nisa 4:160)

"This Quran could not have been forged apart from God; but it is a confirmation of what is before it... wherein is no doubt, from the Lord of all Being." (Sura Yunis 10:38)

There are also verses which refer to the Torah and the Gospel by their specific names such as:

"He has sent down upon thee the Book with the truth, confirming what was before it, and He sent down the Torah and the Gospel aforetime, as guidance to the people, and He sent down the Salvation." (Sura Al Imran 3:2)

"Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet of the common folk, whom they find written down with them in the Torah

and the Gospel, bidding them to honour, and forbidding them dishonour." (Sura Al-Araf 7:156)

"Muhammad is the Messenger of God, and those who are with him... that is their likeness in the Torah, and their likeness in the Gospel." (Sura Al-Fath 48:29)

"But had the People of the Book believed and been godfearing... had they performed the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have eaten both what was above them, and what was beneath their feet." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:70)

"Say, 'People of the Book, you do not stand on anything, until you perform the Torah and the Gospel, and what was sent down to you from your Lord.'" (Sura Al-Maida 5:72)

"And when I taught thee the Book, the Wisdom, the Torah, the Gospel" (Sura Al-Maida 5:110 and Sura Al Imran 3:43)

"People of the Book! Why do you dispute concerning Abraham? The Torah was not sent down neither the Gospel, but after him." (Sura Al Imran 3:58)

"Their mark is on their faces, the trace of prostration. That is their likeness in the Gospel." (Sura Al-Fath 48:29)

"And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, son of Mary, confirming the Torah before him; and We gave to Him the Gospel, wherein is guidance and light, and confirming the Torah before it, as a guidance and an admonition unto the godfearing." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:50)

Those verses which support the Gospel only are among the following:

"So let the People of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein. Whosoever judges not according to what God has sent down - they are the ungodly." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5: 51)

"And We sent following Jesus, son of Mary, and gave unto Him the Gospel." (Sura Al-Hadid 57:27)

Those verses which support the Torah only are among the following:

"Yet how will they make thee their judge seeing they have the Torah, wherein is God's judgement." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:47)

"Surely, We sent down the Torah wherein is guidance and light; thereby the Prophets who had surrendered themselves gave judgement... following such portion of God's Book as they were given to keep and were witnesses to... Whoso judges not according to what God has sent down - they are the unbelievers." (Sura Al-Ma'ida 5:48)

"The likeness of those who have been loaded with the Torah, then they have not carried it, is as the likeness of an ass carrying books. Evil is the likeness of the people who have cried lies to God's signs." (Sura Al-Jum`a 62:5)

"They say, 'We believe in what was sent down on us;' and they disbelieve in what is beyond that, yet it is the truth confirming what is with them." (Sura Al-Baqara 2:85)

"And when Jesus, son of Mary said, '...I am indeed the Messenger of God to you, confirming the Torah that is before me.'" (Sura Al-Saff 61:6)

"Likewise confirming the truth of the Torah that is before me." (Sura Al Imran

3:44)

"Children of Israel ...And believe in that I have sent down, confirming that which is with you." (Sura Al-Baqara 2:38)

"Say, 'Bring you the Torah now, and recite it, if you are truthful,'" (Sura Al Imran 3:87)

An opinion circulating among Muslims claims that the Quran has replaced the Torah and the Gospel on the pretext that it contains and summarizes within its texts all that which is essential and useful in them both. Moreover, that the only reliable book after the advent of Islam is the Quran.

Supposing this opinion were correct, its importance and benefit to the Muslim will be no more than it is to the Christian. The proof of its soundness which satisfies the former must satisfy the latter also.

However, the very texts of the Quran are the greatest refutation of this view, because they mention the Torah and the Gospel as if it were a third independent scripture. The Quran states:

"They fight in the way of God; they kill, and are killed; that is a promise binding upon God in the Torah and the Gospel, and the Quran." (Sura Al-Tawba 9:112)

"The unbelievers say, 'We will not believe in this Quran, nor in that before it.'" (Sura Saba 34:30)

"Whoso disbelieves in God... and His Books... has surely gone astray into far error." (Sura Al-Nisa 4:135)

"...those who assert that they believe in what has been sent down to thee, and what was sent down before thee... Satan desires to lead them far astray." (Sura Al-Nisa

4:63)

The term, "the word of God and His scriptures", contained in these verses make it clear that belief and unbelief do not refer to the Quran only but also the three Scriptures mentioned in the first verse above, namely the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran. How can there be belief or unbelief in something that has been abrogated and replaced?

When Muhammad answered those who disputed with him he did not content himself by declaring his faith in that which was revealed to him, but added the certainty of his faith in that which was revealed before. When he attributes to Satan the intention of misleading mankind far astray he links this not only with the evidence of the Quran but on that which was revealed before it, namely the Torah and the Gospel

There is, therefore, no place for the view that the Quran has replaced the Torah and the Gospel, because this finds no support whatsoever in any single Quranic verse on which a Muslim could build who thoroughly investigates the matter.

It is also said that if the Quran was sent down to replace previous revelation it would have been expected that out of reverence to former Divine revelation, it would contain verbatim references to some of the verses in that which was previously inspired. This is so in the Gospel which has many quotations, and places complete reliance in previous scriptures, the Torah.

There is no doubt than those who defend the opinions we are now considering, say as a pretext that God (to Him be praise) revealed the Torah to Moses, and then afterwards, the Gospel to Jesus, to take its

place, and then to Muhammad a third scripture, the Quran, as a successor to both its predecessors, in the sense that it supplanted them. If the first part of this argument were true, it is probable that the conclusion of the last part would also be true. But to claim that the Gospel took the place of the Torah and succeeded it is far from the truth and contrary to the Quranic texts. The Quran does not abrogate these former scriptures but pays tribute to them both by often mentioning them together.

The Gospel is an essential result and indispensable fulfilment of the Torah. There is no value in any result or fulfilment unless the original has been proved and preserved. Jesus Christ, at the beginning of His ministry confirmed this truth when He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them." (Matthew 5:17)

Moreover, if the Quran were to replace the Torah and the Gospel, it would have proclaimed this clearly so that its followers could be informed. But the Quran has neither any verbatim quotation of the sort mentioned earlier, nor any statement that it takes the place of the previous Scriptures. Actually, it denies this repeatedly as in the verse which censures those, "desiring to change God's words." (Sura Al-Fath 48:115) And that which says, "So do they expect anything but the wont of the ancients? And thou shalt never find any changing the wont of God, and thou shall never find any altering the wont of God." (Sura Al-Fatir 35:41)

We know that because humans are prone to error they make ordinances and laws. When errors are found in those laws they are corrected and the laws are improved.

But is not so with God, praise be to His name. All the laws He reveals at various times to diverse people cannot but agree in principle in spite of any disagreement which may appear in form. The relationship which binds them together is indispensable, clear and firm. Revelation to a Jew cannot be at variance with that given to a Christian, nor that given to a Christian be contrary to what is given to a Muslim, except in trivial, temporal and incidental points. A sound mind would not concede that there is room for contradiction in Divine revelations.

It is therefore seen that the Christian law which God revealed has authenticated, confirmed, extolled and built upon the Jewish law previously revealed. Christians admit the great value, not only of the Gospel, but also of the Torah. They confirm the former scripture verbatim, make it the first part of the Bible, and honour it as much as they do the Gospel, because it is the foundation on which the Gospel has been built. The Torah and the Gospel together make one Book, not two. The first without the second is incomplete and the second without the first has no foundation. The eternal and essential connection between the Torah and the Gospel is also seen in promises, references, symbols and prophecies, which require the completion and fulfilment appearing in the Gospel. Thus we affirm that each of them is incomplete without the other.

The Torah is not for Jews alone, nor is the Gospel only for Christians. Both scriptures are for the whole world, sent by the only God, for all his rational creatures everywhere, because He loves them and desires the best for them without distinction. Acting on the proofs which we

have mentioned we leave it to a fair-minded Muslim to judge that the opinion advocating the “replacement” of the Torah and the Gospel by the Quran is baseless and is unsupported by evidence. It is a surmise and not a fact and may have been invented to combat the arguments of Jews and Christians. A Muslim will not, therefore, be surprised that it is hard to convince others of this opinion.

What needs to be said of the other opinion which many Muslims hold? This is their non-acceptance of the current Torah and the Gospel with their contents, on the view that they are not the originals confirmed by the Quran. The claim is made that the originals have long been lost. The truth or otherwise of this view concerns the Christians as much as it does the Muslims. In investigating it they have a mutual aim, namely to conduct the investigation honestly to find out the extent of its truth.

The first thing to be stated in this matter is that the person who asserts that two existing and important books have lost their originals must offer definite proofs to support his claim, especially since the books concerned are inspired scriptures. He must exhibit a copy of the original to show where the error lies in the copies he rejects. If he claims distortion or forgery in their contents he must support his claim with irrefutable evidence, otherwise his claim is unreliable and void. He can be likened to a person accusing another of a crime where justice demands adequate proofs or withdrawal of the charge owing to lack of evidence.

As regards the Torah, the Jews assert, with proofs, that the day of their Book was written they have maintained a strict watch over every letter and vowel, in it, to an

extent unsurpassed by the Muslims preservation of the Quran. The fact that this Book remained intact, despite the destruction of their holy city and magnificent temple, and the dispersal of their nation all over the globe for nearly two thousand years, is a marvel of history.

A noteworthy matter is the Christians literal acceptance of the Torah of the Jews, and their endorsement of it. It is well known that there has been continuous controversy between both parties which might have caused the Christians to reject the Jewish Book if that were feasible.

The persecution of the Christian by Jews at the time when the Jews had reached the peak of their glory and power is common knowledge. It came to a climax when the Jews crucified Christ and then followed this by persecuting, torturing and killing many of His followers and apostles.

The Jews themselves do not deny this but take pride in it. When the wheel of time turned and power came into the hands of Christians they took revenge and repeatedly persecuted the Jews. Witness for instance the horrible massacres committed by Christians in parts of central and eastern Europe where several thousands of Jews were destroyed, generating bitter hatred between the two. This has lasted nearly two thousand years.

If the book of the Jews had been open to the accusation of corruption or forgery, would it be reasonable for Christians to endorse it and be as devoted to it as the Jews? Would they take it literally as holy a law as their own Gospel, use it as a basis for their publications, honour it and continue to read, study and interpret it daily and abide by its contents? Christians

continue to use it in their sanctuaries, schools and homes, and spend vast sums of money annually to print and distribute it all over the world, even though it is the book of their opponents. Is there not in all this a lesson of great significance, a marvel of history, and one of the most important proofs of the authenticity of the Torah and its freedom from corruption?

Modern scholars testify to the existence of several copies of the Torah and the Gospel written hundreds of years before the advent of Islam, and confirm that these copies agree with those in circulation today. There is no possibility of corruption having made its way into the Torah and the Gospel after the advent of Islam, and their confirmation in the Quran.

It is obvious that if any alteration was introduced to the Gospel after Christ appeared and before the Islamic conquest, the Quran would have raised objections to it instead of confirming it. If any was introduced after the Islamic conquest it would have shown up by comparison to older copies referred to earlier.

Supposing someone were to come forward and claim that the present Quran is not the original one. Would not the logical answer be that the acceptance of the Quran by divergent Muslim sects like the Sunnis and Shiites as well as others is definite proof that the present Quran is original? Otherwise would not one of these sects bring forward another version of the Quran and claim that it is original and the version accepted by others has been corrupted?

It is worth noting that Divine providence led scholars to discover Hebrew and Greek manuscripts which, by the shape of their script, show they were written before the

Islamic era, some of them by more than 1000 years. When compared, such manuscripts were found, in all their basic contents, to be in agreement with the present Torah and Gospel. Other manuscripts and commentaries have also turned up containing texts from the Torah and the Gospel leading scholars to state that if these two scriptures were lost it would be possible to reconstruct the original Torah and Gospel from these numerous quotations.

Evidence such as this is sufficient proof of the integrity of the scriptures (Gospel) which Christians now have. Their agreement on it, despite many bloody and hostile conflicts between some of their many denominations removes any doubt on that score. Let it be known that the main differences among them concern the translation and interpretation of the Gospel. These are restricted to a few words, and even fewer phrases of little importance, and do not at all affect the unity of the Gospel held by all Christians at all stages of their history.

Let us return to what we have previously indicated concerning the fundamental unity between the Torah and the Gospel confirming their authenticity. When a Muslim reads the Torah he will, no doubt, observe many references to an anticipated new age. His prospect of a new age is admitted by both Jews and Christians. The Gospel which conforms with the requirements of the previously revealed scripture, and which it confirms, cannot possibly be forged or distorted. Its name, the "New Testament", indicates its relationship to the "Old Testament", the Torah. Knowledgeable Christians would not consider defending the Gospel unless it is genuine. They are mainly concerned

with the certainty of its origin and authenticity. An intelligent person, knowing that time will expose both the lie and the liar, will never agree to adhere to that which is false. He will describe all who cling to falsehood as being contemptible.

Only men of learning understand how much concerted effort has been expended by scholars in the thorough scientific investigation of the Gospel and related matters. Among these investigators are many who reject the teachings of the Gospel and wish, if possible, to disprove it scientifically. Others, namely those who believe in the Gospel are very zealous in their investigation to rid themselves of any prejudice that might affect their judgement. Both camps have the one aim: to discover the truth despite the differences in their personal objectives. The result of their investigation has been total agreement that the writing of the extant Gospel can be attributed to the disciples of Jesus Christ and his contemporaries whose books carry their names. Sufficient evidence has been presented to prove that the Torah and the Gospel now in existence are the originals which the Quran itself upholds and are free from any blemish of distortion or forgery.

It is accepted that in a straightforward and sincere debate each side may, temporarily, assume his opponent's claim is correct pending the establishment of the truth so that the debate may proceed. We have, therefore, at the beginning of this study taken for granted as true the Muslim's claim that the Quran is divinely inspired. We have a right then to ask both Muslims and Christians to restrict themselves in religious matters of their own scriptures which they believe to be inspired. Such a

restriction eliminates the most difficult of obstacles which cause the estrangement between them in matters of religion. These obstacles result from additions made to what was written by inspiration.

We will be content with mentioning one such addition by Christians and one by Muslims. Perhaps the most difficult thing a Muslim hears uttered by a Christian, or reads in Christian books, is the naming of Mary, mother of Christ, as "Mother of the Deity", or "Mother of God". If a title of this sort were contained in the inspired book the Christians would have no alternative but to use it.

But, because it has no validity whatever, its use is not permissible. For Christ, who is the Son of Man as well as the Son of God, is the son of Mary in His human nature only. It is impossible for Mary to have any place whatever in His Divine nature. On the other hand, perhaps the most difficult thing a Christian would hear from a Muslim, or reads in his books, is the statement concerning the infallibility or impeccability of the prophets in their manner of life. If this statement were true it would conflict with the Torah and the Gospel and nullify them. There is no doubt, therefore, that the best way to reach an understanding and agreement is to eliminate human additions and be content with the Divine original.

Having reviewed what a sincere Muslim says according to his Quran, the question is, "What does an honest Christian say according to his Gospel which is confirmed in the Quran?" Earlier it has been noted what a sincere Muslim, who is true to his faith, will call from his Quranic garden concerning the exalted position of Christ, and from the Gospel which records

His life and teachings. Now the Christian is requested to explain to his Muslim brother some of the precious things of his evangelic garden thus enabling him to reach a balanced judgement on Christian matters.

The foregoing comments are an introduction to the main aim of our treatise which is to examine the significance of Christ's statement, "I am the Light of the world."

As the Gospel we possess is confirmed in the Quran, and as it (the Gospel) attributes this statement to the great Prophet who uttered it, even so will such a declaration become a binding element for the Muslim as well. In the same way, the light of the sun is common to all and not limited to some sections of mankind, so the Light of the Divine truth is all inclusive.

Christ's statement, "I am the Light of the world.", came in the course of a speech He delivered to the Jewish people and their elders in the great temple in Jerusalem. It is not a facile statement, nor easily accepted, and His listeners rejected it completely. But acceptance, or rejection of such a statement depends on what is believed about the person who made it.

If a strange visitor should claim, "I am the ruler of the greatest state in the world," how will his listeners judge him? Naturally they will think he is either a) joking and will pay no attention to him or his claim; b) talking irrationally because he is insane and pity and distance themselves from him; c) a liar who is to be ridiculed and avoided; or d) truthful, in which case his hearers will then treat him with the respect due his high position.

Doubtless, it is impossible for a devout

Muslim to accuse Jesus, son of Mary, of joking, irrational speech or deceit.

Therefore, He is truthful in His statement, "I am the Light of the world". If this were the only claim of its kind, it might be possible to suspect it had found its way into the Gospel in error or surreptitiously. However, it agrees fully with other claims made by this eminent Prophet which are recorded in the Gospel. It is also consistent with the position He occupied throughout all the time He appeared amongst men, and therefore He must be the "Light" of the Muslims also. His statement is vital for it is connected with their eternal salvation. An intelligent person knows that the terms of salvation and eternal damnation are nobler and fairer than sectarian and are not subject to change from people to people or from creed to creed. These terms are analogous to spiritual light which is symbolized by natural light whose variety does not affect its fundamental form because it is eternally unchanging.

There can be no doubt when God raises for mankind a Saviour from eternal perdition, then what is valid for the Jew must also be valid for the Muslim, the Christian and the pagan. The question as to who is the Saviour appointed by God to save mankind from sin and perdition is the most important issue for all religions and the answer is the same for all. It is accepted that religious differences on incidental issues may be useful or even necessary, as are the different fingers on one hand and the different divisions in an army. But reasonable and useful differences cannot transcend the fundamentals of religion.

As all the "People of the Scripture" agree in believing there is only one God with sublime attributes, so it is incumbent on them to agree on the designated Divine

representative, appointed by this one God for the salvation of all mankind. This agreement is of extreme importance. On this approved representative alone depends the revelation of the Creator's thoughts, the declaration of His perfect will, and the manifestation of His Divine plan for the salvation of mankind from sin, together with the conditions for escape from eternal judgement and its punishment. Only this one who is sent from heaven can exemplify in His person, before the eyes of mankind, whatever is possible and permissible to portray of the attributes of Almighty God, setting before them by His own life a perfect human example for them to follow at each state. Who then, is this sole representative sent for the salvation of mankind?

The Gospel contains many verses showing that in Jesus, Son of Mary, are fulfilled the requirements and conditions we have mentioned. This is the secret of the exceeding joy experienced by those who read the Gospel with sincerity, a sound mind and an honest desire to know how man is saved from sin and its consequences.

Science informs us that when the rays of the sun fall on a prism, they are separated into the seven colours of which light consists. When rays fall on raindrops they form a rainbow; in ancient times, this was given as an assurance to righteous Noah of the Divine mercy towards mankind. For on the raindrops of Divine mercy towards sinful and perishing mankind is etched the rainbow or spiritual light coming from heaven in the person of Christ, the Light of the world. If the world gains material benefits from the way scientists split light into various colours for each to be used for its specific purpose, how much greater

spiritual benefits may be obtained from studying each attribute of the person who is "the Light of the world"?

The reader will find an important reference to such details in the statement of the apostle John in the New Testament, which reads:

"On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said: (I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last)

1 ...I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned around I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone 'like a Son of Man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet and with a golden sash around His chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In His right hand He held seven stars..." (Revelation 1:10; 12-16).

2

We can think of each of the seven stars in the hands of this glorious person who is "like a Son of Man" as representing one of His unique characteristics which, blended together and embodied in one person, produce the radiant light which deserve to be the Light of the whole world.

In our present discussion we direct attention to those attributes of Jesus Christ which, being unique, belong to Him alone and are shared by none other. We are not looking at those characteristics in which He excels above other messengers and prophets such as wisdom, composure, humility, zeal, clemency, patience,

uprightness, submission to the Divine will.

It is recognized that the characteristics of Jesus Christ cannot be known except by reading His biography in the Gospel. The records for this discussion are the words of the New Testament which we know have been preserved as originally written, and are believed to be a genuine and true report of the facts concerning the person of Jesus Christ, His words and deeds. We have a right to hope that the candid Muslim will acknowledge the unique characteristics of this majestic person, symbolized in the seven stars He holds in His right hand.

The natural light of the world is not from the earth itself but from the celestial bodies above it. The spiritual light of the world cannot possibly come from the people of the world but comes from above, from heaven, the sources of spiritual light. No wonder, therefore, that the one who said, "I am the Light of the world," often declared that He came from heaven. The Gospel announces: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The Word became flesh, and lived for a while among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:1 and 14)

Jesus told His Jewish listeners, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." (John 8:23) "For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." (John 18:37) "I am the bread that came down from heaven." (John 6:41) "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58)

When the Jews objected to His statement that He was the Light of the world, His

reply was, "Even if I testify on My own behalf, My testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going." (John 8:14)

Later, when He prayed, He said, "And now, Father, glorify Me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began." (John 17:5)

It is not possible for the human eye to perceive the Divine light. In the Gospel we have it stated, "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son who is at the Father's side, has made Him known." (John 1:18)

This verse signifies that He who is the "Light of the world" descended from heaven to mankind by taking on real human nature, when born of the virgin Mary. By descending from heaven and becoming man He stood apart from other apostles or prophets. And since He is the only heavenly person to ever reside on the face of the earth, He has the right to be the Light of the world.

Previously we mentioned that the unique characteristics of Him who is the "Light of the world" are pictorially presented by the seven stars held in His right hand (Revelations 1:16) The first of these reflects...

### 1.1. The Heavenly origin of Jesus Christ

From this star shines the light of the perfect purity of His nature, for obviously no one is fit to be the Light of the world unless He is absolutely pure.

There is none absolutely pure among the people of the world and no such person can come but from heaven, the source of purity. Therefore, descent from heaven is

an essential condition for the person whom God will raise up as the Saviour and Intercessor for man. The hearts of people seeking salvation and righteousness naturally open up to a Saviour coming to them from heaven, because He alone can reveal heavenly matters to them clearly and truthfully. The one who follows a Saviour whose origin is heavenly, whose purity is absolute, and whom he longs to imitate, receives purity by ever looking up to Him. The light of his Saviour's purity illuminates the darkness of his path and reveals to him new heavenly realities, for this Saviour is interested first in purity of the heart and secondly in visible, practical purity. Jesus made this clear to His followers in His statement: "But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgement... Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift... But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away... But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne... or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head... Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes' and your 'No', 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." (Matthew 5:22-24; 28-30; 34-37)

"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

He is the only Man who said nothing that He did not put into practise. He did more than He asked others to do. Looking to Him and believing in Him are a great help

to everyone who desires purity for himself; for as the Scripture says: "Without holiness no one will see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14).

It is known that in vision, the essential point is the person who sees not the object seen; in hearing it is the hearer and not what is heard; and in speech it is the speaker and not his speech. In religion also what is essential is the believer himself, not the form of his belief. This is not meant to belittle the significance and dignity of objects, sounds and speech or the form of belief, but is intended to illustrate Christian teaching which proclaims the importance of a personal relationship, springing from the heart, and the spiritual unity between the individual believer and the universal Saviour appointed by God.

From this union a spiritual influence results which gradually transforms the characteristics of a genuine believer into the image of the Saviour in moral and religious perfections. Anyone who calls himself a Christian but in whose life such an influence is not apparent proves that he lacks such a bond, and his Christianity is merely nominal, not genuine.

This descent from heaven bestows on Jesus Christ not only superiority over the greatest and most righteous of human beings but a uniqueness among them all. No one can hold this basic star in his hand but Him alone.

Alongside this star is the second, namely:

## **1.2. The Prophecies Concerning Christ**

Even though prophecies have been made

concerning the emergence of some historic figures, Jesus Christ is unique in the nature of announcements preceding His coming. They are distinguished from those made concerning any other person by their antiquity, multiplicity and continuity over thousands of years. The truth of the prophecies is also shown by the minute details and authentic ring characterizing them, and the number of people of varying stations in life who declared them. These revelations were given to many people who were far removed in time and place and lived under differing circumstances. They foretold a Messiah who would come in a manner inapplicable to any other person who has emerged or will emerge in world history.

Among the most important of these revelations were the symbols given by Divine command and practised strictly by the people of Israel throughout their history. In ancient time the source of the light for God's chosen people was the promised Messiah. When "in the fulness of time" this person appeared it proved to be true that He had been the Light of the world before He came - that is from the time of the creation of Adam to the day of His appearance, and not only since the time He appeared.

From the star of these prophetic revelations, given repeatedly during thousands of years, shines the light of Jesus Christ's integrity and truthfulness, because the person in whom they are fulfilled cannot possibly be other than genuine. The salvation of mankind depends on the truth of His words and promises, for truthfulness in the Saviour of mankind is an essential quality. Truth alone shines. Everything else is darkness. The Light of the world cannot but be true.

He, to whom be glory, said "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

He is faithful to every one of His promises. Therefore these promises are a safe resort and strong support in all situations and phases of life. For the genuine believer they ensure abundant good now and super-abundance in the time to come. How true is the statement concerning the joy experienced by one who reads the Gospel containing these promises, a joy dispersing all doubt, fear and sorrow.

No wonder, therefore, that every Christian who understands the true meaning of the Christian message, desires to offer it to others, especially to His Muslim brother. This message is joyful news of good tidings which eliminates sorrow and fills the heart of the believer with perfect peace, satisfaction and joy. This shining star of prophetic revelations is not held in the right hand of anyone but His.

In addition to these two stars we see a third. it is:

### **1.3. The Authority of Jesus Christ in Word and Deed**

Other prophets and messengers claimed that the words they spoke were not of themselves. They began by, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts" or "The Word of the Lord came unto me saying..." But Jesus spoke in a way that inspired the writer of the Gospel to report, "The crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (Matthew 7:28-39)

Christ Jesus Himself once declared, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been

given to Me." (Matthew 28:18)

"The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgement to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father, who sent Him." (John 5:22-23)

He promised He would come again in His glory, in His sovereignty with His holy angels and His elect (Matthew 25:31). Therefore, the glory and the kingdom, the angels and the elect, are all His because He and the Father are one, as He said.

He also said that in the last day He would raise those who believe in Him (John 6:39-40), and that He raises and gives life to whom He will (John 5:21)

His authority was manifested in His works as well as in His words, because He acted spontaneously granting full and lasting Divine forgiveness to those who repented. In so doing He incurred the anger of the Jewish elders who accused Him of blasphemy and asked, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Mark 2:7)

When He raised the dead it was He who gave the command, as in the raising of Lazarus from the grave when He said, "Lazarus, come out!" (John 11:43)

Likewise He commanded the demons and the storms as one having authority over them and they obeyed Him. In His manifestation of authority in word and deed He is unmatched by any other prophet or messenger.

From this bright star, the star of His authority, radiates the light of His all-embracing supreme power. He said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." (Mark 2:10)

Can anyone who has no such power give light to the whole world, and save all mankind from sin? Definitely not, for who, I wonder, can rely on a Saviour possessing only human ability?

Thus the star of the authority and power of Jesus Christ illuminates the path of everyone who, realizing his weakness and shortcomings, longs for a mighty Saviour and takes refuge in Him. He finds in Jesus Christ, who cast out demons, a Saviour able to cast Satan, prince of demons from his heart. In Christ, who by a word calmed the raging winds and waves, he will find one able to remove all obstacles and causes of failure from his path. In the one who raised the dead, he will find a Saviour who will impart to him life and power from His own Spirit. In Him who opened His heart and hands to the poor, the despised and the repentant sinner, the seeker finds the one who will intercede for him effectively before the throne of majesty in heaven. In Christ, the one who rose from the grave on the third day, a man will find a Saviour to pluck the fear of death from his heart, and transform the deathbed to a couch of life. He finds in Christ that the seeming victory of hell has been transformed to defeat, and the door to the dark grave transformed to a door leading to surpassing happiness in the glories of heaven.

Authority, therefore, is absolutely essential for the Saviour that God has raised up and made the Light of the world. This is a star no one holds in his right hand but Jesus Christ alone

The fourth star is:

#### **1.4. The Right to Homage**

Any person refusing worship when offered it proves he does not deserve such homage. When, however a person who is acknowledged as being preeminent in righteousness appears and declares He is the only Son of God come down from heaven and accepts the worship offered Him, this acceptance is to be taken as proof of the authenticity of His claim that His person surpasses that of any human and uniquely so. This, undoubtedly, is the meaning of Jesus Christ's acceptance of worship repeatedly offered Him.

For we know that no apostle, prophet or angel consented to receive worship or to be given titles ascribed only to God. But Jesus Christ, with His superior knowledge, great humility and close fellowship with God whom He honoured, and despite His admission that worship must be offered to God alone, did not refuse to accept it even from his own disciples, who were nurtured on his teachings. When one of His disciples addressed Him saying, "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28), Christ did not rebuke him, nor did He do so when another apostle said, "Lord, you know all things." (John 21:17)

He was known to the people as a poor carpenter from the village of Nazareth, far removed from having an earthly kingdom at any time, present or future. But, when He rode into Jerusalem the masses greeted Him with jubilant cry, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." (Luke 19:38)

This event was used by His adversaries as a pretext for demanding His crucifixion, for they accused Him before the Roman governor of being an agitator aspiring to Caesar's throne. When the Governor asked Him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"

(John 18:33), Jesus replied positively saying, "My kingdom is not of this world." (John 18:36) The Governor himself wrote Christ's title and put it on the cross. The writing, in three languages, proclaimed, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." (John 19:19-20)

Nothing of this kind was ever done to any other prophet or apostle. Nor did any restrict salvation to himself as did Jesus Christ who often invited people to come to Him and believe in Him. This is clear from many of His utterances such as, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)

When speaking He did not use the plural, thus joining himself with others in religious matters as is often done, but said, "I", demonstrating His uniqueness amongst men in religious authority. His uniqueness was also manifested in that He never sought God's forgiveness, nor showed repentance nor confessed any sin.

Jesus Christ's right to receive worship and to be the leader of mankind shines forth from this star. Humanity needs a leader capable of guiding all peoples of earth in every place and age, whatever their race, language, circumstances, customs or needs. To lead them out of the desolation of sin and darkness into the paradise of holiness and peace, mankind needs a leader who has the right to say, as Jesus said, "Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

This leader who descended from heaven and was given power, authority and the right to be worshipped, is the one fitted for the universal and permanent leadership of all mankind. The star of homage which

this Saviour has been granted shines to encourage all people to follow the example of those who offer Him reverence. Such folk are convinced of His right to receive it by virtue of His being the model of integrity, meekness, simplicity, and self-denial. In praying to Him these people find unique joy because He shared their human nature, with its temptations and sufferings, and being near to them He sympathizes with their weaknesses. This star of homage is held in the right hand of none other than Jesus Christ.

The fifth star is:

### **1.5. His Abiding Presence**

Christ often declared He would be present spiritually and actually with those who believe in Him, everywhere and at all times, and that He would illumine darkened hearts, living in them by His Spirit. As He is altogether true, this promise of His abiding presence qualifies Him to be a light for the whole world, a living head of all those who trust in Him.

From the star of His continual presence with His followers wherever they may be, shines the light of His surpassing knowledge. This knowledge is an essential quality to Him who, in fulfilment of prophecies, comes from heaven, receives power, and is honoured in worship. Furthermore, the presence of a person with such important prerogatives removes all doubt concerning His surpassing knowledge. The Gospel says of Christ, "He knew all men. He did not need man's testimony about man, for He knew what was in a man." (John 2:24-25) It also says, "Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, 'Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?'" (Matthew 9:4)

His disciples also said to Him, "Now we can see that you know all things and that you do not even need to have anyone ask you questions. This makes us believe that you came from God." (John 16:29-30)

Such a quality of an "abiding presence" has never been attributed to any other prophet or apostle, nor did any of them claim it for himself. This then becomes a shining star which no one holds in his right hand save Jesus Christ alone.

The sixth star illuminates the fact of:

### **1.6. His Death and His Resurrection**

The main purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world was to die for mankind by offering an atonement for their sins, and opening the door of salvation and heaven to those who repent. He said, "The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28), and concerning His imminent crucifixion He said, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life." (John 2:14-15)

Jesus spoke frequently before His crucifixion of His determination to deliver Himself to death on the cross, declaring that by His crucifixion certain prophecies would be fulfilled. One such prediction goes, "He was oppressed, and afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so He did not open His mouth." (Isaiah 53:7), and another, "the Lord makes His life a guilt offering." (Isaiah 53:10)

His atoning death is inseparable from His

glorious and unique resurrection on the third day, after dying in a manner so different from others who rose from death. The purpose of His death was confirmed by His resurrection as He clearly explained during His life. Even as He was unique in prophesying His death by crucifixion, this being the object of His coming from heaven, so He was unique in His resurrection, since in these two events no apostle or prophet resembles Him.

From the star of His atoning death and resurrection beams the light of His boundless love. For all the foregoing stars are worthless to sinful mankind without the addition of this sixth. The descent of Jesus Christ from heaven, His absolute authority, the fulfilment of prophecy, the acceptance of worship and His abiding presence would tend to terrify, judge and condemn sinful mankind, unless it is linked with a corresponding love. Familiar human love does not give light to the dark world, because it resembles a smoky wick. but when the foregoing traits are combined with limitless love for sinful mankind in the person of the one who meets all conditions necessary for the salvation of men for sin and eternal loss, then that person is the one worthy to be the Light of the world.

The grandeur of Christ is not the greatest pillar of Christian faith, because majesty by itself does not illuminate. The moon, for example, when on the wane, passes over our heads in all its grandeur but does not illuminate the world. Neither does the sun lose anything of its greatness when its light is veiled by the night. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world in His attributes, ideals and teachings, the axis and sum of which revolve around love for God and neighbour, even extend to love of an

enemy.

The light of love, even unto death for perishing foes, emanates from the star of the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He alone holds this star.

Footnote: The significance of the sacrifice and the shedding of its blood in Christian belief makes the sacrifice on Mount Arafat and its commemoration at "The Feast of the Sacrifice." (*Id-ul-Adh-ha*) a strong link between the two faiths.

The seventh star is:

### 1.7. His Divine Nature

The six stars which have already been mentioned prepare the way for the seventh, and are inseparably linked with it. We know that the belief of Christians and Muslims, that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin, is neither an argument for nor proof of His Divine nature, but it is the natural requirement of that nature. That does not mean He was human and became Divine, for this would be impossible and such teaching is infidelity. The one who, by His virgin birth, took on a true human nature, possessed from all eternity a true Divine nature in a manner which does not violate the reality of the oneness of God.

The Arabic phrase "the only Son of God" is rendered in the Greek language, in which the Gospel was originally written as "the only Son of God begotten of Him." From this it is evident that Jesus Christ is unique among those called sons of God, for their sonship comes by adoption, not by birth, and yet both are spiritual sonship.

According to the text of the Gospel, Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the fullest sense of the word, even as He is the Son of

Man in the full sense of the word. His concern to be known as the Son of Man is an important indication that He is not a son of man like others. Otherwise, there would have been no need for Him to repeatedly designate Himself as the Son of God. If someone objects that the words of the Gospel are merely those of the disciples of Christ, this objection would lend stronger support to the proof. It does not stand to reason that His disciples would be more concerned about His claim to be Son of Man than with His being the Son of God. The reason for Christ's concern that men should know Him as the Son of Man was His desire to draw near to them in order to win their hearts and gain their confidence, so that they would seek Him as their Saviour.

We must repeat the statement that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in a purely spiritual, unblemished sense. A necessary condition to this is the full preservation of divine unity. None other than the foolish ignore this condition in belief. The Muslim does not surpass the intelligent orthodox Christian in holding to the statement which says, "There is none other God than Allah the one with whom there is no associate" and "He is God, One God, the Everlasting Refuge, who has not begotten, and has not been begotten, and equal to Him is not any one." (Sura Al-Ikhlâs 112)

Anyone finding it difficult to reconcile these statements with the Christian doctrine that "the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God" must pay attention to what is known about unity and its opposite in human personality, for man has two natures, one physical and the other spiritual. That each one of them is to some extent independent of the other is obvious. A statement about a person can be correct

and incorrect at the same time. It is said, for example, that so and so is mortal because He comes from dust and returns to dust. It is also said of Him that He has an immortal soul and lives for ever. Both statements are true. Does this apparent contradiction between the two statements disprove the underlying unity in this His person?

In the Psalms, the prophet David sings, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." (Psalm 103:2) Here we have duality in essential unity where the same person appears at once as the speaker and the one spoken to; as the one who instructs and is instructed. According to the rules of language and logic they appear to be two, but in conformity with experience and sound reasoning we know the two are one and the same person.

The analogy is not cited as a proof that in the one God there are three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, or that in the One Christ there is a human nature and a Divine nature. Rather, it is cited as a reminder that we accept the fact of man's dual nature and that man's duality does not contradict the unity of the creature. Why should it not be permissible to say so of the duality in Jesus's nature, and of unity and its counterpart in the Creator who, according to the Torah created man in His own image?

The erroneous notion some Muslims have that Christians associate partners with God is the result of misunderstanding. The unity of God is the basis of religion, while the doctrine of the Trinity, like the sonship of Christ is to be taken only in a sense which does not violate God's unity, since the first and most important of God's ten commandments, binding Jews and

Christians together, is "I am the Lord your God... You shall have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:2-3)

As God is for all humanity, and no particular group, denomination or nation, can claim Him to the exclusion of others, this must also be true of Him who is the only Son of God. He is not the Messiah of the Christians to the exclusion of Muslims. His appropriation by Christians for themselves is a grave error resulting from their negligence in the study of the Gospel, and their failure to practise its teaching. Jesus, son of Mary, is the Messiah for any who, from all mankind at any time or place, will accept Him. For His call is universal, regardless of race or creed. All this is endorsed and explained by the Gospel.

Every light made by man is limited to one known place, in contrast to the God-created light which is universal and illuminates the whole world. Likewise, there is an obvious difference between a religion which, being initiated by man, restricts its leader and its book to a section of mankind, as against one inspired and revealed by God. The latter is universal and embraces all mankind with no restriction or monopoly. Thus Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all mankind, and the Bible, comprising the Torah and the Gospel, is a message directed to all humanity without distinction. No matter how many times this fact is repeated it is impossible to over emphasize its importance.

In the civilized world an accused person is considered innocent until his guilt is proved, especially if he has no previous convictions and is known to be of good character. Similarly, the previous

statement that the Gospel is true and its sayings authentic as the beneficial influence of the Gospel in the world from the day it was written until now cannot be denied. It also continues to be highly esteemed by most of the world's peoples.

Given that the Bible is authentic and Jesus Christ true, then every one denying His Divine nature is faced with a serious problem for with that denial he not only eliminates Christ from the ranks of the prophets, but also from the ranks of decent moral people, and places Him among liars, blasphemers and deceivers, as was done by His Jewish contemporaries. On this assumption He would have deserved death in accordance with the law revealed to His own people. Any person of good sense, whatever His creed would have an aversion to such a proposition. The star of the Divine nature of Jesus Christ casts its brilliant light on all the stars previously mentioned, which receives most of their light from it. From this star the light of His perfection pours out.

However much man may develop and progress in righteousness, perfection cannot be attributed to Him because none is perfect, save God alone. But the ascribing of Divine perfection to Jesus Christ is based on His Divine nature, which makes it possible for Him to be characterized by its perfections, without contradicting the restriction of perfection to God. As the apostle says, "The mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body... was preached among nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory." (I Timothy 3:16)

There is a wonderful agreement between His Divine nature and the other six stars: His descent from heaven, the prophetic

revelations of His coming, His supreme authority, His right to receive worship, His abiding presence, and His atoning death and resurrection all point to one who is incomparable and in His uniqueness surpasses every human status. The star of the Divine nature is held in the right hand of none other than Jesus Christ and Him alone.

What is clear to us from these seven stars is that Jesus Christ was from past eternity, before the creation of the universe. Prophecies which preceded His coming are numerous, clear and continuous, and He possesses heavenly power in word and deed. He was the object of veneration and worship which would be unlawful to offer a mere man, and which, as He is completely righteous, He did not reject. He declared His continuous presence with His people everywhere and at all times, a claim which no created being could possibly make; and He gave Himself unto death to atone for the sins of mankind, and rose in glory to fulfil the purpose of His death. Through all these signs and others He revealed His Divine nature, which became incarnate when He partook of human nature by being born of the virgin Mary.

The light of the moon is a reflection of the light of the sun. When the moon rises in the evening it heralds the coming of the sun, which is more glorious than itself, and the light, which the moon borrows before the sun's appearance. The Jewish light, which was derived from the Messianic light reflected upon it in advance, remained until the greater light, which it foretold, arose. Is it not to be expected that this greater Messianic light, embodied in the person of Christ, will continuously increase in the world and last as long as

human history lasts?

We now know that the holder of the seven stars in His right hand is the true leader of the religion revealed in both the Jewish and Christian dispensations (covenants). His preeminence endures from the time of Adam to this day.

## 1.8. Conclusion

Doubtless a thinking person will ask himself the following questions:

1. What is the significance of Christ being the only person in world history who combines, in His person, these seven basic prerequisites?
2. Is this not an indication that His person will remain unique in future human history also?
3. Is He not the one raised by God from eternity as the only Saviour for sinful mankind and the only perfect representative before men from God the Spirit, who sees and is not seen, according to the texts of the Gospel?

God forbid that we should seek in this discussion to boast of our creed. Far from it! But we wish from the depths of our hearts that Muslims will also enjoy the blessings which flow from the person of Jesus Christ, who, by the mouth of one of His great prophets said, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters." (Isaiah 55:1); and He Himself also promised, "Whoever drinks the water I give Him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give Him will become in Him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:14)

"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall

have eternal life, and I will raise Him up at the last day." (John 6:40)

It is obvious from the Gospel that Jesus Christ did not mean to gather together a large group and make of them a special people who would follow Him and be called by His name. On the contrary He discouraged many of those who wanted to join Him. His greatest desire was that the heavenly light revealed by God should be spread universally and to all mankind.

This can also be said of Christians who following in the footsteps of and imitating this heavenly light, as Christ declared it, and not just increasing the number of their particular denomination. Clearly the latter aim is likely to result in alienation and opposition, while the former appeals to rational people of all creeds in their sincere quest for the truth.

The Christian believes that one of the most important senses of the statement of Jesus Christ "I am the Light of the world." is that His teachings disperse delusions and explain truths on the subject of religion.

Some of these facts are:

1. Any so-called religion which states that mere piety guarantees salvation and happiness, regardless of change of heart and behaviour, is not a true religion, but a delusion and a serious error. Such piety is based upon the misconception that outward goodness is pleasing to people and sufficient, whereas in fact it is like a rotten rope which cannot save a drowning person from death. It is like an empty vessel containing nothing to quench thirst or satisfy hunger, which then becomes a home for poisonous and deadly insects. Such a vessel is nauseating and one is

better without it. Piety based on hypocrisy is one of the ugliest of sins.

2. Any so-called religion is impotent if it gives people the impression that they are acceptable to God as long as they obey the commands of their leaders and their councils, regardless of Divine commandments, and merely observe religious rites and ceremonies laid down in a creed. Rather, it degrades religion and does not deserve to be so named, for leaders and councils have no right to initiate ceremonies or legislate them in the name of religion. To please God, we have to observe God's ordinances. Nothing else can be honoured with the name of "religion" because it is no more than ignorance and deception.
3. True and beneficial religion is that which makes its adherents perform religious duties out of awe, love and obedience of God, and not fear of man. The devotions of such a man come from a deep inner awareness of God's mercies and grace. He enjoys meditating on God's attributes and desires to glorify Him. He humbly confesses His sins and shortcomings in God's presence, seeking forgiveness in the manner which God has revealed. He perseveres in righteous living, along with the observance of religious duties, not to win human praise, gain influence among His people or achieve success in His work, nor from fear of hell or desire for heaven. All such efforts result from egotism which worships self instead of God. Such a person is not truly devout.
4. The foundation of true religion is what God has graciously given to man and not what man does. The most

important thing in religion is what God offers to man out of love for Him. What man offers to please God is secondary and springs from a deep appreciation of what God has done.

The foregoing truth can be illustrated by noting that the graciousness of a great king towards his children or his servants is a subject worthy of more attention, praise and publicity, than their devotion or service to him, for grace is superior to and far outweighs service. An honest and honourable servant or child of God rarely speaks of his service to God or man, but proclaims the favour of that Gracious Benefactor whose spiritual mercies far exceed His temporal ones as much as the eternal soul surpasses mortal flesh.

Hence the Gospel frequently mentions the spiritual gifts of God as in the well known verse,

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16).

Mercy, forgiveness, grace and peace together with spiritual strength to resist temptations, and other similar gifts are the true cornerstones of religion. Constant remembrance of these excellent gifts creates filial love for God which makes suffering along with God's favour preferable to the enjoyment of pleasures with God's anger.

Faith has been made the basis and condition of salvation, for faith is the personal loving acceptance of all these excellent Divine gifts, together with full confidence in and attachment to them. It is obvious that such a faith is like a living and fruitful tree. The fruits of faith are

seen in the righteous life which flows from it. Faith is not living and true, if it does not bring forth these essential fruits. Good works are not really good unless they are fruits of faith. This explains why the question whether salvation is based on faith or works is of vital importance.

Around this subject revolve controversies, errors and directives from one generation to another.

Good works deserve to be called so only when judged by the benefits they bring to a person other than the doer. No person is considered pure if He ignores religious demands which benefit another person, such as being truthful, kind, gentle, patient, forgiving, co-operative and generous. Anyone ignoring these qualities will not obtain His desire for the soul's salvation, even though He excels in practising religious rites and ceremonies.

If the various parties among "The People of the Scripture" could agree in treating these doctrines of the Gospel as true and appropriate for all and could adopt them as basic, the old divisions would disappear and prejudice and hatred would be replaced by harmony, love and peace.

In God only do we have sufficiency to achieve such a glorious and blessed outcome, on HIM we rely. Glory be to His name for ever and ever, Amen!

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## 2. Footnotes

- 1) King James Version
- 2) Daniel 7:13