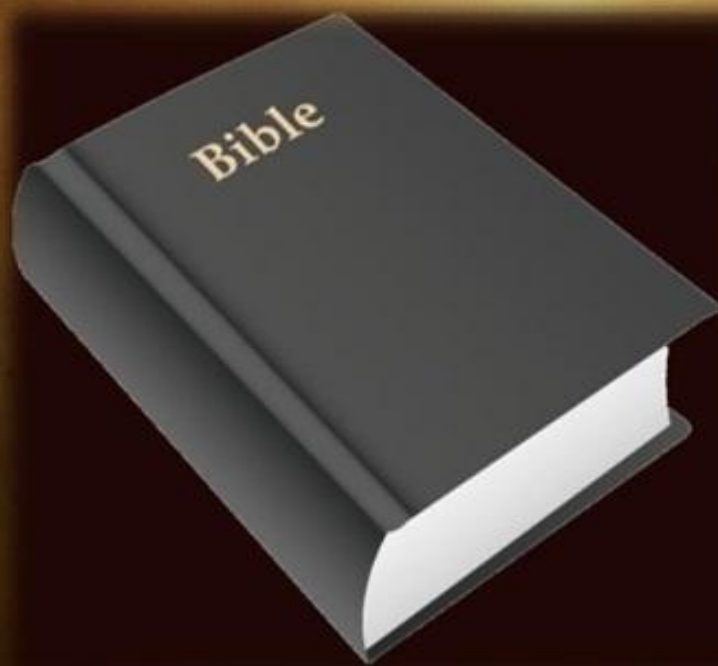


The BIBLE - The facts



Undoubtedly the Christian Bible is the most widely distributed book in the world. Also, it is possible that it may hold the record of being translated into more languages than any other book.

This makes it a very important book. Others, besides Christians, are likely to come across the Bible in hotels, libraries and some hospitals and clinics as well. How much do we know about the compilation of this book? What is the Old Testament? What is the New Testament? Who compiled the Gospels? When were they compiled? Do all Christians have the same Bible?

These and many other questions are answered in this booklet in a brief and concise manner. References are given to other works for anybody who wishes to make a greater in-depth study.

The booklet also contains a very interesting article written by an ex-Methodist minister.

Every household should definitely have a copy of this booklet!

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THE BIBLE

- *THE FACTS*

“...It ought to be pointed out that there was no single, monolithic Christian church, which evolved immediately following the time of Jesus. Rather, there were a multitude of independent Churches, each having its own set of recognized scriptures, each under its own independent bishop or leader, and each having its own viewpoint on such issues as: whether or not it was Jesus Christ who was crucified; the nature of Jesus Christ...; the nature of God... It was not until several centuries later that these issues began to be sorted out, and the traditional consensus of Christian belief began to emerge.”

Jerald F. Dirks M.Div., Psy.D., former minister (deacon) of the United Methodist Church. He holds a Master’s degree in Divinity from Harvard University and a Doctorate in Psychology from the University of Denver.

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THE BIBLE THE FACTS

Christianity is one of the major religions of the world. Christians base their religion on the Bible. Seeing that countless millions of people in the whole world are dependent on the Bible for their religious well-being, it is important to know some facts concerning this important scripture.

Fact One

The Christian Bible refers to two sets of scriptures, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament refers to the scriptures that the Jews had with them. The New Testament was newly compiled by the early Christian churches and includes the Gospels.

Fact Two

The Old Testament is composed of the *Torah* and also two other sets of Jewish scripture, the *Nevi'im* (prophets) and the *Ketuvim* (writings). However, the *Torah* that the Jews have is not the *Torah* that Moses (Pbuh)¹ had. **The original *Torah* went missing completely and a different *Torah* was compiled some five centuries after the time of Moses (Pbuh).** This *Torah* was developed from largely unknown sources in a **cut-and-paste manner**. Seeing that the original scriptures were non-existent it was not possible to compile a standardised *Torah*, so that, at the time of Jesus (Pbuh), there were **four differing versions** of this *Torah* in circulation.

Fact Three

The original scriptures that were given to Jesus (Pbuh) are also non-existent. The compilation of the Gospels came at a much later date. Christian scholars maintain that the earliest the gospels came into being as a literary art form, was during the **last quarter of the first century**. It was not until about 130 CE that Papias, the bishop of Hierapoli, actually referred to the gospel by name.

In the initial period of Christianity, the **Christians in different areas had their own independent bishops, their own doctrines and their own gospels**. The process of unification commenced only in the year 325 CE by the Council of Nicacea. Of the available gospels, letters and acts **only a meagre 9% was utilised to compile the New Testament**. The material which initially formed part and parcel of early Christianity, and which was left out subsequently, is referred to as “New Testament Apocrypha”. There are over 41 such New Testament apocryphal gospels documented. (Refer to the Appendix for a list of some of these.)

¹ Pbuh Peace be upon him. This is a term of respect used for all the Messengers (Prophets).

Fact Four

It must be remembered that the original scriptures revealed to Moses (Pbuh) and to Jesus (Pbuh) were revealed in the languages that were spoken by the people in those times. These languages were Aramaic and Hebrew. Aramaic is still spoken, but only by a small group of people in some villages in Syria. Hebrew is also still spoken, but there was a period when it was only a written language. Seeing that languages also evolve, it is unlikely that the Aramaic and the Hebrew spoken in the present times are exactly the same as spoken in those ancient times.²

There is another factor to consider as well: Anybody doing translations from one language to another knows that there are many other considerations to take note of besides the word-for-word translations of works. **Idiom, context, prejudices, local customs and cultures**, and a host of other factors, have to be taken into account. Without an accurate and detailed account of these factors being available, **there is no guarantee that any translations of ancient works will be 100% accurate**, even though these outmoded languages could be translated.

Fact Five

From the above, it is common sense that, if anybody did claim to have some scrolls that they claim are the original scriptures, no ordinary person would be able to read them. The services of experts, who have specialised in the study of these ancient languages, would be required. (Obviously, any “expert” deciphering them would do so according to his own prejudices, with hardly anybody else being in a position to correct him!) Also, these scrolls would reflect the beliefs of those who wrote the scrolls originally. Who they were, and when they were written, would involve a lot of guesswork from the scholars, as can be seen with the deciphering of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Fact Six

Although Christians maintain that the Bible is the Word of God, it is well-recognised by all serious researchers that **the 4 Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were compiled by people who had no direct contact with Jesus (Pbuh)**. As noted above, in the first place, there was no agreement as to which were “authentic” gospels and which were not. Secondly, the four gospels that finally came to be part of the Bible, were written by people *many years* afterwards, and these people had no direct contact with Jesus (Pbuh)! **Mark, Matthew, Luke and John, under whose names the gospels appear, were not disciples of Jesus (Pbuh)**.

² We just have to compare the English of Geoffrey Chaucer 1343 –1400 to modern English to realise how greatly English changed just over a few hundred years. With Hebrew and Aramaic dating back over two thousand years, one can expect these to have changed to an even greater degree.

Also, thirdly, scholars agree that **several people were involved in compiling these gospels**, even though each gospel is attributed to one person only as the author. Scholars have analysed these gospels and have concluded that **they were “layered” compilations**. That is, some person wrote the initial document and somebody else edited it as time went on, and yet others added to or subtracted from the document.

Fact Seven (a)

It follows that, seeing no original scriptures are in existence, there is just no way to verify that those parts that are attributed to Moses (Pbuh) or Jesus (Pbuh) are really so. Common sense tells us that, **in order to verify the authenticity of any document, one must compare it with the original**. If there is no original, with what does one do a verification check? The practice of looking at the “oldest” manuscripts and stating that these are more authentic than others, is fraught with many problems. This has been shown to be the case when the gospel of Thomas and the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered.

Fact Seven (b)

Just to point out one major problem:

The Jews in Alexandria, Egypt, translated the Hebrew scriptures into the Greek Septuagint before the time of Jesus (Pbuh). Later on, late in the 1st century, the Jewish Council of Jamnia rejected a number of scriptures that were included in the Septuagint. Now, the Roman Catholic Church had used the Septuagint as a basis for their Old Testament. In contrast, the Protestants used the later Jewish canon as a basis for their Old Testament! Those scriptures that were rejected as “unreliable” by the Protestants are known as the **“Old Testament Apocrypha”**. So, **while one group of Christians consider these to be “authentic”, the other has labelled them as “unreliable”!**

It should also be noted that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has its own Bible, which differs from that of the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. Also, the Eastern Syrian Church (Nestorians) also have a New Testament that differs from the one that the rest of Christianity has.

Fact Eight

Subsequent to the initial compilation, the Bible has undergone even many more changes and corrections, resulting in **many different “versions”** as various Christian scholars tried to update the versions they had. This resulted in more versions coming into existence. It is important to understand that the term “version” refers to a copy of the Bible that is considered to be authentic by the scholars endorsing it and that it differs substantially from what somebody else has compiled. Every time somebody produced a new “version” it was thought to be 100% correct. Later on, others found errors in it, and they compiled newer “versions” which were supposed to have eliminated all the errors. In this way,

from the very beginning, there were already several different versions. What is even more confusing is that there exist different translations of a single version! (Some of the different versions and translations are listed in the Appendix I.)

Fact Nine

The Bible is a mixture of historical information, peoples' observations and alleged sayings of Jesus (Pbuh). There is no way of proving what are truly the sayings of Jesus (Pbuh) and which are fabrications, as the sayings were compiled years later by people who had no direct contact with him. When attempts were made to compile the Bible in the early years, there was no science whereby fables, myths, sayings from previous scriptures and stories made up on the spot, could be differentiated from what Jesus (Pbuh) actually said. No attempts were made to sift myths from facts. No rules were laid down for the preserving of the true sayings of Jesus (Pbuh)

Fact Ten

Taking into account the historical background of its evolution, it is obvious that a book like **the present Bible will have many errors and contradictions in it.** Seeing much of the literature of the early Christians was banned, ignored or destroyed, it would be difficult to point out where exactly deviations occurred. Despite these serious drawbacks, Christian scholars themselves, and others, have discovered many errors and contradictions. The *AWAKE* magazine, dated 8 September 1957, of the Jehovah's Witnesses, quotes an extract from the magazine *Look* entitled "*The Truth About The Bible*": "**Modern scholars say that there are probably 50,000 errors**" in the Bible and not an estimated 20,000 guessed at in 1720!

Despite the efforts of scholars over the centuries to eliminate the errors a task which is impossible seeing that there is no original scripture to check with as expected, there are still numerous contradictions to be found. Just a few are reproduced in the Appendix II.

Fact Eleven

Both the scriptures revealed to Moses (Pbuh) and to Jesus (Pbuh), were revealed for the guidance of the Jews and not for the Gentiles. Nowhere can it be found that Jesus (Pbuh) had said that he had come to guide others than the Jews "*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*".

In Summary:

None of the many authors of the Bible had direct contact with Jesus (Pbuh). During the first three centuries, there was no concept of an authorised Bible. It took three to five centuries before the Christians formulated the final 27 books which comprise the New Testament. Thereafter changes were made frequently as new information came to light as people discovered additional gospels, or

brought forth gospels which had been kept in another country. As recently as 1945, the gospel of Thomas, written in Coptic, was discovered in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered in 1947 in some caves in Jordan, also with scriptural material. Yet, some of this newer material has been side-lined as being “apocryphal”.

The best way of describing the Bible is that it is a “cut-and-paste” literary work, as stated by Jerald F. Dirks in “*The Cross and the Crescent.*”

The question arises: Why are there so many versions?

The answers have already been given above. There was no instant and meticulous preservation of the statements and life of Jesus (Pbuh). In fact, in the early phase of Christianity not much importance was placed on the actual statements of Jesus (Pbuh). Many years later, some unidentified individuals wrote down from hearsay what they could. Some added statements from other sources and attributed them to Jesus (Pbuh). Others made changes where they thought necessary. This resulted in a plethora of gospels in different languages Hebrew, Aramaic, Latin, Greek (Koine), Coptic, Syriac, etc. The final version was compiled leaving out many gospels, referred to as “apocryphal”. Some of the early material was also destroyed because it did not conform to what the compilers had in mind. Given the fact that no original scriptures were preserved and that no set of rules were in place to differentiate truth from all the accretions, it comes as no surprise that there are all these variations noted by the scholars.

IN CONCLUSION

It is quite obvious that the Christian Bible is not the Word of God. It does not mean that the Bible does not contain the sayings of Jesus (Pbuh). The problem is to discover what were truly his sayings and which were not. The only statements that can be authenticated as his are those that are confirmed in Islamic literature, i.e. the Qur’an and Hadeeth. (See Appendix III). This being so, it is only a foolhardy person who will stake his future in the hereafter on such a scripture, especially when there is an authenticated scripture like the Qur’an easily available.

Many people who had come to realise the above, have had the courage to study the Qur’an and, in a very objective way, have compared it to the Bible, and have come to the inevitable conclusion that the Qur’an is a Divinely revealed book. One such person was ex-Methodist Minister, Jerald F. Dirks, who carefully studied the Qur’an and compared it to the Bible which he had studied thoroughly when he studied theology at university. His findings appear in the book he wrote, “*The Cross and the Crescent,*” from which most of the material in this booklet has been extracted.

It would be appropriate to let readers know of his experiences in his own words. The article hereunder has been written by him.

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One of my earliest childhood memories is of hearing the church bell toll for Sunday morning worship in the small, rural town in which I was raised. The Methodist Church was an old, wooden structure with a bell tower, two children's Sunday school classrooms cubbyholed behind folding, wooden doors to separate them from the sanctuary, and a choir loft that housed the Sunday school classrooms for the older children. It stood less than two blocks from my home. As the bell rang, we would come together as a family, and make our weekly pilgrimage to the church. In that rural setting from the 1950s, the three churches in the town of about 500 were the center of community life. The local Methodist Church, to which my family belonged, sponsored ice cream socials with hand-cranked, homemade ice cream, chicken potpie dinners, and corn roasts. My family and I were always involved in all three, but each came only once a year. In addition, there was a two-week community Bible school every June, and I was a regular attendee through my eighth grade year in school. However, Sunday morning worship and Sunday school were weekly events, and I strove to keep extending my collection of perfect attendance pins and of awards for memorizing Bible verses. By my junior high school days, the local Methodist Church had closed, and we were attending the Methodist Church in the neighboring town, which was only slightly larger than the town in which I lived. There, my thoughts first began to focus on the ministry as a personal calling. I became active in the Methodist Youth Fellowship, and eventually served as both a district and a conference officer. I also became the regular "preacher" during the annual Youth Sunday service. My preaching began to draw community-wide attention, and before long I was occasionally filling pulpits at other churches, at a nursing home and at various church-affiliated youth and ladies groups, where I typically set attendance records.

By age 17, when I began my freshman year at Harvard College, my decision to enter the ministry had solidified. During my freshman year, I enrolled in a two-semester course in comparative religion, which was taught by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose specific area of expertise was Islam. During that course, I gave far less attention to Islam than I did to other religions, such

as Hinduism and Buddhism, as the latter two seemed so much more esoteric and strange to me. In contrast, Islam appeared to be somewhat similar to my own Christianity. As such, I didn't concentrate on it as much as I probably should have, although I can remember writing a term paper for the course on the concept of revelation in the Qur'an. Nonetheless, as the course was one of rigorous academic standards and demands, I did acquire a small library of about a half dozen books on Islam, all of which were written by non-Muslims, and all of which were to serve me in good stead 25 years later. I also acquired two different English translations of the meaning of the Qur'an, which I read at the time.

That spring, Harvard named me a Hollis Scholar, signifying that I was one of the top pre-theology students in the college. The summer between my freshman and sophomore years at Harvard, I worked as a youth minister at a fairly large United Methodist Church. The following summer, I obtained my License to Preach from the United Methodist Church. Upon graduating from Harvard College in 1971, I enrolled at the Harvard Divinity School, and there obtained my Master of Divinity degree in 1974, having been previously ordained into the Deaconate of the United Methodist Church in 1972, and having previously received a Stewart Scholarship from the United Methodist Church as a supplement to my Harvard Divinity School scholarships. During my seminary education, I also completed a two-year externship program as a hospital chaplain at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital in Boston. Following graduation from Harvard Divinity School, I spent the summer as the minister of two United Methodist churches in rural Kansas, where attendance soared to heights not seen in those churches for several years.

Seen from the outside, I was a very promising young minister, who had received an excellent education, drew large crowds to the Sunday morning worship service, and had been successful at every stop along the ministerial path. However, seen from the inside, I was fighting a constant war to maintain my personal integrity in the face of my ministerial responsibilities. This war was far removed from the ones presumably fought by some later televangelists in unsuccessfully trying to maintain personal sexual morality. Likewise, it was a far different war than those fought by the headline-grabbing pedophilic priests of the current moment. However, my struggle to maintain personal integrity may be the most common one encountered by the better-educated members of the ministry.

There is some irony in the fact that the supposedly best, brightest, and most idealistic of ministers-to-be are selected for the very best of seminary education, e.g. that offered at that time at the Harvard Divinity School. The irony is that, given such an education, the seminarian is exposed to as much of the actual historical truth as is known about: 1) the formation of the early, "mainstream" church, and how it was shaped by geopolitical considerations; 2)

the “original” reading of various Biblical texts, many of which are in sharp contrast to what most Christians read when they pick up their Bible, although gradually, some of this information is being incorporated into newer and better translations; 3) the evolution of such concepts as a triune godhead and the “sonship” of Jesus, peace be upon him; 4) the non-religious considerations that underlie many Christian creeds and doctrines; 5) the existence of those early churches and Christian movements which never accepted the concept of a triune godhead, and which never accepted the concept of the divinity of Jesus, peace be upon him; and 6) etc. (Some of these fruits of my seminary education are recounted in more detail in my recent book, *The Cross and the Crescent: An Interfaith Dialogue between Christianity and Islam*, Amana Publications, 2001.)

As such, it is no real wonder that almost a majority of such seminary graduates leave seminary, not to “fill pulpits”, where they would be asked to preach that which they know is not true, but to enter the various counselling professions. Such was also the case for me, as I went on to earn a master’s and doctorate in clinical psychology. I continued to call myself a Christian, because that was a needed bit of self-identity, and because I was, after all, an ordained minister, even though my full time job was as a mental health professional. However, my seminary education had taken care of any belief I might have had regarding a triune godhead or the divinity of Jesus, peace be upon him.

(Polls regularly reveal that ministers are less likely to believe these and other dogmas of the church than are the laity they serve, with ministers more likely to understand such terms as “son of God” metaphorically, while their parishioners understand it literally.) I thus became a “Christmas and Easter Christian”, attending church very sporadically, and then gritting my teeth and biting my tongue as I listened to sermons espousing that which I knew was not the case. None of the above should be taken to imply that I was any less religious or spiritually oriented than I had once been. I prayed regularly, my belief in a supreme deity remained solid and secure, and I conducted my personal life in line with the ethics I had once been taught in church and Sunday school. I simply knew better than to buy into the man-made dogmas and articles of faith of the organized church, which were so heavily laden with the pagan influences, polytheistic notions, and geopolitical considerations of a bygone era.

As the years passed by, I became increasingly concerned about the loss of religiousness in American society at large. Religiousness is a living, breathing spirituality and morality within individuals, and should not be confused with religiosity, which is concerned with the rites, rituals, and formalized creeds of some organized entity, e.g. the church. American culture increasingly appeared to have lost its moral and religious compass. Two out of every three marriages ended in divorce; violence was becoming an increasingly inherent part of our schools and our roads; self-responsibility was on the wane; self-discipline was being submerged by a “if it feels good, do it” morality; various Christian leaders

and institutions were being swamped by sexual and financial scandals; and emotions justified behavior, however odious it might be. American culture was becoming a morally bankrupt institution, and I was feeling quite alone in my personal religious vigil.

It was at this juncture that I began to come into contact with the local Muslim community. For some years before, my wife and I had been actively involved in doing research on the history of the Arabian horse. Eventually, in order to secure translations of various Arabic documents, this research brought us into contact with Arab Americans who happened to be Muslims. Our first such contact was with Jamal in the summer of 1991. After an initial telephone conversation, Jamal visited our home, and offered to do some translations for us, and to help guide us through the history of the Arabian horse in the Middle East. Before Jamal left that afternoon, he asked if he might: use our bathroom to wash before saying his scheduled prayers; and borrow a piece of newspaper to use as a prayer rug, so he could say his scheduled prayers before leaving our house. We, of course, obliged, but wondered if there was something more appropriate that we could give him to use than a newspaper. Without our ever realizing it at the time, Jamal was practising a very beautiful form of Dawa (preaching or exhortation). He made no comment about the fact that we were not Muslims, and he didn't preach anything to us about his religious beliefs. He "merely" presented us with his example, an example that spoke volumes, if one were willing to be receptive to the lesson.

Over the next 16 months, contact with Jamal slowly increased in frequency, until it was occurring on a biweekly to weekly basis. During these visits, Jamal never preached to me about Islam, never questioned me about my own religious beliefs or convictions, and never verbally suggested that I become a Muslim. However, I was beginning to learn a lot. First, there was the constant behavioral example of Jamal observing his scheduled prayers. Second, there was the behavioral example of how Jamal conducted his daily life in a highly moral and ethical manner, both in his business world and in his social world. Third, there was the behavioral example of how Jamal interacted with his two children. For my wife, Jamal's wife provided a similar example. Fourth, always within the framework of helping me to understand Arabian horse history in the Middle East, Jamal began to share with me:

- 1) Stories from Arab and Islamic history;
- 2) Sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him; and
- 3) Qur'anic verses and their contextual meaning.

In point of fact, our every visit now included at least a 30 minute conversation centered on some aspect of Islam, but always presented in terms of helping me intellectually understand the Islamic context of Arabian horse history. I was never told "this is the way things are", I was merely told "this is what Muslims typically believe".

Since I wasn't being "preached to", and since Jamal never inquired as to my own beliefs, I didn't need to bother attempting to justify my own position. It was all handled as an intellectual exercise, not as proselytizing. Gradually, Jamal began to introduce us to other Arab families in the local Muslim community. There was Wa'el and his family, Khalid and his family, and a few others. Consistently, I observed individuals and families who were living their lives on a much higher ethical plane than the American society in which we were all embedded. Maybe there was something to the practise of Islam that I had missed during my collegiate and seminary days.

By December, 1992, I was beginning to ask myself some serious questions about where I was and what I was doing. These questions were prompted by the following considerations.

1) Over the course of the prior 16 months, our social life had become increasingly centered on the Arab component of the local Muslim community. By December, probably 75% of our social life was being spent with Arab Muslims.

2) By virtue of my seminary training and education, I knew how badly the Bible had been corrupted (and often knew exactly when, where, and why). I had no belief in any triune godhead, and I had no belief in anything more than a metaphorical "sonship" of Jesus, peace be upon him. In short, while I certainly believed in God, I was as strict a monotheist as my Muslim friends.

3) My personal values and sense of morality were much more in keeping with my Muslim friends than with the "Christian" society around me. After all, I had the non-confrontational examples of Jamal, Khalid, and Wa'el as illustrations. In short, my nostalgic yearning for the type of community in which I had been raised was finding gratification in the Muslim community. American society might be morally bankrupt, but that did not appear to be the case for that part of the Muslim community with which I had had contact. Marriages were stable, spouses were committed to each other, and honesty, integrity, self-responsibility, and family values were emphasized. My wife and I had attempted to live our lives that same way, but for several years I had felt that we were doing so in the context of a moral vacuum. The Muslim community appeared to be different.

The different threads were being woven together into a single strand. Arabian horses, my childhood upbringing, my foray into the Christian ministry and my seminary education, my nostalgic yearnings for a moral society, and my contact with the Muslim community were becoming intricately intertwined. My self-questioning came to a head when I finally got around to asking myself exactly what separated me from the beliefs of my Muslim friends. I suppose that I could have raised that question with Jamal or with Khalid, but I wasn't ready to take that step. I had never discussed my own religious beliefs with them, and I didn't think that I wanted to introduce that topic of conversation into our

friendship. As such, I began to pull off the bookshelf all the books on Islam that I had acquired in my collegiate and seminary days.

However far my own beliefs were from the traditional position of the church, and however seldom I actually attended church, I still identified myself as being a Christian, and so I turned to the works of Western scholars. That month of December, I read half a dozen or so books on Islam by Western scholars, including one biography of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him. Further, I began to read two different English translations of the meaning of the Qur'an. I never spoke to my Muslim friends about this personal quest of self-discovery. I never mentioned what types of books I was reading, nor ever spoke about why I was reading these books. However, occasionally I would run a very circumscribed question past one of them.

While I never spoke to my Muslim friends about those books, my wife and I had numerous conversations about what I was reading. By the last week of December of 1992, I was forced to admit to myself, that I could find no area of substantial disagreement between my own religious beliefs and the general tenets of Islam. While I was ready to acknowledge that Muhammad, peace be upon him, was a prophet of (one who spoke for or under the inspiration of) God, and while I had absolutely no difficulty affirming that there was no god besides God/Allah, glorified and exalted is He, I was still hesitating to make any decision. I could readily admit to myself that I had far more in common with Islamic beliefs as I then understood them, than I did with the traditional Christianity of the organized church. I knew only too well that I could easily confirm from my seminary training and education most of what the Qur'an had to say about Christianity, the Bible, and Jesus, peace be upon him. Nonetheless, I hesitated. Further, I rationalized my hesitation by maintaining to myself that I really didn't know the nitty-gritty details of Islam, and that my areas of agreement were confined to general concepts. As such, I continued to read, and then to re-read.

One's sense of identity, of who one is, is a powerful affirmation of one's own position in the cosmos. In my professional practice, I had occasionally been called upon to treat certain addictive disorders, ranging from smoking, to alcoholism, to drug abuse. As a clinician, I knew that the basic physical addiction had to be overcome to create the initial abstinence. That was the easy part of treatment. As Mark Twain once said: "Quitting smoking is easy; I've done it hundreds of times". However, I also knew that the key to maintaining that abstinence over an extended time period was overcoming the client's psychological addiction, which was heavily grounded in the client's basic sense of identity, i.e. the client identified to himself that he was "a smoker", or that he was "a drinker", etc. The addictive behavior had become part and parcel of the client's basic sense of identity, of the client's basic sense of self. Changing this sense of identity was crucial to the maintenance of the psychotherapeutic "cure". This was the difficult part of treatment. Changing one's basic sense of

identity is a most difficult task. One's psyche tends to cling to the old and familiar, which seem more psychologically comfortable and secure than the new and unfamiliar.

On a professional basis, I had the above knowledge, and used it on a daily basis. However, ironically enough, I was not yet ready to apply it to myself, and to the issue of my own hesitation surrounding my religious identity. For 43 years, my religious identity had been neatly labelled as "Christian", however many qualifications I might have added to that term over the years. Giving up that label of personal identity was no easy task. It was part and parcel of how I defined my very being. Given the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that my hesitation served the purpose of insuring that I could keep my familiar religious identity of being a Christian, although a Christian who believed like a Muslim believed.

It was now the very end of December, and my wife and I were filling out our application forms for U.S. passports, so that a proposed Middle Eastern journey could become a reality. One of the questions had to do with religious affiliation. I didn't even think about it, and automatically fell back on the old and familiar, as I penned in "Christian". It was easy, it was familiar, and it was comfortable. However, that comfort was momentarily disrupted when my wife asked me how I had answered the question on religious identity on the application form. I immediately replied, "Christian", and chuckled audibly. Now, one of Freud's contributions to the understanding of the human psyche was his realization that laughter is often a release of psychological tension. However wrong Freud may have been in many aspects of his theory of psychosexual development, his insights into laughter were quite on target. I had laughed! What was this psychological tension that I had need to release through the medium of laughter? I then hurriedly went on to offer my wife a brief affirmation that I was a Christian, not a Muslim. In response to which, she politely informed me that she was merely asking whether I had written "Christian", or "Protestant", or "Methodist". On a professional basis, I knew that a person does not defend himself against an accusation that hasn't been made. (If, in the course of a session of psychotherapy, my client blurted out, "I'm not angry about that", and I hadn't even broached the topic of anger, it was clear that my client was feeling the need to defend himself against a charge that his own unconscious was making. In short, he really was angry, but he wasn't ready to admit it or to deal with it.) If my wife hadn't made the accusation, i.e. "you are a Muslim", then the accusation had to have come from my own unconscious, as I was the only other person present. I was aware of this, but still I hesitated. The religious label that had been stuck to my sense of identity for 43 years was not going to come off easily.

About a month had gone by since my wife's question to me. It was now late in January of 1993. I had set aside all the books on Islam by the Western scholars, as I had read them all thoroughly. The two English translations of the

meaning of the Qur'an were back on the bookshelf, and I was busy reading yet a third English translation of the meaning of the Qur'an. Maybe in this translation I would find some sudden justification for.

I was taking my lunch hour from my private practice at a local Arab restaurant that I had started to frequent. I entered as usual, seated myself at a small table, and opened my third English translation of the meaning of the Qur'an to where I had left off in my reading. I figured I might as well get some reading done over my lunch hour. Moments later, I became aware that Mahmoud was at my shoulder, and waiting to take my order. He glanced at what I was reading, but said nothing about it. My order taken, I returned to the solitude of my reading. A few minutes later, Mahmoud's wife, Iman, an American Muslim, who wore the Hijab (scarf) and modest dress that I had come to associate with female Muslims, brought me my order. She commented that I was reading the Qur'an, and politely asked if I were a Muslim. The word was out of my mouth before it could be modified by any social etiquette or politeness: "No!" That single word was said forcefully, and with more than a hint of irritability. With that, Iman politely retired from my table.

What was happening to me? I had behaved rudely and somewhat aggressively. What had this woman done to deserve such behavior from me? This wasn't like me. Given my childhood upbringing, I still used "sir" and "ma'am" when addressing clerks and cashiers who were waiting on me in stores. I could pretend to ignore my own laughter as a release of tension, but I couldn't begin to ignore this sort of unconscionable behavior from myself. My reading was set aside, and I mentally stewed over this turn of events throughout my meal. The more I stewed, the guiltier I felt about my behavior. I knew that when Ímán brought me my check at the end of the meal, I was going to need to make some amends. If for no other reason, simple politeness demanded it. Furthermore, I was really quite disturbed about how resistant I had been to her innocuous question. What was going on in me that I responded with that much force to such a simple and straightforward question? Why did that one, simple question lead to such atypical behavior on my part? Later, when Iman came with my check, I attempted a round-about apology by saying: "I'm afraid I was a little abrupt in answering your question before. If you were asking me whether I believe that there is only one God, then my answer is yes. If you were asking me whether I believe that Muhammad was one of the prophets of that one God, then my answer is yes." She very nicely and very supportively said: "That's okay; it takes some people a little longer than others."

Perhaps, the readers of this will be kind enough to note the psychological games I was playing with myself without chuckling too hard at my mental gymnastics and behavior. I well knew that in my own way, using my own words, I had just said the Shahadah, the Islamic testimonial of faith, i.e. "I testify that there is no god but Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah". However, having said that, and having recognized what I

said, I could still cling to my old and familiar label of religious identity. After all, I hadn't said I was a Muslim. I was simply a Christian, albeit an atypical Christian, who was willing to say that there was one God, not a triune godhead, and who was willing to say that Muhammad was one of the prophets inspired by that one God. If a Muslim wanted to accept me as being a Muslim that was his or her business, and his or her label of religious identity. However, it was not mine. I thought I had found my way out of my crisis of religious identity. I was a Christian, who would carefully explain that I agreed with, and was willing to testify to, the Islamic testimonial of faith. Having made my tortured explanation, and having parsed the English language to within an inch of its life, others could hang whatever label on me they wished. It was their label, and not mine.

It was now March of 1993, and my wife and I were enjoying a five-week vacation in the Middle East. It was also the Islamic month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast from day break until sunset. Because we were so often staying with or being escorted around by family members of our Muslim friends back in the States, my wife and I had decided that we also would fast, if for no other reason than common courtesy. During this time, I had also started to perform the five daily prayers of Islam with my newfound, Middle Eastern, Muslim friends. After all, there was nothing in those prayers with which I could disagree. I was a Christian, or so I said. After all, I had been born into a Christian family, had been given a Christian upbringing, had attended church and Sunday school every Sunday as a child, had graduated from a prestigious seminary, and was an ordained minister in a large Protestant denomination. However, I was also a Christian: who didn't believe in a triune godhead or in the divinity of Jesus, peace be upon him; who knew quite well how the Bible had been corrupted; who had said the Islamic testimony of faith in my own carefully parsed words; who had fasted during Ramadan; who was saying Islamic prayers five times a day; and who was deeply impressed by the behavioral examples I had witnessed in the Muslim community, both in America and in the Middle East. (Time and space do not permit me the luxury of documenting in detail all of the examples of personal morality and ethics I encountered in the Middle East.) If asked if I were a Muslim, I could and did do a five-minute monologue detailing the above, and basically leaving the question unanswered. I was playing intellectual word games, and succeeding at them quite nicely.

It was now late in our Middle Eastern trip. An elderly friend who spoke no English and I were walking down a winding, little road, somewhere in one of the economically disadvantaged areas of greater 'Amman, Jordan. As we walked, an elderly man approached us from the opposite direction, said, "Salam 'Alaykum", i.e., "peace be upon you", and offered to shake hands. We were the only three people there. I didn't speak Arabic, and neither my friend nor the stranger spoke English. Looking at me, the stranger asked, "Muslim?"

At that precise moment in time, I was fully and completely trapped. There were no intellectual word games to be played, because I could only communicate in English, and they could only communicate in Arabic. There was no translator present to bail me out of this situation, and to allow me to hide behind my carefully prepared English monologue. I couldn't pretend I didn't understand the question, because it was all too obvious that I had. My choices were suddenly, unpredictably, and inexplicably reduced to just two: I could say "N'am", i.e., "yes"; or I could say "La", i.e., "no". The choice was mine, and I had no other. I had to choose, and I had to choose now; it was just that simple. Praise be to Allah, I answered, "N'am".

With saying that one word, all the intellectual word games were now behind me. With the intellectual word games behind me, the psychological games regarding my religious identity were also behind me. I wasn't some strange, atypical Christian. I was a Muslim. Praise be to Allah, my wife of 33 years also became a Muslim about that same time. Not too many months after our return to America from the Middle East, a neighbor invited us over to his house, saying that he wanted to talk with us about our conversion to Islam. He was a retired Methodist minister, with whom I had had several conversations in the past. Although we had occasionally talked superficially about such issues as the artificial construction of the Bible from various, earlier, independent sources, we had never had any in-depth conversation about religion. I knew only that he appeared to have acquired a solid seminary education, and that he sang in the local church choir every Sunday.

My initial reaction was, "Oh, oh, here it comes". Nonetheless, it is a Muslim's duty to be a good neighbor, and it is a Muslim's duty to be willing to discuss Islam with others. As such, I accepted the invitation for the following evening, and spent most of the waking part of the next 24 hours contemplating how best to approach this gentleman in his requested topic of conversation. The appointed time came, and we drove over to our neighbor's. After a few moments of small talk, he finally asked why I had decided to become a Muslim. I had waited for this question, and had my answer carefully prepared. "As you know with your seminary education, there were a lot of non-religious considerations which led up to and shaped the decisions of the Council of Nicaea." He immediately cut me off with a simple statement: "You finally couldn't stomach the polytheism anymore, could you?" He knew exactly why I was a Muslim, and he didn't disagree with my decision!

For himself, at his age and at his place in life, he was electing to be "an atypical Christian". Allah willing, he has by now completed his journey from cross to crescent. There are sacrifices to be made in being a Muslim in America. For that matter, there are sacrifices to be made in being a Muslim anywhere. However, those sacrifices may be more acutely felt in America, especially among American converts. Some of those sacrifices are very predictable, and include altered dress and abstinence from alcohol, pork, and the taking of

interest on one's money. Some of those sacrifices are less predictable. For example, one Christian family, with whom we were close friends, informed us that they could no longer associate with us, as they could not associate with anyone "who does not take Jesus Christ as his personal savior". In addition, quite a few of my professional colleagues altered their manner of relating to me.

Whether it was coincidence or not, my professional referral base dwindled, and there was almost a 30% drop in income as a result. Some of these less predictable sacrifices were hard to accept, although the sacrifices were a small price to pay for what was received in return.

For those contemplating the acceptance of Islam and the surrendering of oneself to Allah-glorified and exalted is He, there may well be sacrifices along the way. Many of these sacrifices are easily predicted, while others may be rather surprising and unexpected. There is no denying the existence of these sacrifices, and I don't intend to sugar coat that pill for you. Nonetheless, don't be overly troubled by these sacrifices. In the final analysis, these sacrifices are less important than you presently think. Allah willing, you will find these sacrifices a very cheap coin to pay for the "goods" you are purchasing.

APPENDIX Ia

Various versions and translations of the Bible

Early in the fourth century CE, Eusebius Pamphili, bishop of Caesarea, proposed a canon of New Testament scripture. He omitted many books currently found in the New Testament.

In 367 CE, Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, made a listing of the New Testament in conformity with the current New Testament.

A few years earlier, the same bishop had been championing *The Shepherd of Hermas* as being accurate.

The Vulgate Produced between 383 and 420 C.E.

Between 742 and 814 C.E. Alcuin reformed the text under Emperor Charlemagne

The Standard Bible was produced in the 13th century by the University of Paris.

John Wycliffe produced the first English translation 1382

Tyndale 1525

Miles Coverdale's compilation 1535

John Rogers/ Matthews Bible 1537

Richard Tavernier's compilation 1538

Great Bible 1539

Geneva Bible 1560

Bishops Bible 1568

Douay-Rheims Bible 1582

Sixtus V published a version of the Vulgate in 1590. The text had so many errors that it had to be corrected in over two thousand places merely two years later and re-issued by Clement VIII.

A translation from the Latin Vulgate 1609

Kings James Version 1611

Revised Version 1881 – 1885

American Standard Version 1901

Revised Standard Version 1946 1952

New American Bible 1970

(Re) Revised Standard Version 1971

New Revised Standard Version 1982 1989

Kindly note that this list may not have all the different versions and translations available. Also, no attempt has been made to differentiate between different versions and translations of these versions.

APPENDIX Ib

Apocryphal Gospels

The Dialogue of the Savior

The Gospel of Andrew

The Gospel of Apelles

The Gospel of Bardesanes

The Gospel of Barnabas

The Gospel of Bartholomew

The Gospel of Basilides

The Gospel of the Birth of Mary

The Gospel of Cerinthus

The Gospel of Eve

The Gospel of the Ebionites

The Gospel of the Egyptians

The Gospel of the Encratites

Gospel of the Four Heavenly Regions

The Gospel of the Hebrews

The Gospel of Hesychius

The Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ

The Gospel of Judas Iscariot

The Gospel of Jude

The Gospel of Marcion

The Gospel of Mani

The Gospel of Mary
The Gospel of Matthias The Gospel of Merinthus
The Gospel According to the Nazarenes
The Gospel of Nicodemus
The Gospel of Perfection
The Gospel of Peter
The Gospel of Philip
The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew
The Gospel of Scythianus
The Gospel of the Seventy
The Gospel of Thaddaeus
The Gospel of Thomas
The Gospel of Titan
The Gospel of Truth
The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles
The Gospel of Valentinus
The Protevangelion of James
The Secret Gospel of Mark
Thomas's Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus Christ

[This list does not contain all the apocryphal gospels and none of the other apocryphal material like epistles, etc.]

APPENDIX II

A few samples of contradictions.

Who incited David to count the fighting men of Israel?

- (a) God did. (2 Samuel 24:1)
- (b) Satan did. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

Who killed Goliath?

- (a) David (1 Samuel 17:23, 50)
- (b) Elhanan (2 Samuel 21:19)

How old was Jehoiachin when he became king of Jerusalem?

- (a) Eighteen (2 Kings 24:8)
- (b) Eight (2 Chronicles 36:9)

Did Joshua and the Israelites capture Jerusalem?

- (a) Yes (Joshua 10:23, 40)
- (b) No (Joshua 15:63)

Was John the Baptist Elijah who was to come?

- (a) Yes (Matthew 11:14, 17:10-13)
- (b) No (John 1:19-21)

Who was the father of Joseph, husband of Mary?

- (a) Jacob (Matthew 1:16)
- (b) Heli (Luke 3:23)

Jesus (Pbuh) descended from which son of David?

- (a) Solomon (Matthew 1:6)
- (b) Nathan (Luke 3:31)

Was baby Jesus (Pbuh) threatened in Jerusalem?

- (a) Yes, so Joseph fled with him to Egypt and stayed there till Herod died. (Matthew 2:13-23)
- (b) No. The family fled nowhere. They calmly presented the child at the Jerusalem temple according to the Jewish customs and returned to Galilee. (Luke 2:21-40)

Where was Jesus (Pbuh) three days after his baptism?

- (a) After his baptism, the spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days... (Mark 1:12-13)
- (b) Next day after the baptism, Jesus (Pbuh) selected two disciples. Second day: Jesus (Pbuh) went to Galilee and selected two more disciples. Third day: Jesus (Pbuh) was at a wedding feast in Cana in Galilee. (See John 1:35, 1:43, 2:1-11)

How did Simon Peter find out that Jesus (Pbuh) was the Christ?

- (a) By revelation from heaven. (Matthew 16:17)
- (b) His brother Andrew told him. (John 1:41)

Did Herod think that Jesus (Pbuh) was John the Baptist?

- (a) Yes (Matthew 3:13-14)
- (b) No (John 1:32, 33)

Did Judas kiss Jesus (Pbuh)?

- (a) Yes (Matthew 26:48-50)
- (b) No Judas could not get close enough to Jesus (Pbuh) to kiss him. (John 18:3-12)

Who killed Saul?

(a) Saul took his own sword and fell upon it... Thus Saul died... (1 Samuel 31:4-6)

(b) An Amalekite slew him. (2 Samuel 1:1-16)

[Extracted from "101 Clear contradictions from the Bible" Detailed discussions of many of the contradictions to be found in the Bible are discussed in the books listed in "The Cross & the Crescent" and "The Choice". See the reference section.]

APPENDIX III

A brief summary of facts concerning the events surrounding the life of Jesus (Pbuh), as confirmed in the Qur'an and Hadeeth:

When the mother of Mary (Mariam) (Pbuh) conceived, she thought that she would give birth to a male child and pledged the child to the worship of Allah. To her disappointment, she gave birth to a girl, Mariam (Pbuh). Nevertheless, she still kept to her pledge and dedicated her to the worship of Allah.

The uncle, Zakariyah (Pbuh), was chosen to be her guardian. Nobody was allowed to enter the chamber where Mariam (Pbuh) resided. So, Zakariyah (Pbuh) was surprised and puzzled to find her having food with her every time he entered the chamber. When asked where she had obtained the food from, she replied that Allah provided her with the food.

Mariam (Pbuh) was a chaste woman, dedicated to the worship of Allah. When the angels gave her the glad news of a child that would be born to her, she was shocked, and exclaimed that no man had touched her. She was then given the good news of an immaculate birth. Jesus (Pbuh) was born to her without the agency of a father.

This should not come as a surprise to those who believe, because believers accept that Allah has power to do whatever He wills and, in fact, created Adam (Pbuh) without the agency of a father or mother.

When Jesus (Pbuh) was born, people accused Mariam (Pbuh) of being unchaste. To counter the accusations, Mariam (Pbuh) said nothing but merely pointed to the infant son. Jesus (Pbuh) spoke to the people in infancy, telling them that he was the bondsman of Allah and detailing the duties that he had been entrusted with by Allah.

Jesus (Pbuh) performed many miracles. With the permission of Allah, he made a clay bird and breathed life into it. He cured the blind and those afflicted with leprosy, with the permission of Allah. He also brought the dead to life, with the permission of Allah.

He stated quite clearly that he had been sent by Allah as a messenger to the Children of Israel, i.e. the Jews.

He also stated quite clearly that he had been sent to confirm the Law of the Torah that was revealed to Moses (Pbuh). He was also given a scripture, the *Injeel*.

The Qur'an also describes the incident where his disciples requested a meal and, miraculously, Allah provided them a meal which descended from heaven.

Jesus (Pbuh) was not crucified, but was lifted up to heaven. He will return to the earth once more, when he will kill the anti-Christ called *Dajjal*.

References

The Cross and the Crescent – An Interfaith Dialogue between Christianity and Islam, by Jerald F Dirks. ISBN 1-59008-002-5 Amana Publications, 10710 Tucker Street, Beltsville, Maryland 20705-2223, USA. An excellent book for any serious student of comparative religion. A comparison of the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an is just one topic that is discussed in it. The author also discusses many other topics in this book, like the Baptism Jesus (peace be on him), the Crucifixion and other related subjects. Highly recommended for anybody studying comparative religion. It is well-researched and has thirty pages of notes and bibliography.

Most of the material that appears in this booklet has been taken from this book.

The Choice – Is the Bible God's Word? By Ahmed Deedat, IPCI, P O Box 2439, Durban, 4000, South Africa. *The Choice* also contains a number of other published works of Ahmed Deedat.

Comparative Religions - 101 Clear Contradictions, by Islámic Information Da'wah Centre International, 1168 Blour Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. M6H 1N1.

The *Encarta Encyclopaedia (Microsoft)* was also consulted.



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