

A Christian explains his faith to Muslims

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. The purpose of this book

This book has been written mainly for Muslim students who intend to study the Christian religion in the context of the “History of Religions” or “Comparative Religion.” As a believing Christian, I hope to give an “inside view” of how Christians understand their own religion.

Since the book is written from this starting point, its emphasis will be different from the many apologetic and polemical books which have been written by Christians down through the centuries. Some of the subjects which historically have been central to Christian-Muslim debates will receive relatively little attention here, simply because they are not at the heart of what Christian faith means to those who practice it. Nevertheless, I will try to take into consideration the questions which Muslims have asked me in the context of university courses or informally outside class and those that have been raised in articles and books.

Muslims are highly critical, with good reason, of many Orientalist writings on Islam which they feel give a distorted view of what Muslims actually believe and live. Often these Orientalist scholars are not consciously trying to give an unbalanced presentation of Islam. More frequently, these non-Muslim writers on Islam are unconsciously bringing their own concerns, preconceptions, and emphases and applying them to their study of Islam. The result, however, is that a Muslim who reads such works may have difficulty recognizing his faith in what he reads.

The same is the case with Christians. We often find that works written by non-Christians fail to express the same concerns that we Christians speak and pray about and often debate heatedly among ourselves. I hope that through this book Muslim students will come to know better how Christians understand their own faith.

In this work, I am not going to try to persuade anyone that Christianity is true and that Islam or any other religion is in error. I should state at the beginning, however, that I am a believing Christian and, as such, I believe in what is taught by the Christian faith. Any truly religious person, Christian or Muslim, believes that his or her faith offers a comprehensive answer to the important questions of human life: where do we come from, where are we going, and how should we live during our time on this planet. It is natural that every believer believes that their path is the true

religious response to what God has revealed to us. If anyone believed that some other religion offered the final answers to life and the way to God in a way more acceptable than one's own, that person should properly change their religion and follow that which he or she considers more convincing, more correct.

In fact, history has shown that the number of sincere, conscientious Christians or Muslims who convert to another religion is very few. For reasons of marriage, professional advancement, cultural assimilation, or social pressure, individuals have in the past and even today occasionally change from one religion to another. But among those who believe deeply in their faith and follow its teachings carefully, there are not many who convert to another religion.

The reason is obvious: when a person has encountered God and God's message through one's religious practice, the person feels no need to begin to search for God elsewhere. I have no doubt that God has touched the lives of millions of Muslims and Christians precisely through the religious teachings, books, and rites of Islam or Christianity, and for such people God is to be found within the context of their Islamic or Christian faith.

I do not mean that Islam and Christianity are basically the same religion, or that there are no real differences between the two. There *are* real differences, and Muslims and Christians must not minimize or ignore these differences when we encounter each other. The differences are painful, because humanly we always want those whom we live with and care about to think and act the same way as ourselves. For religious believers, the fact that others do not follow our path to God is especially painful, because we all consider our faith as "a treasure to be shared," the greatest gift which we can offer to our immediate neighbors and even to the whole world.

Studying together the differences between our two faiths can have positive results. We come to a renewed appreciation for what is *unique* in our own religious path, and we return to God grateful for the faith with which we have been blessed. We also grow in respect for the sincere convictions of others, even though those be different from our own. We understand better why others act the way they do, how they view life and its problems, and we realize better something of our common humanity before God.

On the other hand, we must not concentrate solely on the differences. I am convinced that in many of the deepest, most important elements of our beliefs and religious experience, Muslims and Christians are one. When Christians and Muslims engage in a study of each other's religion, they often experience a great sense of discovery of how much they have in common.

It is frequently the case that the different terminology used by each group can mask ideas about God and human life which are in fact quite similar. They can also have the opposite experience. In learning more about the religion of the other, the Christian or Muslim sometimes discovers that similar or identical terms can refer to very different concepts. One fruit of Christian-Muslim dialogue is learning to delineate more exactly the areas of convergence and divergence between the two faiths.

This is the very limited purpose of this book: not conversion, not polemics, but a simply deeper understanding of what Christians believe and how our religion leads us to live. I would consider my efforts successful if this book might inspire other Muslims and Christians to write their own works and explain their faith to each other in a spirit of friendship. I certainly do not consider this little book to be “the last word” on Christian faith and I, along with many other Christians, would welcome the opportunity to learn more about Islam from Muslim friends who are committed believers.

An oft-repeated saying holds: “the more thoroughly we understand the faith of another, the better we come to understand our own.” In my own life, this has certainly been the case. I consider it to have been a great blessing from God that for the past 30 years, I have lived among Muslims, have had the opportunity to study the Qur’an and the works of the Islamic tradition, and have been able to spend many hours discussing with Muslims questions of Christian and Islamic faith.

B. Introducing the author

At this point, I should introduce myself. I am a Catholic priest, originally from St. Louis, Missouri, in the U.S.A. As a priest, I do not have a wife or children. My parents died some years ago, but I have a brother and two sisters, who are married and have children and grandchildren.

In order to become a priest, I studied philosophy for four years and then Catholic theology for four years. The theology studies included the Bible; dogmatic theology, which is a systematic presentation of Catholic faith; moral theology or Christian ethics; history of the Christian church; patristics, which is the study of the early Christian thinkers; and spiritual theology or the practice of trying to follow Jesus Christ perfectly.

After working for two years as a parish priest in America, I went to Indonesia to teach English in a teachers’ college. Many of my students were Muslims, and through them I became interested in learning more about Islam. Some Muslim students suggested that I do Islamic studies, so that as a teacher I could serve as a bridge between the Christian and Muslim communities, helping Christians to know more about the faith of Islam, and helping Muslims to come to a better understanding of the Christian faith. Thus began the work I have been engaged in for the past 30 years.

In 1971, I went to Lebanon to study Arabic. After a year there, I entered the University of Chicago in order to study under Professor Fazlur Rahman, whose writings on Islam had greatly impressed me. In the course of my studies, I spent two years in Cairo deepening my knowledge of Arabic and attending lectures on Islamic themes at universities in the city.

I returned to the University of Chicago to work on the topic of my doctoral dissertation, which was Ibn Taymiyya’s great critique of the Christian religion, *Al-jawab al-sahih li-man baddal din al-Masih*. This required extensive reading in the many writings of Ibn Taymiyya and other great Muslim thinkers. Having completed my studies, I spent a year teaching Arabic language and Islamic philosophy at Columbia University in New York.

I returned to Indonesia, to the city of Yogyakarta in Central Java, where I taught Christian theology, Islamic philosophy, and introductions to Islam at Sanata Dharma University, the Catholic theological faculty and other Christian schools. I was often invited by Muslim groups to present explanations of the Christian faith at various Islamic institutions in Indonesia, as part of their study of comparative religions and the history of religions. My years in Indonesia were very happy ones, and the many contacts I had with Indonesian Muslims and Christians have deeply touched my life and enriched it greatly.

In 1981, the Vatican, which is the administrative arm of the Pope, the head of the Catholic community of Christians, was seeking someone with academic training in Islamic studies and personal experience in dialogue with Muslims to work in the Vatican to help promote better understanding and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. So from 1981 until the end of 1994, I worked at the Vatican Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (formerly, the “Secretariat for non Christians”), where I was Head of the Office for Islam. My tasks included working together with Muslim organizations to organize joint seminars on matters of common concern to Christians and Muslims and to encounter Muslims in religious and academic discussion in many parts of the Muslim world, as well as in Europe and North America.

On four occasions, I had a very enjoyable and rewarding experience in Turkey. At the invitation of the University of Ankara, I lectured in the Theology Faculty on the subject of Christian theology, as part of the program in history of religions. The experience was repeated the following year at Dokuz Eylül University in Izmir, and again a year later at Selcuk University in Konya, the city of Mevlana, Jalal al-Din Rumi, the great mystical poet. Most recently, in 2001, I taught the same course at the Theology Faculty of Harran University in Urfa. At each university I prepared my lectures in English and worked with a Turkish lecturer who translated the lectures into Turkish.

At the end of my stay in Ankara, some Turkish colleagues in the Theology Faculty suggested that I put the lectures into the form of a book, which could then be translated into Turkish. And thus the idea for this work was born. I reorganized my lectures in book form and tried to integrate the many questions my Turkish colleagues and students had raised, and the book appeared in Turkish as *Hiristiyan Tanr_bilimine Giri_: Dinler tarihine katk_*. It has been translated into Arabic, Albanian, French, Indonesian, Italian, Persian and Portuguese, sometimes by Christians and sometimes by Muslims, but this is the first edition in English.

C. Hopes for this book

I am convinced that Muslims and Christians form two families of faith which go back to one common ancestor, Abraham, and that it is God’s will that we live together in mutual respect and peace and that we work together so that God’s will be done on earth. I hope that through this book, the reader will come to learn more about the Christian religion: its Scriptures, basic beliefs, history, philosophy, theology, the inner life or spirituality of the Christian believer, and the social commitment of the Christian community.

The context of this book is that of the history of religions. Both proselytizing and

polemics are out of place in such a work. I simply want to recount what Christians believe. We leave the question of final truth to God, who is the Most Knowing. One day, we will all stand before God to give an account of how we have lived according to the religious teaching and values in which we believe. At that time, God will inform us about that over which we differed. Only by honesty and openness before God will we grow to become the believers, Muslim or Christian, that God wants us to be.

There is one final point to make. As I said, I am a Catholic priest, which means that I belong to the historical community of Christians who believe that God has appointed individuals, called *bishops*, to exercise roles of leadership, teaching, and blessing among us, and that in this worldwide body of bishops, the bishop of Rome, whom we call the Pope, presides. Because we recognize the Bishop of Rome as our head, we are often called *Roman Catholics*.

Christians sometimes disagree among ourselves concerning certain aspects of Christian faith. The wellknown division between Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant reflects the main lines of division in Christian history, and in Chapter IV I will try to describe how these separate communities came about. In the book, I do not intend to present only the Catholic view. Whenever we treat a matter on which these traditions differ, I will try to distinguish between the positions of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians.

This book does not require any prior knowledge of Christianity, and hence is truly an “introduction.” However, Chapter V, which gives brief surveys of Christian theology, philosophy, and spirituality, was intended to accompany Muslim students who are engaged in the study of *kalam*, *falsafa*, and *tasawwuf*, so that by it they could be introduced to some of the major figures on the Christian side and see how some of the same problems have been handled by Christian thinkers.

CHAPTER II

THE BIBLE: INSPIRATION AND REVELATION

A. What is the Bible?

The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which is the plural of “book.” It refers to the collection of Sacred Books of the Christians. This is the term used, with slight variations, in most European languages (English and French, *Bible*); German *Bibel*; Dutch *Bijbel*; Italian *Bibbia* etc.) Arabicspeaking Christians call the Bible *alKitâb alMuqaddas*, that is, “The Sacred Book,” as do Christians whose languages have been influenced by Arabic, such as Persian, Urdu, Indonesian etc. In Turkish, the terms are similar: *Kutsal Kitap*, *Kitabî Mukkades*, and *Kutsal Yazılar*. Christians use other terms with the same meaning: Scripture (or Scriptures), the Sacred Book, the Biblical Writings.

The Christian Bible has two parts of unequal length: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament is almost identical with the Jewish Bible and consists of 46 (39) books, while the New Testament, with 27 books, is unique to Christians.

A Muslim who looks at the Bible will notice immediately that this is a very different kind of Scripture from the Qur'an. The Qur'an is one book handed on in one language by one man over a period of 22 years. The Bible, by contrast, is a collection of 72 (65) books, which were written or compiled over a period of 1500 years in various languages. It is a *library of Sacred literature*. A large number of inspired writers, many of whose names have not been preserved, were involved in the complex process of producing this Scripture. The books reflect a variety of historical processes and include a number of literary forms or genres.

Some of the books developed slowly over the course of centuries and were put into their final form by an unknown inspired author, for example, the Books of Moses. Others were written by a recognizable individual for a particular situation, e.g., the Letters of St. Paul. The various literary forms found in the Bible include *popular history* (e.g., the Books of Moses), *prophetic messages* (Books of Amos, Jeremiah), *wisdom teachings* (Books of Job, Proverbs), *professions of faith* (the Gospels), *letters of instruction* (Epistles of Paul, Peter, John etc.), *hymns* and *prayers* (Psalms), and *apocalyptic visions* (Daniel, Apocalypse of John.)

B. The Biblical Canon

The term "canon" indicates the collection of works accepted as authentic Scriptural books. The attentive reader will have noticed that I said that the Old Testament consists of 46 (39) books. Which is it? To give an accurate answer we must go back to time of the Jewish people in the centuries before Christ. When Alexander the Great's armies conquered Palestine about 330 B.C., many Jews emigrated from that region and settled in other parts of the empire. This historical event, called the *diaspora*, was hastened by the persecution of the Jewish religion and people which took place under some of Alexander's successors, especially under Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.)

Many Jews settled in Alexandria, where they developed their own cultural and religious life. As time passed, most of these Jews no longer spoke Hebrew, but conversed, wrote and prayed in Greek. In 250 B.C., the Jews of Alexandria translated their Scriptures into Greek. The number of translators was held to have been 70 persons, so their translation came to be called the *Septuagint* (from the Latin word for "seventy.")

This translation contained about 46 books, although the inclusion of some books was considered doubtful. Some of the books in the Septuagint may have never existed in Hebrew. Nevertheless, the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Bible was used by many Jews in the Greek-speaking world, and eventually also in Palestine. It was usually from this Greek translation of the Bible that the Christian writers of the New Testament quoted when they cited the Old Testament.

About the year 100 A.D., after the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple, Jewish leaders met in Jamnia, Palestine, to decide various religious matters. They reviewed the Biblical books one by one and determined a "canon" of 39 books. Several books which had been part of the Septuagint were not included in the Jewish canon as fixed in Jamnia. The books of the Septuagint that were not accepted by the Jewish scholars came to be called "the Apocrypha" (i.e., "the hidden books") or "deuterocanonical" ("in a second place in the canon,") i.e., of doubtful authority.

The early Christian community in the Roman Empire generally used the Septuagint with its larger collection of books, and this Biblical text gradually came to be accepted by the Christian churches. Today, the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic churches accept an Old Testament canon which is based on the Septuagint.

In the 16th Century, the Reformers, in their desire to return to the primitive Christian faith, rejected the Apocrypha and accepted the Jewish canon of 39 books. Although modern Protestants accept the spiritual value of some of the books of the Apocrypha, they usually do not consider these books to be on the same level with the other 39 books. In Protestant and ecumenical translations of the Bible, the Apocrypha are usually included in a special section at the end of the Old Testament.

No disagreement exists concerning the text of the New Testament. Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians all accept the 27 books of the New Testament in their textual integrity.

C. Scriptural inspiration

Christians hold that the books of the Bible were written by God through the instrumentality of a human author. Thus, Christians hold that the Biblical books have a divine author and a human author. In other words, Christians believe that God is the author of the Bible through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God moved the human authors to write and helped them in their writing so that they expressed all that God intended and only what God intended.

Muslims will notice that in this the Christian view differs from that of Islam. God is the ultimate author of the Bible, but God composed the Scriptures through a *human author* as God's agent. The human author was a man of his time, with the limitations of knowledge and language by which all humans are bound. Christians in general do not hold that God *dictated* the Scriptures to the human author, but allowed them to express the divine message in their own ways, literary forms, and personal style.

Some Christians hold for a *literal inspiration* of the Scriptures in which God delivered His message wordforword to a human writer who faithfully wrote down everything that God dictated to him. This view, which has similarities with that held by the ancient Jewish rabbis and has much in common with the way Muslims view the revelation of the Qur'an, concludes that there cannot be even one erroneous word in the Bible.

This view of the literal inerrancy of the Bible is a characteristic of those Christians in this century who used to call themselves "fundamentalists" because they wanted to return to what they considered to be the fundamentals of Christian faith. Today they prefer to refer to themselves as *evangelicals*. However, the majority of Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant thinkers today reject a literalist view of Biblical inspiration and feel that the process of how God inspired the Scriptures is more complex.

The underlying distinction made by Christians is between the message of salvation which is being conveyed and the form or "envelope" in which that message is presented. All Christians believe that the *message* is from God and therefore true. But its *form* depends not only on God, but also on God's human agent, the Scriptural writer who, like others, is capable of human error.

The Catholic church holds that the divine message is found in *what God intended to teach* through the human author. The human author may have had erroneous scientific views, or even incorrect information, and such may be reflected in the Biblical text, but this pertains to the form, the “envelope” in which the news arrives and does not detract from the true and eternal message which God intended to teach through that human writer.

Christians have developed a vast array of Scriptural studies, using historical and literary techniques, to arrive at the message which God desires to convey by means of God’s fallible human agent. One might say that the work of Biblical criticism that is carried on in universities, Christian theological faculties, Biblical institutes, and seminaries around the world, is an effort to “remove the letter from the envelope,” that is, to discover God’s message contained in the Biblical accounts.

D. Revelation

Muslims often ask, why the need for a human author? Is God not capable of revealing God’s message directly to a prophet, who then conveys that message exactly to mankind? Then a religious community would not have to depend upon studies and critical analyses to arrive at the meaning which God intended. The message would be clearly presented by the prophet, and mankind would have only either to accept and obey, or else to refuse the message.

In this attitude towards divine revelation, we find a basic difference between Islam and Christianity. For a Muslim, the Qur’an does not point to some other act of divine revelation beyond itself. The Qur’an *is* God’s revelation, God’s message in clear speech in its final, perfect form. The Qur’an does not intend to lead the believer to an experience of divine revelation beyond itself.

This is not the way in which Christians regard the Bible. For Christians, God’s fullest, most perfect revelation occurred, not in a book, but in a man. Christians believe that it is the man Jesus Christ who reveals God, who perfectly expresses in his life and person what God wants to say to mankind. For Christians, the Bible always points beyond itself. It always intends to form our faith in Jesus and what God is saying to mankind through him. The New Testament authors were men trying to communicate the meaning of their experience of Jesus who lived and suffered and died, and whom they believed that God had raised from the dead. This human testimony is essential to the nature of the Christian Scriptures.

This brings us to another difference between the Christian and the Islamic approach to revelation. Christians speak not only of God’s revealing God’s *message* to mankind, but of God revealing *God’s own self* in human history. The books of the Bible announce and interpret this self-revelation of God. God reveals who God is and the kind of divinity that God is, that is, God’s qualities and attributes. God reveals how God acts towards the whole universe and towards mankind. God reveals a moral will for mankind and, most of all, God’s will to save. One might say that the Bible is the story of God revealing God’s own self as One who saves.

Like Islam, Christian faith teaches that God’s essence is hidden from mankind. God is far too exalted, too great, for humans to understand God’s inner nature. That is far beyond human capability. We only know about God what God tells and shows us

about God's self. Even this partial self-revelation, adapted to the limitations of our human ability to understand, is by necessity wrapped in mystery. Christians are neither surprised nor disturbed to find that our most careful theological formulations can never do justice to who God is. When Christians say that God's nature is a mystery, it is not because we are looking for an easy way out of a theological discussion, but a confession of God's greatness, His height and depth which surpasses human understanding.

Muslims and Christians find that we have much in common in what we believe that God has taught about God's nature and activities. In the Bible, God is revealed as a *living God* (in contrast to the idols that cannot speak or act.) God is the sovereign *master of history*, the *Creator* who made all that exists, including humankind. God was active at the beginning of human history and accompanies people in all the events of history by God's wisdom and grace. God is the final goal towards which history is moving. Thus, Christians and Muslims recognize God as the Sovereign *Lord of life*. Through those given the grace of prophecy, God reveals His moral will for humankind, by which each individual shall be one day judged; hence Christians recognize God as *Judge*.

Gathering together all these affirmations, the Bible teaches that God is a *saving God*, (in contrast to the idols that cannot save). In fact, God is the *one and only* saving Lord who actively enters into human history to exercise His will and power to save.

In the Old Testament, the central event is the *Exodus*, by which God saved his people, bringing them out of slavery into freedom, forming them into a people who would do His will, and making an eternal covenant with them. God's saving power was not shown only once, in bringing the Jewish people out of Egypt, but is a promise for all time, symbolized in the covenant God made with the Jews on Mount Sinai in which "He would be their God and they would be His people."

In the New Testament, it is Jesus who reveals the saving power of God. Christians believe that Jesus is the man in whom the fullness of God's revelation dwells. When Christians want to learn about God and God's saving deeds, and how God wants us to live on this earth, we look what God has revealed in Jesus. We study Jesus' life to come to know him better. We study his teachings and his example in order to learn how we should live. We reflect upon his suffering, death, and resurrection to find the proof of God's will and power to save.

The Christian authors of the New Testament believed that God saved Jesus, raising him from death to new life, and that the Spirit of the risen Christ remained with them and would guide them down through history. For Jews, the central event of human history is the Exodus and the covenant made on Sinai. For Muslims it is the revelation of the Qur'an through Muhammad, God's messenger. For Christians the central event of history is God's making His eternal message human in the man Jesus (which we call the "Incarnation") and God's saving deed in bringing Jesus from death to life (which we call the "Redemption.") In Chapter III, I will look more carefully at these basic elements of Christian faith.

Before we look at the content of the Bible, I will summarize here some of the contrasting ways in which Muslims and Christians understand divine revelation and the inspiration of Scripture.

ISLAM

[\(1\)](#)

The Quran
 One Book A collection
 Revealed over 22 years
 Language: Arabic Languages:
 Author: God Author: God
 Muhammad is a messenger who reports
 what he hears from God. in his own ways of thinking.
 Message: divine, eternal, universal.

CHRISTIANITY

[\(2\)](#)

The Bible
 of Sacred Books
 Compiled over centuries
 Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek
 and human author
 The human author conveys God's
 Message: divine, eternal, universal.

E. The Old Testament

The Jewish people divided their Bible into three parts: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

- 1) **The Law** (*Torah*) consisted of the five books of Moses.
- 2) **The Prophets** included:
 - a. the earlier prophets (the Books of Joshua, Judges, 12 Samuel, 12 Kings)
 - b. the later prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and 12 minor prophets.
- 3) **The Writings** contained the books of 12 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Ruth, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, and Daniel.

1. **THE TORAH : The five books of Moses**

The Jews consider the books of Moses (sometimes called “the Pentateuch,” which means “the book of five volumes”) the holiest part of the Bible. The Samaritans, a form of sectarian Judaism which still survives in some villages in Palestine, accept *only* the Books of Moses as revealed Scripture. Christians also highly revere the Torah which forms the first part of our Bible.

In former times, people believed that Moses delivered the five books, but modern Biblical scholarship shows that its origins are much more complex. The Pentateuch developed over the course of centuries, first as oral accounts handed down by the Jewish people, then gradually collected in several independent written narratives and collections of laws which were eventually woven together and put into their final form by the 5th Century before Christ. The persons who were involved in this long and complicated historical process were many, and most of their names are lost. Jews and Christians agree that God’s work of inspiration directed all the stages of the compilation of the Torah.

Scriptural scholars speak of four major traditions in the Pentateuch: the Jahwist (J), the Elohist (E), the Deuteronomic (D), and the Priestly (P). The central teaching of the Pentateuch is that there is but one God, who is a God of blessing and covenant, who saved the Jewish people and gave them a Law by which they should live. Muslims will recognize the main figures of the Old Testament, as their stories are

also recounted in the Qur'an. To facilitate identification, I will give their names in English and in the Arabic form used in the Qur'an. The first book of the Torah is the Book of *Genesis*. In this book is recounted the creation of the world by God. It tells of the creation of Adam and the story of Adam's sin. Next are the accounts of the early patriarchs, of Noah (Nuh) and the flood, of Abraham (Ibrahim), who left his homeland and his father's house and emigrated to Palestine, of Isaac (Ishaq) and Ishmael (Isma'il), of Jacob (Ya'qub) and Esau, and finally of Joseph (Yusuf) and his brothers, the story of how the Jewish people got to Egypt. The book covers the historical period between Abraham (about 1900 B.C.) and Joseph (about 1550 B.C.). The stories of Adam and his offspring and of Noah are many centuries earlier and cannot be dated, and can be understood as a "prehistory of the Jewish people."

The next Biblical book is that of *Exodus* (the Going Out). It includes the story of Moses (Musa), his birth, education, crime, and flight to Arabia. There he heard the voice from the Burning Bush and received his prophetic mission. The book relates Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, the plagues, the First Passover (which became the most important feast for the Jews), and God's leading the Jewish people out of Egypt across the Red Sea. The climax of the book is God's making the covenant with the Jewish people on Mount Sinai and giving them the Law. The historical period is about 1250 B.C.

The Book of *Leviticus* (the laws of the priestly tribe of Levi) is primarily a law book, and lists the rituals and regulations of the Mosaic Law. The Book of *Numbers* gives the census figures and the genealogies of the Jewish tribes in the desert.

The fifth book of the Pentateuch is *Deuteronomy*. The word means "the Second Law" and is given to this book because it recounts many of the stories in the earlier books and presents anew the laws, ceremonies and ethical teachings of the Torah. Scholars say that this book originated in a reform movement among the Jews at the time of King Josiah and the prophet Jeremiah (7th Century before Christ.) The Jewish people at the time worshiped God, but they simultaneously practiced popular rites which were carried out at local shrines and tainted with idolatry. The book of Deuteronomy preaches strongly against all forms of idolworship and calls the people back to the pure service of God.

2. The Deuteronomic History

Together with the six Biblical books which follow it, the Book of Deuteronomy comprises what Biblical scholars call the Deuteronomic history. Beginning with the Jewish people wandering in the desert, it relates the conquest of Canaan (Palestine) by the Jewish tribes, their rule by the early judges, especially Samuel and Saul. This occurred about the year 1000 B.C. The history continues with the stories of the Kingdoms of David and Solomon, the accounts of the prophets Elijah (Ilyas) and Elisha (Ilyasa), and continues down to the Exile of the Jews in Babylon, in the year 587 B.C. The Deuteronomic history includes the books of *Deuteronomy*, *Joshua*, *Judges*, *12 Samuel*, and *12 Kings*.

The central teaching in the Deuteronomic history is God's claim to the obedience, loyalty, and love of the Jewish people. It teaches that obedience to God brings success, while disobedience leads to disaster. It wants to purify the religious practice

of the Jews from the idolatrous worship carried out at traditional local shrines, and permits sacrifice to be offered only at the Temple in Jerusalem. The book teaches that the Jewish people have been chosen by God to be His people.

3. The Chronicler's History

The Deuteronomic history is followed in the Bible by another, called the Chronicler's history, which is parallel to the Deuteronomic account. It consists of the following books: *12 Chronicles*, *Ezra* (Uzair), and *Nehemiah*. These books tell the history of the Kingdoms of Judah (in the south of Palestine) and Israel (in the North), down to the Exile in Babylon, and the restoration of the Jewish people to Palestine by Cyrus the Great.

In the Chronicler's account, one can see the new form which the Jewish religion took after the return from Babylon. The cult centered in the Temple of Jerusalem. The *Law* became central and the *Scribes* like Ezra became important as interpreters of the Law. The descendants of David were accepted to be the proper rulers of the Jewish people, and hopes for the future centered about a Messiah from the line of David who would free the people from their pagan rulers.

4. The Prophetic Books

The Old Testament knew two types of prophets. There were those, like Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha, who brought oral messages. Through some of these, especially *Elijah* and *Elisha*, God worked miracles. The second type was a prophet whose preaching and prophecies, though delivered orally, were preserved in writing by secretaries.

The Bible contains four "major" or long prophetic books: those of the prophets *Isaiah*, *Jeremiah*, *Ezekiel*, and *Daniel*. In addition, there are twelve "minor" prophets, whose books are shorter, but not less important, than the previous. These are the books of the prophets *Hosea*, *Joel*, *Amos*, *Jonah*, *Obadiah*, *Mikah*, *Nahum*, *Habakkuk*, *Zephaniah*, *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, and *Malachi*.

The prophets are sometimes called "the conscience of Israel" because of their severe criticisms of the sins of the people. The people's sins included idolatry and hypocrisy, but the special concern of the prophets was what would today be called "social morality." The wealthy who did nothing for the poor, judges who passed judgment in favor of the rich and powerful against the interests of the poor, corrupt government officials, merchants who cheated customers, religious leaders who compromised God's message for personal gain, those who mistreated and defrauded the more defenseless members of society like orphans, widows, and foreigners all these were strongly condemned by the prophets.

The prophets warned against military alliances with pagan nations like Egypt and Assyria and predicted disaster if people did not repent and turn to God. Some of the prophets, like Jeremiah, were persecuted because of the harsh challenges they leveled at the leaders of the people. Others were killed because they were considered disloyal and unpatriotic.

The unique personalities of the prophets give their prophetic messages a highly personal character. Amos and Jeremiah delivered angry denunciations of the sins of the people and predicted destruction if they did not repent. Hosea reflected on his unhappy marriage and saw the Jewish people as a wife who has been unfaithful to her husband. Isaiah and Ezekiel had ecstatic visions which they interpreted as messages for the people.

When disaster occurred and the Jewish people were carried off in slavery to Babylon and then had to suffer pagan rule over them, the role of the prophet changed. It has been said that the prophet is called “to afflict the comfortable and to comfort the afflicted.” To the exiles in Babylon, the prophets brought solace and hope in their desperate situation. The prophet told the people that their sins were the cause of their sufferings, but that God would save them if they returned to Him. They should not despair, but take refuge in God. God promises liberation, a new future, for those who remain faithful to Him.

The prophets had a special concern for the *anawim*, the great mass of the pious poor, the despised, oppressed “little people” of this world. Out of these humble believers, say the prophets, God would form a new people. The prophets called this the “remnant,” the small number of those who would remain faithful and obedient to God in times of prosperity as well as in times of distress.

5. Hopes for a Messiah

Out of this teaching of the prophets grew the Messianic hopes of the Old Testament. Despite the destruction of their kingdoms and the exile of many to Assyria and Babylon, God would not abandon His people in their miserable state but would send His Anointed One (the title *Messiah* means “the anointed One,” a reference to the common practice of anointing the head of a new king with oil) to save them. In the prophetic books, one can trace three main currents of Messianic hopes, although these were not always sharply distinguished one from another.

a. The *Messiah*, the *Son of David*. Prophets like Ezekiel and Malachi taught that God would send a Messiah from the line of David who would restore the fortunes of Israel. This Son of David would deliver the people from pagan rulers and reestablish God’s Reign over that remnant of His people who had remained faithful and obedient in times of adversity. He would establish a kingdom of justice, with fair treatment for the poor and the true worship of God. God would rule the people through His Anointed One, the descendant of David. Some of the prophets foresaw that the awaited Kingdom of God would be not only for the Jewish people, but universal, for all peoples on earth.

b. The *Servant of the Lord*. The prophet Isaiah spoke of God’s Servant who would come, without military or economic power, physical beauty or worldly influence. By his faithful, non-violent submission to God’s will and patient suffering in the face of rejection and persecution, the Servant would bear upon himself the sins of the people and be the instrument of their salvation.

c. The *Son of Man*. This mysterious figure is spoken of by the prophets Daniel, Joel, and Habakkuk. These books are in the form of *apocalyptic* literature, a difficult literary form full of unusual and complex imagery and symbols. Apocalyptic

literature comes from a period of Jewish history when the people were persecuted and had to express their hopes in coded, secret ways. The apocalyptic books looked forward to “The Day of the Lord,” when God would come to correct evils, to judge the wicked, and to liberate those who remained faithful. The apocalyptic prophets spoke of the coming of the Son of Man, a heavenly figure, who would come down from the skies as the sign of the immediate approach of the Day of the Lord. To this Son of Man, the prophets said, God would hand over the Kingdom.

6. The Writings, or Books of Wisdom

The pagan neighbors of the Jews wrote many books of wisdom, efforts to show people the best way to lead their lives and find success in personal and social dealings. The Jewish people, based on the conviction that “the good life” was one lived in accord with God’s will, wrote their own books of wisdom. These form the third and final part of the Old Testament.

The best known of is the *Psalms* of David (Daud). These are 150 hymns of praise to God, thanksgiving, repentance, trust in God, hope for the Messiah, and petitions for God’s help. In the psalms, God is especially praised in the wonders of His creation. The Psalms are the “Prayer Book” of Christians, just as they were for Jewish people in the centuries before Christ and as they were for Jesus and his apostles. Many Christians read all 150 psalms every week, and in monasteries the monks and nuns gather for prayer seven times a day to chant the Psalms aloud.

An important wisdom book is that of *Job* (Ayyub). This tells the story of a prosperous and Godfearing Arab sheikh who suffers a series of personal calamities and loses his wealth, family, and health. It is a study of the problem of good and evil, and asks the question so often posed both by religious believers and non-believers, “Why do good people suffer on this earth, while the evil seem to prosper?” The anonymous author took a popular folk tale (preserved in Chapters 12 and 42) and inserted into it a long dialogue on the problem of why a good and almighty God permits evil in His creation.

The book of *Proverbs* is a collection of wise sayings, traditionally attributed to Solomon (Sulaiman). The Book of *Qoheleth* (the Preacher) is a thoughtful reflection on the meaning of life, asking “What is the purpose of life? What makes life worthwhile?” The *Song of Songs* is a collection of Jewish wedding songs, which celebrate human love as something beautiful and enjoyable, a wonderful gift from God. It teaches that human love can be seen as a symbol of God’s love for mankind.

7. The Apocrypha

The Apocrypha are accepted as part of the Bible by Catholic and Orthodox Christians, but not by Jews and most Protestants (p. 7). Most of these books are in the category of Wisdom Literature.

The two books of *Maccabees* recount the heroic actions of the Jews to preserve their faith in the time of persecution by their pagan Greek rulers. The book of *Tobit* teaches the religious values found in ordinary family life. The *Wisdom* of Solomon teaches that true wisdom comes from God and that every believer must seek wisdom. More clearly than any other book in the Old Testament, this work expresses the firm

belief in the resurrection of the dead, with reward for the good and punishment for the evil. The book of *Sirach*, another collection of wise sayings, is similar to the Book of Proverbs. The books of *Judith* and *Esther* tell the stories of brave Jewish heroines. Finally, the book of *Baruch* collects the sayings of the secretary of the prophet Jeremiah.

8. The Books of the Old Testament

A. The Torah (the Books of Moses, the Pentateuch)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

B. The Deuteronomic history: (Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Torah, plus)

Joshua
Judges
12 Samuel
12 Kings

C. The Chronicler's history

12 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah

D. The Writings (Wisdom literature)

Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Qoheleth (sometimes called "Ecclesiastes")
The Song of Songs

E. The Prophets

The "major" prophets:

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Daniel

The "minor" prophets:

Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah
Haggai

Zechariah
Malachi

F. The Apocrypha (in Orthodox and Catholic editions)

Tobit
Judith
Esther
12 Maccabees
Wisdom of Solomon
Sirach
Baruch

F. The New Testament

The New Testament contains those Scriptures which are unique to Christians; it is not accepted by Jews as part of the Bible. In contrast to the disagreement over the Old Testament canon, all Christians (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant) accept the *same* text of the New Testament. Copies of individual books go back to the first century after Christ. The canon of the New Testament was fixed between the years 150-200 and has been accepted by Christians since that time.

All the books of the New Testament were written in the *Greek* language. Some scholars used to believe that perhaps the Gospel of Matthew had originally been written in Aramaic, the language of Jesus and his apostles, but there does not seem to be much historical or linguistic evidence for that view. Translations into modern languages are made from the Greek text, which is the text used by Scripture scholars in their studies.

Scriptural scholars carry out two kinds of study, studies which are comparable to the science of *tafsir* in the Islamic tradition:

- 1) exegesis, which is the effort to understand the exact meaning of the text through linguistic analysis, and
- 2) commentary, understanding the text in its historical and cultural setting.

The authors of the New Testament books were all disciples of Jesus, either his personal companions and disciples or the first generation of disciples who, after Jesus' death, placed their faith in him. Christians do not claim that all the authors of the New Testament were eyewitnesses to the events of Jesus' life, although some appear to have been, but all were members of the first generations of the followers of Jesus. Christians do not call the authors of the New Testament prophets, but we hold that they were all inspired by God in what they wrote.

1. The Gospels

The first four books of the New Testament are called "Gospels," a word taken from Greek (*euangelion*), meaning "Good News." (The Arabic term *injl* (plural: *anajil*), is has the same origin. The Gospels are a uniquely Christian genre of inspired literature. Basically, each Gospel is a **profession of faith** in the risen Christ. Each Gospel intends to show the meaning of Jesus' life for believing Christians.

In the Gospels, Jesus is seen as:

- 1) the *fulfillment of Messianic hopes* in the Old Testament,
- 2) the *revelation of God*,
- 3) the *proof of God's will and power to save mankind*,
- 4) the *founder of a community of disciples*, which we call the church, who are to continue Jesus' work down through history.

The written Gospels were preceded by an *oral tradition*. Christians believe that Jesus died about the year 30. His followers who knew him, saw his deeds, and listened to his words preserved these recollections of Jesus. The early Christians were convinced that Jesus was alive, raised from the dead, and that his Spirit was among them. When Christians came together to pray, they related over and over the accounts of what Jesus had said and done. Gradually, the stories about Jesus took on the form of longer oral narratives.

The first disciple of Jesus to set these accounts in writing in the form of a *gospel* was Mark, a companion of Peter, who wrote about the year 60. (One should note that this date, like the other dates of the New Testament books, is approximate, an estimate of the Biblical scholars based on internal evidence gathered from the sacred book.)

The relationship between the four gospels is interesting. Each gospel contains material about Jesus which is common to other gospels and, at the same time, sayings of Jesus, stories of his deeds, and, most of all, an understanding of the meaning of Jesus' life which is unique to itself. Each of the authors of a gospel (called an "evangelist") emphasized certain aspects of Jesus' ministry and interpreted his life in the context of the particular concerns and situation of the people for whom he was writing. For this reason, the evangelists are said to be among the first "theologians" of the Christian community. Although each gospel is unique and different from the others, Christians do not find any contradiction among the specific visions of faith in Christ presented in the Gospels, and Christians consider all four gospels to have equal authority and importance.

a. *The Gospel of Matthew*

In the New Testament, the first gospel listed is that of Matthew, which was written by a Palestinian Christian shortly after the year 70. Matthew presents Jesus as the Great Teacher, the New Moses, who gives the law of the new Covenant or Testament. Matthew's literary style was to collect the sayings and deeds of Jesus systematically, giving a presentation of Jesus' mission which is thematic rather than chronological. The Sermon on the Mount (Chapters 5-7) gives in summary form the teachings of Jesus. The parables of Jesus are collected together in Chapter 13, and his miracles in Chapters 8-9. Jesus predicts the Day of the Lord, the eschatological crisis, in Chapters 24-25.

Theological emphases of Matthew's Gospel. As mentioned above, Matthew sees Jesus as the New Moses. Just as Moses announced the old covenant to the Jewish people and gave them the old law, Jesus announces the new covenant and delivers the new law. This new law is directed primarily towards the "remnant" of pious poor (cf. the Beatitudes, Mt 5:18), a law not of written regulations but of God's love

written on human hearts. More than any other evangelist, Matthew seeks to present Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. He cites the passages in the prophet Isaiah that speak of the humble *Servant* of the Lord through whose faithful obedience to God the people are saved. Matthew understands Jesus' suffering and death as the fulfillment of all that Isaiah had foretold concerning the suffering Servant.

Scripture scholars suggest that Matthew's gospel arises out of dialogue with Jewish leaders after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. Matthew wants to show that because the Jews have rejected Jesus, the Kingdom is given to nonJews (Gentiles). He identifies this Kingdom with the church and understands the Kingdom of God more as a present reality - "God reigning now" - which Jesus both announced and ushered in, than as an otherworldly realm which is yet to come.

b. The Gospel of Mark

As mentioned, scholars consider this to be the earliest Gospel, written about the year 60. Mark was not one of Jesus' 12 apostles, but the New Testament mentions him as a coworker of both Paul and Peter. "Eyewitness details" have suggested to many readers that Mark is relating many of Peter's accounts. Scripture scholars believe that Mark's gospel was written primarily for nonJewish Christians.

Mark states his intention in the first line of his Gospel: he is "proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." While Matthew is especially interested in the words of Jesus, Mark is more concerned with his *deeds* (confronting and expelling demons, forgiving sins, working miracles) than his words. He emphasizes the human traits of Jesus, stressing Jesus' real humanity against those who held that Jesus only "appeared" to be human.

Mark stresses the most basic, "primitive" form of Jesus' message:

- 1) turn away from sin and turn to God (repentance),
- 2) and accept God's rule over one's life (the Kingdom).

The story of Jesus' **passion** and death plays an important part in Mark's gospel. Like Matthew, Mark describes Jesus' suffering in terms of God's Servant spoken of by Isaiah.

c. The Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles

Luke's version of the Good News is made up of two books:

- 1) the Gospel of Luke
- 2) the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke is thought to have been a nonJewish companion of St. Paul; he is not one of the 12 apostles. Although Luke relied heavily on Mark's Gospel, his work is more "theological" in the sense that the events of Jesus' life and his teachings are interpreted in the light of Christian faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. Scholars suggest that Luke was the best educated of the evangelists, because his gospel is written in a refined and elegant style of Greek.

The Gospel of Luke

The main themes of Luke's gospel can be summarized as follows: Luke stresses the *universality* of Jesus mission; the Good News is addressed not just to Jews, but to all people. Luke portrays Jesus as the *friend of sinners* who wants to show the abundance of God's forgiveness toward those who repent. Jesus' concern for those who suffer is an important aspect of his personality. More than the other evangelists, Luke emphasizes the *dangers of wealth* and the importance of freely chosen poverty for the disciples of Jesus. The idea of *discipleship* is central to Luke's understanding of Jesus' mission; Jesus is seen calling a group of men and women (women play an important role in Luke's Gospel) and forming them into a community of disciples who would live and act like him.

Finally, Luke stresses that Jesus was a *man of prayer*. In this gospel, Jesus is pictured at prayer at all the critical moments of his life. According to Luke, Jesus' prayer is not so much that of the official Jewish ritual, as a silent, interior communion with God, whom he regarded as Father. The history of Christian spirituality has been strongly influenced by Luke's vision of Jesus in contemplative union with God through prayer.

The Acts of the Apostles

Although the second part of Luke's presentation of the Good News is not a gospel, it should be treated in conjunction with Luke's Gospel. The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the growth of the Christian community under the impulse of God's Spirit, not only its numerical growth but the flowering of its self-understanding concerning its nature and mission.

The Book of Acts has sometimes been called "the Gospel of the Holy Spirit." It relates how the Christian community developed from a small Jewish sect which accepted Jesus as Messiah into a universal community of faith distinct from Judaism. The Book of Acts sees this evolution not as a simple historical accident, but as a process in which the community was accompanied and guided at every step by the Holy Spirit. In the Acts, Luke uses much "first person narrative," indicating that he was present at many of the events he describes.

The main theological themes of the Book of Acts concern the work of the Holy Spirit in forming and guiding the Christian community. Through God's Spirit, the risen Christ continues to live within his community of believers. Non-Jews can become followers of Jesus and have the same status as Jewish disciples, with no need to follow the regulations of the Jewish Law. The good news of Jesus is seen as a universal message offered to all people, to non-Jews as much as to Jews..

d. *The Gospel of John*

This gospel is traditionally held to have been written by John, Jesus' "beloved disciple," in Ephesus (modern Efes). Scholars are not in agreement regarding the date of this gospel; estimates range between the years 65 and 90, although scholars today tend to favor the earlier date. John's gospel, like that of Mark, has much "eyewitness detail" that could only have come from one present at the events described.

In John's gospel, the details of Jesus' life are secondary to his *words*. A key idea in the Gospel of John is that God's eternal message was *incarnated* or became human in the man Jesus. He arranges Jesus' teaching carefully in long discourses and employs a complex use of *symbols*. John envisions events in Jesus' life as pointing towards the real but invisible presence of Christ living and acting in the Christian community. He has a great concern for Christ's *sacramental* actions, that is, how deeds performed by Jesus for his disciples are continued until today in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist (pp. 52-56).

An important conviction in John's gospel is that God is love, and it is love which must characterize the community of Jesus' followers. The primary importance of love is also a major theme of the Epistles attributed to John. In John's Gospel, Jesus is seen as the bringer of *light, truth, and life*, and he reveals the *way* to God. These teachings are brought together in Jesus' long discourse at the Last Supper on the night before he died (John:13:17).

In John's gospel, there are many similarities in language and ideas with the Essene sect of Judaism. The Essenes were a Jewish sect who believed that secular society was evil, that the "Day of the Lord" (The Day of Judgment) was coming, and that people should prepare themselves by austere and prayerful lives. The Essenes retired to monasteries in the Qumran region of the Judean desert. Some scholars think that John the Baptist may have been associated with this sect. New studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls show many affinities of outlook and terminology with John's gospel.

2. Why Four Gospels?

Before looking at the other New Testament books, it might be good to pause and respond to a question often raised by Muslims. Did not Jesus bring only one Gospel from God? Why then do Christians accept four gospels? Since it is known from history that other early Christians also wrote gospels, why do Christians accept as Biblical these four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) and no others?

These are reasonable questions and logically consistent with an Islamic theological viewpoint. My answer, as a Christian, presupposes a Christian understanding of revelation (pp. 9-10) and must remain in accord with that view. First of all, Christians never claim that Jesus *brought* a book, a Gospel. He is not the *conveyer* of a revealed message, in the sense in which Muslims understand Muhammad to be the messenger who brought the Qur'an. Rather, Christians believe that Jesus was *himself* the embodiment of God's revelation to mankind. He does not bring a message, he *is* the message. As a result, we do not believe that there was ever some original gospel, written by the hand of Jesus or dictated to one of his disciples.

Since for Christians Jesus is the incarnation of God's word or message, we consider the Gospels as the inspired efforts of his disciples to *profess their faith* in Christ and to indicate what that faith should mean for the community of those who follow him.

Each of the four gospels gives a personal witness to Christ which, while they vary in emphases and details, are in essential agreement concerning who this man Jesus was and what God is communicating, through him, to his followers and to the world. Christians do not pick one gospel to follow in preference to the rest; our faith is

formed and guided by all four. We believe that our faith would not be complete if one of the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, John - were rejected.

This brings us to a second point which shows an even greater difference between the Christian and Muslim understandings of revelation. Christians today accept four gospels as part of the Bible, and no more than four, these four rather than some other gospels, precisely because the early Christian community accepted these professions of faith as coming from God. It is said that the Christian faith is built upon that of the apostles (pp. ??). The early Christians believed, as I mentioned above, that God's Spirit was guiding their community, the church.

This means that God's guidance, through the Spirit, was inspiring the community during the crucial thirty years (3060 A.D.) when there were no written gospels, when the sayings and deeds of Jesus were still orally transmitted. The same Spirit inspired the four evangelists who put the gospels into writing, when they selected from among the many sayings and deeds of Jesus which ones were to be included in their gospel. Most of all, the Spirit formed and guided the evangelists' theological vision of what God is teaching mankind through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Finally, it was under the guidance of the same Spirit that the early Christian community recognized 27 books (including the four gospels) from among many other Christian writings to have been written through God's inspiration. These came to be called the books of the New Testament, which form, for all time, the normative authority of Christian faith.

This is a different understanding of Scriptural revelation from that of Islam. Muslims are a community "formed by the Qur'an." Muslims believe that God sent Muhammad with the Qur'anic revelation, and the Islamic community was formed according to the teaching of the Qur'an. For Christians, however, it was the community, guided by God's Spirit, that produced its own authentic professions of faith, its Scriptures which point to and explain God's revelation in Jesus. Similarly, it was the community which determined that it was these 27 books, together with the Bible of the Jews, and no others, which constituted its Scripture.

How did this determination of the canon of the New Testament come about? It was by a kind of consensus or common agreement that Christians settled on the canon of Scripture. This consensus occurred quite early. In the years 150200, the first lists of Biblical books began to appear among Christians. Many centuries later, the churches stated officially (as did the Catholic church at the Council of Trent in 1546) which books were to be considered part of the Bible, but these late declarations merely confirmed what had already been the traditional belief of Christians.

3. New Testament Apocrypha

What is to be said about the other gospels, letters, books of acts, and apocalypses produced by early Christians, sometimes called the "New Testament Apocrypha," which were not accepted by the church as canonical? Many such books exist, and others we know about only by name.

Some of the apocryphal gospels, such as the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, the *Gospel according to the Egyptians*, and the *Gospel of Peter*, are similar in spirit and teaching to the four canonical gospels and it is conceivable that they could contain

some sayings of Jesus not recorded in the canonical books. Others, such as the Gospel of *Marcion*, of *Thomas*, of *Philip* were produced by the early Gnostics (pp.??) and present Gnostic teachings which are not accepted by the orthodox Christian community.

Still others, such as the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, the *Departure of Mary*, and the *Arabic Gospel of the Childhood* centered their attention on stories about Jesus' childhood and were highly popular as devotional reading among Christians. The lastmentioned work contains stories similar to those about Jesus and Mary which are found in the Qur'an.

Similarly, in addition to the canonical *Acts of the Apostles*, there were other books of Acts, e.g., those of *Peter*, *Paul*, *John*, *Andrew*, and *Thomas*, all of which probably come from the late 2nd Century. There were two early Letters, those of *Clement* and *Barnabas*, and two which were attributed to Paul, a third letter to the *Corinthians*, in addition to the two canonical epistles, and one to the *Laodiceans*. There were also other apocalypses besides the canonical *Apocalypse of John*.

These books, some of which may contain highly inspiring instruction and genuine recollections of Jesus' teaching, are not accepted by Christians today as part of the Bible because they were not considered such by the early Christians. For example, St. Jerome, the early Biblical commentator and translator, translated the Gospel according to the Hebrews from Aramaic into Greek and Latin. He discussed its merits, but never considered it to be a gospel whose teachings formed the basis of Christian belief.

This brings us back to the conclusion I stated above, that it was the consensus of the early Christian community that determined the canonical status of the Biblical books. Those who lived near to the time of Jesus and the writing of the books were in a position to decide which writings formed the basis of Christian faith and which did not. Later generations of Christians accept this consensus and believe that the early community was guided by God's Spirit in this discernment.

At this point, mention should be made of a work known as the "Gospel of Barnabas". Since its translation into English in the first part of the 20th Century by two British scholars, Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, the work has been the subject of much controversy and scholarly study. Scholars date the writing of this work, on linguistic grounds and because of its topical references to issues of the time, to the latter part of the 16th Century. Some scholars suggest that the author may have used some older material, particularly from Jewish-Christian sources.

Its authorship is disputed, but some evidence points to a certain Fra Marino, a 16th Century Spanish convert from Christianity to Islam, who desired to write a gospel which would be in accord with the teachings of Islam. Whoever the author was, he seems to have been a new convert to Islam, however, as the teachings of the book are not fully in agreement with what is taught either by Christianity or by Islam.

One final point should be raised before ending this section. In accepting four inspired gospels, are Christians contradicting the Qur'anic teaching of one Gospel? Why does the Qur'an always refer to one Gospel, *al-Injil*, in the singular?

The answer would seem to be found both in the nature of the four gospels and in early Christian practice in the ancient Middle East. It has already been noted that many of the passages in the four gospels repeat the same stories, often with very little variation from one gospel to the next. Already in the 2nd Century, some Christians began to combine passages from the four gospels into a single long narrative, which they used mainly for liturgical purposes.

Perhaps the most famous of these “synthetic” editions of the gospels was the *Diatessaron*, compiled by Tatian between the years 150-160. Tatian’s *Diatessaron* was highly popular among Syrian Christians and was often called popularly “The Gospel.” For many centuries this was the standard form in which the gospel was read and studied in the region of Greater Syria. It has been suggested that it was to this unifying “edition” of the gospel that the Qur’an refers. The final answer to this question we must leave to the continuing researches of historians.

4. The Epistles of Paul

In the New Testament, 13 letters are attributed to Paul. From a chronological point of view, these letters are the earliest writings of the New Testament. The letters of Paul were usually written to various local Christian churches (Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessalonica) with which he had been associated. Some were written to individuals (Timothy, Titus, Philemon.)

Because of the importance of Paul in the development of early Christianity, some biographical information might be useful. Paul was born in Tarsus between the years 5-15 A.D., which makes him slightly younger than Jesus. A Jew by religion and Roman citizen by nationality, Paul went to Jerusalem about the year 30, that is, about the time of the death of Jesus, to do studies in the Jewish Law.

As Paul confirms in the autobiographical passages in his letters (cf. especially Gal. 1:12-14), he was not a follower of Jesus during his lifetime in Palestine. In fact, he was a great enemy of the Christians. About the year 34, he went to Damascus to see about getting the Christian community in that city suppressed. On the way, he had a dramatic religious experience (recounted in the Acts of the Apostles 9:130 and 22:122) and became a follower of Christ.

His acceptance of Christ brought about a great crisis in Paul’s life. He did not return to Jerusalem but went to Arabia, where he spent three years in solitude and prayer. He came to the conclusion that the message of Christ was not only for Jews but for all people, and he set off on the first of his missionary journeys. He became the greatest missionary of the early Christians and made four long journeys which took him to many parts of the Roman empire. In each city he visited, he formed a small community of Christians, after which he moved on to another place.

Once Paul had left one town and moved on, the local communities formed by his preaching used to write Paul and ask his advice on matters of faith. Sometimes they would report to him moral abuses which had crept into the community, or else they would question him about problems related to the internal organization of the local communities. The letters Paul wrote in response to the various churches are the earliest writings of the New Testament. When Christians assembled for prayer, they

would read Paul's letters, which they considered to be authoritative. They often recopied his letters and sent them on to other local churches.

The first letter of Paul, that to the Christians in Thessalonica, was written about the year 51. Paul followed this with another 12 letters written to Christian communities or individuals in regions located in modern Turkey and Greece, and in the city of Rome. According to Christian tradition, Paul was put to death in Rome about the year 67.

Paul the theologian

Paul is considered by Christians to be the greatest theologian of the New Testament. It may seem surprising that Paul, a man who never knew Jesus during his lifetime, should become the most important interpreter of the meaning of Jesus' life and work. Part of the reason is Paul's background. He was a learned man, trained in the Jewish Scriptures and Law, whereas the twelve apostles and most of the other early disciples were simple fishermen. Paul was also a man of the city and thus able to communicate Jesus' message in terms that could be understood by people of the great cities of the Roman Empire.

But Christians believe, as did Paul himself, that a great part of the answer lies in God's own gifts. God gave the gift of a simple but strong faith in Jesus to the 12 apostles, and to Paul God gave the gift of teaching, of theological reflection on the meaning of Jesus' life.

Paul wrote so much, and his thought is so complex, that it is difficult to give a brief summary of his main ideas. Central to Paul's thinking is that Christians are saved by God's *grace*, not by following the prescriptions of the Jewish Law. Salvation is a free gift from God, not earned in any way by mankind. *Faith* in God, who raised Jesus from the dead, is the essential prerequisite for saving grace. Consequently, Christians, whether of Jewish origin or not, are not bound by the Jewish Law.

Paul taught that since the beginning of history, humankind has been alienated from God because of human sinfulness. Through Jesus' perfect human submission and obedience to God, shown in his life and suffering and death, all humankind has been reconciled to God. This is called the Christian doctrine of the redemption. We will go into this further in Chapter III.

According to Paul, faith demands obedience. Paul never teaches that a person can have faith in Jesus and then can live any way he wants. A Christian life of love and good deeds is the sign that a person has faith. Paul stresses, however, that a person is saved, not by his good deeds, but by God's free gift of grace.

5. The Other Epistles

Besides Paul, several other Christians wrote letters which are included in the New Testament.

The three letters of *John* give the clearest teaching in the Christian Bible on God's loving nature. John teaches: "God is love, and he who abides in love, abides in God, and God in him." It is *love*, for God and for one's neighbor, which must characterize

the life of a Christian. "Let us love one another," writes John, "because love is of God; everyone who loves is born of God and has knowledge of God. A person without love knows nothing of God, for God is love."

Some scholars suggest that the *Letter of James* is the earliest work of the New Testament, written by a Palestinian Christian some time in the years 35-50. However, others hold that the Letter of James was written later. In fact, it is not possible to date the letter, since it does not refer to external events. The letter is traditionally attributed to James, the leader of the Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem and is mainly concerned with moral teaching.

The main concerns of James' letter are that faith without good works is useless; one does not have living faith unless he or she performs good actions. James tells Christians that they must show no favoritism towards the rich, but must treat everyone with equal respect. He insists that acting religious without concern for the poor is a form of hypocrisy. The Letter of James has many similarities with Jewish moral literature, and in his letter James has only two explicit references to Jesus.

The author of the Letter to the *Hebrews* is unknown, and scholars place the date between 80-90. This letter, which gives the impression of having been written by a Jewish priest who became a follower of Christ, stresses the humanity of Jesus. Jesus is human like us in all things, except that he did not sin.

The Letter to the Hebrews understands Jesus as the priest of the "new covenant," the new agreement between God and mankind, which supercedes that made on Mt. Sinai. Jesus offers the perfect sacrifice to God, once for all time. He is mankind's mediator and intercessor before God. The author teaches that all the institutions of the Jewish ceremonial law (the Temple, the priesthood, sacrifice, the covenant) have been fulfilled in Jesus.

There remain three other short epistles in the New Testament: two by *Peter* and the letter of *Jude*. The *First Letter of Peter* is of interest since, from earliest times, it was used by Christians to instruct new members into the values and ideals of the Christian life. It was written at a time when Christians were being persecuted and therefore offers much advice on how Christians should behave in times of adversity.

6. The *Apocalypse of John* (The Book of Revelation)

This is the last book of the Bible and the most difficult to understand. It is written (like the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament) in the form of an *apocalypse*, with complicated, obscure symbolism, made intentionally difficult so that only the "initiated" could grasp what the author was talking about.

Christian tradition holds that this book was written by John, the disciple of Jesus, about the year 94-95. The Apocalypse was written in a time of crisis and persecution against the Christian community. The book envisages history as a continuous struggle between God's people, on one side, and the forces of evil in the world on the other. God's chosen people will have to suffer much, but they should never give up hope, for God, in the end, will win a final and total victory over evil. The Apocalypse ends with a vision of heaven, through the image of the Holy City, the

New Jerusalem, in which God's ultimate triumph, at the end of time, will be universal and include all humankind and the whole cosmos.

7. The Books of the New Testament

A. The Gospels

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

B. The Acts of the Apostles (Part II of Luke's work)

C. The Letters of Paul

Romans

12 Corinthians

Galatians

Ephesians

Philippians

Colossians

12 Thessalonians

12 Timothy

Titus

Philemon

D. Other Letters

Letter to the Hebrews

Letter of James

12 Peter

13 John

Jude

E. The Apocalypse (Revelation)

CHAPTER III

THE BASIC DOCTRINES OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

A. The Foundations of Christian Faith

In this brief survey of the contents of the Christian Scriptures and the Christian understanding of revelation and Biblical inspiration, some of the basic differences between the foundations of Christian and Islamic religion have become evident. These differences lie not only in the diverse roles which the concepts of prophecy, revelation, and Scripture play in each religion, but the differences go deeper into our respective understandings, as Christians and Muslims, of how God speaks and acts in history.

According to the teachings of Islam, God has revealed His message of the one *din* through a series of prophets. Each prophet brought essentially the same message, building upon what went before, until finally God sent the final, perfect, complete message - the Qur'an - through the messenger Muhammad. In doing so, God formed a community of people (*umma*) who would respond to that message and live according to it. Thus, God's revelation through the series of prophets, culminating in the mission and message of Muhammad, can be called the basis of Islamic faith.

I will now try to describe how Christians understand the bases of our faith. I have noted above that the Christian religion is "based on the faith of the apostles." By the apostles, I mean the group of Jesus' disciples, especially the central core of 12 men whom Jesus called to follow him and share in his mission. The disciples lived with Jesus for 13 years, saw his actions and listened to his teaching. They were with him when he was betrayed, and at least one (John) is reported to have been at his cross when he died.

The 12 apostles and the other early disciples of Jesus were convinced that Jesus was the Messiah awaited by the Jewish people, who was sent by God to save them. Jesus' death was thus a moment of crisis. It seemed to them that Jesus was not successful in his Messianic mission. What did it mean? Was it the same old story where the powers of evil seem to win out over the good? They remained together in fear of the Jews and praying for guidance from God.

After three days, small groups (first a group of women, then Mary of Magdala, Peter and John, two disciples traveling near Jerusalem) and then larger groups (10 apostles, then all 11, eventually a large group of 500) believed that they had seen and experienced Christ risen from the dead. These intermittent experiences of the risen Christ went on for slightly over a month (40 days), bringing the disciples joy and hope, but then Christ was seen no more.

The disciples entered another period of crisis. The 12 apostles, together with Mary the mother of Jesus, gathered in Jerusalem to pray and wait to learn what they should do next. This time of prayer and seclusion went on for 10 days. At the end of this time, at the period of the Jewish feast of Pentecost, they had a strong communal experience of God's Spirit working among them. They felt filled with the power of God's Spirit.

They broke their silence, and Peter, the leader of the group, began to preach. As Peter's sermon on that day contains a summary of Christian faith in its earliest form, I would like to cite a portion of that speech which is found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles (2:14-36):

Peter began by quoting the Jewish prophet Joel:

"In the last days, God says,

I will pour out My Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams.

On My servants, both men and women,

I will pour out My Spirit and they will prophesy,

...and everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved."

Then Peter entered into the main body of his talk:
“People of Israel, listen to this:
Jesus of Nazareth was a man
accredited by God to you
by miracles, wonders, and signs,
which God did among you through him,
as you yourselves know.
This man was handed over to you
by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge.
And you, with the help of wicked men,
put him to death by nailing him to the cross.
But God raised him from the dead
and freed him from the agony of death.”

Peter then cited a Psalm which says that God will not allow God’s holy servant to see the corruption of the grave. Peter continued:
“God has raised this Jesus to life,
and we are all witnesses to the fact.
Exalted to the right hand of the Father,
he has received from the Father
the promised Holy Spirit
and has poured out what you now see and hear.
Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this:
God has made this man Jesus, whom you crucified,
both Lord and Christ.”

We can summarize what the apostles believed as a result of their Pentecost experience, which was reflected in the speech of Peter:

- 1) that they were formed into a *community*
- 2) *empowered with God’s Spirit* (the spirit of prophecy)
- 3) with a *mission to preach* the man Jesus
- 4) *whom God raised from the dead* and made Lord and Christ.

This was the essence of the apostles’ faith, which they shared with those drawn towards following what they called “the Way.” In the years after this event, the Christians used to gather in each other’s homes (there were still no “church” buildings), where they would sing the psalms, relate to one another the sayings and deeds of Jesus, and reenact the Last Supper of Jesus (which they called “The Lord’s Supper,” “the Eucharist” (Thanksgiving), or “Agape” (the Love Feast). They were waiting for Jesus’ final return in judgment which would mark the Last Day.

They also gradually accepted new members into the community by means of a process of initiation and instruction (called “catechesis”) which culminated in the rite of Baptism. In Baptism, in which the new Christian was submerged in water and then reemerged in a symbolic rebirth, the early Christians believed that the risen Christ, mysteriously present among them, was leading the new convert into an experience of his own death and resurrection, after which they would lead a new life in the community of Christ’s disciples.

The first generation of Christians had no written Scriptures other than the Jewish Bible. Gradually, Paul, the four evangelists, Peter, Jude, and several others wrote

their professions of faith in what God had accomplished in Christ. The community understood those writings to be normative expressions of their faith and inspired by God. It should be noted that the Pentecost experience included the belief that the community itself was blessed with the Spirit of prophecy (recall the prophecy of Joel with which Peter began his speech). They believed consequently that, through the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, they could produce their own sacred Scriptures.

From this brief account of the foundations of Christian faith it can be seen that it is "the faith of the apostles" which Christians today consider the unchangeable core of their religion. That faith not only preceded the Scriptures in time, but produced and determined the Christian Bible. Even though in the course of centuries, many changes and developments have occurred in the ways in which Christians express their faith, Christian churches and individual Christians must always allow themselves to be "judged" by the faith of the apostles which expressed itself, in a definitive way for all time, in the New Testament.

For this reason, the Bible remains for Christians the starting point for any discussion of the doctrines of our faith. In the following pages, I will try to try to present the main doctrines (beliefs) which Christians find in the Bible, and their development in the tradition of the church which read, prayed, and reflected upon the Scriptures.

B. God

The central belief of Christianity, which it shares with Judaism and Islam, is in the one God. Christians believe that this is the God professed by Abraham, the God of Moses and the Jews, the God of Islam. In other words, Christians consider themselves one of three communities of faith in the *one and same God* coming down from Abraham: the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic communities. This is the same God known as YHWH in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Jews and whom Muslims call "Allah." Actually, many Christians, e.g., Christian Arabs, Maltese, and Indonesians, also call upon God as Allah.

Christians believe GOD to be the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, Creator of the universe and all that is in it, the sustainer of life, merciful and forgiving, transcendent and yet immanently present in this world, the Sovereign Lord, the just Judge of all mankind at the Last Day, the One who gives eternal reward or punishment.

God has an eternal message, God's Word or Wisdom - God's speech by which God reveals God's own self, God's eternal Word which is not created and not different from God.

Christians call God "Father." This is a term which we have inherited from the Jews, who call God their father and the Jewish people God's son. In one of the Psalms of David, God says to the Jewish people, "You are My son, this day I have begotten you." In the prophecy of Hosea, God says, "I called my son (the Jewish people) out of Egypt. Jesus gave the term an intimate, familial connotation and taught his disciples to call God *Abba!*, a term of affection such as children of a family call their own human father (similar to "Daddy" in English or "Baba" in Arabic.) Christians know that "fatherhood" is a metaphor taken from human experience and that God is beyond both generation and gender. In calling upon God as Father, Christians

express their faith that God is like a loving father (or a loving mother!) in the tender care that God bestows upon humanity.

C. Incarnation

The second basic belief of Christians is called the *Incarnation*. We believe that God's eternal, uncreated message *took flesh* and *dwelt among us* in the man Jesus. ("Incarnation" means "taking on or becoming flesh," that is, becoming human.) Another way of saying this is that God's Word (message) was revealed in the human person of Jesus. Thus, as mentioned above (p.11), Jesus does not deliver a revealed book; rather, he embodies God's revelation. He *is* God's revelation. This is a basic difference between Christianity and Islam, in which God's eternal message is delivered in the sacred Books brought by the prophets.

Christians believe that Jesus was a man born, by the power of God, of a holy woman, Mary, who was a virgin. Christians do not believe that Jesus was in any way physically generated by God, or that God had a son in the sexual way humans beget children, or in the way that the ancient Greeks and Romans or Arabs of pre-Islamic Arabia believed about their gods. Christians do not believe that Mary was the wife of God or that any divine "seed" was implanted in Mary. The creed that Christians recite every Sunday states: "Jesus was conceived through the power of God (the Holy Spirit), and was born of the Virgin Mary."

Christians are aware that in calling God our Father and the father of Jesus, we are using a metaphor taken from human experience. In a passage cited above (p. 32), John teaches: "Everyone who loves is born of God." No Christian would think that there is any physical generation involved in the use of such metaphors, which intend to indicate closeness, familiarity, unity, and life together.

The early Councils of the church taught that God's Word was not present in Jesus, living as some foreign object. Jesus was one person, fully human in every way except that he did not sin, but also in union with the divine Word. Like all other human beings, Jesus grew in knowledge and selfunderstanding through his experiences of life and relations with others.

D. Jesus

I will give here in summary form what the Gospels teach about Jesus' life and mission.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the town where David had been born and raised about 1000 years before. The year was approximately 0, that is, the beginning of the Christian era, although the exact year and date is unknown. His mother, Mary, was a virgin who was engaged to be married to Joseph, a carpenter of the town of Nazareth in Galilee in northern Palestine. The Gospel accounts of the birth of Jesus are found in the first chapters of Matthew's Gospel and Luke's Gospel.

The Gospels mention the "brothers and sisters" of Jesus. Catholics and Orthodox interpret the Gospel terms to mean "relatives," that is, cousins or members of the extended families of Mary and Joseph, for these Christian traditions hold that Mary remained a virgin all her life. Consequently, Jesus did not have any brothers and sisters in the physical sense. Protestants tend to interpret the familial terms literally

and maintain that although Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph might have had other children.

In the Qur'an are mentioned some miracles of the child Jesus, such as his speaking in the crib, or bringing clay birds to life. Christians neither affirm nor deny these childhood miracles of Jesus, for they are not mentioned in the Bible. Some Christian devotional books, which date from the early Christians centuries, have accounts which are similar to those in the Qur'an.

At about the age of 30, Jesus left his native town of Nazareth and began to preach. He was preceded in this by his cousin, John (Yahya) the Baptist. We believe that John was a prophet sent by God to warn and urge the Jews to prepare themselves for the one who was to come by turning to God in repentance and obedience. Jesus was originally a disciple of John, but when he was baptized in the Jordan River by John, he had a powerful experience in which he realized that he was chosen by God for a unique prophetic mission. He returned to his homeland of Galilee and began to preach. His basic message was twofold:

- 1) *Repent* (turn away from sin and turn to God)
- 2) *Accept God's governance* over your life (the Kingdom of God).

In addition to preaching and teaching, Jesus:
worked *miracles* and *healed* the sick by God's power,
fought against and cast out *demons*,
forgave sins in the name of God,
comforted the sick, those in mourning, the poor,
associated with sinners,
strongly *criticized* the Jewish leaders and legal scholars,
predicted a great *world crisis*, "the Day of the Lord," in which God would conquer,
formed a *community of disciples* who were to live like him and extend his message to others.

Muslims will recognize that many of these deeds of Jesus are also reported in the Qur'an. The community of followers that Jesus formed originally consisted of an inner core of 12 men (apostles) and a larger group (disciples.) The common people generally welcomed the preaching of Jesus about God's reign and especially appreciated his actions of healing and casting out demons. However, the religious leaders felt threatened by Jesus' teaching and plotted to have him killed. He was betrayed to the Roman authorities by Judas, one of the twelve apostles, and was accused of plotting a violent revolution to overthrow the Roman colonial government.

On the last night of his life, Jesus had a Last Supper with his apostles and gave them bread to eat as his own body and wine to drink as his own blood. The words, as recorded by the Evangelists, were remembered by the Christians and repeated every time they celebrated the Eucharist. Distributing the bread, Jesus said, "Take this, all of you, and eat it, for this is my body." Handing them the cup he said: "Take this, all of you, and drink it. This is the cup of my blood, of the new and eternal covenant. It will be shed for you and for all, so that sins may be forgiven." The reenactment of this Last Supper is the central act of worship of Christians.

When the Last Supper was finished, Jesus went to a small garden in Jerusalem where he was arrested and imprisoned by the Roman authorities, tried and condemned to death. The Gospels teach that Jesus was crucified and died on the cross and was buried.

Had the story ended there, it would have been a tragic, if not particularly exceptional tale. However, what is extraordinary is the Christian belief that after three days, God raised Jesus from the dead. As recounted above, Jesus appeared several times to his disciples and was then taken up into heaven. Shortly thereafter, at the time of Pentecost (pp. 3637), the disciples received the Holy Spirit, which formed them into a community to carry Jesus' message and activity down through history.

E. The titles of Jesus

This belief of what God did and taught in the person of Jesus is central to Christian faith and, in fact, is the unique element of Christianity. In the New Testament, various titles are given to Jesus which describe one or another aspect of his mission.

1. Son of God

Christians call Jesus "the Son of God." By this title, we indicate our belief that God brought Jesus into a unique, intimate relationship with Him, and that God's eternal and uncreated message dwelled in Jesus. The title "Son of God" indicates an intimate mutual knowledge (Jesus knows the Father) and a unity of will (Jesus does only the will of God.)

The title "Son of God" also shows that the early Christians saw Jesus as the "new Israel," the fulfillment of all the Messianic hopes of the Jewish people. Just as the Jewish people had been called "the Son of God" (p. 38), that is, God's beloved chosen people, so Jesus, the "new Israel," is called the Son of God by those who believe in him. It is important to remember that, as mentioned previously, this title does not carry for Christians any connotations of Jesus' being physically generated by God.

2. Son of Man

This is the term by which Jesus most often refers to himself in the Gospels. As spoken of in the Book of Daniel (p. 18), the Son of Man is a figure who comes from heaven before the great crisis of the Last Day, and God gives him judgment and the Kingdom. The apocalyptic current of Jewish Messianic hopes awaited this mysterious figure who would struggle against the forces of evil and ultimately succeed in establishing God's Reign in this world. Christians believe that Jesus fulfilled this hope.

3. Lord

Jesus is called "Lord." This title indicates one who has been given power and authority, as Christians believe were given to Jesus by God when He raised him from the dead. The title indicates the Christian belief that Jesus is the unique mediator between God and mankind.

This title also refers to the presence of the risen Christ in the Christian community. In a surprising use of the term, the first Christians believed so strongly that Christ lived on and continued to act in the community formed by his Spirit that they called the community itself “the Lord.” Especially St. Paul, when he wrote to Christian churches that he was handing on to them what he learned from the Lord, he was communicating to them what had been handed down to him and others by the first Christians.

Finally, when Christians call Jesus “Lord” they indicate their belief that he will return again at the time of the Last Day, when he will sit at the right hand of God as judge. One of the expressions most often used by the early Christians who awaited his Second Coming was “Maranatha!”, which can be translated: “Come, Lord Jesus!”

5. Christ (Messiah, *al-Masîh*)

This title has become almost a second name for Jesus. “Christ” is the translation into Greek of the Hebrew term **Messiah** (literally, “Anointed One”), the promised savior of the Jewish people spoken of by the prophets (p. 17). Similarly, Muslims will note how the Qur’an often refers to Jesus as “Al-Masih,” the Arabic cognate of “Messiah.” The Jewish people believed that the Messiah would come from the line of David. Both Matthew’s Gospel and that of Luke begin with a genealogy which shows Jesus’ descent from David. His birth in Bethlehem, the city of David, was another indication for the early Christians that Jesus was the awaited Messiah.

However, the term was ambiguous, and the Gospels show Jesus reluctant to have this title applied to himself. For many Jews, the Messiah indicated a military leader who would drive out the pagan rulers (in Jesus’ time, the Romans) and establish an earthly kingdom. This is not the way in which Jesus understood his mission. At his trial, he told Pilate, the Roman governor, “Yes, I am a king, but my kingdom is not of this world.”

Although during his lifetime Jesus does not seem to have applied the title “Messiah” to himself, for the reasons mentioned above, after his resurrection, the early Christians were convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah, so that often he is simply called “Christ” as synonymous with his given name, Jesus.

6. The Word of God

Especially in John’s Gospel, Jesus is understood as man in whom God’s Word resided. This eternal message, by which God, in His wisdom, created all things, “pitched its tent” among mankind, taking flesh in the man Jesus. In Jesus, God’s eternal message lived in a person who worked for a living, ate food, had friends and relatives, and who suffered and died, as do all other humans. Jesus was distinguished from the rest of humankind only in that he did not sin.

7. The Servant of the Lord

Jesus understood his mission in terms of the faithful Servant of God (p. 1718) spoken of by the prophet Isaiah (the “Servant Poems” in the Book of Isaiah can be found in: Isaiah 42:19, 49:117, 50:411, 52:1315 and 53:112). In this beautiful poetry,

the prophet Isaiah spoke of a humble servant of God. This servant would be neither handsome nor rich; he would not follow a path of glory and military exploits. He would lead a simple life of faithful obedience to God's will. Although innocent, the Servant would bear upon himself the burden of the people's sins, and through his faithful suffering they would be saved.

The Servant would bring true justice on earth and bear good news to the poor. His tongue would be "sharp" in denouncing evil-doing, but he would offer no resistance to those who would insult and harm him. The Gospels all understand Jesus' passion and death in terms of the Suffering Servant foretold by Isaiah.

8. Other titles of Jesus

Jesus is given other titles in the books of the New Testament. He is called *Savior*, that is, the one through whom God has accomplished humankind's salvation. We will go into the meaning of this title more thoroughly when we treat the Christian concept of the redemption (pp. 5159).

In the Gospels, Jesus is called the *Prophet* who brought God's message to mankind, in his outspoken criticism of hypocrites, harshly legalistic religious leaders, and all those who were oppressing the poor. In the Letter to the Hebrews, he is seen as the *Priest* of the new covenant between God and humankind, who offered once for all time the perfect sacrifice to God.

He is described as the *Good Shepherd* who guides and protects his sheep, and even lays down his life for them. The image of the Good Shepherd is one of the most beloved Biblical images by which Christians grasp the compassion of Jesus, his concern for the weak and the lost, and the power and strength of the one to whom they turn in times of distress and confusion.

In John's Gospel Jesus calls himself the *way*, the *truth*, and the *life*. That is, he is the way to God, the one who brings the truth from God and embodies it in his life, the one who leads the way to reach eternal life.

In Paul's letters to the Christians in Colossae and Ephesus, Jesus is understood as the *image* of the unseen God. The Greek word St. Paul uses is *ikona*, that is, "icon" or picture. One thinks of the many icons in oriental Christian churches. The icon is not identical with the person represented. God is unseen and beyond human conception; because of our human limitations, none of us can see God. But we humans can come to some knowledge of God's attributes and perfections which are made evident, in a human way, by seeing them represented in God's "icon," Jesus.

F. The Trinity (Christian Monotheism)

As mentioned above (p. 38), the central confession of Christian faith is "We believe in One God." It is important to grasp the importance of God's unity in Christianity, because any explanation or theology of God's triune nature which would deny His unity cannot be considered a true expression of Christian faith. As St. Paul said in a discussion whether or not Christians could eat meat sacrificed to idols, "Even if so-called "gods" in heaven or earth existed, for us there is but *one God*, the Father,

from whom all things came and for whom we live.” In other words, when Christians speak about the Trinity, it is an attempt to express God’s oneness.

1. **Tritheism (the belief in three gods)**

In Christian history, some individuals and groups have held speculative views which deny God’s unity and have arrived at the position of three gods. In every case, these views have been strongly rejected and condemned by the Christian churches as incompatible with true Christian teaching.

In the Sixth Century, for example, the views of John Philoponus and some followers were condemned for holding three substantially distinct substances in God. In the Middle Ages, the scholastic philosophers Roscellinus and Gilbert de la Porrée were accused of tritheism. In response, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 formally declared the oneness of God to be an unquestionable and unchangeable element of Christian faith.

At a popular level, some expressions and practices of Christians have tended towards “a practical tritheism.” There are cases in which individual Christians might speak or write in a way which might give the impression that Christians worship three gods. However, such expressions have always been rejected by Christian leaders and theologians as erroneous.

2. **The New Testament and the Trinity**

The Bible never uses the word “trinity.” The first recorded use in Christian history is by Theophilus of Antioch in the year 180. However, the foundations for the concept of the Trinity can be found in the New Testament, most clearly expressed in the baptismal formula in Matthew’s Gospel: “Baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

In the Epistles, the greeting which Christians give one another often has trinitarian implications. E.g.:

“To God’s elect, strangers in the world, who have been chosen by the foreknowledge of God the Father,
by the sanctifying work of the Spirit,
for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood,
grace and peace be yours in abundance.” (1 Peter 1:2)

When referring to God, the New Testament uses the Greek word *ho theos*, (literally “the God.”) This term denotes the eternal God, the Creator, Sustainer of life, the Sovereign Lord. *Ho theos* always indicates the God of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, the God of Moses and the prophets. In the Bible, Jesus is not called *ho theos*, nor is the Holy Spirit. The Biblical authors regularly call God “the Father,” a term which they inherited from Judaism. As mentioned above (p. 38), Jesus taught his disciples to pray to “Our Father in heaven” and he gave the term an intimate, familial connotation (*Abba*). Jesus says he is returning “to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”

Yet the New Testament books affirm a special relationship of Jesus to God, the Father. As we have seen, John speaks of the eternal Word of God taking flesh and

dwelling among us in the person of Jesus. Paul uses a similar phrase: “God was in Christ.” Elsewhere, Paul says that “the goodness and loving kindness of God” was *revealed* in Jesus (Titus 3:4).

In John’s Gospel, Jesus says, “I and the Father are one.” The idea is of a *unique, intimate union of love, will, and activity*. Jesus perfectly carries out the will of the Father. All that Jesus knows or teaches “has been given to me by the Father,” and he adds, “The Father is greater than I.”

To arrive at an idea of the relationship between Jesus and God, a Muslim might recall the concepts of *hulul* (indwelling) and *ittihad* (union) spoken of by Sufi authors. Although most Muslims do not accept these concepts as correct expressions of the Islamic tradition, the Christian Arab authors of the Middle Ages used these very terms to describe the relationship of Jesus to the Father. Because of this special relationship to God, Jesus is called “Son of God.” The title is never used in the sense of physical generation; the idea that God would generate children is as abhorrent to Christians as it is to Muslims. In his *Dictionary of the Bible*, a Biblical reference work widely used by Christians, J. McKenzie states: “The title ‘Son of God’ is a means by which the early church expressed its faith in the absolutely unique character of Jesus.” Because of this special relationship, Christians believe that God communicates to mankind through Jesus. Jesus is God’s servant, God’s messenger. He has been given knowledge by the Father, and the power to judge and to give life. He is a unique mediator between God and humans, and his actions have a special saving efficacy.

The New Testament books refer often to the Holy Spirit as “God’s Spirit.” The Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit differs from that in Islam. In Christian Scriptures and tradition, the Holy Spirit is not identified with the angel Gabriel. The Spirit is not a created being different from God, but God Himself as He lives and acts in human hearts and in the created universe. The Spirit is the powerful immanent presence of God active in the world. Jesus was conceived by the power of the Spirit, and led by the Spirit into the desert. The Gospels picture the Spirit descending upon Jesus in the form of a dove on the occasion of his baptism by John at the beginning of his prophetic ministry.

The Spirit guides and teaches the Christian community, reveals the mysteries of God and inspires the Scriptures. In the New Testament, the Spirit is called the Comforter, the Spirit of wisdom, faith, encouragement, love, and joy.

3. The triune God in Christian history

Although it does not use the term “trinity,” the New Testament does speak of God, called “the Father,” of God’s message taking flesh and dwelling in Jesus, and of God’s powerful immanent presence, called the Spirit. Subsequent generations of Christians have meditated on the Scripture teaching and used their own terms and categories to come to a deeper understanding of what was taught in the Bible.

In the course of their history, Christians have considered God’s triune nature to be a mystery touching very nature of God. As such, it cannot be expressed in any human formulation. Christian writers, theologians, mystics, and leaders have tried to use the New Testament teaching to approach or approximate an understanding of the nature

of God. Even as they do so, they acknowledge that their efforts will necessarily be inadequate.

In every age, Christian thinkers have sought to employ the philosophical concepts and systems of their time in their attempts to express the mystery of the triune God. Church councils and Popes have taught that some specific formulations are erroneous, without limiting the formulation of genuine Christian teaching to their declarations.

Because Christians believe that the church is always guided by God's Holy Spirit, we believe that our understanding of the mystery of the Trinity continues to grow and develop, with Popes, councils, theologians, and mystics all contributing new insights. The early Councils of church leaders (Nicea, Ephesus, Calcedon, Constantinople) defined *one God in three hypostases*. The Greek term *hypostasis* can be translated "a mode of subsistence." The three *hypostases* of God are thus *three ways or modes of God's being and acting*.

The term *hypostasis* was translated into Arabic by the Arab Christian writers as *sifah* (characteristic, aspect) or *uqnum* (from the Greek word *gnome* which means "form.") The same term was translated into Latin as *persona*, a term taken from the world of theater. It originally meant "mask" and came to indicate a role enacted in a theatrical performance. In other words, *persona* meant the way of being and acting undertaken by the actor.

However, in modern languages, "person" no longer means a way of being and acting, but now indicates a distinct, autonomous individual, an independent being who has his own intellect, will, and moral responsibility. Thus, today, when Christians speak about "One God in three persons," it can be easily misunderstood that Christians believe in one God consisting of "three individuals" or "three people," a kind of committee or team made up of three individuals. This is not the correct Christian teaching, and that is not what was intended by the early church councils.

The Arabic word for "person" in the modern sense is *shakhs* (plural: *ashkhâs*). Arab Christian writers have never spoken of the Trinity as "one God in three *ashkhâs*," because they know that Christian faith does not teach that God is made of three people. Christian tradition is unanimous: God is one, in three essential modes of being and acting.

4. **Philosophical formulation of the Trinity**

How can we state positively the Christian teaching of the triune nature of God? Christians believe in one God, whose nature consists of three essential aspects or characteristics (in Arabic, *sifât*). The one God reveals God's nature to be:

- 1) the almighty Creator and Lord of life (whom Christians call "Father" or "our Father")
- 2) the one who revealed His eternal Message in the man Jesus (whom Christians call "Lord")
- 3) the immanent, active, lifegiving presence in the created universe (whom Christians call the Holy Spirit.)

Like Muslims, Christians believe that God's names and qualities are many. However, Christians hold that of all God's countless attributes, three aspects are *eternal*, *intrinsic* to God's nature, and *necessary*:

- 1) God's transcendent nature in Himself (the Father),
- 2) God's speech/Word incarnated in the man Jesus,
- 3) God's immanent, active, lifegiving presence in creation.

These qualities are *eternal*, because there is no essential change in God, whose nature is always the same. They are *intrinsic* to God's nature, not external qualities added on, nor aspects that we humans merely consider God to have. They are *necessary* because, according to the Christian belief of what God has revealed about Himself in the Bible, no one of these three attributes can be denied or taken away from God, for they are essential to God's very nature.

5. God's Plan of Salvation

Modern Christian theologians speak about "the Trinity in God's saving design." God has a plan of salvation for mankind which God is actually carrying out in human history. But history is full of material, changeable events and sinful human individuals. How does the eternal, transcendent, holy God (the wholly "Other") enter this concrete, changing world to save people? Does God remain distant from human affairs and deliver His message from afar, or does God get personally involved in the human situation?

The Christian answer is that God has two ways (or modes) of performing God's saving acts in human history. One way is by incarnating His message, fully and perfectly, in one man, who reveals God in all he says and does. In Jesus' victory over suffering and death, by God's saving power, mankind finds the assurance of what God is doing and will do for each of us. Through him, God forms a community of people who will continue to bear witness to God's salvation which was revealed in that man. This, Christians believe, is what God has done in Jesus.

God's second way of acting in the created universe is through God's powerful presence in the natural world and in every man or woman. This activity of God's is *universal* and touches every person. It is not limited to Christians, but is God present at the depths of each individual, who is active in the lives of Muslims, Jews, and others to teach, guide, and save. Christians call this the universal activity of God's Spirit. For this reason, Christians do not claim that salvation is limited to themselves, but is available to very person who responds to God's Spirit who speaks and acts in the heart of every man and woman.

6. The Christian's Encounter with the triune God

For the Christian, the Trinity is not a mathematical or philosophical exercise, but shapes our personal religious experience. When we encounter God, in prayer and worship, in reading and reflecting on the Bible, even in the demands of daily life, we experience God acting in these "three modes of God's being."

For the believing Christian, GOD is:

- 1) *the transcendent Father* (who made us, to Whom we address our worship and prayers, according to Whose will we strive to live,)

2) who speaks to us and reveals Himself through Jesus (whom we want to follow and to imitate, through whom we are reconciled to the Father, who transforms us to be like him)

3) and *who lives and acts within us as the immanent Spirit.*

7. Trinitarian belief among Christians of Arabia

Although, at the time of Muhammad, there were many Christians in Greater Arabia - the Syrian desert, Sinai, eastern Arabia, southern Arabia (Najran) - there were very few in the Hijaz. Mecca, being the sanctuary of the pagan religion in pre-Islamic times, resisted the spread of Christian ideas. The few Christians who were present in the Hijaz do not seem to have been well educated in Christian faith. There were no schools or institutes of Christian learning, and the Christian Scriptures had not yet been translated into Arabic. As a result, knowledge of genuine Christian teaching apparently was rather primitive.

Archaeological researches in pre-Islamic Arabia show that Christians called upon God by the Arabic word *Al-lah* (literally, "the God,") but their understanding of God often owed more to traditional Semitic concepts than to sound Christian teaching. In his book, *Christianity in Arabia before the Time of Muhammad*, Trimmingham speaks of "the traditional Semitic trinity." Although various Arab tribes gave different names to these pagan deities, the basic pattern was as follows:

Allâh ("the High God") --- Allât ("the Great Mother")

Ba'al ("the Lord")

In the pagan understanding, Allâh, the High God, impregnated his consort, Allât, the Great Mother, with the divine seed and they produced a son, Ba'al, which means "the Lord." We know that the ancient Greeks and Romans, as well as other local pantheons in various parts of the world, had similar beliefs. Such an idea of God having wives and children is abhorrent to the faith traditions that descend from Abraham. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all believe that the One God is far too holy and exalted to be involved in such mundane affairs.

However, the traditional pagan concept seems to have been accepted by some Arab Christian converts who were poorly instructed in the Christian faith. They identified Allâh, the High God, as the Father, Mary as the Great Mother, and Christ as the Lord who was the physically generated son of Allâh and Mary.

This is a distortion of the true belief of Christians, and knowledgeable Christian theologians and leaders have always condemned it. The Qur'an also condemns this belief as unworthy of the nature of God. Christians agree with the teaching of the Qur'an that God is far beyond generating a son, or that Mary and Jesus are two gods in addition to Allah, or that Allah is just one of three gods.

As one Christian reader of the Qur'an, I do not discover in the Qur'an any reference to the traditional teaching of the orthodox Christian churches on the triune nature of God. There is nothing surprising in this, since the Qur'an was condemning the primitive belief of semi-Christianized paganism found in Arabia at that time, a distorted belief which the Christian churches also reject.

I raise this point, not to arouse controversy, but to point out that Christians today, like wellinstructed Christians at all times, do not hold that which is condemned in the Qur'an. Much dialogue will be necessary between Muslims and Christians to get beyond what has often in the past been a stumbling block to better understanding between the followers of Christianity and Islam. I do not say that Christians and Muslims hold the same view of God, or that both are saying the same thing in different words. There are differences, certainly, but it is only through honest dialogue that we will eventually be able to distinguish between apparent divergences, misunderstandings, and real differences.

G. Mary

Christians *never* regard Mary as the wife of God. We view her as a holy, virginal, human woman. As the mother of Jesus, we think of her affectionately as if she were our own mother. We believe that through a special grace of God, Mary never sinned. Many Christians, especially those of the Orthodox and Catholic traditions, visit her shrines (e.g., Ephesus in Turkey, Nazareth in Palestine, Guadalupe in Mexico, Fatima in Portugal, Lourdes in France, etc.), and keep her picture in churches, not to worship her (Christians worship only God), but out of loving fondness and honor. Christians ask Mary to pray to God with them and for them.

Jesus was conceived in her virginal womb by God's power, Christians believe, and at that moment God's eternal Message "took flesh" in him. This is the basis for the title *Theotokos* (Mother of God) which many Christians use to honor Mary. However, it is important to remember that all Christians know that the eternal God has no mother, and that God has never physically generated a son.

H. The Redemption

The Christian doctrine of the redemption presupposes a more basic issue, that is, do people feel a need for salvation, and if so, how and by whom is that salvation accomplished. All persons, religious or nonreligious, look at their personal lives and their societies and find a pattern of ambiguities and sufferings and a lack of completeness or fulfillment. People, according to their beliefs, respond to this human experience in various ways.

Modern existentialist philosophies are pessimistic, holding that human existence is totally and irremediably absurd, and that frank recognition of this fact is the basis of authentic living. No salvation is possible. A very different answer is given by Marxist ideologies, which hold that human suffering and lack of self-realization are the result of oppressive social structures. By changing the social and economic order to make it more just and humane, people, in effect, save themselves. Secular humanists do not raise the question of salvation. They maintain that a person should live according to humanitarian values and in doing so try to make the world a better place. Salvation is not an issue.

Amidst these various worldviews and ideologies, Islam and Christianity hold positions which are surprisingly similar. Both agree that men and women are in need of salvation, and that a person is not able to achieve one's own salvation. This can only come from God. It is in their answer to the question of how God accomplishes this salvation that the uniqueness of both Christianity and Islam can be seen.

According to Islam, God sends prophets with the guidance necessary for following the Straight Path that leads to salvation. God supports the believer with grace (*na'mah, rahmah*), and is prompt and generous in forgiving the sinner who repents. Muslims often ask why, since God is both allpowerful and allmerciful, Christians believe that God needed the death of Jesus on the cross to accomplish mankind's salvation. To Muslims, the death of Christ seems superfluous, since God has both the ability (God is all-powerful) and the desire (God is all-merciful) to forgive any sinner who turns to God in sincere repentance. In other words, why does God's forgiveness not simply come to repentant individuals in all times and places from "on high"? Why do Christians hold that God has accomplished human liberation from sin as the result of a specific historical event, the death of Jesus?

Some of the traditional answers given by Christians are not convincing. One theory, which goes back to *Origen* (p. 78) in the 3rd Century, was that the devil had certain rights over man due to the original sin of Adam, but Satan was defeated when he wrongly tried to extend the dominion of death over the sinless Christ. Christians today do not defend this theory.

In the Middle Ages, *Anselm* (p. 92) best formulated what can be called the "satisfaction" theory. The gravity of offenses is measured by the dignity of the one who is offended. In the case of human sin, this offense against the infinitely great and good God must have an adequate satisfaction. Nothing less than the death of God's own son is sufficient to make up for the wrong committed by human sin.

However, modern Christian theologians criticize this "satisfaction" theory in that it distorts the goodness and justice of God. What loving and just God would demand the blood of the sinless Christ, in a particularly vicious form of death by torture, in reparation for the sins of others? No human would be so unfair and cruel. How could we claim such unworthy behavior of God?

If Christians today find the earlier explanations proposed by Origen, Anselm and others unacceptable, what can we say positively about the meaning of the redemption as a way of understanding how God acts in history to save men and women?

One place to begin would be to remember that Jesus did not want to die, and God did not desire Jesus' death on the cross. What Jesus wanted was for people to accept his message, repent of their sins, and do God's will. Moreover, God who never desires or wills sin, could not have wanted the many sinful acts and hateful attitudes involved in Judas' betrayal of Jesus, the rejection and treachery of the Jewish leaders, and the unjust death sentence of an innocent man by the Roman authorities. Secondly, it was not absolutely necessary that God incarnate His message in the man Jesus, nor that Jesus' death on the cross have a saving effect for mankind. God is supremely free and not constrained by any events of history, or by history itself, and God could have worked in some other way. Christians believe that God freely chose to accomplish mankind's salvation through Jesus.

Has God shown that God exercises saving power through human agents or mediators? I believe that Christianity and Islam agree that God has done this. God uses the prophets as messengers to bring God's Word. But the prophetic mission is not limited solely to the work of bringing a message. Prophets also accomplish other

tasks in God's name. Through Abraham, God also produced a people who would believe in Him and do His will. Through Moses, God led His people out of Egypt.

Muslims believe that Muhammad was not only the bearer of the Qur'anic message, but that he also strove to construct a social and political order formed according to Islamic principles. In his actions and decisions, he was the model Muslim, a prophet who not only delivered the Qur'an but also lived according to its message in an exemplary way, so that his words and actions become *sunna* for the Islamic community.

So too with Jesus, Christians believe that God not only incarnated God's eternal Word or message in Jesus, but that his actions have a special saving efficacy. He began as a simple preacher, urging men to repent and turn away from sin and to accept God's sovereignty. But he also worked miracles by the power of God, confronted and expelled demons, defended those who were oppressed by the regulations of the religious leaders, and condemned those who were corrupting pure religion by making it into a profitable business. He drove the moneychangers out of the Temple with a whip made from cords, and he engaged in harsh debates with the Jewish legal scholars.

In the course of his ministry, Jesus realized that the path which he had taken was putting him on a "collision course" with human selfishness, greed, and thirst for power. The Gospels record several attempts on Jesus' life. It became clear to him, especially by the time of his last visit to Jerusalem, that he would not escape with his life from the situation of hatred in which he found himself. His apostles were warning him not to go to Jerusalem because of rumors of the plots against him which were circulating. Statements of Jesus confirm that he knew that such stories were not idle tales.

This is not to say that Jesus had an "martyr complex." He did not want to suffer and die. The author of the *Epistle to the Hebrews* says: "During his life on earth, Jesus offered up prayer and entreaty, aloud and in silent tears, to the One who had the power to save him from death, and he submitted so humbly that his prayer was heard" (Heb:5:7). After the Last Supper, Jesus retired to a garden to pray, and expressed to God his inner revulsion at the suffering and death that were likely to befall him: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup (of suffering) away from me. Nevertheless, let Your will be done, not mine."

Although Jesus did not want suffering and death, he freely accepted all that as the wholly predictable consequence of his call to preach God's Word without compromise or flight. He was still at prayer in the Garden that the Roman soldiers captured him, after which he was tried, sentenced to death, and crucified. The Gospels record that Pilate, the Roman governor, offered Jesus a "way out"; if Jesus would retract or soften his teaching, Pilate could release him. But Jesus refused, not because he wanted to die, but because he was faithful and obedient to the mission which he was convinced that God had given him.

For Christians, therefore, the question is not why Jesus *had* to die, or whether God *wanted* him to die, but rather, given the fact that this is the tragic way his prophetic ministry ended, "What has God achieved for us in the death of Jesus and what does God teach us by it?" There are three models by which Christians understand the

death of Jesus, which correspond to the ways in which people feel a need for salvation.

1. Liberation from sin and death

People feel themselves oppressed by forces outside of themselves which hold them captive and prevent them from attaining true happiness. St. Paul says that we have been freed from the powers of sin, death, and demonic forces. I am not referring here to personal sin so much as those attitudes, structures, and destructive values which are bigger than any individual and lead us to act in ways opposed to God's will. These forces of sin vary from culture to culture and from age to age, but are always present in one form or another.

In some cases, it might be the fear of the powerful forces of nature, which might strike one down if he breaks the taboos. In secular, globalized market societies it might be a gross materialism and consumerism which teaches that people will be happy so long as they are surrounded by beautiful objects and constantly enjoying new and exciting pleasures. Elsewhere, it could be the concept of family honor or racial pride which clouds sound judgment and makes people do terrible things that otherwise they would know to be wrong. Some societies preach youth, beauty, wealth, power or success as the factors which bring true happiness, which is a particularly bitter message for the vast majority of people, who are not, in fact, young, beautiful, rich, powerful or successful.

There is no doubt that such things are oppressive and that they cause human misery. The Bible calls these societal attitudes "the sin of the world," for which no one is individually responsible, but which negatively affect the lives of us all. Christian theologians speak of "original" sin, in the sense that this sinful environment has exerted its influence on human life ever since the beginnings of the human race.

But there is more. There is death which awaits us all. Does it all end in annihilation? Anyone who has ever suffered the loss of a loved one is confronted by the apparent waste and meaninglessness. Is there any way to make sense out of it?

Christians understand Jesus' death as the *liberation* from the forces of sin and death. He lived among us in innocence, preaching love and proving it by his service of the poor and the sick, calling people to truth and obedience to God. When powerful persons rejected his teaching, he did not run away from death, nor did he oppose them with the same weapons of force and falsehood they were using against him. Luke's Gospel records Jesus' words as he was dying on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

His death by crucifixion was brutally painful, a despised form of execution reserved for slaves and evildoers. Most of his followers, including his closest apostles, abandoned him. Dying young (about 30 years old), mocked and powerless before his enemies, his features disfigured by his own blood and wounds, an apparent failure in the mission he had set for himself, Jesus is the epitome of all that worldly wisdom says we should *not* be.

Yet Christians believe that God raised this man Jesus from the dead, and in doing so *confirmed* Jesus' ministry, all that he taught and the way he lived. Christians see in

God's raising of Jesus to new life the *victory* over sin and death. Jesus triumphed over sin, not by fighting back with the same human methods as his enemies, but by placing his trust in God and submitting himself in obedience to God, even to death on the cross. To his enemies, they thought they had settled the question of Jesus by crucifying him, but they were wrong. It only seemed like that to them. God raised him up, victorious over the forces of sin.

Similarly, Jesus triumphed over death in his resurrection. For Christians, Jesus' resurrection is the sign of God's mighty power to bring life out of even the most shameful death, to bring success out of the most apparent failure, to transform even the most hideous suffering into joy. In raising Jesus, God shows that death, the final enemy of us all, has no lasting power over us. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says, "Death, where is your victory? Where is your sting?"

In Christian churches, schools, and homes, one will always see a cross with Jesus' body hanging on it. For Christians, the cross has become the central symbol of our faith. Muslim friends have often mentioned to me that this seems like a rather morbid fascination with suffering and death. It is not that, but a constant reminder that God has triumphed over sin and death, and all those forces of evil which bind and oppress mankind.

One might seriously object that this is unrealistic. It is clear to everyone that we live in a world where sin and death still abound. Injustice, violence, cruelty, and hatred still exist and people still die. The New Testament teaches that God has overcome these forces through the death of Jesus and has shown how sin and death need not control our lives. But the final victory is still to come, and so Christians live and work in this world with hope in God's power and await the time when God's victory will be fully manifest in the created world.

2. Atonement for sin

The effects of sin do not remain outside the human person. In the *Psalms* of David, there are repeated pleas to "cleanse me of my guilt." People feel themselves contaminated, stained, dirtied by their involvement in sinful mankind. In almost all religions, washing the body symbolizes our recognition of the contamination of sin and our need for the cleansing power of God's grace. In Judaism and Islam, there is the *wudu'*, the purification with water before prayer. In Christianity the first sacrament of God's power is baptism (p. 60), an immersion in water. We all realize that we have been tainted and soiled by sin and feel a need to have our guilt washed away.

The second way by which Christians understand the death of Jesus is in terms of "atonement," or expiation for sin. At the level of the individual person, Christians are in agreement with Muslims that when a person gives oneself over to sin, their proper relationship with God is disrupted. He is actually wronging himself. When persons repent, God forgives them and wipes out their personal or "subjective" guilt.

While this is true, there remains the enormity of the objective wrong which sin commits against the goodness of God and the moral order. This is something which goes beyond the individual sinner and contaminates the whole human race. This is the source of our feelings of "uncleanness" and the need to be cleansed. To ignore

this disruption of the moral order brought about by sin and concentrate solely on personal guilt seems to Christians to make God's forgiveness "cheap" and almost to treat evil lightly.

Just as all people share in the "objective" disorder caused by sin, so can one representative of mankind atone for that wrong. Christians believe that Jesus accomplished this atonement for the objective disruption of sin once for all time. By his act of perfect submission and obedience, Jesus broke down the barrier which sin erects between the infinitely good God and rebellious humankind. This act of reconciliation could not be performed by anyone, but only by one who was himself without sin and who was fully united to divine Wisdom, that is, the right order of the universe.

Some Christian preachers have pictured Jesus' act of atonement as satisfying an angry God who demanded the death of God's chosen one. This is a distortion of the Christian notion of atonement and has no basis in New Testament teaching. It makes God into a sadistic monster who would act so vengefully and cruelly. The Christian teaching is, rather, that Jesus freely accepted his suffering and death in order to act as representative of the human race to atone for all the sins ever committed against God.

Christians sometimes speak of Jesus' death in terms of sacrifice. What were the sacrifices of the Jews in the Old Testament? They were not meant to appease an angry God or to bribe God into doing things which God would not otherwise do. This is what sacrifice meant for pagans, but in the Bible, it is God, not people, who takes the initiative for sacrifice. It is God who sets up rites by which God's people can come into union with Him. It is God who provides opportunities for people to pledge themselves to live and die in obedience to Him.

In their sacrifices, the Jewish priests would sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice on the altar (which symbolized God) and sprinkle some of the blood on the people. This symbolic act expressed the communion of life shared between God and God's people that had been reenacted in the sacrifice. This was the meaning of the *covenant*, that God would be *their* God and they would be *God's* people.

Christians see in Jesus' death the establishment of the *new covenant* between God and all mankind, not merely with the Jewish people. At the Last Supper, Jesus said, "Take this and drink it. This is my blood of the new covenant, which will be poured out for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sins." This new life is one where the objective guilt for sin is no longer an obstacle, and the whole human race has been reconciled to God by Jesus as its representative.

3. Transforming love

This brings us to the third model by which Christians understand the death of Jesus. It is that of the power of love which can touch and change human hearts and transform a person's life. In John's Gospel, Jesus says, "There is no greater love than that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus' act of love has the power to change us because of his innocence and his unique relationship to God.

This corresponds to the third way in which people feel a need for salvation. It is not only forces outside of us which oppress us, not only the sense of contamination which comes from being part of sinful humanity, it is also our own interior drives which lead us to rebel against God and to harm ourselves and others. This is the subjective nature of sin and guilt which I mentioned earlier. Left to ourselves, we would, through our personal greed, pride, anger, lust, envy, and laziness, destroy our own lives and those of others. It is not enough to talk about forgiveness. We still need to be changed, to have our selfish drives transformed into attitudes and actions in accord with the way that God wants us to live.

When we have sinned and repent, God forgives us, but we still need the power of God to transform us into what God knows we could be and what God desires us to become. Christians find in the example of Jesus the inspiration and the grace to imitate him and to be transformed by him.

It can be said that the model of selfless love which Jesus gave is the central ideal that Jesus handed on to his disciples. It has inspired men and women to high degrees of generosity and forgiveness. Many Christians have been guided by Jesus' words after he washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper, "I have given you an example. If I, who am your master, have washed your feet, so you should wash each other's feet."

Muslims often point out that these are beautiful words, but that it is difficult to see them actually practiced in the life of Christians. Christians do not seem to be any more generous, loving, serving, or forgiving than anyone else. Christian history itself is a string of wars, vengeance, ambition, greed, intolerance, and colonial domination. It was Christians who invented the Inquisition and carried out the massacres of the Crusades; it was in Christian Europe that the Holocaust occurred in which millions of Jews, Gypsies, and others were murdered.

This criticism is correct and stands as a strong indictment of the Christian people. This evil-doing can only be explained as the deeds of Christians who ignored or refused to follow the central teaching and example given them by Jesus. However, it is by looking, rather, at those Christians who have allowed the grace of Christ's transforming love to guide and form their behavior that one can see clearly the effects of Jesus' loving act.

History records not only the wars and self-seeking of Christians, but also the individuals and groups who were moved to love and service and forgiveness by the example of Jesus. One might recall the early Christians who died rather than join the Roman armies, Christian parents who teach their children that following Jesus means loving and forgiving others, nuns who devote their lives to teaching and caring for the sick, individuals like Francis of Assisi (p. 102) who at the height of the Crusades went in peace and brotherhood to meet the Sultan in Egypt. The Christian reality is not only Crusades, Inquisition, and colonialism. It is also such people, and it is in their lives that the effects of the third model of redemption can be seen. The example of Jesus on the cross has touched the lives of some Christians and been the inspiration that has transformed them into more loving, self-giving, forgiving people.

J. Church and Sacraments

I am using the word “church” here in its first and basic meaning of the *community* of Christians, not in the derived meanings of the *building* where worship is performed or that of the *organizational structures* which have evolved in the course of history. Thus, “church” indicates the Christian equivalent of the Islamic *umma*, rather than the equivalent of *jami’* or *masjid*.

By *sacrament* we mean a visible act or event in which God offers saving grace. In other words, a sacrament is a visible “sign” of God’s invisible activity.

Christians hold that the church, the community of Christians, exists in the world as a sign of what God has accomplished and continues to accomplish for mankind through the risen Christ. God’s work of *reconciliation* (reconciling man to Himself and to one another) and *sanctification* (making people holy, that is, living in loving obedience to God) goes on within and also outside the Christian church (e.g., Christians believe that God is at work within the Islamic community). The church, the worldwide Christian community, exists to bear witness to God’s activities of reconciliation and sanctification in history and to the way in which, according to the belief of Christians, God has accomplished this salvation of mankind.

Christians believe that the risen Christ lives in and with his community and continues to do the same things he did during his lifetime in Palestine. That is, he continues to teach, pray, serve, heal, feed, comfort, forgive, suffer, die. These invisible actions of Christ are made visible in the sacramental life of the community. In other words, when a Christian participates in a sacramental action, he believes that he is meeting the risen Christ who offers him God’s saving grace.

Almost all Christians agree that the main sacramental actions are two: *Baptism* and the *Eucharist*. In addition to these two central sacraments, Orthodox and Catholic Christians hold for other sacramental actions, making the total number seven. Protestants vary in their numbering of the Sacraments, although most accept the two primary sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist. Several Protestant churches, like Quakers and Salvation Army, have no sacraments.

1. **Baptism**

The first sacrament, which is a basic condition for all the others, is Baptism. This is the *initiation* into the Christian community. In Baptism, an individual takes upon himself the church’s historical task, that is, to bear witness to God’s saving actions in Jesus. Christians believe that all the effects of Jesus’ life and death are communicated to them by God in Baptism. A Christian is baptized only once, at the time of one’s entrance into the Christian community.

The form of Baptism always includes some kind of submersion in water. In some churches, it is the custom to pour water over the head of the person to be baptized. In other churches, there is a pool of water, and the baptized person goes down into the pool and reemerges. Some Christians prefer to use natural bodies of water, such as rivers or lakes. The words spoken at the time of baptism are taken from Matthew’s gospel, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Some Protestant churches baptize only in the name of Jesus.

Since ancient times, it has been the custom to baptize new members of the community at the time of the greatest of Christian celebrations, the *Paschal* feast. This feast, which takes place over three days, comes in the spring at approximately the same time as the Jewish Passover feast.

The feast has three distinct acts of worship, each of which concentrates on one of the events in the life of Jesus on which Christian faith is based:

- 1) On Thursday evening, there is the commemoration of the *Last Supper* of Jesus.
- 2) On Friday, at noontime, Christians recall the *death* of Jesus on the cross.
- 3) Finally, on Saturday evening/Sunday morning, there is the *Paschal celebration* of God's raising Jesus to life.

The most important of these celebrations is the third. The Paschal celebration originally began on Saturday evening and lasted all night, ending about dawn on Easter Sunday morning (the hour, according to the Gospels, of Jesus' resurrection.) Today, the worship service is usually compressed into 24 hours. It is a Christian tradition that in the course of this Paschal celebration the new members of the Christian community make their profession of faith and are baptized. The other Christians present take the occasion to renew their profession of faith and their baptismal promises and to recommit themselves to leading a Christian life.

2. Confirmation

The second sacrament, Confirmation, is actually the second part of the Christian rite of initiation, and in Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches, the rite is administered simultaneously with Baptism. In Baptism, the emphasis is on salvation from sin. God reconciles the sinner to Himself and calls him to live a life of "faith in obedience." In Confirmation, the emphasis is on the positive aspect of bearing witness to what God has accomplished for mankind in Jesus and being strengthened for this task by the Holy Spirit. Since salvation is not merely the forgiveness of sin but a call to continue Jesus' mission to transform society with values that are in accord with God's will, Confirmation strengthens the confirmed person for the social responsibilities of the adult Christian.

Confirmation, which is performed by the bishop or his delegate, consists basically in anointing the person to be confirmed with oil and the words "Receive the Holy Spirit that you may bear witness to Christ." (The various churches use variations on this basic formula.)

When adults enter the church, they receive the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation together, as two parts of the same rite of initiation. When babies are baptized, confirmation often takes place later, shortly before or after puberty. Some Protestant churches do not baptize infants, as they believe that a conscious decision to follow Christ should precede Baptism.

3. Matrimony (Christian Marriage)

There are two sacraments of the states of life. The first is matrimony (Christian marriage.) For Christians, marriage is never something secular; it is a state of life which symbolizes God's love for mankind. In the loving union of two persons, who commit themselves to live together in mutual fidelity and solicitude, to form a

domestic environment in which children can be born and raised to live with faith in God, Christians see a human symbol of the way in which God acts towards all men and women. God loves each individual person, cares for people, and is faithful to God's promises. In matrimony, Christians promise to make their marriage a living sign of this love of God for mankind and of Christ for the community of his disciples. For this reason, Christians consider marriage to be a lifetime commitment and do not approve divorce and remarriage while the partner is living.

5. Holy Orders

The other sacrament of a state of life is Holy Orders. This is a commitment to devote one's life to the service of the Christian community and, through it, to all people.

There are three orders:

- 1) The *bishop* represents Christ in a local region, called a diocese, as *teacher*, *leader* of worship, and *servant*.
- 2) The *priest* helps the bishop in those three roles at the level of the local community of Christians.
- 3) The *deacon* is to preach God's Word in the Bible, and to help the poor, aged, sick, and dying.

All other titles in the church, e.g., pope, patriarch, archbishop, archimandrite, cardinal, monsignor, etc., indicate specific tasks in the community, but have no sacramental significance.

6. Reconciliation

Two sacraments are directed to moments of crisis in the lives of Christians. In the sacrament of *reconciliation* (also called the sacrament of *penance*), the Christian comes to hear God's message of forgiveness. Like Muslims, Christians believe that when they repent of their sins and turn to God, God immediately forgives them. Christians come to the Sacrament of Reconciliation to hear God's words of forgiveness and to be reminded how God has brought about this ready forgiveness, that is, through God's saving actions in the person and life of Jesus. Because sin is not merely a private offense against God, but has social implications and effects, Christians accept this sign of God's forgiveness in the context of the community, the church.

The sacrament of penance has taken different forms over the centuries. In the early centuries of the church, sinners would often publicly confess their sins and perform a public penance. In later ages, individual confession of sins became the usual way to celebrate this sacrament. Today the communitarian aspect of the sacrament is once again being more strongly emphasized.

6. Anointing of the Sick

The other sacrament for times of crisis is the Anointing of the Sick. Just as sin, the sickness of the soul, threatens one's relationship to God, so the sickness of the body is a human crisis that threatens to put an end to earthly life itself. In both situations, the Christian comes to hear God's saving message.

Christians believe that Christ is sent by God to be with those who are sick, to comfort and heal them, and to prepare them for death. The sacrament is a sign of God's loving presence, a reminder that God has not abandoned the sick person. In other words, the sacrament is meant to counter the intense loneliness that one can feel in bodily sickness, especially as the body sinks slowly into death. The Anointing of the Sick shows the sick person that he is not alone, but that Christ is with him leading him to God, and that there is a community of fellow believers praying for him and with him.

7. The Eucharist

For the Christian, the Eucharist is not just "one of the seven sacraments." It is *the central act of Christian faith and worship*. The word "Eucharist" means "giving thanks." It is the commemoration and reenactment of Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples on the night before he died. During the supper, Jesus gave the bread and wine to his disciples as his own body and blood. Christians believe that in sharing this communion meal, Jesus is truly present with us. Just as Moses' covenant between God and the Jewish people was sealed by the blood of the sacrifices on Mount Sinai, so Christians believe that God's new covenant has been sealed in the blood of Jesus.

Each Christian church has devised its own ceremonies or rites for the celebration of the Eucharist. However, two elements are essential and always present:

- 1) readings from the Bible (usually 2 or 3),
- 2) the communion meal.

In the blessing over the bread and wine, the one who presides recounts the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. In the Orthodox and Catholic churches, the congregation celebrating the Eucharist is always led by the bishop or his representative, a priest. In addition to the readings and the communion meal, there are hymns, prayers of petition and praise, a sermon (an explanation of the Biblical passages which had just been read, with an application to the daily lives of Christians) and a greeting of peace.

Many Protestants feel that the Eucharist is so important that it should be prepared for carefully and celebrated only occasionally. They do not want it to come habitual or take the place of reading and studying the Bible. Hence in some Protestant churches the Lord's Supper is celebrated several times a year, for example, once a month.

Orthodox Christians understand the Eucharist as the climax of the worship of the Divine Office, a solemn recitation of psalms and other prayers. They celebrate the Eucharist in connection with and immediately following the Office on Sundays and Feast Days.

Catholics consider the Eucharist to be the heart of daily worship to God, and hence they celebrate the Eucharist daily. While all Catholics are expected to take part in the Sunday Eucharistic worship, many Catholics try to celebrate the Eucharist (in common parlance, "attend Mass") every day.

CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

A. The Apostolic Church

The Christian community which produced and is described in the books of the New Testament is called the “Apostolic Church,” that is, the church of the apostles and first generations of Christians. This period covers approximately the years 30-100, the period between Pentecost (p. 36) and the writing of the last book of the Bible.

The Acts of the Apostles (2:42-47) describes the earliest Christian community in Jerusalem:

“They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. They lived in reverent fear, because of the many signs and wonders performed by the apostles. Those who believed shared all things in common; they would sell their property and goods and divide everything on the basis of the need of each. They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread. With joyful and sincere hearts they took their meals in common, praising God and winning the approval of all.

In time, this “approval” became enmity, first on the part of the Jews, and then from the Roman Empire. Under the leadership of *James*, a relative of Jesus, a Jewish-Christian community continued to grow in Jerusalem and Palestine. These Christians thought of themselves as Jews, performed their prayers in the Jerusalem Temple, and followed the dietary and ritual requirements of the Jewish Law. They formed, in effect, a Jewish sect distinguished from other Jews by their belief that the Jewish Messiah had come in the person of Jesus.

Since missionaries like *Paul* and *Barnabas* had begun to preach to non-Jews, the first great crisis which faced the church was whether the converts from the Roman religion should first become Jews and accept the Jewish Law before they could become Christians. Paul’s view, to which Peter and James agreed, was that when God raised Jesus from the dead, a new period of God’s salvation was begun, and Christians were no longer bound to follow the regulations of the Jewish Law.

Eventually, through the preaching of the apostles, more and more converts joined from the pagan religions of the Roman Empire and the Christian church became predominantly of Gentile (non-Jewish) origin. It consisted of small communities of believers scattered throughout the cities of the Roman Empire: in Syria, Anatolia, Greece, Egypt, Rome. Christian tradition holds that Peter was accepted as the leader, first in Jerusalem and Antioch, and finally in Rome, where he was put to death at the time of the Emperor Nero.

B. The Age of Persecution

The Christian community, which at first believed that Jesus would be returning soon in glory, settled down to what, as it became increasingly apparent, would be a long wait before the Last Day. While the earliest books of the New Testament (e.g., 12

Thessalonians) are full of eager expectation of the imminent return of Jesus, the last books (12 Timothy, Titus, 12 Peter) are more concerned with organizing the community and with moral instruction on how a Christian life is to be carried on in this world.

Little by little, community organization evolved. Bishops presided over the church in each locality. Priests assisted them. Deacons took care of the aged, the poor, and performed other charitable works. In addition, it was recognized that in the community some individuals had been granted special gifts which were to be used for the building up of the church: there were apostles, prophets (who made “inspired statements”), evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Others had the gifts of miracles, healing, and languages.

The Roman officials were often tolerant, but sometimes they persecuted the Christians. Many, including Peter and Paul, were put to death for professing their faith.

Gradually, various centers gained special importance and authority: *Rome* (where, according to tradition, Peter had the role of leadership), *Jerusalem*, *Alexandria*, and *Antioch*. The bishops governing these cities and the surrounding region were called *patriarchs*. In each region, sub-districts called dioceses were formed and governed locally by *bishops* (literally, “overseers”). In the Fourth Century, when Constantine built his new capital in Byzantium (which he renamed *Constantinople*), this city also became one of the principal places where the community was governed by a patriarch.

In contrast to the view of most Christians who came to realize that Jesus’ final return was not imminent, a minority of Christians still believed that Jesus would be returning very soon. They interpreted literally the battles between good and evil in the Book of Apocalypse in the context of the persecutions which the Christians were suffering in the Roman Empire. They expected Jesus to return and establish a reign of 1000 years, after which would be the Day of Judgment. In Christian history, there have always been small sects of Christians, called “apocalyptic” or “millenarian” (meaning “1000 years”) sects, who have prepared themselves for the final return of Jesus.

C. Christological controversies and the Early Councils

Christian thinkers in parts of the Roman Empire began to use the philosophical terms and concepts of their time to express the Christian faith. In this way, Greek philosophy became the normal medium for both Christian theology and works of apologetics (defenses of Christianity against pagan critics).

Some early Christians, influenced by *Gnostic* ideas, denied the humanity of Jesus. The gnostics regarded Jesus as an angelic being, bringing secret knowledge from God. The *Docetists* held that Jesus only “appeared” to be human, but had no human body and did not die on the cross. The Christian churches in the Second Century rejected Gnostic and Docetist teachings and affirmed the real humanity of Jesus.

1. The Council of Nicea, 325

A controversy between *Athanasius* and *Arius*, two theologians of Alexandria, spread to all parts of the Christian church and led to the calling of the first Ecumenical (worldwide) Council in Nicea. Athanasius (d. 373) and Arius (d. 336) agreed that God's Word took flesh and dwelt in the man Jesus. However, they differed concerning the nature of the Word. Athanasius held that the Word, God's Speech which took flesh in Jesus, was *eternal* and *uncreated*, and was with God in the beginning.

Arius held that the Word of God was *not eternal*, but *created* in time by God before the creation of the universe. According to Arius, that which took flesh in Jesus was not the eternal, uncreated Word, but a creature. (Muslims who have studied *kalam* literature will see some parallels with the controversy about the Word of God which later developed among Muslim theologians. The Ash'arite position is similar to that of Athanasius, while the Mu'tazilite view is closer to that of Arius.)

Since the controversy was causing dissension in the church, Constantine called the Council of Nicea to decide the matter. About 220-250 Christian leaders took part. The Council confirmed the formulation of Athanasius and rejected that of Arius. The Council produced a *creed* (a short summary of belief) which defined the Divine Word as deriving from the very nature of God, and not a creature. Arius himself and Arian Christians eventually accepted the decision of the Council of Nicea, and the Arians no longer exist in the church as a group.

2. The Council of Ephesus, 431

Nestorius (d. 451) was a Syrian bishop and theologian. It was claimed by his opponents that he held that Jesus was actually two persons one human, the other divine. The human person was born of Mary and the divine person was the eternal Word of God. The Council of Ephesus rejected this teaching, affirming that Jesus was one person, born of Mary, in whom God's eternal Word dwelt in intimate union.

Nestorius held that his teaching was compatible with that of the church leaders in Ephesus and that the difference was merely one of terminology. Many modern historians confirm the view of Nestorius that his theology was not substantially different from that professed by the Council of Ephesus, but that he merely used different terms to affirm the same belief.

However, at the time it was widely felt that the theology of Nestorius was rejected by the Council of Ephesus. Those who followed the formulation of Nestorius, often called simply "Nestorians," were mainly located in the eastern parts of the Roman Empire, in modern Iraq and Iran. From there they eventually brought the Christian faith to India and China. In the 19th Century, many Nestorian Christians united with the Catholic church; today, the Chaldaean Catholics, as they are called, live mostly in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey, although many have emigrated to North America and Australia.

3. The Council of Chalcedon, 451

This council rejected the teaching of *Eutyches* who claimed that Christ was a single person, but that he had no human nature, only a divine nature. His followers were hence called "Monophysites" (one nature). The Council of Chalcedon rejected the

teaching of the Monophysites and reaffirmed the teaching of Nicea and Ephesus regarding the true humanity of Jesus, in whom God's eternal Word took flesh. The Council of Chalcedon was careful not to limit the formulation of Jesus' relationship to God to its own teachings, but left the door open for future developments in theological understanding.

The churches of Rome and Constantinople accepted the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, while those of Egypt (the Coptic church) and Syria (the "Jacobite" church) did not. Since that time, the Coptic and the Syrian Orthodox churches have not been in union with the churches of Rome and Constantinople. The Armenian (Gregorian) church, which was not represented at Chalcedon, later rejected the teaching of that Council. In the 1970s, the Coptic church and the Vatican, representing the Catholic church, signed an agreement resolving their theological differences.

Many historians today hold that the theological differences expressed in these early Councils were more often due to factors of personality and politics, rather than to deep differences in Christian belief. However, the divisions which remain in the Christian community as a result of these early Councils have led many Christians, of all churches, to work to rebuild Christian unity through the Ecumenical movement (pp. 7576.)

D. The Iconoclast Controversy

This dispute, which lasted in the Byzantine Empire between the years 725-842, centered about the use of images in the churches. The Byzantine church had a tradition of decorating their churches with pictures and mosaics of Jesus, Mary, and the saints, and Byzantine Christians paid great honor to these images. In the time of Emperor Leo III (d. 741), some felt that it was improper for Christians to honor the icons (images). Those who opposed the used of images were called *iconoclasts* ("breakers of idols").

Historians propose three reasons for the opposition to the use of images. Firstly, there were tendencies among some Christians to minimize the humanity of Jesus, whereas the icons emphasized his corporeal nature. Secondly, a Christian heresy from eastern Turkey, influenced by the Manichaean religion, held that matter was evil, and thus images of human bodies were unworthy in places of the worship of God. Finally, the Emperor felt that the use of images was an obstacle to the conversion of Jews and Muslims to Christianity. Less edifying motives also came into play, such as the desire of the state to confiscate the property of the monasteries.

The controversy raged in the Byzantine Empire for almost 150 years, in the course of which many icons were destroyed and many monks, who were the strongest supporters of the veneration of icons, put to death. A Second Council was convened in Nicea in 787, which decided that the honor paid to images was proper so long as the believer was aware that it was the person depicted who was to be honored, not the image, and that true worship be addressed only to God. The controversy ended in 842 when the Empress Theodora declared that images were to be given due honor throughout the Byzantine Empire. In the West, the iconoclastic controversy never arose, and images were accepted without question until the time of the Protestant Reformation (pp. 7173).

E. The EastWest Schism

The term “schism” indicates a division between two bodies of Christians whose basis is not doctrinal. The most important schism in the history of the Christian church is that between the churches of Constantinople and Rome, sometimes called the “East-West Schism.” The Roman church held that the Christian churches were to be governed by the bishops of the world acting as a body, over which the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, presided. The view of the church of Constantinople was that the five ancient centers of Christianity were of equal authority: Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, Constantinople.

Despite this differing view of authority in the church, Eastern and Western Christians remained united until the 9th Century, when the first temporary break occurred at the time of Photius, the Patriarch of Constantinople. In succeeding centuries, the churches were reconciled for periods of time, after which schisms reoccurred. The definitive break between Constantinople and Rome took place in 1045.

Although the schisms were mainly due to political factors, a doctrinal element was introduced concerning the use of the term *filioque* (“and from the Son”) in the Creed. Western Christians (Catholics and Protestants) use the term to indicate the belief that the Holy Spirit comes forth from God and Jesus acting together. Eastern Christians, following the original formulation, do not use the term, affirming that the Holy Spirit is sent forth from God. Although in times past, this issue was hotly debated between Christians of the East and West, it is not an important cause of division among Christians, and Western Christians also accept the traditional formula of the East. This problem mainly concerns the theologians, and most Christians today are aware of the dispute only as an historical footnote.

In recent decades, the movement towards unity between the churches of Constantinople and Rome has gained strength. Popes John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II have visited the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul, and the Patriarchs have visited the Popes in Rome. The two churches have established a joint commission to work towards reestablishing full unity.

F. The Medieval Church

With the conversion to Christianity of the Emperor Constantine (d. 337), the Christian community was transformed from being a persecuted sect within the Roman Empire to the officially recognized state church. This brought about great changes in the life of the church. In the Byzantine and Roman empires, most people, except the Jews, became Christian, at least in name.

Due to the schism between East and West, the two regions developed independently, with the emergence of distinct liturgical, philosophical, theological, and spiritual traditions. The Copts in Egypt, the Jacobites in Syria, and the Nestorians in Iran and Iraq were also developing their own ancient traditions. Today, these churches usually refer to themselves as “Oriental Christian” churches, to distinguish themselves from the Byzantine and Roman traditions.

When Islam emerged in Arabia in the 7th Century, and Muslim rulers began to govern traditionally Christian regions in Egypt, Greater Syria, Iraq, and North Africa, Christians had to take account of Islam as a religion and Muslims as fellow believers, cocitizens, and often rulers. Already in Ummayyad times, the theologian *John of Damascus* wrote the first Christian treatise about Islam.

In the 11th-13th Centuries, Western European countries undertook the *Crusades*, which brought about lasting suspicion and bitterness, not only between Christians and Muslims, but also between Christians of Western Europe and the Greek-, Slavic-, and Arabic-speaking Christians of the Byzantine Empire. The destruction and the massacres of inhabitants by the Crusaders in the sack of Jerusalem (1099) and of Constantinople (1204) were resented equally by Muslims, Jews, and Eastern Christians.

Many abuses had crept into the life of the medieval Catholic church. Among the worst of these was *simony*, the sale of religious offices and privileges. The Pope, bishops, and priests played an exaggerated role in the life of the church. Lay people were often ignorant of Christian teaching and had little voice in the expression of their faith.

There were many reform movements within the medieval church. Some accepted the authority of the Pope and sought to correct the abuses which had grown up in the church. Others rejected the Catholic church altogether and sought to live a purer form of Christian life. In some of these movements, elements incompatible with the traditional belief of the churches led to charges of heresy being leveled against them, and the movements were put down, often with great harshness, through the combined power of the church and state.

The most famous movements were those of the *Bogomils* (10th-12th Centuries, in the Balkans), the *Albigensians* (12th-13th Centuries, in southern France), the **Waldensians** (12th Century until the present, in northern Italy), and the movements of *Wycliffe* (14th Century, in England) and *Hus* (15th Century, in Bohemia). The *Inquisition* was set up in 1232 in order to investigate alleged heresies, and those convicted of erroneous belief were put to death if they did not repent.

G. The Reformation

1. The Protestant Reformation

By the 16th Century, many Christians were calling for reform within the church, but it was the “sale of indulgences” which sparked the actual split within the Catholic church in Western Europe. Enthusiastic preachers traveled through Europe claiming that a person could avoid punishment for their sins by making financial contributions to the church. In 1517, Martin *Luther* (d. 1546), an Augustinian monk from what is today Germany, posted a list of 95 theses in which he disagreed with elements of traditional Catholic dogma and practice.

Luther’s propositions covered a wide range of topics, some of the more important of which are:

- 1) salvation by faith alone,
- 2) the Bible as the sole authority for Christian faith,

- 3) rejection of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharist,
- 4) rejection of religious orders and monasticism,
- 5) expanded role of the laity in worship and church leadership,
- 6) independence of the local church from Rome,
- 7) rejection of various Catholic practices, such as pilgrimages, fasts, confession of sins,
- 8) objection to abuses, e.g., sale of indulgences, simony, etc.

Luther wanted to reform the church according to the original teaching of the Bible, (hence his movement was called the “evangelical reform”), and to return to the original faith of the Christian community. Luther urged the German princes to reject the authority of the Pope and to impose his evangelical reform of the church. The Evangelical Reformed Church is widespread today in the countries of northern Europe (Germany and Scandinavia) and in countries, like U.S.A., to which many Lutherans emigrated.

The reform movement was quickly torn by division when Luther’s followers disagreed concerning various elements of Luther’s theology and began their own churches. *Zwingli* (d. 1531) led the Reformation in Switzerland, and he broke with Luther over the question of Christ’s presence in the Eucharistic meal. *John Calvin* (d. 1564), one of the most brilliant of the Reformers, denied the concept of the priesthood, as understood in the Catholic Church, and introduced the idea of predestination. Calvin’s influence was especially strong in Switzerland, the Netherlands, France (Huguenots), and Scotland (Presbyterians).

The *Anabaptists* were not one movement, but several Protestant bodies which denied infant baptism and stressed the personal acceptance of Jesus as savior. They tended to emphasize inner piety, the action of the Holy Spirit on the individual Christian, simplicity of life, pacifism and nonviolence, and rejection of religious and civil authority. Some of the churches deriving from the Anabaptist tradition are: *Quakers*, *Moravians*, *Mennonites*, and (more distantly) *Baptists*.

In England, the Protestant Reform began with a schism under Henry VIII, who rejected Roman authority while preserving Catholic doctrine. The Church of England still retains this character and, with sister churches in other countries, form the churches of the *Anglican* communion. Under Henry’s daughter Elizabeth, the English church adopted many Protestant elements.

Specifically English forms of the Reformation appeared. The *Puritans* wanted to purify the Church of England in a spirit similar to that of Calvin and his followers. In the 18th Century, *John Wesley* was the leading organizer of a lay preaching movement aimed at promoting, as he phrased it, “vital, practical religion.” Emphasizing interior piety in contrast to theological formulations, the *Methodist* movement, as Wesley’s evangelical revival came to be called, had great success in England in calling lay people, often from working classes, to a deep Christian commitment.

All of these currents of Evangelical reform emigrated from Europe to North America, where the United States is now the world’s largest predominantly Protestant country, and to Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. These currents were later brought by missionaries to Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

2. The Catholic CounterReformation

The Catholic church was forced to recognize the justice of many of the accusations made by the reformers. Many in the Catholic church agreed that the abuses to which the reformers were objecting could not be denied and should be ended immediately. On the other hand, Catholics believed that the reformers had, in the process, discarded some essential elements of Christian faith and some valuable practices.

Thus, a movement began to reform the Catholic church “from within,” called the CounterReformation. The first step in this Catholic movement was the calling of a council to examine the theology of Reformation leaders, to confront the accusations they leveled against Catholic practices and to create structures for putting a stop to abuses. Thus, in 1545-1564 the Pope called the *Council of Trent*, at which the Orthodox and the Protestants did not participate.

The Council of Trent put an end to many of the abuses condemned by the Reformers and affirmed, against the Reformers, traditional Catholic teaching. New religious orders, such as the *Capuchins* and the *Jesuits*, were active in the Counter-Reformation, which sought an internal reform of the Catholic church which would remain faithful to the authority of the Pope. The Counter-Reformation was especially active in the predominantly Catholic regions of southern and central Europe, Poland, and Ireland.

3. The Orthodox Churches and the Reformation

The strong tradition in theological studies which had characterized the Orthodox church in the Byzantine Empire continued after Mehmet II's conquest of Istanbul. Although, in the 16th Century, the Reformation grew up in Western Europe as a movement to reform the (Western) Catholic Church, the Orthodox church in Eastern Europe and the Middle East was inevitably drawn into the conflict and pressed to state the Orthodox position on questions disputed between the Catholics and Protestants. Although one Patriarch of Constantinople, Cyril *Lucaris* (d. 1638) was sympathetic to Calvinist views, the Orthodox churches affirmed the traditional position, which they shared with the Catholic church, on most of the disputed questions.

In 1643 and in 1672, the Orthodox church accepted two Confessions of Orthodox belief against positions taken by Luther and Calvin on the relationship of church tradition to Scripture, on the honor paid to saints and images, on the number and meaning of the sacraments, and on salvation through faith and works. The first, that of Metropolitan Peter *Mogila* of Kiev, and the second, by Patriarch *Dositheos* of Jerusalem, rejected the formulations of the Protestant Reformers and affirmed the traditional view of the Orthodox churches.

On two issues, the Orthodox partially agreed with the Reformers. On the question of the canon of the Bible (pp.89), the Orthodox accepted *four* books of the Apocrypha (Tobit, Judith, Sirach, and Wisdom) as canonical. Along with the Protestants, the Orthodox rejected the Catholic position on the authority of the Pope. However, the Orthodox also rejected the claim of the reformers that the Scriptural Word alone, interpreted by the individual believer through the light of the Holy Spirit, was the sole basis of authority. The Orthodox response was that authority was rooted in the

church community maintained by episcopal succession from the apostles.

H. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)

The most recent Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church was convened by Pope John XXIII in order to renew the Catholic church according to needs of modern times. The participants in the Council were Catholic bishops from all parts of the world. There were official observers from the Orthodox and Protestant churches, as well as invited guests from the Muslim, Jewish, and other religious communities.

The Vatican Council produced 16 documents which attempted to renew every aspect of Christian faith and practice. Some of the most important teachings of the Council were:

- 1) the primacy of the Bible in the faith of the church,
- 2) the priesthood of all Christian believers,
- 3) a commitment to pursue Christian unity (ecumenism),
- 4) active involvement in the struggle for justice, peace, and human rights,
- 5) worship in the languages of local believers,
- 6) God's salvation of the followers of other religions.

One of the documents, entitled *Nostra Aetate* ("In Our Time"), treated the followers of other religions. The chapter on Islam was the first time a Church Council had ever spoken officially about the followers of Islam. The main points are as follows:

Christians should respect and esteem Muslims.

Muslims and Christians worship the one and same God, Creator, Almighty, and Merciful,

who communicates God's message to mankind.

Both (Muslims and Christians) strive to submit themselves to His will.

Both are descendants of the faith of Abraham.

Muslims revere Jesus as a prophet and honor Mary.

Muslims and Christians await God's final judgment and the resurrection of the dead.

Muslims esteem an upright life,

and worship God through prayer, almsgiving, and fasting.

The Council concluded its section on Islam with the words: "Over the centuries, many quarrels and conflicts have arisen between Christians and Muslims. This Council pleads with all to forget the past and to make sincere efforts towards mutual understanding. For the benefit of all mankind, let Christians and Muslims together preserve and promote *peace, liberty, social justice, and moral values.*"

In 1965, Pope Paul VI created a Vatican Secretariat for interreligious dialogue, and shortly thereafter set up a Commission for Islam, which was charged with promoting mutual respect and understanding between Christians and Muslims by building friendly relationships, through academic conferences and study projects, and by encouraging common projects among Muslims and Christians on humanitarian concerns such as social justice, development, the problems of modern societies, and the discussion of ethical issues.

11. The Ecumenical Movement

The Ecumenical Movement within the Christian churches intends to recover the unity which Christ wanted among his disciples. As we have seen, divisions have occurred in the Christian community in the course of its history. There have always been Christians who lamented the lack of unity among Christians and have sought to reunite the churches. These efforts have come together in the 20th Century in the Ecumenical Movement (taken from the Greek word *oikumene*, meaning “the whole inhabited world.”).

Modern ecumenism can be traced back to the Edinburgh Conference of 1910, which led eventually to the creation in 1925 of the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Word. Two years later, the first World Conference on Faith and Order was held in Lausanne and studied the theological basis of the church and its unity. At a second meeting of these two bodies in 1937, it was agreed that they should be fused into a *World Council of Churches* (W.C.C.). A constitution was drafted in 1938, but World War II intervened and delayed the actual inauguration of the W.C.C. until 1948. Geneva was chosen as the site of the headquarters for the W.C.C. because of the neutrality of Switzerland in political affairs.

Although most of the early initiatives came from Protestant churches, a letter from the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul in 1920 appealed to “all the churches of Christ” to work for closer relations and cooperation. From the beginning, the Orthodox churches were full members of the W.C.C. National and regional councils of churches have been set up in almost all countries of the world. Most Orthodox and Protestant churches are members of the W.C.C., although some churches, particularly those of the “evangelical” Protestant tradition, have not joined.

At the time of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic church committed itself to the cause of ecumenism. At the present time, the Catholic church, although it is not a member, works closely with the W.C.C. There are Catholic members on W.C.C. committees and the Catholic church participates in its activities. In 1964, Pope Paul VI set up a Vatican Secretariat to work actively for full Christian unity. At the present time, the Catholic Church in over 60 countries is a full member of the national council of churches.

Every year in the third week of January, Christians of all churches pray for Christian unity, which is promoted through lectures, joint worship services, and the like. Ecumenical cooperation is most evident in Biblical studies and ecumenical translations of the Bible.

This has been a very brief survey of some of the historical developments which have occurred in the 20 centuries since the time of Christ. In an effort to explain how the various Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant churches came about and some of the principal differences among them, I have been forced to concentrate perhaps too strongly on controversies which divided Christians in the past, whose effects continue to be felt today.

This is a painful aspect of Christian history, and no Christian today wants to see these divisions continue. However, the divisions not only have lasted for many centuries, which makes it difficult to overcome them in a short period of time, but they also touch upon basic ways of understanding the Christian faith. Thus, as theological commissions in all the churches try to solve the areas of disagreement,

Christians try to build unity by attitudes of friendship, prayer together, and practical cooperation which cross beyond the boundaries of the various churches. In this way, Christians try to hasten the day when they will again be one, in the unity of love for which Jesus prayed at the Last Supper.

CHAPTER V

AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND SPIRITUALITY

A. Theology

The term *theology* comes from two Greek words meaning “the science of God.” It is used by Christians to include all aspects of the intellectual effort to understand their faith. Orthodox Christians stress that we only know about God what God has revealed; hence, “theology” refers more precisely to “the science of revelation.” In either case, Christian theology embraces a broader field of religious studies than what is treated by *kalam* in the Islamic tradition. A better parallel might be all those fields of study carried out by Muslims within the ambit of *fiqh*.

Christian theology includes reflections on the Bible, efforts to understand the whole of reality in the light of Christian teaching, historical developments in the formulation of Christian faith down through the centuries, elaboration of what can be known about God by reason alone, principles of moral teaching, formulation of the meaning and methods of Christian holiness, and application of Christian teaching to practical problems of leading a Christian life. I will try to describe each of these fields of Christian theology.

1. Biblical theology

The Bible is not a theology textbook, in that it is not a systematic presentation of Christian faith. The authors of the New Testament were *announcing* their faith in Jesus Christ, and that proclamation was oriented towards the particular needs of the Christian community of that time and place.

Each of the New Testament authors has his own understanding of what faith in Jesus means for the Christian believer. Each stresses some elements of Christian belief and does not treat other aspects. Each has his own emphases and preoccupations.

For this reason, it is proper to speak of the theology of John, Paul, James, Matthew etc. Since we do not know in every case the names of the New Testament authors, scholars also speak, for example, of the “theology of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews.” This is also the case with the Old Testament, where one can speak of the theology of Isaiah, of the Book of Deuteronomy, of the Book of Wisdom etc.

For example, one might say that in the theology of John’s Gospel, the concept of the Eternal Word of God becoming incarnate in the man Jesus is central. However, this concept is either not mentioned or is only marginally present in some other books of the New Testament, such as Mark’s Gospel or the Letter of James. In Matthew’s theology, Jesus is understood primarily as the New Moses, bringing the New Law

from God. In the theology of the Letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is viewed as the priestly mediator who brought to completion the Jewish temple ritual.

The Biblical authors did not express their theology systematically. The theology of each can be discovered by studying the Scriptural text as a whole and by looking at the literary structure and form of its separate passages, by investigating the Biblical author's presuppositions and concerns, and by working out and clarifying the implications of his teaching. This is the work of Biblical theology.

Biblical theology also studies the basic *themes* of Christian faith as they are expressed in the various books of the Bible. The scholar tries to make a systematic presentation of the teaching of the Biblical writers. To offer an illustrative example, a popular *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* begins its themes under the letter "P" with the following: paradise, pardon, passover, patience, peace, Pentecost, perfection, persecution etc. If one wants a synthetic grasp of what the Bible teaches about "paradise" or "pardon," one might study a work of Biblical theology.

Since the teaching of the Bible is authoritative for Christian faith, all other theological disciplines, if they are to be truly Christian, must be based on the Bible, and hence are all, properly speaking, Biblical theology. However, Christians usually reserve the term "Biblical theology" to the systematic elaboration of the theology contained in the Biblical books.

2. Systematic theology

Systematic theology is the effort to understand the whole of reality in the light of Christian teaching. Systematic theology is based on philosophy, an intellectual understanding of the nature of the universe.

In the 3rd Century, Clement of Alexandria (d. 215) and Origen (d. 254) used *Platonic* philosophy (p. 90) as the foundation for their theological syntheses. Later theologians like Ambrose (d. 397), Augustine (d. 430), and Dionysius (d. 500) used *Neoplatonism* (pp. 9193) as formulated by Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus as the basis for their theological understanding of the Christian faith.

In medieval Europe, theologians built upon the Neoplatonic theology of Augustine and Dionysius, producing an important body of literature called "Scholastic theology." One of the first thinkers in this tradition was John Scotus Erigena (d. 877), who stressed a clear distinction between *authority* (Scripture) and *reason*. He held that the Bible remains for Christians their main source of knowledge about God, but it is the duty of reason, illuminated by God's grace, to study and systematically present what is taught in the Scriptures.

In the 11th Century, *Anselm* of Canterbury (d. 1109) formulated the program of Scholastic theology in his summary of the relationship between faith and understanding: "I believe so that I may understand." Theology is an effort "to understand that which we believe."

Scholastic theology, especially after the time of *Abelard* (d. 1142), developed the method of the disputation, based on the alternation of the "question" and the disputation itself, a weighing of the arguments for and against. Modern studies have

shown that the scholastics were indebted to the Islamic *kalam* tradition for this theological method. The *Sentences* of Peter Lombard (d. 1160) are considered the “peak,” the finest expression of this early Scholasticism.

In the 13th Century, the Scholastic tradition found new life in the work of *Albert* (d. 1280) and his student, *Thomas Aquinas* (d. 1274), who used Aristotle’s metaphysics as the philosophical basis for their theology. Because of the profundity and breadth of his writings, Aquinas’ theology has been held by the Catholic church to be its “official” theology. Many Christians consider Aquinas to be the greatest theologian in Christian history.

At the time of the Reformation, the men who made the most important contributions to Christian theology were Martin Luther and John Calvin (pp. 7172). In his cry, “Sola Scriptura, sola gratia, sola fide” (“Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone”), Luther set the theological program for successive centuries of Protestants. John Calvin was the most brilliant of the Reformers, and his doctrine of predestination has been one of the cornerstones of the Calvinist tradition. Calvin’s doctrine of God’s gratuitous salvation of the chosen was later challenged by the Calvinist Jacobus Arminius (d. 1609,) who held that God’s omnipotence was compatible with human free will.

The Council of Trent concluded that Calvin’s teaching on predestination was not in accord with Christian orthodoxy, but in introducing the problem of how to reconcile God’s omnipotence with human freedom, Calvin’s theology aroused much controversy among Catholic theologians of the 16th and 17th Centuries. Those of the Dominican Order (pp. 101102), led by Domingo Bañez (d. 1604), stressed God’s power over all events, including human actions, while the Jesuit (pp. 104105) theologians, following Luis de Molina (d. 1600), tried to affirm the reality of human freedom along with God’s absolute sovereignty. Both views were proclaimed acceptable Catholic teaching.

In the Orthodox churches, leadership in theology came to be dominated by the Greekspeaking and the Russian churches. The most important Orthodox thinker of the 18th Century was Eugenios Bulgaris (d. 1806). Born in Corfu, Bulgaris obtained a strong education in philosophy and theology in Padua and became the director of the new Academy on Mt. Athos. Accused by the patriarch of being too strongly influenced by the rationalism of the French encyclopedists, he took up residence in St. Petersburg. His main theological work, the *Theologikon*, has become a standard manual of theology among the Orthodox.

In modern times, new syntheses of systematic theology are made by Christian theologians, who make use of philosophical and scientific advances and are oriented towards the pressing questions of our day. In the Reform tradition, the leading theologian of the 20th Century has been the Lutheran Karl Barth (d. 1968). Highly critical of the positive attitude of liberal churchmen of his day towards science, culture and art, Barth called for a return to the pure ideals of the Reformation. He held that human reason was clouded by sin, which made philosophical and experiential theology impossible. God’s sole means of communication was God’s Word incarnated in Jesus Christ.

Other leading theologians in the Reform tradition in this century are: Dietrich Bonhoeffer (d. 1945), who was hanged by the Nazis; Paul Tillich (d. 1965); Rudolf Bultmann (d. 1976), the controversial scholar of Biblical theology; the brothers Reinhold (d. 1971) and H. Richard (d. 1962) Niebuhr; Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg, who are still living.

In the 19th century, the Orthodox theologian Vladimir Solovyev (d. 1900), developed the concept of *Sophia* (“divine wisdom”), the feminine principle, the “idea which God has before Him as Creator and which He realizes in His creation.” In this century, the Russian emigrés Sergei Bulgakov (d. 1945) and Pavel Florenskii (d. 1943), by working out further Solovyev’s “Sophiology,” have made a uniquely Orthodox contribution to theology. Other important Orthodox theologians of this century are: Nicolai Berdyaev (d. 1948), Georges Florovsky (d. 1979), Alexander Schmemmann and John Meyendorff, both still living.

In the Catholic church, the most important theologian of the 20th Century was Karl Rahner (d. 1984). Rahner’s theological method was influenced by the existentialist philosophy of his teacher, Martin Heidegger. Rahner’s lifelong task was to reconstruct Thomist thought in such a way that it could withstand the criticisms of Kant. Rahner was one of the theologians whose views strongly influenced the Second Vatican Council (p. 74).

Other important 20th Century Catholic theologians are Yves Congar, Henri de Lubac, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. A significant development in Catholic theology in this century is the number of non-European theologians whose views have come to influence the whole church. Latin American theologians, such as Gustavo Gutierrez, Jon Sobrino, and Leonardo Boff, writing from their experiences in struggling with the poor, have introduced theology of liberation (pp. 87) as a hotly debated issue in the churches. Asian and African theologians, such as Amalorpavadass and Felix Wilfrid of India, Aloys Pieris of Sri Lanka, and Vincent Mulago of the Congo, have brought new perspectives from which to view questions of theology of religions and inculturation (pp. 88).

In any brief survey of Christian systematic theology like this, not all the important figures can be mentioned. However, these pages might give some idea, both of some of the key figures in this field of theology, as well as the variety of philosophical approaches which have been employed over the centuries.

3. History of dogma (Historical theology)

Historical theology is the study of how the Christian understanding of the Biblical message has developed over the centuries. It includes:

- 1) the study of the teachings of the Popes,
- 2) the Ecumenical Councils of the church,
- 3) the theological controversies within the church,
- 4) the contributions of individual theologians and mystics,
- 5) renewal movements which promoted new or revived insights into the Christian faith,
- 6) teachings of local councils, patriarchs, bishops, and bishops’ conferences.

One purpose of historical theology is to know precisely what has been *affirmed* and what has been *rejected* by the Christian churches. To this end, it is important to understand earlier teachings in their historical context. Historical theology recognizes that teachings of popes, councils, bishops, and theologians do not all carry the same authoritative weight, nor can such instruction always be accepted on face value. The historian tries to reconstruct the historical situation of the time, to understand the issues under discussion, to ascertain how the questions were seen by the participants, to evaluate the use of terms and concepts, and to bring to light the kind of political, economic, ethnic, and personal factors which influenced the church teaching.

Historical theology is based on the belief that God's Spirit has been guiding the Christian people down through the ages. This does not mean that everything that Christians have said and done is the result of the action of the Holy Spirit. Sin, in the form of animosities, greed, ignorance, ambition, pride, and rivalry has also played its part. Historical theology tries to trace the history of divine guidance as well as recognize human sinfulness in the church from one age, culture and historical situation to another.

4. Patristics (Patrology)

One historical period which receives special attention from Christian scholars is that of the early Fathers of the church. To the period of the Fathers, which covers the 2nd-6th Centuries, is devoted a special field of theological studies called Patrology or Patristics, terms which mean "study of the fathers." The Fathers were the early thinkers and theologians of the Christian churches, who wrote commentaries on the Biblical books, defended Christian teaching against errors, explained the meaning and implications of the Creeds, recorded current events and controversies of the time, and related Christian teaching to the Jewish and pagan thought of their age.

The earliest Fathers wrote in Greek, the language of the intelligentsia of the time. Justin (d. 165) is sometimes called the earliest of the Fathers. He was born a pagan, and before accepting Christianity, he sought wisdom in the philosophical currents of Stoic, Aristotelian, Pythagorean and Platonic thought. In contrast to Justin's own philosophic background, his student, Tatian (d. 180) who compiled the *Diatessaron* (pp. 2930), best expresses the antiphilosophic current in early Christianity. Two important of the early Fathers, Irenaeus (d. 200) and Hippolytus (d. 236) defended Christian teaching against the Gnostics.

Although Irenaeus and Hippolytus, like Justin before them, were at home in the world of Greek philosophy, it was Clement of Alexandria and his student Origen who began to use philosophy systematically in the formulation of Christian thought. These Fathers developed the theology of the Word of God, which they saw as having always been in the world and given by God as Wisdom to the wise. Clement mentions the Persian magi, Druid priests, Hindu Brahmins, and the Buddha, as well as Greek philosophers such as Socrates and Heraclitus, as sages who had received divine wisdom. This Word or Wisdom, which God had given to wise men in a seminal or partial way, then became flesh in the man Jesus.

Origen's great contribution to Christian thought lay in his Biblical commentaries. In extensive commentaries on every book of the Bible, Origen had two goals: *exegesis*,

that is, determining the exact meaning of the text, and *hermeneutics*, its interpretation. Most of the later Biblical commentators among the Fathers, such as the Syrian Eusebius (d. 359), Ambrose (d. 397), and Jerome (d. 420) relied heavily on Origen's work.

The first of the Fathers to write in Latin was Tertullian (d. 225) of Carthage (in modern Tunisia), who wrote many treatises defending Christianity against pagan attacks and was among the first to determine the terminology of Christian Latin. Late in his life, Tertullian left orthodox Christianity to join an apocalyptic (pp. 6566) Christian movement called Montanism, which expected the imminent descent of the Heavenly Jerusalem and Day of Judgment. Tertullian was the first Father to show the Bible as a unity formed by the Jewish Scriptures and the Christian New Testament, against Marcion, a Christian leader who had rejected the status of the Old Testament as Scripture.

Another Latin Father from the same city of Carthage, Cyprian (d. 258), was the first to formulate the church as governed collectively by the bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome. It is upon Cyprian's theological views that the Catholic church has built its understanding of the role of the Pope governing the church in conjunction with the international assembly of bishops.

It was in the second half of the 4th Century, after the Council of Nicea, that Patristic literature reaches its peak. In Palestine, the most important figure was Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), whose writings on catechetics and liturgy allow the historian a glimpse of the life of the church in the Holy City. However, it was Cappadocia, in Central Turkey, that produced the greatest of the Eastern Fathers.

The first was Basil, (d. 379), the bishop of Caesarea (modern Kayseri). After an education which included the best Christian and pagan philosophical learning of the day, Basil became a hermit. He was recalled from his monastic life by Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, whom Basil later succeeded. In his theological works, Basil strove to make peace in a Christian community torn by disputes over the nature of God and Jesus' relationship to the Father.

The second Cappadocian Father was Gregory Nazianzen (d. 389), a close friend of Basil from the time they were philosophy students together in Athens. His village was Nazianzus (modern Bekarlar, near Aksaray, in Turkey). His theology, like that of Basil, was important in helping to reunite the church after the disputes which surrounded the Council of Nicea.

The final Cappadocian of note is Gregory of Nyssa (the modern Nevsehir). Gregory (d. 395) was the younger brother of Basil, and became Bishop of Nyssa about the same time his brother was bishop in Caesarea. His theological works treated all the disputed questions of his day, contributed to the Christian understanding of the sacraments (p. 59), and laid the bases for a spiritual theology (p. 96) which stressed the value of virginity.

Other Eastern Fathers who played an important role in the theological development of the early church were John Chrysostom (d. 407), a priest of Antioch, and the patriarch Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), a brilliant theologian but a vigorous, almost fanatical debater. Lastly, there was the influential Dionysius (pp. 9293), about whom

little is known but his writings. In the West, the most important Fathers were Ambrose (d. 397) of Milan and Augustine (pp. 9192), whose conversion to Christianity was due to the influence of Ambrose.

The importance of this specialized field of historical theology is that through the study of Patristics one can see in its earliest theological writings how the community developed in understanding of the Christian message in the crucial centuries after the death of the apostles. During that period, the community grew from a tiny sect within the Roman Empire to become its dominant religious and intellectual force. Moreover, Christians in Asia and Africa today, living in relatively small and widely scattered communities, as well as Christians in highly secularized Europe and North America, find that the perspective of the Fathers, writing for Christian minorities in the mainly non-Christian Roman Empire, offers important insights for Christian life today.

5. Natural theology (Theodicy, Philosophy of religion)

This is an attempt to investigate what can be known by human *reason* about God and His works. Although this field of study is often called theology, it is more properly a philosophical discipline. Natural theologians seek to understand God and His attributes solely by use of sense perception, logic and the speculations of human reason. In medieval times, natural theology was highly prized by scholastic theologians such as Aquinas, but Protestant thinkers like Emmanuel Kant (d. 1804) and Karl Barth (p. 80) hold that one can know little about God without divine revelation.

Philosophy of religion as a separate field of philosophical study grew out of the 18th Century German Enlightenment. It investigates phenomena of human life relate to “religion” and “religious experience.” It inquires into the essence, content, origins, and value of religion as a factor of human experience, as well as the claims of religion to truth.

The natural theology of the Scholastics differs from philosophy of religion in that the medieval scholastics understood “theodicy” as a philosophical preparation for actual theology, whereas modern philosophy of religion accepts no such distinction. It claims to be a purely scientific investigation into questions of God and religious experience, following the principles, methods and qualifications of the human sciences.

6. Spiritual (Ascetical, Mystical) theology

The three terms - spiritual, ascetical, mystical theology - often used interchangeably, refer to that branch of religious studies which try to appreciate and explain the movement of God’s grace in the life of the Christian believer. It investigates: the goal of the Christian life as a loving union between the believer and God, the stages of Christian perfection, methods of prayer, meditation, and contemplation, the difficulties and dangers encountered by the believer on the path to holiness, the application of spiritual exercises to the demands of leading daily a Christian life,

the techniques of discerning between religious impulses which come from God's Spirit and those which arise from the evil spirit or a person's own egoistic drives.

Great spiritual writers have stamped the Christian tradition with their personal insights and methods. Disciples formed around the great spiritual teachers and lived according to the teaching of their master, handing down his instruction to later generations. Thus, Christians speak of various "spiritualities" or spiritual traditions, such as those in the Catholic church of Benedict, Francis, Dominic, and Ignatius. This aspect of Christian faith will be treated at length on pp. 9798.

6. Moral theology

Moral theology is the effort to understand the moral implications of Christian teaching. It studies the moral teaching of the Bible and tries to clarify the principles which underlie that teaching so that they can be applied by the Christian to all aspects of his personal and societal life. Thus, the concern of this branch of theology is to determine the moral principles on which a Christian's ethical judgments should be made.

Moral theology, sometimes called Christian ethics, examines new problems not specifically mentioned in the Bible (e.g., forms of contraception, moral questions arising from medical advances, problems of commercial and business ethics, questions of social justice, legitimate and illegitimate methods of warfare, and moral questions related to international economics.) In this way, moral theologians try to clarify the moral principles found in the Bible so that Christians understand their duties and responsibilities in the modern world.

8. Pastoral theology

Pastoral theology tries to discover how the Christian message can be best applied to form truly Christian communities of people. It discusses questions of: theological education (catechetics), communication of the Christian message, guidance and counseling of troubled Christians, the methods and dynamics of building Christian communities, sociological and anthropological aspects of Christian life.

9. New fields of theology

In this century, questions have arisen which have inspired theological reflection in new areas. Three of the more important of these new fields are:

a. Theology of religions

Theology of religions is the study of the relationship of Christianity to other religions. It takes as its starting point the existence in this world of people who follow different religious paths: Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Taoists, Traditional Religionists etc. It asks questions such as the following:

How does God act in other religious communities?
How does God save Jews, Muslims etc.?

Is it possible that there are prophets and Sacred Books in other religions?
What attitude should Christians take towards the followers of other religions?

The theology of religions grew out of *missiology*, the study of Christian mission, and is an attempt to understand and evaluate other religions from the perspective of Christian revelation. It differs from comparative religion or the history of religions in that it is a Christian theological study of what can be known about other religions through systematic reflection on the teaching of the Bible and Christian tradition.

b. Theology of liberation

This new approach to theology begins from the premise that God wants to save the whole person, not merely the interior dimension (soul) of man. It raises the following types of questions:

How does the Bible teach Christians to act in situations of injustice and oppression?
Can and should Christians be involved in liberation movements against oppressive social systems and governments?

What is the role and the value of analysis of social structures in the formation of the Christian conscience?

In order to oppose injustice and oppression, is violence ever a valid option for Christians?

In short, liberation theology studies Christian involvement in the social, economic, and political processes of history. Since the methodology of liberation theology is often similar to Marxist analyses of economic structures, many Christian leaders have opposed movements and works of liberation theology.

In two recent documents (1984, 1986), the Catholic Church tried to evaluate liberation theology. The following is a summary of the main points of this evaluation:

- 1) Liberation theology is not one theology, but a number of theological expressions united by a common spirit, that is, the harsh realities of injustice and oppression.
- 2) As a technique, social analysis is neutral and can be used by Christians to come to a better understanding of the interrelation of social structures.
- 3) Christians cannot accept any analysis of history based on the notion of class warfare as an inevitable factor in human life.
- 4) Christians believe that God is the Lord of history, present at all times and places with God's grace, calling all persons to do God's will. Thus, Christians cannot accept any view of history based on atheistic determinism.
- 5) Christians must distinguish an approach to social realities based on the teaching of the Bible, which is valid and necessary, from a Marxism that masquerades as Christian teaching.
- 6) Individual Christians and churches must be actively involved in the full and authentic liberation of humankind.

After the collapse of the Soviet state in 1989, the danger is that neoliberal economics will thrive unchecked. Liberation theology, insisting on the rights and dignity of the

poor as its primary concern, is now engaged in addressing the new social issues of the post-communist world, particularly those connected with the dominance of the globalized market economy.

b. Theology of inculturation

The starting point of the theology of inculturation is the fact that today Christians find themselves in many different cultural settings. This branch of theology studies the relationship of the Christian message to culture. In the past, Christianity was often identified - by others and by Christians themselves - with European culture. Today, Christians from many diverse cultures in Asia, Africa, Oceania, and the Americas want to live out their Christian faith in ways which are in accord with and grow out of their cultural traditions. The theology of inculturation looks at questions such as the following:

What is essential in Christian faith and what is merely a cultural or historical expression or development?

When Christians in various cultural settings reflect on their faith, what new insights arise which can enrich the universal Christian community?

What is the relation between the local church in each nation and the universal community of Christians?

How does the Christian message confront each specific culture? What traditional, cultural values does it confirm, and which values must it challenge and reject?

B. Philosophy

1. Early Christian Encounters with Philosophy

The earliest encounters of the Christians with Greek philosophy in the time of the Apostolic church were not positive. The Acts of the Apostles records the preaching of Paul in Athens and his debates with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers there. Invited to speak at the Areopagus in Athens, Paul gave a summary of Christian faith, but when he began to talk about eternal reward or punishment after death, his listeners scoffed and lost interest. Paul subsequently wrote that Christian faith is based “not on human wisdom but on the power of God.”

Some years later, Paul had a more positive experience in Ephesus, where he spent two years in daily dialogue and debate at the Stoic philosophical school of Tyrannus. Scholars suggest that it was during this time that Paul came to a better understanding of how to present the Christian message in ways which were intelligible to the intellectuals and populace of the Roman Empire. These insights are reflected in his Letters to the Ephesians and the Colossians.

The other early Christians also regarded Greek philosophy with suspicion and sometimes with absolute rejection. They identified Greek philosophy with the pagan religion of the Greeks. To them Greek philosophy was simply the intellectual expression of a pagan worldview. As such, they felt that they had nothing to learn

from the pagan science of philosophy, which they considered the enemy of faith in God. On occasion, fanatic Christians took it upon themselves to burn philosophical libraries and academies.

In the first Christian centuries, Greek philosophy was developing differently in its two major centers, Athens and Alexandria. In *Athens*, philosophy was moving towards esoteric speculations on numbers and the interrelatedness of the universe. The mystical elements of Pythagoras' mathematics were being developed in the direction of a natural mysticism. A gnosticism which taught salvation through secret knowledge, which claimed to originate from Hermes Trismegistus (identified with the Egyptian god Thoth, the father of knowledge), was becoming the dominant philosophical current at the Academy in Athens.

Christians never accepted this esotericism, and early Christian writers of the 2nd/3rd Centuries, such as Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, and Hippolytus, wrote treatises against those who incorporated gnostic features into the Christian faith. Against the Gnostics, these writers insisted on the evident meaning of the Biblical texts and affirmed the real humanity of Jesus and the goodness of God's creation. In 528, when the Christians gained political control of the Roman Empire, the Christian emperor Justinian closed the Academy of Athens as a final remnant of pagan religious thought.

In *Alexandria*, philosophy was viewed more as the human quest for knowledge, an effort which transcended an individual's religious beliefs and practices. In Alexandria, already at the time of Jesus, the great Jewish philosopher Philo (20 BC/50 AD) had explained Jewish thought in terms of the dominant Platonic metaphysics. It is not surprising, therefore, that it was in Alexandria that Christians first began to adopt the terms and concepts of Greek philosophy to formulate Christian teaching.

2. The First Christian Platonists

The first great Christian philosopher was *Clement* of Alexandria (d. 215), who considered Greek thought to be a gift from God. He was attracted to the views of Plato, rather than to Aristotle, because of Plato's acceptance of the reality of the spiritual world. Clement established a school to prepare religion teachers in Alexandria, where Greek philosophy was taught and studied. This school became the most important theological institute of early Christianity and had a great impact on Christian thought of the age.

The greatest scholar of the Alexandrian school was Clement's pupil *Origen* (d. 254). Origen's voluminous writings included commentaries on Plato's *Dialogues*, as well as philosophically based studies of the books of the Bible. Origen became a controversial figure in the early Christian community, and some of his writings were alleged to depart from orthodoxy. Nevertheless, Christians continued to study at the philosophical academy of Alexandria, together with Jews and pagans, and they gradually became the most numerous group at the school. When the school was eventually transferred to Antioch in the 7th Century, the director and all the professors were Christian.

Clement and Origen can be said to be the great exponents of pure Platonism in early Christianity, for with the work of Plotinus (d. 270), the views of Plato were reformulated, and the new philosophical synthesis of Neoplatonism came into being.

3. Christian Neoplatonism

It is not necessary to elaborate on the basic teachings of Neoplatonism. Plotinus' concept of the One (the Good), from whom emanates the universe in a hierarchical series, his emphasis on the contemplation of the One as the highest goal for man, and his view that ideas are planted in the human mind from the demiurge (the heavenly Active Intellect), all greatly influenced both later Christian and Muslim philosophers.

Plotinus' student and editor, Porphyry (d. 305) was convinced that Plato and Aristotle were basically saying the same thing. This led to the harmonization of the views of the two philosophers, with the consequent confusion of the true views of each. In particular, Aristotle was "read through the eyes of Plato."

The greatest Christian Neoplatonist in the early centuries was *Augustine* (d. 430). Born in North Africa (modern Algeria) of a pagan father and a Christian mother, Augustine abandoned the Christian teaching he had been given. He studied law and letters in Rome, and later developed a passion for philosophy. His spiritual quest led him first to the Manichaean religion, which he later left, at the age of 33, to become a Christian.

Augustine's writings, which continued over the next 43 years, make him one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Christianity. Augustine is primarily regarded in the Christian world as a theologian. However, in his philosophical writings, he took the structure of Neoplatonic thought and thoroughly Christianized it. Through his works, philosophy came to be regarded as a legitimate Christian science in Western Christianity. In this regard, one might compare the role of Augustine in Christian history to that of AlKindi in the Muslim philosophical tradition.

Through Augustine, Neoplatonic cosmology entered medieval Christian philosophy as the system *par excellence* for understanding the created world. Augustine inherited from Neoplatonism its exaltation of the spirit with a distrust and suspicion of all things earthly or corporeal. The religious believer is called to devote his attentions, loyalty, and contemplation towards the City of God, while remaining uncorrupted by his dealings in the City of Man. Augustine felt that the two "Cities" were opposed to each other throughout history, and that in the end the City of God would conquer.

In the transition period between the Roman Empire and early medieval Europe, two other early Christian Neoplatonists deserve mention. *Boethius* (d. 524) took up the emphasis of Plotinus on the contemplation of God (the One), and he proposed that philosophy, pursued in a quiet, isolated, reflective life, would lead one to the knowledge of God. In this approach to philosophy as a solitary ascetical discipline, Boethius may be compared to Ibn Bajja in the Islamic philosophical tradition. Boethius' translations into Latin of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Porphyry, and his handbook of philosophy for students, all greatly influenced the rise of Scholasticism in later centuries.

More systematically than either Augustine or Boethius, the writings of *Dionysius*, popularly called “the Areopagite,” attempt a synthesis between Neoplatonism and Christianity. The identity and true name of this great philosopher is unknown, but he is assumed to have lived and written about the year 500 in Syria.

Dionysius tried to explain the whole of Christian faith and life within the categories of Neoplatonic philosophy. The goal of the Christian life, according to Dionysius, is an intimate union with God accomplished through a progressive deification of man. This is done by a process of “unknowing,” leaving behind the perceptions of the senses and then the reasoning of the intellect, until the human soul is illuminated by a Divine Ray of grace.

The writings of this unknown philosopher were not only accepted as the first great *summa* of Christian philosophical theology, but also became the guidebook for Christian mystics. Both in Eastern Christianity and in Western Europe, almost all great Christian thinkers wrote commentaries on the works of Dionysius.

4. Scholastic philosophy

Out of the disruptions of the Dark Ages (6th Centuries), when Greek philosophical thought was preserved mainly in Irish and Benedictine monasteries, Christian scholasticism was born. Based on the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) and the *quadrivium* (mathematics, geometry, astronomy, music), the education of the medieval monastic schools led the students to speculation upon the ultimate principles of life and being. It may be noted that this same basic curriculum became standard in Islamic schools, through the influence of Ibn Sina, especially in Iran. This curriculum is still followed in the *madrasas* of Qum.

Greek works were translated into Latin, and commentaries were made. The commentaries were studied and in turn also commented upon. Old ideas were challenged, abandoned or refined; new ideas were proposed, and a philosophical corpus grew upon the advances of previous generations. In the Muslim world, a parallel philosophical effort was going on contemporaneously in Muslim intellectual centers such as Baghdad, Damascus, Cordoba, Hamadan, and Nishapur. In commenting upon the works of Augustine, Boethius, and Dionysius, the Scholastics refined and extended the Neoplatonic views of the earlier writers and, in doing so, set the stage for the period of “High Scholasticism.”

One of the first great Scholastics, John Scotus *Erigena* (d. 877), attempted to reconcile the Neoplatonist concept of emanation with the Christian doctrine of creation. In his work, which after his death was suspected of pantheism, Erigena took the Neoplatonic teaching of emanation and return to show that God was both at the beginning and end of the created universe.

With Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) begins the golden age of Scholasticism. Anselm expressed its goals as follows: “I believe that I may understand,” that is, the believer must strive to understand what he believes. Anselm preferred to defend the doctrines of Christian faith by use of reason, rather than by recourse to Scripture, and he was the first of the Scholastics to formulate the “ontological argument” for the existence of God.

4. Influence of the Muslim Philosophers

A great stimulus to Christian philosophy occurred near the beginning of the 12th Century. This was the translation into Latin of the writings of the great Muslim philosophers. The earliest translations were made at the Norman court in Palermo and by the Jewish community in Naples. The Christians translated the Arabic writings directly into Latin, as in Palermo, or retranslated the Hebrew versions previously made by Jews. In this way, the works of AlKindi, AlFarabi, Ibn Sina, AlGhazali, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Tufayl, and Ibn Rushd gradually came to be studied by the Christian scholastics and their views wellknown and heatedly debated.

Scientific works by Muslims, especially those on medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, were translated and widely disseminated. In these fields, the writings of men like Jabir, Ibn Sina, and M. ibn Zakariyya alRazi became standard texts for centuries in Christian Europe.

The leading Scholastic in the Augustinian Neoplatonist tradition was Peter Lombard (d. 1160). Above all a theologian, Lombard's *Sentences* was the main textbook of Christian philosophical theology until it was supplanted by Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Peter Lombard was the first Scholastic to learn to read Arabic, and he promoted the study of Arabic in the schools so that students could gain a firsthand knowledge of the Arab philosophers. A contemporary of Ibn Tufail and Ibn Rushd, he did not have the benefit of Ibn Rushd's commentaries on Aristotle. His work thus marks the high point of Augustinian Neoplatonist scholasticism before the arrival in Europe of the thought of Aristotle.

6. The Rediscovery of Aristotle

About the year 1230, Christian Europe discovered pure Aristotelian thought through the Latin translations of Ibn Rushd's commentaries. There were three general reactions among Scholastics:

- 1) The traditional Augustinians rejected Aristotle as a materialist whose views were wholly incompatible with Christian faith.
- 2) The "Latin Averroists," led by Siger of Brabant at University of Paris, developed Ibn Rushd's approach to the relationship between rational knowledge and revealed truth and concluded that reason was the primary human faculty for arriving at knowledge. Revelation offered simple people a symbolic approach to truth in the form of stories and images.
- 3) Those who believed that Aristotle's philosophy could be reconciled with Christian faith held that the work of Aristotle provided the most adequate philosophical basis for theology.

The first important teacher in the third line of thought was *Albert* the Great (d. 1280). Like Ibn Rushd, he wrote commentaries on all the extant works of Aristotle. He considered it his life work to make Aristotle intelligible to Latinspeaking Christians and to show that Aristotle's philosophy could form a sound basis for Christian theology. Albert's philosophical and theological writings were many and profound and are still studied by Christian scholars. Albert was quickly overshadowed by his brilliant student, *Thomas Aquinas* (d. 1274).

7. Thomas and Aristotelian Thomism

According to Thomas, the distinction between reason and faith is fundamental. Although the body of knowledge which may be known by reason is vast, some matters cannot be known except through revelation. Revealed doctrines cannot be proved by reason, but one can show rationally that such truths are not impossible. Revealed truth can never contradict reason, but some elements of faith surpass the capabilities of the human intellect.

He applied Aristotle's theory of matter and form (*hylomorphism*) to every aspect of the created universe and even to the nature of God: (matterform, existenceessence, actpotency, substance-nature). In God, essence and existence are one: God is pure act. Following Ibn Sina, Thomas held that God's existence is a necessary consequence of His nature. God is NecessaryinHimself. Since all knowledge begins with sense knowledge, Thomas constructed his famous five rational proofs for God's existence from the observation of the created universe, and from there he proceeded rationally to the necessity of God's existence. From Ibn Rushd (although the view was held earlier by Ibn Tufail), Thomas developed his view that knowledge is produced in the mind by the mind. It is not planted by an outside agent. Breaking with the Neoplatonic tradition, he held that the Active Intellect is not to be identified with the demiurge, nor with the angel Gabriel (Jibril), as AlFarabi and Ibn Sina had held, but is a function of the human intellect.

The strength of Thomas' writings have made Aristotelian philosophy dominant among Catholics until today. The Augustinian Neoplatonists, however, did not disappear. Their greatest medieval proponent was *Bonaventure* (d. 1274), who stressed the primacy of the will against Thomas' intellectualism. In keeping with his Neoplatonic background, Bonaventure stressed that all human wisdom was foolishness next to the divine illumination that God sheds on one who approaches Him with faith and love. Bonaventure's approach can be fruitfully measured against the notion of *dhawq* in the Ishraqi tradition of Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra.

The third stream of thought, that of the Latin Averroists who held reason supreme and revealed truth a symbolic representation perhaps useful for uneducated persons, continued in the great universities of Europe, such as Paris and Padua, and can be regarded as the forerunner of modern rationalist, positivist, and scientist systems of European philosophy. Many historians of philosophy trace the intellectual roots of Renaissance humanism and the later Enlightenment to the Latin Averroists of the universities.

At the time of the Renaissance, many European intellectuals "rediscovered" Plato and sought to revive his thought as a reaction against what had by then become a dry and oversystematized Thomist Aristotelianism. One of the most prominent philosophers of the "Platonic revival" was George Gemistus *Plethon* (d. 1450) from Istanbul, who conceived the idea of founding an Academy in Florence to train students in pure Platonic philosophy.

Plethon's student, Marsilio *Ficino* (d. 1499), was more influential in challenging the dominance of Aristotelian philosophy in Europe. Ficino prepared new translations into Latin of most of Plato's important works and directed the Academy until his death. He attempted a new synthesis of Christian faith with Platonic thought which

had great influence on many Renaissance scholars. Particularly in England, Christian scholars such as John *Colet* (d. 1519), John *Fisher* (d. 1535), Thomas *More* (d. 1535), and the 17th Century “Cambridge Platonists” integrated Renaissance humanism and Platonic politics, ethics, and psychology into their expression of Christian faith.

It is not possible here to go into all the currents of modern philosophy which have arisen in the Christian world since *Descartes* (d. 1650). Although many modern philosophers, like Descartes himself, have been believing Christians, the communitarian effort to construct a “Christian philosophy” came to an end after the Renaissance.

A skepticism concerning the validity of “natural theology,” with the resulting divorce between reason and faith, as well as positivist tendencies to confine intellectual inquiry into observable facts, were some of the reasons for this. One might also note the failure of Scholasticism to maintain its creative energy in the postindustrial world, where it became a dry, fixed body of philosophical literature. In our century, existentialist currents of thought which go back to the Danish Lutheran philosopher Søren *Kierkegaard* (d. 1855) have offered promise of providing a philosophical basis for a modern Christian understanding of reality and human life.

As a process related to the inculturation of Christian faith in various cultures, many Christians are engaged in rethinking and reformulating Christian doctrine in the context of diverse, particularly non-European, cultural and philosophical traditions. In Asia, Christians are finding new ways to understand the person and mission of Christ with insights gained from the rich and ancient sapiential and philosophical traditions of India, China, Japan, and the Malay-Indonesian cultural zone. Christian seminarians and theology students in Arab and other predominantly Muslim regions study the writings of Muslim scholars such as Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd, who had such great influence on Christian thinkers like Thomas Aquinas.

As the history of philosophy in the Christian community shows, Christian faith is not bound to any single philosophical system or outlook. Wherever there are Christians who reflect deeply and systematically on their faith, new currents of Christian philosophy can arise.

C. Spirituality and Mysticism

1. Mysticism in the Christian Tradition

One can define mysticism as the immediate knowledge of God attained in this life through personal religious experience. It is a state of prayer which includes both brief moments of divine “touch,” as well as a permanent union with God (which some spiritual writers call the “mystical marriage.”) The mystics agree that the proof of a genuine mystical experience is shown in an increase of virtue, for example, love, humility, service.

Christian mysticism recognizes God as simultaneously *transcendent* and *immanent*. In orthodox Christian mystical teaching, there is no notion of absorption into the divine. Hence, like Sufism in the Islamic tradition, Christian mysticism is “dualist,” God and the worshiper, though united in the mystical experience, always retain their

distinct natures. Christian mystics understand mystical unity with God as a union of love and will, in which the distinction between Creator and creature is permanently maintained.

Dreams, visions, locutions, trances, visions, and ecstatic experiences may accompany Christian mystical experience, but they are not essential to it. Some mystics hold that such extraordinary phenomena usually cease at the higher states of mystical experience.

Christian attitudes towards mysticism differ. Some Protestant thinkers such as Reinhold Niebuhr (d. 1971) consider mysticism a deviation from the Gospel message, which is concerned with a divinely-guided human society in this world. At the other end of the spectrum, thinkers like Berdyaev (p. 72) consider the mystical experience to be the *essence* of Christianity.

However, most Christians would agree that some mystical elements are a part of the life of every true Christian. The Catholic and Orthodox churches highly revere their mystics. Many of the great mystics are considered saints and their writings are studied and followed. Their lives are considered models to be imitated. Protestants, while more reserved in their attitude towards the mystical tradition, are not without mystics of their own.

The influence of the mystical tradition within Christianity is so pervasive that it is difficult to consider the mystics as a separate class within the Christian community, or their path as in some way distinct from that of “orthodox” Christianity. As Scriptural bases for the mystical life, Christians usually point to the Gospels, especially that of John, to passages in the Letters of Paul, and to the Book of the Apocalypse.

Christians often speak of “spiritualities,” comprehensive *ways* or programs of Christian life which usually include mystical elements. Each Christian spiritual tradition has as its goal the perfect following of all that is taught in the Gospels and is thus called an “evangelical” path. One might say that spirituality is a program for conforming oneself internally to the implications of following Jesus in each aspect of life. In this sense, there is only one Christian “spirituality,” that is, responding fully to all that God has taught in the Bible.

Christian spirituality is an awareness that a response to God necessarily includes a “vertical” and a “horizontal” dimension, neither of which may be lacking in a fully integrated Christian life. The vertical dimension is that of worship and prayer, the Christian’s duties before God. The horizontal dimension includes the Christian’s responsibilities towards oneself, towards others, and towards society, in which love and service are to be the motivating and unifying factors.

Jesus taught that the whole teaching of the Law and the prophets can be summarized in two commandments. The first is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” The second, “which is similar,” is “to love your neighbor as yourself.” This “law of love” is so central that Paul says a person can understand all the mysteries of theology, do great deeds, and even die a martyr for his faith, but if he does not perform those deeds in love, it is all worthless.

Although there is fundamentally only one Christian spirituality, to which Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants aspire, Christian history knows various movements or programs of spirituality which emphasize certain elements of the Biblical message or provide a distinct method for following the Gospel. Although it is not possible to give here a complete history of Christian spiritual traditions and mystical writers, I will try to outline some of the most important and representative movements.

2. Early monasticism

Already in the days of the apostles, there were some Christians who chose to follow Christ in virginity and asceticism. Jesus never married, and he taught that there were some who would remain virgins for the sake of "God's reign." However, most of his disciples, including Peter, were married, Paul being one of the few exceptions. At first, virginity was associated with the belief in Jesus' imminent return and the coming of the Last Day. Eventually, when it became clear that the Second Coming of Jesus was not to happen immediately, some Christians chose virginity as a sign of the new life to be found in Christ and the new relationships within the Christian community, based not on blood lines and family bonds, but on faith in God.

It must not be forgotten, however, that from the time of the apostolic church on, married life has always been recognized by Christians to be the normal situation in which to follow Christ and bear witness to his teachings. In Christian history, virginity is an exceptional way for a small number of Christians who feel specially called to lead their life of faith in this way.

In the early centuries of persecution, Christians formed a small tightlyknit community which followed the path of the Gospel at great personal risk. However, when Christianity became the state religion at the time of Constantine and most inhabitants of the Roman Empire embraced the Christian faith, it was perhaps inevitable that standards should decline. Many Christians were living in ways which did not reflect the teaching and example of Jesus.

Out of this changed social situation came the movement towards early desert monasticism. The Jewish community had already set a precedent in the Essene communities who had monasteries near Qumran on the Dead Sea. These communities considered secular society to be irredeemably evil, and they tried to remove themselves from the temptations and corruptions of society by creating their own alternative way of life in the desert.

In the 3rd Centuries, some Christians chose the same path. Leaving the cities like Alexandria and Antioch, they retired to the deserts of Egypt and Syria to live a life of solitude, prayer and asceticism. When it became known that there was a holy monk living in the desert, others began to go out to seek advice and instruction, and to spend time with him in prayer. Eventually, some chose to remain with the monk and lead the same kind of life. Thus, around the hermitages of the desert solitaries emerged the first communities of monks living a shared life.

This phenomenon had its earliest beginnings in the Egyptian desert and quickly spread to the Syrian and Arabian desert regions. *Antony* (d. 356) and *Makarios* (d. 399) were two of the first Egyptian hermits who lived alone and practiced extreme forms of asceticism. *Pachomius* (d. 346) was the first to draw up a rule to regulate

the monks' common life. He was joined by so many companions and disciples that he built nine monasteries of 100 monks each.

The three Cappadocian fathers, Basil, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa (p. 84), had a very different view of monastic life. For them, human society was not evil nor was it to be rejected. All three of these men were busy bishops, actively involved in theological controversies and political issues. Yet they continually returned from time to time to the desert to pray and think. In this way, they felt that they could keep from becoming "submerged" in activity; through prayer, seclusion and ascetical practices, they continually sought to recall to themselves the true goal of life, that is, a perfect following of Christ according to Gospel teaching.

Basil drew up a rule for monks which is still followed in the Eastern churches. "Basilian" monasteries were founded throughout the Syrian and Arabian deserts and in the less populated regions of Anatolia and Greece. The monks not only led a life of prayer and offered religious advice and encouragement to people from the cities who came to visit, but the desert monasteries also performed a valuable social function. They provided safe refuge and hospitality, a place of quiet and peace, to desert travelers who were lost, stranded, pursued, injured or otherwise in trouble. Some Qur'anic commentators suggest that the famous "Light" passage in Surat al-Nur (24:35-38) contains an allusion to the atmosphere of prayer, safety, and welcome found in the desert monasteries.

In the West, John Cassian (d. 435) is said to be the first to write on the monastic life. However, the true father of Western monasticism was *Benedict* (d. 547). As a young man, he retired to a mountainous area near Rome to live alone in prayer. Within a few years, others joined him, first for instruction and then to share his life. Benedict wrote a Rule for community life which became the most important document in the history of Western monasticism.

The key to the Benedictine life is "pray and work." There is a fixed schedule to the daily life of the monasteries, which centers about a communal recitation of the Psalms seven times a day, beginning about 2:00 am. The main work was originally agricultural, but as the Roman Empire fell into the ruins of the Dark Ages, the Benedictine monasteries took over the task of preserving philosophical, scientific, and theological learning. Many of the great cities of Europe grew up around Benedictine monasteries, and many of the great centers of learning began as monastic schools.

Monasticism has been very important in the development of Christianity in the Orthodox churches. Orthodox monks follow the above mentioned "Basilian Rule" drawn up by Basil, which prescribes daily prayer in common and assigns various tasks in the monasteries. Special mention should be given to Mt. Athos, a peninsula in northern Greece on which twenty independent monasteries exist. The monasteries of Mt. Athos, to which that of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai is attached, have played, over the centuries, an important role in the spiritual life of the Orthodox church.

Moreover, it was monks who were the Christian missionaries to the countries of the Balkans and to Russia. With them, they brought the Eastern tradition of monasticism and the Rule of St. Basil. Especially in the Russian Orthodox church, monasticism played an important role in the history of Christianity in that country.

3. *Hesychasm*

Hesychasm is a Greek word meaning “quietness,” and it indicates the main current of mystical practice in Orthodox Christianity. This method began among in the 45th Centuries among monks in what is today Turkey and Greece. It draws much of its inspiration from the writings of the Greek Fathers, such as Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and Maximus the Confessor (d. 662). The main theoreticians of hesychasm, Simeon the New Theologian (d. 1022) and Gregory Palamas (d. 1359), systematized what had already been practiced for centuries by the monks at the monasteries on Mount Athos and Mount Sinai. From there, the movement spread to Russia, where it became the principal form of Russian monastic spirituality.

The Hesychasts practice a type of repetitive prayer (similar to the *dhikr* of Sufi Muslims) called the Jesus prayer. This short prayer is repeated continuously, with a particular body posture, eyes fixed inwardly on the heart, and controlled breathing. The goal is a nonconceptual prayer of the heart, where the person awaits the Divine light. This Light is not the essence of God, but divine energy or grace which emanates from God. This Light can be “seen” or experienced by those whose physical faculties (the senses, intellect) are “shut down” so that the person is receptive to the spiritual.

5. **Medieval mystics in the West**

The mystics in the West, like the Hesychasts in the East, were greatly influenced by Dionysius (p. 92). Dionysius held that the goal of human life is an intimate union between the believer and God, which leads to the progressive deification of man. The mystic enters a darkness and awaits “a ray of divine darkness.” In this was he comes to know immediately the Divine Presence which can neither be affirmed nor denied intellectually. Western mystics such as Hugh (d. 1142) and Richard (d. 1173) of St. Victor and Julian of Norwich (d. 1342) presented this approach to Christian mysticism.

The Order of Preachers (popularly called Dominicans) was founded by Dominic (d. 1221) in the 13th Century. They devoted themselves to preaching and education and called a “mendicant order” because they were not to have any other source of income than donations. It was primarily through the Dominicans Albert and Thomas Aquinas that the Aristotelian theological synthesis called Thomism became the leading system of philosophical theology in the Catholic church.

The German mystics of the Dominican Order developed the insights of the earlier mystics into a program for leading the mystic to where he would be open and prepared for the reception of the light of God’s grace. This was done through:

- a total submission to God’s will
- a renunciation of self
- a rejection of all sense images (even that of Christ).

The goal of this mystical path was meant to lead one to a union with God so intimate that nothing could come between the mystic and God. Because of its view of the extinction of the self and the consequent tendencies towards pantheism, the orthodoxy of this “path” has been questioned by some Christians.

The leader and main teacher of this current was Meister *Eckhart* (d. 1327). Some of his writings were condemned by the Pope, but through his students John Tauler (d. 1361), Henry Suso (d. 1366), and Jan Ruysbroeck (d. 1381), his writings have had a great influence on Christian mysticism. At the time of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther greatly admired Eckhart's writings, and the German philosophers Kant and Hegel were attracted to his teachings. Many Christians today strongly defend Eckhart's writings against accusations of unorthodoxy.

6. Francis of Assisi

Francis (d. 1226) is one of the most beloved and influential persons in Christian history. Born into a wealthy merchant family in the town of Assisi, Francis experienced dissatisfaction with his worldly way of life and devoted the rest of his years to following the example of Jesus. At the age of 20, with a group of equally young companions, he began to live in a literal way Jesus' call to follow him in poverty. This life of absolute "evangelical" poverty was a great challenge to the church of Francis' day, which was extremely wealthy.

Francis was certainly a mystic, and he would retire for weeks and months at a time to caves and woods to pray. He was blessed with visions and extraordinary religious experiences. Near the end of his life, he is said to have received the "stigmata," the marks of Jesus' wounds on his body.

However, Francis' path to God was the exact opposite of the "Dionysian" mystics. Instead of extinguishing the senses, Francis taught that the created world was the immediate sign of God's gracious activity towards man. He called the sun "brother" and the moon "sister," and he saw all animals, plants and natural phenomena as fellow creatures of God. The way of life which he inspired was one of simplicity, quiet piety, disinterest in intellectual achievement or worldly ambition, and an affectionate and familial relationship to the created universe.

Francis is said to have been the man "most similar to Jesus" in Christian history. His example, the many prayers he wrote, the simple, immediate approach to faith which he taught, and the many religious congregations of men and women who follow his way of life make Franciscan spirituality one of the most influential in the history of Christianity.

5. The Spanish mystics

A high point of Christian mysticism was reached in Spain in the 16th Century in the works of *John of the Cross* (d. 1591), *Teresa of Avila* (d. 1582), and *Ignatius of Loyola* (d. 1556). All three of these persons lived extremely active lives and were deeply involved in reform movements within the Catholic church, but their mystical writings are among the most important in the Christian tradition. John of the Cross and Teresa of Avila were members of the Carmelite Order, while Ignatius was the founder of the Society of Jesus.

a. John of the Cross

In his mystical writings, John holds that God is essentially beyond understanding, feeling, and imagination, and can be known immediately only by pure love. God is

the Lover of the soul, and guides and draws the believer to Him. God purges the soul of all the comforts and pleasures of sensible devotion in the “night of the senses” and the mystic is left with nothing but pure faith.

After a period of rest, God begins to purge the mystic in the “night of the spirit,” which is the painful awareness of the greatness and the sovereignty of God and the smallness and unworthiness of man. Out of these two purgations, which take place throughout the lifetime of the mystic, comes the union of the soul with God.

In order to describe the union of the person (the Bride) with God (the Bridegroom), John often employs daring sexual metaphors taken from the experience of human love.

c. **Teresa of Avila**

Teresa is perhaps the greatest writer on the “stations” and types of mystical prayer in the Christian tradition. She envisioned the life of the believer as a castle of many rooms with Christ waiting in the center. To reach him, the soul must pass through seven “apartments,” each of which represents a type of prayer. She describes each time of prayer at length, with its many variations and subdivisions.

There are three stages of “acquired” prayer, accomplished by the believer’s efforts, to purify oneself of attachments to the world and to inner obstacles. When one reaches the fourth apartment, there begins “infused prayer,” initiated by God’s grace to which the soul remains the passive recipient. At the fourth stage, the will is united to God, but the memory and imagination still run free. At the fifth stage, all the functions are fixed on God and the prayer of “simple union” begins. The sixth stage represents the “prayer of ecstatic union,” and is often accompanied by visions, raptures etc. At the seventh stage other phenomena pass away and all that remains is the “mystical marriage.”

Those acquainted with the *tasawwuf* literature in the Islamic tradition will recognize immediately the parallels to the *maqamat* and *ahwal*, *fana’* and *baqa’*, and the other categories and methods of the Sufis in the writings of Teresa. In fact, the writers of the 16th Century Spanish “Golden Age” of Christian mysticism were all greatly influenced by Sufi traditions. This influence is quite clear in the writings of Ignatius of Loyola.

d. **Ignatius of Loyola**

Ignatius was a soldier who, like Francis of Assisi before him, led a rather wild life in his youth. Wounded in a battle, he, again like Francis, experienced a conversion during the period of his convalescence. After some years of prayer and searching, he went to study at the University of Paris, where with several companions, he founded the Society of Jesus (popularly known as “Jesuits.”) Like the Protestant reformers, the aim of the Jesuits was to reform the church, but they were committed to remaining faithful to the authority of the Pope. In addition to the three traditional vows of poverty, virginity, and obedience, the Jesuits took a fourth vow to go wherever the Pope would send them.

Ignatius' mystical experiences are described in his *Autobiography* and in his spiritual handbook, *The Spiritual Exercises*. Central to Ignatius' spirituality is the retreat. Similar to the Sufi *khalwa*, a retreat is a time of isolation and intense prayer lasting 8 days (annually) or 30 days (once or twice in a lifetime). During this time, the person follows a specific pattern of spiritual exercises designed to lead one step by step to a contemplation of God's love.

Breaking with the tradition of rigidly structured methods of prayer, Ignatius emphasizes the imagination. An important contribution of Ignatius to the history of Christian spirituality is his simple but effective rules for discerning between thoughts and feelings which arise from the action of God's Spirit and those which come from the evil spirit. Jesuits are largely responsible for the retreat movement, which is now universal in the Catholic church, and retreat houses are found in all places in the world where there are Catholics.

7. Mysticism in the Protestant Tradition

As mentioned previously, Protestants have tended to view mysticism with some skepticism. They do not find strong bases for the mystical path in the Bible and the experience of the early church. They feel that it tends to be a flight from the real demands of Christian life in society. Nevertheless, the Protestant tradition has produced some mystics and its own distinctive forms of spirituality.

One of the earliest Protestant mystics is the Lutheran Jakob *Boehme* (d. 1624). Boehme claimed to describe only what he had learned by divine illumination, a mystical knowledge deriving directly from his experience of God. His writings are difficult, borrowing from the Swiss theosophist Paracelsus, as well as from alchemy and astrology. Scholars are not agreed whether Boehme's writings are ultimately pantheist or dualist. Boehme's writings influenced the German idealists and romanticists such as Hegel, Schelling, and von Baader.

Protestant *quietists* condemned the use of any human effort and believed that a believer must wait patiently for God to act. One example of quietism is the Society of Friends (popularly known as Quakers). They have no prescribed rites or any appointed leader. They believe that God will appoint whoever He wills to speak to the community. The Quakers put emphasis on the "Inner Light," which is basically the sense of God's presence and Christ working directly in the soul.

A Protestant movement with deeply spiritual aspects is *pietism*. This began as a reform movement within the Lutheran church in Germany in the 17th Century. The pietists felt that too much emphasis was placed on intellectual formulations of belief and doctrinal orthodoxy, with the result that there was not much living faith in practice. They began to form devotional circles for prayer and Bible reading and emphasized the priesthood of all Christians.

Pietism found its English counterpart in the Methodist movement which arose within the Church of England in the 18th Century under the leadership of John *Wesley* (d. 1788). Although a Christian all his life, Wesley (cf. p. 64) underwent an experience of conversion in 1738 and devoted the rest of his life to promoting "a practical religion" and by God's grace to "beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the

souls of men.” Eventually, the movement separated from the Church of England and became the Methodist church.

The *Pentecostal* movement, which, in its modern form, began in revivalist circles in the United States in the 19th century. Pentecostals stress the “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” which they distinguish from sacramental baptism with water. As evidence of the powerful action of the Holy Spirit, they display the extraordinary gifts - speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and exorcism - found in the apostolic community and mentioned in the New Testament. Their worship is characterized by great spontaneity and enthusiastic devotion.

In the past 30 years, many of the features of Pentecostalism have appeared, not only in the historical “Pentecostal churches,” but also as movements within the Orthodox, Catholic, and traditional Protestant churches. It is more commonly spoken of in these churches as the “Charismatic movement” or “Life in the Spirit” movement.

CONCLUDING WORDS

At the beginning of his great work, the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas stated: “We cannot know what God is but only what God is not.” The great Muslim thinkers of the *kalam* tradition made the same affirmation. The paradox is that while God remains at the center of human life - revealing, active, and governing all, God is still a mystery far beyond our human comprehension. Even though we, Christians and Muslims, read our Sacred Books, study the various aspects of our religious traditions, and try to live in accord with what is taught therein, God is still able to surprise us and move us forward by God’s own free activity and power.

In this book, I have tried to give a brief presentation of the Christian Scriptures, the central tenets of Christian faith, and the historical development of the Christian community, and an outline of its theology, philosophy, and interior spiritual life. My goal has always been to try to make the various aspects of Christian faith intelligible to Muslim students. “Intelligible” does not mean that I expect Muslims to be convinced by my presentation, but I hope that can see how sincere, intelligent Christians might find in this religion a credible response to God. If I have been able to dispel some misunderstandings and to communicate an understanding of Christian faith which is recognizable to those who believe and practice it, this work will represent a small step forward in the mutual understanding and respect between the followers of Islam and Christianity.

The people of today’s world have many needs. They need to believe in something beyond the facts of daily life, with its crises, frustrations, and transient pleasures. They need a reason for hope, for continuing to strive to become the persons they could be and to move human society towards the justice and dignity which could characterize it. They need a source of inspiration which is able to lead them beyond egoism, conflict, and mutual isolation.

To those who believe, God has given a mission to show by word and example the path to our full humanity. Christians and Muslims, in my opinion, must see one another as partners in this mission. As Pope John Paul II has said to the representatives of the Muslim community who welcomed him in Nairobi in 1980,

Muslims and Christians are called to “a joint commitment to promote peace, social justice, moral values, and all the true freedoms of man.” This is the challenge which faces our two religious communities in our relations with one another and in our common approach to life on this planet.

Thomas Michel, S.J.

APPENDIX I

SUGGESTED READINGS FROM THE BIBLE

I suggest some passages of the Bible that Christians down through the centuries have found particularly instructive and inspiring. The list includes passages from both the Old and the New Testaments. This is a personal selection; another Christian might consider other passages to be of greater value.

A. The Old Testament

1. The Torah

Genesis 12; the Creation

Genesis 3; the sin of Adam and Eve

Genesis 69; the story of Noah

Genesis 1213, 1517, 2122; the story of Abraham

Genesis 3748; the story of Joseph and his brothers

Exodus 2; Moses' birth and childhood

Exodus 34; Moses in Arabia and his prophetic call

Exodus 5; Moses and Pharaoh

Exodus 710; the plagues of Egypt

Exodus 12; the first Passover

Exodus 1314; Crossing the Red Sea

Exodus 1920; the Covenant on Sinai and 10 Commandments

Numbers 1114; the Jewish people in the desert

Deuteronomy 13; Moses' final instructions

Deuteronomy 67; the Law of Moses

Deuteronomy 2931; the death of Moses

2. The history of the Jewish people

Joshua 6; the conquest of Jericho

Judges 1316; the story of Samson

I Samuel 13; the story of Samuel

I Samuel 1012; Saul, the first king

I Samuel 1624; the story of David in his youth

II Samuel 59, 1112; stories of King David

I Kings 310; the stories of Solomon and the Temple

I Kings 1719,21; the story of Elijah

II Kings 2425; destruction of Jerusalem and Babylonian captivity

Ezra 1, 46; Cyrus restores the Jewish people
Nehemiah 8; Ezra reads the Torah to the people

3. Wisdom

Job 12; the patient Job tried by Satan
Job 3; Job curses the day he was born
Job 29-31; Job defends himself
Job 38-42; God answers Job and restores his health

Proverbs 6, 10-22; wise advice of Solomon
Qoheleth 1-12; treatise on the meaning of life
Song of Songs 1-8; songs of human love
Wisdom 1-9; the destinies of the good and the bad

Psalms

Psalms 1-134; morning and night prayers
Psalms 135-150; prayers in time of trouble
Psalms 151-183; hymns of praise to the Creator
Psalms 184-198; more hymns of praise
Psalm 23; God the good Shepherd
Psalm 32, 51; prayers of repentance
Psalms 62, 63, 90, 120, 131; prayers of hope
Psalm 71; prayer of an old man

4. The Prophets

Isaiah 6; Isaiah's prophetic call
Isaiah 40; the prophet of consolation
Isaiah 42, 49, 50, 52, 53; the Suffering Servant
Jeremiah 31; God will restore His people
Ezekiel 1-3; allegorical story of the Jewish people
Daniel 1-6; stories of Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar
Daniel 7; Daniel's apocalyptic visions

Hosea 1-14; Israel, God's unfaithful wife
Hosea 11; God's mercy is beyond human understanding
Amos 1-9; Amos, the prophet of social justice
Jonah 1-4; the story of Jonah
Zechariah 1-14; a promise of Messianic salvation

B. The New Testament

1. The Gospels

Matthew 1-23; the birth of Jesus
Matthew 24-25; the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 26-28; Jesus' healing miracles
Matthew 1-11; the parables of the Reign of God
Matthew 12-23; Jesus criticizes the Jewish leaders
Matthew 24-25; the Last Judgment

Mark 1112; Jesus' preaching in Jerusalem
Mark 13; Jesus' apocalyptic sermon
Mark 1416; Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection

Luke 12; births of John the Baptizer and Jesus
Luke 3; the preaching of John the Baptizer
Luke 15; three famous parables of God's mercy
Luke 1719; teachings and deeds of Jesus

John 1; prologue: God's Word made flesh
John 6; Jesus' "Bread of life" discourse
John 10; the "Good Shepherd" discourse
John 1317; the Last Supper narrative
John 21; Jesus' final appearance after his resurrection

2. Acts of the Apostles

Acts 2; the early Christians' Pentecost experience
Acts 9, 22; the conversion of Paul
Acts 19; Paul's two years in Efes
Acts 2728; Paul's journey to Rome

3. The Epistles (Letters)

Paul: Romans 1214; duties of Christian life
Paul: I Corinthians 13; the primacy of love
Paul: I Corinthians 15; the resurrection of the dead
Paul: Galatians 5; Christian liberty and fruits of the Spirit
Paul: Ephesians 56; moral teaching
Paul: I Timothy 23; roles in the Christian community
Hebrews 57; the priesthood of Jesus
James 15; practical religion
I John 34; the law of love

4. The Apocalypse

Apocalypse 23; letters to the churches of Asia
Apocalypse 14; apocalyptic vision of the Lamb
Apocalypse 2022; vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem

APPENDIX II

GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

Apocalyptic literature. Jewish and Christian writings from the period 200 B.C.100 A.D. which seek to disclose the end of the present world and the beginning of the next. Through use of complicated imagery and symbolism, these works direct the reader's attention to the future destiny of this world and the coming "Day of the Lord." In the Bible, the best examples are the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament and the Apocalypse of John in the New. There are other apocalyptic passages in the Bible, as well as many nonBiblical apocalyptic writings.

Apocrypha. Those books not accepted in the canon of Scripture. The Old Testament

apocrypha include the books accepted as Biblical by Orthodox and Catholics, but not by Jews and Protestants. The New Testament apocryphal books consist of gospels, epistles etc. which Christians do not regard as inspired Biblical books.

Apostolic church. The church in the period of the apostles and the first disciples of Jesus which produced the New Testament writings. It covers the time period between the death of Jesus (about 30) until approximately the year 100.

Atonement. Man's reconciliation with God through Jesus' death on the cross. Christians believe that in dying Jesus broke down all barriers which human sin had erected and established a new and eternal covenant between God and humankind.

Bishop. Literally, "overseer," the bishop is the spiritual head of the Christian community in each locale, i.e., "diocese."

Catechesis. Instruction in the Christian faith given to new members of the community.

Canon of Scripture. The collection or list of books which are accepted by Christians as being part of the Bible. A **canonical book** is one considered by the Christian churches to be an authentic part of the Christian Scriptures.

Catholic Church. That community of Christians who consider the church to be governed by a "college" or assembly of bishops over which the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, presides.

Christ. cf. "Messiah."

Church. From the Greek word meaning "assembly," the church is the international community of Christians which exists in history to bear witness to what God has accomplished in the man Jesus. The "local church" refers to the Christian community in a particular region. In secondary, derived meanings, the term "church" can refer to a building where Christians worship or to the organizational structures which characterize the Christian community.

Coptic Church. The church of Egypt and Ethiopia whose spiritual head is the Patriarch of Alexandria. Tradition holds the church to have been founded by St. Mark. The Coptic Church did not accept the Council of Chalcedon and hence is not in union with the Orthodox or Catholic churches. Since 1959, the church in Ethiopia has been independent.

Council. A formal meeting of bishops and representatives of churches held to discuss matters of faith and discipline. Ecumenical councils are assemblies of bishops of the whole church. "Local" councils - those of one nation or region - are often called "synods." All Christians accept the first seven ecumenical councils, and Catholics consider fourteen later councils to have ecumenical authority.

Covenant. A free agreement between two parties in which agrees to do something for the other. The covenant on Mt. Sinai created a special relationship between God and the Jews. Christians believe that Jesus inaugurated a New Covenant (New Testament) between God and all mankind.

Diaspora. The dispersion of Jewish communities outside Palestine which occurred first at the time of Alexander the Great.

Diatessaron. An edition of the gospels which selects passages from the four gospels and arranges them into one long narrative. The most famous diatessaron is that of Tatian.

Dogma. An element of Christian faith which has been revealed by God and defined by the church.

Epistle. A letter, written by an apostle or an early disciple of Jesus, either to an individual or to a local community of Christians. 21 epistles are accepted by Christians as books of the Bible.

Ecumenical Patriarch. The title of the Patriarch of Constantinople residing in Istanbul. Cf. "Orthodox."

Eucharist. The central act of Christian worship, the Eucharist is a commemoration and reliving of the Last Supper of Jesus.

Evangelical Christians. In a broad sense, all Christians whose faith is based on and in accord with the four gospels are "evangelical." Today the term usually refers to those who accept the literal teaching of the Bible as the sole basis of faith.

Evangelist. One of the four writers of the gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.

Exegesis. The effort to understand the exact meaning of the Scriptures through linguistic analysis.

Exodus. God's leading the Jewish people out of Egypt.

Gregorian Armenian Church. Armenia was the first nation in history to adopt Christianity as the state religion when King Tiridates III of Armenia was converted in 301 by St. Gregory the Illuminator. The church in Armenia did not accept the Council of Chalcedon and hence is not in union with the Orthodox or Catholic churches. The Catholicos of Etchmiadzin (in modern Armenia) is the spiritual head of the Armenian church.

Hypostasis. A mode of subsistence. Christians believe that the one God has three essential, eternal *hypostases*, or ways of being and acting. The term has been translated into Arabic as *sifah/sifat* or *uqnum/aqanim* and into Latin as *persona/personae*.

Icon. An image of Christ, Biblical figures, and Christian saints. Icons and statues are not objects of worship, but honor is shown them for the persons whom they represent.

Incarnation. God's eternal Word taking flesh or dwelling in the man Jesus.

Indulgence. A remission of part of the punishment due for sin through prayer or the performance of good works.

Inspiration of Scripture. God's action upon the human authors of the Biblical books which moves them to write and insures that they express what God intends to teach.

Messiah. The savior awaited by the Jewish people. Christians believe that Jewish messianic hopes were fulfilled in Jesus. The translation of "Messiah" (Arabic: *Masîh*) into Greek is Christ.

Orthodox. A family of independent churches who share the same faith and acknowledge the honorary primacy of the Ecumenical Patriarch (of Constantinople) who resides in Istanbul. The family of Orthodox churches include the four ancient patriarchates of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, the newer patriarchates of Russia, Serbia, Rumania, Bulgaria, and Georgia, and several "independently governed" churches. As an adjective, the term "orthodox" means "having the right teaching."

Patriarch. 1) A title of respect given to early Biblical figures, e.g., to Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc. 2) The title given to the heads of the five ancient centers of Christianity: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Constantinople, which signified authority over the churches of the surrounding region. The title is also used in the Orthodox church for the heads of independent churches. Cf. "Orthodox."

Patristics. The study of the writings of the early "fathers," the thinkers and leaders of the Christian community in the first five centuries. Also called "patrology".

Pentateuch. In Greek, "Book of five parts." A common term for the Torah, the "Books of Moses," the first five books of the Bible.

Pentecost. The Jewish feast of the harvest which occurred 50 days after the Passover. For Christians, the term refers to the event when the 12 apostles experienced the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit at the time of the Jewish feast.

Pope. A title, meaning "Father," given, in the Catholic church, to the Bishop of Rome, and in the Coptic church, to the Patriarch of Alexandria. cf. "Catholic Church."

Protestant. Those churches which derive their inspiration from the 16th Century reform movement begun by Martin Luther. There is a wide variety of belief and practice among Protestant communions, all of which stress the primacy of the Biblical message.

Redemption. God's saving actions for mankind in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Sacrament. The invisible actions of the risen Christ within the Christian communion made visible through signs and rites.

Schism. A division within the Christian community which is not based on a difference in doctrine.

Simony. The sin of buying and selling of spiritual things: offices, privileges etc.

Spirituality. The internalization of the Christian message by which the believer seeks a perfect union of mind and heart with God. The various **spiritualities** in Christian history are comprehensive paths or ways of leading the Christian life oriented to perfect discipleship of Christ.

Syrian Jacobite Church. The church in Syria traces its origins to the early Christian community in Antioch. The spiritual head is the Patriarch of Antioch. The Syrian church did not accept the Council of Chalcedon and hence is not in union with the Orthodox or Catholic churches.

Vatican. The residence and administrative center of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. The official name is “The Holy See.”

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