

IS ISLAM GENUINE?

By Catholic European scholar, who wishes to remain anonymous for personal reasons.

The following is a provoking critique on the authenticity of the Islamic religion

“Is Islam genuine?” It is an easy question to pose, but the answer is far from simple, if only because the answer is dependent on who is giving it. This will, of course, strike the reader as strange because the question appears to be very similar to the same question about Judaism or Catholicism, and thus beyond essentially subjective responses. The question, “Is Islam genuine?” does not receive an objective response in this article. It is because Islam is at once a fact and an illusion, a contradiction which will be shown in due course to a paradox, and on that has tremendous implications not only for the Catholic Church, but also for the one in six people walking this earth who call themselves Muslims.

Some Jewish theologians down the centuries have treated Islam as a Judaic heresy in the same way that they have treated the Creed of Jesus Christ a Judaic heresy, although it has to be said that Jewry has frequently found it possible to work with Muslims in a way that it has not been able to do so with Christians. Whether this has been due to historical figures or historical circumstances, or even merely psychological dispositions, is something to be debated, though there is an a priori case for thinking that there is something inherent to Christianity which Judaists fear profoundly and which is not to be found in Islam. Some of the facts of this article may add a certain measure of conviction to this notion.

In the Catholic Church theologians, such as St. Thomas Aquinas, and lay writers, such as Hilaire Belloc, have treated Islam as a Christian heresy. This will come as a surprise to many readers who have been brought up thinking that Islam was something set well apart from the Catholic Faith, but the fact remains that there is much to underpin such an opinion in spite of contemporary appearances. Belloc writes, for example, that:

Mohammedanism was a heresy: that is the essential point to grasp before

going any further. It began as a heresy, not as a new religion. It was not a pagan contrast with the Church; it was not an alien enemy. It was a perversion of Christian doctrine. Its vitality and endurance soon gave it the appearance of a new religion, but those who were contemporary with its rise saw it for what it was—not a denial, but an adaptation and a misuse, of the Christian thing [The Great Heresies, 1938]

Fr. Sheehan, Archbishop of Germia, in his *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* 1944 wrote of Islam:

“The fragments of revealed truth which the religion contains were borrowed from Judaism or Christianity.” In other words, if Islam drew upon both creeds, there is a certain truth in saying that it is simultaneously a Judaic and a Christian heresy.

What we're told

Let us look at what the world at large and Muslims in particular think is genuine Islam.

We are told that it is a new religion that was founded by the Prophet Muhammed, also was born in Mecca—a large and important trading center as well as a site of pagan religious pilgrimage—in western Arabia in 570AD. We are told by the Pakistani writer, Dilip Him, in *Islamic Fundamentalism* (1988) that Islam means “state of submission.” Professor Edward Hulmes of the Universities of Durham and Princeton, in his 1986 Catholic Truth Society pamphlet entitled *Muhammed* says that it means “peace through submission to the revealed will of God.” We are told that, inspired by the Archangel Gabriel, Muhammed wrote the Holy Book of Islam, the Qur’an (Koran), and that this book, full of subtlety, wisdom and insight, is the defining proof of Muhammed’s prophetship, because he was an uneducated man—variously a shepherd or trader—who could neither read nor write. The fact that the Qur’an is written in classical Arabic and has no literary antecedents adds weight to the claim that Muhammed was inspired by the Divine Will. We are informed that he sought to preach the Quranic creed amongst the pagans of Mecca, but that he was driven out and forced to seek refuge in Medina [both places located in modern-day western Saudi Arabia—Ed.]. He

persevered, however, making converts here and there through the power of his word and example. Given the violent nature of society in those days, he necessarily came into conflict with the pagan forces around him and in 624, won the decisive Battle of Badr. A few years later, Mecca fell to the truth of Islam, and the Ka'ba, the house which contained the stone idols of the Meccan pagans, was turned into the House of God. The Ka'ba becomes the center of the Islamic world, the foremost shrine, to which all Muslims should seek to go at least once in their lives on pilgrimage.

This is a summary of the reply to "Is Islam genuine?" It is a standard description that will be found in books written by Catholics, by Muslim clerics, by secular academics and by Western Islamologues. The sole problem with this description can be summed up in one phrase: Virtually none of it is true! That will come as a shock to many, but only because they have absorbed what has been handed down to them at face value. It is exactly like the conviction of many Conciliar Catholics that Mgr. Lefebvre was an excommunicated schismatic—it is not something that they have proved through reading, research and study, but something that they have taken as truth simply because it has been repeated to them from every side with barely a dissenting voice. But mere repetition, be it by academics or by the apathetic, is not the hallmark of Truth. Thus, to get to the truth about Islam, to get a truly objective and historical "handle" on Islam, we are going to have to dig much deeper, not with the intention of offending or insulting Muslims—they too are creatures of God made in His image and likeness—but with the intention of bringing light to bear on a twilight zone, so that the Truth might shine forth and set free those disposed to receive God's grace.

Pride and Prejudice

In the early 1980's, Dr. Maurice Bucaille published, through Seghers of Paris, a book entitled *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science: The Holy Scriptures Examined in the Light of Modern Knowledge*. Throughout his work, he lays great stress upon the fact that in comparing the Christian Bible to the Qur'an, he is acting purely objectively. He emphasizes that he is a surgeon, that he has been formed in the spirit of Western scientific objectivity, and that when he set out on this work, he had no preconceived ideas. Before long the reader comes to see that the whole purpose of the book is to

demonstrate the inferiority of the Bible to the Qur'an, and to do this in the name of "scientific investigation." 'We are told: "Today, it is impossible not to admit the existence of scientific errors in the Bible" (p.6). He concludes the Qur'an does not possess scientific errors and therefore it is the true revealed Word of God.

Equally important for our study is another of his statements:

In the West the critical study of the Scriptures is something quite recent. For hundreds of years, people were content to accept the Bible as it was. It would have been a sin to level at it the slightest criticism *ibid.*, p.16.

You can feel the slightly mocking tone here, the "intellectual" looking down upon the masses who believed the "superstitions" of the Bible. The doctor's spirit is that of the 18th- and 19th-century rationalists "disproving" the Bible, but printed on a page in the 20th century. Implicit, of course, is that this is not the case with the Qur'an: that it has been tried and tested to the satisfaction of science. Don't be crestfallen. Dr. Bucaille's "scientific" approach is a lie to the first order, and is typical of so many Islamic apologists, whether they be practicing Muslims or simply people calling themselves secularists or agnostics!

It is certainly true that a systematic and critical study of the Old and New Testaments by Christians— and approached by many different disciplines such as textual criticism, archaeology, epigraphy, history, theology etc.— only really got underway at the beginning of this century [Unfortunately, false and haughty critical study was used by modernists to undermine the credibility of the Bible.—Ed.] What is devastatingly true is that Muslims have not even begun to do this to their religious books! Thus, we find the Dominican. Fr. Calmel. writing:

The Muslims have never subjected their religious books to criticism. They would think that this profanes them and that they would be guilty of sacrilege. From the moment one of their books is held to be revealed by God, it is not possible to maintain that it might be penetrated by the historical thought of Man. We are not used to seeing things in this way, and the Catholic does not understand that one can posit a principle (the separation between divine faith and historical or philosophical reason [Islam: A Jewish Undertaking

(1961)].

In case people think that Fr. Calmel is being partisan, it should be noted that many Western Islamologues, who are no friends of Christianity, say exactly the same thing. Regis Blachere and Denise Masson, who have both made attempts unsuccessful to make coherent translations of the Qur'an, have said the same thing. Masson writes:

The critique, historical and scriptural, based upon epigraphy and archaeology, has still not been applied to the Qur'an following the normal methods. Introduction to her translation of the Qur'an (Pleiade, 1967)].

When Denise Masson sought to suggest that "certain verses" of the Qur'an were "obscure," she was forbidden to do so by the Supreme Islamic Council, to which she submitted.

When the Biblical School of Jerusalem began studying critically the Old and New Testaments at the beginning of this century, there were some scholars who undertook to study Islamic tradition. It needs to be understood that in addition to the Qur'an, there are three other works which combine to make up Islamic tradition. The first is the Hadith Sayings of the Prophet Mohammed, which was put together two centuries after the death of Muhammed, and is claimed to be authenticated by the companions and eyewitnesses of the Prophet passing down this information from generation to generation. The second is the Sunna, which is the juridical legislation pertaining to Islam. The third is the Sira, which is the Life of Mohammed, and which was allegedly put together in the form that we now know it by Ibn Hisam in the ninth century, a man about whom we know little or nothing, and who also claims that the information contained in the Sira is genuine because it was passed down by the companions and eyewitnesses of the Prophet from generation to generation.

Getting the truth

The first person who really began to expose the tenuous nature of Islamic origins was the Jesuit Fr. Lammens, working at the University of St. Joseph in Beirut (Lebanon) at the beginning of the century. Drawing upon the

work of many scholars, such as De Weil in 1843 and Caetani in 1905, he demonstrated that the eyewitnesses that guaranteed the Hadith and the sira were pure fiction, and that the Hadith and the Sira were no more than paraphrases and embellishments of statements to be found in the Qur'an. He wrote:

The statements found in the writings sacred to the Muslim tradition form not the control, not a source of further information, as was thought until now, but a fantastic development. On the basis of the Quranic text, the Hadith embroidered its legends, happy to create names of players in the field so as to pad out the basic themes [Quran and Tradition 1910].

The French monk, Br. Bruno Bonnet-Evmard, whom we will mention later, summarizes the position of Fr. Lammens: "Tradition explains the Qur'an, which itself is the basis of Tradition." in other words, it is a vicious circle which the "scientific" enquiries of the likes of Bucaille fail to notice.

Was Fr. Lammens simply a biased priest? Well, we find Professor Goldziher, a Jew, writing in *Mohammedan Studies* (1989) of "the profoundly tendentious nature of the (Islamic) Tradition." Again, in the *Ecclesiastical Dictionary of History and Geography* (1924) Rene Aigrain writes in the entry on "Arabia":

In such circumstances, we can no longer deal with the life of Mohammed by using the Sira as a basis, as have several of his biographers.

Caetani wrote in his *Annali dell'Islam*: "We can find almost nothing true about Muhammed in Tradition, and we can reject as apocryphal all the traditional materials that we have." Maxime Rodinson, in his *Mahomet* (1974) informs us that "nothing allows us ever to say: this dates mdispu times of the Prophet." Even those (e.g., Gaudefroy-Demombnes, Noldeke, et al) who are not prepared prepared to eliminate the Sira and the Hadith as fictitious, do so not because of evidence for their historicity, but because the alternative would be to start from scratch. Noldeke, for example, simply states that he will leave aside "the mystery surrounding the personality of Muhammed" (cited in Fr. Lammens' work, *Quran and Tradition*).

The importance of the work of Lammens should not be underestimated,

for it is highly destructive of “Islam” as we know it. It is destructive for this reason: once you have eliminated the Sira, there is not a single, positive source attesting even to the existence of Muhammed! This is a truly incredible thing given the immense collections of manuscripts, parchments, monuments, sculptures, tombs and inscriptions of the ancient world that have come down to our day. Thus Dilip Hiro can describe Muhammed in the following terms: He grew up to be a sturdy man of average height, with a curved nose, large eyes, sensuous mouth and thick, slightly curly hair. He was a quiet man, serious, reflective, given to speaking briefly and pointedly.

Without the Sira, there is nothing to back up this apparently reasonable description. We do not hear about this fact, and the reader can make up his own mind about why this may be, but it does not detract in anyway from the fact.

Digging more Deeply

Fr, Lammens does not take us all the way to the truth. What he did was to begin a process, a process which was continued 50 years later by the Dominican Fr. They writing under the pseudonym, Hanna Zakarias. Fr. They was a renowned medievalist in his day, and was highly respected in the scientific world. He is considered the founder of the scientific exegesis of the Qurán, although he did not read Arabic or Hebrew, and thus had to read it in various translations. His intuitions came from an understanding of texts and their make up, and his major critical contribution was his conclusion in *Islam under Evaluation* (1957) that the Qurán did not originate in Arabia at all and its author was a scholar from elsewhere who created the Arab religious language.” This is an important point because for the Iraqi “exegetes” of the ninth century, the fact that the Qur’an had no literary antecedents was in itself “a miracle.” Far from decrying the Qurán as rubbish, Fr. They establishes the fact that it has some real worth, a value that is not found in the other elements of Islamic tradition. He says in *The Quran is not Arab* (1957) that when one considers the Quranic text alongside the Sira, the latter are only the babblings of stupid children, and the disorder, unlikelihood and grossness of their legends on the life of the prophet allow the detail and power of this uneven Arabic text to stand out marvellously.

The kind of thing he had in mind can be gleaned from an example. As Lammens showed, everything in Tradition has been taken from the Qurán and embellished. Thus the Quranic text, "We have sent you a light," (a mistranslation in fact) is developed in Hadith and Sira so that it comes to be applied directly to the Prophet himself. Thus, Islamic tradition tells us that Muhammed actually gave off waves of light so that he was visible even in the darkest shadows. The light that he gave off was so powerful that it allowed someone to find a lost needle in the dark!

Comparing the Qur'an to the Hebrew Bible and the rabbinical Midrashim, Fr. They concluded that the Qur'an was only "the Bible explained to the Arabs," though he also isolated a residue, drawn from allusions made to contemporary events by the Quranic author, which could not be explained away in this fashion. This residue he believed was a little like the Acts of the Apostles, and so he dubbed them the Acts of Islam, thereby presenting them as kind of diary of rabbinical attempts to convert the Arabs to Judaism. Although Fr. They did not have a completely closed and satisfactory theory, he advanced the study of Islam and declared the key to discovering it would be a systematic and scientific translation of the Qur'an, for the Qur'an was the only sure document. He believed that the Qur'an had to explain the Qur'an in the way that the Bible explained the Bible. His linguistic deficiencies, however, made him unsuitable for the task.

The process has been greatly advanced in our days; by Brother Bruno Bonnet-Eymard. He is not merely a gifted theologian, who has studied Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in depth, but he is also a talented linguist who reads Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, and Arabic.

The first thing to understand is that his systematic translation of the Qur'an is necessary because no one has ever succeeded in doing it to date. The reason is that the translators have been guided not by the actual meaning of the text, but by taking into predominant consideration "the received sense" of the text. There is actually no agreed translation of the Qur'an in existence! We may be used to differences of phraseology and emphasis in the various editions of the Bible that exist, but no one disputes the essentials. With the Qur'an, however, it is all the other way round. One writer will translate a phrase in one way, another will do so in a completely different way, and both

talk of breaks in meaning, interpolations, amendments, and adaptations in an effort to cover up the essential uselessness of their work. Speaking of such translations, Fr. De Nantes, a colleague of Br., Bruno, writes:

Nonsense, fantastic inventions, contradictions, incoherence without" even mentioning the innumerable omissions of embarrassing words and misplaced additions-such is the method of the traditional translation for 13 centuries.

Thus when the text (Sura III, vs.14) clearly refers to "gold and refined gold," translators like Blachere and Masson write "gold and silver" because they do not understand the reference. They create the word "silver," which is not in the text, although the reference is clearly taken from the Psalms. It is a question of Psalm 18:11, which says: They are more precious than gold, than heaps of purest gold. [Confraternity edition, 1946.]

This is an example of the kind of invention that goes on in such translations. An example of contradiction is to be found in Sura ILL, vs.13, with the word mitlayhim. Blachere translates this as meaning "in equal number," whilst Masson informs us that it means "two times superior in number." Which is it? Or again, there is the problem of arbitrary meaning, where the same word in one context is ascribed a wholly different meaning in another. Thus Sura III, vs.25, contains the word; wuffiyat, and is translated as "holding faithfully to an alliance," whilst in Sura II the same word is translated as receiving a just reward."

Space requires restraint here, but let it be said that we are confronted by a mass of shifting sands, a problem that has to be resolved before a serious answer to the question, "Is Islam genuine?" can be given. This is the historic task that Br. Bruno had and has before him, and to date he has published three volumes, totalling some 1,000 pages of dense script, which has translated and explained in great depth the first five chapters (Suras) of the Qur'an. His research has shown that not only is the Qur'an not a hodge-podge theological work of dubious value, as previous translations might lead people to believe, but that it is a mine of information that is coherent and interesting, and which is the work of a truly erudite man. Although there are still another 109 Suras to translate, his work has revolutionized the study of

the Qur'an to the point where one can already say that Islam, as we have known it, has been dealt a fatal blow.

Br. Bruno begins by stating:

Whatever incertitude remains concerning the genesis of Arabic script, it is an incontrovertible fact that the alphabetic system was fixed precisely for one given purpose: the publication of the Qur'an....

He goes on to say: Our exegesis will show clearly that the alphabet used in the Qur'an is only a pure and straightforward transposition into Arabic from the Hebrew alphabet.

Thus, Fr. They's intuition that the author of the Qur'an was "a rabbi," whilst not absolutely confirmed, is clearly not a million miles off target. Br. Bruno tells us that the word Islam is traditionally translated as "submission," something that we saw at the outset of this article. He says that the translation is clearly wrong and wholly unconnected to the text. The Hebrew root word, sim, is also to be found in Aramaic and is simply 'aslim in Arabic. The word means "perfect"—in Aramaic, hawei selim means, "Be perfect!" Why this should be will be explained in due course.

It is, of course, beyond the scope of this article to follow Br. Bruno through all his translation, so we will have to content ourselves with a brief overview of the text, which shows the true meaning of the Qur'an, and also through looking at certain key words. Firstly, however, we will have to review our historical knowledge a little, so that the full impact of what has been discovered comes home to the reader.

After the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70AD, the Jews were dispersed. Where did they go? Historians, such as Torrey, believe that many went en masse to Teima, an oasis in southern Palestine, hoping and believing that they would be able to return at some time. What is not in dispute is the fact that the Arabian Peninsula has a tremendous history that is only becoming known in our day, and in which the Jews have a pivotal role. For those who have thought it was just so many miles of sand, with Arabs travelling about aimlessly by camel, the following will come as a shock.

We know from inscriptions in 280AD that the inhabitants of Sheba and the Yemenat worshipped Athtar, that is to say, the goddess Venus, but that by 378 such paganism had died away to be replaced by a monotheism which invoked "the Lord of heaven and earth" and who was designated the "Merciful." We know from historians such as Jamme and Danielou that southern Arabia from the end of the fourth century played a dominant role in the history of the Arab peninsula. We know too that not only was Yemen a fertile and prosperous place, but that it was the theater of a real attempt at complete Judaization which had neither precedent nor equivalent.

Naturally, we will ask ourselves how this came about and why. The first point to bear in mind is that the Judaism of today does not actively seek converts, and has not done so for a long time, but it would be a mistake to believe that it was always this way. In the early days of Christianity, Jewry fought long and hard against Christian missionaries wherever they appeared, using whatever methods were available, and one of these methods was to seek to win people over to Judaism. The second point to bear in mind is that Judaism spread easily in the Arab Peninsula because circumcision was common amongst the Arabs. The third point to bear in mind is that Jews were numerous in the land of the Himyarites (Yemen), a fact attested to by Philostorge, who relates coming across an Arian mission headed by Theophilus of Dibous in 356. We are informed that while the population was mainly pagan at the time, Theophilus made great inroads, converting the king and building churches everywhere. Such reports demonstrate the scale of Roman and Christian expansion, but it also demonstrates that such expansion was coming up against a well-entrenched Jewish community.

In 378, the king of Yemen turned against the Roman Empire and allied himself to the Persian Empire, a change brought about by the Jews since they were the sole intellectual and social elite in the country. This was the high tide in Rome's attempts to colonize the peninsula, and it also marks the high tide of Christian missionary effort since the Persians were far from sympathetic to the religion of its imperial rival. Thus, the fifth century saw the region becoming evermore Hebraic in outlook.

We know from John of Ephesus that, at the beginning of the sixth century,

a war broke out between Aidog, Prince of Ethiopia and Dimion, King of Yemen. The latter was heavily pro-Jewish, to the point that he had all Roman merchants entering his territory arrested because of the Roman persecution of the Jews. Nonetheless, the Ethiopian prince won the day, converted to Christianity, and built churches everywhere. This Christian expansion was seen by the Jewish community as a provocation, and Simon de Beth Arsham, a Persian bishop, relates that the Jews at Tiberias (the major Jewish school of the day— Ed.J) send their priests (sic) year after year and season after season to provoke trouble for the Christian Himyarites.

The anti-Ethiopian and anti-Christian reaction was led by a Jew named Dfi Nuwas, who promptly allied himself with the Persians. He in his turn was also crushed by the Christian forces.

We know from an inscription in 618 that the king of Yemen was a monophysite (Arian) Christian by the name of Abramus, and that the inscription, in an Arabic-type script, says: "By the power, the favor and the mercy of the Merciful, and his Messiah and his Holy Ghost."

In the north of Arabia, a different situation developed. The pressure of imperial conflict between Byzantium and Persia caused the various Arab tribes to unify, serving either one empire or the other. Yet it is known that the Arabs who converted to Christianity did not stay in the Hedjaz, where modern day Mecca is to be found, but migrated to Syria, Palestine, and Egypt. The negative result was that by 582, the Hedjaz looked for all the world like a Jewish province. The voluminous literary and epigraphic evidence for a implantation in the first centuries of Christianity in the Hedjaz can be found in, for example, Joseph Horowitz's article. "Arabia," published in the Encyclopaedia Judaica in 1929.

Francois Nau in his *The Christian Arabs of Mesopotamia and Syria in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries*. published in 1933, tells us that, at the beginning of the seventh century all the Arabs of Mesopotamia and Syria were to a certain degree Christian, at least in atmosphere. Everyone had seen some of the hermits or ascetics, had eaten at the doors of the monasteries, had been present at the controversies between the monophysites and diphsites.

Fr. Henri Charles tells us in his *The Christianity of the Nomadic Arabs in the Limes and in the SyroMesopotamian Desert in the Region of the Hegira* (published by Le Roux in 1936) that, the powerful personality of famous hermit, St. Euthyme, marks ‘the beginning of a highly fruitful mission, constantly spreading, so that the territory of the Ghassanides by 570 was flourishing with Arab monophysite monasteries.....”

Thus, for centuries the Arab Peninsula was the scene not merely of military warfare, but also of theological warfare: warfare between Jews and Christians, and between various heretical Christian sects and Catholicism. Inevitably, there is a seeping down of all such influences into the fabric of society, a penetration, a cultic mixing, which, as we shall see, prepares the way for the appearance of the Qur’an.

While all of this is going on, there is a steady development and change in the alphabets used in the region. Such changes are now virtually clear, and they demonstrate that the Qur’an in Arabic, far from being “a miracle,” is, in fact, the end of a centuries-long progression.

There is a bi-lingual inscription at Umm-al-Jimal which has been dated to the end of the third century, and Littman comments in *Florilegium Meichior de Vogue* (Paris 1909) that “the script is already a transitory stage towards Arab script,” whilst the inscription at Namara is dated December 7, 328, and is by then proto-Arab. The definitive evolution of this development can be seen in the inscription at Harran which is dated 568, and in the inscription at Zabad in the Syro-Mesopotamian region, both being what we would now call Arabic. It is a variety of Aramaic, Aramaic being the commercial language of the Old East at this period.

What is not only interesting, but actually vital, is the fact that both the Harran and Zabad inscriptions are Christian inscriptions. Nan tells us: It is the Christians above all who created alphabets for the people they converted, and taught them how to read and write. So-called classical Arabic is no exception. Its alphabet is owed to Christians, because in the homes of the Christian Arabs of Syria are to be found the oldest examples of this writing.

Having taken on board a little of the historical background leading up to the Qur'an, we can now place it and its message in a defined context. It is not a spontaneous creation, a revelation falling from the skies, but a work with deep roots, an ancient lineage and a "sting" suited to the times.

Even a brief perusal of the Qur'an will demonstrate that Abraham is central to Islam, and yet from the opening prayer we see that there is a distinct lack of 'Islamic coloration.'" In the name of God, the Merciful, the Mercy-Giving Praise be to God. Lord of the Universe, the Merciful, the Mercy-Giving! Ruler of the Day of Judgment! You do we worship and from You do we seek help. Guide us along the Straight Road, the Road of those whom You have favoured, with whom You are not angry, nor who are lost.

It can be readily seen that there is nothing specifically Islamic about this prayer. Indeed, it could be just as equally Jewish or Christian in origin at first sight. If you think about it, this is certainly a strange occurrence in an apparently new religion. Br. Bruno, however, demonstrates that, in fact, it is a very old Jewish prayer which is given a subtle anti-Trinitarian bent, and that Irving's translation is inaccurate in that it has lost much of the subtlety and finesse of the Quranic original.

As Br. Bruno has proceeded to translate the first two Suras of the Qur'an, its basic theme is becoming clear and hints are being revealed regarding its author and his background.

Confronted by the violent and unending conflicts between Jews and Christians in the peninsula, it is evident that the Quranic author was forced to reflect on why the alliance—the covenant with God—had come to this sorry pass. He remarks that the sign of the alliance with God is circumcision, and that the alliance was made with Abraham. Yet he also remarks that the first son of Abraham to be circumcised is not Isaac, but his son, Ismael, by the slave Agar. Recall that God demonstrated his power to Abraham by giving a son, Isaac, to his elderly wife, Sarah. We know too that, at the insistence of Sarah, Agar and Ismael were sent away, and Ismael would become the father of the Arab people. Thus the alliance was made with Abraham, who was neither Jew nor Christian, but was a pagan who became "perfect"—the first Muslim. Abraham and his son Ismael were made "perfect men"—

muslimayn— and they were told to consecrate their ancestors to God, to make of them “a perfect people”—muslimat. This call to perfection was a “justice” which came upon Abraham and Ismael (because God never stopped listening to the prayer of Agar and her son, according to the Quranic author) and also upon Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets including Moses and Jesus without distinction. In other words, there is no distinction made between the Old and New Testaments, for the author holds that the Torah of the Jews and the Gospels of the Christians have been used wrongly to divide the Peoples of the Book. The Jews are held to have fallen away from the Law, and the Christians have distorted the prophetship of Jesus, making a mere man a God, and thus fallen into apostasy. The Quranic author apparently felt called to reunite the Peoples of the Book. This he does by taking the racial line of Judaism through circumcision and adding to it the call to perfection from the Gospels, emphasizing all the time that the falling away of the Jews and Christians from God’s alliance did not abolish the alliance made with Abraham and Ismael.

We see another view of Islam as “a call to perfection.” In one sense, we have to see this theological reasoning as a stroke of genius by the author of the Qur’an, and as something that suited the warring theological atmosphere of the peninsula, Br. Bruno states:

The author does not have as a plan to found a third religion, but to abolish the two others—Jewish and Christian— by restoring what he believes is the sole “tradition” (qiblat), that of authentic Abrahamism.

Whilst the first Sura is purely Jewish and very old, Sura II is concerned with reminding people of the demands of the Jewish Torah, and Sura III with the demands of the Christian Gospels. Thus Sura II ends with a prayer of the author’s making, the Our Master, Our Circumciser, which stands half way between the Yalzwe/z of the Jews and the Pater Noster of the Christians.

How, then, does the Quranic author believe that the true religion of Abraham can be restored? Simply by a return to Jerusalem, by a return to the place or house of Abraham, and by uniting with the true believers, the offspring of Ismael. Now tradition tells us that the place or house of Abraham is to be found in the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem, and this because it is

believed that it was at this spot on Mount Moria that Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac. The House carries the name “Bakka,” and the purest form of adhesion to the alliance is the “pilgrimage to the House” (hi jju l’bayti) at Bakka. It is portrayed as an unlimited blessing and as “the Way” to God. By insisting on this, the Quranic author is attacking the Jews, who had stopped the pilgrimage to the ruins of the Temple centuries before, and equally the Christians, who had forbidden it in the name of the Gospels, because it is not the Law, but the spirit which saves. [For Catholics, going through the motions of a Catholic life, that is, observing the Law, is not the same thing as living a Catholic life. The first gives little or nothing; the second opens the door to salvation.—Ed.]

At the same time, we see that the Quranic author, while being anti-Christian, does not see all Christians in the same light. He makes distinctions. He refers in Sura III, vs. 113 to those Christians “who stand and recite the words of God throughout the night,” whilst in another place in Sura III, vs.114, he states:

They speak with softness and remain calm, they are distant from what is extraneous, and they give of themselves freely. These are amongst those who prosper.

These are clear references to the desert monks, and Aigrain demonstrates in his article, “Arabia” Ecclesiastical Dictionary of History and Geography, 1924), “the real fact of the prestige of the monks and their power of conversion upon the Arabs.” So it should not be surprising that this man of intellect and subtlety would also be an admirer of a Christian phenomenon of which he would have had direct knowledge. Furthermore, Br. Bruno demonstrates that the author had a profound knowledge of Christian culture, had meditated deeply on the Gospels and upon the other books of the Christian revelation, and this is shown in the precisions and allusions of the Quranic text. The Quranic author was a scholar of the first order.

The aim of the author and of the “faithful” is to return to the House of Abraham, to Bakka, by means of pilgrimage. Suras IV and V of the Qur’an are concerned with the means of that return.

History tells us that Jerusalem fell in 614, with the armies of Emperor Heraclitus of Byzantium being crushed by the Persians. Krauss tells us (Jewish History) that Jews from southern Palestine were allied with these Persians—possibly the Jews from the oasis of Teima mentioned by Torrey as well as from Arab bands. Upon arrival in Jerusalem the Jews threw themselves with fury upon the Christian population and their shrines including, naturally, the Holy Sepulchre. Yet it is recorded that they threw themselves with greatest fury upon the Nea, the Church of Our Lady, a point whose significance will appear later.

In 617, the Jews, according to Krauss, “demanded certain rights of autonomy in the Holy City.” The Persians by this time had been in the presence of the Christians of Jerusalem for three years and had found them most accommodating, so when the Jewish demand for autonomy was made, the Persians decided enough was enough. They deported the Jews to Persia. From the writings of historians like Krauss and Graetz, it would appear that the Arab bands were dispersed beforehand, thanks to the treachery of the Jews, and Br. Bruno’s translation (Sura III, vss.118—119, 122) shows that the Quranic author complains of treachery and the perfidy of false brothers, the sons of Israel.

Sura III deals with this defeat of the Arabs, and the author talks of his “calvary,” but he turns his meditations upon the Gospels to good effect and demonstrates that this defeat is not an absolute defeat, but a purification. It is at this point that the historical myth of the Battle of Badr, mentioned earlier on, comes in.

The town of Badr is currently a small town south west of Medina, but no map of antiquity records its existence. Furthermore., the word “badr” does not exist anywhere in the Qur’an., neither in Sura VIII where all previous authors insist on talking about the Battle of Badr, nor in Sura III where the word bi-badrin is wrongly translated as “at Badr.” In Sura IV, vs.6, the related word bidran is correctly translated by Blachere and Masson as “dissipation” or “dispersion,” and is a straightforward transposition of the rabbinical Hebrew word bidder meaning “to dissipate.” Bi-badrin, therefore, means “through or by dispersion.” The reason why Islamologues translate the word as at Badr” is because they do not see the meaning of the text, either in whole or part.

while on the other hand Br. Bruno's translation makes logical sense. The Quranic author is referring to the "miracle" of the saving of his Arab bands "through the dispersion" brought about by the Persians in 617. It is one of many examples where sense—linguistic and historical—is made clear in the text where others have only brought confusion and contradiction until this point, we have consistently talked about the "Quranic author," rather than Muhammed, who is everywhere stated to be its author. Why? For the simple reason that a man called Muhammed did not write the Qur'an.

We noted above that once one has put the fantastic myths of the Hadith and Sira aside, there is no irrefutable proof for the existence of Muhammed. Historically, however, Muslims claim that the author refers to himself in the Quranic text as Muhammed, so there can be no doubt about his identity. Is this really the case?

It is certainly the case that in the Qur'an, the author makes several references to himself, but he is remarkable for the overall silence about himself. In Sura III, vs.144 he calls himself muhammadun, and from the work of Ibn Hisam onwards, this has been taken to be the real name of the founder of Islam. Br. Bruno says that this is not the case, and gives his proofs at length. It is interesting to note that this assertion of the non-existence of Muhammed has not drawn a single rebuttal from Fr. Michel Lagarde, a priest who is not only an expert in the field himself, but who is also heavily committed to Islamic-Christian dialogue.

On the other hand, Br. Bruno translates the word muhammadun as "the beloved." He is saying that it is not a name as such, but a title bestowed upon someone; a little like saying "the light of my life" in referring to your child, for example, which could not be misconstrued as the name of the child. He says that the word muhammadun is derived from the root word hmd, which is the Arabic transposition of the biblical root word hamad, meaning "to covet" or "to desire." In Sura I, vs.2, the monk had already shown that the related word 'al hamdu was the love that one ought to have for "God, the Master of the centuries." Now, a southern Arabic inscription at Jamme uses the word mhmd to refer to "the God of the Jews," so the obvious sense of the expression is "he who is the object of love"—the beloved—the supreme divine name. This ought to evoke in the reader the

memory of the Gospel: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him" (Mt. 17:5). This is not the only time that Jesus is said to be the muhammadun of God. We read in the account of the meeting of Our Lord and St. John the Baptist at the River Jordan: "...and he saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove, coming upon him. And behold, a voice from the heavens saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mt. 3:16,17). It is not being suggested that the author is presenting himself, or thinking of himself, as God. Rather he presents himself and Our Lord Jesus Christ in the first Sura as rasulun, that is, oracles, prophets, both being men, both "beloved" of God. We find in the Book of Daniel that the prophet is called the "man of predilection." that is, is hamudot. The substantive, is, means "man" and is replaced in the biblical expression by the Arabic prefix "m"—thus mhamudot, "muhammed." For those of us who are not linguistic scholars, this may seem a little difficult, but a little perseverance will show that it makes the most perfect sense in the given context.

Throughout the Quranic text, it is evident that the author knows St. Paul and turns him to his desired end, which is to confer the divine alliance upon the sons of Ismael, the perfect people, the musliymat. Fr. De Nantes, a colleague of Br. Bruno goes further, saying that throughout the whole Sura the similarities with the Gospel are so close and so numerous that he believes that the Quranic author's intention was not merely to imitate the approach of St. Paul, but to substitute himself for Christ.

This may not be as far-fetched as it first sounds. The parallel between the "failure" of Christ leading to Calvary is paralleled by the "failure" of the Quranic author to take "the House at Bakka" in Jerusalem in 614. His faithful are dispersed, and this is his "calvary." He uses the term "qarhun," meaning "calvary." specifically to emphasize the parallel. Yet the Sura also makes clear that the "failure" has not forced him to renounce his objective.

Let us take a look at the word Mecca, which we are told is the translation of Makka. We are told by Hiro that Mecca was the birth place of Muhammed, that it was a trading center of some 5,000 people, and that this was where Muhammed began his apostolate. There are two problems with this: 1) the word Mecca does not appear in the Qur'an at all. Rather, the word Bakka appears once and is wrongly translated as Mecca, and 2) all of the maps of

antiquity prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that the city of Mecca did not exist in the seventh century. The great mapmaker of the 19th century, Vidal de la Blache, was an expert in the great commercial routes of antiquity and, using the Geography of Ptolemy, showed that Mecca did not exist. Even Blachere does not dispute the point, nor does Fr. Lagarde in his 1990 review in the publication *Islamochristiana* of Br. Bruno's first published volume. Indeed, given Blachere's desire to promote Islam at the expense of Christianity, his testimony is all the more weighty:

There is no doubt that Byzantine writers have given us precious information about the Arab emirs ruling on the steppes of Syria with the consent of the emperor. Thanks to these authors, we are reasonably well informed about the conflicts of these emirs with their Babylonian counterparts in the service of the Persian Sassanids. Through these authors we can determine the religious affiliation of the Arab tribes, either nomadic or settled, in the Transjordan or on the steppes to the west of the Euphrates. Even mysterious Yemen furnishes us with several scraps of information about its past, and allows us to make out foreign trends, some of which come from Ethiopia, standing alongside its age-old paganism. But on the cradle of Islam, on the Hedjaz and Mecca, its holy city, in the sixth century, we have nothing more than the examples of Muslim "cartographers" (*The Problem of Mahomet*, 1952).

In other words, there is no pre-Islamic map in the world which shows the existence of Mecca. Attempts to show that Macoraba was Mecca under another name have always been pure speculation, and have no serious evidence to back them up.

So if there is no Mecca, what is the meaning of this word, Bakka? It appears only once in the whole Qur'an (Sura III, vs.96) in the same Sura that is concerned with the return of the faithful to Jerusalem. Now, in Sura II, vss. 125 and 127, the author talks about the House—al bayt—and attributes its foundation to Abraham. It is, therefore, perfectly obvious that the "House" is in Jerusalem specifically among the ruins of the Temple. It just so happens that the word Bakka is used in the Sura in relation to the House, with the consequence that the word can only be a reference to the "valley of Baka," which is to the north of the Hinnom Valley and to the west of Jerusalem.

Indeed, the meaning is so transparent, one wonders why none of the scientific enquirers have ever even suggested it as a possibility. But there is more.

The Qur'an gives no idea of the geography or layout of Mecca, but it does give some precise information about Jerusalem, which reinforces the fact that the theme of the Qur'an is concerned up to this point with a return to Jerusalem, to the cradle of the alliance made between God on the one hand, and Abraham and his son Ismael, on the other.

In Sura II, vs.158 the author refers to as-safa, which is the Hebrew transposition of ha-sophim. meaning "the sentry." It just so happens that to the north of Jerusalem, there is a hill which is connected to the Mount of Olives, which is rendered in Greek as skopos. It is to be found in rabbinical literature, and is a point where one can overview Jerusalem as from a watchtower. Skopos is Greek for "sentry."

Again, when the Quranic author promises his faithful in Sura IV, vs.13 and elsewhere, that they "will enter gardens—janna—where rivers flow underground— min tahtiha," he is not writing mere literature. It is an exact description of the irrigation system of the Jerusalem of his time!

In the Byzantine period, the area outside the walls of Jerusalem to the southwest were known as "the Gardens." To Christians who spoke Aramaic, it was known as Pordesaya. The Greeks called it Phordesa and the Jews, Pardesaya. These are all words meaning "Paradise." The reason for this is not hard to discern. Jerusalem, situated in difficult terrain, always suffered drought from May until October, and this was made worse by the prevailing east wind. To combat this, a system of storage tanks was built underground and which came to the surface through a narrow opening. These tanks filled from November to March thanks to the abundant rain, and thus allowed the crops and so on to thrive. J. T. Milik in his book, St. Thomas of Phordesa (1961), tells us that it was "a complete and complex system of irrigation." Here are your "underground rivers."

Or again, we find that the word "Gehenna" appears once in Sura II, three times in Sura III and seven times in Sura IV. The word in Arabic is jahannam,

and it is called “the valley of Anger.” Gehenna is a valley to the south of Jerusalem leading off from the valley of Baka in the west. It was a desolate public place where a permanent fire burned for the disposal of garbage. The fires of Gehenna (Mt. 5:22; 18:9) are a symbol of eternal punishment, or, if one likes, for eternal anger. The text is also more appealing because in travelling from the valley of Baka to the valley of Gehenna, one is travelling from Paradise to Hell, a physical reality with a theological component.

Finally, let us look at the problem of the Ka’ba, the stone temple or House of God, which is to be found in the middle of the mosque of Mecca (see magazine cover), and which is the most important shrine in the Islamic world. Since Mecca did not exist, we have to ask ourselves what the word Ka’ba meant to the Quranic author.

It is first mentioned in Sura IV, vs.6. It means “cube”—kubos in Greek—and pertains to the foundation stone of a house. Fr. Jomier in his article “Ka’ba,” says that the word “comes from the more or less ‘cubic’ form of this sanctuary.” He goes on to say that “the word was also used already to refer to specific sanctuaries of the same shape.” Br. Bruno has managed to identify two such sanctuaries: one at Petra, where the Quranic author and his faithful set out on the return to Jerusalem, and the other at the gates of Jerusalem. It is also important to note that the word Ka’ba appears for a fourth and final time in Sura LXXVIII, vs .33 bearing the meaning “virgins”—kawaa ‘iba. The two meanings are so radically different that we are justified to ask: “Is the Ka’ba “a house” or a “virgin”?”

We know that the Ka’ba was always associated with the esplanade maqam of Abraham, such that both one and the other were connected to the House— al bayta. The House is the Temple at Jerusalem and the maqam is the courtyard of the Temple—that is to say, the sacred Rock of Mount Moria. Thus, if we want to find the real origin of the Ka’ba, we need to be looking at Jerusalem.

From a homily of St. Germain of Constantinople (634—733), concerned with the Dormition of our Lady and the transportation of her body from her home in Holy Zion to her “tomb” in Gethsemani. We learn that along this route there is a monument known in Greek as Kubos. He says: It is along the

route followed by the funeral cortege, going down the valley of Josaphat, that there is to be found a monument in the form of a cube... [It] is at the center of this cube that there is the venerated column which commemorates the miracle wrought in the healing of the impious Jew.

We also find the monk Epiphany, on pilgrimage to the Holy Land in the seventh century, describing this monument with the word: tetrakoinin. He states, "It is a cubic edifice with four columns and crowned by a cupola." Fr. Daniel (1099—1185) is even more precise:

It is 100 yards from the gates of the City (Jerusalem) to the place where Jephonias [the High Priest—Ed.] tried to throw down the body of the Holy Mother of God from her stretcher, who was being taken by the apostles to Gethsemani. An angel appeared, cutting off his two hands with a sword, and leaving his hands fixed to the stretcher. Fr. Daniel adds: "From this point to the tomb of the Holy Mother of God is 200 yards." This allows us to situate precisely this cubic monument outside the Beautiful Gate on the eastern side of the Holy City. The miracle referred to by St. Germain is that "the impious Jew," Jephonias, had his hands restored, and converted to the Catholic Church. Thus the apparent riddle is easy to solve.

In reparation for the attack on Our Lady, the Christians of Jerusalem put up a monument in her honor. The High Priest, Jephonias, came to it and was miraculously healed. It is plausible that during the seventh century, in the time of Epiphany, the Muslims still maintained respect and veneration for this holy place, kubos, consecrated to the Virgin, ka'ba, and vilifying the impious action of Jephonias.

In this way, we see how easily the cube could become a virgin. The hypothesis at this stage for the good monk is that the Muslims took the Kubos to be a symbol of the House of Abraham, and thus transported it (or simply its base) at another date for reasons unknown. Of course, it could be that the Ka'ba in Mecca has wholly different origins, which have no connection whatever with the Qur'an.

All this article has tried to do is convey some of the spectacular research being done spearheaded by Br. Bruno, and hope that it will encourage the

interested to dig deeper for themselves. The research is far from finished. There are 109 Suras more to be translated, each bearing vital and revealing information of the birth and development of Islam as outlined and desired by the Quranic author. There will also undoubtedly be pertinent information forthcoming from the experts excavating the vast Christian monastery discovered in the sands of Al Oousour (1990), and which has already been dated as late sixth, perhaps seventh, century . This is all for the future.

Through serious and genuine scientific enquiry, the validity of the Hadith and Sira of Islamic tradition has been eliminated. It can be shown that neither Mecca nor Badr existed at the time, and thus all the stories of Muhammed's prophetship and battle victories are just so much invention. It can be demonstrated, indeed, that there never was such a man at all. By systematically translating the Qur'an, even the meaning of the name, Islam, can be shown to have been corrupted, and the historical and theological background that made the Qur'an possible demonstrated. The importance of the Jewish community in this development has set researchers on tracing the path to the true identity of the Quranic author, a man who was clearly of exceptional talent, energy and insight. In fact, Br. Bruno's work is spurring research which is showing that Islam is a fact, because the Islam of the Qur'an is a fact; but it is now becoming increasingly evident that the Islam of today is an illusion in the sense that all that it truly holds in common with the outstanding genius of the Quranic author is the name of the religion and a mutilated understanding of his powerful book. This is the contradiction become the paradox mentioned at the beginning of this article.