

## What is Islam?

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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### (A) RELIGION OF UNITY

#### 1)Unity of God

Islam teaches the purest form of Monotheism and regards polytheism as the deadliest sin. A Muslim addresses GOD by His Personal Name: ALLAH --- the word "god" and its equivalents in other languages being unstable in the matter of connotation. Allah, according to Islam, is the One God, who is Indivisible in Person and Who has no partner: wife, son or daughter. He is the Matchless and "naught is as His likeness". "He begetteth not, nor was He begotten". He is the First, the Last, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Almighty, the Omniscient, the Omnipresent. He is the Creator, the Nourisher, the Cherisher of all things. He is the All-just, the Avenger of the wrongs done to the weak and the oppressed, the Compassionate, the Merciful and Loving, the Guide, the Friend, the Magnificent, the Glorious, the Beautiful and the True. In short, He is the Possessor of all Excellence.

Speaking of the conception of God in Islam, Gibbon, the famous western historian, says: "The Creed of Hazrat Muhammad is free from the suspicion of Ambiguity and the Qur'an is a glorious testimony to the unity of God. The Prophet of Mecca rejected the worship of idols and men, of stars and planets, on the rational principle that whatever is corruptible must decay and perish, that whatever is born must die, that whatever rises must set. In the Author of the universe his rational enthusiasm confessed and adored an infinite and Eternal Being, without form or place,

without issue or similitude, present to our secret thoughts, existing by the necessity of His own nature, and deriving from Himself all moral and intellectual perfections. These sublime truths ...are defined with metaphysical precision by the interpreters of the Qur'an. A philosophic theist might subscribe to the popular creed of the Muhammadans."

### (2) Unity of the Universe

From the Unity of the Creator, according to Islam, proceeds the Unity of the Universe, i.e., Unity of Creation and Unity of Purpose. In other words, the Cosmos is a Moral Order.

### (3) Unity of Mankind

Islam regards the whole of mankind as an "organic unity" --- a single family, and emphatically says that the distinctions on the mundane plane, the distinctions, namely, of race, colour, language or territory, cannot form the ground for claims of superiority of one group over the other. The only distinction that has "value" is that which arises at the moral and spiritual planes – namely, the distinction of "taqwa", or, "piety and righteousness".

Prof. H.A.R. Gibb, the famous English critic of Islam says, ".....Islam.....possesses a magnificent tradition of inter-racial understanding and co-operation. *No other society has such a record of success* in uniting in an equality of status, of opportunity and of endeavour so many and so various races of mankind... *If ever the opposition of the great societies of East is to be replaced by co-operation, the mediation of Islam is an indispensable condition.*" (*Whither Islam?* p.379).

### (4) Unity of Religion

According to Islam, the human intellect, though a great and powerful asset, has its natural limits, and, therefore, neither the normative nor the empirical sciences are capable of leading humanity to a sure knowledge of ultimate truths and the code of life based upon them. The only source of sure knowledge open to humanity is, consequently, Divine Guidance, and that course has been actually open ever since the beginnings of human life on earth. Allah raised His "Prophets" and "Messengers" and revealed His Guidance to them for transmission to humanity. Coming from the same Source, all revealed religions have, therefore, been one, i.e., ISLAM.

Allah's Prophets and Messengers continued to come to every country and community to work in their respective limited fields. Time after time, the revealed Guidance was either lost or corrupted through human interpolation, and new Prophets with fresh Dispensations were sent, and humanity continued to advance from infancy to maturity. At last, when the stage of maturity was reached – when humanity was practically to become one family --- instead of sectional Guidance, a perfect, final and abiding Revelation, addressed to entire mankind and for all time, was granted in the seventh century of the Christian era. That Revelation, which recapitulates all former Revelations and thus sets a seal on the Unity of Religion, is ISLAM; the Scripture which enshrines it is the HOLY QUR'AN; and the Prophet who brought it is the Leader of Humanity, Hazrat Muhammad (Allah bless him!).

Thus all the Prophets of God, from Adam down to Hazrat Noah, Hazrat Abraham, Hazrat Moses and Hazrat Jesus (peace be upon them all), are the Prophets of a Muslim the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him!) being the Last and Final one, and all the Divine Scriptures are the Scriptures of a Muslim, though he follows only the Holy Qur'an because it alone exists in its original purity and it alone contains the religion of Islam which has been followed by all rightly-guided people since the day the first human being came into existence.

### (5) Unity of Sexes

Differentiation of functions have misled certain cultures of the world to regard woman as a being who belongs, so to say, to a different and inferior species: and to meet out to her inhuman treatment accordingly. Islam emphatically

repudiates that notion and teaches that both man and woman have sprung from the same essence and the same source and consequently possess the same human status. Their functions and interests, instead of being antagonistic, are meant to be complementary. The natural relation between the sexes, in all its aspects, is therefore, that of love and harmony, without which no true human progress can be possible.

### (6) Unity of Classes

Islam aims at the creation of a classless society by eliminating all possible social conflicts (through revolving the different interests).

In the sphere of economics, Islam lays down the principle that wealth should not be allowed to circulate among the wealthy only, and envisages, through its laws and institutions, a "Cooperative Common-wealth of Talents".

In the political sphere, Islam stands for the "Cooperative Commonwealth of the Pursuers of Righteousness".

Taken as a whole, the Islamic state is a "welfare state" where sovereignty belongs to Allah alone and no human being has a right to govern other human beings except in the name of Allah and according to His Will, and where nobody, not even the Head of the State, is above the law. Absolute Justice is the watchword and the Establishment of Righteousness is the goal.

The merits of Islam's social ethics have elicited praise even from the otherwise hostile critics. For instance:

H.G. Wells says: "Islam created a society more free from widespread cruelty and social oppression than any society that had ever been in the world before" (Outline of History, p.325).

H.A.R. Gibb says: "Within the Western world Islam still maintains the balance between exaggerated opposities. Opposed equally to the anarchy of European nationalism and the regimentation of Russian communism, it has not yet succumbed to that obsession with the economic side of life which is characteristic of present-day Russia alike." (Whither Islam? p.378).

Prof. Louis Massignon says: "Islam has the merit of standing for a very equalitarian conception... It occupies an intermediate position between the doctrines of bourgeois capitalism and Bolshevik communism." (Whither Islam? p.378).

### (7) Unity of Human Activity

Islam conceives of the human personality as a "unity" and consequently regards the distinction of "secular" and "religious" as unscientific, irrational and absurd. The life of a Muslim, both in its individual and social manifestation, is a life lived for God and God alone.

"Islam," says Dudley Wright, scholar of Comparative Religion, "is no mere creed; it is a life to be lived. In the Qur'an may be found directions for what are sometimes termed the minor details of daily life, but which are not minor when it is considered that life has to be lived for God. The Muslim lives for God alone. The aim of the Muslim is to become God-bound, and to endeavour to advance the knowledge of God in all his undertakings. From the cradle to the grave the true Muslim lives for God and God alone."

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## (B) RELIGION OF "SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE WILL"

The word "Islam" means "submission" and, as a religious term, it connotes "submission to the Divine Will and

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Commands". As such, ISLAM is co-extensive with NATURE. For, everything in Nature submits to the Divine Will without demur. The only exception is man. He has to choose "Islam" through his free will and thus to attain his destiny by falling in line with the rest of God's Creation.

Goethe, the renowned poet-philosopher of Germany, says:

*"Naerrisch, dass jeder in seinem Falle Seine besondere Meinung priest! Whenn Islam Gott ergeben heisst, Im Islam leben und sterben wir alle"*

viz:

*"It is lack of understanding that everyone praises own special opinion; (for) Islam means submission to God and in Islam we all live and die."*

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### (C) RELIGION OF NATURE

The above statement brings out, and the Holy Qur'an emphasises in clear terms, that to be a Muslim is to live and grow in accordance with true human nature and in harmony with the Nature around. Islam, thus, means conformity to the Natural Law.

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### (D) RELIGION OF DISCIPLINE

The concepts of Submission to the Divine Will and Conformity to the Natural Law, when actively realized in human life, give rise to the healthiest form of DISCIPLINE and Islam is the religion of Discipline *par excellence*.

In his famous book; First and Last Things, H.G. Wells says:

"The aggression, discipline and submission of Muhammadanism makes, I think,... fine and honourable religion for men. Its spirit, if not its formulae is abundantly present in our modern world... I have no doubt that in devotion to a virile... Deity and to the service of His Empire of stern Law and Order, efficiently upheld, men have found and will find salvation."

The German Orientalist Friedrich Delitzsch admits that the Muslim shows "owing to his religious surrender to the Will of God an exemplary patience under misfortune and he bears up under disastrous accidents with an admirable strength of mind." (Die Welt des Islam, p.28).

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### (E) RELIGION OF TRUTH

The concept of "Truth" forms the keynote of Islamic ideology and pervades the entire universal order presented by Islam. Not only is "truthfulness" a fundamental value in the elaborate Islamic Moral Code – a value which forms the foundation-stone of Muslim character, but God Himself has been mentioned in the Holy Qur'an as "The Truth", or "the True", the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (God bless him!) as the "Bearer of Truth", the Qur'an itself as "the Truth", and the abode of the righteous after death as the "Seat of Truth".

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### (F) RELIGION OF TEMPERANCE

Islam is the religion of Purity and Temperance *par excellence*. It stresses purity not only of the mind and the heart, which certain other religions also stress, but also of the body, its fundamental principle being the harmonious development of human personality. Consequently; it strictly prohibits the use of all drinks and foods which might be unhealthy and injurious to the body, or the mind or both. Thus its prohibitive injunctions cover not only all the intoxicants, e.g., wine, opium, etc., but also those foods which are harmful to healthy human growth. Ultimately, Islamic Temperance covers all evil thoughts, feelings and deeds.

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## (G) RELIGION OF BEAUTY

Unlike certain religions, Islam is not the religion of contempt for the world, of the negation of any fundamental value. It is positively and definitely a religion of fulfilment – fulfilment of all the faculties and positive capabilities with which God has endowed man. Aesthetic culture, therefore, forms part of Islamic life – of course, governed and controlled by Islam's moral and spiritual principles. In Islam the concept of "Beauty" permeates the entire human activity – nay, the whole cosmic order, "Allah," says the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be with him!), "is Beautiful and loves what is beautiful." Beauty in thought, words and deed, and beauty in all creative activity is the Islamic ideal.

Islam permits the creation of Art, within the limitations of its spiritual and moral framework. But its motto is not "Art for the sake of Art" but "Art for the sake of Life", whereby alone a true blending of spiritual, moral and physical beauty – the rational and harmonious goal of human life – is achievable.

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## (H) RELIGION OF REASON

Islam regards Reason as man's distinctive privilege and God's noble gift, and the Holy Qur'an has repeatedly exhorted mankind to employ Reason in the matters of social and natural phenomena and in understanding its Message and practicing its Guidance, thus giving to "personal judgment," its due place in the life of a Muslim.

"Intellectual Culture" in general, forms one of the noblest pursuits of human life in Islam and the acquisition and cultivation of knowledge has been made obligatory upon every Muslim man and woman.

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## (I) RELIGION OF THE NEGATION OF SUPERSTITION

Islam is a positively rational religion and stands opposed to the mystery cults and religions of mysterious dogmas whose acceptance is generally claimed on the basis of blind faith.

Speaking of the negation of superstition and the affirmation of Reason in Islam, Godfrey Higgins says: "No relic, no image, no picture, no mother of God disgrace his (Hazrat Muhammad's) religion. No such doctrines as the efficacy of faith without works, or that of a death-bed repentance, plenary indulgences, absolution or auricular confession, operate first to corrupt, then to deliver up his followers into the power of a priesthood, which would of course be always more corrupt and more degraded than themselves. No indeed! The adoration of one God, without mother, or mystery, or pretended miracle, and the acknowledgement that he, a man, was sent to preach the duty of offering adoration to the Creator alone, constituted the simple doctrinal part of the religion of the Unitarian of Arabia." (Apology for Hazrat Muhammad).

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## (J) RELIGION OF ACTION

Islam stands in sharp contrast with those religions which interpret the Salvation of man in terms of the acceptance of certain intricate and inexplicable formulae. Simplicity is its watch-word and rationality its lifeblood, and as such it gives to both "Faith" and "Action" their due place. Wherever the Holy Qur'an mentions the problem of human salvation, it bases it on "right belief" as well as "righteous action", emphasizing the former as the ground and the latter as the sequence.

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## (K) RELIGION OF BALANCED PROGRESS

Islamic life is a life of the attainment of "*Falah*" which means, "The furrowing out of latent faculties". A Muslim, therefore, has to continuously strive for progress.... a progress controlled by righteousness and illumined by Divine Guidance, a progress grounded in spirituality, a progress balanced and comprehending all aspects of human life: spiritual, mental, moral, aesthetic and physical.

Paying tribute to the balanced character of Islam and the progress which it inspires, the famous Orientalist Prof. H. A. R. Gibb says:

"Within the Western world, Islam still maintains the balance between exaggerated opposites...For the fullest development of its cultural life, particularly of its spiritual life, Europe cannot do without the forces and capacities which lie within Islamic society." (Whither Islam? p.378).

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## (L) RELIGION OF SCIENTIFIC QUEST

While other religions may feel shy of science Islam has made the scientific quest a religious obligation. The aims of that quest, however, are not the unbalanced indulgence in physical pleasures and the tyrannisation over fellowbeings, but the advancement in the love of God through progress in the knowledge of His works and the service of humanity through the acquisition of control over the "forces of nature".

Speaking of the role of Islam as the inaugurator of the modern scientific era, Briffault, the reputed scholar of the history of civilisation, says:...although there is not a single aspect of European growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic culture is not traceable, nowhere is it so clear and momentous as in the genesis of that power which constitutes the permanent distinctive force of the modern world and the supreme source of its victory – natural science and the scientific spirit ... The debt of our science to that of the Arabs does not consist in startling discoveries of revolutionary theories; science owes a great deal more to Arab culture, it owes its existence. The ancient world was, as we saw, pre-scientific. The Astronomy and Mathematics of the Greeks were a foreign importation never thoroughly acclimatised in Greek culture. The Greeks systematised, generalised and theorised; but the patient ways of investigation, the accumulation of positive knowledge, the minute methods of science, detailed and prolonged observation and experimental inquiry were altogether alien to Greek temperament... What we call science arose in Europe as the result of a new spirit of inquiry, of new methods of investigation, of the method of experiment, observation, measurement, of the development of Mathematics in a form unknown to the Greeks. That spirit and those methods were introduced into the European world by the Arabs... Neither Roger Bacon nor his later namesake has any title to be credited with having introduced the experimental method. Roger Bacon was no more than one of the apostles of Muslim science and method to Christian Europe; and he was never wearied of declaring that knowledge of Arabic and Arab Science was for his contemporaries the only way to true knowledge. Discussions as to who was the originator of the experimental method...are part of the colossal misrepresentation of the origins of European civilisation. The experimental method of the Arabs was by Bacon's time widespread and eagerly cultivated throughout Europe ... Science is the most momentous contribution of Arab civilisation to the modern world..... It was not science only which brought Europe back to life. Other and manifold influences from the civilisation of Islam communicated its first glow to European life. "(Making of Humanity, pp 190-202).

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H.G. Wells, another great Western authority, had to admit that: "Through the Arabs it was, and not by the Latin route, that the modern world received that gift of light and power (i.e., the Scientific Method)."

Because of its deep-rooted hostility to Islam, implanted during the Middle Ages, the West has been very slow in acknowledging the merits of Islam. Admissions and confessions have, however, been gradually coming forth grudgingly or ungrudgingly. Thus, as we have seen above, it has been admitted that the Muslims gave to the West the Scientific Method as well as the scientific inspiration. But the Muslims themselves received them from the Holy Qur'an. This fact has also been admitted at last. For instance, Stanislas Guyard observes: "In the seventh century of our era, the Old World was in agony. The Arabian conquest infused into it new blood ... Hazrat Muhammad gave them (the Arabs) the Qur'an, which was the starting point of new culture. " (Encyclopedia des Sciences Religieuses, Tome IX, p. 501). Challenging the adversaries of Islam and referring to the Holy Qur'an, Dr. A Bertherand says: "Let them read and meditate on this great Book: they will find in it, at every passage, constant attack on idolatry and materialism; they will read that the Prophet incessantly called the attention and the mediation of his people to the splendid marvels, to the mysterious phenomena of creation... those who have followed its counsels have been, as we have described in the course of this study, the creators of a civilisation which is astounding to this day." (Contribution des Arabes auprogres des Sciences Medicales, p. 6).

Emmanuel Deutsch observes: "By the aid of the Qur'an the Arabs...came to Europe to hold up the light to humanity, they alone, while darkness lay around,...to teach philosophy, medicine, astronomy and the golden art of song to the West as to the East, to stand at the cradle of modern science, and to cause us late epigoni for ever to weep over the day when Granada fell."

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### (M) RELIGION OF THE SANCTITY OF LABOUR

In Islam, all honest labour is sacred and forms the life-blood of human progress. "For man is naught but what he strives for," says the Holy Qur'an, and "the labourer is the beloved of God," says the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (God bless him!). Thus "idleness" is a sin and "industry" is a virtue in Islam.

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### (N) RELIGION OF THE HIGHEST IDEALISM IN ETHICS

Islam lays the foundation of ethics on "submission to the Divine will" and gives to humanity the ethical ideal of imitating the Divine Attributes, even as we have been exhorted by the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (God bless him!) who says: "Imbue yourselves with Divine Attributes."

"The highest form of religious ethic," observes Sir Richard Gregory, "is that in which the aim of conduct is complete and implicit obedience to what is conceived to be the Will of God ... (this obedience) may become a joyous and spontaneous acceptance of a mode of life, such as it is conceived would be consonant with the nature of God, subject to such limitations of the flesh as are ineradicable – the ideal of saintliness. Hence arises the desire for uprightness as end-in-itself; either with a view to reward, if not in this world, in the next, or pursued selflessly for its own sake. This concept of religious ethic has led to the highest idealism in human conduct." (Religion in Science and Civilisation, p. 63).

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### (O) RELIGION OF PEACE AND GOODWILL

The word "Salam", which means "peace", has close root-affinity with the word "Islam". Thus the concept of PEACE forms an integral part of the world ISLAM itself. Indeed, this concept permeates the Islamic religion through and through. For, God, according to the Holy Qur'an, is As-Salam, i.e. (the Source of) peace"; a Muslim's Salutation, which

embodies the ideal of Muslim life, is As-Salam-o -alaikum, i.e., "Peace be unto you"; and the abode of the righteous, towards which the Holy Qur'an invites humanity, is Dar-us-Salam, i.e., "the Abode of Peace".

One of the ideals of Muslim life, therefore, is the attainment of peace on all fronts --- peace with self through harmonious self-realisation, peace with fellow creatures through the maintenance of the basic attitude of Goodwill, and peace with God through submission to the Divine Will.

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### (P) RELIGION OF STRUGGLE (JIHAD)

The Islamic concept of Peace is not, however, utopian, For, Islam is a practical religion par excellence –a religion of Struggle (Jihad) --- and does not, therefore, prescribe any course of action which is unnatural or impracticable. Thus, for instance, in international relations, although basically committed to the promotion of Peace and Goodwill, Islam does allow the participation of Muslims in war when it becomes morally inevitable – when no other course remains open for safeguarding justice, nay, peace itself.

The word "Jihad", which has been maligned much by the evil-minded misrepresenters of Islam in connection with the wars of Islamic history, means "struggle" and, according to Islam, it is of two kinds: (1) Struggle for subjugating one's lower self to the higher self. This is the higher form of "Jihad" and its function is purely spiritual: (2) Struggle for defeating the forces of evil on the collective plane. This is the collective Jihad.

The collective Jihad may, again, be either of a peaceful character, namely, propagation of Islam and its establishment in the collective life of the people through preaching and reform, or it may be in the form of war against an aggressor.

The Islamic permission of war is basically for defensive purposes. And not only does Islam rule out all immoral impulses to war but it also lays down a rigid ethics which in its sublimity and humanness surpasses all other ethics of war which humanity has ever known.

Says O. Houdas: " ... The Qur'an states: 'And fight for the cause of God against those who fight against you; but commit not the injustice of attacking them first; verily God loveth not the unjust' – S.II 190..... Jihad had to be waged to defend Islam against aggression... Once the war was terminated, the Muslims always displayed a great tolerance towards the conquered peoples, leaving them their legislation and religious beliefs." (La Grande Encyclopaedia, Tome 20,p. 1006).

"In their wars of conquest," says E. Alexander Powell, "the Muslims exhibited a degree of toleration which put many Christian nations to shame." (The Struggle for Power in Moslem Asia, p. 48).

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### (Q) RELIGION OF "NO COMPULSION IN CONVERSION"

As regards forcible proselytisation, it has been explicitly banned by Islam with the Qur'anic declaration: "there is no compulsion in matters of faith", and the propaganda that Muslims went out into the world with the sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other to convert the non-Muslims forcibly is a pure fabrication. Indeed, it is so utterly unfounded that even an enemy of Islam like Rev. Dr. O'Leary had to admit:

"History makes it clear that the legend of fanatical Muslims sweeping through the world and forcing Islam at the point of sword upon conquered races, is one of the most absurd myths that the historians have ever repeated". (Islam at the Cross-Roads, page 8).

## (R) RELIGION OF BROTHERHOOD

Islam inculcates the love of God's creation in general and of the human family, in particular. "The best of you is he who is best to God's family (i.e., humanity)," says the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (God bless him!) Islam regards humanity as 'one Fraternity inside which it affirms the existence of the "Islamic Brotherhood", wherein all distinctions of caste and tribe, race and colour, language and territory are superseded and obliterated, and which has been allotted the function of acting as the servant of, and the torch-bearer of Divine Guidance for, the larger Human Brotherhood.

Side by side with the code of conduct meant to be observed within the circle of Islamic Brotherhood Islam also gives a definite code of Human Love which relates to the dealings of Muslims with the larger human society.

"The brotherhood of Muhammadanism," says Dr. Leither, "is no mere word. All believers are equal and their own high-priest." (Muhammadanism. P.18).

The Dutch Orientalist Snouck Hurgronje observes: "The ideal of a League of Human Races has been approached by Islam more nearly than by any other ideology; for the League of nations founded on Hazrat Muhammad's religion takes the principle of the equality of all human race so seriously as to put other communities to shame." (Muslim World Today).

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## (S) RELIGION OF SPIRITUAL DEMOCRACY

In the sphere of worship, Islam stands for the establishment of direct relation between God and human being without the mediation of any priest. Every Muslim man and woman is, therefore, his or her own priest or priestess.

It is wrong to regard the scholars (Ulama) or the leaders (Imams) of congregational prayers in the mosques as priests. Any good Muslim who knows Islam can lead the prayers, while the 'Ulama' are simply scholars and experts of Islamic knowledge and merely fulfil a responsibility which rests on the shoulders of the entire Islamic Brotherhood. For, Islam wants every Muslim man and woman to be a scholar of its teachings, unlike, for instance, Hinduism, where those belonging to the caste of Brahmins alone possess this privilege.

Rev.W.Wilson Cash, the famous Christian missionary and hostile critic of Islam, had to confess: "Islam endowed its people with a dignity peculiarly its own... Direct access to God makes one of the strong appeals of Islam" (The Expansion of Islam p. 177)

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## (T) RELIGION OF HUMAN DIGNITY

### Problem of Slavery

By emphasizing freedom as the birthright of all human beings, by proclaiming human equality without distinctions of caste, colour or clime, by denying the sin-innate theory and all other theories of the evil origin of mankind by affirming that the progeny of Adam is the noblest creation of God, by raising humanity to the status of the Vicegerency of God on earth, by making imitation of the Divine Attributes the ethical ideal of mankind, and by pointing out the conquest of the universe as the human destiny, Islam has established human dignity on the loftiest pinnacle conceivable.

Humanity was suffering in various ways because of the wrong notions held by pre-Islamic cultures and religions about human dignity, when Islam appeared. Cruelty was being perpetrated in the name of caste, tribe and race, large

masses of humanity had been reduced to the status of serfs, and slavery, which had been an age-old institution, was being practiced by various races and peoples of Europe and Asia, including the Arabs, with the sanction of such scriptures as the Bible and without the least moral compunction. Islam raised its masculine voice of protest against all those evils and gave to the world a philosophy and a legislation which has made it the saviour of the downtrodden and the oppressed for all time.

Among the many misconceptions spread about Islam by its enemies, one is that which relates to slavery. For a proper appreciation of the role of Islam in the abolition of slavery, the reader is referred to the present writer's "Islam and Slavery." Here, in this brief brochure, we might confine ourselves to the brief statement of a fair-minded non-Muslim scholar of the last century, who said: "His (i.e., Hazrat Muhammad's) law of slavery is, 'If slaves come to you, you shall' --- not imprison and then sell by public sale, though no claimant appears, as in the nineteenth century is the law of Christian England in her provinces, but, --- 'redeem them, and it is forbidden to you to send them forth' (Qur'an II, p.85). And this was a man standing up in the wilds of Arabia in the seventh century." (Westminster Review no. IX, p. 221).

Even the hostile and biased Dutch critic of Islam, Prof. Snouck Hurgronje, had to say: "According to the Muhammadan principle, slavery is an institution destined to disappear."

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## (U) RELIGION OF RATIONAL SEX MORALITY

### Problem of polygamy

The Islamic view of the fundamental equality of sexes has been already stated in the section on "Religion of Unity" and an impartial historical appreciation of the problem proves beyond all doubt that it was "Islam which removed the bondage in which women were held from the very dawn of human history and gave them a social standing and legal rights such as were not granted them in England till many centuries later." (Lady Evelyn Cobbold, in "Pilgrimage to Mecca"). But the widespread propaganda of the enemies of Islam in connection with polygamy necessitates a specific statement in that connection.

In the first instance, polygamy was not invented by Islam, nor was it made in any way obligatory. It had existed in pre-Islamic societies since time immemorial with the sanction of religion and had been practiced even by those who were accepted as holy personages as for instance, we find in the Old Testament. There it was governed by no law whatsoever, and so also it was in the Arabian society at the advent of Islam. What Islam did was to regulate it and to subject it to such severe restrictions as to make it prohibitive except in cases of emergency. Indeed, monogamy has been the ideal and polygamy only an exception in Muslim Society. This fact is fully borne out by the present as well as the past history of the Muslims and has been admitted by all fair-minded critics of Islam. For instance, William Kelly Wright says: "Most Mohammedans in all ages have had only one wife." (Philosophy of Religion, New York, 1935).

Islam is a natural religion and it takes a very serious view of sexual vices and social ills. Consequently, it was very natural for Islam to permit limited and restricted polygamy for the maintenance of social health in all those situations where it is the only natural remedy. For instance, when war alters the natural sex ratio, giving to women preponderance over men, there are only two alternatives, namely, widespread prostitution or polygamy. Islam prefers the latter to the former in the interests of moral health and social wellbeing of womanhood. Similarly, if the first wife is sterile or suffers from any incurable disease, there are only two possible alternatives, namely, either the first wife should be divorced and a fresh wife taken or she may continue in her status undisturbed along with a second wife. The former course would mean distressing, spinsterhood for the first wife while the latter course would provide to her an honorable normal life without temptation to evil. Polygamy can also become a necessity in a medically incurable case of the hypersexed male who, in most cases, would look to more than one woman for the satisfaction of his biological need. In all such cases, the Islamic permission of polygamy with all its responsibilities and restrictions would be a definitely healthier course than the hypocritical adherence to the formal monogamy.

Polyandry (i.e., the marriage of one woman with several husbands) is not permitted in Islam because psychologically

it is unsound, sociologically it is impracticable and biologically it is most dangerous for the physical health of the persons concerned. Certain primitive tribes who practice polyandry are infected with the plague of venereal diseases.

Speaking on polygamy, Dr. Annie Besant says: "There is pretended monogamy in the West, but there is really polygamy without responsibility; the 'mistress' is cast off when the man is weary of her and sinks gradually to be the 'woman of the street', for the first lover has no responsibility for her future, and she is a hundred times worse off than the sheltered wife and mother in the polygamous home. When we see thousands of miserable women who crowd the streets of Western towns during the night, we must surely feel that it does not lie in western mouth to reproach Islam for polygamy. It is better for a woman, happier for a woman, more respectable for a woman, to live in polygamy, united to one man only, with the legitimate child in her arms, and surrounded with respect, than to be seduced, cast out into the streets, perhaps with an illegitimate child outside the pale of law, unsheltered and uncared for, to become the victim of any passer-by, night after night, rendered incapable of motherhood, despised of all."

Another critic of Western social order observes: "The law of the state, based upon the dogma of the Church, which makes it a criminal offence for a man to marry more than one wife, by that same provision makes it illegal for millions of women to have husbands or to bear children...It is untrue that monogamy was advocated by Jesus Christ... whether the question is considered socially, ethically or religiously, it can be demonstrated that polygamy is not contrary to the highest standards of civilization ..... The suggestion offers a practical remedy for the western problem of the destitute and unwanted female: the alternative is continued and increased prostitution, concubinage and distressing spinsterhood" (J.E. Clare McFarlane: Case for Polygamy).

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### (V) RELIGION OF SALVATION IN THIS LIFE AND THE HEREAFTER

It is the distinctive merit of Islam that it does not concern itself merely with Salvation beyond the grave—salvation in the Hereafter, but also gives full consideration to --- in fact, ensures --- human salvation in this life. For that purpose, it provides comprehensive Guidance which guarantees moral perfection, social progress, economic justice and political health – in short, all that is needed for the practical realisation and attainment of true human happiness in earthly life and all-round harmonious evolution of humanity.

Laura Veccia Vaglieri says: "A religion which is not content with being a theory adapted to the aspirations of our human nature, nor with fixing a code of sublime precepts which may or may not be applied, but which also provides a code of life, establishes the fundamental principles of our morality on a systematic and positive base, precisely formulates the duties of man towards himself and towards others by means of rules which are capable of evolution and compatible with the widest intellectual development, and which gives its laws a Divine sanction, surely deserves our most profound admiration, as its influence is continual and salutary on man." (Apologie de L' Islamisme, p. 88).

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### (W) RELIGION WITH AUTHENTIC AND PERFECT DIVINE SCRIPTURE

There are three fundamental merits of the Holy Qur'an, the Scripture of Islam, in which it stands unique among the scriptures of the world. They are: (1) authenticity of its text; (2) perfection of its literary form; (3) rational character, comprehensiveness and profoundness of its guidance. Even a brief discussion of these merits is not possible in the present introductory sketch. They are, however, so well-established that even the non-Muslim western scholars, who are always ready to attack Islam on the slightest pretext had to admit them in forceful words.

Commenting on the beauty of form of the Holy Qur'an Paul Casanova remarks: "Whenever Hazrat Muhammad (P.B.U.H.) was asked a miracle as a proof of the authenticity of his mission, he quoted the composition of the Qur'an and its incomparable excellence as a proof of its Divine origin. And, in fact, even for those who are non-Muslims nothing is more marvelous than its language with such a prehensile plenitude and a grasping sonority that its simple audition ravished with admiration those primitive peoples so fond of eloquence! The amplexness of its syllables with a

grandiose cadence and with a remarkable large rhythm have been of much moment in the conversion of the most hostile and the most sceptic." (L'Enseignement de l'Arabe au College de France, Lecon d'ouverture, April 26, 1909).

As regards perfection in matter of guidance and the authenticity of its text, Laura Veccia Vaglieri observes: "But besides the perfection of form and method, the Book is also revealed inimitable by its very substance, for, we read in it, among other things, previsions or future events and of relations of fact accomplished since many centuries or which are generally ignored, and allusions to the most different sciences, religious or profane. On the whole we find in it a collection of wisdom which can be adopted by the most intelligent of men, the greatest of philosophers and the most skillful politicians..... But there is another proof of the Divinity of the Qur'an: it is the fact that it has been preserved intact through the ages since the time of its Revelation till the present day. And so it will always remain, with God's Will, as long as the universe exists. Read and re-read through out the Muslim world, this book does not rouse in the Faithful any weariness; it rather, through repetition, is found feeling of awe and respect in the one who reads it or listens to it." (Apologie de l'Islamisme, pp.57-59).

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## (X) RELIGION WITH THE SIMPLEST CREED

The Islamic creed is as simple as the Islamic ideology is profound. Its first fundamentals are:

### (1) SEVEN ARTICLES OF FAITH

They are: Belief in:

1. Allah;
2. Angels;
3. Divine Scriptures;
4. Messengers of Allah;
5. the Hereafter;
6. the pre-measurement of Good and Evil;
7. Resurrection after death.

### (2) THE "FIVE PILLARS"

They are:

1. Declaration of faith in the One-ness of God and in the Divine Messengership of Hazrat Muhammad: (Peace be upon him) La ilaha Illallah Muhammadur-Rasulullah;
2. Obligatory Prayers;
3. Obligatory Fasts;
4. Zakat or Poor-tax;
5. Pilgrimage to Ka'aba at Meccaa by those who possess the means.

A Christian critic of Islam makes the following confession: "Islam had the power of peacefully conquering the souls by the simplicity of its theology, the clearness of its dogma and principles, and the definite number of practices which it demands. In contrast to Christianity which has been undergoing continuous transformation since its origin, Islam has remained identical with itself" (Jean Lheureux: Etude sur l'Islamisme, p. 35).

For an appreciation of the Seven Articles and the Five Pillars, the reader is referred to "The Principles of Islam" written by His Eminence Muhammad Abdul Aleem Siddiqi and published in the present series. Here it may be noted, however, that these Seven Articles and Five Pillars constitute only the "first fundamentals", while the complete ideology of Islam, which shoots off from these fundamentals and which is enshrined in the Holy Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions, is so comprehensive as to cover the entire sweep of necessary guidance on physical, moral, social and spiritual aspects of

human life.

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## (Y) Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him) THE PINNACLE OF HUMAN PERFECTION

A code alone cannot, by its existence as such, inspire mankind to action. Hence to love the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (Allah bless him!) above all human being and things of the world, to believe in him as the Most Perfect Embodiment of Human Perfection and as the Absolute Leader and the Last and the Final Prophet (after whom no new prophet of any category, zilli, buruzi, tashri'ee, ghairtashri'ee --- shadowy or real --- is to come), and to follow him as the "Best Example", form the prerequisite of Islamic Belief.

This is the theological status of the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be with him) in Islam. As regards his refulgent personality, that would require volumes even to do bare justice to it.

It is said that the best testimony is that which comes from the enemy's camp. Here, therefore, we might quote a few statements of the Western scholars of Islam.

Hazrat Muhammad's (peace be with him) figure was highly majestic, his complexion and features were extremely handsome, and "he was gifted", says the renowned Orientalist Lane Poole, "with mighty powers of imagination, elevation of mind, delicacy and refinement of feeling. 'He is more modest than a virgin behind her curtain", it was said of him. He was most indulgent to his inferiors, and would never allow his awkward little page to be scolded whatever he did. 'Ten years,' said Anas, his servant, 'was I about the Prophet and he never said as much as Uff to me.' He was very affectionate towards his family. One of his boys died on his breast in the smoky house of the nurse, a blacksmith's wife. He was very fond of children; he would stop them in the streets and pat their little heads. He never struck anyone in his life. The worst expression he ever made use of in conversation was, 'what has come to him? May his forehead be darkened with mud!' When asked to curse someone, he replied, 'I have not been sent to curse but to be a mercy to mankind.' He visited the sick, followed any bier he met, accepted the invitation of a slave to dinner, mended his own clothes, milked the goats, and waited upon himself, relates summarily another tradition. He never first withdrew his hand out of another man's palm, and turned not before the other had turned.

'He was the most faithful protector of those he protected, 'the sweetest and most agreeable in conversation. Those who saw him were suddenly filled with reverence; those who came near him loved him; they who described him would say, 'I have never seen his like either before or after.' 'He was of great taciturnity, but when he spoke it was with emphasis and deliberation and no one could forget what he said.

"He lived with his views in a row of humble cottages separated from one another by palm branches cemented together with mud. He would kindle the fire, sweep the floor, and milk the goats himself. The little food he had was always shared with those who dropped in to partake of it. Indeed, outside the Prophet's house was a bench or a gallery on which were always found a number of poor who lived entirely upon his generosity, and were hence called 'people of the bench'. His ordinary food was dates and water, or barley bread; milk and honey were luxuries of which he was fond but which he rarely allowed himself. The fare of the desert seemed most congenial to him even when he was the sovereign of Arabia...

"There is something so tender and womanly, and withal so heroic, about the man that one is in peril of finding the judgement unconsciously blinded by the feeling of reverence and well-nigh love that such a nature inspires. He who, standing alone, braved for years the hatred of his people, is the same who was never the first to withdraw his hand from another's clasp; the beloved of children who never passed a group of little ones without a smile from his wonderful eyes and a kind word for them, sounding all the kinder in that sweet-toned voice. The frank friendship, the noble generosity, the dauntless courage and hope of the man, all tend to melt criticism into admiration.

"He was an enthusiast in that noblest sense when enthusiasm becomes the salt of the earth, the one thing that keeps men from rotting whilst they live. Enthusiasm is often used despitely, because it is jointed to an unworthy cause or

falls upon barren ground and bears no fruit. So was it not with Hazrat Muhammad (Peace be with him). He was an enthusiast when enthusiasm was the one thing needed to set the world aflame, and his enthusiasm was noble for a noble cause. He was one of those happy few who have attained the supreme joy of making one great truth their very lifspring. He was the Messenger of the one God, and never to his life's end did he forget who he was or the message which was the marrow of his being. He brought his tidings with a dignity sprung from the consciousness of his high office together with a most sweet humility." (Speeches and Table-talk of the Prophet Hazrat Muhammad, Introduction' XXVIII – XXX).

"The essential sincerity of Hazrat Muhammad's (Peace be with him) nature," says Professor Nathaniel Schmidt, "cannot be questioned; and historical criticism that blinks no fact, yields nothing to credulity, weighs every testimony, has no partisan interest, and seeks only the trust, must acknowledge his claim to belong to that order of Prophets who, whatever the nature of their psychical experience may have been, in diverse manners, have admonished, taught, uttered austere and sublime thoughts, laid down principles of nobler than they found, and devoted themselves fearlessly to their high calling, being irresistibly impelled to their ministry be a power within." (The New International Encyclopaedia. Vol. XVI, p. 72).

Speaking of the glorious success which attended the Holy Prophet Hazrat Muhammad's (Peace be with him) mission, Caryle observes: "To the Arab nation Islam was a birth from darkness into light; Arabia first became alive by means of it. A poor, shepherd people, roaming unnoticed in its deserts since the creation of the world; a Hero-Prophet was sent down to them with a word they could believe: see the unnoticed becomes world-notable, the small has grown worldgreat. Within one century afterward Arabia is at Granada on this hand, at Delhi on that, glancing in valour and splendour and the light of genius, Arabia shines through long ages over a great section of the world. These Arabs, the man Hazrat Muhammad, (Peace be with him) and that one century --- is it not as if a spark had fallen, one spark on what seemed black, unnoticeable sand? But lo ! the sand proves explosive powder, blazes heaven-high from Delhi to Granada!" (Heroes and Hero-Worship: Chapter on "Hero as Prophet").

O. Houdas, the French scholar, said half a century ago about the inner vitality of the Holy Prophet's Message: "Never has a religion developed with parallel rapidity. In less than half a century Islam spread from the banks of the Indus to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and, if this movement slowed down, it still persists after fourteen centuries of existence. After having penetrated in India, in China and Malaysia, Islam continues its invading march in the African Continent which will before long become entirely Muslim. Without special missionaries and without resort to the force of arms, the religion of Hazrat Muhammad (Peace be with him) has converted the Black Continent, and it is not without some astonishment to point out the existence in England and America of small white communities which..... have adopted the Islamic doctrines and made efforts to propagate them. This invasion of Europe, hardly visible today, will surely grow." (La Grande Encyclopaedie, Tome 20, article: Islamisme).

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## (Z) ABSORPTION IN THE LOVE OF GOD THE FINAL GOAL

Cultivation of and absorption in the love of Allah, and the permeation of the heart with the sweet ecstasy of that love, until a person becomes virtually incapable of acting against the Divine Commands, is the final goal, which bestows upon a Muslim "Abiding Life" --- a life of Peace, Progress and Perfection.

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