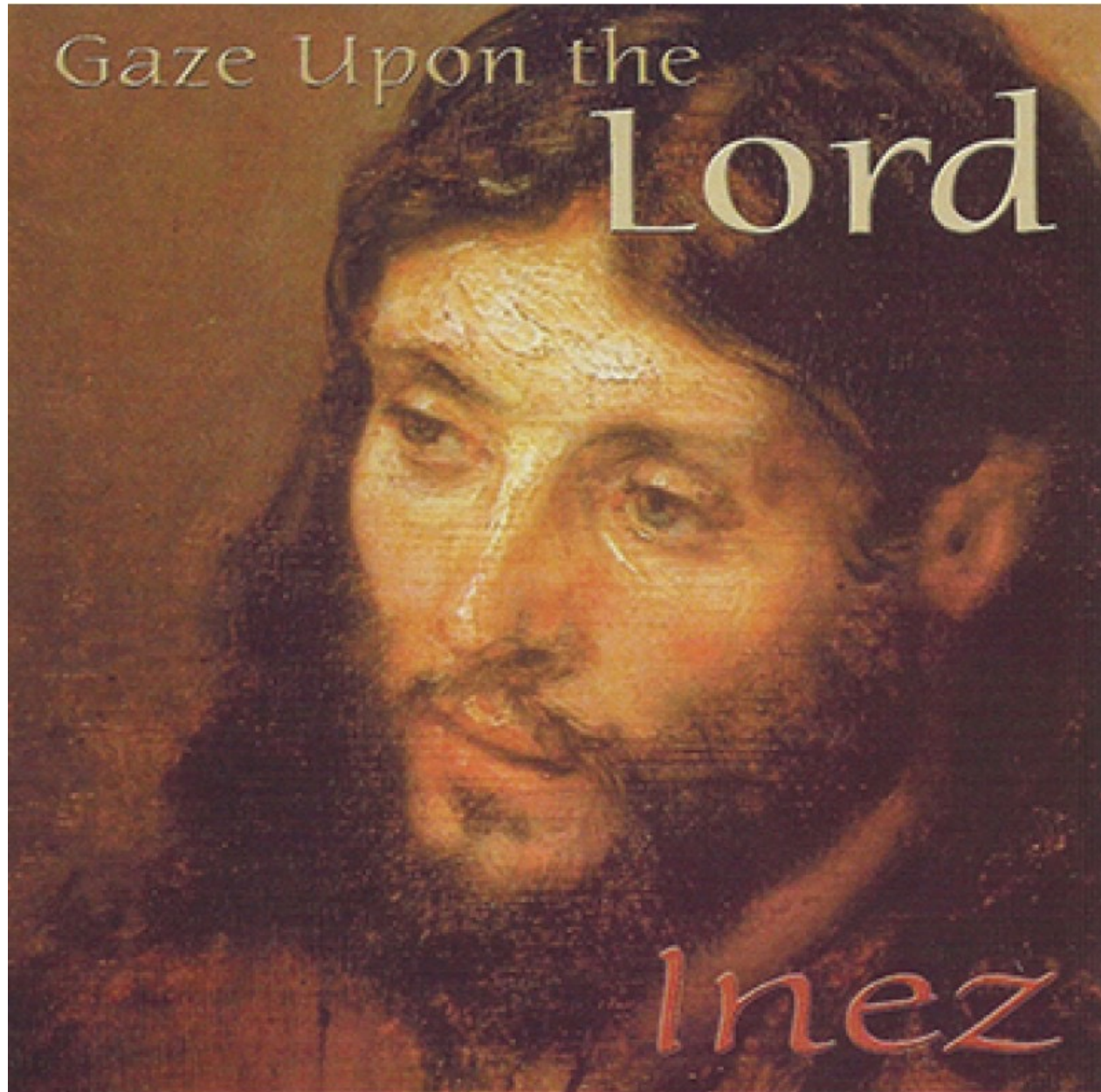


12. Sûrahs 70-114



Sûrah 70 (from Mecca).

Another sûrah on the judgment. Hell is *'a churning fire, ripping away the scalp'* (verses 15-16).

Sûrah 71 (from Mecca).

It is clear from the way the story of Noah is told that Muhammad sees himself as carrying on the prophetic mission of Noah. Those who reject Muhammad's revelation will suffer the same fate as Noah's contemporaries.

Sûrah 72 (from Mecca).

This section refers to the '*finn*' (verse 1), elemental spirits of a lower order than the angels. Some were understood to have been enlightened by Muhammad and converted to Islam.

Sûrah 72:23 *'Whoever disobeys God and His Messenger, his shall be the Fire of Hell, abiding therein forever'*.

Sûrah 72:26-28 *'Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone, save to the one whom He approves as a messenger. Then He dispatches before him and behind him a guard, that He may know that they have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord. And He encompasses whatever is with them and keeps a numbered count of all things'*.

Sûrah 73 (from Mecca).

This sûrah describes how Muhammad rose from his bed and wrapped himself in a cloak to carry out a vigil.

Sûrah 74 (from Mecca).

Some claim that this was Muhammad's first experience of receiving words from God. Others claim this for Sûrah 96, verses 1-5. It is a warning to those who do not believe in the Day of Judgment.

Sûrah 75 (from Mecca).

This sûrah is about the power of God to raise the dead:

Sûrah 75:22-24 'Faces that Day shall be radiant, gazing upon their Lord. And faces that Day shall be scowling, knowing that a spine-crushing calamity will befall them'.

For Jesus' parable about God's final judgment, see Matthew 25:31-46.

Sûrah 76 (from Medina).

Commentators suggest that this surah was revealed when Muhammad's family were fasting, having given their food to the 'indigent, the orphan and the captive' (verse 8).

It speaks (as do many of these shorter sûrahs) of divine judgment

Sûrah 76:30-31 'Truly God is Knowing, Wise. He causes whomsoever He will to enter into His Mercy. And as for the wrongdoers, He has prepared for them a painful punishment'.

Sûrah 77 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 77:37-38 'Woe that Day to the deniers. This is the Day of Division'.

The 'Day of Division' is the Day of Judgment when the good will be rewarded and the evil punished.

Sûrah 78 (from Mecca).

Again, the Day of Judgment. It speaks of the blessings of Paradise.

Sûrah 78:31-34 *‘Truly the reverent shall have a place of triumph, gardens and vineyards, buxom maidens of like age, and an overflowing cup.*

We looked at this verse, and others like it, when examining the relationship between men and women in the Quran.

Sûrah 78:40 *‘Truly We have warned you of a punishment night, on a day when a man beholds what his hands have sent forth, and the disbeliever says: “Oh, would that I were dust”.*

Sûrah 79 (from Mecca).

This sûrah speaks of those being wrested from the love of what is other than God. It is yet another sûrah on the Day of Judgment

Sûrah 79:37-41 'For one who rebels, and prefers the life of this world, truly Hellfire is the refuge. For one who fears standing before his Lord and forbids the soul from caprice, truly the Garden is the refuge'.

Sûrah 80 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 80:38-42 'Faces that Day shall be shining, radiant, laughing, joyous. And faces that Day shall be covered with dust, overspread with darkness., Those, they are the disbelievers, the profligates'.

Sûrah 81 (from Mecca).

Another sûrah on judgment and the necessity to listen to Muhammad.

Sûrah 81:19-20 speaks of Muhammad's vision of *'a noble messenger, possessed of strength, before the Possessor of the Throne, of high rank'* (the Angel Gabriel).

Sûrah 82 (from Mecca).

More on the Day of Judgment.

Sûrah 82:13-15 *'Truly the pious shall be in bliss [see Sûrah 83:22]; and truly the profligate shall be in Hellfire, burning therein on the Day of Judgment'*.

Sûrah 83 (from Mecca).

Again on the Day of Judgment, with special reference to those who defraud others.

Sûrah 84 (from Mecca).

More on the Day of Judgment.

Sûrah 85 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 85:10-11 'Truly those who persecute believing men and believing women, then do not repent, theirs shall be the punishment of Hell, and theirs shall be the punishment of the burning. Truly those who believe and perform righteous deeds, theirs shall be the Gardens with rivers running below: that is the supreme triumph'.

Sûrah 86 (from Mecca).

Sarah 86:17 Muhammad is told: 'Be gentle with the disbelievers; grant them respite for a while'.

This stands in stark contrast with many sûrahs from the Medina period.

Sûrah 87 (from ?)

Sûrah 87:15 is a call to *'remember the Name of the Lord [The Most High – al-A'la] and pray'*.

Sûrah 88 (from Mecca).

This sûrah speaks of the fate of those who believe and those who disbelieve. Muhammad is sent to warn them.

Sûrah 89 (from ?)

Sûrah 89:17-19 speaks of the fate of those who *'honour not the orphan, and urge not the feeding of the indigent, and devour inheritance with rapacious devouring, and love wealth with abounding love'*.

A constant theme of the Quran is the call to care for the needy (see Presentation 6).

Sûrah 90 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 90:13-20 *‘The steep pass [a striving for God] is the freeing of a slave, or giving food at a time of famine to an orphan near of kin, or an indigent, clinging to the dust while being one of those who believe and exhort one another in patience, and exhort one another to compassion. Those are the companions of the right. And those who disbelieve in Our signs, they are the companions of the left. Upon them is a Fire enclosed’.*

In Presentation 6 we examined the Muslim and Christian call to care for the poor. We also examined the different approaches to divine judgment in the Quran and in the Christian Scriptures.

Sûrah 91 (from Mecca).

Sûrah 91:9-10 *'Indeed, he prospers who purifies it [the soul]. And indeed he fails who obscures it. He is indeed a failure who stunts it'*

Sûrah 92 (from Mecca).

The Study Quran states: 'The central theme is one found in many of the shorter sûrahs, that human beings have diverse ends' (page 1522).

Sûrah 92:20-21 commends the person who *'seeks the Face of the Lord, the Most High, and surely He will be content'*

Sûrah 93 (from Mecca). quoted in full

These words came to Muhammad after an interval during which he received no words.

'By the morning brightness, and by the night when still, thy Lord has not forsaken thee; nor does He despise. And the Hereafter shall be better for thee than this life. And surely the Lord will give unto thee, and thou shalt be content. Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter, find thee astray and guide, and find thee in need and enrich? So as for the orphan scorn not. And as for one who requests, repel not. And as for the blessing of the Lord, proclaim!'

I find this one of the most beautiful of the sûrahs. Muhammad the orphan found his Guide and Protector in God, and was moved to proclaim to others the Lord's blessing.

Sûrah 94 (from Mecca). Quoted in full

Another very beautiful sûrah. Comfort is given to Muhammad at a time when he was being shunned and ridiculed.

Sûrah 94 'Did We not expand for thee thy breast, and lift from thee thy burden that weighed heavily upon thy back? And did We not elevate thy renown? For truly with hardship comes ease! Truly with hardship comes ease! So when thou art free exert thyself; and let thy desire be for your Lord.'

Sûrah 95 (from Mecca).

This is yet another short sûrah that speaks of God's judgment.

Sûrah 96 (from Mecca).

This appears to express Muhammad's first experience of receiving what he experienced as words from God (610AD). See *The Study Quran*, pages 1535-1536.

Sûrah 97 (from Mecca). Quoted in full

Sûrah 97 'Truly We sent it down in the Night of Power. And what shall apprise you of the Night of Power? The Night of Power is better than a thousand months. The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by the leave of their Lord, with every command; peace it is until the break of dawn.'

The Study Quran states: 'There are over forty interpretations of what is meant by the Night of Power' (page 1540 column 1). It may be an acknowledgment of the impossibility of finding words to express the experience of revelation.

Sûrah 98 (from ?).

Sûrah 98:1-3, 6 'Those who disbelieve among the People of the Book and the idolaters will not desist until the clear proof comes to them, a messenger from God, reciting scriptures purified wherein are books upright ... Truly the disbelievers among the People of the Book and the idolaters are in the fire of Hell'.

Sûrah 99 (from ?).

This sûrah speaks of the earthquake issuing in the Day of Judgment.

Sûrah 100 (from Mecca).

God knows all that we do, and we will be judged on our submission.

Sûrahs 101-104 (from Mecca).

More very short sûrahs on judgment.

Sûrah 105 (from Mecca).

In the year of Muhammad's birth, 570AD, Abrahah, the ruler of the Abyssinian kingdom in Yemen, attacked Mecca intending to destroy the Ka'bah. He had to abandon the attack.

Sûrah 106 (from Mecca).

The sûrah speaks of God's protection of the Quraysh, because of the presence in Mecca of the Ka'bah.

Sûrah 107 (from Mecca). Quoted in full

Sûrah 107 'Hast thou seen the one who denies religion? That is the one who drives away the orphan, and does not urge feeding the indigent. So, woe unto the praying who are heedless of their prayers, those who strive to be seen yet refuse small kindnesses.'

This has a lesson for us all.

Sûrah 108 (from ?). Quoted in full

Disbelievers taunted Muhammad that he had no son [his two sons died as children]

Sûrah 108 'Truly We have bestowed abundant good upon thee. So pray to thy Lord and sacrifice. Truly thine enemy shall be the one without posterity.'

Sûrah 109 (from Mecca). Quoted in full

Sûrah 109 Say, "O disbelievers! I worship not what you worship; nor are you worshippers of what I worship; nor am I a worshipper of what you worship; nor are you worshippers of what I worship. Unto you your religion, and unto me my religion.'

Muhammad is being encouraged not to compromise.

Sûrah 110 (from Medina). Quoted in full

Sûrah 110 'When God's Help and Victory come and you see mankind entering God's religion in throngs, hymn the praise of thy Lord, and seek forgiveness from Him. Truly He is Ever Relenting.'

This is one of the last revelations received by Muhammad, given just prior to his death.

Sûrah 111 (from Mecca). Quoted in full

Sûrah 111 'May the hands of Abu Lahab [one of Muhammad's opponents] perish, and may he perish! His wealth avails him not, nor what he has earned. He shall enter a blazing Fire. And his wife, carrier of firewood, upon her neck is a rope of palm fibre.'

Sûrah 112 (from ?). Quoted in full

Sûrah 112 'Say: He, God, is One, God the Eternally Sufficient unto Himself. He begets not; nor was He begotten. And none is like unto Him.'

The Study Quran recognises that the Christian idea of Jesus as God's 'Son' is different from the pagan Arab's concept of physical generation (page 1580, column 1).

Sûrah 113 (from ?). Quoted in full

Sûrah 113 'Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak, from the evil of what He has created, from the evil of the darkness when it enshrouds, from the evil of those who blow upon knots [malignant witchcraft], and from the evil of the envier when he envies.'

Sûrah 114 (from ?). Quoted in full

Sûrah 114 'Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind, the King of mankind, the God of mankind, from the evil of the stealthy whisperer, who whispers into the breasts of mankind, from jinn and mankind.'

Epilogue

I have been working on this paper for two years, because I share the conviction that we must all contribute what we can to a better understanding of Christianity and Islam if our world is to enjoy peace and prosperity. I can only hope that my small contribution will be found helpful. By way of conclusion I wish here to underline the main ideas that have come to me during this time.

Firstly, I want to reproduce here three points I have already made in regard to our use of the word 'God' (see Presentation 2).

1. Nothing that we directly experience is self-explanatory. It exists, but it does not have in itself the explanation for its existence. We know that there must be an explanation, and this knowing is reinforced when our search for meaning is successful. Our search, however, is never fully satisfied because what we discover always requires a further search. Either there is an ultimate explanation for what is, or there is not. Some choose to believe that reality has no ultimate meaning. Others, encouraged by the small successes we have in our search for meaning, believe that there exists a Reality that is not dependent on any other reality, but that has within itself a fully satisfying explanation for its existence. In other words they believe in God, a reality that is the ultimate explanation for the existence of everything.

2. Fully comprehending this Reality is beyond our capacity. We know that if reality is ultimately meaningful, this Reality must exist, but we cannot define it. Any words we use to speak of this Reality can at best point us towards it. It remains mysterious. People have intuited the Presence of this mysterious Reality in nature: in a mountain shrouded in cloud, in a grove of trees, in a spring gushing from the earth, in the sun or moon, in thunder and lightning and in the night sky. There emerged in human consciousness an intuition that ultimately everything is interconnected, that the spirit of the ocean and the spirit of the earth and the spirit of the sky are ultimately the one Spirit, the one Presence, the one Creator that accounts for the existence of everything and sustains everything in being. The notion of Monotheism was born. It is a central idea to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These are not the only religious movements to have this idea, but they are the ones we are focussing on in this paper.

3. A key conclusion from the above is that when we use words to speak of God we must do so only with the most profound humility. We must begin with the realisation that no words can comprehensively express a Reality that transcends our necessarily limited experience and capacity to understand. We must begin also with the conviction that everyone has a contribution to make here: every thinker, every artist, every lover, every culture. In the context of this paper we can name Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

Now I would like to highlight four points that have been central to this paper.

1. Part of this humility is a conviction that has been stressed often in this paper: religious texts are human documents. We may cherish these texts as inspired by God, because we find them inspiring. Especially significant here are the Sacred Writings of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, because for many hundreds of years they have continued to nourish people's lives. There is a temptation for the followers of a religious tradition to think of their foundational texts as coming directly from God. Lifted in this way above human authorship, the texts can be judged to avoid contextual analysis. If we are to contribute to the search for meaning, we must acknowledge this temptation and act against it. Such is our propensity for self-deception that we need each other's help if we are going to maintain the humility that is necessary in all that we say about God.

2. I pray that this paper may assist Christians to appreciate the contribution Islam has made to our search for meaning: its fidelity to Muhammad's central mystical experience of the Oneness of God; its highlighting, however imperfectly, of God's Compassion and readiness to forgive; its call to prayer; its care for orphans, for the poor and for strangers. I pray that this paper may assist Muslims to find these same values in Christianity. Of course, I haven't wanted to, and haven't been able to, resist pointing to Jesus as God's most beautiful human revelation of God as a God of Love. I want to grow in this conviction. Christians need to grow in this conviction. Whatever religious tradition helps make sense of our lives, I pray that knowing Jesus better will enrich us.

3. Islam had its beginnings in a violent world, which helps explain the inclusion in the Quran of instructions, purporting to come from God, to use every means, including violence, to protect and propagate Islam, the 'Religion of Truth'. Jesus, too, lived in a violent world. His response was to reveal God as Love and to teach us to love our neighbours, including our enemies. My prayer is that Christians will learn to follow Jesus in this, and that Muslims will see the statements in the Quran that support violence as a seventh century response that is understandable in the context, but that does not represent the will of God. Freed from this idea, Islam will be free to make its contribution to our search for meaning, and to the building of peace in this 'our common home'.

I conclude with a plea from Saint Paul, and then give the last word to the Quran.

Firstly, a plea from Saint Paul to the Christian community in Philippi: “If then there is any appeal in Christ, any consolation from love, any communion in the Spirit, any movements of compassion and feelings of love, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one soul and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Do not strive after or seek to find your value in things that are worthless, but in humility regard others above yourselves, so that not everyone is focused on themselves, but each is looking to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus’ (Philippians 2:1-5).

And now from two of my favourite sûrahs:

Sûrah 93 'By the morning brightness, and by the night when still, thy Lord has not forsaken thee; nor does He despise. And the Hereafter shall be better for thee than this life. And surely the Lord will give unto thee, and thou shalt be content. Did He not find thee an orphan and shelter, find thee astray and guide, and find thee in need and enrich? So as for the orphan scorn not. And as for one who requests, repel not. And as for the blessing of the Lord, proclaim!'

Muhammad the orphan found his Guide and Protector in God, and was moved to proclaim to others the Lord's blessing.

Sûrah 1 *'In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds, the Compassionate, the Merciful. Master of the Day of Judgment. Thee we worship, and from Thee we seek help. Guide us upon the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed'.*

Amen.



I'll be always loving you