

Qx25 – Muhammad & The Quran

Dear: At the end of the previous chapter, I didn't ask you to start reading the "holy book" of Islam, i.e., the Quran (or Qur'an or Koran), because even more so than for the case of the Bible, a person contemplating reading the Quran should first address the question: "What the devil is this?" It's similar to preparing for a trip: if you're heading to the beach, make sure you have some sun screen, if you're heading for the mountains, make sure you have some mosquito repellent, and if you're heading for the tropics, make sure you're inoculated against tropical disease. In this chapter, similarly, my plan is to try to prepare you for heading into the weird world of the Quran.

In spite of its "weirdness", I do encourage you to read the Quran [a word derived from the Arabic root *qara'a* meaning "to read" or "to recite"], but certainly not because I'd want you to adopt the religion known as Islam [which means "surrender (to God)"] and thereby become a "Muslim" [which you can find is derived from the Arabic word *aslma*, meaning "to resign oneself (to Allah)" – or another author says that Muslim means "those who have surrendered"]. And actually, I have very little concern that, if you read the Quran, you'll become a Muslim, because I expect Islam's "holy book" will really "turn you off": if you agree that the Bible is "bad news", Dear, then before reading the Quran, prepare yourself for some really "horrible stuff". Yet, it's not that the Quran is totally horrible: just as you can find a few gems in the torrent of muddy, polluted water known as the Bible, there are a few gems in the Quran – in a river of mayhem, murder, and blood!

Instead, I encourage you to read the Quran, so you'll begin to understand what Islam is "all about". In turn, I think you should try to learn about Islam, because I expect that, throughout your life, fighting Muslim extremists (terrorists) or "Islamists" will probably be similar to what fighting Communism was throughout most of my life: a continuous drain on your financial resources and (more significantly) on your happiness (both because of threats to your and your family's survival and because of diminished prospects for peace). Yet, let me add the encouraging comment: I expect (maybe with a probability of about 70%) that if you make it to 70 or so, you'll have seen freedom and democracy eventually triumph over the Islamists, just as freedom and democracy triumphed over Communism. But that's a topic that I'll get to in the X-chapters; here, my goal is to introduce you to some general features of Islam and its founder, Muhammad.

MUHAMMAD & HIS SATANIC VERSES

At the outset, I should mention the caveat that my understanding of Islam is certainly limited; therefore, should you desire to learn more, you'll need to dig more deeply with the help of others and on your own. As you can find elsewhere, it's claimed that the Quran is the record of "revelations" transmitted by "Allah" [or "al-Lah" or "al-ilah" or "the God", probably originally meaning "the Moon God" – and, therefore, Islam's ubiquitous use of the crescent-moon symbol]¹ via the angel Gabriel to the Arab merchant Muhammad [also spelled Mahomed, Mahomet, Mohammed, Mahmoud, and Mehemet]. Allegedly, Muhammad was born in the village of Mecca in about 570 and died there in 632. He claimed that he started receiving revelations [from the Persian/ Zoroastrian "messenger of God", Gabriel] when he was about 40 years old. When he was 52, he was driven out of Mecca to the village of Medina, basically because he was judged to be a "nut case" (or, as described in the Quran, a "mad poet"), but a few years before his death at age 62, he and his ruthless warriors had returned to Mecca to rule not only Mecca but also most of the desert tribes of Arabia.

Actually, there are some details about how Muhammad and his few followers got out of Mecca that are relevant to the West's interactions with Islam even today. To show you a few of these details, below is a quotation from an Article entitled "An Atheist's Guide to Mohammedanism" by Frank R. Zindler.²

At least at first, Mohammed's 'revelations' were like those of other oracles, soothsayers, and religious con-artists whose utterances took the form of rhymed prose. Mohammed convinced himself that he had been called to be a prophet in the tradition of the Jews and of Jesus. He also convinced a small coterie of relatives and friends that he had tapped into a direct line to Allah. This quickly led to friction with his tribe, the Quraysh, who were custodians of the Ka'aba, which at the time was a pagan shrine housing all the idols of economic significance to his tribe.

As is necessary for foundation myths of virtually all religions, the first followers of the new faith had to endure persecution, fleeing to Christian Ethiopia around the year 615. While those Muslims-in-the-making were out of town, Mohammed and the disciples who had stayed with him in Mecca were confined under siege – to be starved into submission.

¹ For example, see the article (by an unidentified author) entitled "Allah – the Moon God" at <http://www.biblebelievers.org.au/moongod.htm>.

² Copied from <http://www.atheists.org/Islam/mohammedanism.html>. The article was originally published in *The American Atheist Vol. 40, #1*, Winter 2001-2002.

Just in the nick of time, Mohammed received a revelation that helpfully clarified the theo-political questions at issue for the Meccan guardians of the gods in the Ka'aba. When Mohammed had reported that Allah was the only god in town, it turned out that he hadn't received the entire satellite transmission. Perhaps Gabriel had mumbled and Mohammed missed part of the message. Wouldn't you know? The three favorite goddesses of Mecca – al-Lat, al-Uzzah, and al-Manat – were also real!³

This saved Mohammed's neck and all body parts attached thereto, and the exiles were able to return from Ethiopia. Later, when it was safe to do so, this all-important revelation was expunged from the Qur'an and it was explained that the revelation had come from Shaitan (Satan), not Allah. Thus began the legend of the "Satanic Verses," which more than a thousand years later was to prompt the Ayatollah Khomeini to issue a *fatwa* of death against the novelist Salman Rushdie.

To draw attention to the Satanic Verses is to galvanize a still-raw nerve in the body politic of Islam. The Satanic Verses are an acute embarrassment to Mohammedan authorities because they imply that it was Satan, not Allah, who had saved their prophet's life. If Allah was the only god, and if he had previously selected Mohammed to be his last and greatest mouthpiece on this planet, why didn't *he* save his own appointed prophet? Why would the god of evil want to save his enemy's ambassador? Might not there be more Satanic Verses in the Qur'an – verses that have never been recognized as the handiwork of the prince of devils? Who knows what evils yet may lurk in the Book of Books?

And actually, Dear, there's more evil, here, besides what's in the Quran. In particular, this 1989 *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie represented (besides an evil violation of Rushdie's rights of free speech) a major turning point between modern-day Islam and the rest of the world. With this *fatwa*, the "spiritual leader" of Iran (Khomeini) was basically declaring that Islamic law [known as *sharia* or *shariah* or *shariat* and based both on "Islamic scholars" interpretations of the Quran and "traditions of the prophet" as given in writings called the *Hadith* and *Sunna*] was applicable worldwide, even for Rushdie who was living in England – and even for guess who, living where I ain't telling the crazy kooks. I trust you agree, Dear, that such bloodthirsty blowhards should be told to blow it out their ears.

But anyway, Dear, and before I mention more about Muhammad, himself, let me mention more about the Quran, itself.

³ Quoting <http://www.biblebelievers.org.au/moongod.htm>: "The three daughters, al-Lat, al-Uzza and Manat are sometimes depicted together, with Allah the Moon-god represented by a crescent moon above them. The archeological evidence demonstrates that the dominant religion of Arabia was the cult of the Moon-god."

SOME STRANGE FEATURES OF THE QURAN

The historical record of how the Quran was put together is almost as complicated and obscure as is the case with the Bible, both the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT). In the Quran (as you'll see) Muhammad claimed that he could neither read nor write (although there are hints in the Quran that, later in life, he did learn both), but in any case, the Quran appears to be the product of recordings of what other people claim Muhammad said.

She Said He Said

I wrote the previous sentence the way I did, because controversies about what Muhammad said (and did) continue. Two frequently discussed examples (as you can find on the internet)⁴ are whether Muhammad saw God and whether Muhammad said that a male Muslim's prayers are nullified if a dog, donkey, or woman passes in front of him.

One of the prophet's wives [Aisha, whom Muhammad married when she was six or seven years old and he had sex with her, consummating the marriage, when she was nine and he was in his fifties!] stated that both claims are false. But then, courtesy one of Muhammad's "revelations", in Islamic law (*sharia*) it takes two women's testimony to equal a man's (☹). So, to triple Aisha's claim, I'll assert for the record that Muhammad didn't see God (since such an animal doesn't exist!) and that a male Muslim's prayers aren't nullified if anything passes in front of him – since all prayers are already totally useless!

Tangled Twists and Turns

Meanwhile, Dear, if you want to decipher the tangled twists and turns of how the Quran took its current form, I'd recommend that you do so on your own. Here, I'll mention only three points.

First, putting the Quran into its "final form" after Muhammad's death seems to have taken about as long as did the similar concoction known as the NT, i.e., roughly three centuries. In addition, as described in the Wikipedia article on the History of the Quran:⁵

⁴ For example, see http://answering-islam.org.uk/Responses/Menj/women_prayer.htm.

⁵ See especially http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Quran_-_Skeptical_scholars.

...the earliest account of Muhammad's life by Ibn Ishaq was written about a century after Muhammad died and all later narratives by Islamic biographers contain far more details and embellishments about events which are... lacking in Ibn Ishaq's text.

Consequently, Dear, given that a lot of white-washing can be accomplished in a century (!), that tall tales always seem to grow taller in the telling, and that all clerics are primarily interested in benefiting themselves, you'd be wise to be skeptical about all claims either about Muhammad or about "the miracle of the Quran".

I'll make my second point by simply again quoting Frank R. Zindler's article (referenced above):

Clear proof that Qur'anic texts have evolved can be seen from the fact that the first Qur'anic (more accurately, pre-Qur'anic) quotations known are found on coins and inscriptions dating toward the end of the seventh century. Many of these differ from the canonical text. Substantial differences from the canonical text are also found in the ornamental inscriptions decorating the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, executed during the reign of Abd al-Malik in the seventy-second year of the Islamic era [691–692 CE]. Finally, some scholars have concluded that much of the Qur'an actually predates Mohammed, being liturgical material that was used by monotheistic Arabs, perhaps Judaeo-Christians or the mysterious Hanifs to whom Mohammed joined himself early in his career. Much of this material, of course, was unintelligible to later commentators of the Qur'an who had to invent far-fetched explanations for the obscurities.

And my third point is to mention that "errors" in the Quran are far from insignificant. A specific example is described in an article entitled "Scholars Scrutinize the Quran's Origin" by Alexander Stille in the 4 March 2002 issue of *The New York Times*.⁶ Some revealing quotes from this article include the following:

Christoph Luxenberg, a scholar of ancient Semitic languages in Germany, argues that the Koran has been misread and mistranslated for centuries. His work, based on the earliest copies of the Koran, maintains that parts of Islam's holy book are derived from pre-existing Christian Aramaic texts that were misinterpreted by later Islamic scholars who prepared the editions of the Koran commonly read today. So, for example, the virgins who are supposedly awaiting good Islamic martyrs as their reward in paradise are in reality "white raisins" of crystal clarity rather than fair maidens... [!]

⁶ Available at, e.g., <http://www.corkscrew-balloon.com/02/03/1bkk/04b.html>; see also the more complete article at http://www.guardian.co.uk/saturday_review/story/0,,631332,00.html.

Scholars like Mr. Luxenberg and Gerd-R. Puin, who teaches at Saarland University in Germany, have returned to the earliest known copies of the Koran in order to grasp what it says about the document's origins and composition. Mr. Luxenberg explains these copies are written without vowels and diacritical dots that modern Arabic uses to make it clear what letter is intended. In the eighth and ninth centuries, more than a century after the death of Muhammad, Islamic commentators added diacritical marks to clear up the ambiguities of the text, giving precise meanings to passages based on what they considered to be their proper context. Mr. Luxenberg's radical theory is that many of the text's difficulties can be clarified when it is seen as closely related to Aramaic, the language group of most Middle Eastern Jews and Christians at the time.

For example, the famous passage about the virgins is based on the word *hur*, which is an adjective in the feminine plural meaning simply "white." Islamic tradition insists the term *hur* stands for "houri," which means virgin, but Mr. Luxenberg insists that this is a forced misreading of the text. In both ancient Aramaic and in at least one respected dictionary of early Arabic, *hur* means "white raisin."

Mr. Luxenberg has traced the passages dealing with paradise to a Christian text called *Hymns of Paradise* by a fourth-century author. Mr. Luxenberg said the word paradise was derived from the Aramaic word for garden and all the descriptions of paradise described it as a garden of flowing waters, abundant fruits and white raisins, a prized delicacy in the ancient Near East. In this context, white raisins, mentioned often as *hur*, Mr. Luxenberg said, makes more sense than a reward of sexual favors.

If Luxenberg's result becomes widely known, if testosterone-laden Muslim terrorists start "believing" that, rather than being awarded 72 virgins for perpetual sex-orgies in Paradise, they'll be given 72 white raisins, then in the future, maybe fewer Muslim maniacs will volunteer for suicide missions.

Rhyme But No Reason

But setting such (important!) ideas aside for now, Dear, if you turn to the prospects of reading the Quran, you'll find it to be a very strange book – in the sense that it has no obvious structure. One might have hoped that the Quran would have been organized according to some chronological structure (derived either from the order in which the alleged revelations were received or from stories about Muhammad's life), but instead, "the compilers" of the Quran chose a doubly weird order: first they arranged the "chapters" (with strange names) according to length (!); then, they collected them to form the Quran by putting the longest chapters first and the shortest, last!

Perhaps such an ordering is consistent with the Arab custom of reading each page from right to left (do they read books from back to front?!), but

otherwise, there seems to be “neither rhyme nor reason” to the ordering – save one. Thus, perhaps “the compilers” were promoting memorization of the Quran (which in Arabic is written as poetry, but the poetry is entirely lost in available English translations); then, perhaps “the compilers” decided that such memorization, by the (generally) illiterate Arabs, would be facilitated if the Quran were started (at the end of the book?!) with the “chapters” that were shortest and therefore easiest to memorize.

DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE QURAN

Beyond the “strangeness” in the ordering of the text of the Quran, there’s something else that’s not only strange but also much more significant. I’ll summarize it this way: Dear, when you read the Quran and find something “weird” (e.g., contradicting what you’ve already read), then you need to learn to take not just “double takes” but “triple takes” – and even more!

Now, of course it’ll take me a while to explain what I mean – but while I do, Dear, please remember that the need to account for “multiple takes” is actually quite important. An outline of these “multiple takes” is as follows; I’ll describe the first-four “takes” for the case of Muslims:

- First are those Muslims who engage in only a “single take” of the Quran. They’re generally peaceful and usually doltish, illiterate, and/or disinterested in “theological niceties”.
- Second are those Muslims who engage in a “double take” (and only a “double take”). Many if not most of them are Islamic terrorists or their supporters and promoters.
- Third are those Muslims who proceed to a “triple take” (*via* historical analyses). My interpretation of them is that, commonly, they seem to be trying to “white-wash” Islam, attempting to show especially concerned Westerners that the brutal, murderous parts of the Quran were appropriate only when Muhammad was at war (and not permanent injunctions for Muslims to “**kill the unbelievers**”).
- The fourth take of the Quran is more hopeful: it’s taken by those “secular Muslims” who are trying to drag the rest of the world’s Muslims out of the 7th Century and into the 21st Century (although while still maintaining the data-less speculation that some giant Jabberwock in the sky actually exists).

As for the fifth take, which I’ll emphasize in the next three chapters, it’s taken by all Humanists (aka scientific humanists); in brief, it can be summarized with: “**All this supernatural stuff – ya gotta be kidding!**”

* Go to other chapters *via*

The “First Take” of the Quran (& Islam)

To begin to see what I mean by these “multiple takes” of the Quran (and of Islam), first consider those Muslims who (similar to most Christians and Mormons) read little to none of their “holy book”, preferring to listen to what their clerics choose to dictate. Islamic clerics or “holy men” (called *imams*, meaning ‘leader’, from the Arabic word *amma*, meaning “lead the way”) have found that superficial, “first-take” sermons are especially useful when trying to convert people to Islam – or, as the Islamic clerics like to say, to get people to “revert” to Islam, claiming that Islam is the “one true religion” and that everyone is a Muslim at birth. Whatever!

In such “first takes” of Islam emphasis is on the “lovey-dovey” stuff in the Quran – and the gullible fall for it, such as is illustrated by the following quotation [to which I’ve added some notes in brackets].⁷

IslAam: a home of tolerance, not fanaticism

By Yusuf Islam [formerly known as Cat Stevens, an American singer]
20 September 2001 [Dear: notice that date.]

Media speculation since the horrific terrorist attacks on America has pointed the finger at Muslims and the Arab world, and that has meant ordinary citizens of the US and other Western countries becoming easy prey for anti-faith hooligans. Shame. [Is Cat Stevens thereby suggesting that, if you’re “anti-faith”, then you’re a hooligan? I wonder if he’d be interested in my response or the response of any Humanist to such an idiotic statement.]

Sadly, the latest horror to hit the US looks to have been caused by people of Middle Eastern origin, bearing Muslim names. Again, shame.

This fuels more hatred for a religion and a people who have nothing to do with these events. [At least, according to Cat Stevens and his “first-take” view of Islam!] This is why I want to explain [as if he had the knowledge to do so!] some basic facts about this noble way we call Islaam, before, God forbid, another disaster occurs – next time probably aimed at Muslims.

I came to Islaam in my late 20s, during my searching period as a wandering pop star. I found a religion that blended scientific reason [cough, cough] with spiritual reality [how’s that for an oxymoron: “spiritual reality”?!] in a unifying faith far removed from the headlines of violence, destruction and terrorism.

⁷ Copied from http://www.allahuakbar.net/us/cat_stevens.htm.

One of the first interesting things I learned in the Koran was that the name of the faith comes from the word salam – peace. [Insofar as we'll have peace if we surrender to Muslim maniacs!] Far from the kind of Turko-Arab-centric message I expected, the Koran presented a belief in the universal existence of God, one God for all. [No evidence, mind you – just blind-belief!] It does not discriminate against peoples; it says we may be different colors and from different tribes, but we are all human [which is one of the few good ideas in Islam] and “the best of people are the most God-conscious” [which is one of the many bad ideas in Islam].

Today, as a Muslim, I have been shattered by the horror of recent events; the display of death and indiscriminate killing we've all witnessed has dented humanity's confidence in itself. Terror on this scale affects everybody on this small planet, and no one is free from the fallout. Yet we should remember that such violence is almost an everyday occurrence in some Muslim lands [and would Cat Stevens like to enlighten us about why that is so, e.g., about reasons why Muslim Sunnis and Muslim Shias have been killing each other for at least the past 1,000 years?!]: it should not be exacerbated by revenge attacks on more innocent families and communities.

Along with most Muslims, I feel it a duty to make clear that such orchestrated acts of incomprehensible carnage have nothing to do with the beliefs of most Muslims. [Which is probably a fairly accurate statement – not because such “incomprehensible carnage” isn't sanctioned and promoted in the Koran, but because “most Muslims” don't waste their time reading the Koran – if they can read at all!] The Koran specifically declares: “If anyone murders an (innocent) person, it will be as if he has murdered the whole of humanity. And if anyone saves a person it will be as if he has saved the whole of humanity.” [Which, of course, is an excellent idea (and which, I'll be showing you, was copied from Jewish literature) – but unfortunately, Dear (as I'll show you soon) in the Quran it was “abrogated” (i.e., cancelled) by later messages in the Koran – which maybe Cat Stevens hasn't yet read and which approve the killing of “unbelievers” (in Islamic balderdash, be it either Sunni or Shia), because (doncha know) people who profess the “wrong” belief (or no belief!) aren't “innocent” and therefore deserve to die – according to the Quran!]

The Koran that our young people learn is full of stories and lessons from the history of humanity as a whole. The Gospels and the Torah are referred to; Jesus and Abraham are mentioned. In fact there is more mention in the Koran of the prophet Moses than of any other. [Which is especially interesting, since as I'll show you in the “excursion” Yx (dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”) it's essentially certain that the Moses depicted in the Old Testament (OT) never existed! He's just a non-historical, storybook character. Therefore, since the Koran relays so many fictitious stories about Moses as if they occurred, the Koran (similar to the OT) is fictitious!] It [the Koran or Quran] acknowledges the coexistence of other faiths, and in doing so acknowledges that other cultures can live together in peace. [Which is another “message” in the Koran that's abrogated by later messages – “peace” is possible only if non-Muslims surrender to Muslims.]

“There is no compulsion in religion,” it states, meaning that people should not be compelled to change their faith. [That is, no one “compels” people to keep their heads attached to the rest of their body; it’s their choice: believe what we tell you to believe – or die!] Elsewhere it states, “To you, your religion; to me mine.” [But the revised message (found later in the Koran) is that if you keep you religion and it’s other than Islam, then you’ll be “subdued” by (be subservient to) the “best of people”, i.e., to Muslims.]

Respect for religious values [as defined by Muhammad!] and justice [as defined by Muhammad!] is at the Koran’s core. The Koranic history we teach our young provides ample examples of inter-religious and international relationships of how to live together. [Dear: I’ll show you some of those examples, later (in both this Qx and in Yx), and I think that also you will respond with something similar to: Thanks anyway, but I’d sooner be free!]

But some extremists take elements of the sacred scriptures out of context [according to the naïve Cat Stevens; not according to those (e.g., Osama bin Laden) who have studied the Quran thoroughly!]. They act as individuals [No, Cat; for example, al Qaeda is not an “individual”], and when they can’t come together as part of a political structure or consultative process [But they do! Again, investigate the “political structure” known as al Qaeda], you find these dissident factions creating their own rules, contrary to the spirit of the Koran – which demands that those recognized as being in charge of Muslims must consult together regarding society’s affairs. [As I’ll be showing you Dear, that isn’t so: not only are Muslim terrorists such as those affiliated with al Qaeda following in “the spirit of the Koran” (those part that apparently Cat Stevens hasn’t yet read!), but also, notice that Cat Stevens identifies “those recognized as being in charge of Muslims”, i.e., dictators. In other words, Muslims aren’t to take “charge” of their own affairs!]

Communal well-being is central to human life, so there is a concept in Islaam called *Istihsan*, which means “to look for the common good” [as in communism]. Even though the Koran may lay down a diktat [dictate?], scholars are also supposed to consider the circumstances prevalent at the time. Sometimes that means choosing the lesser of two evils or even suspending legislation if necessary: for instance, a person who steals bread during a famine is not treated as a thief. [What wonderful seventh-century enlightenment!]

Once I wrote in a song, “Where do the children play?” Our sympathy and thoughts go out to the families of all those who lost their lives in this tragic act of violence, as well as all those injured. But life must go on. Children still need to play, and people need to live and learn more about their neighbors so that ignorance doesn’t breed more blind fanaticism. Moderation is part of faith, so those who accuse Muslim schools of fostering fanaticism should learn a bit more about Islaam. [Or Cat Stevens should learn more about Islam!]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “Ruined are those who insist on hardship in faith,” [but as I’ll be showing you, Dear, other statements attributed to Muhammad express the exact opposite!] and, “A believer remains within the scope of his religion as long as he doesn’t kill another person illegally.” [Which is a good example of a meaningless statement, since it fails to define ‘illegally’; in particular, as I’ll be showing you, the Koran explicitly commands to “kill the unbelievers” (e.g., Dear, you!)]. Such knowledge and words of guidance [which contain no ‘knowledge’ (only the dictator Muhammad’s desires) and aren’t “guidance” (unless you want to keep your head affixed to the rest of your body)] are desperately needed at this time, to separate fact from falsehood [Cat Stevens wouldn’t recognize the difference between “fact” and “falsehood” if his life depended upon it] and to recognize the Last Prophet’s own definition of that which makes a person representative, or otherwise, of the faith he lived and the one we try to teach. [As an example of a “fact” that Cat Stevens doesn’t recognize: more certain than any other “fact” that humans have been able to identify is the “fact” that there are no gods and never were any gods; therefore, there is no such thing as a “Prophet” of any god.]

The above communication from Cat Stevens is a good illustration of what I’ve identified as a “first take” of the Quran (and of Islam). It’s written by someone who is either incapable of distinguishing fact from fiction or is unwilling to invest the effort need to do so. To him, the supernatural is real, God, angels, and Satan exist, Moses accomplished supernatural miracles, Muhammad is a prince of peace, and everything would be “lovey-dovey” if only everyone would believe in such fairy tales.

Fortunately for humanity, the majority of Muslims have also (and only) engaged in similar “first takes” of the Quran (and Islam). They are ordinary people who desire peace with justice among all humans and go about their business without much regard for “theological niceties”. They’ve been hoodwinked by similarly naïve (or in other cases, purposely deceptive) imams preaching “lovey-dovey” messages from the Quran. Such imams have been found that preaching such messages to be useful both for recruiting more simpletons (similar to Cat Stevens) into Islam and for placating simpleton (or equally devious) politicians, such as President Bush and Prime Minister Blair, who then exude such unsupported (and unsupportable) statements as “Islam is a religion of peace.”

Abrogation and the “Second Take” of the Quran

Islamic fundamentalists, however, such as Muslim terrorists and related Islamic clerics who seek world domination – as well as non-Muslims who resist any attempts by Muslims to obtain world domination! – do a “second take” of the Quran. As a result, they see that the “lovely-dovey” peaceful

stuff in the Quran is a “fake-out”, used to lull the unsuspecting until Muslims have a chance to strike. The key to their understanding is contained within a critical verse in the Quran, in the sura (or surah, meaning ‘chapter’) called *Al-Barqarah* (Sura 2, verse 106):⁸

None of our revelations do We [Allah] *abrogate* or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar: knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things?

This verse is key, Dear, because it’s used (by those who desire to so use it) to resolve any of the many contradictions between different “revelations” in the Quran. Thus, if one “revelation” says “make peace” and another says “make war”, the above “abrogation sura” provides a resolution: according to Muhammad, God Almighty HIMself said (in effect), “**Forget about what I told you before; take the most recent communication!**”

Consequently, although most of the rest of us don’t know which “revelation” is first and which is most recent (because there’s no chronological order to the Quran), Islamic fundamentalists do claim to know which is which and claim that the “make-war communications” abrogate (i.e., “take precedence over” or “cancel”) the “make-peace communications” – giving the terrorists a green light to kill “unbelievers”. And most unfortunately, the arguments of the fundamentalists are sound – once they accept the data-less speculation that any giant Jabberwock in the sky communicated anything to anyone.

To get a general idea of the Islamic fundamentalists’ reasoning (at least, their “reasoning” with respect to the relative applicability of conflicting Quranic verses), consider the following,⁹ quoted from an article by Joseph Smith (not the Mormon ‘profit’!) written in May 1995 and entitled “The Qur’an – Apologetic Paper” [and to which I’ve added some notes relevant to the way I’ll be organizing these Qx-chapters dealing with the Quran]:

According to Muslim Tradition the “revelations” of the suras (or books) were received by the prophet Muhammad, *via* the angel Jibril (Gabriel) within three periods. The first is referred to as the 1st Meccan period [which, Dear, I’ll call “the

⁸ Dear: As I mentioned earlier in the book, there are different ways to reference text from the Quran (or Qur’an or Koran). One way is simply to use the name of the chapter (or “sura”); in total, there are 114 such suras. Another reference method is to use the number of the chapter or section (or sura) along with the line number (or verse) within the sura; as mentioned by Smith (see next footnote), “**each verse or portion of the sura is known as an ‘aya’, which means ‘miracle’ in Arabic.**”

⁹ Available at <http://debate.org.uk/topics/history/quran.htm#H>.

First Period”], and lasted between 611–615 CE. During this time the suras contain many of the [religious] warnings [e.g., about Hell], and much of the leading ideas concerning who Allah is, and what He expected of His creation (i.e. suras 1, 51-53, 55-56, 68-70, 73-75, 77-97, 99-104, 111-114).

The 2nd period, referred to as the 2nd Meccan period (between 616–622 CE) [which I’ll call “the Second Period”] had longer suras, dealing with doctrines, many of which echoed Biblical material. It was during this time that Islam makes the claim of being the one true religion (i.e. suras 6-7, 10-21, 23, 25-32, 34-46, 50, 54, 67, 71-72, 76).

The third period, referred to as the Medinan period (between 623–632 CE) [which I’ll call “the Third Period”] centered in Medina and lasted roughly ten years, until Muhammad’s death in 632 CE. There is a distinct shift in content during this period. Divine approval is given for Muhammad’s leadership, and much of the material deals with local historical events. There is a change from the preaching of divine matters, to that of governing. Consequently, the suras are much more political and social in their makeup (suras 2-5, 8-9, 22-24, 33, 37, 47-49, 57-59, 60-66, 98, 110).

From which, Dear, I’d have you first notice that Sura 2 (containing the “abrogation” clause, i.e., “if in doubt, choose the latter”) occurs during the Third Period. Second, Dear, be aware that all the “make-war” suras (some of which I’ll soon show you) come in the later periods, canceling out all the “make-peace” suras! Further and even worse (and as I’ll be showing you), some of the later suras also advise, in effect: “Fake your enemy out: first pretend to make peace and then, when your enemy is weaker than you and/or unsuspecting, slaughter him” – which may be occurring throughout “the Western World” today. And if that’s a scary thought, Dear, then good – not so you’ll be more inclined to read the Quran, but so you’ll be more inclined to be alert to some very serious dangers.

If you think that I’m exaggerating, Dear, then immediately below I’ll give you a preview of some “revelations” in the Quran. All of the following are from “the Third Period”; i.e., they weren’t abrogated; they’re still in full force! These suras were assembled by an unidentified author (unidentified, I expect, to protect himself or herself from being assassinated by Muslim extremists) and appear in an article entitled “Islam – A Religion of Peace? – Evidence From the First Chapters of the Quran,” posted at www.humanists.freeserve.co.uk.¹⁰

¹⁰ Available at <http://p4h.humanists.net/Islam%20peace/QuranPeace.html>.

In Chapter 2: *The Cow*

Don't bother to warn the disbelievers. Allah has blinded them. Theirs will be an awful doom. 2:6

Allah has sickened their hearts. A painful doom is theirs because they lie. 2:10

Allah has blinded the disbelievers. 2:17-18

A fire has been prepared for the disbelievers, whose fuel is men and stones. 2:24

Disbelievers will be burned with fire. 2:39, 90

Allah stamped wretchedness upon the Jews because they killed the prophets and disbelieved Allah's revelations. 2:61

Allah turned Sabbath breakers into apes. 2:65-66

Allah has cursed them for their unbelief. 2:88

The curse of Allah is on disbelievers. 2:89

Jews are the greediest of all humankind. 2:96

Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers. 2:98

Only evil people are disbelievers. 2:99

For disbelievers is a painful doom. 2:104

For unbelievers: ignominy in this world, an awful doom in the next. 2:114

Disbelievers are losers. 2:121

Allah will leave the disbelievers alone for a while, but then he will compel them to the doom of Fire. 2:126

Those who reject the proofs, are accursed of Allah. 2:159

Those who die disbelievers, are cursed by Allah, angels, and men. 2:161

The doom of the disbelievers will not be lightened. 2:162

They will not emerge from the Fire. 2:167

Disbelievers will be deaf, dumb, and blind. 2:171

Those who hide the Scripture will have their bellies eaten with fire. Theirs will be a painful doom. 2:174

How constant are they in their strife to reach the Fire! 2:175

Believers must retaliate. Those who transgress will have a painful doom. 2:178

Kill disbelievers wherever you find them. If they attack you, then kill them. Such is the reward of disbelievers. 2:191

Fight them until “religion is for Allah.” 2:193

War is ordained by Allah, and all Muslims must be willing to fight, whether they like it or not. 2:216

Those who die in their disbelief will burn forever in the Fire. 2:217

Intermarriage is forbidden. 2:221

The disbelievers, they are the wrong-doers. 2:254

Disbelievers worship false gods. They will burn forever in the Fire. 2:257

Allah does not guide disbelievers. 2:264

Give us victory over the disbelieving folk. 2:286

In Chapter 3: The Family of Imran

Those who disbelieve the revelations of Allah, theirs will be a heavy doom. 3:4

Those who disbelieve will be fuel for the Fire. 3:10

Those who disbelieve shall be overcome and gathered unto Hell. 3:12

Those who disbelieve, promise them a painful doom. 3:21

Let not the believers take disbelievers for their friends in preference to believers. 3:28

Allah loveth not the disbelievers. 3:32

Allah will punish disbelievers in this world and the next. They will have no helpers. 3:56

Don't believe anyone who is not a Muslim. 3:73

Theirs will be a painful doom. 3:77

All non-Muslims will be rejected by Allah after they die. 3:85

Disbelievers will be cursed by Allah, angels, and men. They will have a painful doom. 3:87-88

Disbelievers will have a painful doom. And they will have no helpers. 3:91

Disbelievers will have their faces blackened on the last day. They will face an awful doom. 3:105-6

Those who disbelieve will be burnt in the Fire. 3:116

Don't be friends with non-Muslims. They all hate you and want to ruin you. 3:118

The Fire is prepared for disbelievers. 3:131

Give us victory over the disbelieving folk. 3:147

We shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Their habitation is the Fire. 3:151

Theirs will be an awful doom. 3:176

Disbelievers do not harm Allah, but will have a painful doom. 3:177

Disbelievers will go to Hell. 3:196

In Chapter 4: *The Women*

Those who disobey Allah and his messenger will be burnt with fire and suffer a painful doom. 4:14

For disbelievers, We prepare a shameful doom. 4:37

Allah has cursed them for their disbelief. 4:46

Those who ascribe a partner to Allah (like Christians do with Jesus and the Holy Spirit) will not be forgiven. They have "invented a tremendous sin." 4:48, 4:116

Those who invent lies about Allah are guilty of flagrant sin. 4:50

Jews and Christians believe in idols and false deities, yet they claim to be more rightly guided than Muslims. 4:51

Those (Christians and Jews) are they whom Allah hath cursed. 4:52

Unbelievers will be tormented forever with fire. When their skin is burned off, a fresh skin will be provided. 4:56

Those who refuse to follow Muhammad, follow false gods and are deceived by Satan. 4:60

Those who refuse to believe what Allah has revealed to Muhammad are hypocrites. 4:61

Oppose and admonish those who refuse to follow Muhammad. 4:63

The hypocrites refuse to die for Allah and Muhammad. 4:66

Those who obey Allah and Muhammad are favored by Allah. They are the best company. 4:69

Allah will bestow a vast reward on those who fight in religious wars. 4:74

Believers fight for Allah; disbelievers fight for the devil. So fight the minions of the devil. 4:76

Allah casts the hypocrites back to disbelief. Don't try to guide those that Allah sends astray. 4:88

Have no unbelieving friends. Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them. 4:89

If the unbelievers do not offer you peace, kill them wherever you find them. Against such you are given clear warrant. 4:91

The disbelievers are an open enemy to you. 4:101

For the disbelievers, Allah has prepared a shameful punishment. 4:102

Relent not in pursuit of the enemy. They have no hope from Allah. 4:104

Those who oppose the messenger and become unbelievers will go to hell. 4:115

Allah will lead them astray and they will go to hell. 4:119-121

Allah will gather hypocrites and disbelievers into hell. 4:140

Allah will not allow disbelievers to succeed against believers. 4:141

Do not choose disbelievers as friends. 4:144

The hypocrites will be in the lowest part of hell and no one will help them there.
4:145

You must believe everything Allah and his messengers tell you. Those who don't are disbelievers and will face a painful doom. 4:150-151

For the wrongdoing Jews, Allah has prepared a painful doom. 4:160-1

God will guide disbelievers down a road that leads to everlasting hell. 4:168-169

In Chapter 5: The Table Spread

Those who deny Islam will be losers in the Hereafter. 5:5

Disbelievers are the rightful owners of Hell. 5:10

Allah has cursed the Jews and hardened their hearts. Nearly all of them are treacherous. 5:12-13

Allah has stirred up enmity and hatred among Christians. 5:14

Those who make war with Allah and his messenger will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be expelled out of the land. That is how they will be treated in this world, and in the next they will have an awful doom. 5:33

Disbelievers will have a painful doom. 5:36

Disbelievers will want to come out of the Fire, but will not. Theirs will be a lasting doom. 5:37

Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, and tooth for tooth. Non-muslims are wrong doers. 5:45

Don't take Jews or Christians for friends. If you do, then Allah will consider you to be one of them. 5:51

Jews and Christians are losers. 5:53

Don't choose Jews, Christians, or disbelievers as guardians. 5:57

Jews and Christians are evil-livers. 5:59

Evil is the handiwork of the rabbis and priests. 5:63

Allah has cast enmity and hatred among the Jews. 5:64

Allah does not guide disbelievers. 5:67

Christians will be burned in the Fire. 5:72

Christians are wrong about the Trinity. For that they will have a painful doom. 5:73

Disbelievers will be owners of hell-fire. 5:86

Clear enough, kid? And if it's not, then below are a few more samples from the same Third Period:

- I will instill terror into the hearts of the unbelievers, smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them. It is not ye who slew them; it was Allah. (8: 12–17)
- Strike terror (into the hearts of) the enemies of Allah and your enemies. (8: 60)
- Fight (kill) them (non-Muslims) and Allah will punish (torment) them by your hands, cover them with shame. (9: 14)
- O ye who believe! Fight the unbelievers... let them find firmness (harshness) in you and know that Allah is with those who fear Him. (9: 123)

And oh, Dear, in case you didn't notice, then maybe you'd like to read all the above again, to see that you're one of the horrible "unbelievers" – unless you're willing to start obeying "Allah's messenger", i.e., Muhammad.

Now, Dear, in the above I was trying to show you what I meant by the need for taking a "double take" when you read the Quran: a "first take" (a novice's take), as commonly served to newcomers to Islam (and parroted by such fools as Blair, Bush, and Cat Stevens), is that "Islam is a religion of peace." Promoting this "religion of peace", Islam clerics claim that theirs is the fastest growing religion in the world, but in that regard, they neglect to mention three points:

- 1) If it were true, it's probably mostly because Muslim countries have the fastest birth rate in the world (because family planning in Islam is as ignorant as that promoted by Catholic clerics),
- 2) Most Muslim children are brutally forced to continue to be Muslims – or be murdered as "apostates", and

- 3) Almost certainly the claim is false. Instead, I expect that the fastest growing “religion” in the world is secular humanism (aka Humanism), which in the U.S., for example, is at least doubling every decade – whereas certainly (and thankfully) Islam isn’t expanding its idiocy at anywhere near that rate.

In any event and as I began to show you with the above quotations from the Quran, a “second take” reveals that the “first take” is erroneous. At the end of this chapter, I want to show you glimpses of a “third take” (i.e., reinterpretations with historical analyses), a “fourth take” (modernization), and a “fifth take” (that of scientific humanists), but before getting to any of that and for reasons that I hope will become clear, I want to go back (as promised) to try to show you a little more about this crazy character who was renamed “Muhammad” (viz., “**the praised one**”; his name given at birth being unknown) and about the infantile religion known as Islam.

A FIRST LOOK AT MUHAMMAD

In the previous sentence I used the adjective “crazy” (in this “crazy character... Muhammad”) with some deliberation, since there are a number of suggestions that (similar to “Saint” Paul) Muhammad had what before Hippocrates was called “the sacred disease”, i.e., epilepsy. To quickly learn more about this neurological malfunction, I’d suggest that you read the entry in Wikipedia,¹¹ where you’ll find under “History and Stigma” (with references here suppressed):

The word **epilepsy** is derived from the Greek *epilepsia*, which in turn can be broken in to *epi-* (upon) and *lepsis* (to take hold of, or seizure). In the past, epilepsy was associated with religious experiences and even demonic possession. In ancient times, epilepsy was known as the “Sacred Disease” because people thought that epileptic seizures were a form of attack by demons or that the visions experienced by persons with epilepsy were sent by the gods... In ancient Rome, epilepsy was known as the *Morbus Comitialis* (“disease of the assembly hall”) and was seen as a curse from the gods... Stigma continues to this day, in both the public and private spheres, but polls suggest it is generally decreasing with time, at least in the developed world; Hippocrates [the famous Greek doctor] remarked that epilepsy would cease to be considered divine the day it was understood.

The possibility that Muhammad had “the sacred disease” can be seen from his biographies (or “siras”), the first of which appeared more than a century after his death (when the Muslim warriors had conquered territories from

¹¹ At <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epilepsy>.

Spain to India). Illustrative is the following quotation, again from Joseph Smith's article, where listings of his references can be found.¹²

Since the Qur'an tells us little concerning how Muhammad received his revelations, we refer to those who compiled the Sira of the prophet, men like Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hisham, Ibn Athir, and the Turkish writer 'Ali Halabi to get a clearer insight. Their writings list seven forms of the experience of *Wahy* by Muhammad, some of which are quite revealing:

While the *Wahy* (inspiration) lasted, according to his wife Aisha, there were the sounds of bells ringing as he sweated profusely. He would become greatly perturbed and his face would change (Sahih Muslim). Muslim Tradition tells us that sometimes he would shiver and swoon, his mouth would foam, and he would roar like a camel (Mishkat IV p.359). At other times when the inspiration descended there was the sound near his face like the buzzing of bees (from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab), while at other times he felt a tremendous headache (from Abu Hurairah). Many times it seemed to his friends that he swooned and looked like someone intoxicated (Pfander 1910:346).

- *Wahy* came to him in dreams.
- Inspiration also came to him in visions while he was awake.
- At times he saw an angel in the form of a young man (Pfander 1910:345).
- At other times he saw angels in angelic form (sura 42:51).
- During one evening (known as the Mi'raj) he was raptured through the Seven Heavens (according to the Hadith, Muhammad was taken to the highest heaven where he received the command to pray five times a day).
- Allah spoke to him from behind a veil (sura 42:51).

When we look at all these examples of inspiration a picture begins to form, of a man who either had a vivid imagination, or was possessed, or suffered from a disease such as epilepsy. Muhammad, according to 'Amr ibn Sharhabil, mentioned to his wife Khadijah that he feared he was possessed by demons and wondered whether others might consider him possessed by *jinn* (Pfander 1910:345). Even during his childhood Muhammad was afflicted with similar problems, causing concern to his friends who felt he had "become afflicted" (Pfander 1910:347).

But whether or not Muhammad was epileptic, there's no doubt that he became one of the world's more influential people – at least, if the "influence" is restricted to the (damnable) fields of religion and politics! That is, in reality, surely the world's most influential people have always been not religious and political leaders, but realists – such as the first people who learned how to control fire, make tools, irrigate crops, domesticate livestock, construct buildings, work metals, treat illnesses, manipulate math,

¹² At <http://debate.org.uk/topics/history/quran.htm#H>.

write, develop the printing press, and all subsequent applications of the scientific method that have led to everything from pulleys to the internet! What Muhammad definitely excelled at, however, were the tricks used by all successful con artists, clerics, and politicians, i.e., how to manipulate people.

Without doubt, Muhammad was a master manipulator of men: the horrors that he and subsequent Muslim leaders (called “caliphs”) tapped into and exploited have been unsurpassed. And the supreme strength of their method is its utter simplicity. Thus, stripped to its essence, their “interactive sermon” was (and continues to be) similar to the following:

“You brave, strong, glorious men: your customs are best. Right?”

“Riiight,” the crowd of ruffians replied.

“You like having sex with women, lots of women, and having it the way you want it. Right?”

“Riiight,” the testosterone-laden brutes replied.

“And working to produce a living for you and yours is a real pain in the butt. Right?”

“Riiiiight,” the greedy freeloaders replied.

“Furthermore, except perhaps for the fun of raping women, there’s nothing more fun than smashing stuff and slaughtering people. Right?”

“Riiiiight,” the bloodthirsty beasts replied.

“But you’re not that keen on getting killed yourself. Right?”

“Riiiiight,” the cowardly fools replied.

“Well, then, not to worry, because from now on, here’s how it’s gonna be: from now on, you can rape and pillage and destroy and kill as much as you want – and never, but never, need you worry again, either about working for a living or about your own death. You can live off the fat of the land; let all those fools work for a living; you can take their property, rape their women (and children, if you want), and kill anything that you feel like killing. Or if you don’t want to kill them, just cut off their limbs, gouge out their eyes, whatever. And never – but never – worry about your own death, because I’ve made a special arrangement with no less than the creator of the universe: anyone who follows me and is killed, gets instant access to the most wonderful paradise imaginable. If you follow me, then everything – but everything! – that you ever wanted in this life, you’ll get in the next life (including 72 perpetual

virgins who'll give you the kind of sex that you can only dream about). So, are you with me?"

"Riiiiiiiiight," the greedy, lazy, stupid, cowardly, bloodthirsty, sex maniacs replied in unison – and Islam was on its way to try to turn the world into hell for the peaceful producers (and into heaven for the con-artist clerics).

Now, Dear, it would be too much of a distraction from my goal for this Qx "excursion" (to show you some of the policies promoted in the "holy books" of our culture) to show you, now, some of the historical evidence that support the ideas conveyed in the above "sermon". I'll show you some of the evidence in the "excursion" Yx, including some reasons for labeling Muhammad as a megalomaniacal narcissist. Here, I'll just list a few items for your consideration (which you might want to investigate on your own).

- In reality, not much is reliably known about Muhammad. Much of what the Muslims claim is known is likely just as fictional as are similar "descriptions" of Moses and Jesus.¹³
- At the start (when he was in his 40s), Muhammad seemed to be primarily a social reformer, primarily trying to get his fellow Arabs to switch from their polytheism (with the moon-god one of many gods) to the Zoroastrian-Jewish-Christian monotheism (with, in the Muslim case, the moon-god being the "greatest" god); it was only later (during his 50s) that his Bedouin ways got the better of him, turning him into a bandit, obtaining goods and more followers by raiding caravans.
- Whereas Muslims still claim that Muhammad was "the perfect man" who lived a "perfectly sinless life", he was (and still is) their "role model" – and for the brutes who want to rule this world by force and live off the producers, I doubt that a more horrible "role model" could be conceived.
- Muhammad's new weapon of war, the jihadists, "bought into" the crazy idea that they'd go directly to paradise if they died for the *Jihad* (viz., "holy war"); thereby, they fell for the "proof-by-pleasure fallacy", i.e., if it "feels good", then it's true.
- To die trying to help yourself is vastly different from dying to try to help others. Certainly the Athenians, for example, willingly gave their lives in battle, but what drove them in their bravery wasn't their belief that, after death, they would proceed directly to paradise, but their desire to protect their fellow Athenians: a hero dies trying to help other humans; hideous people die trying to help themselves.

¹³ For information, see (e.g.) <http://www.atheists.org/Islam/mohammedanism.html>.

A FIRST LOOK AT HOW & WHY ISLAM SPREAD

With their new weapon of war (suicide attacks), Muhammad and subsequent Muslim leaders expanded the curse of Islam beyond what sane people imagined even in their worst nightmares – and such expansion is still being pursued today, courtesy (undeserved) oil wealth of many Muslim nations, but again, I don't propose to go into details, here. I'll show you more, later (e.g., in Yx and in the X-chapters, e.g., those dealing with “Exterminating the God Meme”). You might wonder, however, how in the past, such hideous, ransacking and raping policies could have propagated so widely, polluting the world from Spain to Indonesia. If you want to dig into some details on your own, you might want to consider the following points.

- In Muhammad's time, Arabia was ripe for consolidation: it was a rag-tag group of desert nomads.
- As a trader, Muhammad bought what he thought he could sell, and as a trader, of course he had to know his customers. Thus, from the stories he heard from the Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and Sabians, he “bought” what he thought he could sell to his fellow Arabs. In some cases, he repackaged the stories he heard about “the one true God” (or otherwise modified the stories) before offering them for sale to his customers.
- Muhammad knew his customer's culture, because it was also his. In many ways this culture was brutal; certainly it was dominated by males; absolute obedience to the “war lord” was demanded of everyone; unheard of were ideas of freedoms and human rights.
- Immediately following Muhammad's death, the Middle East was ripe for conquest: the lingering remains of the Roman Empire (the Byzantine Empire, centered at what was then called Constantinople and later called Istanbul) had exhausted itself fighting the remains of the Persian (Sassaniad) Empire, which was similarly exhausted. Attacks from the generally unguarded south of both empires by even the weak but fanatical Muslims (willing if not eager to die in their *Jihad*) were then successful.
- Not only were such attacks successful, the parasite Muslim clerics found more fodder to feed on: they promised the conquered men that they, too, could rape and pillage as much as they wanted, immune from death, if only they'd become Muslims.
- As a result, the wave of idiocy known as Islam grew with every conquest: in the West, first through Egypt, then across North Africa, to Spain; in the East, first across what's now Iraq and Iran, then across what's now Afghanistan, Pakistan, and into India. Everywhere they went (until they hit Catholic France and Hindu India), the Muslims found men more-than-eager to join in plundering producers.

- When the first waves of horror subsided, the Muslims had to slow down to devour their pillage. They lived off the fat of the land (provided by those people who were still producers). In time, the Islamic system even began to make some sense – because it was forced to “get real” (even though the leaders continued to live in almost unbelievable luxury, including with thousands of sex slaves per “sultan”).
- Eventually during this time of relative peace (“Islam’s Golden Age”, during the “Abbaid caliphate”), the arts and sciences began to flourish – because, as Mangasarian said, no matter how hard the clerics tried to push it down, “truth” has a way of bobbing back up to the surface.
- Examples of such “emerging truth” are in the poem entitled *The Rubaiyat* by the Persian poet-mathematician-philosopher-astronomer Omar Khayyam (1048–1131), who revised the Persian calendar, developed the method that you use to solve quadratic equations, developed what we in the West usually call “Pascal’s triangle”, started the development of non-Euclidean geometry, and lectured on what we call the Copernican theory, i.e., that the Earth rotates. Most significantly for Islam, Khayyam was a naturalist, rejecting the idea of a final judgment day and, as a minimum, “antagonizing” ideas about resurrection and eternal life.¹⁴ In his poem (as not just translated but “transformed” into English, in multiple editions published during the late 1800s, by Edward Fitzgerald and in which ‘Mahmud’ is an alternate spelling for ‘Muhammad’), Khayyam wrote:

Ah, but my Computations, People say,
Reduced the Year to better reckoning? – Nay
‘Twas only striking from the Calendar
Unborn To-morrow, and dead Yesterday.

And lately, by the Tavern Door agape,
Came shining through the Dusk an Angel Shape
Bearing a Vessel on his Shoulder; and
He bid me taste of it; and ‘twas – the Grape!

The Grape that can with Logic absolute
The Two-and-Seventy jarring Sects confute:
The sovereign Alchemist that in a trice
Life’s leaden metal into Gold transmute:

The mighty Mahmud, Allah-breathing Lord
That all the misbelieving and black Horde
Of Fears and Sorrows that infest the Soul
Scatters before him with his whirlwind Sword.

¹⁴ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omar_Khayyám; in particular, see Khayyam’s lines “Since the end purpose of the universe is nothingness/ Hence then you shall be naught/ then, while you are, be happy!”

- But criticizing Muhammad (or “Mahmud”, to keep the poem’s beat!) was one thing; criticizing the clerics was quite another. In other stanzas [or rubaiyat(s)] in the same poem, Khayyam wrote (according to Fitzgerald):

Some for the Glories of This World; and some
Sigh for the Prophet’s Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we too into the Dust descend;
Dust into Dust, and under Dust to lie
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and – sans End!

Alike for those who for To-day prepare,
And those that after some To-morrow stare,
A Muezzin from the Tower of Darkness cries
“Fools! your Reward is neither Here nor There.”

Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss’d
Of the Two Worlds so wisely – they are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter’d, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust.

Myself when young did eagerly frequent
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument
About it and about: but evermore
Came out by the same door where in I went.

With them the seed of Wisdom did I sow,
And with mine own hand wrought to make it grow;
And this was all the Harvest that I reap’d –
“I came like Water, and like Wind I go.”

Into this Universe, and Why not knowing
Nor Whence, like Water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not Whither, willy-nilly blowing.

What, without asking, hither hurried Whence?
And, without asking, Whither hurried hence!
Oh, many a Cup of this forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence!

Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate
 rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate;
 And many a Knot unravel'd by the Road;
 But not the Master-knot of Human Fate.

There was the Door to which I found no Key;
 There was the Veil through which I might not see:
 Some little talk awhile of Me and Thee
 There was – and then no more of Thee and Me.

Earth could not answer; nor the Seas that mourn
 In flowing Purple, of their Lord forlorn;
 Nor rolling Heaven, with all his Signs reveal'd
 And hidden by the sleeve of Night and Morn.

A Moment's Halt – a momentary taste
 Of Being from the Well amid the Waste –
 And Lo! – the phantom Caravan has reach'd
 The Nothing it set out from¹⁵ – Oh, make haste!

Would you that spangle of Existence spend
 About the Secret – Quick about it, Friend!
 A Hair perhaps divides the False and True –
 And upon what, prithee, may life depend?

Strange, is it not? that of the myriads who
 Before us pass'd the door of Darkness through,
 Not one returns to tell us of the Road,
 Which to discover we must travel too.

The Revelations of Devout and Learn'd
 Who rose before us, and as Prophets burn'd,
 Are all but Stories, which, awoke from Sleep,
 They told their comrades, and to Sleep return'd.

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
 Some letter of that After-life to spell:
 And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
 And answer'd "I Myself am Heav'n and Hell:"

Heav'n but the Vision of fulfill'd Desire,
 And Hell the Shadow from a Soul on fire,
 Cast on the Darkness into which Ourselves,
 So late emerged from, shall so soon expire.

¹⁵ Did Omar Khayyam even see that the universe came from nothing?!

The reaction of Muslim clerics to such “blasphemy” by Khayyam was the same as that of the Catholic clerics, ~500 years earlier: to force the searchers for truth to shut up and shut down. Such clerical idiocy plus the defeat of Muslim armies and the slaughter of millions of Muslims by the world’s most notorious butcher, Genghis Khan (1162–1227) who eventually ruled from China to the Black Sea, plunged the Muslim world into their Dark Ages, which in the main still shrouds all of Islam.

- That most Muslims are still in their clerically imposed Dark Ages can be seen in a recent poem by a very brave author Wajeha Al-Huwaider – although I wouldn’t be surprised if she’s using a pseudonym, since writing such ideas can lead to a “fatwa” from the clerics, calling for her murder. The poem is introduced as follows.¹⁶

In a Satirical Poem, Saudi Author Laments Conditions in the Arab World

In a satirical poem titled *When*, posted on Arabic reformist websites including <http://www.aafaq.org>, reformist Saudi author and journalist Wajeha Al-Huwaider lamented what she regards as the conditions in the Arab world. In the introduction to this poem, she wrote:

“*When* is an ode to the troubles of the Arab citizen. Both men and women participated in its [writing], and it is still open to additions. This ode will be hung on the walls of the palaces of the Arab rulers, so feel free to add your contributions.”

The following are excerpts from the poem:

When you cannot find a single garden in your city, but there is a mosque on every corner – you know that you are in an Arab country...

When you see people living in the past with all the trappings of modernity – do not be surprised, you are in an Arab country.

When religion has control over science – you can be sure that you are in an Arab country.

When clerics are referred to as ‘scholars’ – don’t be astonished, you are in an Arab country.

When you see the ruler transformed into a demigod who never dies or relinquishes his power, and whom nobody is permitted to criticize – do not be too upset, you are in an Arab country.

¹⁶ Copied from <http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi?Page=archives&Area=sd&ID=SP147907>; special Dispatch Series – No. 1479, 28 February 2007, Middle East Media Research Institute.

When you find that the large majority of people oppose freedom and find joy in slavery – do not be too distressed, you are in an Arab country.

When you hear the clerics saying that democracy is heresy, but [see them] seizing every opportunity provided by democracy to grab high positions [in the government] – do not be surprised, you are in an Arab country...

When monarchies turn into theocracies, and republics into hybrids of monarchy and republic – do not be taken aback, you are in an Arab country.

When you find that the members of parliament are nominated [by the ruler], or else that half of them are nominated and the other half have bought their seats through bribery... – you are in an Arab country...

When you discover that a woman is worth half of what a man is worth, or less – do not be surprised, you are in an Arab country...

When you see that the authorities chop off a man's hand for stealing a loaf of bread or a penny, but praise and glorify those who steal billions – do not be too surprised, you are in an Arab country...

When you are forced to worship the Creator in school and your teachers grade you for it – you can be sure that you are in an Arab country...

When young women students are publicly flogged merely for exposing their eyes – you are in an Arab country...

When a boy learns about menstruation and childbirth but not about his own [body] and [the changes] it undergoes in puberty – roll out your prayer mat and beseech Allah to help you deal with your crisis, for you are in an Arab country...

When land is more important than human beings – you are in an Arab country...

When covering the woman's head is more important than financial and administrative corruption, embezzlement, and betrayal of the homeland – do not be astonished, you are in an Arab country...

When minorities are persecuted and oppressed, and if they demand their rights, are accused of being a fifth column or a Trojan horse – be upset, you are in an Arab country...

When women are [seen as] house ornaments which can be replaced at any time – bemoan your fate, you are in an Arab country.

When birth control and family planning are perceived as a Western plot – place your trust in Allah, you are in an Arab country...

When at any time, there can be a knock on your door and you will be dragged off and buried in a dark prison – you are in an Arab country...

When fear constantly lives in the eyes of the people – you can be certain that you are in an Arab country.

PLANS FOR THESE CHAPTERS ON THE QURAN

But enough of that for now. Instead, I want to return to the recommendation (made earlier in this chapter) to take “multiple takes” when reading the “holy book” of Islam and to outlining my plans for subsequent chapters dealing with some of the crazy (and worse, viz., horrible) policies promoted in the Quran. In what follows, I’ll try to help you keep track of what I’m trying to describe by adding numbers and subtitles, such as the following.

1. First Take

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, in the “first take” of the Quran (in the “lovey-dovey part”), readers will find ideas promoted that seem similar to ideas apparently generally accepted by dolphins and little children: try to be kind to others, try to “do good” and “avoid evil”, help those in need, don’t be arrogant, and generally, don’t bother people (e.g., by trying to impose your religious views on them).

From what I’ve read about Muslim clerics promoting Islam in Western countries (mostly funded by Saudi oil money), I’ve gained the impression that such ideas are generally used to hook people who are exploring Islam – and the hook seems to catch many unsuspecting people, perhaps especially those people with little “real-world experience”, meager intellectual capabilities, and/or those who have become overwhelmed with the modern world (many of whom are in prison).

What such people aren’t usually told is that such “peaceful” ideas in Islam were (allegedly) developed by Muhammad when he first started out on his “religious kick” and was an “underdog” in his community (Mecca). At that time, his ideas were rejected (even by his guardian uncle) as “lies”, “delusions”, and with suggestions that he was “mad” and “insane”. I’ll go through this part of the Quran, “the First and Second (or Mecca) Periods” of the Quran, in the next chapter.

* Go to other chapters via

<http://zenofzero.net/>

2. Second Take

In the “second take” of the Quran, the reader should see that the “mood” in the Quran changes dramatically, from “make love” to “make war”. Ideas from this “Third Period” of the Quran were (allegedly) developed by Muhammad when he was in Medina (as an outcast from Mecca), running the town as its warrior chief, building an army of warriors not only to raid caravans but eventually to return to Mecca as a conquering hero.

In the subsequent three chapters I’ll go through Muhammad’s idea from this “Third (or Medina) Period” – and note again, Dear, that the division into, first, one-quarter (the Mecca Period) and then, three quarters (the Medina Period) is, not by my design, but roughly follows from the bulk of the corresponding material in the Quran.

And I should admit, Dear, that there’s “no way” that I can competently perform a “second take” of the Quran – maybe no Westerner can! Of course a huge problem is the need to understand the Quran historically (which as far as I know, no one has yet accomplished), but the bigger problem for Westerners is that Muslims will not permit “outsiders” to investigate the Quran – under threats of *fatwas* (i.e., “rulings”) issued for their murder!

Nonetheless, even from my cursory examination of the Quran in chapters to follow, I expect you’ll agree that material in this “Third (or Medina) Period” describes someone (Muhammad) who’s trying to build an empire here on Earth – and he does so ruthlessly, as tyrannically as any dictator known throughout history, from the “butcher emperor” Constantine who forced Christianity on the Roman Empire, through the brutality of the monster Genghis Khan (who overran the Islam empire in about 1200), to 20th Century dictators such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. Indeed, comparing Muhammad to those megalomaniacs seems particularly appropriate, because when the Jews rejected Muhammad as a “prophet” (in a genetic line that he claimed extended back to Abraham), just as the Jews had rejected Jesus as a “prophet”, then Muhammad went ballistic: if there’s truth in the stories told, he personally chopped off the heads of more than 600 Jewish captives during a single day.

3. Third Take

In this **Qx**, I don’t plan to provide many details about this “third take” of the Quran; I’ll show you some of it in the **X**-chapters (dealing with many topics, from “EXposing Ignorance” to “EXterminating the God Meme”). But I

* Go to other chapters *via*

wanted to mention this “third take”, here, because most Muslim clerics throughout the world promoting Islam (again, mostly with funding from oil-producing nations) go to great lengths promoting this “third take”, which seems basically to be: “Oh, don’t worry about us Muslims; we’re peaceful and harmless; what you read about in the Quran that seems to suggest otherwise was written by Muhammad when he was at war, but we’re no longer at war.”

Now, Dear, if I tried to show you, now, why I reject this “third take” on the Quran as a “white-wash”, it would require multiple chapters – or even another book! Many such books have recently been published; if you want to explore some of them and other sources, I’d encourage you to start exploring at “Jihad Watch” (<http://www.jihadwatch.org/>), “Faith Freedom International” (<http://www.news.faithfreedom.org/>), and the Daniel Pipes website (<http://www.danielpipes.org/>). My assessment is that most leading Islamic clerics are “hell bent” on becoming the rulers of the world – and they’ll resort to any level of double-dealing deception to attain their goal.

Further, their plan is by no means modern: the goal for “Islamization” of the world was promoted by Muhammad himself. Thus, the double-dealing, two faces of Islam are clear already in the Quran, as illustrated with the following quotation from an article entitled “Islam: the Façade and the Facts” by Abdullah Al Araby.¹⁷

The Façade

The “Islam” that Muslim activists introduce to the West these days is completely different from the Islam we knew and experienced in the Middle East. This is a new edition – revised, modified, expanded and abridged – of the real Islam. A major facelift operation has been taking place here.

To their credit, I must acknowledge that the international Islamization movement, in recent years, has grown much in both intelligence and sophistication. They lacked power, so they decided to be smart. Since they could no longer use the sword to conquer the world, as they once did, they decided to use more cunning methods, taking advantage of democracy in the West. The following are some of the methods Muslim activists are now adopting:

1. Change of Identity

Muslim activists in the West avoid referring to teachings that may offend the Western citizen, such as the Islamic code of punishment. They stress that they believe in

¹⁷ Copied from <http://www.islamreview.com/articles/facade.shtml>.

Moses and Jesus. They refrain from calling Jews and Christians “infidels”, nor would they call them “Zionists” or “Crusaders”. The last thing they want to do is to shock people...

2. Change of Vocabulary

Instead of living in isolation from society, they are using now a completely new terminology. Words like love, grace... are now part of their vocabulary. Theological Christian terms such as Salvation, Justification, and Sanctification are now part of their teachings. They change Quranic translations to hide some of Islam’s harsh teachings...

3. Change of Strategy

Their new strategy lies in trying to be accepted, included, and involved in all activities, religious, social, and political. They are now becoming active in partisan functions in order to have a say in parties’ platforms. They conduct letter campaigns to members of Congress to influence legislation. They run for public offices in hope of reaching a position of authority. They make full use of their voting power to get concessions in their favor. They try to be represented on educational programs to go in line with their beliefs.

The stage of weakness and the stage of *Jihad* (Holy War)

It seems that these new tactics we discussed are not without precedent in Islamic history. Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, the noted Egyptian author, refers to this concept in his book *Autumn Furor*. He states:

“So the element of *Jihad* emerged in the ideology of Abul Aala Almaudoody. He went on to differentiate between two separate stages a Muslim community goes through:

“The stage of weakness – in it a Muslim community is unable to take charge of its own destiny. In this case – according to his thinking – they must withdraw for the purpose of preparing themselves to be capable of executing the second stage.

“The second stage is the *Jihad* stage, and it will come when the Muslim community has completed its preparedness and is ready to come out of its isolation to take charge, through *Jihad*.”

“In this, Abul Aala Almaudoody was making a comparison between the two stages of weakness and *Jihad* on the one hand, and on the other hand, Mohammed’s struggle in Mecca then in Medina.”

Mohammed in Mecca and Mohammed in Medina

Historians agree that there is a big difference between Mohammed’s personality in Mecca and his personality after his migration to Medina.

In Mecca Mohammed was weak, struggling to be accepted, often mocked at and ridiculed. He tried to appeal to the people of Mecca by being compassionate and loving. His teachings condemned violence, injustice, neglect of the poor. However, after he moved to Medina and his followers grew in strength and number, he became a relentless warrior, intent on spreading his religion by the sword.

This change in Mohammed's personality becomes apparent by comparing the Meccan and the Medinan surahs. The following are some examples:

In surah 73:10 **God tells Mohammed to be patient with his opponents:** “Be patient with what they say, and part from them courteously.” While in surah 2:191 **God orders him to kill his opponents:** “Kill them wherever you find them, and drive them out from wherever they drove you out...”

In surah 2:256 **God tells Mohammed not to impose Islam by force:** “There is no compulsion in religion.” While in verse 193 **God tells him to kill whoever rejects Islam:** “Fight (kill) them until there is no persecution and the religion is God's.”

In surah 29:46 **God tells Mohammed to speak nicely to people of the Book (Christians and Jews):** “Argue with people of the Book, other than evil doers, only by means of what are better! and say, we believe in what has been sent down to us and sent down to you. Our God is the same as your God, and we are surrendered to him.” While in surah 9:29 **God tells him to fight the people of the Book:** “Fight those who do not believe in God and the last day... and fight People of the Book, who do not accept the religion of truth (Islam) until they pay tribute by hand, being inferior.”

To justify this sudden change in the Quran's mood from peaceful to militant, conciliatory to confrontational, Mohammed claimed that it was God who told him so. It was God who abrogated the peaceful verses and replaced them by harsh ones.

However the truth of the matter, as Almuudoody puts it, is that Mohammed became strong enough to move from the stage of weakness to the stage of *Jihad*.

Today, in the West, we are witnessing the Islamic stage of weakness, but let's not be fooled, the stage of *Jihad* is coming sooner or later. This meek little lamb will turn out to be a ravaging wolf, the sweet melodious “Baa Baa” will change to a thunderous roar.

To see just a single illustration of the relentless pursuit by Islamists for world domination, Dear, I'd encourage you to carefully read the “blue print” for “The Process of Islamization” (which is the booklet's title) promoted by Dr. Ja'far Sheikh Idris. Originally, these ideas were presented at the Muslim

Students' Association of the US and Canada (MSA's) 13th Annual Convention (held at the University of Toledo in August 1975).¹⁸

4. Fourth Take

The “fourth take” on the Quran is certainly much more appealing to me – and to all secular and scientific humanists, even though I've personally experienced (on an Islamic Forum) just a little of the huge difficulties it will need to overcome if ever progress is to be made. I'll skip describing some of the personal stuff and just provide an extremely sketchy description of the idea and then a really great example.

The “sketch” is this. Basically the idea being promoted is to try to “reform” or “transform” Islam into a 21st (or at least an 18th!) century religion, similar to the transformation that occurred in most of Christianity since the Enlightenment. Stated differently, the concept is to separate “mosque and state” – which, however, will be much more difficult to accomplish than the separation of church and state, not only because in Islam there never was a statement such as Jesus' “**Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is his...**” but also because Islam always was and always is promoted to be more than “**just a religion; it's an entire way of life**” (including all political life). Yet some Muslims are struggling hard to accomplish this objective; if you want to learn more, I'd recommend that you start at the website of the Free Muslims Coalition at <http://freemuslims.org/>.

A beautiful example of such attempts to “secularize” Islam is the following “St. Petersburg Declaration” by the identified “secular Muslims” (which is a term, my experience has shown, that's rejected by most Muslims as an oxymoron).¹⁹ For more information, I'd encourage you to visit the “secular Islam” website at http://www.secularislam.org/blog/SI_Blog.php.

Released by the delegates to the Secular Islam Summit, St. Petersburg, Florida on March 5, 2007

We are secular Muslims, and secular persons of Muslim societies. We are believers, doubters, and unbelievers, brought together by a great struggle, not between the West and Islam, but between the free and the unfree.

¹⁸ The text of “The Process of Islamization” is unabashedly posted at available at http://www.masmn.org/documents/Books/Jafar_Sheikh_Ibris/The_Process_of_Islamization/index.htm.

¹⁹ Copied from http://www.secularislam.org/blog/post/SI_Blog/21/The-St-Petersburg-Declaration.

We affirm the inviolable freedom of the individual conscience. We believe in the equality of all human persons.

We insist upon the separation of religion from state and the observance of universal human rights.

We find traditions of liberty, rationality, and tolerance in the rich histories of pre-Islamic and Islamic societies. These values do not belong to the West or the East; they are the common moral heritage of humankind.

We see no colonialism, racism, or so-called “Islamophobia” in submitting Islamic practices to criticism or condemnation when they violate human reason or rights.

We call on the governments of the world to

reject Sharia law, fatwa courts, clerical rule, and state-sanctioned religion in all their forms; oppose all penalties for blasphemy and apostasy, in accordance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights;

eliminate practices, such as female circumcision, honor killing, forced veiling, and forced marriage, that further the oppression of women;

protect sexual and gender minorities from persecution and violence;

reform sectarian education that teaches intolerance and bigotry towards non-Muslims; and

foster an open public sphere in which all matters may be discussed without coercion or intimidation.

We demand the release of Islam from its captivity to the totalitarian ambitions of power-hungry men and the rigid strictures of orthodoxy.

We enjoin academics and thinkers everywhere to embark on a fearless examination of the origins and sources of Islam, and to promulgate the ideals of free scientific and spiritual inquiry through cross-cultural translation, publishing, and the mass media.

We say to Muslim believers: there is a noble future for Islam as a personal faith, not a political doctrine;

to Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Baha’is, and all members of non-Muslim faith communities: we stand with you as free and equal citizens;

and to nonbelievers: we defend your unqualified liberty to question and dissent.

Before any of us is a member of the Umma, the Body of Christ, or the Chosen People, we are all members of the community of conscience, the people who must choose for themselves.

Endorsed by:

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Magdi Allam

Mithal Al-Alusi

Shaker Al-Nabulsi

Nonie Darwish

Afshin Ellian

Tawfik Hamid

Shahriar Kabir

Hasan Mahmud

Wafa Sultan

Amir Taheri

Ibn Warraq

Manda Zand Ervin

Banafsheh Zand-Bonazzi

And let me add that what I'd like to do, as an absolute minimum, is warmly shake the hand of every single one of the brave people who signed the above Declaration. As you can check for yourself, Dear, many of them are under death threats for their attempts to "secularize" Islam.

5. Fifth Take

Finally, Dear, the "fifth take" that I recommend be taken when reading the Quran – or any "holy book" – is the one that I'll be showing you in the next four chapters, in which I go through the Quran, line by line. The essence of this "fifth take" is simply to say:

*Somebody's gotta be kidding! No data support the existence of any god or any of the rest of such supernatural silliness; so, trash the stupid book! Replace it with a book based on data, such as Euclid's *Elements*, Newton's *Principia*, Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Maxwell's *Electricity and Magnetism*, Einstein's *Relativity*, Feynman's *Lectures on Physics*, or Morse and Feshbach's *Methods of Theoretical Physics*!*

You'll see more of what I mean if you read the next four chapters, but before I steer you in that direction, Dear, I should add some comments and caveats about the particular translation of the Quran that I'll be using.

The translation I've used is available at the University of Michigan's Digital Library Production Service (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/k/koran/browse.html>)

and also at <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/HolKora.html>. At both those locations, it's stated that this version of the Quran was translated by M.H. Shakir and published by Qur'an, Inc., in 1983.

My first caveat is to note that, when reading any translation of the Quran (from Arabic), you should be alert to possible biases introduced by the translator. For example, consider the following harsh comments about another translation:²⁰

The Qur'an has been badly served by Western Translations... the most widely available translation in English, by N J Dawood, the first edition of which was published by Penguin in 1956. This translation subverts the original in several ways. Often a single word is mistranslated in a verse to give it totally the opposite meaning. In 2:217, for example, we read: "idolatry is worse than carnage". The word translated as 'idolatry' is *fitna*, which actually means persecution or oppression. Dawood's translation conveys an impression that the Qur'an will put up with carnage but not idolatry. In fact, the Qur'an is making persecution and oppression a crime greater than murder. The extract should read: "oppression is more awesome than killing".

At other times, Dawood uses subtle mistranslation to give an undertow of violence to the language of the Qur'an. This is evident even in his translations of chapter titles. "Az-Zumar", which simply means "crowd", is translated as "The Hordes"; "As-Saff", which means "the ranks", is translated as "Battle Array". "Al-Alaq", which literally means "that which clings", and refers to the embryo as it attaches to the wall of the uterus, is translated as "Clots of Blood". Most Muslim translators simply call the chapter "The Clot". What is intended to convey the idea of birth, Dawood projects as the notion of death.

Therefore, obviously I should add the caveat: I'm incapable of commenting on the quality of the translation that I'll be using, which again is the translation by M.H. Shakir. Further, you might be interested to notice the charges (which you can find on the internet) that there is (or was) no such person as M.H. Shakir and that, in reality, this translation was done by Maulana Muhammad Ali in 1917.

I should add another comment. Thus, my experience leads me to heartily concur with some of the comments on the literary quality of the Quran that are given in Smith's article already referenced:

²⁰ I found these comments at <http://www.plastic.com/article.html:sid=04/08/20/15441501>; they were "introduced" by "chatsubo" (post #138) but seem to be based on a original article (quoted in italics) by Ziauddin Sardar in a review of an Oxford University translation of the Quran.

The Qur'an, on the other hand, reads more like a jumbled and confused collection of statements and ideas, interposed many times with little relationship to the preceding chapters and verses. Many scholars admit that it is so haphazard in its make-up that it requires the utmost sense of duty for anyone to plow through it!

The German secular scholar Salomon Reinach in his harsh [1932] analysis, states that: "From the literary point of view, the Koran has little merit. Declamation, repetition, puerility, a lack of logic and coherence strike the unprepared reader at every turn. It is humiliating to the human intellect to think that this mediocre literature has been the subject of innumerable commentaries, and that millions of men are still wasting time in absorbing it."

McClintock and Strong's [1981] encyclopedia concludes that: "The matter of the [Koran] is exceedingly incoherent and sententious, the book evidently being without any logical order of thought either as a whole or in its parts. This agrees with the desultory [random] and incidental manner in which it is said to have been delivered."

Even the Muslim scholar Dashti laments [in 1985] the literary defects of the Qur'an, saying: "Unfortunately the Qur'an was badly edited and its contents are very obtusely arranged." He concludes that: "All students of the Qur'an wonder why the editors did not use the natural and logical method of ordering by date of revelation, as in 'Ali ibn Taleb's lost copy of the text."

When reading a Qur'an, you will discover that the 114 suras not only have odd names for titles (such as the Cow, the Spoils, the Bee, or the Cave), but their layout is not at all in a chronological order. Size or length had more to do with the sequence of the suras than any other factor, starting with the longer suras and ending with the shortest. Even within the suras we find a mixed chronology. At times there is a mixture of Meccan and Medinan revelations within the same sura, so that even size is not an infallible guide in dating them.

Another problem is that of repetition. The Qur'an was intended to be memorized by those who were illiterate and uneducated since they could not read it. It therefore engages in the principal of endless repetition of the same material over and over again... This all leads to a good bit of confusion for the novice reader, and gives rise to much suspicion concerning its vaunted literary qualities.

But whatever! It's time to get underway with what's available – but not, of course, until after you get some exercise!