To consider mankind otherwise than brethren, to think favours are peculiar to one nation and exclude others, plainly supposes a darkness in the understanding.

—John Woolman

The Venture of Islam

Conscience and History in a World Civilization

MARSHALL G. S. HODGSON

VOLUME ONE

THE CLASSICAL AGE OF ISLAM

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To John U. Nef
and to the memory of
Gustave E. von Grunebaum
in admiration and gratitude

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II

Muḥammad's Challenge, 570–624

The lands from Nile to Oxus would most certainly have changed somehow in the eighth and ninth centuries, even without the intervention of Islam. The Sâsânian empire, perhaps under a new dynasty, might indeed have succeeded in taking Syria and Egypt (if not the Maghrib) permanently from the Roman empire and might have developed, in Syriac (Aramaic) and Pahlavî (Iranian), a culture not unlike what developed in fact among the Muslims in Arabic and Persian. Such a culture might have been carried fairly widely in the hemisphere; for some elements of the Iranian and Semitic traditions were already being carried into Europe and India. But it is hard to conceive of such a renewed Syriac-Pahlavî civilization as having developed all the homogeneity and expansive vitality which were manifested under Islam. Arab tribes might even have taken a hand in establishing the new dynasty which would have succeeded to the Sâsânian, yet by all analogies we must suppose that ordinarily they would have been rapidly assimilated to the more cultured settled population, forgetting in time their remarkable but limited Bedouin poetry, learning to speak some sort of Aramaic, and adopting one or another of the existent forms of Christianity. One ingredient, the presence of Islam, would seem to have made the vital difference, making possible a truly new civilization, based on uniting the bulk of the population of the region into one religious community.

Among the most important elements in the background of the Islamicate civilization, then, is the development of Islamic religion and of the community which carried it. This was the work of a number of remarkable men, starting with Muḥammad himself. The community was built up first within the general Arabian culture and then, after its sudden conquests, as a ruling community scattered thinly throughout the Aramaic- and Iranian-speaking lands and far beyond. Within the community there were sharp disagreements about what its character was to be, and many struggles among the contending parties. The Muslim religion and community that resulted from these struggles could not have been foreseen by any human means; yet they bear the impress of the vigorous minds and devoted spirits that went into their formation.[1]

[1] William McNeill, in his *Rise of the West* (University of Chicago Press, 1963), did me the honour of referring to an early (and very incomplete) version of this work as an important source for his own thinking about Islam and the Islamicate civilization. This is flattering, for I regard McNeill's book as very important in the sense that it is the first genuine world history ever to be published (the first to present the history of citied peoples as a single overall historical complex, with primary attention to interrelations among the societies, and without unduly excessive attention to one society). Unfortunately, I find myself occasionally disagreeing with McNeill (beyond this fundamental point) both as to basic theory and as to the interpretations of the several civilizations; and particularly as to his interpretation of Islam and Islamdom. Many of my points of disagreement both on world history generally and on Islam will become obvious in the course of this work.

Bedouin-based culture in Muḥammad's time

Between the Roman and Sâsânian empires, and increasingly important in their wars and their commerce, was the vast bloc of Bedouin Arabia. This was not simply the Arabian peninsula as such. Bedouin Arabia was that area of the peninsula in which the customs founded on camel-nomadism prevailed: primarily the north, west, and centre. These were arid steppe lands, interspersed with great reaches of rock or of sand, visited in winter and especially spring with sporadic rains that awoke transient vegetation. The steppes were dotted with oases, where the earth formations brought water fairly close to the surface in sufficient amounts so that regular irrigation could maintain a more or less extensive agriculture in limited and isolated areas. From the spotty seasonal vegetation, and from springs and wells that could be dug even where no oasis was possible, by keeping frequently on the move, herdsmen could maintain their animals, supplementing their milk and occasional flesh (and what they could get by hunting) with the wheat and dates that agriculturists could raise in the oases. The agriculturists, in turn, though hemmed in by the desert, could get needed animals from the herdsmen and also any specialized products that required bringing from a distance. But such a pattern of living presupposed the domesticated camel, alone capable of forming the basis for large-scale pastoral life in such deserts.

The camel does not seem to have been domesticated early, not before the second millennium before our era. Only after long experience in breeding camels for transport would some pastoral groups, relying less on sheep and more on camels, have been able to move out into the more arid regions at a distance from the settled areas of the Fertile Crescent, followed step by step, presumably, by the necessary agriculturists in the oases. Independent pastoralism may have begun not long after agriculture itself—that is, a life based on herding in which the herdsmen are not members of a village community, herding the village animals, but rather form permanent social units of their own independent of any particular village. But camel nomadism deep in the desert was a highly specialized form of life, presupposing special technical and even social skills. We cannot surely identify camel nomads, that is, Bedouin, until the beginning of our era. By then, the tradition was well established, at least in the margins both of Syria and of the Yemen, and it unfolded its consequences rapidly from that time on.[2]

[2] I owe to H. A. R. Gibb's lectures my attention's being drawn to the significance of the chronology of camel pastoralism, as well as to numerous other points in this part of the work. The chronology itself is still in doubt.

Once camel nomadism had developed, it carried potentialities of a major social force. Camels allowed their herders greater mobility than other pastoral animals, being able to endure longer than ordinary animals without food and even water, and so to travel farther between watering places. But the wild ass is almost as tough, and faster; the hunting people who tamed it could range even more freely than the camel men. It was crucial that the camel was also a great beast of burden: it was unrivalled, except by the elephant; and it yielded good milk; through its various qualities it not only sustained its owners but found a ready market. Such economic advantages enabled a heavier concentration of people to live from camels than could live, say, from wild asses; but with equal independence from agrarian controls. This gave the Bedouin a potential predominance over not only the desert oases but even the nearby reaches of the settled countries, allowing them not merely to trade (which was essential) but, under favourable circumstances, to exact tribute. If there were governments strong enough to refuse tribute, then the qualities that Bedouin life developed in the men and their ready-made transport equipment and their numbers made them welcome soldiers for those same governments—which could prove an alternative path to social power.

The Bedouin necessarily developed their own distinctive type of social organization. Originally adapted to herding, it could be maintained more or less in other situations too. In fact, by the sixth century even parts of western Arabia that had once been little more than extensions of the settled life of Syria or the Yemen, living under kings, had been absorbed into the Bedouin life; even people settled in the agricultural oases or in commercial towns tended to be organized as 'settled Bedouin', to keep camels, and to think of themselves as if they were in principle pastoralists.

This sixth-century Bedouin and Bedouin-based Arabian culture differed from that of the more agriculturally developed of the lands on the agrarianate level in its presuppositions for historical action. Bedouin-based society presupposed the wider agrarian-based society of which it was essentially an extension; and hence looked to an agrarianate level of high or learnèd culture, if to any. It did not escape the overall historical limitations imposed by the fact that the bulk of the resources on which any large-scale historical endeavour must be based were limited by the agricultural resources on which wealth and leisure were ultimately based. Yet within these limitations, Bedouin-based culture posed a special variant case. With all pastoralists on roughly the same economic level, there might be wealthier or more respected families, but relative to more agrarian societies there was little class stratification and concentration of wealth—the herdsmen could not be so readily exploited as could a peasantry—and hence also a lack of many aspects of learnèd high culture within the Bedouin communities.

The relative equality among Bedouin was reinforced by their tribal organization, such as independent herdsmen have commonly developed; that is, hereditary economic and social solidarity among smaller or larger groups of families, not based either on territorial proximity or on directly functional relations, yet sharing a common responsibility in good and bad fortune. In this way, families were associated in larger groups for general economic purposes, and these in turn in still larger ones for political strength. Groups on every level possessed internal autonomy, but were likely to be grouped with yet others in still larger associations. (We call the larger—and more tenuous—of these groups 'tribes'. Smaller groups are sometimes called 'clans'.) At every level, these groups defined themselves in terms of a real or fictive common descent, though newcomers might be adopted into them. No man who had sufficient kin could want for protection and status.

That the herdsmen were nomads does not mean, of course, that they wandered indifferently according to their fancies. Each larger grouping—normally, what we call a tribe or some division thereof—possessed its own recognized pasturing grounds; even within these grounds, major movements might be made in massed armed groups. But the camel nomadism of Arabia was less closely tied to fixed grazing grounds and seasonal itineraries than most nomadism elsewhere. There remained a good deal of leeway for unpredictable wandering by smaller groups and even individuals, which helped give a tone to the Bedouin social ways. Each tribe, almost each clan or group of families, was sovereign; led by its chief, chosen partly for his family descent and partly for his personal wisdom, each group defended its own grazing rights in its own area, or attempted to better its position at others' expense. Each group had to take decisions in which all might participate and which repeatedly could mean life or death for all adult males of the group.

Such a society rejected authoritarian political forms and based itself instead on individual prowess and prestige and on close lineage group loyalties. Besides leadership in fighting, the chief might serve to arbitrate disputes or he might be custodian of the group's sacred symbols; but others might serve in either of these roles. In any case, he had no authority to coerce the acceptance of his position by any family. Every man was free in the last resort to depart at will with his dependents. In the absence of any common court of justice, intergroup restraint was maintained by the principle of the retaliatory blood-feud: an injury by an outsider to any member of a group was regarded as committed against the whole group by the whole group to which the outsider belonged; the injured group's honour required that it exact from the other group in retaliation an equivalent—normally an eye for an eye, a life for a life (though commutation in goods might be accepted)—or more, if the injured group regarded itself as above the level of the other. But if the retaliation were regarded by the other group as excessive, it in turn was honour-bound to retaliate again—till the feud could somehow be stopped.[3]

[3] W. Robertson Smith, *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (London, 1885) chaps. I and II, conveniently presents the nature of the Arabian tribes and their genealogies. Modern Bedouin life is studied from the viewpoint of its political potentialities—in any period—by Robert Montagne, *La civilisation du désert* (Paris, 1947).

From time to time, especially in association with some sedentary power, such large agglomerations of tribes could be formed acknowledging common leadership, that the chieftain at the top, normally basing himself at least in part on urban revenues, could take on something of the role of a king. But such kingship was founded, even so, on tribal presuppositions. Unlike a tribal chieftain, the king could have orders carried out by his own agents with relatively little regard to group sentiment; but his power was based on the lineage ties of a tribe, which ultimately he could not flout. Such kingdoms were precarious in their power at best.

The camel nomads were the élite of the more arid parts of Arabia. In addition to their camels, they often had horses which they pampered and used for specialized raiding purposes; more humble but more economically useful were sheep and goats. But the dignity of a tribe was likely to be in inverse proportion to its dependence on the smaller animals; for sheep-herders had to stay near the agricultural lands, and necessarily found themselves at the mercy of those more mobile than themselves. The pure camel-herders, more mobile and resourceful than either agriculturists of the oases or other pastoralists, felt that they had, and they were widely conceded to have, greater prestige than any other people of the area. Even when more settled groups did not actually descend from Bedouin who had taken over the oases by superior force, they looked to Bedouin traditions as the most honourable to follow.

The camel nomads called themselves '*Arab*. And the earliest appearances of the term seem to connect it with camel-herders as such. But, presumably in consideration of the nomads' prestige, the term '*Arab* came to mean not only Bedouin proper, still herdsmen, but also settled Bedouin who would still have camels but who lived from the date palms and grain of the oases or were engaged chiefly in commerce. Hence the dominant population of the peninsula came to be called 'Arab and their language (a form of Semitic differing somewhat from the Aramaic of the Fertile Crescent) 'Arabic'. (Subsequently, '*arab* has been used in Arabic itself in several senses, some of them quite extended. Here we will use 'Arab' to refer to any person whose parental tongue is derived from the Arabic of the Peninsula. 'Arabic' is used with reference to the language itself, and 'Arabian', of course, only with reference to the Peninsula proper, not to the Arabs generally.)[1]

The economic life of the Bedouin tribes, while immediately a matter of herding or (when they settled in oases) of agriculture, was ultimately dependent on an extensive system of trading and raiding. The herding groups always depended on agricultural groups for essential food or equipment, notably for grain and dates to supplement camel's milk and meat; beyond this, a more long-distance trade brought in luxuries like wine or skilled singing (slave) girls, in which all tribes desired to share. Thus the nomads became involved in

[1] For the several ways in which the term 'Arab' has been used among scholars—which must be kept distinct when one reads their works—see section on usage in Islamics studies in the Introduction.

the commerce between the Mediterranean lands and the Southern Seas. Tribes near trade routes furnished camels for transport, escorted traders, or even traded on their own. Others shared in the booty by raiding the more fortunate. The occasional towns, accordingly, as nodes of the trade, formed a focus of tribal aspirations. They enjoyed an influence based on wealth and prestige, which was not, however, necessarily expressed in any political domination.

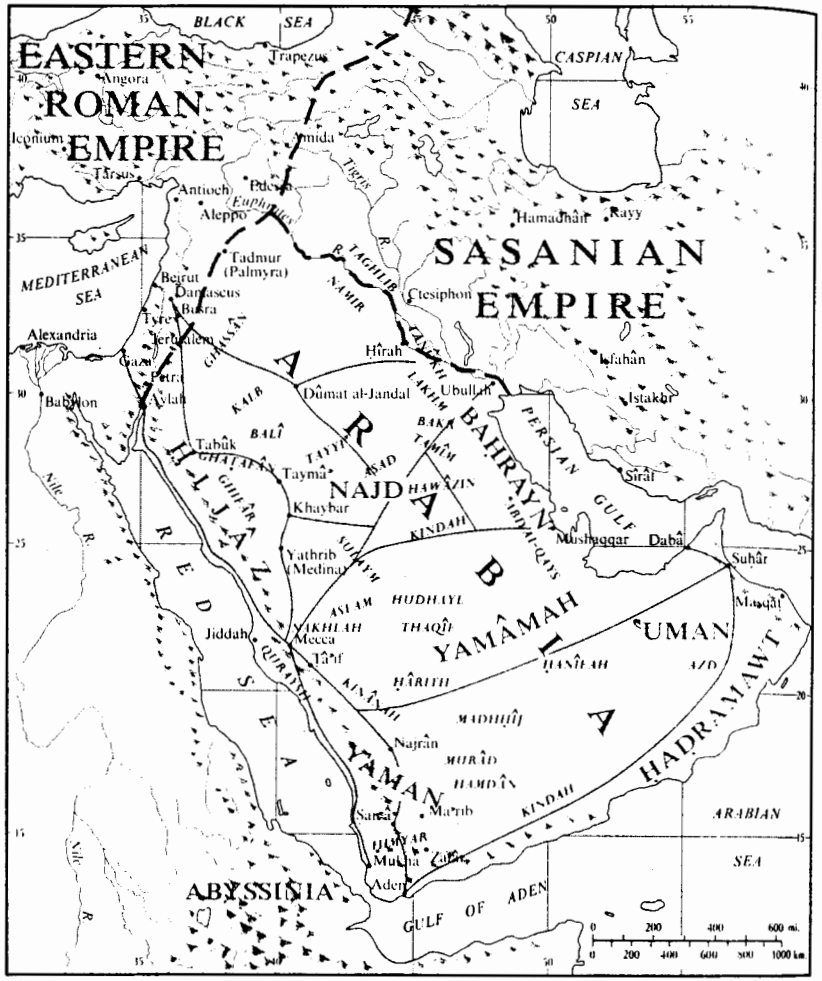
The Arabs in international politics

The Arabs were proud of their independence, blazoned in glorious tribal genealogies. But once the Bedouin society was fully developed, then both politically and economically their life was constantly entangled with that of the great empires around them, on whose commerce their own trading and raiding depended. As the map of Arabia shows, Bedouin Arabia lay between three agricultural lands: the Iraq, Syria, and the Yemen. ('Umân, relatively infertile, cut off from the main mass of the Arabs by the wastes of the Empty Quarter, and giving only on the south Iranian deserts, counted for little.) Syria and the Iraq formed the main portions of the Fertile Crescent, the long-standing home of the Semitic cultural traditions. The Yemen, since about 1000 BC, had been the site of agrarian kingdoms of a Semitic language (south Arabian) and of a culture related to that of the Fertile Crescent but distinctive. (The kingdoms there had left a more recent memory of greatness than the Semitic kingdoms of the Fertile Crescent, a memory cherished by tribes with Yemeni associations.) The Yemen throve partly on agriculture, which had been declining, and partly on trade, which had been growing more important over the millennia, between the Southern Seas and the north. Like the Fertile Crescent, it was Christian and Jewish in religion, but it had a more important pagan sector than had survived in the Fertile Crescent.

Each of the three lands was connected with what may be called a political hinterland—a highland region which tended, in the sixth century, to dominate it. Behind the Iraq lay the Iranian highlands, homeland of the Sâsânian empire. Syria had long been ruled by an empire based in the Anatolian highlands—and more generally, in the Greek-using peninsulas of the north Mediterranean. For the Yemen, the Abyssinian highlands were less important. The Abyssinian citied culture itself had derived originally fairly directly from that of the Yemen, though it had struck independent roots and developed a distinct language and its own dominant Christian church. But the Abyssinian monarchy—commonly in alliance with the Roman empire—had cultivated commercial and political pretensions which had culminated in an occupation of the Yemen by Abyssinian forces, which had ruled there autonomously until overthrown by the Sâsânians at the end of the century.

The Bedouin were playing an ever larger part in the life of all three surrounding lands, and hence of the empires which dominated them. The greater part of the Yemen, by the sixth century, seems to have been Arabic-speaking:

the south Arabian language died out soon after the rise of Islam, though traces of the dialects have persisted. There were many Arabic-speakers also in Syria, and they played a role in the Iraq. This was partly due to the normal tendency for population distant from cities, and less subject to the great scourges of life on the agrarianate level, to fill in the recurrent gaps in the more



Towns and tribes in Arabia in the time of Muhammad

settled population. It was also due to the active initiative of the Bedouin Arabs as traders and as soldiers. The trade routes north and south along the west Arabian littoral were of long standing; in late centuries they were no longer controlled by Yemenis or by Aramaic-users based in Syria, but by Arabs of Bedouin background. Newer trade routes across Arabia in the middle

and around the northern fringes—skirting conventional customs stations and perhaps river pirates—were also in Arab hands, and important enough to enter Roman-Sâsânian treaties. When Muḥammad was growing up, much of the transit trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean basin was passing through Arabian overland routes. This may have been due partly to the long sequence of wars between the Roman and Sâsânian empires, which encouraged the enterprise of neutral merchants who could bypass troubled frontiers; it was made possible, however, by the full development of the technique of camel transport, which began to replace the donkey or the ox-drawn wagon for long-distance hauls. Moreover, Arabs were becoming mercenaries and allies in the great power struggles.

All three lands had their political projections into the Bedouin Arab complex. At the end of the fifth century, the Yemeni kingdom was supporting a great tribal grouping in central Arabia, under the lead of the Kindah tribe; presumably it should have acted for Yemeni interests in trade and perhaps politically to balance Roman and Sâsânian power, but just then the Yemen was occupied by the Abyssinians. The Kindah power broke up almost immediately. But soon the Sâsânian and Roman empires were each sponsoring, and subsidizing, their own Bedouin tribal kingdoms. On the southern borders of Syria, the Romans gave high title to the Ghassânids, partly expecting protection from raiding by other tribes, partly as an Arab arm in their power struggle with the Sâsânians, in which the lands south of the Fertile Crescent, like the mountainous region north of it, offered opportunities for gaining competitive advantages. The Sâsânians financed the Lakhmid kings at Ḥîrah near the Euphrates, at the end of an Arabian trade route to the Iraq; these controlled tribes far to the south and the northwest and had great prestige even in central Arabia. The Lakhmid was the strongest and most enduring of the Bedouin kingdoms, till after 602 the Sâsânians took direct control of Ḥîrah and its military resources. But even apart from these kingdoms, Arabs were serving as mercenaries at least in the Roman armies. The Lakhmid forces seem to have been sufficiently well placed to have helped decide a contested succession to the Sâsânian throne. The development of camel nomadism had reached a point where it was impinging importantly on the surrounding lands.

The Arabs had surely been in touch with each other, over the whole of Bedouin Arabia, from the time when nomadism was fully developed. But it was under the stimulus of the international competition that was pouring money into the Arab kingdoms, and doubtless partly because of the prosperity of the Bedouin trade routes, that in the fifth and sixth centuries the rudiments of an Arabic high culture grew up. The first Arab merchant-kings had used Aramaic as their formal tongue. Ghassânids and Lakhmids were proud to use Arabic. There was surely always tribal poetry, but in these centuries the poetry reached a peak of formal specialization.

The supreme cultural expression of the tribal life—again whether among the nomadic Bedouin tribes or in the towns—was a highly cultivated body of

poetry in a standard all-Arabian form of Arabic, sometimes called *muḍari* or 'classical' Arabic. Very early, poetry was connected with the transient Kindah kingdom. Later the most important poetic centre was the Lakhmid court, which rewarded panegyrics grandly. The patterns of metre and of sense in these poems were highly stylized and the individual poets were given great recognition as tribal spokesmen. Despite a tendency to kingly patronage of distant poets, even the Lakhmid chiefs shared in this tribal mood. Each new poem was soon carried throughout Arabia by professional reciters, especially if it bore some relation, as it commonly did, to the greater intertribal feuds. For at this time—perhaps not unrelated to the wider commerce—a network of feuds and political struggles tended to involve the whole of Arabia in a single political complex, if a rather incoherent one.[5] The Arabs had their common sagas and common heroes, and their common standards of behaviour worthy of a Bedouin.

The Meccan system

The Quraysh Arab tribe at Mecca made a special place for themselves in this Arab society. The most important trading centre of western and central Arabia was Mecca in the Ḥijâz. It was at the junction of two major routes. One went south and north, through the mountainous Ḥijâz from the Yemen and the Indian Ocean lands to Syria and the Mediterranean lands; the other, of less importance, went east and west from the Iraq, Iran, and the central Eurasian lands to Abyssinia and eastern Africa. As compared to Tâ'if and other central Ḥijâz localities in the same area, Mecca was relatively unpromising; unlike Tâ'if, it had no great oasis—that is, sufficient underground water was not tapped there to form a watered agricultural area. It had sufficient water to satisfy many camels, however; it was protected by hills from Red Sea pirates; and it possessed a respected shrine to which pilgrimage was made.

Some generations before Muḥammad, under the leadership of one Quṣayy

5 On the condition of pre-Islamic Arabia, and especially of the Ḥijâz, see Henri Lammens, *Le Berceau de l'Islam: l'Arabie occidentale à la veille de l'hégire*, vol. I, *Le Climat —Les Bédouins* (Rome, 1914), especially part III, 'Les Bédouins'; and Henri Lammens, 'La Mecque à la veille de l'hégire', in *Mélanges de l'Université St.-Joseph*, 9 (Beirut, 1924), 97–439.) In using Lammens, the reader must beware of Lammens' over-scepticism; often Lammens' doubts leave the evidence hanging in mid-air, and sometimes he exaggerates (e.g., in introducing modern commercial terminology). The standard historical work will now be Jawâd 'Alî, *Ta'rîkh al-'Arab qabl al-Islâm* (6 vols., Baghdad, 1951–57). Frants Buhl, *Muhammeds Liv* (Copenhagen, 1903), translated as *Das Leben Muhammeds* (Leipzig, 1930), has a lucid and judicious chapter describing relevant conditions, 'Forholdene i Arabien ved Tiden for Muhammeds Optraeden'. Sidney Smith, 'Events in Arabia in the Sixth Century', *BSOAS*, 16 (1954), 425–68, is useful on dating. See also Giorgio Levi della Vida, 'Pre-Islamic Arabia' in *The Arab Heritage* ed. Nabih A. Faris (Princeton University Press, 1944)—a skilful summary of what we do and do not know about the history of pre-Islamic Arabia as a whole; note that the translator has misrendered some words so badly that they can be misleading to the unwary reader at important points.

and with the aid of tribes along the route to Syria, a tribe had been brought together, called Quraysh, to take over the springs at Mecca and the shrine from other Bedouin. The Quraysh were organized on Bedouin principles, without a king or any other municipal institutions beyond the clan councils; they used an assembly of notables of all the clans for non-binding consultation. The threat of blood-feud guarded the peace. But ever since Quṣayy's time, the Quraysh had maintained solidarity (not without some clans gaining a position of more influence than others) and had made effective use of their resources. They controlled the north-south trade and grew rich by it. To do so, they had also to win a secure diplomatic (and warlike) position among the tribes of the Ḥijâz, which was then bolstered with a financial position—leading tribesmen became their creditors. For they engaged not only in the long-distance trade, but in local trade in western Arabia; they had fostered the pilgrimages (and accompanying fairs) made at certain seasons to Mecca itself and to a neutral spot not far away ('Arafât), as well as other markets held in the region. They became the dominant partners in an alliance with the Thaqîf tribe of nearby Tâ'if, where leading Meccans had summer houses. In the course of all this, they had acquired prestige as a tribe of dependable and independent honour.[6]

Their position was institutionalized in religious forms. The fairs took the form of pilgrimages, and to protect the traffic at those times the Meccans established sacred truce months, four a year, which a large number of tribes observed. To settle the times of the sacred months, the Meccans maintained a calendar of their own, equally widely used. Internally, their solidarity was maintained through the worship at the Ka'bah, a rectangular building which formed the object of the Meccan pilgrimage (*ḥajj*). This worship seems to have embodied a somewhat unusual development of the Arab paganism.

Among a world of minor spirit beings (*jinn*), the Arabs distinguished a number of more serious divinities, often as protectors of particular tribes; each was associated with a shrine at some given locality, a tree or a grove or a strangely formed rock (or sometimes with a sacred stone or other object carried ceremoniously by the worshipping tribe). The greatest divinities were likely to be associated also with stars. People supplicated or propitiated them with special rites in view of some worldly hope or fear. Back of these active divinities was a vaguer figure, Allâh, 'the god' par excellence, regarded as a Creator-god and perhaps as guarantor of rights and agreements which crossed tribal lines. But, as with many 'high gods', he had no special cult.[7]

6 Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (2nd ed. Berlin, 1897; also in *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, Heft 3), section 'Mekka, der Hagg, und die Messen', discusses the reasons for Mecca's importance. For the commercial position of the Quraysh and their political relations, see Lammens 'La Mecque à la veille de l'hégire', especially chaps. I–III and XIII–XV. (But beware exaggerations.) Irfan Kawar, 'The Arabs and the Peace Treaty of AD 561', *Arabica*, 3 (1956), 181–213, brings out some suggestive points about the Arab commercial context of Meccan activity.

7 On the pagan Arab cults, see Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, especially the final section; but note that the conception of a supreme creator-god need not be explained linguistically, for such figures are widespread.

In the Ka'bah were gathered the sacred tokens of all the clans of Mecca; it thus merged their several cults into one. Qur'ânic testimony shows us that the Ka'bah was presided over by Allâh, presumably in his capacity as guarantor of agreements among the tribes, and hence as guarantor of the pilgrimage as well as of the agreements among the Meccan clans. If Allâh still had no special cult, at any rate in Mecca he thus came into special prominence. (It seems that even Christian Arabs made pilgrimage to the Ka'bah, honouring Allâh there as God the Creator.) The special role of the Ka'bah as shrine of joint pagan worship was not limited to the Meccans. In addition to the sacred tokens of the Meccan clans, other tribes in alliance with the Quraysh were encouraged to bring their tokens and fetishes there, so as to join in a common sacredness. A number of the more active divinities seem to have received special honour at Mecca: notably three goddesses (Allât, al-'Uzzà, and Manât) who were widely worshipped among the Arabs and in particular had shrines in the neighbouring districts with which the Meccans had close relations. Worshippers honoured the Ka'bah by circling it a fixed number of times on foot, and touching the sacred stones built into it: particularly the Black Stone in one corner. Near it sprang a sacred well, called *Zamzam*. It was the centre of a hallowed area, extending all round Mecca, in which fighting was taboo even when it was not a truce month.

Mecca was located approximately equidistant from the three spheres of power around Bedouin Arabia. Midway between Syria and the Yemen, it was about equally distant from the long arm of Sâsânian power to the northeast. Perhaps only at such a distance from the agrarian lands could so thoroughly independent and Bedouin a system have arisen. A major task of the Quraysh —on their own behalf and perhaps also on behalf of the tribes of their allies— was to maintain the independence of their zone. Both Romans and Abyssinians had made expeditions to the area (the Sâsânians had not, and it is clear that the Quraysh rather favoured the Sâsânians over either Rome or Abyssinia). When a Jewish dynasty came to power in the Yemen, Abyssinia, as Christian ally of Rome, had finally intervened to overthrow it, on the pretext of halting persecutions of Christians, but perhaps also on account of the Sâsânian and anti-Roman sympathies shared by many Jewish groups, even in Syria. The Abyssinians seem to have sent expeditions as far north as Medina against Jewish settlements along the trade route. The Abyssinians in turn were ejected by Sâsânian forces, evidently gladly received in the Yemen. In Muḥammad's lifetime, an attempt by one of the Quraysh to forge links with Byzantium (and possibly rise to power in Mecca himself) was frustrated by Meccan insistence on neutrality.

The corollary of maintaining political neutrality was to maintain neutrality among the religious allegiances that disputed among themselves the lands from Nile to Oxus and the Fertile Crescent in particular. This was not necessarily easy. Bedouin Arabia was a prime mission field offering opportunities to casual merchants or to solitary monks. Arabs were keenly aware of those

venerable agrarianate high cultures in which they as Bedouin had little share, and in particular of the confessional communities that played so prominent a part in urban civilization. Some Arab tribes had even adopted for themselves, to some degree or other, one of these religious allegiances in place of the not very lively tribal paganism of their ancestors. We may surmise that the rest of the Arabs could not long resist conversion to one or another such religious allegiance. Perhaps only the want of a single allegiance that would automatically command adherence had allowed them to linger.

In the area around Bedouin Arabia the confessional traditions, all of the Irano-Semitic monotheistic type, proliferated as diversely as anywhere in the Nile-to-Oxus region. Most widespread was Christianity, which in a variety of mutually hostile forms prevailed in the Mesopotamian plain (Nestorian and Jacobite Christianity), in Syria (Jacobite, Armenian, and Chalcedonian Christianity—the latter being the official Christianity of the Roman empire, later split into Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox), in Egypt (Coptic and Chalcedonian), and in Abyssinia (Coptic). Judaism and Christianity were also especially strong in the Yemen in the far south. On the east coasts of Arabia, Zoroastrianism was also important. In most of Bedouin Arabia, and especially in the Ḥijâz, the mountainous area of the west in which are Mecca and Medina, none of the confessional allegiances had yet become prevalent. Bedouin Arabia, never incorporated till then into the great agrarian empires that had risen and fallen north of it for so long, was a still pocket of paganism, where the commonest form of religion was the old worship of local and tribal spirits. But all the main religious allegiances were represented there; even in the Ḥijâz there were some Christians and a great many Jews. When Muḥammad preached a religion of one God, of prophets, and of Hell and Paradise, the terms he used could be understood by many Arabs, even among the pagans.

Yet Muḥammad may have been in the one place where paganism was still most vital. As the camel nomads began to play a role in the agrarian lands and in international politics, the Quraysh of Mecca were playing a role not only influential but politically and religiously unique among them. In contrast to the precarious pyramiding of tribal agglomerations with a king-like chieftain at the top, they had been able to base a reasonably effective political order on the solidarity of one tribe, and its prestige. And this was cemented in an equally independent religious system, likewise based on Bedouin ways, and equally neutral to all the confessional religious allegiances. The Meccans seem to have offered the only effective Bedouin-based alternative to assimilation to the settled cultures.[8]

[8] Joseph Chelhod, *Introduction à la sociologie de l'Islam: de l'animisme à l'universalisme* (Paris, 1958) is not about the sociology of Islam as a religious tradition, but about the development of religious consciousness in Muḥammad and his compatriots, in their social context. Chelhod builds upon Lammens' work very suggestively, stressing the evolution of Mecca itself in the Ḥijâz; unfortunately, his racialism leads him to misconceive the course of subsequent Islam; and even on the proper subject of his book, his arguments are mostly very tenuous. See the excellent study by Gustave von

Muḥammad becomes a prophet

Abû-l-Qâsim Muḥammad b. 'Abd-Allâh[9] was a substantial and respected merchant in Mecca. He had grown up an orphan, under the care of an uncle in unprosperous circumstances; but he was of an established family (the Banû Hâshim), members of the Quraysh, the ruling tribe of Mecca. He had shown his competence as a trader in the service of a well-to-do widow, Khadîjah, some years his senior, whom he subsequently married. By her he had four daughters (and evidently sons who died in infancy), whom he was able to marry into prominent families.[10] He was known in Mecca as *al-Amîn*, 'the trustworthy'.

In his thirties, if not earlier, Muḥammad seems to have become preoccupied with questions of how to live a serious life in truth and purity. He apparently listened to all who had something to say about the meaning of human life in this world and he meditated intensely in periods of retirement in a cave (on Mount Ḥirâ') outside the town. He did not dissociate himself from the rites and customs of the Quraysh, which indeed continued dear to him. But he sought something which they lacked.

We shall be talking a good deal about religion in this work, for it pervaded every aspect of Islamicate culture. I must make clear my point of view on it.[11] It may be said that the religious impulse is ninety per cent wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is, indeed, rooted deeply in us. Unlike other animals, human beings live by their illusions: our very words, it has been said, point to what is in fact not there. Human beings alone are artists. Over and beyond the immediate stimulus and response, we want every moment to make sense in some larger whole which our lives form: people cannot stand living with sheer absurdity. If we refuse to make a conscious choice of what sense to make of life, we are told, we will in practice adopt some pattern of sense unconsciously and without consideration. Hence even intelligent people may persuade themselves to believe almost anything that seems to make hopeful sense of life. And since life is largely a tissue of miseries, we are under pressure to discover some sense which will give the misery a positive meaning. The logic of wishful thinking,

Grunebaum, 'The Nature of Arab Unity before Islam', *Arabica*, 10 (1963), 5–23, on the pre-Islamic Arabs and the conditions that allowed Mecca to play a special role among them.

[9] The abbreviation 'b.' stands for *ibn*, 'son of'; for a fuller explanation, see the section on personal names in the Introduction.

[10] On Muḥammad's connections and the status of families in Mecca, see W. Montgomery Watt's *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford, 1953), chaps. I.2 and II.3.

[11] I am personally a convinced Christian, of the Quaker persuasion, but neither here nor earlier do my general formulations on the nature of religion represent Christianity as such. If they represent anything, it is the sort of considerations that have been developed in the modern discipline of religion studies in the works of such scholars as Rudolf Otto and especially Mircea Eliade; not without influence from the anthropological tradition (e.g., Bronislaw Malinowski, Paul Radin), the sociological (e.g., Emile Durckheim), certain psychologists (e.g., Carl Jung), and philosophers (e.g., Ernst Cassirer, Wm. James, Albert Camus).

then, is not to be despised: that if something is possible (though proof or disproof is unattainable), and if it is desirable, then it may be presumed true until disproven.

But what is remarkable about human beings, in distinction from other animals, is what we have done with our illusions—with our free imaginations. Artists deal, in a sense, with illusion; but if they are disciplined, they can evoke reality by way of the illusion. In religion also a disciplined imaginative response can touch reality. The component of sheer wishful thinking in religion is large, but is still not the whole of it. What is most interesting about religion is not the wishful thinking as such, but the creative insights that come along with it, which open new possibilities of human meaningfulness and expression. To identify these expressions of religion in particular, the observer must sometimes penetrate into motives and implications not immediately apparent to outsiders in the words used in religious discourse. But this need not mean distortion. What serious and intelligent persons over many generations, and in preference to many available alternatives, have held to be significant rarely turns out, on close investigation, to be trivial.

Despite Quṣayy's measures, the prevailing religious climate in Mecca was still not far removed from the Bedouin paganism round about. Relations with fetishes or with deities were chiefly on the basis of bargaining—for this offering I give you, lord, you will give me that favour in return. This was little removed from magic. Lots were cast at the Ka'bah to foretell fortunes, and vows and sacrifices were made to assure successes. A sense of loyalty certainly there was; but there seems to have been little higher moral challenge. Even the special presence of the Creator-god Allâh did not carry far. No meaning or goal was added to a man's life other than what he already had as a tribesman.

But a different sort of spiritual attitude was also represented at Mecca, an attitude associated with monotheistic religion. Foreigners who were settled in Mecca, or just passing through, were attached to a number of Christian and perhaps Jewish communities and to other monotheistic communities of a 'Gnostic' type such as were then common in Syria; Meccans were aware that such religion was supported by the great empires, and knew that some important Arab tribes adhered to it en bloc. Apparently none of the representatives of monotheism whom Muḥammad knew in Mecca was very well-versed in his faith. The terminology used in the Qur'ân, as well as other details, reflects traditions from a variety of religious communities but presupposes no intimate understanding of any of them.[12] Nevertheless, even an ill-trained adherent of any monotheistic group could convey at least the possibility that a

[12] Whatever one thinks of the provenance of the Qur'ân, its language is designed explicitly to be intelligible to Arabs. Hence we may gather from it what sort of concepts could be expected to be intelligible to Muḥammad and his contemporaries. That is, we can learn from it with assurance what ideas were circulating in Mecca at the time. It is only those ideas of which the Qur'ân would make use.

man's life must be measured by larger than tribal standards—that his actions counted as those of a human being, not just a tribesman; that to be good they must accord with the nature of the world as a whole, not just with personal or tribal interests; and that accordingly only at a summing up of the world's whole history could any man's life be seen in its proper light.

There were a few other men of the Quraysh in Muḥammad's time who were attracted to monotheism; they seem to have worked out, perhaps each for himself, some sort of private faith—later tradition called them the 'Ḥanîfs'. From these, Muḥammad was distinguished by a crucial event. Toward the age of forty, during one of his retirements in Mount Ḥirâ', he heard a voice and saw a vision which summoned him to offer worship to the God who had created the world, the God of the monotheists, to Allâh whom the ordinary Arab honoured but had no cult for. Encouraged by his wife, Khadîjah, he accepted the summons as coming from God Himself. Thereupon, he received further messages which he interpreted as divine revelation, and the worshipful recitation of which formed a major element of the new cult. The messages collectively were called the *Qur'ân*, which means 'recitation'. For a time, only his wife and a few close friends shared the cult with him. But after some years the messages demanded that he summon his fellow Quraysh to the worship of God, warning them of calamities to come if they refused. From a private monotheist he was to become a prophet to his people.

We know far less about Muḥammad than was once supposed. On the face of it, the documentation transmitted among Muslims about his life is rich and detailed; but we have learned to mistrust most of it; indeed, the most respected early Muslim scholars themselves pointed out its untrustworthiness. But we do know a great deal more about him than, for instance, about Jesus. The evidence about Jesus is almost exclusively contained in the four Gospels and in a letter by Paul. The more they are analyzed, the less dependable the Gospels prove to be. Even the recorded sayings of Jesus can be shown to have been heavily edited at least in some Gospels. As to the personal spirituality of Jesus we have only the thinnest evidence. We may surmise that he was sincere; but we are already in the realm of conjecture when we try to say what he was sincere in. We tend to choose as characterizing him those episodes that are most touching, or most distinctive and unlikely to have been common stock. This is probably a sound instinct, but it is dangerous from a scholarly viewpoint; at the least, it must be checked on the basis of other texts from the period, which are only just becoming available. In the case of Muḥammad, though we must use a large amount of conjecture, we can base it on reasonably objective scholarly principles. We can rely on the text of the Qur'ân itself as direct evidence—though that text is habitually ambiguous in any concrete references it makes. To interpret the Qur'ân, we are forced to resort to reports collected several generations later; but even among these, we are not entirely at a loss: we can probably rely on those reports which can be shown not to grind the axe of any particular later party, provided such reports fit reasonably well into a coherent picture that emerges from them all as a body. And most important, we can often rely on the background detail which the reports take for granted as known to all. Hence, though what I have to say about Muḥammad is largely conjecture, yet it can be responsibly offered.

About Muḥammad's call, we may say this. First, Muḥammad accepted the summons to the new cult: that is, he himself believed. This in itself was a decisive act of faith. And then he did more: he accepted the role of prophet to his people. This acceptance required not only unwavering faith in the validity of his cause, but high courage; for it necessarily brought on him the scorn and ridicule and mistrust of most of the men about him. For them, such a claim was at best absurd—and at worst likely to be a cloak for private ambition, perhaps connected with some Roman plot to control the Ḥijâz trade through a local puppet, such as the Quraysh had had to resist before. Muḥammad's positive response to what he found himself confronted with, then, was his great creative act. Before he summoned others, he himself had accepted the consequences of his faith and staked his life on it.

A prophet is one who speaks for a god—who utters whatever messages from the god are divinely laid upon him (not necessarily, of course, nor even primarily, messages regarding the future). The impulsion to speak as a prophet has been variously felt; it has ranged from institutionalized rituals, in which abnormal physiological states are induced out of which dark words come, to the expression of consciously personal insights by 'inspired' poets. Muḥammad's standard for prophecy was, in principle, the experience and action of the old Hebrew prophets. But he knew nothing of them directly. His own experience was evidently very personal.

He found himself gripped in a distinctive physical condition and therein becoming conscious of ideas which he did not recognize to be his own. The physical stress seems to have been sometimes sufficiently violent that he required wrapping up and he then sweated profusely; sometimes it was far milder. (On the basis of some aspects of the detailed Muslim descriptions, the moments of revelation have been very conjecturally likened to epileptic seizures.) At such times he might be unconscious or at least abstracted. The form in which the ideas came seems to have varied still more than his physical condition. On certain occasions, presumably at the very start, we have the evidence of the Qur'ân that there was not only audition but ocular vision; notably, according to reports, a waking vision of a gigantic being on the horizon—on every horizon to which Muḥammad turned his eyes—who spoke to him the words he must say. Usually, however, there were simply auditions: Muḥammad heard words spoken or—in milder cases—some sort of tinkling sound, to which, on his arousing, a meaning was attached.

The words which he then uttered were written down with care—he used a number of 'secretaries'—and were memorized by the pious. They were retained especially by the 'Qur'ân-reciters', followers of his who specialized in

reproducing and teaching the whole of the constantly growing Qur'ân.[13] The various bits of revelation were arranged in *sûrahs* ('chapters'), some of which represented a single revelation but most of which were added to from time to time—often new passages being inserted in the midst of old.

A variety of incidents show that neither the occasion nor the content of the revelations was under Muḥammad's conscious control. After the earliest revelations, there was a long period when he received none at all and became severely depressed, doubting the truth of his own call—he was supported, above all, by Khadîjah's continuing reassurance. Later, Muḥammad came to expect a revelation at need. Accordingly, he was badly embarrassed on at least one occasion when for days a required divine decision failed to come—an experience he interpreted as designed to humble him.

The experience of being gripped as by an outside being, as well as the ecstatic rhyming prose in which especially the earlier revelations took form, seemed to the Arabs like the similar outbursts of a soothsayer, *kâhin*. These men were regarded as possessed by *jinn*, sprites, who put their utterances into their mouths. On a higher level, the respected poets, though they suffered no state of seizure and what they uttered was in a far more developed literary form, were regarded also as inspired by jinn. The words of both soothsayer and poet were regarded as preternatural and possessing hidden powers. Muḥammad was at great pains to distinguish himself from either soothsayer or poet; to insist it was no transient and irresponsible jinn that possessed him, but a cosmic representative of the Creator-god Himself, an angel. (Eventually he identified the angel as Gabriel.) Muslims have made a point ever since of denying the Qur'ân to be poetry in the technical sense, *shi'r*, as practiced by the ancient Arab poets.

Monotheism and personal moral responsibility

At first it does not seem to have been clear that the new cult was incompatible with the existing cults in which the Quraysh took part. In the new cult, portions of the Qur'ân were recited periodically to the accompaniment of bowings and prostrations in honour of Allâh. This was called the *ṣalât;* as a form of adoration it was reminiscent of Syrian Christian practice. Just as even Christian Arabs could take part in the ḥajj pilgrimage, the first Muslims, adding their special practices, need not otherwise have made any notable break with Quraysh customs. But from the first, the new cult set off its devotees as

[13] The Qur'ân-reciters (Qâri') are sometimes called 'Qur'ân *readers*' in English, but this is misleading. They were often illiterate and in any case were not engaged in 'reading' the Qur'ân in the modern sense of taking in the meaning of a written text before one. (Unfortunately, there are still Muslims who speak of 'reading' the Qur'ân—or other text!—when they mean merely declaiming it: uttering the appropriate sounds, with or without sight of the printed page, without necessarily attaching any meaning at all to the individual sounds uttered. In this sense, some claim to 'read' Arabic without knowing a word of the language.)

pledged to a new vision of life. The early portions of the Qur'ân contain numerous moral injunctions, urging purity, chastity, and generosity. The specific moral ideals were in no case unprecedented and rarely departed from moral norms upheld, in principle, in the older Bedouin society. (The Qur'ân made no attempt to lay down a comprehensive moral system; the very word for moral behaviour, *al-ma'rûf*, means 'the known'.) What was new was the conception of the place of these norms in a man's life.

In the Qur'ân, the immensity of the human situation is brought out in the descriptions of the Last Day, thus (LXXXI, 1–14):

> When the sun shall be darkened, when the stars shall be thrown down, when the mountains shall be set moving, when the pregnant camels shall be untended, when the savage beasts shall be stampeded,[14] when the seas shall be set boiling, when the souls shall be coupled, when the buried infant shall be asked for what sin she was killed, when the scrolls shall be unrolled, when the skies shall be stripped off, when Hell shall be set blazing, when Paradise shall be brought near,—a soul shall know what it has produced.

There is a moral condemnation of infanticide here, but not by way of introducing a new commandment nor even of reinforcing an old one. Rather, female infanticide, which was a natural consequence of the tribal emphasis on males and of its disregard of the individual as such, is pointed to as showing what sort of thing the godless soul 'has produced'—the quality of a life which is without God.

In the Qur'ân it was early made clear that human beings face a fundamental moral choice. They cannot hover half way. On the one hand, they may choose to stand in awe of their Creator and accept His moral demands. In this case, God, in His mercy, will guide those who are faithful, making them upright and pure. Or human beings may, on the contrary, turn away from their Creator; becoming absorbed in their private wishes of the moment, and praying the various godlings for success in them. In this case, God will likewise turn away from them, and they will become wicked, petty men and women. For a human being cannot choose to be pure at will (a sad fact too readily experienced!); he does not control his own ways, but can achieve moral purity only by the power of God.[15] The fundamental choice, then, appears in the Qur'ân as overwhelmingly crucial: to turn to God and worship Him, or to turn from Him to one's own desires. All else in the moral life will follow from this choice.

[14] Stampeded by fear, as Richard Bell suggests—literally, 'driven together'. The scrolls, further on, are of course the records of persons' lives. I have based my renderings on A. J. Arberry's but have departed from him freely so as to stay closer to the direct simplicity of the original. (For Bell, Arberry, and other Qur'ân translators, see the section on translations of the Qur'ân in the Selective Bibliography.)

[15] This account of predestination in the Qur'ân seems to answer the tenor of the whole, Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Mahomet* (Paris, 1957), p. 357, suggests that Qur'ân XCII, 5–13, may express this idea succinctly. Certainly the usual interpretation of it makes it improbably thin in moral content.

Muḥammad was convinced that this choice determined the whole worth of a person's life. As did the other monotheists, he believed that this fact would be made inescapably manifest in a final cosmic catastrophe, when the world would be destroyed and all human beings would be visibly judged by God Himself, those who had already died being restored to life for judgment. Then those who had been faithful to God would be rewarded with all good things the human heart delights in while those who had turned away would be punished with all evil things the heart dreads. The Qur'ân painted both the rewards and the punishments in vivid colours—the blessèd would dwell in beautiful gardens with delicious fruits and charming damsels; the damned would burn frightfully in fire, swallowing nauseous refuse. The likelihood of the great final catastrophe was supported by descriptions of lesser catastrophes that had overtaken individual peoples which had rejected the summons of prophets sent to them; for instance, the people of Noah. Doubters were reminded that such a catastrophe, and the resurrection of the dead for judgment, were entirely within the power of the God who had made the world and who had formed each man and woman in the womb in the first place. But the coming of the great Day was assured for Muḥammad, finally, by its having been announced in the messages sent to Muḥammad and to all previous monotheistic prophets as well. The same revelation which insisted on the choice between the commands of the Creator and one's own desires also warned of the final Judgment in which the choice would be vindicated; Muḥammad could not doubt any portion of the total message.[16]

Accordingly, Muḥammad insisted on the moral responsibility of human beings. Life was no matter of play, it called for sober alertness; men dare not relax, secure in their wealth and their good family and their numerous sons—all these things would avail nothing at the Judgment, when a person's own personal worth would be weighed; humans must live in constant fear and awe of God, before whom they were accountable for every least deed. To be sure, God is merciful: if a person were truly turned toward Him, slips could be forgiven in view of his human weakness; but a carelessness which neglected God Himself for the transient delights He had given would not be forgiven.

The Qur'ân puts the human situation in powerful images, drawn from Biblical and Talmudic lore but reworked to express the vision of Islam. God

[16] Very often, scholarly interpreters of the Qur'ân have stressed the *source* of various notions which appear in it. For our purposes, it is more useful to look for their *meaning within the Qur'ân*. The Qur'ân could speak only in terms of the language and the concepts which Muḥammad and his followers already possessed with which to receive its message. These were limited, on the whole, to what was to be found in the monotheistic traditions. To understand a given reference, one must take note of the assumed context first: e.g., to see the meaning of references to the Last Judgment, we must recognize that the notion of the Judgment as an event in time was *given* by the monotheistic tradition. Then one must see what the Qur'ân does with this—what *direction* the notion is pushed in. It is only this which can yield its *meaning*, morally and humanly. The same, of course, holds for all the Qur'ânic tales, whether Biblical or not. Their deviation from the Biblical form is relevant primarily as pointing up the message they are to carry.

offered to the heavens the trust of keeping faith, and they refused; He offered it to the mountains, and they said they were not strong enough; but human beings undertook it. When the angels heard that God was creating mankind, they objected. Why should God place in the earth creatures which would simply fill it with injustice and bloodshed? But God insisted He knew what He was doing. He taught Adam the names of all things (we would say Adam received the faculty of rational discrimination), then He challenged the angels to tell what things were; when they found they had to be taught this by Adam, they acknowledged God was doing something beyond their understanding. Indeed, God insisted that they all bow down and do obeisance to Adam and all did so save Iblîs (Satan), who was too proud. Thereafter, Iblîs was permitted to tempt humans to evil, and those who did not sincerely turn from him to God would succumb. Then God drew forth all future generations of mankind from the loins of Adam and confronted them with the demand, 'Am I not your Lord?' They acknowledged Him each one and were tucked back in, to come forth in due time to be tested, whether they would maintain the faith or no.[17]

The responsibility to obey God is thus imprinted in human nature, the Qur'ân tells us, but by people's carelessness the truth is forgotten—unless warners come from God, prophets (*nabî*) who will bring to humans messages from God such as Muḥammad brought, whereby men and women may be reminded of their duty. The figures appealed to by the various monotheists had been such prophets, bringing to their several peoples the same reminder of their duty toward God. Many of them had performed wonders, deeds beyond normal human powers, which authenticated their messages by showing that they were supported by the same Being who performed the wonders of creation and Who alone could be expected to produce wonders of a truly high order. Thus Jesus, with the permission of God, gave life itself (to clay birds, as told in an apocryphal gospel), a wonder especially distinctive of the Creator and therefore unmistakably marking His intervention. Muḥammad himself claimed no wonder but the Qur'ân itself; this, however, he regarded as undeniable. He challenged any man to produce its like; and (like any great creative work) it has in fact proved inimitable. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Qur'ân that the divine message ought to be acknowledged without need for any such evidentiary miracles. Those who are blinded by their delight in transient things, and hence subject to the suggestions of Iblîs (who can whisper his temptations to the heart, though he has no power of himself to mislead us), will reject any prophet, however well evidenced. But those who have guarded themselves from such blindness will recognize the truth as soon as they are reminded of it by the warnings of a prophet. The prophet's mission, therefore, is in the first instance simply to utter the warnings as God gives them to him.

[17] Qur'ân, xxxiii, 72; ii, 30–34 (28–32); xxxviii, 71–85, xvii, 61–65 (63–67); vii, 172 (171).

At least latent in Muḥammad's message from the beginning was the idea that there is only one true object of worship, only one God; that all other godlings are not just secondary but absolutely false, and their cults wicked. For a time, Muḥammad may have preached the new cult without insisting on the overthrow of any of the old cults; once he even tried to find a place for a cult of the greater, Meccan goddesses as intermediaries, subordinate to that of Allâh; yet, before long, insistence on the exclusive cult of God alone became the central dogma of Islam.[18]

As Muḥammad confronted both his opponents and his own followers with the new message, and as its implications were lived through, it became clear that no concessions could be made. If Judgment was to be total and final, the Judge must be utterly transcendent, incommensurate with all that was to come under His judgment. There could be no intermediaries, no half-gods. And if people genuinely made the fundamental moral choice of turning to God for His guidance, they should not turn back to the petty cults which were there to serve only their lusts. The various monotheists agreed in imposing such a ban, and the ban became the crucial test of whether a person had become a *muslim*, whether he was undertaking the obligations of faith. The essential step in joining the Muslim community came to be abandonment of idolatry (*shirk*, literally association of something else with God); that is, any cult of beings other than the Creator-god.

The monotheistic communities whose representatives Muḥammad looked to as worshippers of the Creator-god had developed complex theories about the divine realm. The elements of an elaborate supernatural apparatus seem to have played a considerable part in Muḥammad's thought also, particularly at first. The Qur'ân presupposes acquaintance with various cosmic figures and objects. It mentions, for instance, angels, the Spirit (*Rûḥ*), the Word (*Qawl*), the Command (*Amr*); several heavens, the divine Throne, and heavenly books —the latter recording not only human destiny, but men's and women's deeds in the world and the divine message itself (from which the Qur'ân comprises only excerpts).[19] On the other hand, Muḥammad seems not to have been acquainted with the more central doctrines of the New Testament—those of divine incarnation, of suffering, sacrificial love, of redemption; nor to have been acquainted with the major literary prophets of the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaiah or Jeremiah. Nevertheless, he seems to have become less concerned, in time, with the supernatural apparatus, and to have centred into an outlook far more in harmony with the great Hebrew prophets than with the sectarianism, often of Gnostic type, whose terminology and sacred tales he knew. It is as if he had been led back of the popular imagery that was visible to him, in the chance representatives of monotheism he encountered, to the grand themes of the old prophets whose personalities had not seized the popular

[18] On the 'Satanic verses' and on the early evolution of Muḥammad's mission, cf. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, chap. V.1.

[19] On the Qur'ânic cosmology cf. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, *Mahomet*, pp. 292ff.

imagination, but whose basic insight still formed the solid groundwork under all the later luxuriant overgrowth.

Muḥammad, with the Qur'ân, presented a potent challenge to everyone at Mecca: a challenge to rise to a level of personal moral purity such as it had occurred to few to dream of. He presented it as a real possibility for human beings, indeed a necessity if they were not to risk offending the very structure of the cosmos in which they found themselves. And he presented it in a concrete, tangible form in which, by an act of will, they could adopt the new ideal practically.

Muḥammad founds a religious community

When Muḥammad began to preach publicly his new cult, particularly when he began to oppose the old cults, most men of the Quraysh naturally ridiculed and opposed him; but he won many converts, especially among the younger men. Some converts were slaves or tribeless persons, but most were from the less powerful Quraysh clans, and a number were among the less well-placed younger men in the very top families. With the development of Mecca as a commercial and financial centre, the moral standards of Bedouin society no longer served well. Though the Quraysh seem to have kept the dangerous custom of feuding under control at least within Mecca, a type of economic inequality had arisen between man and man which threatened tribal solidarity and in any case undermined the Bedouin ideal of generous manliness in which wealth was a welcome but relatively transient distinction. In Mecca, as the individual began to act more freely in his own private interest, the tribal expectations came to fit less well. Particularly those who were disadvantaged in the new, more individualistic pattern welcomed a moral conception which could restore something of the older moral security in a form adapted to individualistic, commercial life. To this end, Islam was highly appropriate. Muḥammad's creative act of accepting prophethood thus found a public capable of responding to it.

It was not only his message that mattered, however; Muḥammad's personality backed up the message. He was able to convert and hold the loyalty of diverse sorts of outstanding and able men. As the chart of Muḥammad's relatives shows, he won their respect on the most intimate level. Two youths of his own household, whose conversion may no doubt be ascribed to his private influence, grew into exceptionally strong leaders. His uncle, Abû-Ṭâlib, had entrusted one of his sons, 'Alî, to Muḥammad to raise; 'Alî as a boy may have been the first male to accept Muḥammad (i.e., the first person after Khadîjah); as a man he proved a powerful warrior, winning in his own person an almost fanatical loyalty from many men. Almost as early a convert was Zayd b. Ḥârithah, a freedman of Muḥammad, whom he adopted for a time as a son, and who was later a trusted general for Islam.

One of the earliest converts from other clans was Abû-Bakr b. Abî-Quḥâfah,

a well-to-do merchant (though not among the very wealthiest), who acted somewhat as Muḥammad's faithful lieutenant, devoted his wealth unhesitatingly to the cause, always showed a cool good judgment and an admirable impartiality, and won abiding general respect among the Muslims. 'Uthmân b. Maẓ'ûn, also an early convert, contrasted with Abû-Bakr in having independently become something of an ascetic monotheist before Muḥammad's preaching and seems to have continued, even while loyal to Muḥammad, as something of a leader on his own; he is listed as chief of those Muslims who went to Abyssinia to escape persecution. 'Uthmân b. 'Affân (who was to become a caliph), was a retiring and deeply pious member of one of the best families of Mecca. 'Abd-al-Raḥmân b. 'Awf was a clever businessman; it is said that later, on arrival penniless in Medina, he refused an offer of property from a Medinese friend, took a trifling item to the market place, and quickly traded himself into a good supper—afterward becoming quite wealthy.

'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭâb was impulsive, almost fiery, but intensely committed to whatever won him. He is said to have been talking of killing Muḥammad out of zeal for the Meccan godlings one day, when he was told for the first time that his sister had herself become a Muslim; going to her in a rage, he found her engaged in reading a portion of the Qur'ân—and on reading it himself he was impressed, and converted; thereafter he forced the Quraysh to let him perform Islamic worship publicly at the Ka'bah itself, which was not tolerated before, and all the Muslims could do so likewise. His uprightness was never doubted; on occasion he chided Muḥammad himself. His sternness is said to have been such that levity which was tolerated in Muḥammad's own presence was suppressed if 'Umar appeared. After Muḥammad's death, he governed the Muslims with genius during their greatest conquests.

Islam soon became more than a private cult; it became an issue dividing the town. Muḥammad demanded that all Mecca join his cult and abandon all others, on pain of divine chastisement. This demand created something of a dilemma. Though in principle Muḥammad was but one of the faithful, distinguished from the others only as recipient of the Revelation and as specially charged to warn the rest, in practice he could not but be more. The lines of commitment which tied together the new group, and which tied the new group as a whole to Muḥammad, had an emotional and moral strength which could well rival that of a weakened tribal solidarity. Muḥammad, as prophet, could readily seem the authorized interpreter of the moral implications of the message which he brought, and therefore have an authority over the faithful. Muḥammad and his followers always distinguished between the Revelation from God and Muḥammad's own decisions. For years some of his strongest and closest followers were inclined to come to their own conclusions as to what the new faith implied in given situations. Nevertheless, Muḥammad showed himself a man of good personal judgment and when the demands of faith began to conflict with accepted standards at Mecca, he naturally came into a position of leadership among the faithful.

Muḥammad's Relatives

Names of those who played an important role in Muḥammad's lifetime or afterwards are in capitals.
Most men shown had more sons than those mentioned.
Muḥammad, 'Alî, and others had more wives than those mentioned.

After some years of the preaching in Mecca, the Qur'ân revelations began to recount the experiences of former (usually Biblical) prophets with the peoples to whom they were sent. As in earlier monotheism, the divine challenge was taking historical form. The cosmos of the Qur'ân was intensely human and even social; if a single sequence of historical unfolding does not emerge as in the Hebrew Bible, despite its adumbration in the first part of sûrah 11 (for the Qur'ân rejected the idea of a chosen people), yet we feel a strong sense of common human destiny. In these historical stories, the prophet came to figure as something like the head of a community of faithful, set off against their opponents; the story of Moses was a favourite. The stories, of course, reflected Muḥammad's own circumstances in Mecca and therefore gave divine sanction to what was becoming increasingly evident: that for the Quraysh to accept the new cult of Allâh would mean accepting not merely the moral demands of the Creator, but also the political lead of Muḥammad himself. In the nature of prophecy, a transcendent universality appealing to the individual conscience was inescapably linked to concrete relationships with a particular human group and its leader.

The tribal forms of Meccan life allowed no more for municipal than for monarchical institutions. Hence when Muḥammad preached repentance and the worship of the God of the great empires round about, there was no government to jail him as a traitor or even as a public nuisance; nor for his followers to seize and reform. Instead, the struggle between the reformers and their opponents took the form of personal manoeuvres and of family and clan oppositions. In such a struggle, the Muslims, distributed as a minority among many clans, were at a disadvantage. There was a certain measure of personal persecution. The weakest of Muḥammad's followers, especially slaves, who had no clan to retaliate against any who might do them harm, were molested by the more zealous enemies of Islam, and occasionally tormented painfully; Muḥammad himself was sometimes insulted in ways hard for an Arab to bear. One of Muḥammad's uncles, called in the Qur'ân *Abû-Lahab* (the 'flame man', as doomed to Hell) was one of the most vehement in fighting the movement. But the Banû Hâshim as a whole, led by Muḥammad's uncle Abû-Ṭâlib, loyally stood by their clansman Muḥammad, even though most of them did not accept his cult; threat of retaliation from them, accordingly, prevented any direct personal injury to Muḥammad. The same seems to have held good for most of the better-placed faithful, though some may have suffered considerable loss through financial pressures, for which retaliation was not provided under the Bedouin code of honour.

Two years after the mission was made public, some Muslims (about eighty) began to emigrate to Christian Abyssinia, across the Red Sea, where they could expect (and did find) asylum among monotheists. A few became Christian and stayed there, but most subsequently returned to Mecca or (later) to Medina when Muḥammad was established in that oasis. Their motive was in part to escape from persecution but they may also have been expected to form

a base for some sort of wider plan envisaged by Muhammad.[20] Such a project would be the first instance of Muḥammad's attempting measures on a political plane toward a solution of the dilemmas presented by his becoming a prophet; in any case, the adventure illustrates how quickly his followers were becoming an autonomous group, with its own destinies as such.

Perhaps three years after the mission was made public, the other clans of the Quraysh, failing to persuade the Banû Hâshim to cease protectingMuḥammad, joined in a boycott of the Banû Hâshim, refusing to have commercial relations with them. The Banû Hâshim held out against this for two or three years till there arose sufficient disunity among the Quraysh for the boycott to be given up. But shortly after this, in about 619, Abû-Ṭâlib, Muḥammad's protector, died and Muḥammad's position with the Banû Hâshim became more questionable. At the same time, he lost his wife Khadîjah, who had been a major spiritual support to him. Muḥammad began taking active steps to find a more satisfactory base for his work.

A visit to neighbouring Ṭâ'if proved fruitless; he was abused and driven away. Returning to Mecca, he was able only with difficulty to assure himself protection from families outside the Banû Hâshim (now, it seems, led by his enemy Abû-Lahab) so as to remain provisionally in Mecca. He seems to have been greatly discouraged. He was gratified to feel that a number of jinn (sprites) who happened to be listening as he recited the Qur'ân were converted, and he seems to have made a good deal of a dream vision which he was granted, in which he visited Heaven, or possibly Jerusalem, city of the prophets. (This vision was later greatly elaborated among Muslims, as the *mi'râj*, and given a central place in Muḥammad's legend.) Muḥammad's insistence on such things seems to have scandalized some of his followers and to have contributed to their defection during these years.

He may have regarded his mission, till then, as directed chiefly to his own people, the Quraysh, just as other prophets had been sent to their own people (though at all times any human being who was present was certainly included, for the message was in its nature universal). Clearly, however, most of the Arabs, being pagans and not monotheists, were equally in need of the message, and now he preached to all who would listen at the great fairs in the vicinity of Mecca. In 620, about a year after Khadîjah's death, he met (at 'Aqabah, on the pilgrimage) with a handful of converts from Yathrib (afterwards called Medina), an agricultural oasis about two hundred miles north of Mecca; the next year they returned with a few more and not only declared themselves Muslims but pledged themselves to obey Muḥammad in any wholesome command; in 622 six times as many were at hand to reinforce the pledge, promising Muḥammad and his Meccan followers protection if they came to Medina. In the same year, Muḥammad sent most of his followers, rather more

[20] For possible implications of the migration to Abyssinia, cf. Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, chap. V.2.

than seventy, to move one by one to Medina, and finally went himself. (This move, or 'migration', was called in Arabic the *Hijrah*.)

Pressure against the Muslims had been mounting in the last year or so. There was some sort of effort to prevent Muḥammad's leaving at the last when it was realized what was afoot—the Muslims subsequently, at least, interpreted it as a plot to kill him. Muḥammad and Abû-Bakr, his lieutenant, fled by night and hid in a cave till the search had slackened (away from their protectors at Mecca, but not yet at Medina, they would presumably have been fair game). Then they made the long trip secretly, till at the outskirts of Medina the local converts came to meet them and receive Muḥammad as their chief.

The Ummah achieves autonomy

To the Medinese, such a step was a solution to pressing problems. Medina had evidently been developed or restored as an agricultural oasis (notably raising date palms) by Jewish Arab tribes; apart from their religion, these tribes shared the same culture as the other Arabs, though presumably at least the nucleus had immigrated from farther north, originally being Aramaic-speakers from Syria. With the adoption of Judaism had come sufficient of the Jewish law to provide good order. In recent generations, however, other clans had settled there, still pagan, who had not adopted Judaism. Their Bedouin ethical system of 'honour' had plunged the settled clans into ever more intense feuds; in Muḥammad's time they had lined up in two main tribes, 'Aws and Khazraj, who had come to a deadlock such that no man was safe outside the limits of his own fields. Living among Jewish tribes, even the pagans at Medina had come to recognize and no doubt to respect monotheistic religion. In Muḥammad's message, many saw an opportunity to adopt a monotheistic cult of their own which would at the same time introduce a new type of moral sanction and a neutral leader to represent and apply it as arbiter of the deadlocked quarrels. Thus they added to the public which was proving capable of responding to the Revelation. Even those pagans who were little interested in the new faith could welcome a neutral arbiter to restore peace.[21]

To Muḥammad, the move to Medina was not merely an escape from an untenable immediate position in Mecca. It was an opportunity to build a new order of social life such as the development of his faith had more and more obviously demanded. The cult of Allâh as Creator demanded, in the first instance, a personal devotion to moral purity; but personal purity implied a just social behaviour: generosity to the weak and curbing the licence of the strong.

[21] On conditions in Medina and the relations among Jews and pagans, cf. Wellhausen, 'Medina vor dem Islam', in *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten*, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1889); but his assurance that most of the Jews must have come from Palestine seems based partly on racialist presuppositions. Clearly, conversion to Judaism meant a sharper break with Bedouin tradition than did conversion to Christianity, but descendants of converts were capable of acquiring both settled habits and Talmudic learning.

Moreover, it was fully recognized that a person's moral life is usually less a function of his good resolutions than of the level of actual expectations around him. It must be society and not just individuals that should be reformed. The Qur'ân makes it sufficiently clear that the new way is for everyone, not just for moral heroes, by praising almost as much those who urge others to a virtue as those who practice it themselves. The new life must be lived by a society at large.

This called for more than exhortation to be good; it became clear that Muslims could not rest content to be irrelevant deviants in a society founded on contrary principles. Sooner or later, the challenge of the Qur'ân was bound to require the creation of a just polity as the natural outgrowth and context of the personal purity it required. Obviously, no pagan who did not accept the challenge could have remained neutral to such claims in the long run. Whatever the personal circumstances, the pagan Quraysh could not have tolerated a movement which attacked the principles of their social order and suggested an alternative sort of moral sanction for behaviour and especially for social authority. So long as the Muslims stayed as a minority in Mecca there would have been deadlock at best.

Muḥammad and his followers had been gradually emerging in Mecca as something like a new tribal formation (possibly, on this level, analogous to what happened when the Quraysh had been first gathered by Quṣayy). Each man retained his loyalties to his inherited clan; but (and here Quṣayy's example was departed from) he was coming to have overriding loyalties to the new grouping, based not on family ties but on individual acceptance of the faith which Muḥammad preached. The word Muḥammad used for the new grouping was *Ummah*—a word which he had used of a people to which a prophet had been sent (such as the Meccans), but which now was applied to such of that people as did respond to the prophet and so formed a new community with him. In the negotiations with the Medinese Muslims, Muḥammad claimed explicitly an authority over the religious community which had become increasingly implicit already even among his Meccan followers. He did not yet make the same demands among non-Muslims, of course, but the political autonomy of the Muslims allowed them to establish at least a certain level of social expectations among themselves. Moreover, as *ḥâkim*, judge-arbiter, among even those Medinese who were not Muslims, Muḥammad was able to extend something of the new spirit outside the Ummah proper even before the whole of Medina merged into the Islamic group.

The life of the new Ummah was to be marked by a pervasive new moral tone, derived from the individual's relationship to God, but maintained (as moral standards must be, save perhaps in the case of 'moral athletes') by the expectations prevalent in the group as a whole and given form in their corporate life. The new tone was contrasted to a moral orientation associated with both Bedouin pastoral life and with the settled Bedouin pagans. These had stressed, above all, individual and group pride and point of honour—

pride in birth, pride in one's wealth or prowess, pride which led, when crossed, to an unremitting, pitiless vengefulness; to a passionate and heedless (if sometimes magnificent) pursuit of self-centred, inherently trivial ends. Even those who might prefer a different way of responding to life were dragged into the pattern by the voice of public opinion, urging vengeance as the most practical means of justice, and praising transient delights of drink and sex in which to forget the pettiness and pointlessness of a life which time would sweep away.

To the heedless pettiness of men, which Islam presented as sheer ingratitude (*kufr*) to their Creator, Islam contrasted humility, generosity, and a serious purpose of carrying out the demands of God in a pure life. To the passionate vengefulness of men, Islam contrasted patient restraint and mercifulness. Some of these virtues had, indeed, been recognized and extolled by the wiser among the Bedouin, though humility and restraint in carnal pleasures had not; but the accent in any case had been different. Islam was to reinforce in its community life the godly virtues, provide more just alternatives to the relentless feud, and remove all persuasion to what were newly felt as vices.

The contrast was summed up in key words. The old heedlessness of God was termed *kufr*, 'ingratitude' or 'denial', to be replaced by submission to Him, *islâm;* the old harsh passions were summed up as *jâhiliyyah*, to be replaced by trust and faithfulness to God, *îmân*. (In later times, *kufr* became a theological term for whatever was incompatible with Islam, and *Jâhiliyyah* became a historical term for the age before Islam appeared.)[22] And the new moral order, like the old, was not to be merely a personal ideal but the effective norm of a total, responsible, social environment.

When it was disentangled from the clans at Mecca, and so could form a political unit of its own, the Muslim Ummah at first still took an essentially tribal form. In Medina, Muḥammad was the acknowledged commander of the Muslims, both those of Mecca (called *Muhâjirûn*, 'emigrants') and those of Medina (called *Anṣâr*, 'helpers'). He was also, more generally, arbiter among all the social groups at Medina. This position was established in a document (sometimes rather grandiosely called the 'constitution of Medina') in which the mutual obligations of the adhering clans were set forth, and all Medina was included by way of clan alliances. But at first his primary role lay among the Muslims as such and especially his own Meccans. His Meccans, the Muhâjirûn, lacked resources when they arrived; they became the guests of the Medinese Anṣâr, with certain of whom, to begin with, he paired them as brothers. Almost immediately, he began sending the Muhâjirûn out to raid the trading caravans of the Quraysh.

Raiding was, of course, the normally received procedure whereby the less well-placed Arab tribes recouped their disadvantages from the more fortunately placed. In leaving Mecca, the Muhâjirûn had broken their ties with their own clans there, abandoning claims to protection by them; they now formed, in effect, a clan or tribe of their own; that they should raid (if they could) those with whom they no longer had any agreements was taken for granted. Muḥammad, however, felt the step nevertheless required justification in terms of the new moral orientation. He pointed out therefore that the Quraysh were not merely declining to become Muslims themselves; they were actively opposing the divine order with their persecution of Muslims and their interference with the public practice of Islam. This was not just a private grief of the Muhâjirûn, but a public cause on which the eternal fate of others hung; it was right to fight the Quraysh till they should no longer place obstacles in the way of those who might otherwise become Muslims.

[22] On the relation between the moral tone of the pagan Arabs and Islam, cf. Ignaz Goldziher, 'Muruwwa und Dîn', in his *Muhammedanische Studien*, vol. I (Halle, 1889); Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, chap. III, 3, 4; Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Structure of Ethical Terms in the Koran* (Keio University, 1959).

In particular, there were two outstanding motives for launching the raids, which set them off from the normal Arab raiding. In the first place, they were a means, important if not absolutely necessary, for Muḥammad's own men to gain an independent economic position at Medina, without which the life and social order of the new community there must remain artificial. (Perhaps also such raids, once they became effective, might form an outlet for the passions of the Medinese, debarred henceforth from the old feuding; but it is doubtful if Muḥammad would have acknowledged such a motive as being independently valid.) Secondly, the raids were to humble the pride of the Quraysh, perhaps in anticipation of coming acts of divine displeasure—or even as part of those acts, as it might appear when fighting came to be commanded in the Qur'ân itself. It may have been that Muḥammad already had the aim of ruining their trade and reducing them to a recognition that in Islam they were meeting something bigger than they supposed, with which they must come to terms even to survive in the present life.

The first raids were unsuccessful. The first success was that of a small party which attacked (at Nakhlah, near Mecca) a caravan during a sacred truce month, killing one man and bringing home the booty. It is unclear how far Muḥammad was directly responsible for the violation of the truce month, but he may have anticipated it; the event proved to be a scandal at Medina, which was calmed only by a revelation in the Qur'ân that while violation of the truce was bad, persecution of the faith was worse and justified the violation. Muḥammad then allowed the booty to be accepted. This act deepened the breach between the Muslims and the Quraysh to a breach with the whole of pagan Arab culture, and particularly the Meccan system, of which the truce months were a primary symbol. The primacy of Islam over all old customs was asserted; in effect, no bond or tie of pagan society need hold, in the Islamic community, unless explicitly acknowledged anew within Islam. In the following years this principle was implemented consistently. Whatever crimes a man had been guilty of, even against Islam, when he adopted Islam the slate was wiped clean. And just as a Muslim could not be punished for what had gone before, so he could not profit by attachments with the past: he retained his

own property, indeed, but could inherit nothing from a pagan relative. Thus the Ummah of Islam was proclaimed wholly independent.

Muḥammad's acceptance of the success at Nakhlah despite the qualms of his followers may be thought of as a mark of courageous consistency in which he discerned, without flinching, the complete implications of his mission and carried them through as occasion presented itself. Had he compromised here, he might well have been reducing his Ummah to the status, in practice, of but one more competing tribe within a common pagan moral framework. In the clarity and single-mindedness of aim here displayed surely lay much of his genius. At the same time, the inherent dilemma in Muḥammad's mission found here concrete expression. Through the prophet, transcendent truth was brought into men's and women's lives by being embodied in the work and fortunes of a given human community, which was limited by given circumstances. It could thus take practical effect. But the raid at Nakhlah was not simply a break with a superstitious custom, hallowed by pagan cults but inconsistent with a new wider truth. Since there is no indication that the Muslims had previously declared or implied that they would not respect the truce months, it was also an outright act of treachery which Muḥammad accepted, and perhaps had to accept, as occasion for consummating the moral independence of Islam.[23]

Muḥammad establishes a new polity

The success at Nakhlah seems to have encouraged a large turnout at the next raid, in which many Anṣâr Muslims from Medina also participated. The caravan from Syria which was its object got by safely, but the raiders, some 315 men, found themselves at the wells of Badr face to face with a relieving force from Mecca at least twice their size. Good generalship on Muḥammad's part, and presumably good discipline among the Muslims as well as high enthusiasm, won them a smashing victory. Several leading men of the Quraysh, opponents of Islam, as well as many lesser Meccans were dead or prisoners. Muḥammad regarded the victory of so few, over a numerous foe of such high prestige, as being the result of divine intervention. It seemed to seal the independence of the Muslim community and its ability to survive, and indeed to fulfill some foretaste of the doom with which the Quraysh were threatened. In later years. to have been present at Badr, at the first triumph of Islam as an organized body, was like a patent of nobility. Later converts might be attracted by success, but the men of Badr had been converted when Islam was weak and they had held firm during its leanest years.

Henceforth the other Arabs, especially the nomads, must regard the Muslims as challengers to and potential inheritors of the prestige and the political role of the Quraysh. Muḥammad found himself in a position to attack some Bedouin tribes which proved unfriendly; thus he gained booty and also a freer hand against the Quraysh. And within a year a whole Quraysh caravan had been captured. From then on, a primary activity of the community was raiding and warfare, as its influence (and, later, conversion to Islam itself) was extended. The warfare culminated eventually, but did not end, with the surrender of Mecca itself.

[23] On moral implications of the Nakhlah raid, cf. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford, 1956), chap. I.3; also X.2.But the sacredness of the truce months was surely not merely a matter of superstitious fear of retribution.

Directly after Badr, Muḥammad expelled the Jewish clan of Banû Qaynuqâ' from Medina. This was in part an admission of defeat and a countermeasure thereto. Muḥammad had won his converts among the gentile clans and his first authority was in the gentile sector of Medina. But he had always expected that monotheists, whether Christians or Jews, ought to welcome his message and give him support in his work among the pagans. But just as serious Christians could not accept a timeless monotheism stripped of the Incarnation, so most Jews could not accept a universalism in which their history as the chosen people lost its unique significance. Moreover, Muḥammad's versions of Biblical, Talmudic, and apocryphal Christian stories were too patently incoherent, and sometimes garbled, to win the respect of those who already possessed the older sacred books. There was little to encourage them to hail Muḥammad as prophet even to their pagan neighbours.

When Muḥammad found that the Jews of Medina denied his prophethood and ridiculed his misapprehensions of Biblical stories, he was deeply disappointed. More, he was threatened. As interpreters of monotheism, the Jews had undoubted seniority over the Muslims and were already respected in Medina. As long as they challenged his authority, a single bad turn of fortune might make his position untenable. Together with numerous smaller groups of Jews, there were four important clans which were mostly or entirely Jewish; of these, two held some of the best date groves in the oasis and a third, the Banû Qaynuqâ', comprised the craftsmen and retail tradesmen in the market at the heart of Medina. These three latter clans, at least, were in a sufficiently strong position to hold aloof from Muḥammad's arrangements. Muḥammad took advantage of a fracas between some Muslims and the Banû Qaynuqâ' (in which it chanced that a Muslim had begun the violence). He besieged them in their strongholds till they agreed to leave Medina with their property, but to abandon their arms. (Expulsion or migration of whole clans, either within an oasis or to great distances, had been of quite frequent occurrence in Arabia and at Medina in particular, as an outcome of tension among neighbours.) Numbering perhaps two thousand adults, the Banû Qaynuqâ' migrated to Jewish settlements further north.

The expulsion of the Banû Qaynuqâ' consolidated within Medina the prestige Muḥammad had gained at Badr vis-à-vis the Quraysh and the Arabs at large. He did not leave it at that. From this point on, at least, he was building no longer just a new tribe but a more developed polity, in which both Muslims

and non-Muslims at Medina were to be subsumed on the basis of their common social life. While adherence to his leadership, at least apart from the Muhâjirûn, remained as yet voluntary, and from time to time even some professing Muslims refused to go along with him, his position as general arbiter had taken on weight. He now uncontestedly spoke for Medina as a whole. His chief rival among the Medinese, Ibn-Ubayy, who had tried to intercede for the Banû Qaynuqâ', had been rudely discomfited. Islam, under Muḥammad's leadership, formed henceforth the ruling community in Medina and dissenters found themselves at best tolerated. We do not know when any given provision was inserted into the agreement called the 'constitution of Medina', but it was appropriate to the spirit of this period that it contained a ban on any Muslim's helping an infidel against another Muslim.

Not everyone who now proclaimed himself a Muslim was wholehearted. Ibn-Ubayy became the leader of a group whom Muḥammad called the 'waverers' (*munâfiqûn*, sometimes rendered 'hypocrites'), who gave Muḥammad trouble for several years. But he never gave them a chance to turn against him openly. It was soon expected that all those who had been pagans, at least, would now be Muslims; and Jews were expected to recognize Muslim primacy. Meanwhile, the market place had become vacant, ready to be occupied by Muḥammad's Meccans, who could thus gain a surer economic position.

The new position appeared most clearly in the cult. In the quarrel with the Jews it became clear that Islam not only was distinct from paganism but, even within monotheism, formed an independent religious system, parallel to and distinct from Judaism and Christianity. Whereas up to this point Muḥammad had expected his cult to conform by and large to that of the Jews (for instance, in praying toward Jerusalem and in observing certain fasts), now the Muslim cult was set off markedly. Learning that Abraham was considered the common ancestor of Israelites and of Ishmaelite Arabs, he pointed out that Abraham was faithful to God though he was neither Jewish nor Christian, having lived before either Moses or Jesus. Muḥammad's cult was to be like that of Abraham.

This decision sprang from two principles both very marked in the Qur'ân, which now came into their own. First was the principle of worshipping God alone. Pure religion need be bound by no communal limitations—as Abraham himself was bound by none. Muḥammad proclaimed himself the *ummî* prophet, that is, the prophet of those who had no sacred book—who belonged to none of the established religious communities. This referred in the first instance to his being an Arab. But it carried implications. The Irano-Semitic dilemma of conflicting religious communities, which could become specially clear to the thinking person in that mission field which was Bedouin Arabia, was to receive its solution through a community that rejected the exclusivities of the old communities and went back to the very font of the monotheistic tradition. In principle, one cult was as good as another; wherever one turned his face, the

Qur'ân pointed out, there was God. A cult was instituted only to meet human requirements; what mattered, as the Qur'ân tirelessly stressed, was a person's acceptance of God Himself, not his adherence to anything lesser (e.g. sûrah VI, 160 ff.). This casual attitude toward any particular formulation of cult or law is illustrated in the Qur'ânic assurance that not only earlier revelations were accommodated to their people's needs, but even within the present revelation, God may set aside one verse of the Qur'ân, and its injunctions with it, and then a better will be given in its place.

Yet once instituted, of course, a command could not be ignored by those who adhered to the new community; and to worship God properly, one had to be in a guided community. The independence of the Meccan religious system and the central place in it of the Creator-god Allâh now proved a point of departure for a new interpretation of monotheism that might transcend the communal divisions of the older monotheistic traditions in a concretely practical way. Abraham and Ishmael were naturally presumed to be the founders of the chief shrine of Ishmaelite Arabia, the Ka'bah at Mecca, which was therefore in origin dedicated only to the true God; the tribal fetishes there were subsequent contaminations. One of the sacred stones near the Ka'bah was—then or later—specially dedicated to Abraham (the *Maqâm Ibrâhîm*). The bowings and prostrations of the formal worship, the *ṣalât*, were commonly done at least three times a day in unison, normally at the prayer ground (mosque) at the Prophet's home. Now Muslims were told to perform this worship in the direction not of Jerusalem but of the Ka'bah. They were also to look forward to performing the ḥajj, the annual pilgrimage in the Meccan area, as a ceremony instituted in principle by Abraham. Elements of the cult were derived also, however, from the experience of the new community itself. The month of Ramaḍân, in which the Qur'ân is said to have been first revealed and in which the battle of Badr was certainly won, was likewise instituted as a time of fasting superseding the time of the Jewish fasts. Islam thus became ritually independent of previous monotheisms.

The essentials of the new society were the new relations in it between human beings and God and between one human being and another. But the society was held together by the Prophet; his position was indispensable and unique. The chief of a tribe, in view of his authority as commander in war, and also as responsible for various obligations in maintaining the tribe's position and honour, conventionally received a fourth of the booty taken in a tribal raid. Muḥammad, in a somewhat analogous position, received a fifth of any booty, which he was to use for community purposes such as the relief of the poor or the conciliation of new converts, and over the dispensing of which he had complete authority. Also like some of the greater tribal chiefs, who had numerous wives, Muḥammad was authorized to have numerous simultaneous wives beyond the four to which his followers were limited. Muḥammad seems to have used his marriages to cement political relations, so that this privilege was, like the fifth of the booty, essentially a political one. (Only one of his

wives was a virgin when he married her, 'Â'ishah, and in no case are social and political reasons for a marriage not traceable.)

In harmony with their importance, his wives were to receive special respect from the public. They were to live secluded, receiving their visitors (who were many, on account of their supposed influence with Muḥammad) only from behind a curtain, rather than face to face. After Muḥammad's death they were not to marry again but were to be honoured as mothers of all the faithful. Despite their political significance and the social hedge with which he had to surround them, his wives meant much to Muḥammad personally as well. Their various quarrels produced his gravest personal emotional crises; the trace of more than one of his marital complications is left in the Qur'ân. None of them ever took the place of Khadîjah; in any case, he tried to treat them all on an equal basis without favouritism. But his best-beloved was Abû-Bakr's daughter, 'Â'ishah, whom he married at nine years old and who was always the liveliest of them all. With her he seems always to have unbent. Indeed, despite his special position, Muḥammad seems to have lived a quite simple and modest life without any luxury, by and large accessible and affable with the lowliest, delighting in laughter and in children.

An attack on Muḥammad was felt as an attack on Islam, which he represented. Muḥammad had deeply resented a number of individuals who had abused him publicly, especially in verse. (Poetry was held in great respect by the Arabs, being felt not only as the primary means of building one's own and destroying one's opponent's morale, but even as something of almost magical powers.) By existing Arab custom, Muḥammad owed no obligation to persons with whom he had no treaty. Shortly after the victory at Badr, he encouraged some of his followers to assassinate, among these detractors, a certain man and a woman to whom the assassins were closely related (and on whose account, therefore, they were not subject to blood-feud).

Beginnings of a new society and culture

Supreme within its own territory and spiritually independent, Islam could begin to develop its own social order in earnest. It was scarcely as yet an independent culture in most respects, to be sure; but increasingly many aspects of culture among the Muslims were differentiated in the new social context. This was sometimes a matter of detail. Muslims were forbidden pork (here Bedouin and Jewish feeling seem to have converged) and gaming and intoxicants or at least the imported wine (this was in part a measure of social discipline).[24] Most noticeable was a new system of assuring the security of the

[24] The Bedouin may have had no objection to wild boar meat, but domesticated pig was never suited to pastoralism and probably always had peasant associations. The history of prejudice about animals like the pig and the dog will not be satisfactorily elucidated till we are able to see how probably diverse motives converged and were reinforced by continuing circumstances; circumstances which can include ethnic pride, but cannot include any inherent racial sentiment, too often invoked by scholars at present.

weak against the strong. Feuding among Muslim clans was forbidden and equal penalties strictly proportioned to the offences were substituted, to be exacted under the eye of Muḥammad as God's representative. At the same time, the financially weak were also provided for by the collection of *zakât*, a tax on possessions. This 'alms' tax grew out of a practice of alms-giving for self-purification, *zakât;* it was organized in Medina as the financial basis of group life (along with Muḥammad's fifth of the booty) as well as to serve individual justice: its proceeds were normally used at Muḥammad's discretion, like the fifth of the booty, either for the common cause or for the needs of the poor, the traveller, and others in like case. Both the legally fixed criminal penalties and the centrally distributed alms helped give individuals a status independent of clan associations, and so could foster individualistic culture traits.

Perhaps at the heart of any social structure is its family law. Certainly in the Medina community it was in this field that the most explicit innovations were made; so far as the Qur'ân contains legislation, it largely regards family relationships. The regulations were made piecemeal during the rest of Muḥammad's life, but here again the tendency was persistently toward asserting individual rights on the basis of equality before God. We are not perfectly acquainted with marriage practices among the pre-Islamic pagan Arabs, but it is clear they varied greatly. In some cases the man acquired the woman very nearly as property and brought her to live with his own clan; in some cases the man seems to have retained but a casual relation to his woman, who remained completely dependent on her parental clan.[25] What dignity either a man or a woman had in the family relationship depended on status at birth, family circumstances, and wealth.

At the centre of Muḥammad's family arrangements were the Qur'ânic rules on marriage, which universalized one existing type of Arab marriage, with modifications. The nuclear family—man, wife, and children—was stressed as a self-sufficient unit, with every marriage given equal status at law. This was largely achieved through strengthening the position of the individual adult male. The man retained wide authority over the wife to the exclusion of either his family or hers. The children were to be the husband's, who was responsible for maintenance of wife and children. Inheritance was to be primarily within the immediate family, not diffused through the clan. The degrees of relationship within which marriage could not take place were stressed and even multiplied—with the effect that it was less easy for a married couple to be absorbed by multiple ties within a wider household; thus relationship by fosterage

[25] Watt has some suggestive, but not altogether proven, theses on the meaning of traces of matrilocal practices at Medina, *Muhammad at Medina*, chap. VIII.2. For a more general discussion of family law, see J. Wellhausen, 'Die Ehe bei den Arabern', in *Nachrichten von der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, no. 11 (1893), pp. 431–81. Corrections by Gertrude H. Stern, *Marriage in Early Islam* (London, 1939), are not always reliable; in particular, her sampling could provide little evidence for absence of polygyny, which is everywhere rare save among the wealthy.

(many of the Quraysh had their children nursed by foster mothers, that is, wet-nurses) was made equal to relationship by blood. At the same time, the integrity of the natural family was protected against the introduction of fictive relationships which might be independent of whether children had been reared together: adoptive relationship, which the Arabs frequently created between adults, was allowed no status at law. If a man formed more than one sexual partnership—as sometimes happened among the wealthiest Arabs, as elsewhere—each partnership must be given equal status with the first, up to the number of four; each marriage, that is, must have the same tight-knit character. More casual unions (with free women) were strictly forbidden, save possibly in special cases.

At the same time, wives and daughters were given a stronger position than they had had in those Arab marriages on which the Muslim form of marriage was modeled. In Bedouin society the man had often given the bride's family a 'bride-wealth', *mahr*, when taking his bride. In Mecca this had often been given to the bride herself and this became the Muslim law. A substantial mahr helped assure the woman's position. Under Islam, part of the male prerogative as provider for the family was the right of divorce (though women also might —at least later—sometimes initiate divorce); but if a man divorced he could not regain his mahr. Nor could he make use of his wife's property during the marriage, but must maintain her from his own resources. Both wives and daughters inherited from their men, though sons, having to maintain new families of their own, were given twice as much as daughters. The insistence on the personal dignity of every individual, male or female, was illustrated in the prohibition of infanticide, which had borne especially on infant girls.

In one case Muḥammad and the Qur'ân permitted an inequality of status in the family to continue, though mitigated. As everywhere till recently, men and women could own other men and women as property, though even such slaves were allowed certain rights. Muslims were not permitted to enslave Muslims, but outsiders could be enslaved. A man was permitted, in particular, to take his female slaves as concubines, despite Muḥammad's general disapproval of other than strict marital unions. Slaves were for the most part war captives, commonly children who had been sold far away from their tribes and so had no family when they grew up except that of their owners. Since in Arabia no one could well exist without family and clan, slaves could not usually expect to separate from their owners altogether; what they could look to was an improvement of their status within the owner's family. This was encouraged; the freeing of slaves was suggested as a common penance for breaches of duty; then the ex-slave would be freely attached to his former owner. But Muḥammad did not compromise the principle of the solid nuclear family by encouraging slaves to be adopted into it and receive the full right of sons.

One further aspect of family law received special attention in the Qur'ân, personal etiquette. The privacy of the home was to be respected and a modest decorum was to be observed by both men and women outside the home.

Though the rules laid down in the Qur'ân were not very precise, they served to support respect for individuals in their independent private lives. After Muḥammad's time, however, these rules became the starting point of a social code of very different import.

The Qur'ân and the community experience

As the Muslim community developed, the character of the Qur'ânic messages altered. The earlier portions of the Qur'ân commonly have an ecstatic character, suggesting with great beauty the solemn majesty of the divine and pointing up the awesomeness of the Revelation itself. These lyric solemnities gave way to exalted but often rather prosaic exhortation and commentary. The Qur'ân served at once as the inspiration of Muslim life and the commentary on what was done under that inspiration; its message transcended any particular circumstances yet at the same time served as a running guide to the community experiences, often down to seemingly petty details. It was filled with repeated exhortations to support the community efforts, notably the military excursions, and with regulations of community procedure, especially in regard to marriage. Even particular crises were sometimes resolved by decisions on disputed points or justifications of lines of action. At one point, Muḥammad's best-beloved wife, 'Â'ishah, was accused of infidelity to him by a faction hostile to her, in circumstances where no judgment, pro or con, could rest on other than an estimate of her character. After a time of agonized doubt, the Qur'ân pronounced in her favour. But at the same time it brought a rule requiring four witnesses in such an accusation—and upbraiding those who had spread the cruel accusation without proof. A factional episode was written into the Qur'ân: and with it, moral observations on the episode which carried beyond it.

The Qur'ân did not generally initiate social policies as such. Here it was left to Muḥammad personally to act. The 'constitution of Medina', which settled the position of the several elements in Medina when Muḥammad established himself there, was the work of Muḥammad, not of the Qur'ân. Time and again, crucial decisions were left to Muḥammad in his own person. Even at the crisis of Ḥudaybiyah when, as we will see, the Quraysh stopped a much heralded pilgrim expedition to Mecca, and Muḥammad's wisdom was doubted by his closest followers, the Qur'ân did not intervene to dictate a course of action. It concerned itself especially with individuals and with their individual consciences. For instance, it did not order the burdensome expedition to Mu'tah (toward Syria), which most Muslims would have liked to resist. But it dealt individually with the cases of three slackers who had failed to join the expedition despite being sincere Muslims. Nevertheless, it steadily supported Muḥammad's policies, solving problems that arose out of them—for instance, the distribution of booty—and above all it urged the supreme importance of loyalty to the common cause as this was determined by Muḥammad.

Throughout the Qur'ân, the transcendent point of reference in all this human confusion was kept vividly before the mind, and a tone of grandeur was maintained. In the whole monotheistic tradition, on its more populistic side, ethics tended to be thought of in terms of the market—thus the protection of orphans was, in the first instance, protection of their property; hence the Qur'ân freely uses market terminology—partly by way of familiar analogy (the faithful strikes a good bargain with God), but partly by way of introducing the transcendent inextricably into daily life. But the manner of using mundane references ennobled them. Even when the question of 'Â'ishah's adultery is discussed, for instance, the very wording of the Qur'ân —word order and proportion, overtones, sonority—combines to keep the discussion on such a level that the dignity carries the sordidness with it, rather than the reverse; a quality that hardly can come through in translation. The wholeness of its vitality gives the Qur'ân a certain self-sufficiency. As the embodiment of an independent Islam, the Qur'ân needed no supplementing from the older revelations. It became a many-sided, vivid, and intimate possession mirroring the spiritual hopes and needs of each of the faithful and above all bringing to ever new focus their common destiny as it unfolded.

Because of its intimate interaction with the day-to-day destinies of the community, the Qur'ân cannot be read as a discursive book, for abstract information or even, in the first instance, for inspiration. The sequence of its bits and pieces is notoriously often lacking in clearly logical order or development. Even the stories it recounts come not as consecutive narratives but rather in the form of reminders of episodes which are often presumed to be known to the audience—reminders which point up the implications of the episode for faith with little concern otherwise for continuity—as if he who did not know the story should ask someone to tell it him before approaching the Qur'ân's commentary on it. Hence many non-Muslims have found it a jumbled and incoherent mass, ridden with repetitions, and have been at a loss to fathom why Muslims regard it as supremely beautiful. It must not be read through but rather be participated in: it must be recited, as an act of self-dedication and of worship. The Qur'ân presents at every point one great challenge: to accept the undertaking of faith. To recite it truly is to be accepting and affirming that undertaking. Then its beauty can be responded to line by line and one will delight in the juxtaposition, whatever the immediate subject, of all its main themes within any given passage. The repetitious phrases remind one of the total context in which a given message must be understood: in even a small part of the Qur'ân, the act of worship can be complete.

By and large, the Qur'ân did not emphasize the mysterious or the exceptional after the earliest period. It never lost the sense of majesty, indeed. Even the relatively late 'light verses' of the Sûrah (Chapter) of Light, revealed at Medina, illustrate an intense aspect of Muḥammad's piety: they liken God to an ethereal, supernally pure Light in images which can suggest a true mystical experience. Yet the dominant tone of Muḥammad's piety was to suffuse everyday life with a powerful sense of transcendently divine requirements. In the same Sûrah of Light, side by side with the most lyrical descriptions of divine luminosity and of the desperate state of those who have lost divine guidance, come simple exhortations, 'Perform the ṣalât, pay the zakât, and obey the Messenger; perhaps so you will find mercy. Do not think that those who are ungrateful [to God] can frustrate [Us] on the earth; their sheltering place is the Fire, a bad destination'. And then immediately come details to encourage propriety in the household—bringing a sober, sensible discipline to a community of ordinary people: 'You who are faithful, have those who are in your possession [slaves] and those who have not reached puberty ask you leave at three times [before coming in]: before the dawn ṣalât, and when you take off your clothes at midday, and after the evening ṣalât, three times of privacy [lit., nakedness] for you. Neither you nor they are at fault, apart from then, when going about among yourselves. So God makes clear to you [His] signs. And God is knowing, wise.'

In the opening sûrah of the Qur'ân, the Fâtiḥah, we find a typically sober expression of the community's reverent hope and fear of God:

> In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: Praise belongs to God, Lord of all being; the Merciful, the Compassionate; Master of Judgment Day. Thee we serve, on Thee we call for help. Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom Thou art bounteous to, not those whom anger falls on, nor those who go astray.

Muḥammad has been called 'the prophet armed'. This scarcely distinguishes him from a number of other prophets, beginning with Moses. It is more helpful to say that he was the prophet of the Ummah, of the confessional community. The religious community had moved increasingly toward becoming the framework of all high culture between Nile and Oxus. Despite his rejection of the ultimacy of any one community's law—or perhaps because of the creative freedom which this insight allowed him in building a new and purer community form, it was Muḥammad's achievement to fulfill this communal tendency at least in a single instance. His community at Medina formed nearly the total framework of culture and society there. But the regional tendency could be thus fulfilled at all only because Muḥammad's community was not designed simply to redeem the elect from the world, leaving to the Devil those who failed to respond to its vision. It was designed to transform the world itself through action in the world.

But such a vision led inevitably to the sword. When those whose interests will suffer by reform also wield power, maintaining jointly sufficient force to put down any individual objections, reform will require changing the basis of power. In the twentieth century, Gândhî has brought to the fore methods of creative non-violence for producing basic changes in social power. But short

of these methods, a serious intention of social reform has commonly implied at least readiness on the part of the reformers to use physical compulsion to meet and overcome the compulsion used by those already in power. That is, it has implied readiness to wage war—and to commit all the violence and deceit this necessarily entails.

It is not just a Christian squeamishness, I think, that points to Muḥammad's military measures as a central problem in his prophethood. Every virtue carries with it its own characteristic defects, every perception of truth is accompanied by its own temptations to falsehood. In any tradition, greatness is in part to be measured by success in overcoming the peculiar failings which necessarily accompany the peculiar excellences of the tradition. Christianity has its own pitfalls. A peculiar test of Islam lies in how Muslims can meet the question of war. In the loyalty and risk of warfare, a man used to find the supreme virtue of dedication to a goal beyond himself to the point of readiness to give up his life. But warfare—apart from the acts of individual injustice it necessarily involves (since individuals are treated as elements in a mass)—is at the same time the supreme expression of that claim to exclusive validity for one's own position, which must be fatal to the open search for truth. Such a claim to exclusivity has been, indeed, a standing temptation of all the monotheistic communities. Muḥammad's prophethood, in fulfilling the monotheistic tendency toward a total religious community, at the same time left his community confronted with that temptation to a spirit of exclusivity that went with any vision of a total community and that received appropriate expression in warfare. The resulting problems came to form a persistent theme of Muslim history.

III

The Early Muslim State, 625–692

Muḥammad had created a new local polity, founded on his prophetic vision. But almost immediately that polity took on far-reaching international dimensions. Very soon it was contesting power within Arabia not only with the Quraysh but with both the Byzantine and the Sâsânian empires. Having through these contests, made itself a general Arab polity, in the succeeding two generations it extended its sphere over the neighbouring lands in monumental struggles between the Muslim Arabs and the two imperial powers. These the Arabs replaced, forming an established empire and organizing in Arab and Islamic terms the life of the whole region from Nile to Oxus as well as much of the west Mediterranean basin. The campaigns which created the Arab empire were epic achievements.

But decisive struggles were equally required among the Arabs themselves at each step in the formation of the empire. Only so could what started as a loose association in the Ḥijâz, built around a charismatic individual, be transformed into a massive and permanent state administering a complex agrarianate civilization. At every turn, crucial decisions were made determining the character which the Islamic polity was to take for the future. Ultimately, this character, in turn, determined what impact Islam was to have on the society it had conquered. It was the internal development which ensured that the conquests should have any permanent significance.

Muḥammad builds an Arab commonwealth between the Byzantine and Sâsânian empires

While Muḥammad was creating a new social order at Medina, he was also actively extending his influence beyond his chosen oasis. Indeed, it was this militancy that both made possible and, at least in some measure, formed the character of the Medina society. As can be seen from the chronology of Muḥammad's lifetime, once he was established at Medina decisive events followed one another very quickly. The relatively slow preparation at Mecca bore fruit with great rapidity, first at Medina itself and then at Mecca and in all Bedouin Arabia.

The Quraysh were duly alarmed at the position Muḥammad had achieved at Medina after Badr. It was clear that Muḥammad might possibly ruin their

Chronology of Muḥammad's Lifetime

Events in Muḥammad's Life	Related Events
?570 Birth of Muḥammad	**?575** Sâsânians occupy the Yemen, expelling Abyssinians
	579 Death of Khusraw Nûshîrvân, greatest Sâsânî monarch, leaving his empire at war with Romans
?580 Confederacy of the Fudûl formed in Mecca to counterbalance more powerful clans	**580** Ghassânîs, Byzantine-sponsored Arabs, burn Ḥîrah, capital of Sâsânî-sponsored Lakhmid Arab kingdom in the Iraq desert
?585–590 War of Fijâr—Quraysh involved in a breach of a sacred month in fighting Bedouin	**582–602** Reign of Mauritius, Roman emperor, who bolsters the crumbling empire; brings the Ghassânîs in Syrian desert under more direct control
?590— 'Uthmân b. Ḥuwayrith attempts (in vain) to lead Mecca under Byzantine paramountcy	**589–628** Reign of Khusraw Parviz, Sâsânî monarch
?595 Muḥammad marries Khadîjah; four daughters from this marriage	**591** After a revolt, Khusraw is restored by the Romans, with whom he makes peace
	602 Lakhmid Arab kingdom put under control of a Sâsânî resident; soon after, it breaks up
	602–610 Phocas, incompetent general, overthrows Mauritius and is attacked by Khusraw
610 (or earlier) Muḥammad has first revelation	**610–641** Reign of Heraclius, who reorganizes Roman empire
	?611 Day of Dhû Qâr: an Arab tribal group defeats a Sâsânian force near Ḥirah
613 (or earlier) First public preaching	**612–614** Sâsânians occupy all Syria with aid of Jewish uprisings, remove the "True Cross" from Jerusalem to Sâsânian capital
615 (or earlier) Emigration of some Muslims to Abyssinia	**615** Sâsânians occupy Anatolia as far as Chalcedon opposite Constantinople
616–619 (or earlier) Boycott of the Banû Hâshim	
?617 Battle of Bu'âth at Yathrib (Medina)—stalemate between 'Aws and Khazraj groups	
?619 Death of Khadîjah and Abû-Ṭâlib; Muḥammad seeks support in Ṭâ'if	**619** Sâsânians occupy Egypt
621 First agreement at 'Aqabah with Medinan converts	
622 Larger agreement at 'Aqabah, and Hijrah to Medina	**622–625** Heraclius invades Sâsânian realm via the Armenian highlands
624 Expedition of Nakhlah, first bloodshed; Battle of Badr, Muslim victory against odds; Qaynuqâ' Jews expelled from Medina	
625 Battle of Uḥud: Quraysh fail to suppress Medina despite a victory; Jews of al-Naḍîr expelled	
626 First expedition to Dûmat al-Jandal, between Syria and the Iraq	**626** Avars from across the Danube, cooperating with Sâsânians, besiege Constantinople unsuccessfully
627 Meccans besiege Medina (campaign of al-Khandaq, the Ditch); Qurayẓah Jews are massacred	**627** Heraclius campaigns in Mesopotamia
628 Treaty of Ḥudaybiyah: truce with Quraysh; Khaybar Jews are subjugated	**628** Heraclius is victorious near Ctesiphon, Sâsânian capital, and Khusraw Parviz is assassinated; peace is made (status quo ante)
629 Peaceful pilgrimage to Mecca; first expedition to Mu'tah, toward Ghassân territory on Syrian border, following Sâsânian evacuation	**629** Sâsânians evacuate former Roman provinces; Romans refuse to renew subsidy to Ghassân in Syrian desert; plague carries off Khusraw's son—thereupon, 629–632, numerous claimants, including two women, enthroned in Sâsânian empire
630 Muslims occupy Mecca; defeat Bedouin at Ḥunayn; temporarily abandon siege of Ṭâ'if; massive expedition to Tabûk south of Syria, against Ghassân	**630** Heraclius restores the "True Cross" to Jerusalem
631 Deputations from many parts of Arabia accepting Islam, including Ṭâ'if and the Sâsânî-connected Yemen	
632 Muḥammad's "farewell" pilgrimage; Musaylimah appears as prophet in Yamânah in central Arabia; Muḥammad's death	**632** Yazdagird III succeeds to the Sâsânian throne

trade with Syria (and therefore with the Yemen as well); discredit them among the Bedouin, on whose respect their whole system depended; and make their position in barren Mecca untenable. The following year they organized a major campaign against Medina. They collected all available Meccan resources for the expedition. Arrived at the Medina oasis, they set about cutting the new grain, standing in the ear, and so forced the Medinese to abandon the strongholds to which they were inclined to retire and to come out to a pitched battle. Muḥammad took a strong position against a hill, Uḥud, at the northern side of the oasis. (Some of the 'waverers' preferred to sit the battle out, even so.) Muslim tradition has it that what promised to be a victory was changed to defeat because some of Muḥammad's men, posted to guard the flank, broke away against his orders to join in the plundering. A Meccan cavalry captain called Khâlid saw the opening and turned the tide. Muḥammad himself was wounded, but he held his ground and became the centre of a rally at the hill.

The Quraysh were overjoyed at their victory. Their women had followed the army to encourage it, as was common on major occasions, and they celebrated the victory after their fashion. Indulging in unusual excess, Hind, wife of the leader, Abû-Sufyân, tore the liver from the body of the fallen Ḥamzah, Muḥammad's uncle and an early convert, and bit into it; for Ḥamzah, one of the heroes at Badr, had there killed her father.

With the Muslim army still partially intact, however, and with some forces in Medina not yet engaged, the Quraysh evidently did not feel strong enough to attack the Medinese strongholds; they withdrew with some restoration of prestige but without subduing Muḥammad.[1] Muḥammad took advantage of their departure to exile a second Jewish clan, the Banû Naḍîr, whom he suspected of hostile designs; when they refused to leave on the same terms as the Banû Qaynuqâ', retaining ownership of their palm groves, he besieged their strongholds and forced them to leave and forfeit their palm groves also. Outside Medina, Muḥammad assured himself of the co-operation or at least neutrality of any tribal groups who stood to gain by friendliness with Medina, and he continued his raiding.

Two years later, when it became clear that Muḥammad was becoming stronger rather than weaker, the Quraysh made a still greater effort. They summoned all the Bedouin allies still left them, adding that strength to the full local strength of Mecca. They thus admitted that Meccan strength by itself could not put down Muḥammad. The campaign had to be decisive, or even the potential ultimate strength of the Quraysh would prove insufficient and prestige might be irrecoverably lost. The cumbrous coalition this time arrived

[1] Frants Buhl, *Muhammeds Liv* (Copenhagen, 1903), p. 251 (p. 256 of the German translation), suggests that the failure of the Quraysh to follow up Uḥud resulted from their lack of statesmanly vision, which let them be satisfied with formal vengeance for Badr. The case is conjectural, but in view of the leadership which some of the same Quraysh later took in major Muslim conquests, W. Montgomery Watt's analysis of the event followed here, is more convincing. Similar dilemmas arise in interpreting many events of Muḥammad's life.

later, after harvest, and the Medinese could not be lured from the more built-up part of the oasis and their strongholds there. To neutralize the Meccan and Bedouin cavalry (the farmers of Medina had few horses), Muḥammad had a ditch dug across the more vulnerable sectors. For about a month the ditch was successfully defended in a series of skirmishes and the fighting was restricted to what could be done on foot. Then some of the Bedouin were persuaded to abandon the Quraysh, and the whole company faded away. Muḥammad's blockade of Meccan trade was confirmed. From this point on, the Quraysh had defensively to await Muḥammad's moves.

The one Jewish clan in Medina that still resisted Islam and Muḥammad's leadership, the Banû Qurayẓah, had remained neutral during the defence of the ditch but had negotiated with the Quraysh. The exiled Jewish clans had been very active in supporting the Bedouin coalition in favour of the Quraysh. When the Quraysh departed, Muḥammad attacked the Banû Qurayẓah, refused to allow them to depart into exile like the Banû Naḍîr, and insisted on unconditional surrender. In Arab expectations (as among many ancient peoples), when enemy captives were taken, the women and children were enslaved but adult males were killed or held for ransom, as they were not dependable as slaves. Muḥammad now allowed no ransom but insisted that all the men, about six hundred, be killed.

Muḥammad had been able to set up a new moral order in Medina and had been able to defend it against the Quraysh attacks. But even so it was not self-sufficient. In a society where the Bedouin set the moral norms of all, a single oasis could not long maintain, by itself, quite contrary standards. More specifically, Mecca might for now be neutralized; but so long as the Meccan system still stood on its pagan foundations, any other system in the area was precarious. If Muḥammad was to create a totally responsible moral environment for his Muslims, he must Islamize the Meccan system itself. Consciously or not, what he proceeded to do would be sure to have that result—and more.

Muḥammad's first public preaching had taken place in the midst of a war between the Sâsânian empire and the Roman—a war in which at that time Syria was being occupied by the Sâsânians. The occupation was a major calamity for the Byzantines: not only was the territory devastated by the armies as they occupied it, but large numbers of the most crucial personnel were deported to old Sâsânian territory—for instance, many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Even beyond Syria, Constantinople itself was besieged. For the Quraysh, the occupation and devastation put in question their trade, of course, but also their neutrality. What had been a strong but distant empire had now moved closer—both in the Yemen and in Syria. What Muḥammad had in mind we cannot know, but if all his expeditions that now followed had been as successful as were those against the Quraysh, he would have been gathering into his system not only the elements which had gone to make up the Meccan system, but also the Arabs at the northern and southern ends of the main Meccan trade route—taking them away from either Abyssinian or Sâsânian or

Byzantine control and aligning them with the trading cities of the Ḥijâz. If this alignment had in fact succeeded, it would have created a power from Syria to the Yemen which might conceivably have defied both Byzantines and Sâsânians, even if the latter continued to hold the main part of Syria.

From his base in Medina, and presumably building upon the ties of alliance that already existed between various Medinese clans and some of the neighbouring Bedouin tribes, Muḥammad had been systematically building up Bedouin connections to rival those of the Quraysh. If not a full allegiance to Islam, the Bedouin accepted at least alliance with the Muslims and some recognition of Muḥammad's leadership. This was accomplished partly by direct conversion; partly, when some anti-Muslim act gave occasion, by punitive raiding (in parties ranging from a dozen to several hundred). But mostly it was by diplomacy. Muḥammad played on differences between factions in a clan or a tribe as well as offering the more direct advantages that might come from the friendship and perhaps the arbitration of a neutral Medina and, later, from sharing in the Muslim raids. Thus the system of security among clans, which he had built in Medina, was extended into considerable territory beyond the oasis.

The setback at Uḥud had not long interrupted this policy. Gradually it became clear that Muḥammad was aiming at converting all accessible Arabs to his faith, not merely those who had had links to the Quraysh; or at least at tying them to his society by bonds that would assure peace and security among all the Arabs, such as would be congenial to the new Islamic ideals; and most especially the Arabs to the north—toward Syria. The year after Uḥud, a Muslim expedition into the Syrian desert underlined his interest in the Syrian Arabs. Gaining them over would mean, in the first instance, disrupting the Meccan trade with Syria. But there was more. The tribes in that direction had been accustomed to varying degrees of Byzantine political influence, many becoming more or less Christian as well. Since Syria had passed under Sâsânian administration, the Sâsânian-Byzantine rivalry seemed ended in favour of the Sâsânians. Muḥammad, however, did not believe the Sâsânian victory was final. In the Qur'ân, their subsequent defeat was predicted at the very moment of their victory. (In 622, in fact, Heraclius had invaded the Sâsânian empire through the Armenian highlands; by 625, the year of Uḥud, he was ready to make a full push to the heart of the empire, where, indeed, by 628 he was entirely successful. He forced the Sâsânians to restore the status quo ante.) But meanwhile, Muḥammad's systematic efforts in the direction of Syria suggest that he was hoping ultimately not only to replace the Quraysh in the central Ḥijâz, but also (outbidding the Sâsânians) to replace Byzantium, and its Christian allegiance, among the Arabs further north.

In Medina, after the Meccan failure before the ditch, Muḥammad presided without open opposition over a society of Muslims, with a certain number of Jews remaining in a more or less autonomous dependent relation to the various Muslim clans. Among the tribes outside Medina, most were pagan and were

increasingly required to become Muslims as a condition of entering into league with Muḥammad and into his security system. But, especially on the way to Syria, many were more or less Christian, and in the oases most were Jewish. From these allegiances there was little conversion. Many of the oasis dwellers, who had been shown to be incorrigibly inimical, were reduced to dependence by military expeditions, beginning in the year following the defence of the ditch, and were forced to turn over part of their crops henceforth to Medina. In contrast, some Christian-oriented Bedouin tribes who were willing to work with Muḥammad were accorded, it seems, a status as equal allies. Yet Muḥammad was always acknowledged as commander of the joint enterprises.

Accordingly, Muḥammad's society came to include both Muslims and non-Muslims in various degrees of membership. It had long since ceased to be just a new tribe of the faithful, or even a local voluntary association. It was becoming a complex and extensive society of heterogeneous elements, more fully organized than had been the Meccan system (both religiously and politically); the political structure which Muḥammad was building for it was by now clearly a state, like the states in the nations round about Arabia, with an increasingly authoritative government, which could no longer be ignored with impunity. Muḥammad sent out envoys, who taught the Qur'ân and the principles of Islam, collected the zakât, and presumably arbitrated disputes so as to keep the peace and prevent feuding. The Muslims of Medina thus undertook to bring into being throughout much of the Ḥijâz, and even beyond it, a way of living which should be just and godly. They depended fundamentally, to be sure, on the willingness of a majority to accept the system for the sake of its more immediate benefits in peace among themselves and strength against rivals outside. But the ideal was to be established whether with or without the active co-operation of the various tribes.

Mecca is taken

Such a system could not, however, well be completed or even survive without including Mecca and exploiting the trade route between Syria and the Yemen: without actually replacing the Meccan system. In 628, toward the end of his sixth year in Medina, Muḥammad marched with perhaps a thousand or more men to Mecca with the stated aim of taking part in the annual ḥajj pilgrimage. After tense negotiations at Ḥudaybiyah outside Mecca, he signed a treaty with the Quraysh: the Muslims would withdraw this year (it took all Muḥammad's charisma to hold his men to this renunciation), but the following year the Quraysh would evacuate their own city long enough to allow the Muslims to make the pilgrimage without hostile contact. Temporarily, at least, the Muslims would control even the Meccan shrines. The treaty could seem highly favourable to the Quraysh: Muḥammad allowed them a ten-year truce, during which their trade would be unhindered. But the Quraysh had to permit their

Bedouin allies to leave them and join Muḥammad—which, indeed, some of them promptly did. Given the atmosphere of high prestige that Muḥammad already had, his tribal system in the Ḥijâz was, in effect, tacitly being accorded Quraysh approval; and the old Meccan system was being allowed to lapse. Yet in the negotiations Muḥammad had demonstrated a friendly, even generous attitude to Mecca. The Quraysh could be assured that they would hold a high position in his system if they should enter it.

In the year following Ḥudaybiyah, Muḥammad completed his subjugation of certain major Ḥijâz oases. The pilgrimage was duly made as arranged. On the reoccupation of Syria by the Byzantines in 629, he sent a major expedition (3000 men) to Mu'tah at the southern tip of Syria, which made a show of force.

Then in 630, in Muḥammad's eighth year at Medina, Muḥammad interpreted a skirmish between some Bedouin allies of the Quraysh and of the Muslims as a breach of the treaty by the Quraysh. Collecting all his Bedouin allies, he marched to Mecca with an enormously increased host—some ten thousand men. After the death of many leading men at Badr, Abû-Sufyân (of the Umayyad clan) had become the most prominent leader among the Quraysh. Since the breach of the truce, he had evidently been attempting to arrange some settlement by personal negotiation; now he came to Muḥammad's camp, reluctantly became a Muslim, and returned to Mecca announcing that Muḥammad would grant a general amnesty if he were permitted to enter the town as master. The Quraysh agreed. There was little resistance when Muḥammad marched in. He received the peaceful submission of almost all his old enemies; a handful were proscribed, chiefly for public insults against him in verse.

The Muslims had now inherited the position in Arabia of the Quraysh. The Quraysh immediately joined Muḥammad in an expedition against those Bedouin who still resisted, and they were so generously rewarded out of the spoils that Muḥammad's older followers were inclined to complain. Most of the Bedouin were forced to submit very soon, and submission now meant full acceptance of Islam. The idols, sacred stones, and shrines of godlings in Mecca and in all the areas dependent on Mecca were destroyed. Before long, Ṭâ'if, Mecca's rival and partner as a trading city, which had at first successfully resisted a siege, found itself isolated and forced to submit likewise.

The year after the taking of Mecca is known as the year of deputations. Representatives from tribes all over the Ḥijâz and Najd arrived to come to some understanding with the new power. In some cases, whole tribes were ready to adopt Islam. Often just one faction within a tribe seems to have come seeking support against its rivals. There were a few deputations from almost every part of Arabia, even areas remote from the Ḥijâz such as the Baḥrayn mainland and 'Umân. An important part of the Yemen, where Sâsânian control seems to have become weak during the wars, submitted, notably the Christian town Najrân; as monotheists, the people of Najrân were

permitted to acknowledge the political control of Muḥammad without abandoning religious allegiance to their own prophet, Jesus.

The tribes toward Syria in the northwest, however, were mostly still unready to submit; after the Sâsânian defeat, they seem to have renewed their ties with Byzantium. Muḥammad seems to have been more concerned about them than about any of the others and his remaining military efforts were mostly directed against them. From the time of the Sâsânian withdrawal, those who submitted to Muḥammad were given very good terms, while those who refused had heavy tribute laid on them when they were overwhelmed. A year after taking Mecca, Muḥammad led his largest expedition, perhaps 30,000 men, against the Banû Ghassân, the chief defenders of Byzantine interests on the Syrian frontier, with indecisive results.

At the next ḥajj pilgrimage to Mecca, those Arabs who remained pagan were forbidden to appear thenceforth. Then in 632 Muḥammad made the pilgrimage in person, establishing the forms of the pilgrimage which were to hold in Islam. In the Islamic system, as in the Meccan system, the pilgrimage had a prominent place; but in being Islamized, its cult was more sharply focused. It was intertribal no longer because it assembled tokens from all the tribes but because its cult far transcended any tribe—even the Quraysh. Though observances at several secondary places were retained, these were all made to depend upon the primary visit to the Ka'bah, the house of Allâh founded by Abraham and Ishmael. The Muslims kissed the Black Stone in the corner of the Ka'bah no longer as embodying some godling, but as a symbolic act of allegiance to God, who had sent both Abraham and Muḥammad to guide mankind.

A few months later, in the midst of equipping another expedition toward Syria, Muḥammad was taken with illness and died in the arms of 'Â'ishah. He was buried at the spot where he had died.

The genesis of a new regional culture

The period that followed was naturally of supreme importance in forming the Islamicate civilization. But our interest in it here is for the elements going to form a civilization which in itself did not exist till later, rather than for the general cultural life of the time in itself. Throughout the period of genesis, before and for a time after Muḥammad, the mainstream of religious, artistic, intellectual, and commercial life in the region from Nile to Oxus continued to reflect the ascendancy of earlier cultural allegiances. In the light of Islamicate cultural developments, it is only a limited range of what was happening, in all this period, which stands out as specially pregnant for us. Within this range we often include events equally significant for their own cultural setting as for Islamicate development: thus certain evolutions in the pre-Islamic Roman and Sâsânian empires, in whose territories the Islamicate civilization developed, were decisive under Islam also. But sometimes, though we exclude much that