Christian Influences in Early Islam

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BY the process of conquest and assimilation of subject peoples Islam itself was not unaffected. It went through a period of development and consolidation. I want in this lecture to indicate some of the ways in which Christianity affected that development. It will have to be done very generally. I take the three lines of Popular Influence, Theology, and the Transmission of Greek Philosophy.

The great influx of Christian converts to Islam, which took place in the end of the first and the beginning of the second century of the Hijra, naturally brought Christian popular ideas with it. These converts did not entirely change their spirit by changing the name of their religion. It has been even asserted that it was they who brought into Islam the spirit of partisanship and bigotry to which they themselves had been so long accustomed. Of that it would be unfair to lay the whole or even the main blame upon them. Islam in the beginning was tolerant in a sense. So long as the Christians submitted and paid the tribute they were not very much molested, and even enjoyed a considerable amount of liberty. But that was because the Omayyad Caliphs and Governors were not so much religious leaders as worldly rulers. As the religious system took deeper hold, Islam would probably of itself have developed a stricter spirit. But these Christian converts must have brought with them much that belonged to their former faith. The collections of Moslem Traditions contain many stories and sayings which are evidently of Biblical and Christian origin. It was natural that the early Moslems should show keen interest in the Bible, and their discussions with Christians would help to make them familiar with the contents of Scripture. Still, I think it was by way of popular importation that much of the Christian material in the Traditions came.

These collections of Traditions contain a great mass of material true and false, sober sense mingled with wildest fancy. Islam began as a theocracy, guided directly by Muhammad in the name of God. When he died that source of guidance was removed. The Qur'an ceased to be delivered. It remained only to be collected. As prophet, Muhammad had no successor. The Shi'a indeed regard the divine light which dwelt in Muhammad as having been transmitted to his descendants of the house of Ali. But according to the orthodox view, prophecy died with Muhammad. The Qur'an, suited to the conditions of Arabia, did not cover the many difficulties which arose in a world-wide empire. Yet pious Moslems felt that Islam was a religion and a law which must have its own answer to all these questions. When the Qur'an failed to give clear guidance it was natural to ask what the Prophet had done in similar circumstances. That was the *Sunna*, the custom of the Prophet, which ultimately took place alongside the Qur'an as the source of authoritative guidance for the Moslem community. Hence the collection of traditions regarding the sayings and doings of the Prophet had for Islam not only an historical interest, but a practical, legal, and religious interest as well. Events, however, ran ahead of theory. As often as not Tradition had established custom. The production of a tradition from the Prophet became one of the ways of supporting a custom or sentiment which one desired to see accepted. The authors of the great collections of Tradition which were made in the third century of Islam exercised extreme care and strict criticism according to their lights. But in spite of that many things which certainly not derive from Muhammad have found their way into these collections, and some things which were rejected, for instance, by Bukhari, the most authoritative of these collectors, have yet survived in popular memory. The Tradition is the deposit of the development rather than its source.

While the sentiment of the community would operate strongly against the introduction of any ritual practice or doctrine which was patently inconsistent with the Qur'an, in the case of edifying sayings, stories, and such like that sentiment did not operate. It was perhaps felt that if these had not been spoken by Muhammad they ought to have been, and we know how easily such sayings and stories do get, quite unintentionally, transferred from one personage to another. Thus we find quite a number of sayings both from the Old Testament and from the New, reported as having been spoken by Muhammad. On the authority of Abu Huraira, upon whom a large proportion of these pious and edifying sayings are fathered, the Prophet is reported to have commended, *"the man who gives alms, but hides it so that his left hand does not know what his right hand does"*.[1] On the same authority, the Prophet is reported to have said: *"One of you does not really believe until I am dearer to him than father or son"*,[2] a reminiscence probably of the Gospel saying: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." I need not continue citations of these. It was natural that these things should find their way into collections of sayings of the Prophet, and Goldziher,[3] and recently Guillaume,[4] have cited a number of them. I shall only cite this, which will lead us over to another phenomenon.

The Prophet is reported to have declared that: *"God the mighty and glorious has said: I am present when my servant thinks of me: I am with him when he remembers me: Verily God rejoices more over his servant's repentance than one of you when he finds his strayed animal in the wilderness. Whoever draws near to me an inch I draw near to him a span, and whoever draws near to me a span I draw near to him an ell. When he approaches me at a walk I approach him at a run."*[5] It cannot be said that the God of the Qur'an is any too forgiving. He is merciful indeed. But in contact with Christianity Moslems must have felt that the consistent grace and forgiveness of God needed to be emphasised. Materials for this lay ready to hand in Christian sources. That the desire to outbid Christianity in this respect was not altogether absent may perhaps be shown by the following story, which is gravely recounted as having been told by the Prophet: *"Among those who lived in former times was a man who had killed 99 persons. Thinking to repent, he enquired for a wise man and was directed to a monk. He went to him and asked whether having killed 99 persons there was any possibility of repentance for him. The monk said, 'No! So he killed the monk and completed his hundred. Then he enquired again and was directed to a scholar* (*i.e.* a Moslem 'Alim). To him he put the like question whether having killed 100 persons there was any possibility of repentance for him. The scholar replied, 'Yes! No one can stand between you and repentance.' 'Go to such a land where there is a company who worship Allah Most High. Worship Allah Most High along with them and do not return to your own country; for surely it is a wicked land.' So he set off. But when he was half-way death overtook him. Then arose a dispute regarding him between the angels of mercy and the angels of punishment. The angels of mercy maintained that he was coming to Allah repentant. The angels of punishment argued that he had never done good in his life. Then came to them an angel in human form and they made him arbiter. He suggested that they should measure the distance between the two countries and to whichever he was nearest they should reckon him as belonging. So they measured and found that he was nearer the country to which he was journeying than to that which he had left. So the angels of mercy took possession of him."[6] Another version adds that the man was only nearer by a span. But lest it should appear that he had after all only escaped by the skin of his teeth, a third version adds that God ordered one country to draw back and the other to approach.

It would probably be hasty to say that the angel in human form who appears as arbiter is a reminiscence of Jesus. But the story may at any rate be taken as an illustration of the activities of the Qass. Some of the early Caliphs had at their court a sort of official relater of traditions whose occupation it was to recount stories partly for edification and partly for entertainment. The temptation to be entertaining must at any rate have been very strong upon these men. Later the Qass carried his activities to public places and became a kind of popular entertainer. Thus he fell into disrepute with the learned. But his earlier activities may account for some of the strange matter which we find floating in the wide sea of the Traditions.

To return to the conglomeration of sayings which I quoted above, I think the Biblical flavour of them must have been evident, though it is difficult to quote literally exact parallels for them. They come at second or third hand. The source of the saying, "God rejoices more over His servant's repentance than one of you when he finds his stray animal in the wilderness ", is, however, unmistakable (*vide* Gospel of Luke, ch. xv. v. 3 ff.). Further, the saying has developed into an independent story suited to Arab life. There are several versions of it, but the general outline is the same in all. A man is travelling across a desert, his supply of food and drink loaded upon a camel. He dismounts for his noonday rest, and falls asleep; when he wakes up he finds that his camel has gone; he seeks it until he is overcome with thirst. Then he says: "I will return to the place where I was, and will go to sleep and die". He returns and lays his head on his arm to die, but waking up he finds his beast beside him loaded with his supply of food and drink. God is more rejoiced over the repentance of His believing servant than this man over his beast and his provisions.

Naturally the Parables of the New Testament furnished material which was readily transferred and adapted. Of that I shall only quote the following example: the Prophet is reported to have said: the two Peoples of the Book may be described by the following story: *"A man hired labourers and said who will work for me from the morning till the middle of the day for a qirat? So the Jews worked. Then he said: Who will work for me from the middle of the day till afternoon prayer for a qirat? So the Christians worked. Then he said: Who will work for me from afternoon prayer till sunset for two qirats? Ye* (i.e. the Moslems) *are they. The Jews and Christians became angry and said: What is wrong with us that we get the most work and the least pay? He replied: Have I diminished aught of your right? They said: No. He replied: Then that is my bounty, I give it to whom I will."*[7] The derivation of that from the New Testament parable of the labourers in the vineyard is, I think, evident.

The miracle stories of the Old and New Testaments were perhaps even more fruitful in influence upon popular Islam. The motif of the miraculous increase of food as in the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, occurs in various forms. I give one in which it is not yet connected with the prophet or only remotely so. According to tradition there was a bench in the mosque at Medina on which poor people sat who were dependent on the bounty of the Prophet and the richer Moslems. Abd ar-Rahman, the son of Abu Bakr, is made the authority for the following story (I shorten it a little): *At the Prophet's request Abu Bakr took three of these people to his house to give them supper. He himself, however, went to the Prophet's house and delayed until supper-time was past. Coming home later he found that they had not supped. He blamed his son for want of hospitality, and though it was explained to him that it was the guests themselves who had refused to eat until he were present, in his irritation he vowed that he would not taste the food. The guests fell to (sic!). But for every bit of food which they took from the platter, a larger piece grew up from below; so that when they were satisfied there was more than when they began. Then Abu Bakr ate of it, saying that his vow had been from Satan. In the morning he took it to the Prophet. It happened that a treaty had expired and an expedition was gathered consisting of twelve leaders and 'God knows how many men'. It sufficed for them all*.[8]

It is as certain as anything in his life can be, that Muhammad did not claim the power of working miracles. Sorely tempted as he must have been to produce a "sign" of his own, he was content to point to the "signs" of God's intervention in former times and the revelation of the Qur'an to himself. But to the Moslem community he was the last and greatest of the prophets. If other prophets worked miracles he must surely have performed equal and greater. Quite early, miracle stories began to grow around his name. The motif of the miraculous increase of food was as we would expect, transferred directly to him. Perhaps even more frequently, the miraculous production of water was ascribed to him, as, for instance, in the incident of the expedition to Tabuk related already by the earliest biographers.[9] In the course of that expedition, the Prophet came to a little trickle of water from the hillside, the accumulation of which had been drunk out by some who had preceded him. Moistening his hand with the water he anointed the rock and

prayed over it, whereupon the water came down in a torrent which had a sound like that of thunder. Many incidents of the same kind are associated with the Prophet.

If miracle stories found their way so early into the accounts of the Prophet's expeditions where one would have expected the light of history to be fairly clear, the early part of his life offered even more scope for them. They gather numerously round his birth, his escape from Mecca at the Hijra, and round his call to the prophetic office. Of all perhaps the night-journey is the most remarkable and the one which has had the greatest consequences in Islam. It finds a nucleus in the Qur'an (Surah xvii. v. 1): *"Glory to him who by night carried his servant from the Mosque of the Haram, to the further Mosque"*. The ground of this may have been a dream in which the Prophet saw himself transported to the Temple of Jerusalem. But it has grown into a wonderful story of a night-journey in the company of Gabriel, first to Jerusalem, and then through the seven heavens to the very presence of God, whom Muhammad is said to have seen and spoken to. The Apocalyptic literature of Judaism and Christianity has probably supplied most of the motifs for this story.[10] I only mention two details which seem to show direct Biblical influence. In a less developed form of the legend Muhammad is simply said to have met the prophets Adam, Idris, Moses, Jesus, and Abraham. (The later story tells in which heaven each was met and the conversation which passed with each.) That may have been suggested by the Transfiguration story of the Gospels. Again, we have a reminiscence of Abraham's bargaining with God for the sparing of Sodom in that part of the story which tells that when Muhammad first spoke to God he was commissioned to prescribe fifty prayers a day for his people. On his way back he passed near Moses who asked him how many prayers had been prescribed, and learning the number advised Muhammad to return and beg for a reduction of the number. This he did several times until the number was reduced to five.[11]

Thus we see even in the first two centuries, the biography of Muhammad being decked out with all the kinds of miraculous and legendary stories with which we are familiar in the case of the Christian saints and Jewish rabbis, and having ascribed to him also that direct mystic vision which ascetics both Jewish and Christian have enjoyed. These things opened the way for that religious veneration of the Prophet (and of the later *walis*) which is so characteristic of, and such a strength to, popular Islam; and also to that mysticism which has provided Moslems with a relief from the hard intellectuality of their orthodox theology.

Mysticism and Asceticism in Islam form a subject too wide and important to be treated here. Muhammad was certainly not an ascetic, though there was in his teaching from the first the great motive which lies behind all asceticism, an intense fear of God and His Judgement. That persisted in Islam, and afforded congenial soil upon which asceticism might flourish. But there is no doubt that the seed of the growth of ascetic practices came from the outside. All sorts of influences have no doubt gone to the production of Sufi'ism; Western and Oriental, Neo-Platonic and Buddhist as well as native Moslem. Still, it seems to be true that in its first beginnings Muhammadan Mysticism was simply a quietistic asceticism such as was so commonly practised by Christian monks. The word *Sufi* used to denote these ascetics, which has clung to the movement through all its wonderful development, practical and philosophical, is derived from *suf*, a word meaning wool, and "was originally applied to those Moslem ascetics who, in imitation Christian hermits, clad themselves in coarse woollen garb as a sign of penitence and renunciation of worldly vanities"[12]. So that it was originally through the channel of popular Christianity with its practice of, and reverence for, asceticism, that this ascetic and mystic movement which has played such a part in Islam received the stimulus which caused it to germinate. The truth of this is confirmed by the fact that Moslem theologians were at first bitterly hostile to it. The grafting of Mysticism upon the intellectualism of Moslem theology was the work of Ghazzali, the greatest of the theologians of Islam, who lived in the latter half of the fifth century.

Another direction in which Christian influence is manifest is in the traditions bearing on Eschatology and the signs of the End of the World. We know what a part these things have

always played in popular Christianity, and we have seen also that Muhammad himself was deeply impressed by ideas of that kind. Around the signs of the Last Day mentioned in the Qur'an popular imagination naturally exercised itself. But we soon find ideas introduced which are not to be found there. That there will be dissensions and civil wars among Moslems before the end comes is probably a deduction from the actual course of events. But the idea of the *harj*, the great slaughter which will come at the end of the world, has suggestive similarity with Christian chiliastic beliefs, all the more so as the meaning "slaughter" which is specifically assigned to the word *harj* in these traditions is more appropriate to the root in Hebrew than in Arabic.

The irruption of Gog and Magog is mentioned already in the Qur'an, but the Beast which is to appear before the End is probably borrowed from he same field of speculation at a later date. In spite of the number of traditions which refer to it, no very clear account of it is given. That the figure of the Dajjal which plays a large part in these traditions, and in popular thought, comes from the same source is certain. The word is Aramaic. The full title which appears in some of the traditions is *al-masih ad-dajjal*, which corresponds to the Syriac *meshiha daggala*, the false Messiah or false Christ (cf. Matt. xxiv. v.24), the Antichrist of Christian anticipations. The Dajjal is sometimes represented as a monster, and that is the form in which it is nowadays most commonly thought of. But in the Traditions, the Dajjal is mostly represented as a man. Sometimes he is described as being "blind of an eye", or "blind of the left eye", or "with eyes straight up and down"; "with shaggy" or "with curly hair"; or again as having the *kafir* (unbeliever) written between eyes so that those who can read will plainly see it. Sometimes it is said that "he will appear between Syria and Iraq"; sometimes, "that Khurasan will be the place of his first appearance". These are additions derived from historical experiences. "He is a false prophet bringing a false religion" "his Paradise will be Hell, and his Hell, Paradise". He will work certain miracles, "producing or withholding rain", and other things of that nature; and will deceive, if not the very elect, at any rate many professing Moslems. In one tradition it is said that "the Jews will follow him, and perish in his overthrow". His reign will last for forty years, *"a year like half-a-year, a year like a month, a month like a week, and the last of his days like a spark"* (the days will be shortened; cf. Mark xiii. v.20). More commonly it is said that he will reign for forty days, *"one day like a year, another like a month, another like a week, and the rest of his days like ordinary days"*. The juggling with numbers and with times seems to be inseparable from that species of speculation. Remembering the source of the figure of the Dajjal, it will not surprise us so much that according to these traditions he is to be overthrown by Jesus (Isa b. Maryam). Jesus will appear according to one version at the white minaret on the east of (the mosque of) Damascus; according to another at Jerusalem. He will pursue the Dajjal, and overtaking him at the gate of Ludd or Lydda, will slay him.[13]

The appearance of Jesus in this environment leaves no doubt as to whence these things came to the Moslems. In some of these traditions it is further stated that Jesus will rule as a just Imam. One of those from which I have been quoting above, after telling of the overthrow of the Dajjal goes on as follows: *"The Messenger of God said: 'Isa b. Maryam will be a just judge and a well conducted Imam among my people, making smooth the rough things, slaying the pigs, remitting the jizya, and leaving off taking the sadaqa. Tax will not be levied upon sheep or camel. Envy and enmity will be taken away. The poison of every poisonous animal will be removed, so that a little boy may put his hand in the mouth of a snake, and it will not harm him, and a little girl may put a lion to flight and it wilt not harm her. The wolf will be among the flocks like their dog, and the earth shall be full of Moslems as the vessel is full of water. The creed shall be one, and there shall be no worship but that of Allah. War shall cease its ravages, and the Quraish shall be deprived of their kingdom. The earth will be like an ingot of silver, and will bring forth its vegetation as in the days of Adam'"*, and so on.[14]

The kinship of that, with Christian millennial ideas and with the eleventh chapter of Isaiah hardly needs to be pointed out. But I want to call attention to the phrase, "the Quraish shall be deprived of their kingdom". That transports us at once into the situation before the fall of the Omayyad

dynasty when the populations were being ground by unjust governors and the Mawali (those not of Arab race who had come over to Islam), were being denied what they were beginning to learn were their just claims - freedom from the Jizya, and equal rights with other Moslems. There is no doubt that these Messianic beliefs played some considerable part in preparing the way for the uprising of the Mawali which overthrew the Omayyads, and that they were used by the adroit politicians of the Abbaside family to maintain an atmosphere of expectation and hope of better things when a ruler belonging to the Prophet's family should attain to power. The underground scheming and whispered propaganda of that time can only be guessed at. But we know that when the time came there was among the converted populations - especially in Iraq - not only widespread discontent, but also a widespread disposition to accept a ruler of the Prophet's family. Properly speaking, that ought to have helped the House of Ali to power, but the Abbasides had known how to play upon that sentiment, and to keep their own pretensions secret from all but the initiated till the victory was practically secure. The Ali'ites thus disappointed remained, under the Abbasides, a troublesome element. Rebellion after rebellion, of which some member of the ill-fated family was made the figure-head, had to be slaked in blood. The Shi'a, the party of Ali, gradually drew apart from orthodox Islam, a difference of doctrine and of spirit growing out of the political cleavage. It was with the Shi'a and with the extreme sects which grew out of the same root that the Messianic expectations were at first most closely associated.

But popular Islam has always been susceptible by the idea of the *Mahdi* - "the guided one" - the just ruler who shall arise in the end of time and fill the earth with equity and justice as it has been filled with tyranny and oppression. Remembering that, as I have already mentioned, according to other traditions, Jesus was to appear as an upright Judge and just Imam, remit the Jizya, and so on, the presumption is that the figure of the Mahdi is the adaptation of the figure of the millennial Christ, or that, at any rate, the political desire for a just Caliph decked itself out with these eschatological ideas. Other details which are associated with the Mahdi appear also associated with the appearance of Jesus such as the great rain, the great productivity of the earth, and the cheapness and plenty of everything. That the adaptation took place in the time of the Abbaside propaganda is perhaps shown by the traditions which declare that the Mahdi will come of the Prophet's house or by the following which definitely associates the coming of the Mahdi with the Abbaside rising which began in Khurasan.

"A people will come out of the East and will smooth the way for the Mahdi."[15]

"The Messenger of God said. Three will fight over your Treasures. They will not become the property of any of them. Then will appear the black flags from the direction of the East. They will make such slaughter of you as was not made by any people. Then, says the narrator, he mentioned something which I have not remembered. Then he said: "When you see him, swear allegiance to him even if you have to creep upon the snow. For he is the vice-gerent of God - the Mahdi."[16]

These things which I have mentioned found their way into Islam by way of the mind of the people. They, of course, affected Moslem theology, for theology had to find a place what had become so deeply rooted in the mind of the Moslem populace. But there was also a direct influence of Christian theology upon the thought of the younger religion. As showing how that took place I take two thing which occur in the works of John of Damascus. John's father was a Christian who was employed in an official position at the court of the Omayyad caliphs at Damascus. He himself in early life occupied a similar position, and began his literary activity there before he withdrew to the monastery of Saba where the latter part of his life was spent. In the introduction to his great dogmatic work in which he treats of the heresies he devotes a section to Islam. There is also included in his works a Dialogue with a Saracen which is a kind of manual for the guidance of Christians in their arguments with Muhammadans. It is not the only work of that kind which has come down to us from that early time. It is not perhaps so interesting as we might expect from the situation to which it belongs. But the very fact of such a work having been

composed is itself suggestive. It proves what in itself is inherently likely - that arguments of that kind were fairly frequent. It corresponds also to the situation that it is a manual for defensive argument rather for attack. The Moslems held the upper hand, and we may imagine that often they would attack the beliefs of Christians or try to persuade them to the acceptance of Islam. It is to supply the Christians with answers to these attacks and arguments that the little book was composed.

The Dialogue centres round two main questions - the freedom of the human will and the Divinity of Jesus Christ. In regard to the first the Saracen does not seem to have any very well-defined position of his own. He seems concerned rather to involve the Christian who denies that God is the author of evil and therefore maintains that man has freewill within limits, in difficulties which imply a limitation of God's power. The argumentation is to our minds primitive on both sides. But at any rate the questions of the Moslem show a much more naive conception of the problem than the answers of the Christian. He seems almost to be sitting at the Christian's feet for instruction. Nor is that altogether due to the fact that it is from the Christian controversialist that we learn his arguments. His questions are real questions such as, with the Qur'an in his mind, a Moslem would naturally ask. He already shows the tendency to emphasise the supreme and continuous creative power of God which ultimately triumphed in Islam and which was strongly present in it from the first. But we can quite well conceive that in trying to raise difficulties for the Christian on this subject he found himself involved in questions for which his own mind had no satisfactory solution, and that the arguments of the Christian were not without effect. As a matter of fact we know that it was on this very subject, and in Syria, in the time of the Omayyads, that the first theological discussions arose in Islam. We hear of a sect of Qadarites who held that man was endowed with a certain amount of *Qadar*, "power" or "freewill". I think we may assume that these discussions with Christians were thus early beginning to have influence upon the thought of Islam just in process of formation.

The other question is even more interesting. The position assigned to Christ must have seemed to the Moslem easily assailable. On the basis of the Qur'an it must have seemed to him little removed from idolatry. But brought into contact with instructed Christian thinkers he must have found himself transported into a field which he did not understand. "If", says John, "you are asked by a Saracen: What do you say Christ is? say to him: The Word (Logos) of God." John is conscious that this is a wily answer, for he adds that he does not think there is anything wrong in it, for Christ is called the Word in Scripture as well as Wisdom and many other things. Then the Christian is to ask the Moslem: "What is Christ called in his own Scriptures? and to refuse to answer any more questions until he replies. For he will be bound to reply that Christ is referred to in the Qur'an as "the spirit and word of God".[17] Then the Christian is to ask further whether according to the Qur'an this spirit and word is created or uncreated. If he replies, as he is practically bound to reply, that he is created, he is to be met by the retort that before creating the word and spirit God must have had neither word (Logos) nor spirit; *i.e.* God must be ultimately unreasonable unintelligent Power. "Then", adds John, "he will flee from you, having nothing to answer, for people who hold such an opinion are regarded as heretical among the Saracens and altogether abominable."

Another question follows which shows the Moslem trying to raise difficulties about this position which he has been driven to admit: Are the words *(logia)* of God created or uncreated? He is evidently designing to drive the Christian to the position that if the Logos be uncreated and therefore divine, the words of God (in Scripture) must also be in the same position. This leads the Christian to a long explanation that the words of Scripture are not *logoi* but *rhemata*, and that the Scripture often uses words not in their strictly accurate sense but tropologically. Into that we need not go. But we may note that here we have a hint - perhaps a little more than a hint, but still interesting of how the difficulty about the Logos was afterwards solved. In later times the Logos doctrine was applied to Muhammad himself by the mystic thinkers of Islam,[18] but at this early stage that was impossible. It was applied to the Qur'an. Thus we have in orthodox Islam the

doctrine of the eternal uncreated Qur'an practically taking the place of the eternal uncreated Word or Son of God. It is perhaps too much to say that it was these discussions with Christians which led to the adoption of that doctrine; for the Qur'an itself had paved the way for it. But they must have helped considerably towards the realisation of the necessity for it.

The only other argument which I shall notice is one which perhaps does not belong to John's own Dialogue but which is given by Theodore Abu Qurra as being derived from him. It is an argument which is still used by Moslems and amounts to this. The world before Moses was given up to idolatry. After his coming Judaism was the right religion. Christianity superseded it after the coming of Christ. Why then should not Muhammadanism be the true religion since the coming of Muhammad? To this the reply is not that reason must judge of the truth of a religion - the Christians of that time would as little have accepted that position as the Moslems - but that it is not enough that a man should claim to be a prophet and preach and teach a religion. His commission from God must be evidenced by signs and wonders and the miracles which he performs. Thus we see the Moslems being by way of these discussions brought up against the necessity for the mission of their Prophet being evidenced by miracles, which we have already seen popular imagination supplying. Apart from the interest of the separate arguments, however, there is in this Dialogue of John of Damascus a peculiar interest in that it gives us a glimpse into a process that must have gone on very widely in these early days of Islam. Here was a religion just as it were emerged from the desert, full of the fire of enthusiasm as no doubt it was in the case of many of its devotees, but absolutely naive in its conceptions of the world. Its astonishing success as a conquering community brought it at once into contact over a wide area and under conditions of the closest association with a culture much older and much more advanced than that out of which it had sprung. Continued success was giving it the leisure to reflect upon itself. And we see its followers in their arguments with Christians being driven back upon problems for which they had no solution. The necessity of adjusting itself to a general philosophy would no doubt have arisen in any case. But brought thus early into contact with the elaborate system of Christian theology, the lines of that adjustment must have been to some extent prescribed for it. Christian theology in a manner set the questions which Islam with its own different materials had to answer. Not only so, but the thought-world to which it had to adjust itself was no longer the thought-world of Arabia but soon came to be the same Hellenistic thought-world with which the Christian Church had had to grapple, and which in the East it had played a large part in forming.

The course of history decreed that it should not be in Syria or in Egypt that Hellenistic culture was introduced into Islam, but further to the East, in the lands where the Nestorian Church had worked, suffered, and flourished. The Omayyad caliphs had their seats in Syria. But while they ruled, interest in Greek thought and knowledge did not produce much result. Times were still unsettled. The caliphs did not much encourage such intellectual interest. One of the princes of the Omayyad house, Khalid b. Yazid, interested himself in alchemy. But he was an exception. These Omayyad princes were Arabs by race and sentiment, and their encouragement was given to the old desert poetry and traditions of Arab life.

It was after the Abbasides came to the throne in 132 A.H. that Islam really became inter-national, and began to absorb the culture of the peoples it had conquered. They built a new city as their capital, the famous city of Baghdad, on the banks of the Tigris. It became the centre of the Muhammadan world, distinguished alike by its wealth, its luxury; its literary brilliance, and its schools of learning.

The impulse to this outburst of intellectual activity came from contact with the culture of the Eastern world. Persian and even Indian influences played their part. But more important than either of these was that form of Hellenism which the Syrians had transmitted to the East. The Syrians were not an original people, but they were diligent translators of Greek works.

There were three great centres of Greek learning in the East before the rise of Islam. One was Harran (or Charrae), which was a heathen city, surrounded though it was by Christian influences. There Greek science especially had found zealous cultivators. Another was Nisibis, the best-known school of the Nestorian Church, where especially Greek philosophy was studied, that being essential as a foundation of the Church's theological teaching. A third was at Junde-Shapur (Beth Lapat). This famous school was in Persia proper, and had been founded by one of the Chosroes in imitation and emulation of the school of Antioch. At a later time it had been strengthened by some of those who were expelled from Edessa, when that famous school within the borders of the Roman Empire was closed in consequence of its Nestorian sympathies. It was therefore also largely Christian. It remained, long after the triumph of Islam, a centre of medical and scientific knowledge. The private physicians of the Abbaside caliphs were drawn from it, and, though these physicians occupied positions of great trust and responsibility, by their names they must have been Christians.

In fact, the practice of medicine in those days was largely in the hands of Christians and Jews. The Nestorian Church had indeed played a great part in introducing Greek philosophy and science into the East. It had all along displayed an honourable zeal for knowledge as well as for missionary activity.

As the result of the labour of Syriac writers, not only the works of the Greek theologians had been translated into Syriac, but also a large number of Greek philosophical, scientific, and medical works. When translations began to be made into Arabic it was from Syriac that they were first made. Later, when the Caliph Ma'mun gave his personal interest and active encouragement to this work, fresh translations were made direct from the Greek. But even then the majority of the translators, including Hunain b. Ishaq, the best known of them all, were Christians. Thus it may be said that the Christian Church of the East transmitted Greek knowledge to Moslem scholars, to be by them preserved in Arabic dress, and transmitted again to the West at the close of the Middle Ages.

For our immediate interest the result was that Islam became a massive intellectual system, the equal of scholastic Christianity itself in its philosophic basis and dogmatic elaboration. To think that on the basis of scholastic dogma Christianity can make any great headway against Islam is a vain imagination. For Islam met Christianity in that form in the days of its youth, and by the labours of as great intellects as had been employed on the elaboration of the Christian system was made impregnable against it.

Nor must we forget that through all this influx of more or less alien and Christian material and modes of thought, the powerful and somewhat sinister genius of the prophet of Medina maintained itself. The influx of Greek thought produced a certain amount of agitation in Islam. It had its free-thinkers *(Mutakallimin)* who, to the scandal of the pious, questioned everything, and brought the apparatus of logic to bear on the discussion of the most sacred subjects. It had its heretics *(Mu'tazilites)*. The pious fell back upon the Qur'an and tradition. Thus, as any religion which has spiritual strength left in it must do, Islam preserved its distinctive type against the inroads of a culture which would have destroyed it, until it was able to assimilate that culture and make it its own. This it did in the end. And having done so the system so formed became itself a tradition. Christianity escaped from its scholastic shell at the Reformation. Islam still awaits that deliverance and new birth. The West has outstripped the East in science and culture, and is busy just now paying back the debt it has owed to Islam since the revival of learning in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. What will be the effect upon Islam of the infusion of the Western spirit into the East it is impossible to say. At present Islam is doing what it did before, falling back upon tradition. It will learn from the West in everything but religion. In religion it will learn nothing nor even acknowledge that in religion the West has anything to teach it. But when new life begins to stir no religion can permanently rest upon tradition. Sooner or later the new spirit will begin to affect it. There are indications that it is already beginning to do so

especially in India and Egypt. Whether the result will be a better understanding with Christianity, it would be rash to predict, though it does seem to contain the promise of that. At any rate the scholastic system of Muhammadan theology is almost bound to be loosened. Something analogous to the liberation of Christianity at the Reformation time will take place sooner or later, and Islam will begin to adapt itself to the modern spirit.

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[1] Bukhari, *Sahih, K. az-Zakat*, b. 13.

[2] *Id., K. al-Iman*, b. 7.

[3] *Muhammadanische Studien*, ii. p. 382 ff.

[4] *The Traditions of Islam*, p. 132 ff.

[5] Muslim, *Sahih K. al-Tauba*, b. 1.

[6] Muslim, *Sahih K. at-Tauba*, b. 40.

[7] Bukhari, *Sahih, K. al-Ijara*.

[8] Bukhari, *Sahih, K. Mawaqit as-Salat*,b. 41.

[9] Ibn Hisham, I. p. 904.

[10] *Vide* Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads*, p. 39 ff.

[11] Bukhari, *Sahih, K. as-Salat*, b. 1.

[12] Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam*, p. 3 f.

[13] Most of these details are taken from Ibn Maja: *Sunan, K. al-Fitan.*

[14] Ibn Maja, *loc. cit.*, b. 33, 7.

[15] Ibn Maja, *loc. cit.*, b. 34, 7.

[16] Ibn Maja, *loc. cit.*, b. 34, 8.

[17] John, we may note, knows the Qur'an; and the Moslem controversialists evidently know a good deal about the Bible.

[18] *Vide* Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads*, p.333 ff.