

CONCLUSION

Islam's single most defining characteristic is unity—unity of belief, of origin, of people, of purpose, and, of course, of God. The meaning of the word *Islam* is 'submission', in the root of which we also find the word *salam*, peace. The implication of this is that peace will come, and will only come, from submission to the power and wisdom in the universe that is far, far greater than our own, that of God, of *Allah*. If we look at the names of the other two monotheistic faiths, we find a striking contrast. Jews define their beliefs and identity around a tribal name, Judah, or Israel, which itself means 'he who struggles against God'—the opposite of submission—though Isaiah's straight path in the desert remains a living possibility. Christians define themselves around the name of a man whose very nature is disputed, not least amongst themselves. The focus of these two faiths is not essentially upon God, as is shown clearly in these names (and what they say about their own faiths serves to confirm this). It is, respectively, on the Jews, and on Jesus.

The attitude of the two faiths to their Books reflects this concern and, if there has been another way to God, one that has been right under their noses, it has not been seen because of this. Perhaps it is that attitude which saved the Biblical hints about the Seal of the Messengers from being destroyed during the text's many stages of redaction and editing. However, there remains the problem that the Jewish and Christian belief systems have also discouraged the development of spirits that are ready or willing to submit to the final revelation of God. This has been sent, not to God's

Chosen People, nor to a white European, and not even to Jerusalem, but to an Ishmaelite in a small Arabian town. Amazing the world, God has favoured the outcast, the humble, and the exiled.

The two greatest limiting factors in the way Jews and Christians see the Prophet Muhammad (upon him be peace) are, respectively, the Jewish assumption that no further prophets could be sent, and the Christian reluctance to tolerate the possibility that another messenger might come before the second coming of Jesus at the end of time. Muhammad (upon him be peace), the prophet of the line of Ishmael, who restored the pure and simple monotheism of Islam, a faith, a *din*, that is both the faith of the mostly Jewish Prophets who preceded him *and* a universal faith for all people, does not fit into this picture. This is, as I have argued, a responsibility to be laid at the doors of those who have kept those faiths alive rather than a fault of the God-centred essence of those faiths. Essentially, Islam rises above the debate as to who the only or new Children of Israel are, whether Jews or Christians, by embracing them both and proclaiming that we are all Children of Abraham, and ultimately, of Adam. Islam accepts both Isaac and Ishmael: as the sealing religion, it is dramatically and mercifully inclusive.

In *this* picture, Jesus was the last Jewish Prophet, calling Jews back to God and heeding Isaiah's counsel to rely on Him alone. He was the Messiah who promised God's kingdom on earth. What he was not was the political leader who would found this kingdom, nor was he a religious leader come to found a new faith. Both of these tasks were to be carried out by the most human, and the best human, of the Prophets: the Prophet Muhammad (upon him be peace). The moment when his calling ceased to be a particularist Arab one, and became a universal mission was when he was awoken by the Angel Gabriel to be taken to Jerusalem, there to affirm the other Messengers, to pray and to ascend into the heavens to meet the Lord of All. This happened in Jerusalem, and could only have happened in Jerusalem. But Jerusalem is

a vortex of turmoil; the House of Peace, the House of God, lies elsewhere, and it was thence that the Prophet Muhammad (upon him be peace) returned, and it is towards that House that we now, as Muslims, turn.

In the light of this, and if we apply a sense of humour and imagination, the Israeli Government Tourist Authority advertisement of 1999 that says 'In the land where the Millennium began the Dome has already been built' could look like an implied acceptance of the Prophets 'Isa and Muhammad. A glimmer of light in hard hearts? Though probably not intended as such, it could be seen as something a little like the *Shahada*. As the Qur'an says: 'And they planned, and God planned, and God is the best of planners.'

If there were grounds for optimism in the words of this advertisement, uttered at a moment when the Israel-Palestine peace process was tottering towards collapse, Israel's government was given a serious reality check by the outbreak of the Al-Quds (Jerusalem) *Intifada* at the end of the following year, 2000. The Camp David talks earlier in the year, between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, presided over by Bill Clinton, had seemed to come close to creating a definitive, final settlement of the whole problem. Ultimately though, the breaking point was not the fate of the Palestinian refugees, nor settlements, nor final borders, but the fate of Jerusalem and particularly its central point, the Al-Aqsa complex. Though neither of the protagonists (nor, for that matter, their peoples) were particularly religious in an overt, practising way, they were unable, for political, psychological and ultimately religious reasons to accept anything less than full sovereignty over the area.

It seems that it had to be so, that there is no political, 'worldly' solution to this crisis, that there is no half-and-half compromise on 'owning the access point to God'. The baby cannot be cut in half. There is but one way to God, and until that is taken heart and soul, the dominant relationship between those who currently claim it will be struggle and not peace. God, through the Final Prophet, has put before us

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a very simple choice in how we relate to Him: a choice of struggle against God, or submission. Hence the question remains: Do we choose Israel or Islam?