

Summary:

THE CHRISTIANS IN THE HEART OF THE MESSAGE

Christian Reading

Originally written in Arabic (Beirut, Lebanon durin 2003), this conference has been translated in English and then in Turkish – by a dear friend in Istanbul – in order to be published in the *Zaman* Newspaper.

On the 3rd October 2005, Fouad A. Kassis presented this Conference at the Arabic Cultural Centre of Nabek. A very large assistance of 260 to 300 citizens approximately was in the auditorium. The Governor of Nabek, the Mufti of Kalamoun along with seven Sheikhs from the Muslim Community and eight Christian Priests from Nabek, Homs, Damascus, Yabroud and, Deit-Atiyeh and Qara representing the Christian Community were also present.

On the end of the Conference, numerous comments closed the séance: the Mufti Yasser Hafez was the first one, followed by Sheikh Aly Al-Adib, then by some Priest, my niece Rita Kassis Syriani, Mr. Mohamed Nafoury, the Manager of the Nabek Friends Society. The Priest of Notre Dame of Fatima Church in Damascus, P. Amer Kassar, has explained to the present citizens his positive point of view concerning the friendly relations between Christians and Muslims in Syria, during the History of our country. The last comment was presented by P. Paolo Dall'Oglio, Abate of the Mor Moussa Al-Habshi Monastery, in Nabek.

This Conference was the first one presented by the author in his native City Nabek. The Nabek News Network has registered and published it on his site. This Conference is video registered and available in Arabic, on request...

During a meeting, held in the auditorium of the Theological Institute of the Greek Catholic (Monastery of Harissa, Lebanon) on April 2006, about the dialogue between Christians and Muslims, in presence of an Iranian delegation, a journalist of the group asked me the authorization to translate this Conference in Persian, in order to publish it in a important magazine of the capital Teheran.

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The Christians in the Heart of the Message¹

The sense of this audacious title may puzzle the reader creating, in his mind, perplexity and doubt concerning its meaning. To eliminate this suspicion and to reach conviction, let us have a look through the comment and the analysis of the following Verse in its three parts, as expressed in the Sacred Koran.

“Strongest among men in hostility to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and the Polytheists;

**And nearest among them in affection to the Believers
with thou find those who say: “We are Christians”;**

Because amongst these there are Priests and Monks and they are not arrogant²”.

- It is a matter of fact that carrying out a research about religion matters has a special fear; writing about Believers and faith supposes important knowledge, precision and wisdom since it is surrounded by dangers and risks like:
 - Making wrong explanations who contradict convictions of numerous Believers;
 - Being convinced by an analysis based on a background rejected by many people;
 - Accepting an interpretation which can offend the faith of some believers;
 - Confronting people who don't even accept the concept of religious debate.
- In spite of all the points mentioned here above and even though I am not an erudite neither in Christian theology nor in Islamic studies or in biblical exegesis, I will illustrate my opinion. So I ask the readers to allow me to write about what dictates my personal conviction, my logical point of view and my religious background regarding the sacred Verses here above mentioned.
- I pray all erudites in religion to correct me if I made mistakes, to help me if I haven't been sufficiently clear and to rectify my analysis if my understanding and my interpretation of the verse's meaning and will are wrong.
- The clear will and the perfect correlation between the three paragraphs of the Verse demonstrates clearly to the whole world the deep conviction in the heart and in the mind of the Arab Messenger about his human environment.

Consequently, the paragraphs of this Verse will be the three titles of this Exposé :

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¹ This is a translation of an Arabic Conference presented by F. A. K. in Syrian the Cultural Center of Nabek on the 10.3.2005. This Conference has been translated in Turkish & published by Mr. Ibrahim Imam Oglu. Later on, it has been translated in Iranian for a News-paper of Tehran. On this same site, the French text is available, translated by the same author for the Arab Cultural Center in Brussels.

² Al-Maïda (The Table Spread) - 5/82 - Medina

I. - Strongest among men in hostility to the Believers wilt thou find the Jews and the Polytheists

In the word **wilt thou find**, the “noon” letter (in the Arabic word) asserts – without any doubt – the real and undeniable conviction that the **hostility** of the Jews was deep and violent. This **hostility** becomes deeper when the Prophet Mohamed affirmed to them that the Arab nation belongs to Abraham the beloved, by means of his descendance. As a matter of fact, his first born son Is mail was thrown out from the Abrahamic home with his mother Hagar in an oppressive and unjustifiable way and denied of his part of heritage, in spite of receiving the double of what his father allowed to his other son Isaac, according to what’s expressed in the Bible:

“If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the first born son be hers that was hated: then it shall be, when ha maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: but he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of hi strength; the right of the firstborn is his³.”

- The History confirms this hereditary law, according to Hammurabi Constitution.
- The Jews have been unable to accept that somebody else inherited with them the Abrahamic Legacy, believing that God is their own God and considering that all the people of the earth have no rights on this legacy because they are heathens Gentiles”. When Jesus Christ came, he rejected their pretentions affirming, in his Gospel:

“God is able of the stones to raise up children unto Abraham⁴ “.

- Then the apostle Paul, in his two Epistles to Galatians 3/8 and to Romans 4/17, confirmed clearly that Abraham is the father of all people, that God is the God of all nations and that all human being are equal.
- After more than six centuries, the Koran expressed the same speech, in a wonderful and eloquent way which is repeated by the whole world with respect and regard:

“O mankind! We created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most, honoured of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you, and God has full knowledge and is well acquainted with all things.⁵”

- Going back to the Sourat Al-Ma’ida, our subject, we find that the word **Polytheists** is linguistically connected with **Jews**. It means that **Jews** and **Polytheists** are similar to

³ Deuteronomy 21/15-17, Bible

⁴ St. Matthew 3/9, Gospe

⁴Al-Hujurat (The Apartments) 49/13 -Medina

each other in their enmity **to the Believers**. Maybe it is an exaggeration, but the question is: does the Koran intend to accuse the Jews to adore God and money?⁶...

- When Jesus Christ came, he taught and announced beneficence and charity to all the human being, without distinction between Arabs and foreigners and asserting that Allah is the Most Gracious and the Most Merciful Father of all his creatures.

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.
Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after equity: for they shall be filled.
Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven⁷”**

- In an other announcement occasion, Jesus, Son of Mary, instructed the people saying:

**“Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world for : I was hungered and ye gave me meat;
I was thirsty and ye gave me drink;
I was a stranger and ye took me in;
I was naked, and ye clothed me;
I was sick and ye visited me;
I was in prison and ye came unto me⁸.”**

- And when the Arab Prophet appears as announcer, as guide and as reformer, he taught the people saying:

“It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces towards east or west; But it is righteousness to believe in God, the last day, the Angels, the Book, the Messengers; To spend of your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves; To be steadfast in prayer, and practice regular charity; To fulfill the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient, in pain and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the God-fearing⁹.”

- I mentioned those texts from the Gospel and Koran, in order to say that Allah is not exclusive to one people only. He is the creator of everybody; He is the God Most Gracious, Most Merciful, as he was called by our ancestors since the early days of the Christianity, as it was engraved in Syriac on the Churches doors and as repeated while entering in the prayers’ places. The Messenger consecrated the expression Bismillah that became obligatory to all Muslims when starting their prayers.

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⁶ According to the history, they consider God obliged to serve them, to take in consideration their interests, to help them destroying and throwing every one who set obstavcles in their wayto obtain earnings, benefand profits from all people of the earth, in the same wayof the idolaters of Qureishand the Peninsula.

⁷ St. Matthew 5/3-10, Gospel

⁸ St. Matthew 25/34-36, Gospel

⁹ Al-Bakara (The Cow) 2/177- Medina.

II. - And nearest among them in affection to the Believers with thou find those who say “We are Christians”

- Here also, we reassert that the double “noon” in the word **thou find** appears once again to confirm the steady conviction that the Christians are **nearest among them in affection to the Believers**. Here we need to enumerate the most important reasons for this nearness and the **affection** between Christians and Muslims:

- 1) The common accord regarding the paternity of Allah to all his creatures, without distinction or exclusion or preference of one people over another, is only by charity and devotion.
- 2) The common accord concerning the charity toward the similar, the assistance of the orphans and the needy, feeding the hungry and poor, giving a roof to homeless and mendicants, respecting the promises and honoring the engagements.
- 3) The common accord between the Gospel and the Koran is the affection and the respect to Jesus Christ, to his Mother and to Imran family.

“Behold! The angels said: “O Mary! God hath chosen thee and purified thee and chosen thee above the women of all nations¹⁰.”

“Behold! The angels said: “O Mary! God giveth glad tidings of a Verb from him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honor in his world and the hereafter and of those nearest to God¹¹.”

“...we gave Jesus, the son of Mary clear Signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit¹².”

“And remember her who guarded her chastity: we breathed into her of Our Spirit, and We made her and her son a Sign for all peoples¹³.”

- 4) The nearness between the Honorable Prophet and the pious and devout Christian Communities in hermetic retreats, in spiritual meditations, far from the city’s noises and turbulence, during the month of Ramadan, in Ghar Harra’...The qualities of the retired monks are:

“Those that turn to God in repentance; that serve him; that wonder in devotion to the cause of God; that bow down and prostrate themselves in prayer; that enjoin good and forbid evil; and observe the limits set by God; So proclaim the glad tidings to the Believers¹⁴.”

“...they are not all alike the people of the scripture, there is a staunch community who recite the revelation of God, in the night season, and falling prostrate in adoration¹⁵.”

“...those who were given knowledge before it, when it is recited to them, fall down on their faces in humble prostrations¹⁶.”

¹⁰ Al-Imran (The Family of ‘Imran) 3/42 - Medina.

¹¹ Al-Imran (The Family of ‘Imran) 3/45 - Medina.

¹² Al-Bacara (The Cow) 2/87 - Medina

¹³ Al-Anbiya’ (The Prophets) 21/91 - Mecca.

¹⁴ At-Tawba (repentance) 9/112 – Medina.

¹⁵ Al-Imran (The family of Imran) 3/113 -Medina

- 5) The nearness and the love of the Christians to the Believers was strong since the early days of the Islam and this love became stronger because of the important **enmity** and the categorical reject of the Jews regarding the new “Message”, like their reject of the Christ’s Message.
- 6) The closeness of the Messenger to “the People of the Book” was clear during all his life. As a matter of fact, he always revered, respected and honored the “Book” without making any difference between the Bible and the Gospel. Numerous verses have been revealed confirming this point view; here under are some of them:

**“...I believe that there is no God except Him on the children of Israel believe in:
I am of those who submit to God¹⁷.”**

**“If thou art in doubt, concerning what we have revealed unto thee,
then ask those who have been reading the Book from before thee¹⁸...”**

“Those were who received God’s guidance: Copy the guidance they received¹⁹...”

- 7) The Prophet met the Christianity “since he opened hi eyes” in a home believing in Allah and in his uniqueness. As a matter of fact, the person whose father’s name is Abdullah (the servant of Allah) grows in a believing and monotheist house. The person who retires with companions of charity and beneficence in Ghar Harra’, spending the night in adoration and making pious acts, is certainly very close to hermits and monks while **they rehearse the Signs of God all night long.**

What we called the three paragraphs of the Sacred Verse, we are talking about, is indeed a unique and connected entity in its meaning and in its construction, especially in the closing sentence:

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¹⁶ Al-Isra’ (Le voyage de nuit) 17/107- Mecca.

¹⁷ Yunus (Jonas) 10/90 - Mecca.

¹⁸ Yunus (Jonas) 10/94 – Mecca.

¹⁹ Al-An’am (The Cattle) 6/90 - Mecca

III. - Because amongst these there are Priests and Monks and they are not arrogant.

I could be making a mistake, but I believe that the first word of this Verse is “causal”, meaning that the existence of Priests and Monks between Christians is one of the most important reasons of **the affection toward the Believers**, because:

- They are erudite in religions, having deep knowledge of the Book :
- “Those who have been given knowledge ²⁰”
- “Those who have been reading the Book from before thee²¹.”
- “Those who they will never be wronged²²,” because they are
- “Those who turn to God in repentance that serves him²³.”
- “Those who were given knowledge beforehand, when it is recited to them fall down on their faces in humble prostration²⁴.”
- “Those who enjoin in good and forbid evil and observe limits set by God²⁵.”

When reading the last paragraph of the last sacred Verse, we can clearly realize that Allah has donated to the Priests and Monks the quality of humility, acceptance and respect of the other. These qualities that Allah donated to Christians have been denied to Jewish as previously reported by the famous Book Jalalain Explanations.

The Jewish convictions consider the quality of humility and the non-arrogance toward other as weakness, subjugation and scare. Accepting and respecting Others is forbidden for them, even their culture refuses the humility because they consider Allah as theirs exclusively and outside them, there is no salvation for the Human Beings which they call: heathens: (Gentiles).

We have to confirm our sincere conviction: The Bible is a Holy Book honored and respected by all people and the Judaism is one of the monotheist religions. What's expressed in the previous paragraph is related to the people but to its religious faith. To conclude those pages that I have had the courage to write, I wish that everyone, who reads them, comes back to his Holy Book which is originally a unique Book, who prescribes to all Human Beings to know, to accept and to respect “Others”.

This Book advises us to be devoted to Allah ad close to Him:

“To enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong”:

Is there any Holy Book that teaches stealing, killing, adultery or false witnesses?

²⁰ An-Nahel (The bees) 16/27 – Mecca.

¹⁹ Yunus (Jonas) 10/94 - Mecca.

²² Al-mou'minoun (The Believers) 23/62 – Mecca.

²³ At-tawba (The repentance) 9/112 – Medina.

²⁴ Al-Isra' (Le voyage de nuit) 17/107 – Mecca.

²⁵ At-Tawba (The repentance) 9/112 – Medina.

Is there any Holy Book that rejects Other's faith and believe without knowing them ?

For these reasons Christians and Muslims must know and respect each other's Book...

Christians recognize that Mohamed, the Son of Abdullah, accepted the call of The Most Gracious to carry the Message of the pure Monotheism and the last day, involving himself in this direction sincerely, because the Koran is:

- ❖ The calling horn of the Monotheism,
- ❖ The wonderful melody of the Monotheism,
- ❖ The eloquent announcement of the Monotheism.

“And we made the Son of Mary and his Mother as a Sign²⁶.”

“We made her and her Son a Sign for all people²⁷.”

All that has been expressed in the Holy Koran about the Christ Issa, son of Mary, about his Sacred Mother and about the Imran family is more than unqualifiedly and it is sufficient to say that the Christ of the Koran is:

- ❖ The Messiah of God,
- ❖ The Verb of God,
- ❖ The Spirit of God.

This is what we learned in our Gospel and in our Koran...The lesson from what we said above is: “In our Middle East, Christians and Muslims, we must respect each other, unify our will, tighten our ranks and forget our discordances in front of the dangers around us in order to face the atheistic movements, the materialistic and consumerist epochs and the destructive ideas.

We must be able to forbid the Occident to swallow the Homeland of the monotheism inspiration and the Country of spirituality. Through this way, our religious roots will never be forgotten or denied like it happened in the Europe of 25 nations, the 18th June 2004, when they refused to recognize their Christians roots in the European Constitution. Despite those Christians roots, they are deeply attached to their History, their cultures and their traditions.

The 12th August 2004, the Ad-Diyar – a Lebanese newspaper – reported on its last page that an American federal magistrate gave the order to remove the Gospel from a memorial statue, located in front of the Court building in the center of Huston, in the American State of Texas, the State of the President George W. Bush.

Is that what we desire to our spiritual Orient, the source of the celestial Religions ?...

²⁶ Al-Mou'minoun (The believers) 23/50 – Mecca.

²⁷ Al-Anbiya' (The Prophets) 25/91- Mecca.

Isn't it already the time to work with sincerity without accusing each other of atheism ?

Isn't it the time to look after our religious heritage, to defend our traditions, to preserve our dignity and to protect our Religion from the ferocious attacks of the movements that reject the spirit and they believe ?

Those pages have been written hoping that they will contribute to create comprehension, to facilitate the dialogue and to incite the reader to accept "each other" on this Holy Land.

Fouad A. Kassis

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Beyrouth, 22nd August 2006