

# BIBLE AND QUR'AN

## THE RELIABILITY

### OF THE ORIGINAL BIBLE



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by Rev. Professor-Emeritus Dr. Francis Nigel Lee

**Queensland Presbyterian Theological College**  
**Brisbane, Australia.**

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## RELIABILITY OF ORIGINAL BIBLE COMPARED TO QUR'AN (Dr. F.N. Lee)

Islam's Great Prophet Muhammad's highly-literate wife Khadiya's sectarian Christian cousin Warakah Ibn Nawfal knew how to write in Hebrew, and probably knew at least how to read Greek. Consequently, the following points are very important. For they all bear upon the genesis and the inscripturation of Muhammad's original *Qur'an*.

All the jots and tittles of the Old Testament are canonized by Jesus (Matthew 5:18). Paul canonized the sayings of Jesus (Luke 10:7 *cf.* First Timothy 5:18). Peter equated all the Epistles of Paul with the other Scriptures (Second Peter 1:21 & 3:15f). And Jesus, through John, warns us neither to subtract from nor to add to the then-finished Bible (Revelation 22:18-20).

But what **is** a jot? And what **is** a tittle? On Matthew 5:17-18, Dr. John Calvin speaks of "*un iota ou un seul **point***" - "one iota or a single **point**." Does that mean "one small consonant or one consonantal spur thereof?" Or does Calvin not rather mean: "one 'i' and one 'o' - one *chireq* i-dot and one *cholem* o-dot?" Significantly, *Cassell's French-English Dictionary* defines Calvin's own word **point** or *point* as: "Point; speck; dot" *etc.*

Around 400 A.D., the great Bible Scholar Jerome of Bethlehem was not only reading the Hebrew Scriptures from a vowelled or pointed copy of the Old Testament. He was also reading the vowelled Greek New Testament - and translating both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament into his own Latin Vulgate edition of both.

Nearly three centuries later, the *Qur'an* re-established the authority of the Bible. Yet the *Qur'an* itself teaches God's having abrogated parts even of the *Qur'an*.

Many Christian Scholars maintain that the original (now lost) **autographs** of the various canonical books of the inspired Hebrew Scriptures (1440 to 400 if not even from 4004 to 400 B.C.), were vowelled alias '**pointed**.' One such, was the A.D. 400 Jerome of Bethlehem.

Others include first-rate Hebraists such as the Westminster Assembly Commissioners Archbishop Rev. Dr. James Ussher and Dr. John Lightfoot, Dr. John Owen, the Buxtorffs, Gerard, Glassius, Voetius, Flaccius Illyricus, Polanus, Leusden, Whitaker, Hassret, Wolthuis, Rev. Dr. John Gill, Rev. Professor Dr. Robert Dabney and Rev. Dr. George Ella. Interestingly, the *Westminster Confession* I:8r cites Matthew 5:18 re the Hebrew **autographs**.

Why, then, would the original Hebrew vowels ever **later have been omitted**? Some believe it was to expedite the rapid production of hand-written copies thereof. **Such copies were then produced, more rapidly, without vowels.** However, yet-later copies were '**re-vowelled**' - when rapid production also of vowelled copies became feasible both somewhat before and especially after the 14th-century-A.D. invention of **movable-type printing**.

Here are some of the arguments on the subject by Rev. Dr. John Owen - by far the greatest British Theologian of all time. In summary, he regards the view that the Hebrew originals were not vowelled or unpointed - as a sixteenth-century **innovation** of the Judaist Elias Levita which was propagated then and thereafter also by the Romanists.

Levita used his new theory (contrary to earlier Judaistic arguments in favour of original pointing) to try to judaize Christians - by making them dependent on the early-mediaeval Jewish *Talmud* in order to arrive at the true meaning of the Old Testament. Romanists used the same argument to try to get Judaists and Muslims and also Protestants to depend solely on the dogmas of the Papal Church in order to understand all revealed truth.

Owen's arguments here below, are taken from three of his 1659 treatises. They are: *The Divine Origin...of the Scriptures*; and *A Vindication of the Purity and Integrity of the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Old and New Testament*; and *Some Exercitations about the Nature and Perfection of the Scripture*. See the 1968 Banner of Truth edition of his *Works* (16:281-421).

In the *Epistle Dedicatory* to the former treatise, the Anti-Romish Owen writes that it is the "filth and abominations...of **the synagogue of Rome**" which have darkened the Bible and "taken from its fulness and perfection, its sufficiency and excellency - by their...oral law...of traditions...for all their abominations. The Scripture itself (as **they** say, committed to **them**) - they plead to their eternal shame to be in the **original languages corrupted**, vitiated, interpolated; so that it is no stable rule to guide us throughout in the knowledge of the will of God.

"The Jews, they [the Romanists] say, did it [viz. inserted vowels after the inscription of the Older Testament] - while they were busy in the burning of Christians. Therefore, in the room of the originals, they [the Romanists] have enthroned a **translation** [the Latin Vulgate] that was never committed to them [the Jews]."

Yet the latter enthronement is quite contrary to Romans 3:1-2, which teaches that it was to the **Jews** that the Oracles of God - meaning the Old Testament Scriptures - were committed. "All this" was done, observes Owen, "to place [the Romanists] themselves on the throne of God, and to make the words of a [Latin] translation authentic - from their stamp!"

There are, insists the Protestant Owen in his discussion of Non-Protestant errors, at least "three corrupt and bloody fountains:- 1. The Scripture...is but a partial revelation of the will of God.... The other part of it - how vast and extensive it is, no man knows. For **the Jews** have given us their *deuterooseis* in their *Mishna* and *Gemara* [thus Judaism].... 2. The Scripture is not able to evince or manifest itself to be the Word of God so as to enjoy and exercise any authority in His Name over the souls and consciences of men - **without** an accession of testimony from that combination of political world-minded men that call themselves **the Church of Rome**. 3. The original copies of the Old and New Testaments are so **corrupted**...that they are not a certain standard [thus Islam and Romanism]....

"Of all the inventions of Satan to draw off the minds of men from the Word of God," claims Owen, "this decrying the authority of the originals seems to me the most pernicious.... At the beginning of the Reformation before the Council of Trent, **the Papists** did...defend their Vulgar Latin translation....

"Melchior Canus, Gulielmus Lindanus, Bellarminus, Gregorius de Valentia, Leo Castrius, **Huntlaeus**, Hanstelius, with innumerable others...have pleaded that the originals were corrupted.... **Huntley[-us]**, a subtle Jesuit..., ascribes the corruption of the Hebrew Bible to the good providence of God - for the honour of the Vulgar Latin!....

Morinus puts forth his Exercitations entitled 'Of the Sincerity of the Hebrew and Greek Texts' - indeed to prove them corrupt and useless.... For my own part," observes Owen, "I must confess that I shall as soon believe a poor, deluded, fanatical **Quaker** pretending to be guided by an infallible Spirit - as their pope with his whole conclave of cardinals, upon the terms here laid down by Morinus!...

"At that time lived **Elias Levita**, the most learned of the Jews of that age.... He broached a **new** opinion...not at all received among the Jews nor...once mentioned by Christians before - namely that the points or vowels...used in the Hebrew Bible, were invented by some critical Jew or Masorete living at Tiberias about five or six hundred years after Christ.

"No doubt the man's aim was to reduce the World of Christians to a dependence on the ancient Rabbins.... After a while, the poison of this error beginning to operate. The Papists, waiting... to catch at every word that might fall from them [*viz.* Anti-Christian Judaists such as Elias] to their [the Romanists'] advantage, began to make use of it" against the Protestants.

"The study of the Hebrew tongue and learning being carried on, it fell at length on him who undoubtedly hath done more real service for the promotion of it than any one man whatever - Jew or Christian. I mean **Buxtorff the elder**. His *Thesaurus Grammaticus*, his *Tiberias* or *Commentarius Masorethicus*, his *Lexicons* and *Concordances* and many other treatises...evince this to all the World.

"Even [the Romanist] Morinus saith that he [Buxtorff] is the only man among Christians that ever thoroughly understood the Masora.... Now this man [Buxtorff], in his *Tiberias* or *Commentarius Masorethicus*, printed with the great Rabbinical Bible of his own correct setting forth...in the year 1620, considereth at large this whole matter of the points - and discovereth [or discloses] the **vanity** of Elias' pretension about the Tiberian Masorettes....

"The points are taken into consideration.... That word or those three letters D-B-R are instanced by [the A.D. 400 Bethlehemite] **Jerome** to this purpose (*Hom. IX:12*). As it may be pointed, it will afford eight several senses: DaBaR is *verbum* [or 'word']. And DeBeR is *pestis* [or 'plague'] - as far distinct from one another as life and death!...

"Jerome [the author of the Latin Vulgate translation of the Holy Scriptures]...tells us over and over, that notwithstanding the translation of the LXX [alias the B.C. 270 Greek Septuagint version of the Old Testament] - he had his knowledge of the **Hebrew** tongue from the **Hebrew itself**, and the help of such **Hebrews** as he **hired** to his assistance.... There was a succession of learned men of the Jews at Tiberias until a hundred years after Jerome" - Jews who employed "the points of the Hebrew Bible...according to the tradition they **had** received from them who spoke that language in its purity.... None" - however critical - are "able to show, out of any copies yet extant in the World or that they can make appear ever to have been extant, that **ever** there were any such various lections in the originals of the Old Testament!...

"It is true we have not the *Autographa* [or Hebrew original master writings] of Moses and the Prophets.... But the *Apographa* or [Hebrew] 'copies' which we have, contain every ioota that was in **them** [the originals]....

"What use hath been made and is as yet made in the World, of this supposition that corruptions have befallen the originals of the Scripture?... It is, in brief: the foundation of Mohammedanism (*Alcoran Azoar* 5); the chiefest and principal prop of Popery; the only pretence of fanatical anti-Scripturists [such as the Quakers]; and the root of much hidden Atheism in the World.....

"It is granted that the individual *Autographa* of Moses, the Prophets, and the Apostles, are...utterly perished and lost out of the World; as also the copies of Ezra.... **Had** those individual writings been preserved - men would have been ready to adore them, as the Jews do their own *Apographa* in their synagogues!"

Yet : "The Jews have a common saying among them - that 'to alter one letter of the Law, is no less sin than to set the whole World on fire'.... Consider that the Word to be transcribed was, every *ioota* and tittle of it, the Word of the great God!... [The A.D. 1135-1204 Rabbi] Maimonides, in *Halachoth Sefer Torah* VIII:3-4, tells us that [the 10th-century A.D. Tiberias Masorite] Ben Asher spent many years - in the careful, exact writing out of the Bible....

"Consider the twenty things which they [the Masorettes] affirm to profane a book or copy - and this will further appear. They are repeated by Rabbi Moses, *Tractatus de Libro Legis*, chapter X. One of them is... 'If but one letter be wanting'; and another, 'If but one letter be redundant'...

"We add that the whole Scripture entire as given out from God without any loss, is **preserved** in the copies of the originals yet remaining.... In them all, we say, is every letter and tittle of the word.... It is a foolish conjecture of Morinus, from some words of Epiphanius, that [the A.D. 250 Christian Scholar] Origen in his *Octapla* placed the translation of the Septuagint in the midst to be the rule of all the rest.... The truth is, he [Origen] placed the **Hebrew**, in Hebrew characters, in the **first** place - as the rule and standard of all the rest....

"Various arguments giving evidence to this truth, might be produced.... I handle them at **large**.... 1. the providence of God in taking care of His Word.... 2. The religious care of the Church...to whom these Oracles of God were committed. 3. The care of the first writers in giving out authentic copies of what they had received from God unto many.... 4. the multiplying copies to such a number, that it was impossible any should corrupt them all, wilfully or by negligence. 5. The preservation of the authentic copies first in the Jewish synagogues [*cf.* Romans 3:1-2], then in the Christian assemblies [Second Timothy 3:15 & 5:18], with reverence and diligence. 6. The daily reading and studying of the Word by all sorts of persons ever since its first writing, rendering every alteration liable to immediate observation.... 7. The consideration of the many millions that looked on every letter and tittle in this book as their inheritance.... 8. **The care of Ezra and his companions**, the 'Men of the Great Synagogue,' in restoring the Scripture to its purity when it had met with the greatest trial that it ever underwent.... 9. The **care of the Masorettes** from **his [Ezra's]** days and downward, to keep perfect and give an account of every syllable in the Scripture.... 10. The constant consent of all copies in the World, so that...there is not in the whole *Mishna*...or *Talmud* any one place of Scripture found otherwise read than as it is now in our copies. 11. The security we have that no mistakes were voluntarily or negligently brought into the text before the coming of our Saviour Who...not once reproves the Jews on that account, when yet for their false glosses [or

misinterpretations thereof] He spares them not. 12. Afterward, the **watchfulness** which the...Jews and Christians had always one upon another."

Yet in spite of the above, concedes Owen, there arose the **false** "assertion of the **points or vowels...to be a novel invention of some Rabbins of Tiberias in Palestina...** I nowise doubt but...we shall yet manifest that they [the **vowels**] were completed by *'Ansheey Knesset Ha-Gadolah*, the 'Men of the Great Synagogue' - Ezra and his companions - guided by the infallible direction of the Spirit of God....

The A.D. 1600 Calvinist "Junius, in the close of his animadversion of *Bell. De Verbo Dei* II:ii, commends that saying of [the converted Jew and Hebrew Christian] Johannes Isaac against [the Romanist] Lindanus, 'he that reads the Scriptures without points id like a man that rides a horse *achalinos*, without a bridle; he may be carried he knows not whither!' Radulphus Cevallerius goes further (*Rudiment. Ling. Heb. cap. iv*)..... Saith he: 'I am of their opinion who maintain the Hebrew language...to have been plainly written with them [**the vowels**] from the beginning.... Without the vowels...it hath nothing firm and certain'....

"This man's judgment...is my own!" - affirms Owen. "Jewish scribes and copyists would never have dared to insert vowels not in the originals or ancient copies thereof!"

Owen then refers to the Westminster Assembly's "learned Dr. Lightfoot" - in his *Centuria Chorograph* (LXXXI:146). Lightfoot was, *inter alia*, also a Calvinistic Christian Scholar of the Talmud. Hear, then, what "the learned Dr. Lightfoot" says - against the 'pointless' innovation of the sixteenth-century Jew Elias Levita:

"I do not admire the Jew's impudence who found out that fable!" - observes Lightfoot. "Recount, I pray, the names of the Tiberians - from the first foundation of a university there, to the expiring thereof!.... Read over the *Talmud of Jerusalem*; consider how Rabbi Juda, R. Chamnath, Z. Judan, R. Hoshai, R. Chaija Rubba, R. Chaija Bar Ba, R. Jochanan, and the rest of the great doctors among the Tiberians - do behave themselves!... If you can believe the 'points' of the Bible to **proceed** [or to have **originated**] from such a School - believe also their *Talmuds*! The **pointing** of the **Bible** savours of the work of the **Holy Spirit** - **not** of...**men**!"

Moreover, adds Owen: "The Jews generally believe these points to have been from Mount Sinai, and so downward, by Moses and the Prophets; at least from Ezra and his companions, the 'Men of the Great Synagogue'; not denying that the knowledge and use of them received a great reviving by the Gemarists and Masorettes, when they had been much disused. So R. Azarias at large, *Imre Binah*, cap. lix.... The learned Buxtorfius' discourse *De Origine et Antiquitate Punctorum* lies unanswered....

"Languages are not made by grammars, but grammars are made by languages.... The grammar of it and them must be collected from the observation of their use.... The rule and art of disposing, transposing, and changing of them - must be constituted and fixed **before** the disposition of them....

"Johannes Isaac, a converted Jew, *Book I to Lindanus*, tells us that above two hundred testimonies about Christ may be brought out of the original Hebrew that appear not in the Vulgar

Latin or any other translation.... Let any man consider...Isaiah 53 and Daniel 9, as they are now pointed...in our [Hebrew] Bibles, and compare them with the translation of the [Greek] Septuagint - and this will quickly appear unto him.... As the text stands now **pointed**..., neither Jews nor Socinians...have been able or ever shall be able to relieve themselves from the sword of the truth therein....

"It is **said**, then, 'that whereas the **old Hebrew** letters were the present Samaritan - the Samaritan letters have been always without points.... This is not a place to speak at large of the Samaritans, their Pentateuch, and its translation. The origin of that nation is known from the Scripture, as also their worship of God. Second Kings 17. Their solemn **excommunication** and casting out from any interest among the people of God, is also recorded. Ezra 9-10; Nehemiah 13....

"The Jews are [wrongly] said to have forgot[ten] their own characters in the captivity.... That the men of one and the same generation should forget the use of their own letters which they had been exercised in, is incredible! Besides, they had their Bibles with them always, and that in their own character only.... When, then, this forgetting of one character and learning of another should arise - doth not appear.... Not can it be made to appear that the Samaritan letters had never any vowels affixed to them. Postellus affirms that the Samaritans had points in the days of Jerome - and that their loss of them is the cause of their present corrupt reading....

"Of the *qeri uwketib*" - the *qeri* or often several variants which could be read, as distinct from the *ketib* or written text which could not be altered - "the difference in them is in the consonants, **not** in the vowels.... [The A.D. 1093-1167] Aben Ezra makes it no small matter that men of **old** knew aright how to pronounce [the vowel] *Kamets Gadol*. Saith he...'The men of Tiberias, also the wise men of Egypt and Africa, knew how to read *Kamets Gadol*.'"

To Owen, then, the Hebrew vowels were inherent in the original Old Testament Scriptures - and not the invention of the Masores. The latter novel theory is refuted by "the uncontradicted reception of them absolutely, without the least opposition, all the World over, by Jews and Christians" (not just before but also after the Masoretic Period) - and also by "the impossibility of assigning any author to it, since the days of Ezra."

We now return to the Massoretic "*qeri uwketib*" or the *scriptio* and *lectio*.... One word is placed in the line, and another in the margin - the word in the line having not the points or vowels affixed to it that are its own, but those that belong to the word in the margin.... **All** the difference in these words is in the consonants, **not at all** in the vowels. The word in the margins, owns the vowels in the line as proper to it.... The difference in the sense, taking in the whole context, is upon the matter very little or none at all....

"Doth not our Saviour Himself affirm of the Word that then was among the Jews, that not *iota hen* or *mia keraia* [not one iota or tittle] of it, should pass away or perish?" Matthew 5:18. "For **Papists**, who are grown bold in the opposition to the originals of the Scripture - I must needs say that I look upon them as effectually managing a design of **Satan**."

Concerning the **Greek New Testament**, one can be much shorter - as **all** of its ancient copies were always vowelled. This is so, in spite of later Muslim claims to the contrary - in

efforts to justify Islamic assertions that the promised Comforter of John 14 to 16 is actually Muhammad the *PeRiKLuToS* or "the praised one" rather than the Holy Spirit or *PaRaKLeeToS* alias "the Comforter" - about which later.

Too, as Owen indicates: "For various lections in the Greek copies of the New Testament" - "**Protestants** for the most part have been the chiefest collectors of them. Stephanus, Camerarius, Beza, Cameron, Grotius, Drusius, Heinsius, De Dieu, Cappellus...have had the prime hand in that work. **Papists** have ploughed with their [the Protestants'] heifer - to disparage the original [Greek], and to cry up the Vulgar Latin" translation so ridiculously canonized by Rome!

This then brings us to the Calvinistic 1675 *Formula Consensus Helvetica* of Rev. Professors Dr. Johan Heinrich Heidegger of Zurich and Francis Turretine of Geneva and Luke Gernler of Basel. At its outset, it cites Romans 1:16 and Second Timothy 3:15 and the 'jot and tittle' text Matthew 5:18. It then boldly proclaims that "the Hebrew Original of the Old Testament which we have received and to this day do retain as handed down by the Jewish Church unto whom formerly 'were committed the Oracles of God' (Romans 3:2) - is **not only in its consonants but in its vowels** (either the vowel-points themselves or at least the power of the points) not only in its matter but in its words **inspired by God**. It thus forms, together with the Original of the New Testament, the sole and complete rule of our faith and life....

"To its standard, as to a Lydian stone, all extant versions oriental and occidental ought to be applied - and, wherever they differ, be conformed. Therefore we can by no means approve the opinion of those who declare that the text which the Hebrew Original exhibits, was determined by man's will alone. They do not scruple at all to remodel a Hebrew reading which they consider unsuitable - and amend it from the Greek Versions of the Septuagint and others, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Chaldee Targums, or even from other sources.... Thus they bring the foundation of our faith and its inviolable authority into perilous hazard!"

This 1675 *Formula* was composed at Zurich and designed to condemn and exclude that modified form of Calvinism which then emanated from the Theological School at Saumur - as represented by Amyrault, Placaeus, and Daille and subsequently known as Amyraldianism. Significantly, the *Formula* was included by Rev. Professor Dr. A.A. Hodge as an Appendix to the 1879 expanded edition of his excellent manual *Outlines of Theology*. There, in his Preface, Hodge remarks that "the Appendix contains a translation of the *Consensus Tigurinus* of Calvin and of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* of Heidegger and Turretin, two Confessions of first class historical and doctrinal interest to the student of Reformed Theology."

Even more than half a century after the *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, Schultens in 1737 - followed by Michaelis - contended that at least some of the Hebrew points or vowel-marks had been in use from the **earliest** ages of that language. Even Eichhorn and Gesenius tended to think that some of the points were Pre-Hieronomic and even Pre-Talmudic.

According to T.H. Horne's 1828 *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (II:145) - the Jews then believed that "when God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai, He taught him...its true reading...handed down by oral tradition from generation to generation until...committed to writing.... The true reading is the subject of the Masora."



Further (II:8f): "**All** languages...**require vowels**, which are...the **soul** of **words** [even as consonants are their 'bodies']....

"Origen, who [around A.D. 230f] transcribed the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek characters in his *Hexapla*, did not invent new vowels to express the vowels 'absent' in Hebrew words. Neither did Jerome, who also expressed many Hebrew words and passages in Latin characters.... The Masorites, in affixing **points** to the text, did not do so according to their own notions.... They followed the received reading of their day." Indeed, "some passages have been adduced from the *Talmud* in which **accents** and **verses** are mentioned."

Only in 1830 was Hupfeld considered to have shown that the **Massoretic** punctuation was unknown to Jerome and the Talmud. Yet many even today (just as all of the orthodox Jews till 1500 and all of the orthodox Calvinists till the rise of Amyraldianism in the middle of the seventeenth century) continue to opine that some apparatus like the points - must have been needed to achieve uniformity in Hebrew pronunciation during successive ages even **before** the Massores in **all** the various parts of the World.

When the liberal W.R. Smith's 1878 work *The Old Testament in the Jewish Church* seemed to disparage the antiquity and accuracy of the Masoretic Text, Professor R.L. Dabney responded in his 1882 *Refutation of Prof. W. Robertson Smith*: "Josephus, a [first-century A.D.] Greek-speaking and Septuagint-reading Jew, still gives the narrative as the **Hebrew** text does.... Jewish copyists and critics of their text **since** the Christian era have a great reverence for the accuracy of their holy Book.... They have adopted an exact system for insuring accuracy of transcription.... This system has actually given us, for the **last** thousand years, a set of *codices* almost without various readings. Why may not the same reverence and the same method of copying have produced the same happy result in the **previous** thousand years?...

"The text followed by the **Peschito Syriac Version** is unquestionably the Masoretic.... The accuracy of the old Syriac version is **impregnable**.... We have every reason to believe that the **Vetus Itala**, the [Old] Latin Version made before the Masoretic revival, followed our **Hebrew** text and not the Septuagint - as does also Jerome's [A.D. 400] Latin version, the **Vulgate**." All of this, thus Dabney, shows "the **correctness** of the **Massoretic** copies of the Pentateuch."

We shall now summarize the main arguments for this position that the autograph and the oldest (now non-extant) copies of the Hebrew Old Testament were vowelless. That position has been set out by the famous modern scholar Rev. Dr. George Ella of Muelheim (Germany) in the *British Reformed Journal* 17 (January - March 1997) and 21 (January - March 1998).

**Modern Theological Liberals**, argues Dr. Ella, regard the (perhaps 10th-century A.D.) Tiberian **Massoretic** text as the **cradle** of Hebrew **vowelling**. Yet 17th- and 18th-century A.D. Hebrew Scholars rejected the notion that the Massores had originated such vowel-pointing. Instead, they believed the Tiberians were **not sufficiently skilled** in linguistics and could not themselves spontaneously have **created** such a precise system of vowel-pointing as that found in the Massoretic text.

So they also believed such pointing was taken over by the Massores from **much older copies** of the Old Testament. Professor Dr. James **Ussher** believed it was the Biblical **Ezra** who

**re**-pointed the Hebrew text of the Old Testament Bible - on the Jews' return from exile in Babylon around B.C. 454. **Re**-pointed. For Ussher argued there was a form of **vowel**-pointing even **before Ezra** - which vowel-pointing had lapsed during the 70 years' exile.

Ussher's contemporary Rev. Dr. John **Owen**, teaching similarly, appealed to Matthew 5:18. There, Jesus said: "Till Heaven and Earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any wise pass away from the Law.'

Here, Jesus infallibly refers to the "jot" - which is the smallest **consonant** in Hebrew. Our Lord and Saviour **in His very same breath** here infallibly refers also to the tittle or *keraiia* - which many see as the smallest **vocalization-letter** or **part of a vowel-sign**.

Rev. Dr. John Gill claimed the Greek word *keraiia* here refers to the Hebrew vowel-sound *chireq*, alias the **dot** at the **root of all of the vowel-pointing** in Hebrew. Gill gives much archaeological, numismatic and documentary evidence to prove the antiquity of such Hebrew pointing.

Gill demonstrates that points (or such 'dots') **were** in **general** use at the time of the Massores. He also shows that even **printed** versions of **vowelled** Hebrew Bibles were **then** being circulated - **before** the invention of movable typesetting.

Dr. Gill also probes backwards from the time of the Massoretic text - back through the works of Ben Asher, Ben Naphtali, Saadia Baon, Jerome, Rabbi Ase, the Sura Academy, the *Rabboth*, the *Jerusalem Talmud*, Origen's *Hexapla*, Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, the *Targums* of Jonathan and Onkelos, Josephus, Nechuniah ben Kana, and Ptolemy Philadelphus - to show that the giving of a 'late date' for vocalizing the Hebrew Old Testament cannot be taken seriously. The evidence points to a use of vowel-signs after the Babylonian Exile already around the fifth century B.C. Indeed, **recent diggings** have produced **Semitic vowelings** even from the **ninth century B.C.**

So Hebrew vowel-pointing is older than even the fifth-century B.C. time of Scribe Ezra (Ezra 1:1f). Also the very word "*Masorettes*" means '**transmitters**' - **not** 'inventors.' All languages regularly develop historically, from the more-complicated to the less-complicated. Thus simpler forms of spelling, syntax and grammar - replace the earlier more complex forms.

*Cf.* how cryptic Modern-American has replaced 'long-winded' Elizabethan-English. Note too how Erse spelling recently was simplified to a very dramatic extent. See J.J.N. Sean O'Beirne's *Irish Self-Taught*, Marlborough, London, 1932, pp. 130f.

Thus, especially in Hebrew, vowel-characters - and even consonants dependent on such vowels - became redundant only in the mediaeval period A.D. The Phoenician alphabet is evident on the 13th-century B.C. tomb of King Ahiiram of Byblos. The Old-Semitic Ugaritic (compare the *Ras Shamra* inscriptions), dating from 1400 B.C. [alias the time Moses inscripturated what is now the *Pentateuch*], had at least 30 letters (including vowels). Adding the seven Masoretic vowel-signs to the 23 consonants, it produces an Ancient-Hebrew alphabet of also 30 characters. And the alphabetical Sinai Inscriptions go back to 1700 B.C.

Even exilic and post-exilic Babylonian texts use seven clearly-defined vowel-signs - representing eleven vowels of various length and quality (Rosenthal). For very many centuries both liturgical and Biblical texts with pointing have been used, in worship, alongside of unpointed copies of *Torah* texts. Indeed according to the article 'Bible' in the 1938 Judaistic *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, even the largely consonantal **Intertestamentary Text** often **vocalized** by using consonants as *matres lectionis*. Thus *Aleph* = a, *Yod* = i, *He* = o, and *Wav* = u.

The full-alphabet script-tradition was carried on in the Palestinian, Babylonian and Tiberian forms of written Hebrew. The former two, place the vowel-letters over the consonants; but the Tiberian method, places them below the consonants (except for the long-o vowel *choolem*). Also Arabic perhaps shows vestiges of both forms - as dots are present even in its alphabetical consonants.

Bodmer maintains that the hitherto-supposed oldest part-manuscript, is the *Prophet Codex* (Kairo). Significantly, it is vowel-pointed. Certainly the mediaeval Masoretic pointing is based on yet-older pointing (as in Babylonian, Syrian, Palestinian, and Samaritan *etc.*) - and was not a sudden development.

The Massores have left very much if not all of the vocalization exactly as they received it. They expressed their different opinions only in the margin of their text - thus showing they wished to transmit, and not to alter, the text they had received.

In the Greek New Testament, the infallible Christ (in Matthew 5:18-19) - mentions the inspiredness of every *ioota* and *keraiia* in the Hebrew Old Testament. To Gill and Ella, these clearly seem to be referring to the *jod* and the *chireq*. Such are respectively the smallest consonant and the smallest vowel in copies of the *Torah* alias the *Pentateuch* in general, and the Law of God in particular.

In the prevailing modern view, the first reference here to the *ioota* as a difficult-to-quantify *hapax legomenon* - would be signifying either the *choolem* as the smallest vowel-dot or alternatively the *jod* alias the smallest consonant in the Hebrew Old Testament. And the second reference to the tittle or *keraiia* - would then indicate the 'horn' (*cf.* the Hebrew word *keren*) or 'spur' or 'nib' which in Hebrew consonants distinguishes a *beth* (alias a "b") from a *kaph* (alias a "k") and a *daleth* (alias a "d") from a *resh* (alias an "r") in Matthew 5:18 & Luke 16:17. Compare the 'tail' on our "Q" - differentiating it from "O" in modern typed English.

It makes little difference whether one thus adopts the classic Ussher-Owen-Buxtorff-Gill or the modern *ioota*-dot and consonantal 'horn-spur-nib' view. The bottom line here obviously remains Jesus' stated inspiredness of every single "jot and tittle" - which extends not just to every letter but also to every part of every letter (whether consonant or vowel) in the original Hebrew Old Testament.

Some old manuscripts of Old Testament materials, present even the *pathach*-vowel and the *qaamets*-vowel in dot-format rather than in line-format. However, with the development of the mass-copying of texts in handwriting and in printing - many of these vowel-signs disappeared. For they were too time-consuming to form or cut out of a block, especially before the invention of movable type.

No wonder the **A.D. 340-420** compiler of the Vulgate, **Jerome** of Bethlehem, complained he could not read the vowel-signs of the **Hebrew** Old Testament at night by **candle-light**! What would Jerome have then thought of contemporary computer-programming's Notepad version in Ascii (DOS) Delimited Text code - which deprives even our modern languages of many of their remaining diacritical signs (such as the *umlaut* in German and the *kappie* in Afrikaans)?! Thus far Dr. George Ella, as abridged and expanded by myself (Dr. F.N. Lee).

Even the revisionist, Marburg's Old Testament Professor Ernst Wuerthwein, in his famous book *The Text of the Old Testament: An Introduction to Kittel-Kahle's Biblia Hebraica* (ET, Blackwell, Oxford, 1957, pp. 11-20) - concedes the existence of a long **Pre-Massoretic tradition** of producing vowelled copies of the Old Testament. Wuerthwein declares:

"It is well-known [read: well-alleged - F.N.L.!] that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament existed for many centuries as a consonantal text.... The vocalisation of the text...was done by the Masorettes.... The ['Protestant-Judaistic'] Karaite movement, whose influence on the intellectual life of Judaism seems to have been of great significance, led to a flowering of Masoretic activity in the West in about the years 780 to 930....

"About 1100, the **Karaite Hadassi** declared that God had not created the *Torah* without pointing - a view which Johann **Buxtorff the Elder** (1564-1629) revived.... At the same time, it must be remembered that the **Masorettes** did not follow their own ideas in vocalising the text - but endeavoured to express exactly the tradition they had received." Thus Wuerthwein. My own emphases throughout (F.N. Lee).

Remember that the A.D. 400 Jerome of Bethlehem could not read the vowels in his infallibly-inspired Hebrew Old Testament at night by candlelight! Comparing and **contrasting** this to the equally Co-Semitic but uninspired original *Qur'an* almost three centuries thereafter, is very interesting.

All of the many human writers of the books of the Bible - from Moses to the Apostle John - were literate. Either they or their immediate secretaries directly inscripturated their inspired utterances.

Two hundred years after the highly-literate Jerome, who needed daylight to read the vowels in the Hebrew copies of his Old Testament and who could easily read the more prominent vowels in the Greek copies of his New Testament - the illiterate Muhammad was born into an Arabian society itself largely illiterate and overwhelmingly starved of Christian influences. However, it is very clear even from his *Qur'an* that some then in Arabia could read and also had been reading - the Old Testament in Hebrew; the New Testament; and especially some of the apocryphal writings.

Yet Muhammad himself, the sole human author of the *Qur'an*, was illiterate. His oral utterances were written down (on all kinds of objects from bones to tree-leaves) only after he voiced them. They were collected into the *Qur'an* only decades after his death. Those uninspired utterances by the illiterate Muhammad were recorded initially in A.D. seventh-century Hejazi Arabic. This was done not only without written vowel marks, but also without diacritical points alias **consonantal dots**.

Let us now illustrate this vital difference between the Bible and the *Qur'an* - with reference to the Biblical texts on the ***Parakleetos*** alias the Comforter or Holy Spirit. This word is misapplied to Ahmad or Muhammad in the *Qur'an* - as if the original Bible had rather used the vowelless word ***Prklts*** (with the meaning of ***Periklutos*** as alleged by Islam).

Islam maintains that post-apostolic **later** Christians **falsified** the primordial Greek word now translated in John 14 to 16 as "Comforter." According to Islam, the original Greek word was the vowelless ***Prklts*** and meant ***Periklutos*** (alias 'the praised one'). Into Arabic, ***Periklutos*** should then be translated '***Ahmad***' - which would then refer not to the Holy Spirit Comforter but to the 'praised' **Muhammad**.

So, precisely in order to try and deny this - maintains Islam - **post-apostolic** Christians falsified the original word in John's Gospel (meaning ***Periklutos***), by changing it to ***Parakleetos***. This word ***Parakleetos*** (meaning 'the one summoned' and hence 'Advocate' and 'Helper' or 'Comforter' in the sense of 'Strengthened') - Islam alleges was then misapplied by those later Christians not to the promised ***Periklutos*** (meaning the 'praised one' alias Muhammad) but instead rather to the coming of the Holy Spirit **before** the later coming of the there-predicted Muhammad (in order to try to discredit the latter).

Islam further maintains that not only the Old Testament in Hebrew but also the New Testament in Greek would originally - like the first *Qur'an* - have been written without vowels. Consequently, it would not (so Islam claims) have been the (to Muslims) falsified word ***Parakleetos*** but only the allegedly original consonants ***P-r-kl-t-s*** that would have been written down in the autograph and in the first manuscript copies of John 14 to 16.

This ***P-r-kl-t-s*** would (according to Islam) originally have been pronounced as ***Periklutos***. Only centuries later would Muhammad-hating Christians in their later-corrupted manuscript copies of John's Gospel - have falsified this by vowelizing such copies as ***Parakleetos***.

In so doing, such later Christians are also said (by some Muslims) to have rejected one of the original Gospels which allegedly represented John's words correctly on this point. This writing, allege such Muslims, was the (**so-called**) *Gospel of Barnabas*. That latter maintains that Muhammad would be the promised coming Saviour of the World - and that Muhammad would also abolish the idols.

Recently, it is then especially this so-called *Gospel of Barnabas* (not to be confused with the much earlier *Epistle of Barnabas*) which has given some comfort to some Muslims. It is today extant, in full, only in an Italian translation kept in Vienna.

It originated between the 14th and the 16th centuries A.D., perhaps being written possibly in Spain by an apostate from Christianity to Islam. It syncretizes Biblical, Gnostic, Judaistic and Islamic elements.

It states that Jesus did not die on the cross but that Judas was transformed into the likeness of Jesus, and that Judas was crucified in the place of Jesus. It denies that Jesus is either the Son of God or the Christ; it has Jesus describing Muhammad as the 'Greater One'; and it announces Muhammad as the predicted Messenger of God.

Interestingly, it was not till 1854 that Islam began to use this bogus '*Gospel*' against Christianity. Yet especially since 1959, even several Muslim Scholars have rejected this writing as being irreconcilable with the Quranic claims: that not Muhammad but Jesus is the Christ; that Jesus was born under a palm-tree in Jerusalem and not in an inn near Bethlehem; that Mary suffered birthpangs, and did not experience a painless childbirth; that there are seven and not nine heavens; that polygamy is permitted, and not disallowed; and that hell lasts forever, and is not just a temporary location.

However, the seventh-century *Qur'an* itself (at *Sura* 3:81) maintains that "God took the Covenant of the Prophets [in the Old Testament], saying: 'I give you a Book [*viz.* the New Testament] and Wisdom [*viz.* Jesus the Word (as in *Suras* 3:45 & 4:171)]. Then [*viz.* thereafter] an Apostle [*viz.* Muhammad] comes to you, confirming what is with you. Believe him, and render him help!"

On this, the Muslim Scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments: "The argument is...Muhammad is foretold in the Gospel of St. John 14:16, 15:26 and 16:7. The future Comforter cannot be the Holy Spirit as understood by Christians, because [the] Holy Spirit already was present, helping and guiding Jesus.

"The Greek word [today] translated 'Comforter' is 'Paracletos' [Ali means *Parakleetos*], which is an easy corruption from 'Periclytus' [Ali means *Periklutos*], which is almost a literal translation of 'Muhammad' or 'Ahmad.' See *Q[ur'an]*. 61:6.

"Further, there were other Gospels that have perished, but of which traces still remain - which were even more specific in their reference to Muhammad. *E.g.*, the Gospel of St. Barnabas, of which an Italian translation is extant in the State Library at Vienna. It was edited in 1907 with an English translation by Mr. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg." Thus, Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

At the above-mentioned *Sura* 61:6 in the *Qur'an*, one reads: "Remember, Jesus the son of Mary said: 'O Children of Israel! I am the apostle of God (sent) to you confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of an Apostle to come after me whose name shall be Ahhmad.' But when he came to them with Clear Signs - they said: 'This is evident sorcery!'"

On this, Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments: "*Ahhmad* or *Muhhammad*, the Praised One, is almost a translation of the Greek word *Periclytos* [Ali means *Periklutos*]. In the present [corrupted] Gospel of John, XVI:16 [Ali means XIV:16 alias 14:16], XV:26 and XVI:7, the word 'Comforter' in the English version is for the Greek word '*Paracletos*' [Ali means *Parakleetos*]. This means 'Advocate' [*cf.* I John 2:1], 'one called to the help of another,' 'a kind friend' - rather than 'Comforter.'

"Our [Islamic] doctors contend that Paracletos is a corrupt reading for Periclytos, and that in the original saying of Jesus there was a prophecy of our holy Prophet *Ahhmad* by name. Even if we read Paraclete, it would apply to the holy Prophet, who is 'a Mercy for all creatures' (21:107) and 'most kind and merciful to the Believers' (9:128)."

The latter-mentioned references to the *Qur'an* (21:107 and 9:128) are very obscure as to the *Parakleetos/Periklutos* point at issue. Yet how should Christians and others concerned about accuracy, then evaluate this argument that the Greek original manuscript or autograph of John 14 to 16 was allegedly without vowels, so that either *Parakleetos* or *Periklutos* would originally have appeared simply as *P-r-kl-t-s*? Consideration needs to be given especially to the following three counter-arguments.

(1) Some Bible Scholars such as the Buxtorffs, Rev. Dr. John Owen, Rev. Dr. John Gill, Rev. Professor Dr. Robert Dabney and Dr. George Ella maintain that Jesus' **infallible** references in e.g. Matthew 5:18 and Luke 16:17 also to the 'titles' of the Law, would indicate that even the inscripturated Old Testament's Hebrew autograph and also the **oldest copies** thereof - were indeed **vowelled**. That would be suggested also by ancient renditions of parts thereof (such as the *Samaritan Pentateuch*) and by ancient translations thereof (such as the *Greek Septuagint*) and from later reworkings of portions thereof (such as the *Dead Sea Scrolls*) and from later commentaries thereon (such as the Aramaic *Targums*). Only in yet-later times would Hebrew manuscripts (such as e.g. the oldest now-extant copies of the Old Testament) have been written down vowellessly in order to speed up the copying process. Indeed, even as regard the *Qur'an*, (not the non-extant autograph but) its oldest extant **Arabic copies** **do** exhibit vowel-signs.

(2) Apart from the Hebrew Old Testament, it is absolutely certain that all Greek manuscript copies of the New Testament - still exhibit vowel-signs. That is true even as regards those later Greek copies thereof which were made only after the inscripturation of the *Qur'an*. Consequently, the Islamic accusation that later Christians went and falsified an allegedly original word *Periklutos* into *Parakleetos* - even despite the serious curses at the very end of the Bible in Revelation 22:18f against all such actions - is totally absurd.

(3) Furthermore, Islam's specious above-mentioned 'Christian falsification theory' - is both text-critically as well as linguistically impossible. The reason for this is obvious. Every Greek manuscript copy of the New Testament or portion thereof up to and also for quite a time after Muhammad, here reads: *Parakleetos*. Not one of them reads *Periklutos*.

Suffice it to say, in refutation of the Islamic view of this, that also the Scholar of Islam P.J.P. de Beer has pointed out how even the Persian translation *Faraqilit* and the Arabic translation *Barqilit* of the Greek Comforter-texts in John 14 to 16 - support not the Islamic but the Christian view of what John here inscripturated. For even those Persian and Arabic translations show that not *Periklutos* but *Parakleetos* is the word used in the original Greek Gospel of John and certainly in all of the oldest extant Greek manuscript copies thereof.

Enough, then, has been said about the Islamitic *Periklutos*-theory. It is clearly essentially foreign to the Bible - and to all the extant Greek manuscript copies thereof.

Islam is grounded in the deeds of the famous Arab Muhammad, 570-632 A.D. His achievements were remarkable, especially despite his illiteracy (acknowledged also by Islam in the *Qur'an* 7:157 and 62:2). Quite a lot of his imposing pronouncements were, shortly after their oral delivery, written down and preserved on all kinds of objects by his favourite wife, the literate Khadiya - whose cousin Warakah Ibn Nawfal was a sectarian Christian who knew how to write in Hebrew.

On the illiterate Muhammad's utterances, compare the following accounts by the Islamic Scholar Imam Achmad Deedat. Declares Imam Deedat: "Muhummed was forty years of age.... In the cave, the Archangel Gabriel commands him....**Proclaim!**.... Muhummed is terrified, and in his bewilderment replies...'I am not learned!' The angel commands him a second time, with the same result. For the third time, the angel continues.... Now, Muhummed grasps that what was required of him was to **repeat!**.... And he repeats the words as they were put into his mouth.... *Holy Qur'an* 96:1-5....

"The first five verses which were revealed to Muhummed...now occupy the beginning of the 96th chapter of the *Holy Qur'an*.... Immediately the angel departed; Muhummed rushed to his home. Terrified and sweating all over, he asked his beloved wife Khadija to cover him up. He lay down, and she watched by him. When he had regained his composure, he explained to her what he had seen and heard....

"During the next twenty-three years of his prophetic life, words were 'put into his mouth' and he uttered them. They made an indelible impression on his heart and mind.... As the volume of the Sacred Scripture (*Holy Qur'an*) grew," portions thereof at first "were recorded on palm-leaf fibre, on skins, and on the shoulder-blades of animals.... Before his demise, these words were arranged in the order in which we find them today in the *Holy Qur'an* .

"The words (revelation) were actually **put into his mouth**" - for he was the "**Unlettered Prophet.**" Indeed, the words "I am not learned' is the exact translation of the words...which...Muhummed uttered twice to the Holy Ghost, the **Archangel Gabriel**, when he was commanded: 'Read!'.... He was absolutely unlettered and unlearned....

"Moreover, the Divine Author (God Almighty) Himself testifies to the veracity of Muhummed's...claim that he could never have composed the contents of the *Holy Qur'an* . He could not have been its author.

"'And you (O Muhummed) were not (able) to recite a book before this (Quranic Book came). Nor are you (able) to transcribe it with your right hand.' *Holy Qur'an* 29:48 [cf too vv. 45-49]." Thus Muslim Imam Achmad Deedat.

Now shortly after these utterances by the illiterate Muhammad, they were recorded - initially, in A.D. seventh-century Arabic. This was done not only without written vowel marks (as in some Hebrew copies of the Old Testament where such unvowelized inscriptions of words themselves are plain enough) - but, vitally, without diacritical points alias **consonantal dots** in the original Arabic manuscript of the *Qur'an* .

Such latter are vital to establish meaning. For fully 21 of the 28 consonants of the Ancient Arabic alphabet writtenly need diacritical points in order to distinguish them from one another. Such 21 Arabic letters are: *ba, ta, tha, geem, ha, kha, dal, zal, ra, zeen, seen, sheen, sad, dzad, dza, 'ein, ghein, fa, gaf, non, and ya.*

For instance, the **undiacritical** A.D. seventh-century Arabic consonants *ba* and *ya* and *non* and *tha* and *ta* were all depicted by the same upward-facing crescent-sign. In their connected forms, these written letters were anciently **identical**. Only in **Post**-Quranic ages was *ba*



diacriticalized with one dot under it, and *ya* diacriticalized with two dots under it, and *non* diacriticalized with one dot above it, and *ta* diacriticalized with two dots above it, and *tha* diacriticalized with three dots above it.

Until that later time, the Arabic word *bint* ("daughter") was written undiacritically by three such **identical consonants**. The uninspired various diacritical points were inserted into copies of the *Qur'an* only later - by Islamic scribes and commentators. While preserving the same consonantal outlines, such diacritical marks could change the meaning of the undiacritical Arabic word *bint* ("daughter") to: *bayt* ("home"); or *bayn* ("between"); or *yatheb* ("he jumps"); or *natheb* ("we jump"); or *nabath* ("utters few letters").

Sometimes thus-written undiacritical consonants might even in the same three **identical consonants** radically change the meaning. Thus: *yabet* means "he makes a decision"; *nabat*, "was planted"; *bathat*, "she broadcast"; *yaboth*, "he broadcast"; *teen*, "figs"; *tebn*, "hay"; *thabbat*, "strengthens"; *thanat*, "bent"; and *tannob*, "to prevent."

Furthermore, the later addition of vowel signs by means of marks such as *damma* or *fathha* or *kassra* or *shadda* or *scoon* or *madda* could, from the same three **identical consonants**, yield yet further meanings. Thus: *bent* (with *fathha*), = "she built"; *bayan* (with *shadda*), = "he manifests"; *bayat* (with *shadda*), = "he intends"; *naboth* (with *shadda*), = "we broadcast"; *nabot* (with *shadda*), = "we make a decision"; *etc.*

Many of these undiacritical and unvowelized original inscriptions of sayings of Muhammad were, within fifty years after his death, collected and canonized by Muslims like Zaid and 'Uthman. Only then were they inscripturated as the autograph of the **entire** "Mother of the Book" - and **first** written down as the **completed** *Qur'an* itself (3:3-7 *cf.* 43:1-4). This, be it noted, is not Christian propaganda but orthodox Islamic teaching.

Indeed, the very word *Qur'an* seems to mean "recitation" rather than 'writing.' *Cf.* the root-meaning also of the Hebrew word *qaaraa'* -- with the primary meaning of "to call out" (or "to call to worship"), rather than the different *kaatab* (with the primary meaning of "to write down" or "to engrave"). Thus one perceives that, unlike the Old Testament, which is indeed pre-eminently a **written** document - the original *Qur'an* was initially an oral or a recited alias a **spoken-forth** teaching.

How **different** is the **Holy Bible**! "All **Scripture** was breathed into by God, and is profitable...for instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may be...thoroughly equipped unto all good works." Second Timothy 3:16-17. "No forthtelling of **Scripture** is of any private interpretation. For the forthtelling did not come in olden times by the will of man; but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Second Peter 1:19.

Early during the Arab conquests, many of Muhammad's followers were killed. Together with them, much knowledge about the *Qur'an* too passed away. Muslims then began arguing over what should be in the *Qur'an*, and what should not. An Army General back from Azerbaijan feared a controversy. He is said to have entreated Caliph 'Uthman (644-656) - the third Islamic ruler to succeed Muhammad - to "overtake this people before they differ over the *Qur'an*."

'Uthman convened an editorial committee. It gathered the various pieces of Islamic scripture that had been memorized or written down by Muhammad's companions. This produced a standard written version of the *Qur'an*. 'Uthman ordered all incomplete and "imperfect" collections of Proto-Islamic scripture, to be destroyed. Then copies of the new version were quickly distributed to the major centres of the new Islamic Empire.

After the collection and canonization by Zaid and 'Uthman of the undiacritical and unvowelized original inscriptions of the sayings of Muhammad some fifty years after his death, **this original *Qur'an* disappeared or disintegrated**. Yet that occurred only after uninspired Arabic copies of the *Qur'an* itself had been made and circulated among Muslims.

However, even many of the oldest extant copies - are **palimpsests**. Thus, also perhaps the oldest page from the oldest extant copy of the *Qur'an* - recently photographed by University of Saarbruecken Archeologist Gerd R. Puin in Yemen - reveals in ultraviolet light even earlier Quranic writing underneath. Here below is the story, as told by Toby Lester in his *What is the Koran?* (as published in *The Atlantic* during January 1999).

In 1972, restorers of the Great Mosque of Sana'a in Yemen discovered in a loft tens of thousands of fragments from almost a thousand different parchment codices of the *Qur'an*. Some seemed to date back to the seventh and eighth centuries (+/- 690 to 799 A.D.), being fragments of perhaps the oldest extant copies of the *Qur'an*. Some revealed aberrations from the standardized text of the *Qur'an* - featuring unconventional verse orderings, textual variations, and palimpsests (or versions clearly written over even earlier washed-off versions) written in the rare and early Hejazi Arabic script of Mecca itself.

As Dr. Andrew Rippin, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary, a leader in Quranic Studies, has pointed out: "Their variant readings and verse orders are all very significant." They suggest "that the early history of the Koranic text is much more of an open question than many have suspected. The text was less stable, and therefore had less authority, than has always been claimed."

Dr. Crone is a Historian at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton. She wrote in her 1977 book *Hagarism* (subtitled *The Making of the Islamic World*): "There is no hard evidence for the existence of the Koran in any form before the last decade of the seventh century."

Archaeologist Gerd Puin concludes "the Koran is a kind of cocktail of texts that were not all understood even at the time of Muhammad.... Many of them [*e.g.* Pre-Muhammad Arabic materials] may be a hundred years older than Islam itself. Even within Islamic traditions there is a huge body of contradictory information, including a significant Christian substrate."

Also Egypt's famous Islamic Professor, Dr. Nasr Abu Zaid, agreed. He himself ended up admitting that the orthodox-Islamic view is stultifying - reducing a divine, eternal, and dynamic text to a fixed human interpretation with no more life and meaning than "a trinket...a talisman...or an ornament."

The fact is, up to the arrival of Muhammad, Mecca was a local pagan sanctuary of considerable antiquity. As Mecca became prosperous in the sixth century A.D., pagan idols of

varying sizes and shapes proliferated. Even the traditional Islamic story claims that by the early seventh century, the Caaba was surrounded by some 360 statues (one for each day of the Arabic year), including also what purported to be representations of Jesus and Mary.

After Muhammad around A.D. 610 believed the angel Gabriel gave him what he and others believed were divine revelations in a cave, he propagated his Islamic views. That he did, first in nearby Mecca - and from A.D. 622 onward also in Yathrib alias Medina some 200 miles to the north till he died and was buried there around A.D. 632.

The *Qur'an* is often difficult for contemporary readers - even educated speakers of Arabic - to understand. It makes shifts in style, voice, and subject matter from verse to verse. Its inconsistencies are easy to find. God may be referred to in the first and third person in the same sentence; and divine rulings occasionally contradict one another. Indeed, the *Qur'an* itself anticipates this criticism - and asserts the right to abrogate even its own message ("God blot out or confirms whatever He pleases").

A big theological debate arose within Islam in the late-eighth century - between those who believed in the *Qur'an* as the uncreated and eternal Word of God, and those who believed in it as created in time. Under the Caliph al-Ma'mun (813-833), this latter view briefly became orthodox doctrine.

It was supported by several schools. Such included also Mu'tazilism, which developed a theology based on a metaphorical rather than a literalistic understanding of the *Qur'an*.

Yet by the end of the tenth century the influence of the Mu'tazili school had waned, for political reasons, and the official doctrine had become that of *ijaz* or the inimitability of the *Qur'an*. Consequently, it has traditionally not much been translated by Muslims - neither for Non-Arabic-speaking Muslims, nor for other persons. The translations by Muslims that do exist, are regarded as nothing more than uninspired aids.

The fact is, however, as pointed out by Dr. Gerd Puin: "The Koran claims for itself that it is 'mubeen' or 'clear'.... But if you look at it, you will notice that every fifth sentence or so simply doesn't make sense. Many Muslims - and Orientalists - will tell you otherwise, of course; but the fact is, that a fifth of the Koranic text is just incomprehensible."

Patricia Crone declares of the *Qur'an* that "the first compilers were not redactors but collectors of *debris*, whose works are strikingly devoid of overall unity." John Wansbrough, formerly of the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, in his *Quranic Studies* regards the holy book of Islam as "several partially overlapping collections of *logia*...modified by the influence of Rabbinic Judaism." Indeed, the Muslim Ali Dashti, in his 1985 *Study of the Prophetic Career of Mohammed*, labelled many of Islam's traditional accounts of Muhammad's life as "myth-making and miracle-mongering."

For alongside of the many extant fragments and copies, and copies of copies, of the now-unextant first *Qur'an* - also the *Sunna* (or oral traditions of Muhammad) came into being. Later arose also the *Hadith* (or written-down traditions regarding Muhammad and Islam); the *Sira* (or biographies of the Prophet); and the *Tafsir* (or Quranic commentary and explication).

It is from these later sources - compiled in written form by and large from the mid-eighth to the mid-tenth century - that all accounts of the alleged revelation-process of the *Qur'an* and the early years of Islam are ultimately derived. Such helped mediaeval Islamic scholars to manufacture later diacritically and vocally amended and thus uninspired copies and copies of copies of the *Qur'an* (which was originally devoid of vowel signs and even of consonantal diacritical marks).

Yet not the *Sunna* nor the *Hadith* but the *Qur'an* alone remains decisive for Muslims - together with all of the problems of the *Qur'an*. Indeed, one such verse in the *Qur'an* states: "*ALM Sabbeh Raboka Al 'Azzaam.*" Muslims have translated this: "ALM praise your glorified God." However, nobody explains what this ALM is. Yet by adding just one diacritical point below the consonant alleged to be *ba*, and thus changing it into *ya* - the sentence could be read as: "*ALMsyyh Raboka Al 'Azzaam.*" That would mean: "The Christ is your glorified God" - and would then supplant Islam with Christianity!

Thus the *Qur'an* is a powerful mixture of a few reworked excerpts from the much earlier Bible, together with a multitude of other material. The first-mentioned data in the *Qur'an*, is unoriginal to it; and was re-arranged therein from a measure of acquaintance with the contents of much older writings. Such first-mentioned data include *inter alia* a few pericopes from the Old Testament, and even less portions from the New Testament of the Bible (being the infallible Word of God).

The rest of the material in the *Qur'an* was collected together from outside of the 66 books of the Bible. Such is a collection of: certain portions from the Jewish apocryphal books which originated in the Intertestamentary Period between Malachi and Matthew; bits and pieces of Post-Christian sectarian writings from the *Pseudepigrapha*; reworkings of elements of Pre-Islamic Arab religions; and Muhammad's own opinions.

All of that material was then collected and inscripturated as the *Qur'an*. This is quite different to the Bible. The Bible was written down, *in toto*, over approximately at least fifteen centuries; the *Qur'an*, over less than 24 years.

The latter does not, like the Bible, consist of 66 books with more than 1000 chapters written down by at least 40 inspired people (or their secretaries) under the guidance of the Triune God *'E:lohiym*. For the *Qur'an* consists of but one book of hardly a hundred chapters proceeding from just one man who acted in the name of one of Arabia's Pre-Islamic gods - the monotheistic yet unitarian god *Allah*.

Other than does the Bible, the *Qur'an* reflects the milieu not of all three of the Old World Continents - but by and large only that of the then-backward region of Arabia. It does not mention many theodicies and miracles, but only its own version of some eschatological predictions derived from the Bible itself. Islam proclaims no atonement for sins and no empty tomb of Jesus in Jerusalem - but rather legalistic Islamic strictures, and Muhammad's unempty tomb in Medina.

(A) **Viewed historically**, the Christian sources of revelation are much older and therefore **historically** weightier than those of Islam. Books of the Bible and portions thereof were

inscripturated shortly after they were revealed. Genesis 5:1; Exodus 17:14; Deuteronomy 31:24f etc. Copies (and later also translations) thereof, were made and circulated shortly thereafter. Deuteronomy 17:18f; Matthew 1:21; 27:46; Mark 5:41; Luke 1:1-4; 23:38; John 19:19-20; Acts 2:4-11; First Corinthians 14:6-28; Colossians 4:16 and Revelation 1:19 to 3:14 etc.

Actually, the completed Bible also ends with the solemn warning not to add anything to it or to omit anything from it - right down to Jesus' final coming at the end of World History. Revelation 22:19f. But the *Qur'an* ends with a reference to the wicked Satan "the Whisperer (of evil)...who whispers into the hearts of mankind, among *jinnns* [or spirits] and among men" (*Sura* 114:6).

Muslim Writer Sheik Ahmed Behardien recognizes in respect of the **Old Testament**: "For historical purposes the most important versions were the Greek version, known as the Septuagint, and the Latin version, known as the Vulgate. The Septuagint, the earliest portion dated from about 284 B.C.... The Vulgate was a Latin translation made by the celebrated Father of the Christian Church, St. Jerome, from Hebrew, early in the fifth century A.D., superseding the Old Latin Version" (our emphases -- F.N.L.). He is **silent** about the **Hebrew original**!

In respect of the **New Testament**, the Muslim Writer Bashyr Ahmad maintains: "The documents from which most of the Christian theologians have compiled the records of events as narrated in the New Testament, are: the *Codex Vaticanus*, the *Codex Sinaiticus* and the *Sinaitic Lyriac*." Both of the first-mentioned two manuscripts, date from no later than precisely early in the 4th century A.D. Ahmad is **silent** even about **copies** of the **Greek original**!

According to Islam, the many written-out **copies** of both the Old Testament as well as the New Testament - after the wearing out of the autographs or **original writings** thereof - are supposed to have become **quite corrupted** in the course of time. Therefore Islam holds that it pleased God later to get His infallibly-recorded Word permanently inscripturated in the allegedly faultless *Qur'an*.

From then on, the Old and the New Testament are regarded as having been **abrogated** and thus **no longer necessary**. If however they are indeed consulted, those allegedly fallible and faulty Biblical documents are now to be interpreted in the light of the allegedly infallible *Qur'an* - and never *vice versa*.

Now even the very oldest extant manuscripts of the Bible or portions thereof, were recorded on proper writing materials. However, there is considerable evidence (even among Muslims) that parts of that which later became the **original *Qur'an*** had first been recorded on animal bones, leaves, rocks and skins etc. - and that it was only after the death of Muhammad that some of those writings (if not also other oral materials) were collected and canonized and systematized precisely by Muslim Leaders like Zaid and 'Uthman.

Muhammad died in 632 A.D., leaving his alleged revelations in disorder. His successor Abu Bekr ordered the fragmentary written remnants referred to above, to be collected. To them, he added oral memorizations of other utterances by Muhammad to be transcribed from the mouths of those who had learned them by heart. When completed, this combined record was entrusted to Hafsa, the daughter of one of Muhammad's widows.

In the 30th year of the *Hijra* (and so in 651 A.D.), Caliph 'Uthman observed the great disagreements between the various copies of the *Qur'an*. Those of Iraq followed the reading of Abu Musa al Ashari; but those of the Syrians followed that of Macdad Ibn Aswad. So 'Uthman ordered many copies to be transcribed from that of Abu Bekr - under the inspection of Zaid and three others.

Wherever they disagreed about any word, they were to write it down in the dialect of the Muhammad's Quraish tribe, in which it was first orally delivered. Once made, those new copies were then dispersed into the various provinces of the Islamic Empire - and all the older copies burned or suppressed. Many things in Hafsa's copy were corrected thus, yet some few variant readings still occur. Thus the very first standardized copy of the *Qur'an* got compiled, around 680 A.D.

But even that autograph or original writing of that standardized Qur'an itself shortly thereafter became either worn out or lost or (according to one Islamic tradition) taken up into Heaven. It is thus today (here on Earth) just as little accessible for scientific investigation thereof, as are the autographs of the nineteenth-century original writings of the Mormons. Howsoever uniformly even the oldest extant Arabic-language copies thereof might agree with one another - nobody on Earth is today able to compare any or all of those oldest extant Arabic copies with the autograph of the *Qur'an* itself.

Precisely Islam therefore has a huge text-critical problem. And that, not only in respect of Arabic copies of the now-perished or now-lost autograph of the *Qur'an* which was itself only many decades after the death of Muhammad for the first time inscripturated as a complete book with its 114 *Suras* - but especially in respect of the preceding bits and pieces of rags and skins and bones and leaves *etc.* containing alleged words of Muhammad which were only later reworked as the *Qur'an* by men like Zaid and 'Uthman.

Attemptedly, this text-critical problem was evaded by standardizing the *Qur'an* within fifty years after the death of Muhammad - and by thereafter declaring all subsequently-submitted bits and pieces alleged to contain pronouncements by Muhammad - to be uninspired ["apocryphal"!]  
*Hadith* or traditions evaluatable only in light of the completed *Qur'an* itself. In addition to this, there are also statements in the *Qur'an* itself (*e.g.* at 3:45 and 4:171) which are hardly to be reconciled with one another.

All Muslims have to admit that not even any part of the *Qur'an* could have been inscripturated before 'The Call' of Muhammad around the year 609 A.D. - and that the first inscripturated manuscript of the **whole** *Qur'an*, dating from around 680 A.D., can today no longer be found anywhere on Earth. They further have to admit that all authoritative extant manuscript copies of our Bible in its original languages and/or in early translations thereof were not only written down and preserved many centuries before Muhammad - but also that all ecclesiastical parties even before Jerome (*circa* 345-419 A.D.) and centuries before Muhammad (*circa* 570-632 A.D.) agreed as to the scope and final normativity of the whole Bible.

Now the A.D. 609-680 *Qur'an* frequently tries to shame the "People of the Book" - *viz.* especially the Judaists, but also the Christians - for not heeding the Holy Bible. In so doing, it is true that Muhammad was hereby trying to establish the superiority of the *Qur'an*.

But by rebuking the majority of Judaists and Christians for not being loyal to the Bible, he established the veracity of the Bible. And in conceding that some of the "People of the Book" were indeed quite loyal to it - he unwittingly thereby **confirmed the accessibility and authority and understandability thereof also in his own day and age and locality.**

Thereby Muhammad himself overthrows the later Islamic theory that the Holy Bible had long been corrupted and was insufficiently intelligible by the time of the beginning and the duration and the completion of the compilation of the *Qur'an*. Excerpts below from several examples of this in the *Qur'an* itself, abundantly prove this point.

In *Sura* 3:64-66, Muhammad and his Muslim friends say: "O People of the Book! Come to common terms as between us and you!.... You are those who fell to disputing, (even) in matters of which you had some knowledge.... You have knowledge!"

In *Sura* 3:75-76, the *Qur'an* says: "Among the People of the Book are some who, if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will (readily) pay it back.... Those who keep their plighted faith and act aright - verily, God loves those who act aright!"

Even in *Sura* 3:78-79, the *Qur'an* further concedes anent those of the People of the Book who were wicked: "There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues. (As they read.) you would think it is a part of the Book. But it is not part of the Book. And they say, 'That is from God!' But it is not from God. It is they who tell a lie against God. And (well) they know it!"

"It is not (possible) that a man to whom is given the Book and Wisdom and the prophetic office, should say to people: 'You must be my worshippers rather than God's!' **On the contrary**, (he would say): '[You must be worshippers] of Him Who is truly the Cherisher of all! For you have taught the Book, and you have studied it earnestly.'"

In *Sura* 3:81, the *Qur'an* further says of those who are the People of the Book: "God took the Covenant of the Prophets, saying: 'I give you a Book'.... Then an Apostle [*viz.* Muhammad] comes to you, **confirming** what is with you.... God said: 'Do you agree, and take this My Covenant as binding on you?' They said: 'We agree!'"

As the famous 1934 Islamic commentator Abdullah Yusuf Ali here observes: "The argument is: 'You (People of the Book) are bound by your own oaths, sworn solemnly in the presence of your own Prophets. In the Old Testament as it now exists, Muhammad is foretold in Deuteronomy 18:18; and the rise of the Arab nation in Isaiah 42:11. For Kedar was a son of Isma'il and the name for the Arab nation. In the New Testament as it now exists, Muhammad is foretold in the Gospel of St. John 14:16, 15:26 and 16:7.'"

None of the five Bible verses Ali here cites, predict what he says they do. Yet he, on the strength of *Sura* 3:81, rightly refers not only the People of the Book in Muhammad's time but refers also his own readers of the *Qur'an* to the **Holy Bible** containing those verses.

So too at *Sura* 3:99. There, the *Qur'an* urges: "O you People of the Book!... You were yourselves **witnesses (to God's Covenant)**. But God is not unmindful of all that you do."

In *Sura* 3:113-115, it is further conceded: "Not all of them are alike. Of the People of **the Book**, there are a portion that stand (for the right). They rehearse the signs of God...and then prostrate themselves in adoration. They believe in God and the Last Day. They enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong. And they (hasten in emulation) in (all) good works. They are in the ranks of the righteous. Of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them. For God knows well those who do right."

Clearly, then, Muhammad here assumes it is precisely from the Holy Bible that these 'People of **the Book**' are able to discern what is right - so as to be able to do it. From that same **Book**, they are also able to worship God aright - and to believe in the Last Day.

Indeed, at *Sura* 3:187 the *Qur'an* even states: "Remember, God took a Covenant from the People of **the Book** to make it **known** and **clear** to **mankind**." This stresses the **clarity** and the **knowability** of the Covenant of **that Book** - not only to Judaists and Christians but indeed to all of "**mankind**" too (including also Muslims).

Hence, as *Sura* 3:187 insists: "There are, certainly, among the People of **the Book** those who believe in God - in the revelation of You, and in the revelation to them - bowing in humility to God.... For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in account." Again in *Sura* 4:47: "O you People of **the Book**! Believe in what We have (now) revealed, confirming what was (already) with you!"

Also in *Sura* 6:19-20, Muhammad says to the People of the Book: "Can you possibly bear witness that beside God, there is another God?" He then urges them to "say: 'Nay! I cannot bear witness!'" - and also to "say: 'But in truth, He is the one God.'" Then the *Qur'an* immediately says about those 'People of the Book': "Those to whom We have given **the Book** - **know** this."

However. That clearly presupposes the understandability of **the Bible**. Also in Muhammad's own time.

Vital are *Suras* 5:62 & 5:71 and 10:94. "O People of the Book!.... **We** [Muslims] **believe** in God and **the revelation**...which came **before** us.... You have **no ground** to stand upon - unless you **stand fast** by the **Law**, the **Gospel**, and **all the Revelation** that has come to **you** from your Lord....

" If you were in doubt as to what We have revealed to you, then ask **those** who have been reading **the Book** from before you!" This means also **Muhammad** and his **colleagues claimed** to **believe** (and thus to understand) the **Bible**.

Whether the original content of these latter verses in the *Qur'an* are directed at Christians or at Judaists or at Muslims or at all three - **it proves** in all respects very clearly that **even** according to the *Qur'an*, precisely **copies of the Bible itself** were **valid** as the **then-available** and **reliable** and **understandable** and **well-known** and **only religious standard** (accepted by the *Qur'an*) until **at least 680 A.D.** For it is only around such latter year, that little pieces of the by-then-completed *Qur'an* itself were for the first time collected and again written down as one complete document - and subsequently reproduced and increasingly made available, first in various Arabic copies thereof and later still in the form of translations.



The **historical data**, also according to various Muslim Writers in respect of the manuscripts of both the Bible and the *Qur'an*, show that there today exist extant manuscripts of all parts of the Bible which were inscripturated at least 200 to 250 years before the original writing (and thereafter also before even the oldest extant Arabic copies) of the *Qur'an*. Historical priority must thus be given to the Biblical manuscripts above those of the *Qur'an*.

(B) **Theologically**, the Protestant Christian view anent God's Self-revelation stands or falls with the reliability of the Bible as the only source of revelation anent salvation. The position of the Muslim sources of revelation, however, is more complicated - and there are differences about this among Muslims themselves. The Islamitic sect of the Malikites, for example, believe in four sources of revelation [namely the *Qur'an* (or holy book); the *Sunna* (or authentic oral tradition from Muhammad); the *Hadith* (or later-inscripturated traditions); and the *Djima* (or general concurrence of the community)] - while the *Sofites* in turn add to this yet another and fifth source of revelation, namely the *Qujas* (or analogical inference).

The *Qur'an*, however, stands at the forefront. The *Darut=Tabligh-II=Islami* puts it very clearly: "QURAN, SUPREME AUTHORITY. First and foremost is the Holy Quran.... **Other teachings lie in the shade beside the Holy Quran**.... PLACE OF SUNNAH.... The Sunnah came into existence along with the revelation of the Holy Quran. After the Holy Quran, therefore, Muslims owe most to the Sunnah....

"The Holy Quran is the Word of God, the Sunnah is the practice of the Holy Prophet.... The Holy Quran and the Sunnah are our main sources....

"PLACE OF TRADITIONS.... The Traditions [= *Hadith* - F.N.L.] provide the evidence for the Sunnah.... The compilation of Traditions began about a century or more after the Holy Prophet.... Do not think, therefore, that the Traditions can have any authority over the Holy Quran....

"The Sunnah, of course, is what gives expression to the real meaning of the Holy Quran.... Although a major portion of the Traditions is of probable value, nevertheless, they preserve a wealth of Islamic lore. Among them are Traditions which support the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. These should command our obedience....

"The Traditions which contravene the Holy Quran and the Sunnah, and the Traditions which contradict Traditions supported by the Holy Quran...are not worthy of acceptance. To accept them, is to reject the Holy Quran and Traditions in accord with the Holy Quran.

"No righteous Muslim would have the audacity to believe in Traditions which contravene the Holy Quran and the Sunnah. Nor those which contradict Traditions in accord with the Holy Quran.... The Traditions which possess only a degree of truth, can never be judge over the Holy Quran. They are no more than corroborative evidence.... The Holy Quran alone can be judge over the Quran." (My emphases throughout - F.N.L.).

What, then, is the ranking-order of the sources of revelation in Muslim Theology? It is as follows:-

1. First - the *Qur'an*. That alone is regarded as the Word of God (and not as the word of Muhammad). In any clash of doctrine, the *Qur'an* is therefore always chosen above the *Sunna* and the Traditions.

2. Second - the *Sunna*. That is regarded as the practice of Muhammad. The *Sunna* expresses the true meaning of the *Qur'an*, but the proof of the *Sunna* in turn is to be sought in the *Hadith* or Traditions.

But only some traditions are dependable, namely those which the *Qur'an* corroborates, or which are corroborated by such traditions as again in turn are supported by the *Qur'an*. All other traditions are unworthy of being accepted, and thus cannot be cited as proof of the *Sunna* (or of the *Qur'an*).

It therefore all boils down to this. The closed canon of or delineated data in the *Qur'an* exercise a decisive limitation to the in other respects unclosed data in the *Sunna* and the *Hadith* (or Traditions). Consequently, there is thus - strictly speaking - in orthodox Islamic practice no "open canon" for Muslims. Islamic doctrines can in fact be judged only according to the *Qur'an*, as approached in the light of the fallible *Hadith* containing also the *Sunna*.

As the Muslim Scholar Abdullah Yusuf Ali in our opinion reasonably observes: "While freely reserving the right of individual judgement on the part of every earnest writer [interpreting Islam], I think the act of interpretation must stick as closely as possible to the text which it seeks to interpret..., which is usually perfectly perspicuous, as it claims to be.... It has been said that the Quran is its own best Commentary."

We have seen that the Holy Bible - even according to the *Qur'an* (3:187 & 6:20) - is "**clear to mankind**" and easy to "**know**." Yet according to the above commentator on the *Qur'an* (the profoundly-learned Muslim Scholar A.Y. Ali) the *Qur'an* itself is only "**usually**...perspicuous" - and thus **not always** so clear and easy to understand.

We ourselves here agree with A.Y. Ali. Indeed, we now present five passages of the *Qur'an* to illustrate this.

*Sura* 2:65 states: "Well you [Judaists] knew those amongst you, who transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath. We said to them: 'May you be apes, despised and rejected!'"

Abdullah Yusuf Ali comments: "There must have been a Jewish tradition about a whole...community...which persisted in breaking the Sabbath and were turned into apes, cf. 7:163-166. Or should we translate in both these passages, 'Be as apes' instead of 'Be apes'? This is the suggestion of Maulvi Muhammad Ali on this passage, on the authority of Mujahid and Ibn Jarir Tabari."

*Sura* 3:2-3 states: "God! There is no god but He - the Living, the Self-Subsisting, Eternal. It is He Who sent down to you (step by step) in truth, the Book [*viz.* the *Qur'an*] - **confirming** that [*viz.* the Bible] which went **before** it. And He sent down the Law...and the Gospel of Jesus **before** this, as a **guide to mankind**; and He sent down the Criterion."

Ali comments: "In some editions [of the *Qur'an*], the break between verses 3 and 4 occurs here in the middle of the sentence. But in the edition of Hafiz Uthman, followed by the Egyptian Concordance *Fathhur-Rahhman*, the break occurs at the word *Furqan*. In verse-divisions, our classicists have mainly followed rhythm. As the word *Furqan* from this point of view is parallel to the word *Intiqam*, which ends the next verse, I have accepted the verse-division at *Furqan* as more in consonance with Quranic rhythm.... From this point onwards in this Sura, M.M.A., followed by H.G.S., numbers the verse[s] so that there is a deficiency of one compared with the accepted numbering in the most approved Texts, which I have followed, including that of the Egyptian Royal Edition and that of our Anjuman-iHimayat-i-Islam."

*Sura 3:7* states of the *Qur'an* itself: "He it is, Who has sent down to you the Book. In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning). They are the foundation of the Book; others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity, follow the part thereof that is allegorical - seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings. But no one knows its hidden meanings, except God. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge, say: 'We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord.' And none will grasp the message, except men of understanding."

Ali's comments hardly make the above transparent. He says: "This passage gives us an important clue to the interpretation of the Holy Qur-an. Broadly speaking, it may be divided into two portions B not given separately, but intermingled. Viz., (1) the nucleus or 'foundation' of the Book, literally 'the mother of the Book'; and (2) the part which is figurative, metaphorical or allegorical. It is very fascinating to take up the latter, and exercise our ingenuity about its inner meaning. But it refers to such profound spiritual matters, that human language is inadequate to it; and though people of wisdom may get some light from it, no one should be dogmatic - as the final meaning is known to God alone.

"The Commentators usually understand the verses 'of established meaning' (*muhhkam*) to refer to the categorical orders of the *Shari'at* (or the Law), which are plain to everyone's understanding. But perhaps the meaning is wider: the 'mother of the Book' must include the very foundation on which all Law rests, the essence of God's Message - as distinguished from the various illustrative parables, allegories and ordinances.

"If we refer to 11:1 and 39:23, we shall find that in a sense the whole of the Qur-an has both 'established meaning' and allegorical meaning. The division is not between the verses, but between the meaning to be attached to them. Each verse is but a Sign or Symbol. What it represents, is something immediately applicable and something eternal and independent of time and space - the 'Forms of Ideas' in Plato's Philosophy. The wise man will understand that there is an 'essence' and an illustrative clothing given to the essence, throughout the Book. We must try to understand it as best we can, but not waste our energies in disputing about matters beyond our depth.

"One reading, rejected by the majority of Commentators but accepted by Mujahid and others, would not make a break at the point here marked *Waqfa Lazim* ['except God'], but would run the two sentences together. In that case, the construction would run: 'No one knows its hidden meanings except God and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge. They say' *etc.*" To me (Francis Nigel Lee), that sounds even more obscure and elitist!

*Sura 4:157* states, again of certain Judaists, that "they said (in boast): 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God.' But they did not kill him nor crucify him. But so it was made to appear to them. And those who differ therein, are full of doubts with no (certain) knowledge but only conjecture to follow. For of a surety, they did not kill him. Nay, God raised him up unto Himself.... And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death."

On at least two points, Muslims themselves disagree with one another as to what the *Qur'an* is here claiming. So much for the perspicuity of the *Qur'an*!

On the above words 'God raised him up' - Ali comments: "There is a difference of opinion as to the exact interpretation of this verse. The words are: the Jews did not kill Jesus, but 'God raised him up (*rafa'a*) to Himself.' One school holds that Jesus did not die the usual human death, but still lives in the body in Heaven. Another holds that he did die (5:120), but not when he was supposed to be crucified; and that his being 'raised up' unto God means that instead of being disgraced as a malefactor as the Jews intended, he was on the contrary honoured by God as His Apostle."

Also on the meaning of Muhammad's above further words that 'none of the People of the Book...must believe in him before his death' - Muslims are further divided. As Ali comments: "Interpreters are not agreed as to the exact meaning. Those who hold that Jesus did not die...refer the pronoun 'his' to Jesus. They say that Jesus is still living in the body and that he will appear just before the Final Day in preparation for the coming of Imam Mahhdi, when the World will be purified of sin.... Others think that 'his' is better referred to 'none of the People of the Book' - and that the emphatic form 'must believe' (*la-yu-minanna*) denotes more a question of duty than of fact."

As a final example of the obscureness of the *Qur'an*, at 5:62-63 (*cf.* 7:163-166), it returns to the statement in 2:65 that God is supposed to have transubstantiated certain Sabbath-breaking Judaists into apes. For it again refers to "those who incurred the curse of God and His wrath; those of whom some He transformed into apes and swine."

Here, Abdullah Yusuf Ali gives the following comment: "For apes, see *Qur'an* 2:65. For men possessed by devils, and the devils being sent into swine, see Matthew 8:28-32. Or perhaps both apes and swine are allegorical - those who falsified God's Scriptures became lawless like apes; and those who succumbed to filth [or] gluttony or gross living, became like swine." Here, the Muslim Scholar Ali needs the help of the clear Bible (at Matthew 8:28-32) to help make the obscure *Qur'an* clear!

So the *Qur'an* itself claims that the Holy Bible is "**clear**" and easy to "know." Nevertheless, Muslim commentators themselves have noted the **obscurity** of much in the *Qur'an*!

One should note too that Muslims themselves admit that also Islam's *Sunna* and *Hadith* themselves must be interpreted in the light of the unclear *Qur'an*. So noted, the epistemological situation of the Islamic sources becomes even more problematic!

In an obscure way, the *Qur'an* in 2:65 & 5:62-63 & 7:164-166 implies that Jews are apes and pigs - as a well-catechized three-year-old Fundamentalist Muslim girl told the World, in 2002, over an Arabic television network. However, from the Biblical Book of Hebrews (1:1 to 13:21) it is quite clear that Jews are neither apes nor pigs - but images of the Triune God Who calls upon all mankind (including Jews and Muslims) to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God - yesterday, and today, and for ever!

So the Bible is the Word of God - even according to the *Qur'an*. But the *Qu'ran* - according to the *Qur'an* - has the right to abrogate even parts of itself. And, according to many Muslim Scholars themselves - is obscure as to its meaning.

How different is the witness of the Bible - to the Bible! "Prepare the way of the Lord [Jesus]; make straight in the desert a highway for our God!" For "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed; and all flesh shall see it together. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken it." Isaiah 40:3-5 *cf.* Luke 3:2-6 & 3:15-17 (*q.v.*).

So, then - in the words of the Prophet Isaiah 40:6-8 - apart from the ever-living Christ, "all flesh is grass, and all its comeliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades - because the Spirit of the Lord blows upon it. Surely, the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades. But the Word of our God shall keep on standing for ever!"

[The above is excerpted from the 2004 expanded edition and English translation of Dr. Lee's 1964 University of Stellenbosch M.Th. Afrikaans-language Dissertation *Muhammad in die Bybel? Is Muhammad en die Islam in the Bybel voorspel?* (*Muhammad in the Bible? Were Muhammad and Islam Predicted in the Bible?*)]