

CONTRADICTIONS WITHIN THE QURAN

"Do they not consider the Quran? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much discrepancies." (Sura 4:82).

This verse is further amplified by the already quoted texts:

"No change can there be in the Words of Allah (Sura 10:64)

"There is none that can alter the Words of Allah (Sura 6:34)

We Christians believe this too. Let us assume for a moment that there is no discrepancy between the message of the Bible and the Quran, which, as we have seen, is not the case, and consider the Quran on its own.

The problem of abrogation.

"When We substitute one revelation for another, - and Allah knows best what He reveals, - they say 'Thou art a forger: But most of them understand not. Say, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy Lord in truth.'"

"None of our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute *something better* or similar--Knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things?....Would you question your Apostle as Moses was questioned of old?" (Suras 16:101 and 2:106,108).

We should like to find out how a divine revelation can be improved. We would have expected it to have been perfect and true right from the start. Yusuf Ali tries to explain:

"...it means that God's message from age to age is always the same, but that its form may differ according to the needs and exigencies of the time. Some commentators apply it also to the Ayat (revelation) of the Quran. There is nothing derogatory in this if we believe in progressive revelation.

In Sura 3:7 we are told distinctly about the Quran, that some of its verses are basic and fundamental, and others are allegorical, and it is mischievous to treat the allegorical verses and follow them (literally)." (comm 107).

This is fully acceptable. God has revealed His Word progressively, the revelation being levelled at the comprehension and culture of the people to whom it was first given. Everybody will agree that an allegory should not be taken literally. But what about the law of 'mansukh' (=abrogated verse; please note Sura 2:106 does not speak of intellect, culture or progressive revelation with reference to scriptures given prior to Mohammed, but to Quranic verses only!) and 'nasikh' (=the verses that take the place of the mansukh verses)? .

We must recognize one important principle: If we want to know what a certain passage really means we have to make a proper exegesis. We have to establish what exactly the text in question was intended to say to the original hearers. How did *they* understand it? Only having done that can we interpret a text in today's situation without distortion. There are various possible ways of establishing the original meaning, but one should also look at the very old commentaries and see how they understood and interpreted the text.

The "Tafsir-i-Azizi" explains three kinds of abrogations (=cancellations):

- i) where a verse has been removed from the Quran and another given in its place;
- ii) where the injunction (command) is abrogated and the letters of the verse remain; !
- iii) where both the verse and its injunction are removed from the text

Jalalu'd-Din, says that the number of abrogated verses has been variously estimated to range from 5 to 500 ("Dictionary of Islam", page 520)

In his 'Itqan' he furnished a list of 20 verses, which are acknowledged by all commentators to be abrogated ("Dictionary of Islam", page 520).

Just a few be mentioned here:

The Qibla (prayer direction) was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca (Sura 2:142-144);

The division of inheritance left by parents or other relatives according to Sura 4:7 had to be equal (a share and a share which has to be determined). This was abrogated and replaced by verse 11, where it is commanded that males must get double the share of females.

The night prayer performed by reciting the Quran ought to be more or less half the time of the night (Sura 73:2). This was changed to as much as may be easy for you (verse 20).

The treatment of adulteresses is to be life imprisonment (Sura 4:15), which was changed to flogging with 100 strokes (Sura 24:2). This despite the leniency prescribed for homosexuals (Sura 4:16) on repenting.

The retaliation in cases of crime, particularly murder, was to be confined to people of equal rank (slave for slave, free for free etc.) (Sura 2:178) This is in disagreement with Sura 5:48 and Sura 17:33 where retaliation is allowed against the murderer only.

The Jihad or Holy War was forbidden in the sacred months (Sura 9:5) but is allowed, even encouraged in verse 36 which replaces the former.

"Sura 2:106 occurs immediately before a series of sweeping changes, or rather modifications, introduced by Muhammad in both the ritual and the legal spheres. The verse thus precedes a change in the Qibla (vss. 115,177,124-151); in the pilgrimage rites (vs. 158); in the dietary laws (vss. 168-174); in the law relating to talio (vss. 178-179); in bequests (vss. 180-182); in the fast (vss. 182-187); and again in the pilgrimage (vss. 191-203).

Similarly, Sura 16:101 is followed by allusions to modifications in the dietary laws (vss 114-119), and in the Sabbath laws (vs.124)" ("The Collection of the Quran" by John Burton).

Elaborating on this we note that the fast is compulsory "but if any of you is ill or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up) from days later. For those who can do it (with hardship) is a ransom, the feeding of one, that is indigent." (Sura 2:184).

"Here one can hardly escape the conclusion that the first verse (i.e. 184) allows a rich man to buy himself out of the fast." ("Islam" by A. Guillaume). The next verse is said to replace the former. It allows no compensation of any kind for the fast.

In verse 180 of the same Sura "it is prescribed, when death approaches any of you, if he leaves any

goods, that he make a bequest to parents and next of kin....". This is said to be replaced by Sura 4:11, according to which a double portion of inheritance falls to males compared to that of females.

The much discussed "verses of the sword": "...fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them and seize them, beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (or war)." (Sura 9:5) and "...when you meet the unbelievers (in fight) cut off their necks..." (Sura 47:4) are "said to have cancelled no less than 124 verses which enjoined toleration and patience." (A. Guillaume).

To us it is surprising to find the mansukh and nasikh verses often near to each other. We judge these to be cases of interpolation.

As stated earlier, we *do* believe in progressive revelation. The Old Covenant of the Law, as given to Moses, was superseded by the New Covenant of grace, which Jesus introduced. But these developments took place over a considerable time (1 500 years) with many prophetic warnings and predictions in between, so that no arbitrary action may be assumed on the side of God. In the light of this we find it unacceptable that within a space of 20 years a need for change or correction can become necessary. This surely suggests that God is either not all-knowing or else the recorder made a correction.

There are other verses which further add to the confusion:

"If we wished, we could make away with what we have revealed to you!" (Sura 17:86). "We shall teach you to recite it (i.e. the Quran) and you will not forget - except that Allah wills (Sura 87:6-7).

Why should anything be forgotten of an eternal revelation? To "substitute for it something better"? We do admit that an inspired man can err at times, but an inspired book (nazil) cannot!

Zarkasi explains the above concept more deeply. He states (vol. I p. 235):

"The 'naskh' (sic) of the wording and recital occurred by means of God's causing them to forget it. He withdrew it from their memories, while commanding them to neglect its public recital and its recording in the mushaf. With the passage of time, it would quite disappear like the rest of God's revealed Books which He mentions in the Quran, but nothing of which is known today. This can have happened either during the Prophet's life so that, when he died, the forgotten material was no longer being recited as part of the Quran; or it might have happened after the death of the Prophet. It would still be extant in writing, but God would cause them to forget it. He would then remove it from their memories. But, of course, the naskh of any part of the revelation after the death of the Prophet is not possible." ("The Collection of the Quran" by John Burton p.97).

We suggest that Allah could have spared us a lot of confusion, doubt and explaining, had He given the better text right from the beginning.

"There was a series of Hadiths designed expressly to give the impression that Muhammad had forgotten part of the revelations. The reports were specific and detailed enough to identify the actual wording of the verses in question. Anas is reported in the two Sahih's (i.e. al-Bukhari and Muslim) as declaring: There was revealed concerning those slain at Bi'r Ma'una a Quran verse which we recited until it was withdrawn: "Inform our tribe on our behalf that we have met our Lord. He has been well pleased with us and has satisfied our desires.'" ("al-Itqan by Jalal al Din).

'Abdullah b. al Zubair therefore asked 'Uthman what had possessed him to include Sura 2:240 in the 'mushaf' (document or canon), when he knew it to have been abrogated by Sura 2:234.

'Because', he replied 'Uthman, 'I know it to be part of the Quran text.' '(ibid.). ("The Collection of the Quran" by John Burton).

A further problem arises from the fact that there is by no means any certainty which verses are mansukh and which nasikh, since the order in which the Quran was written down is not chronological, but according to the length of the Suras. However, even the Suras were not necessarily given in one piece. It happened that a certain portion of a Sura was given, and the next given text would be directed by Mohammed to be added to another Sura, and later again another addition was made to the first again, etc. The Hadis gives no conclusive information about the chronological order either, so that strictly speaking, there is no means of determining which of two disagreeing texts is mansukh, and which nasikh.

In any case we Christians see in this whole subject just a theological gimmick to "explain" contradictions. The quotation:

"No change can there be in the Words of Allah" and "There is none that can alter the Words of Allah. Already hast thou received some account of those Apostles." or "the other Apostles also said so." (Suras 10:64 and 6:34).

is contradicted by all those Muslims who claim that the Bible which is admitted to be a revealed book, has been altered and corrupted.

To underline our point let us just look at two passages of the Quran that have not been reconciled in terms of the law of abrogation.

In Sura 41:9-12 we read that the world was created in eight days, in Sura 7:54 we are told it were six days. It is, we suppose, up to the believer to make up his mind which of the two he will accept.

QUESTION: Must we assume that God is inconsistent? Knowing all things, such contradiction surely does not originate from God?

Problems regarding the consistency of Revelation.

The Quran is inconsistent regarding commitments on the part of Allah on which the believer can reckon or on which he can build his life. Commitments that are given are contradicted elsewhere:

"Allah has inscribed for himself (the rule of) mercy"

or

"Allah has prescribed for himself as law to act merciful" (Sura 6:12).

is contradicted in the same Sura: (verses 35-39):

"If it were Allah's will, he would gather them into true guidance.... Whom Allah willeth he leaves to wander, whom he willeth, he placeth on the way that is straight".

As we shall see (pp 21ff.), the Muslim's hope rests on that despairing word:

"IF it pleases Allah."

This is striking, for even in the Old Testament the believer was aware of the Law of cause and Effect. Once a believer broke any of God's Laws he was cut-off from God, and was lost and perishing. But if he atoned therefor in repentance according to God's prescribed ordinance (the sacrifice) his sin was forgiven. God had committed Himself to it. This is even further elaborated in the New Testament:

"If we confess our sins (while we have fellowship with God: vs. 6), He is faithful and just, and *will* forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9).

We see a definite regression from this standard in the Quran.

We also find it strange to read:

"Strongest among men in enmity to the believers wilt thou find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers wilt thou find those who say, 'we are Christians'." (Sura 5:85)

This is supported to some extent by an explanatory note in the "Mishkat" (IV page 103, note 2380) where we are told that "nearly two-thirds of paradise" will be filled with "the followers of the Holy Prophet and the followers of other prophets will form one-third." In strange contrast to this are the words of Sura 5:51

"Take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends."

What about being together in Paradise? The reason is just as strange:

"They (Jews and Christians) are but friends and protectors to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust.

It can hardly be said that Jews and Christians have ever protected each other, except that they agree on the authenticity of the Old Testament.

It is said of Mohammed that he was the first to bow down to Allah (in Islam) (Sura 6:14, 163, 39:12). But it is also said of Abraham, his sons and Jacob that they were Muslims (Sura 2:132), and of all earlier prophets who brought 'books' (i.e. Moses, David and Jesus) (Sura 28:52-53). Again it is reported of the disciples of Jesus that they were Muslims (Sura 3:52).

All these we view as contradictions. Some would not be of a serious nature, were it not for the claim that the Quran is "nazil" or "brought down" from heaven to Mohammed without the touch of human hand - except for the act of writing itself.

QUESTION: Is there any uncontradicted statement in the Quran on which a Muslim can rely to have eternal life in heaven?

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