

THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY

(GENESIS 3:8-9)

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Introduction:

Some time ago, I had just arrived home from the university, where I had been involved in an enlivening though exhausting discussion with an English convert to Islam. We had talked about the role of the *Khilafa*, and how Britain was or was not ripe for an Islamic state. Because of my Mennonite background, I had difficulty not only in agreeing with my friend, but in understanding why such a state was necessarily important for him. I couldn't understand his position and he couldn't understand mine. Both of us were simply talking past each other.

It was cold that evening, and feeling grubby and tired, I ran a hot bath and sank down into the warm soothing water until the suds were tickling my nose. I watched the vapours lift lazily off the surface and disappear into the dark cold air above. It is at times like these that my mind gets free, and thinking flows. On this night, I was still pre-occupied with my earlier conversation, when suddenly, an idea popped right into my partly submerged head which would have clarified what I was trying to say to my friend at SOAS, and unblock the log-jam which we had experienced. The idea, interestingly, originated from two seemingly insignificant verses which are found in the third chapter of Genesis.

If you have the time, put this paper down and read Genesis chapter 3, and ask yourself what is the major theme of this chapter? How would you interpret it for someone else? In other words, what is the hermeneutical key which comes to mind here?

Now, without wanting to lose my audience in the first few minutes, let me explain what I mean by "hermeneutical key." This term is nothing more than the science of interpreting what scripture says, exegeting passages so they make sense, or presenting an idea which is used as a cornerstone for other ideas, a sort of code-book which explains a host of little known secrets, a program which unravels the intricate details of a complicated set of beliefs. In fact, by penning these definitions we have carried out an exercise in doing just that.

Where would the two small verses which I am referring to be? Look at verses 8 & 9.

(Genesis 3:8-9):

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called out to the man. "Where are you?"

"...God walked in the garden, with Adam...and the Lord had to call out to Adam." That was it! That was what I had been missing! That was what my friend needed to hear. I needed to take him back to Eden. Now it all made sense.

[A] FINDING THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY

1) THE GARDEN OF EDEN:

Let me explain. Ever since I was a little child I had been told the story of creation, and the story of the Garden of Eden. I knew all about Adam and Eve. I still remember vividly till this day the movie titled "The Bible." I remember the Eden episode especially, as it has become the standard for how I view that story even up to this day. The greater part of the story, however, gravitated around the incident at

the tree with the forbidden fruit.

I soon found that most of the stories about Adam and Eve dealt with the fruit. Every Sunday-School lesson, every night-time devotional on the subject, and every film and film-strip always reminded me that it was here that I and all of the rest of the little boys and girls in the world became evil. We all became polluted because of that offensive fruit. Every teacher since that day has taken it upon themselves to remind me and every other little boy and girl that Eden was where all our troubles began. I am sure that the reason I don't like fruit till this day has something to do with my sensibilities over that dastardly first-fruit which has put us into the mess in which we find ourselves.

But, you know what is curious? I don't ever remember anyone talking about **verses 8 and 9!** And I don't know why, all of a sudden, those two verses popped into my head on that cold spring evening while basking in my 2nd floor tub. But they did. And since then, they have completely changed the way I view God, and the way I intend to introduce Him to others, especially my Muslim friends.

Now some of you may say, "So what? They are not important to the story, except to tell us that Adam and Eve were about to be caught for their sin." And on face value, I would have to agree, "So what?" All my life I have been taught the same view. But it wasn't just they who were going to be caught, but me and my sisters and all the rest of the little boys and girls who were in the world. We were all 'imputed' with guilt as a result of that act. Genesis 3 has always been drummed into my head as the chapter on the great fall. I had never really stopped at these two verses, or paid them any attention, because the real meat was with the apple and with the condemnation which followed. That is, until that night in the tub.

While salubriously sitting, soaking in the suds a suggestion slunk its way slowly into my subconscious, saying: "**what was God doing walking among the trees and calling out to Adam, 'Where are you?'**"

Here was the creator of the universe, who flung the stars into space and tread out the valleys on the earth, who reached out and in one swoop separated the light from the darkness; who shaped the mountains and rustled up the wind, and with only a word formed every living, swimming, crawling or flying creature that has ever existed. This great omnipotent and powerful God humbled Himself to walk in the cool of the day, and look among the trees and call out, "Where are you?" This was the God who made the heavens and the earth. Why should He have to call out and ask Adam where he was?

Now can you begin to see why I find these two verses so important? Here in this little scenario, we find something about the character of God which you will not find in any other religious or philosophical book in the history of the world. No other religion or faith even comes close to delineating the creator-God as someone who would lower himself and come among those whom He has created.

The Aristotelian tradition of thought starts from a completely different starting point. The material world and God, according to Aristotle, are incompatible with one another. The two never intersect. The one, God, exists in total separation from the other, the material world. This view of the God-world dichotomy, which originated in the third century B.C., has become deeply entrenched in not just western-European thinking but has been borrowed, via the expansion and conquest of North Africa, by Islam following the prophet's death.

Therefore, since no other faith has desired to present their God in the context of relationship, they have missed what I consider to be the most important aspect about God, which, in turn explains the entire scope of who we are, how the world is to be run, and what God's intentions are for His created.

From these two verses we can find three things.

1) (**Limitation**) We read that this **omnipotent** God came down and was walking in the garden. That shows us, as I have mentioned, that God lowered Himself and took on the limitations of His created. He was looking for Adam. Therefore, He restricted Himself, casting away His omnipotence to walk and search and talk in the same fashion as did His created man and woman.

2) **(Response)** This **omniscient**, all-knowing God called out “Where are you?” Certainly God knew where Adam was. He knows everything. Yet, in this verse we find that He gave Adam the chance to respond. He had humbled Himself to come down to His level, and now He was calling out to Adam to return to Him.

3) **(Relationship)** Finally, and most importantly, from the fact that God was walking about and looking, we can surmise that this was something that He did often with Adam and Eve, possibly taking walks with them in the evening. What astounds me about this act, however, is that the all-powerful creator God seemed to have a personal **relationship** with Adam and Eve. The possibility that He did this often shows me that He cared about them, and sought out their companionship. He was looking for them, which implies that He wanted to spend time with them. Indeed, He was in relationship with them. In other words, here we find an infinite creator-God who walks and talks with His finite created man. Do you know of any other concept or belief in a God who claims to walk and talk in the context of a loving relationship?

The reason I find this important is that from this item alone, I believe, we can build a theology of not only who God is, but who we are, what purpose we have here on earth, how we are to model our lives, our families, our societies, where it is that we are headed, and what we will find once we get there.

It is these verses that show us the unique relationship which Adam and Eve shared with their creator. Therefore, it is this relationship which, I feel, must be the hermeneutical key with which we can measure almost everything else.

Interestingly, in respect to Islam, it is not surprising to note that these two verses do not exist at all in the Qur'an. A reason for their exclusion could be due to the influence of the Aristotelian thought which, some believe, crept into Islamic philosophy after the conquest of North Africa, where it had already been well entrenched.

(note=the evolution of the Qur'an infers that many theological, political and social concepts were added later on by Muslim tradition in the 8th and 9th centuries).

Consequently, one might say that because these verses do not exist in their Qur'an, it stands to reason that there will be a large divergence in the way the Muslims explain who God is, who we are, what purpose we have on earth, where it is we are headed, and what we will find once we get there. This hermeneutical key doesn't exist in Islam, and therefore, we have a tool which can help us understand the differences between us.

What I would like to do now is begin listing how this hermeneutical key, **the relationship which God had with man**, features in our two theologies today. Because once we do that, I feel we can then interpret the gospel so much more adequately for the Muslims.

[B] APPLYING THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY:

2) GOD

A good place to begin our discussion is with God, because that is where our scriptures begin. In the first verse of Genesis we read, “In the beginning God...” As we delineate who this God is we find that the God of the Bible is quite different from that of Allah in Islam.

According to Islam, Allah is one-dimensional; that is he has only one character, which is powerful and imposing (as we noted, almost Aristotelian). He is an omnipotent and impersonal God, one who is completely transcendent, and therefore quite distant and distinct from his creation.

Though Muslims will respond that there are 99 names which depict his character, not one of

these names is personal, or denotes a true understanding of a God of love. Muslims say he is merciful and compassionate, yet they do not define those terms as we do.

-**(Personal)** The God of the Bible, likewise, is all-powerful, but He is not impersonal. Verses 8 and 9 of Genesis 3 show us that God walks and talks with His creation. He is very personal, and the name He has chosen for Himself, **Yahweh**, delineates His personal character. In the Bible we find this name repeated 6,823 times, more than any other name (note: In the English translation of the Bible this name for God is indicated by capitalizing the letters LORD).

In the Greek New Testament several times God is referred to as **Abba** (which means father) denoting a very close and intimate relationship with His creation. This is unique to the Judeo-Christian understanding of God. A true father not only instructs and protects his children, he loves and is self-sacrificial for them, even to the point of death. Nowhere in any other holy book or philosophy do we find this character of God even intimated.

-**Relational/Sacrificial** Further attributes of Allah point out other differences between a Muslim and Christian concept of God. Allah, because he is not interested personally with his creation loves only those who do his will. Sura 66:12 says, "If you love Allah, follow me, (i.e. Muhammad), Allah will love you and forgive your sins. Allah is forgiving, merciful...Allah directs the hearts of those that believe him..."

The God of the Bible, Yahweh, however, because He desires to be in relationship with His creation, not only loves those who are good, but He loves those who are sinners, even those who reject Him. His love is exemplified in its highest expression, the sacrifice of one for another. Yet, His death on the cross encompassed not just those who loved Him, but all of creation, though its saving power is only efficacious for those who acknowledge it (Romans 5:1-10).

-**Just/Righteous** Islam tells us that Allah is not bound by any moral obligation, as this would limit his sovereignty. Al-Ghazzali, an 11th century Islamic scholar, confirms this in the context of love, stating, "Love is to sense a need of the beloved and since Allah cannot be said to have a need or an experience of a need, it is therefore impossible that Allah should love" (Nehls, Christians Ask Muslims, pg.34).

We would expect to find this in a one-dimensional god. It follows that Allah is also the author of evil. Sura 91:7,8 implies this by saying, "He intimated to it by inspiration its deviating from truth and its piety" (Mishkat III pg.104).

Allah is under no necessity of his own nature to be right, or just. Al-Ghazzali maintains that, "Allah's justice is not to be compared with the justice of man. A Man may be supposed to act unjustly by invading the position of another, but no injustice can be conceived on the part of Allah. It is in his power to pour down torrents upon mankind and if he were to do it, his justice would not be arraigned. There is nothing he can be tied to, to perform, nor can any injustice be supposed of him, nor can he be under obligation to any person whatever" (Nehls, Christians Ask Muslims, pg.28). A Muslim exhibits this twist-of-logic by saying, "Allah does not will an act because it is good; rather, it is good because he has willed it."

Allah is free to be good or evil. The fact that He is both good and evil, proves that He is free for himself only. If Allah has no principles in which he has bound himself to, his justice is likewise unbound. There are no absolutes by which he has bound himself to, and thus mankind has no real boundaries by which to live by, except that which Allah has revealed in his law, making that law the only absolute. Consequently, Allah can be totally capricious in his dealings with man. Allah pronounces his law, though he does not live by it himself. This presupposes no covenant relationship with his created.

In Christianity we find quite a contrast to this notion of a capricious God. The God of the Bible wills not to be evil. As Barth says: "God's freedom constitutes not only His action towards what is outside Himself, but also His own inner being." (Barth, Church Dogmatics Vol.2, Part 1, pg.303) "According to the Biblical testimony, God has the prerogative to be free without being limited by His freedom from external

conditioning, free also with regard to His freedom, free not to surrender Himself to it, but to use it, to give Himself to this communion, and to practice this faithfulness in it, in this way being really free, free in Himself" (Barth, pg.303). Thus God (*Yahweh*) is free to not be free. He could choose to have no choice, so we must not limit His freedom.

We, on the other hand, are limited by our nature. We cannot walk through walls. Yet there is freedom within that choice, in that we can walk up to and around the walls. God, on the other hand, is unbound by His nature. He can be whatever He wants. He could walk through walls if He so chose. He could also sin if He so chose. Yet **God chooses to limit that choice**, and so He has chosen not to be sinful. His choices became even more limited when He chose to become human. But why did he take on these limitations?

What we know about the Biblical God is that He chose to be in covenant with His creation, thus He chose to limit His power. God, before the world began drew up a charter, to live by certain limitations. It is an eternal covenant (Ephesians 1:9, Colossians 2; 1 Peter 1-2). The Father and the Son covenanted together with respect to their creation.

Consequently the Biblical God is now bound by His character because of that choice, and He is absolutely just and pure. God is infinitely righteous and holy (Psalm 77:13;99:9). What this means is that God, *Yahweh*, is incapable of doing evil, nor could He be attributed as its author, and though He allows evil to exist, it may never share its presence with Him, for, according to Habakkuk 1:13, "His eyes are too pure to look on evil."

When we take these three attributes of the Biblical God: 1) a God who desires a personal relationship with His creation, 2) who is completely selfless and sacrificial in His love, yet, 3) who is unable by His choice to create or accept evil, we find in these three that which sets Him apart from all other gods created by man.

The God of the Bible is, therefore, multi-dimensional. He is both an omnipotent king, and a personal father; both the almighty creator and a sacrificial servant; both righteous judge and redeeming priest.

Perhaps for many these categories seem contradictory, and that is just as well, for God does not choose to stoop to the categories of men. His character is beyond our feeble wisdom. What these characteristics of God do reveal, however, is that they could not have originated within a one-dimensional and impersonal god, such as we find in the Allah of Islam. No, they could only be explained within the context of a multi-dimensional God, one who is both three and one, or, what the church has chosen to call the *trinity*. Yet, it is this very term which has caused so much derision by both non-Christians and Muslims alike.

3) TRINITY:

"How," many people today ask, "can God be both three and one?" Furthermore, they continue, "why is this so important?"

It is important primarily because we find God revealed in the scriptures as both three and one. The first clues to what God is like is found almost immediately, in fact, in the very first verse of Genesis, where we read, "In the beginning God created..." The word for God (*Elohim*) is plural, so God is plural. The word created (*Bara*) which follows, however, is singular. Therefore, in this first verse we find that a plural God creates as one. This is echoed again in the same chapter, verse 26, where God speaks to Himself saying: "Let us make man in our own image, in our likeness."

As we continue on through the Old Testament we find many inferences to the plurality, yet oneness of the godhead (Genesis 3:22; and 11:7; Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 6:8; 7:14; 9:6; 44:6; and 63:7-10). The New Testament, likewise, carries the theme on from where the Old Testament left off, many times stating that God expresses Himself in a multi-dimensional capacity (John 1:1-5,10-12; 8:58; Luke

7:49; Colossians 1:19,16-17; Philippians 2:6-7; Rom.9:4-5; II Corinthians 4:4; Titus 2:11-14; and Hebrews 1:2-3).

-It Explains the Love of God: But to understand why this concept of the trinity is important for our present discussion, it may be helpful to use as an example the idea of the love of God, a belief which both Christians and Muslims can agree upon (though our definitions may vary, as evidenced in al-Ghazzali's quote earlier, where he intimates God's love as mercy and compassion). It is not until we comprehend the trinity (a doctrine much maligned by Muslims) that we can truly understand love. For it is within the trinity that love is fully expressed.

True love by its very nature requires an object, otherwise it becomes self-centred, self-serving and carnal. If God were one-dimensional, where would true love have originated? How could love have existed before creation if there was no object on which it could be expressed? **The trinity, encompassing the triune godhead, delineates the source from which love began, as each person of the godhead, since eternity, has given and received love from among themselves.** The best example of the love between the godhead is exemplified by God the Father who sent God the Son to earth (John 3:16); and by God the Son, who in turn "being in very nature God...made Himself nothing...being made in human likeness...He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

As a result of this extreme act of love, we humans, being made in the image of God, can now explain and model perfect love to the world, using the examples of God the Father towards God the Son, and the ongoing relationship of God the Holy Spirit in our lives counselling us to become more like Him, by exemplifying that same love.

When Muslims maintain that Allah can be defined as the God of love our response must be that this claim simply makes no sense. For where did it originate, and from where is it exemplified in history, or in Islam today? Realistically speaking, love can only be understood within the context of a multi-dimensional God, where it was not only originally modelled within Himself, but continues even now as He aids us in that same endeavour, through the working of the Holy Spirit.

God, as three in one, then, helps explain why relationships between one person and another are so important, and why we humans are such 'social animals.' Having been made in God's image, it stands to reason that we would reflect these very significant attributes of God, a God who has eternally been in relationship within the trinity.

One can, moreover, understand why God desires that same relationship with His created. And with that in mind, we can now introduce our next category, God's highest creation: humanity.

4) HUMANITY:

Here again, by using the hermeneutical key of relationship we find a vast divergence between the view of humanity in Islam and that of Christianity.

Because Allah is considered to be totally transcendent, his creation shares none of his character. Humans enjoy a unique place in creation, because Allah breathed into Adam his spirit (Sura 15:29). But the Qur'an never explains what the Spirit of Allah does. What we do know is that humans were created to be Allah's representative, or his vicegerent on earth (Suras 2:30; 33:72; 35:39). Thus, humans have the task to maintain the earth.

The relationship between Allah and his creatures is one built upon obedience and fear, what the Qur'an calls **Taqwa** (which when translated means self-protection or fear of God). Humans are no more than slaves to Allah; their sole requirement to obey their creator. In fact the word *Muslim* has come to mean "one who obeys, or submits."

-In God's Image: Christians, likewise, believe that humans were created to "rule over the fish of

the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth" (Genesis 1:26). But that is only half the story, for the Bible tells us that humans were created in God's image (Genesis 2:27), a view which is in direct contrast to that of Islam, which perceives humans as slaves to Allah. According to the Bible, we were never created to be slaves. We were created, from the very beginning, to be His children, in perfect relationship with Him.

We see clearly from Genesis chapter 3 that God walked and talked with Adam. This implies that Adam had a higher status than simply that of a caretaker. Indeed, a relationship is evidenced between Adam and God; a relationship which was worked out within a context of equality, in that God, the second person of the trinity, confined Himself by taking on all the limited characteristics of Adam's finite existence, such as the need to walk, to search and even to call out when He couldn't find Adam in the garden.

-Freedom of Choice: Conversely, because Adam was made in God's image he had the capacity to choose, to make up his own mind. This stands against the concept of slavery, as a slave has no freedom to choose. Freedom of choice entails that one can accept or reject something, in this case a relationship with God, despite the fact that He is their creator. Adam was given that choice, with tragic consequences, and we, each one of us, are likewise confronted with the choice to accept or reject God.

Though Muslims testify to the superiority of Allah, because he is only one-dimensional, they fail to take into account that which is missing, that which Allah cannot offer. Allah, because of his overwhelming omnipotence cannot accept the possibility of rejection by those he creates. In fact, all that Allah can offer is that his disciples follow him blindly. The penalty for apostasy is death. While the Qur'an mentions nothing about a death penalty for apostasy, the Hadith attribute numerous occasions when he demanded it. He is purported to have said, "Slay him who changes his religion" (Gibb and Kramers, pg.413), and at another time a set of traditions reports his ruling that it is permissible to take the life of someone who "abandons his religion and separates himself from his community" (Gibb and Kramers, pg.413).

In contrast, the God of the Bible does not seek a blind obedience from His creation, nor does He demand any sort of capital punishment for those who reject Him. For that would not illustrate true love. **True love seeks the best for the loved-one, at the owner's expense.** This sacrificial love is best exemplified in the crucifixion of Christ, the 2nd person of the trinity, on the cross. It is this same quality of love which God desires from us, both in our relationship with Him, and in our relationships with all of humanity, who are made in His image, sinner and saved alike. Made in His image, and therefore free to choose to accept or reject His love for us, brings us to the fifth category where Islam and Christianity differ: sin.

5) SIN

In both the Qur'anic and Biblical accounts of Eden, we find that Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit. Yet, for both Islam and Christianity the consequences of that sin are quite different.

According to Islam, since there was no special relationship between man and God in the garden, there was nothing which could be lost by Adam's sin. Consequently, the sin of Adam was his and his alone. In fact, not much ado is made of his sin in the Qur'an. According to Muslims it was an act of disobedience for which Adam, and he alone, was responsible. Once he repented of the sin, God simply forgave him and extended to him his mercy and guidance (Sura 20:122). Nothing needed to be repaired, because nothing substantial had been broken. The matter is then left to rest.

-Adam was sinless: In the Biblical account, the story is altogether different. Adam's sin was taken much more seriously. It is not difficult for us to understand why in light of Genesis 3. As we know, before the sin of Adam and Eve, Eden was a garden which was perfect. There was no blemish, and as such it was a place in which God could come and be in relationship with Adam, the two communing openly. There was nothing between them which could impede their relationship.

-Adam became sinful: Once the fruit was eaten, however, that relationship was completely altered. Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge and, suddenly, like God, they could now understand right from wrong (Genesis 3:22).

*Note: the idea of **fall** comes from Origen in his work "Peri-archon." In his overwrought fantasy the small logoses (all created beings) turn round and round the real Logos contemplating him. They fell, however, when they began to contemplate themselves [Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol.4, pg.256-260]. The fall, therefore, is a misnomer. It would perhaps be more correct to call it the **divorce**, or **separation**.*

Before they had been in total innocence and only knew that which was right (Genesis 1:31). They were naked but felt no shame. Now, however, they covered their bodies with leaves to hide their shame, and hid behind trees to hide their guilt. They were in perfect relationship with their surroundings. There were no thorns and the earth bore its fruit readily. Now, however, this relationship had also been impaired, so that Adam had to toil for his food (Genesis 3:17). But most importantly, their relationship with God was now totally broken, because sin had entered into the world. In other words, they, who were now in sin had to be removed from Him who knew no sin. Thus due to the fall, they were dismissed from God's presence.

-Adam was thrown out of Eden: This one seemingly small bite from the fruit had eternal consequences, one which would affect the entire shape of history. Not only was corruption and death introduced into the world by this little bite, but more devastating, humanity's unique relationship with the Lord was annulled, causing Adam and Eve, and along with them all their descendants, including us, to be banished from God's presence.

The fruit was probably the most expensive the world has ever known. Though it may have been a small blemish for the fruit, it incurred an enormous blemish for all of mankind, and that's the bad news. But fortunately, we serve a God who desires above all else to remain in relationship with us, His created. We know that the story doesn't end with the garden of Eden. We know that God has made a way for us to get back in relationship with Him.

6) THE CROSS/ATONEMENT:

This then brings us to the sixth category for delineating how the hermeneutical key of Genesis 3 helps us understand the nature of God and ourselves.

In the previous section we mentioned that sin separated us from God and needed to be repaired. God ordained in the Old Testament that after sins were committed, the offender should seek to atone for them in order to be reconciled with God (Leviticus 4:21,26,35). The way this should be done was stipulated in great detail in the book of Leviticus. It was by means of a sacrifice. In fact the word atonement appears 79 times in the Old Testament.

In the New Testament the place of an animal sacrifice was taken by Jesus, who suffered in the place of the offender once for all (Hebrews 9:12,14,26-27; 10:10).

Ironically, the word for atonement is found only once in the New Testament. We know from the Bible, therefore, that our relationship with God has been repaired by means of this sacrifice, this atonement on the cross.

Muslims disagree with this, reasoning that it would be unjust of God to punish the innocent for the offence of the guilty. Jesus (the just) cannot suffer for someone else's sin (that of the unjust) for this would be offensive to God's concept of righteousness and justice. Each person, they believe, must pay the penalty for their own sin. What the Qur'an does not teach, is that the penalty for sin is death. Sin, for them, can merely be forgiven with a few words of pardon from Allah. Death is not required.

It is for this reason that the death of one of God's prophets is appalling to Muslims. Why would Allah allow prophets to die? God has promised to protect his prophets, yet ironically the Qur'an does

admit that prophets did suffer and die in Sura 3:183.

To say that God, while in the form of a man, died is even more audacious, as it not only implies the inadequacy of Allah to protect His prophets, but assumes that God as a man could not even protect Himself!

Consequently no atoning death is needed. Muhammad taught that the shedding of blood for the sacrifice of one's sin did not bring forgiveness in Suras 6:164 and 53:38. (There is, however, a curious passage in Sura 5:32 which seems to allow the shedding of one man's blood as a blessing of many, alluding perhaps to the possibility of an atonement by one for the many).

Christians, on the other hand, believe that blood is required for an atonement. Furthermore, we believe that Christ as God on the cross is the only means by which complete atonement can be achieved. Atonement means a reconciliation with God after having rebelled against Him by breaking the covenant that He made with humanity, which is sin.

Atonement demands the shedding of blood (Hebrews 9:22). It is not sufficient to simply say someone is forgiven. It should not be difficult for Muslims to understand this, as they are familiar with the sacrifice of Ishmael, and that of Cain versus Abel. It is part of their history as well. Yet, they continue to question why so much of Old Testament history, and that which is revealed in the previous scriptures speak of blood sacrifices? Have they bothered to question why they must sacrifice a goat at *Eid*; or why the goat must be unblemished? These are 'typologies' as well as bridges which we can use with the Muslims to introduce the need for atonement.

Sin demands a punishment in order for justice to be served (Romans 6:23). The offender deserves to be punished, to be put to death. Since sin separates us from God, atonement reverses that process by returning us to God.

By punishing sin with death God expresses His righteousness (providing for the justice demanded by the sin), and by taking the punishment on Himself, He expresses His mercy. Apart from this there is no way for a righteous God to punish the heinousness of the sin and yet be merciful as well.

Both Muslims and Christians believe in justice. **Justice is getting what we deserve.** We deserve to die. **Mercy**, which both Muslims and Christians believe in, **is not getting what we deserve.** Yet, we don't deserve to be pardoned if sin has not been dealt with. That is a false pardon, but it is that which Islam offers. What is needed is grace. We don't deserve pardon, because we have not paid for our sins. Yet, God, by His atonement on the cross has paid for our sin, which we receive by His grace. Therefore, **Grace is getting what we don't deserve.** Only Christ on the cross fulfills the price of sin, death, and provides the atonement for those who acknowledge that God has bought them back a second time (i.e. the story of 'little John' and his boat: "Little boat you are mine two times; I first made you, and then I bought you back again."). But we are getting ahead of the story, for Muslims would balk at such a suggestion, that God would come and associate amongst his creation, let alone die for that same creation.

7) THE INCARNATION:

It is anathema for a Muslim to accept that the perfect omnipotent God would choose to pollute Himself by coming amongst his creation and live among them. Take for instance the pronouncement of the Muslim apologist Ahmed Deedat who identifies humanity as equalling worms, or maggots. He says,

"These worms, you know, that go on manure, human dung. You and I according to this book of God, you are nothing more than a maggot...God Almighty goes out of His way to tell you. Look, this Jesus of mine is no exception...this Son of Man, who is only a worm, worm, a worm! (shouting out the word)."

It is not surprising then, that with such a chasm between Allah and his creation there is no room for the incarnation in Islam, because it implies that Allah needed to do something to help humanity,

almost as if he had to correct a mistake, his mistake.

Muslims would not say that Allah is incapable of doing this, but that it is against His character to do so. For proof, they point to the complete humanness of Jesus. How would God debase Himself so?

Since Jesus had all the characteristics of a human, they throw the problem back into our laps, contending that this fact alone is proof that Christians started from the perspective of humanity and simply elevated a man to the position of God. For a Muslim this act is considered the most heinous of sins, as it is simple idolatry, what the Qur'an refers to as "Shirk" (see Suras 4:48; 5:75-76; and 41:6).

For Christians, the incarnation, on the other hand, stands as one of the cardinal examples of God's love for His creation. God, desiring to be in relationship with humanity, as we noticed earlier, takes the initiative and comes Himself as a human.

What better way to communicate than to enter into relationship with the people with whom you want to communicate, be one of them, live with them, speak their language, cry with them, and use their methods and world-view to better explain your truth (Romans 10:14-15). It is much the same model we use as missionaries when going cross-culture.

We must remember that it was God who came down to the garden with Adam, and incarnated Himself there. If He did it at that time, then why should we be surprised if He chose to do it again?

Since Muslims don't have this incarnational story in their Qur'an, it stands to reason that they cannot perceive God in that role. In what capacity was He there? Is this an incarnation, or a theophany? Most likely it was the later.

Muslims are not aware of the **theophanies** which many Christians believe are found in our scriptures: such as Genesis 18:1-33 where He came as Abraham's visitor; or in Genesis 32:25-30 where He wrestled with Jacob; or in Exodus 3:2-5 at the burning bush with Moses (also mentioned in the Qur'an, Sura 27:8-9); or in Exodus 13:21 where He appeared as pillars of cloud and fire leading the Israelites; and later in Exodus 33:9-11 and Numbers 12:5-9 appearing as a cloud at the tent of Meeting with Moses Aaron and Miriam; and finally in Judges 2:1 where He came as an angel at Bokim. Take special note that God specifically states that he speaks to Moses "mouth to mouth...that he [Moses] beholds the form of the Lord" when they speak, in Numbers 12:7-8.

Once Muslims understand that the supreme incarnation, Jesus Christ, had entered time and space before, it will then be easier for them to understand that God could come down again as the Christ, 2,000 years ago.

They will also then understand that in His desire to be continually in relationship with us, He continues even till this day to incarnate Himself by means of His Holy Spirit.

Yet, though we can understand why God would want to incarnate Himself, so as to better communicate His truth to us, that is only half the picture. He did not simply come to earth to reveal the gospel. He came also to repair that relationship with His creation which had been broken at the very beginning, in the garden of Eden; thus the two-fold purpose of Christ's ministry which is completely lost in an Islamic context. The reason it is lost can be blamed on their revelation, the Qur'an, which, like our own scriptures is the foundation for most of what they believe, and the theme of our eighth category.

8) REVELATION:

Islam tells us that Allah is remote and therefore must not reveal himself to man upon a personal level. It is for that reason that Allah reveals himself by means of appointed prophets, who are referred to as, **rasul**, meaning "the sent one." These prophets are merely human and so finite, yet they are protected by God. Revelation in Islam is simply one-way, from God to man via the prophets. The final revelation, and therefore the most important, according to Muslims, is the Qur'an. It was revealed to Muhammad between A.D. 610-632, via the angel Gabriel, using a process known as **Nazala** which means 'to descend',

implying a word-for-word transmission.

Thus, Muslims believe that the exact Arabic words that we find in the Qur'an are those which exist eternally on the original stone tablets, in heaven.

Since Allah is infinite and transcendent, it stands to reason that his revelation would be infinite and transcendent. For instance, according to Sura 85:21 and 22, we read, "Nay this is a glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a tablet preserved." Muslim scholars admit that this passage refers to the tablets which were never created. They contend that the Qur'an is an absolute identical copy of the eternal heavenly book, even so far as the punctuation, titles and divisions of chapters is concerned. Why modern translations still can't agree what those divisions are is evident when trying to refer to an *aya* (verse) between one version and another.

The Qur'an comes from the "Mother of books," according to Sura 43:3. There is thus no other book or revelation which can compare. In fact, three times, in Suras 2:23, 10:37-38, and 17:88 we find the challenge to, "Present some other Sura or book of equal beauty."

This final revelation then, according to Islam, is transcendent, and consequently, beyond the capacity for conjecture, or criticism. What this means is that the Qur'an which we possess today is and has always been final and pure, which prohibits any possibility for verification or falsification of the text.

Because Allah is revered much as a master is to a slave, so his word is to be revered likewise. One does not question its pronouncements any more than one would question a master's pronouncements.

What then are we to do with the problems which do exist in the Qur'an? If it is such a transcendent book, as Muslims claim, then it should stand above any criticism. Yet, when we look more carefully at the text which we have in our possession today, that (supposedly) of Uthman's final codification of the Qur'an, compiled by Zaid ibn Thabit, from a copy of Hafsah's manuscript, we are puzzled by the differences between it and the other codices of Abdullah Masoud, Abu Musa, and Ubayy Ibn Ka'b, all of which have deviations and deletions between them (see Arthur Jeffrey's Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'an). We are also puzzled by the many errors and contradictions in its text, as well as the numerous second century heretical Jewish "Talmudic" accounts found within its pages.

Other problems concern its very pronouncements. Because of its seeming transcendency we are obliged not to question its content, much of which originates (we are told) from the later Medinan period of Muhammad's life (the last 10 years). These Suras consist primarily of rules and regulations for seventh to ninth century social, economical, and political structures, leaving us with a document which is ill adapted to the twentieth century.

The Bible, by contrast is not simply a book of rigid rules and regulations, which takes a particular historical context and absolutizes it for all ages and all peoples. Instead, we find in the Bible broad principles with which we can apply to each age and each culture (i.e. worship styles, music, dress).

As a result the Bible is much more adaptable and constructive for our societies today. Since we do not have a concept of *Nazala* revelation, we have no fear of delving into and trying to understand the context of what the author was trying to say (philological analysis).

But one would expect such from a revelation provided by a personal God who intended to be actively involved in the transmission of His revelation.

Perhaps this is the crux of the problem between the two views on revelation.

Christians believe that God is interested in revealing Himself to His creation. Since the time of creation He has continued to do so in various ways. His beauty, power and intricate wisdom is displayed in the universe all around us, so that humanity cannot say that they have never known God. That is what some theologians like to call "general revelation."

But God also chooses to reveal Himself more specifically; what those same scholars call “special revelation.” This He does by means of prophets, who are sent with a specific word for a specific time, a specific place, and a specific people. Unfortunately, much of what was revealed to those people was quickly forgotten. The human mind has a remarkable urge to be completely independent of God, and will only take the time to think of Him (if at all) when they are in a crisis, or near to death.

Therefore, God saw the plight of His creation and in His love and compassion for His creation, decided to do something about it.

God decided to reveal Himself directly, without any intervening agent, to His creation. He did this also to correct that relationship which had been broken (which we will refer to later). This is consistent with a God who is personally involved with His creation.

Simply speaking, God Himself came to reveal Himself to humanity. To do this He took upon Himself the form of a human, spoke our language, used our forms of expression, and became an example of His truth to those who were His witnesses, so that we, who are human would better understand Him who is beyond all human understanding.

As we find in Hebrews 1:1,2:

“God, who at various times and in diverse ways spoke in past times to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds.”

In Jesus Christ we see God perfectly revealed to humanity. This goes beyond special revelation. This is revelation personified!

The Bible, therefore, introduces the world to Jesus Christ. One may prefer to call it a secondary revelation, as it is simply the witness by men to the revelation of God. The Bible tells about His life, speaking about what He said and did, and then expounds upon these teachings for the world today. Consequently, it is a book which points to a person. We can use the book to learn about the person, but ultimately, we will need to go to the final revelation, Jesus Himself, to truly understand who God is.

And here is where revelation becomes specific for us today, because God did not simply stop revealing Himself with Jesus Christ. He still desires to be in relationship with His creation, and has continued to reveal Himself in an incarnational way. His ongoing revelation continues from that time right up until the present as He reveals Himself by means of Himself, the Holy Spirit, the comforter, convicting us of guilt in regard to sin, guiding us into all truth, telling us what is yet to come, and bringing glory to Jesus (John 16:7-15).

Jesus is the truest revelation. We find out about Him in the Bible. Yet, that is not all, for the Holy Spirit continues to make Him known to us even today, and that is why the scriptures become alive and meaningful for us.

For Muslims this must sound confusing, and possibly threatening. Perhaps to better explain this truth to them, we may want to change tactics somewhat. Instead of comparing the Qur'an with the Bible, as most apologists tend to do, it might be helpful to compare the Qur'an with Jesus, since they are both considered as the Word of God, and stand as God's truest revelation to humanity.

The Bible (especially the New Testament), consequently, is the testimony of Jesus's companions, testifying about what He said and did. To take this a step further, we could compare the Bible with their traditions, the *Hadith*, the *Tarikh*, the *Sira* and the *Tafsir*, all of which comment upon the life and teachings of the prophet and the Qur'an. While this may help us explain the Bible to a Muslim we must be careful to underline that while the New Testament speaks mostly about what Jesus said, about His message, it has little to say concerning what He did, whereas the Muslim traditions talk primarily about the life of Muhammad, what he did, with interpretations of what he said.

In this light, there is no comparison between the two revelations, Jesus and the Qur'an. The Qur'an, a mere book with all its faults and inadequacies, its very authenticity weakly resting on the shoulders of one finite man, who himself has few credentials as a prophet, is no match against Jesus, the man, revered by Muslims and Christians alike as sinless (Sura 19:19 & Hebrew 1), who, according to His sinless word is God Himself, and therefore, the perfect revelation.

In light of Genesis 3 we would expect God to reveal Himself in this way, because that is what someone who desires a truly loving relationship would do, versus a God who manipulates and controls us much as a robot or a mannequin. This then introduces our ninth category, that of predestination.

9) PREDESTINATION: (i.e. where you find yourself when you've missed your train)

Sura 9:51 says "Nothing shall ever befall upon us except what Allah has ordained for us." For many Muslims the idea that Allah has total control over all that happens, including history, gives them the security they crave.

The popular phrase "*Insh'allah*", which means "if Allah wills it," reflects this mentality.

All our actions both good and bad, they believe, are controlled by Allah. Consequently, it is Allah who brings about evil and good. There is no personal choice, and consequently no assurance of salvation, as it is Allah who decides what is to happen to us (Sura 16:93,95). What Muslims fail to acknowledge is that this belief smacks of the mechanical doctrine of predestination, a non-questioning acceptance of destiny and a resignation to fate, commonly termed *Kismet* (or *Qismah*) in Arabic, much like a master to a slave or an engineer to a robot.

This is total determinism. Humanity is judged and condemned for what they cannot help doing. This is also total injustice. One would expect such from a non-personal god, one who seeks total obedience. Gone is any hope of free will or free choice.

For some, Allah's complete control leads to a fatalism and passivity; while for others it frees the mind from matters over which it has absolutely no control. *Kismet* makes the Muslim fanatically self-sacrificing in war, yet resigned in defeat or in bereavement or in disaster, or in the presence of preventable evil such as epidemics (because these could fall under the "will of Allah").

Without the context of relationship one would expect Allah to be in total control, his creation accepting his authority without questioning, as a puppet with its maker.

Christianity, however, views this relationship quite differently. The Bible stands against the idea of a total pre-destination of humanity. While there is some room for interpretation within scripture concerning whether God totally predestines or merely has foreknowledge of our choices (reflected in the two traditions which speak to this issue best: Reformed vs. Arminian thinking), it might be helpful to remember that these views are only argued within the context of one's salvation.

Many Christians believe that we are given the option of free-will, that we are given the option to accept our saviour or reject Him (notwithstanding the theology of election). God woos us, and we respond. Depending on our decision, we are either saved or condemned, but the decision rests with us. This form of choice reflects what a lover would do for his loved one. One cannot demand love, it must be earned. We respond to God's love by accepting Him, because He first loved us, and made it possible for us to respond freely to that love. A true relationship, by its very nature, requires the possibility for both acceptance and rejection. Therefore, it is this kind of relationship between the creator and His created which is unique to the God of the Bible.

10) THEOCRACY:

The tenth category which I would like to deal with is that of the Kingdom of God, and follows on from our discussion on predestination, in that if we begin with a God who controls us so completely, then we would expect his kingdom to reflect that same control.

A transcendent God would desire a transcendent kingdom, where he would have absolute authority. The term for this kingdom in Islam is **Khilafah**, which constitutes a theocratic state on earth, controlled by the dictates of Allah, and maintained as an aspiration for all Muslims.

Allah's blueprint for all of life is best exemplified by the control which would be established within the *Khilafah*, and would include social, political, economical, legal (**Shari'ah**) and religious functions. Modelled upon a seventh-ninth century scenario, with a **Caliph** at the head, it would be supported by a hierarchy of religious leaders (**Ulema**) who would be chosen from within the circle of **Dar-al-Islam** (house of Islam).

Jacques Ellul in his writings speaks of cities as the epitome of rebellion against God. Cities, he believes, are man's extreme attempt for security, to be their own gods, to be in control, and away from the authority of God. Theocracy has much the same desire. One might argue that this view of the Kingdom of God found within Islam, the *Khilafa*, parallels what we find in Ellul's cities, an attempt to create structures of security for ourselves, which in the end merely take over and supplant God.

Christianity, on the other hand perceives itself as made up of individuals who are sojourners passing through this world. This is not our home. Indeed, our home is where God is, in heaven, or with the Holy Spirit on earth. We yearn and desire to be with Him at all times.

While on earth, our security is with Him, via the Holy Spirit. Thus our relationship with Him, in whatever environment we find ourselves (either belligerent or welcoming), is what we seek after. We have no need for a physical Kingdom of God, as He is with us wherever we are. Because our security is in His hands, we have no need to recreate that security.

We, therefore, are not fearful of belligerent kingdoms, and ironically, historically we have thrived under persecution. Perhaps that is because sometimes it takes persecution to eradicate our carnal securities, to put us back on the "cutting edge," and bring us back into God's security, back into relationship with Him. Thus, we stand against a theocracy.

Speaking of history, Christianity has a number of examples of failed theocracies, such as: Solomon's kingdom, Constantine's religious state in the 4th century, the Reformation experiment in Geneva during the 1500's, and colonialism in this century. All of these are examples of failed human attempts to create their own security, while erroneously using the name of God for their authority, much as Islam continues to do.

One cannot talk of a *Khilafa* state without also bringing into the picture the means by which it is installed, that which Muslims term **Jihad**, or "striving." While many Muslims are quick to point out that this only refers to peaceful forms of **Da'wah** (which means "to invite"), much as we have in our own missionary activity, history has shown that much of the expansion across North Africa, and into the southern reaches of Turkey, and also into India (under Aurangzeb) was carried out by forceful conquest, followed by an "Islamic Ambience" (i.e. influencing from above, by implementing **Dhimmi** laws as well as **Jizya** and **Kharaj** tax on the 'unbelievers').

Perhaps an easy example for today would be that of the existing Islamic countries which refuse to open themselves up for the propagation of the gospel. It is understandable why a religion which is rigid and transcendental would require such a violent and rigid means of propagation and consolidation.

Compare that with Christianity, where we are never invoked towards violence but are demanded specifically to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...and teaching them..." (Matt.28:19-20). We know that we are merely the vessels of the Word of God, 'a pen in the hands of a ready-writer.' It is the Holy Spirit who has the task to convict and bring men and women to God. God Himself, who desires to bring His creation back to Himself, does so Himself. We are His mouthpiece, through which the Holy Spirit can work. And that brings us to our 11th category, that of the Spirit World.

11) THE SPIRIT WORLD:

Islam perceives the world within a Dualistic framework, which some believe was borrowed from Aristotelian thought (discussed earlier). Therefore, much of the current Muslim superstitions surrounding the fear of *Jinns* and spirits do not belong within an orthodox understanding of Islam. In fact, most scholars today point to pre-Islamic Arabic religions, which incorporated many *Jinns* in their beliefs, for the influence of demons and *Jinn* in Islam. Theologically speaking, Islam has no “excluded middle” (the area between the platonic heaven and earth where spirits dwell). Consequently, Folk Islam has evolved over the centuries to fill this gap, this heart-felt need, which is evidenced in so many Muslim communities. Interestingly, folk Islamic practices are now found in approximately two-thirds of the Islamic world, and are a deep embarrassment to those from the more orthodox backgrounds.

Allah, who is impersonal, does not involve himself in the day-to-day goings-on of humanity. He does not intersect time and space, and work amongst his creation, and therefore does not fulfill the need, which all humans have, to be in contact with something bigger than themselves.

Christianity, which accepts God as personal, acknowledges the spirit world. Jesus often speaks about it, and warns against the evil forces which Satan controls. Yet, He doesn't just leave His creation open to the whims of the evil one, but promises power over him and his cohorts by means of the Holy Spirit.

One would expect a personal God to value His contact with His creation, while providing a defence against those evil powers which seek to thwart His rule, as we find in Christianity.

12) PRAYER:

Along those same lines, a God who desires relationship with His creation would also desire to communicate with them on an ongoing basis.

In Islam we find that individuals can only communicate to Allah by means of certain prescribed prayers, many of which are memorized and repeated verbatim, without any thought of a response from God. It is a one-way communication.

In Christianity prayer is not at all conceived within the framework of a programmed formula. We wouldn't converse to a friend this way, nor to our wife or husband, and certainly not to Him who is the focus of our life, our Saviour and Lord. Relationship requires a two-way communication, so we would expect that a loving God who desires our relationship would willingly and joyfully respond to our requests and praises to Him.

(i.e. note the programmed nature of the 5 pillars of Islam, the well known exercises which are at the centre of Islamic practice: *Shahada*= a programmed oath, *Salat*= a programmed communication, *Sawm*= a programmed penitence, *Hajj*= a programmed fellowship, *Zakat*= a programmed giving)

13) PARADISE:

The final category which I will deal with is that of paradise, or heaven. In Islam, Paradise is a garden, with rivers (some of wine), fruits and large eyed virgins (*Houris*); a very carnal and man-centred environment (Suras 55:56; 56:22,35-36), reflecting again a seventh-ninth century Middle Eastern mentality.

Ironically, in Islam, men are promised the very things which they must abstain from in this life. Nowhere is there any mention of Allah in relationship with his creation in paradise. He is conspicuously absent. The Islamic aversion towards any contact between the creator and his created continues even till the end. Mankind is relegated to spending eternity filling up on fruit, wine and women.

Christianity, however, has a completely contrasting view of heaven to that of Islam, one that is not carnal, nor man-centred, but absolutely God-centred. For it is here, in heaven, that the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve finally return to a full relationship with God. In heaven Eden is realized as it should have been. We are once again walking and talking with God, but in a new and invigorated garden.

In heaven the incarnation of God is fully realized, so that the relationship which He had intended from the very beginning comes to fruition. In heaven we come full circle. For every individual who accepts and acknowledges Christ's relationship with them, brought about by means of the cross while on earth, will be allowed into a perfect and eternal relationship with God in heaven, as He had intended from the beginning.

CONCLUSION:

So what can we say concerning this new hermeneutical key which we find in verses 8 and 9 of Genesis 3? Does it help us to better understand the gulf which exists between our two faiths? Can it be used to explain the Muslim and Christian views concerning who God is, who we are, and what God intends for us?

I believe it can. To conclude let us consider a number of important distinctions between that which we believe and that which the Muslims believe. If we use this hermeneutic as a key to compare between our two faiths we find that:

ISLAM'S POSITION

1) on the one hand, when we consider the Allah of Islam, we are confronted with a one-dimensional **transcendent God** who neither desires, nor is able to have a relationship with his creation.

2) On the one hand within Islam we find **humanity** created to serve and obey Allah, their sole responsibility that of vicegerents on earth.

3) On the one hand we find an Allah who is totally one-dimensional, and singular, which excludes any possibility of how or where **love** and relationship originated.

4) On the one hand we find within Islam a concept of **sin** which is cheap and simplistic, because it does not take into account that which sin has destroyed, the relationship which only humans enjoy with their creator. Nor does it take into account the consequences of sin, which is **death**, both physical and spiritual.

5) On the one hand, because of Genesis 3, we can now understand why Islam fails to acknowledge an

CHRISTIANITY'S POSITION

1) On the other hand, within the Biblical account we find substance to the concept of love and sin, because it is fashioned not only within the context of the Godhead but reflected within the **relationship between the creator and His created**. Love which creates the relationship, and sin, which destroys it.

2) On the other hand the Bible views the creation of **humanity** within the terms of a relationship, with a God who creates Adam to be much more than just a vicegerent of the earth, but created to be His child whom He loves.

3) On the other hand we find that the fountainhead for relationship and **love** is exemplified within the Godhead itself, and is adequately described by the **trinity**, because only in the context of a God who is both three and one can true love have originated, which engenders relationship one with another, and which in turn gives us, who are made in His image, that same character.

4) On the other hand the Bible not only acknowledges the heinousness of **sin**, and its consequence, but it speaks of a response, provided by God Himself on the cross, a more than adequate **atonement** for our sins, restoring that relationship with God which He had intended with Adam in the garden of Eden.

5) On the other hand, within a Christian framework, we would expect **God** to take on the

incarnational God, as this would **pollute** his character.

6) On the one hand we find the final **revelation** of Islam a mere book, the **Qur'an**, an echo of its creator, supposedly, though a book, totally transcendent, final, cold and non-verifiable.

7) On the one hand, the cross and the atonement for Muslims make no sense, since without any true concept of the **separation** with God which sin causes, there is no need for a reparation, and thus no need for an atonement, or a saviour.

8) On the one hand a transcendent God would necessarily require a transcendent kingdom, exemplified in the **Khilafa**, a structured hierarchical entity which controls all aspects of human life, much as a master would control a slave. It would follow that the means by which individuals are brought in to the *Khilafa*, *Jihad*, also reflects this same distant and nonpersonal thinking.

9) On the one hand a dualistic world, as Islam personifies, leaves no room for the work of God amongst His people. **Allah**, because he is distant, remains **distant**, not even attempting to communicate personally with his creation, demanding instead a blind and complete obedience to his **rules** and regulations.

10) And finally, on the one hand without any understanding of Allah in relationship with humanity, Islam delivers a view of **paradise** which is quite **carnal** and man-centred, an escape to all the desires which man is to repress in this life, with no inference at all to Allah's presence. And humanly speaking, that possibly makes sense.

form of a **human** since He had previously done so not only in Genesis 3 but subsequently as well, choosing to enter time and space to communicate and relate with His creation, both in history and now, by means of the **Holy Spirit**.

6) On the other hand the **revelation** which we hold most dear is that of God Himself, in the person of **Jesus** on earth. The Bible, which is merely a book written by men, though inspired, is only a secondary account of what the true revelation, Jesus, said and did, and to which we can refer to in order to better know who God is, and what He intends for our lives.

7) On the other hand because Christianity is the only faith which points to the dilemma of a creator separated from His creation, through no fault of His own, it is the only faith, likewise, which adequately provides an answer to the separation which we all feel with our creator, a **solution** rendered by the creator, Himself, on the **cross** 2,000 years ago.

8) On the other hand the Biblical perception of God's children is that of **sojourners**, incorporating, voluntarily, the kingdom within their hearts, in anticipation of the final and **eternal kingdom** of God, which we yearn for, but which we will only experience on the other side of death.

9) On the other hand **Yahweh** of the Bible, because He truly desires a relationship desires equally to communicate and involve Himself intrinsically with His creation; responding to **prayers**, while guiding and protecting His loved ones much as we would expect a true **father** to do.

10) On the other hand **heaven** for a Christian is where the relationship, broken at the time of Eden, is finally and completely restored; where the creator reunites with His created, coming full circle to offer humanity the life which He had intended for them from the very beginning, to be with Him in **perfect relationship for eternity**. Now this makes more sense.

So, essentially, what we have found in this discussion is that without a view of a God who is in relationship with His creation, all the other ramifications of our lives fall into a cold and calculated man-

centred existence, devoid of God's presence. Until Muslims understand that God is not just a one-dimensional transcendent being, but personal and loving, they won't be able to understand the reason or the possibility for a loving God who can and did come to earth to rectify the moral dilemma of our sin.

And until they begin to step back and take a critical look at the authority for their beliefs: the Qur'an, Muslims will be condemned to limit their view of reality to that of the dualistic, black and white hues which it proposes, while neglecting the myriad of colours which reflect the true revelation of a God seeking to relate to each of His creation, personally, and in accordance to their individual needs, so that we all can live with Him in relationship, as was intended in the garden of Eden.

Furthermore, until Muslims see God and Man in the context of a loving relationship, as they originally were in Eden, they won't understand why sin has caused so much damage. Nor will they understand why we need to repair that which has gone wrong.

Islam, without a concept of the personal loving and sacrificial God, only has half the picture. God as Abba father wants to be in relationship with me and you His children, now more than ever before. The good news is that the possibility for a repaired relationship has been provided by God, both because of what happened on the cross 2,000 years ago, and subsequently, because of the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in our lives today. We don't have to wait for the "pie in the sky when we die, but can enjoy the steak on our plate while we wait." It is that which gives us hope.

What remains is for us to speak, and go out and offer to our Muslim friends that which their revelation cannot offer; a true view of the creator-God in relationship with His creation; a relationship which, because of the fruit, was temporarily broken, but which, because of the cross, can be repaired at any time, anywhere, and by any one, loved and un-loved alike.

(overview next page)

HERMENEUTICAL KEY OUTLINE

Similarities: Monotheism, similar history, prophets, scriptures, moral teachings & volition.

Differences: We also have differences. To best understand them, we need to go to the beginning, to **Genesis 3:8-9**.

	<u>Islam</u>	<u>Christianity</u>
1) Garden of Eden:	1) Not on earth: (Suras 2:30-39; 7:19-25; 20:116-123). No relationship/man, except via the Spirit (Ruh), or Gabriel	1) On earth: Genesis 3:8-9 - God walks & talks with man = Limits Himself - Response expected- in <u>Relationship/man</u>
2) God:	2) Distant, transcendent, is merciful to those who do his will, a master to be obeyed.	2) Personal, <i>Yahweh, Abba</i> Relational/Sacrificial, Just/Righteous (Ps.77:13; 99:9; Hab.1:13), loves His enemies
3) Trinity	3) <i>Wahid</i> , god is only one dimensional.	3) plural godhead (Gen.1:1,26; 3:22; 11:7; Deut.6:4; Jn.8:58) explained by >God is Love=
4) Humanity	4) relation to god = <i>Taqwa</i> = fear of God, Muslim = one who obeys, born as Muslim, no choice, slave	4) Made in God=s Image (Gen. 1:27), as a child of God=s, not born Christian, Freedom to choose.
5) Sin	5) Adam=s disobedience, was forgiven & banished to earth-Why? No relationship	5) Adam was sinless (perfect) = in relationship with God. He sinned-

	existed/God, so none lost. Sin=breaking God=s law - no corruption, just weakness to Satan=s seduction	>(imperfect) knew right & wrong, broke trust, hid, evicted from Eden, lost relationship with God (Men & nature), God = pure & holy (Ps.77:13; 99:9) & no sin in His presence (Hab.1:13), separates us (Is.59:1-2)
6) Atonement	6) Consequence of Sin = punishment alone, Shedding of blood doesn=t bring forgiveness. Innocent cannot take place of the guilty = unjust (S.6:164; 53:38). God must not die, shows inadequacy of God. Why then Eid sacrifices?	6) Consequences of sin = death, (Eze.18:20; Rom.6:23). Thus need Atonement (Lev.4:21,26,35). 79 times in OT, 1 in NT. Sin separates & atonement redeems. Atonement needs blood (Heb.9:22) Demanded by Abraham (Gen.22), fulfilled in Christ on the cross (Heb.9:12,14,26-27; 10:10)
7) Incarnation:	7) Chasm between god/man, no pollution, Jesus Christ -> God = <i>Shirk</i> (S.4:48, 5:75-76; 41:6) (S.27:8-9?)	7) Made in his image, so came as man (Gen.1:27) Best communication= <i>Emmanuel</i> = God with us; <i>Theophanies</i> (Phil.2:7-8) Jesus Christ came to eradicate sin & repair the lost relationship.
8) Revelation:	8) Qur=an = <i>Nazil</i> (perfect) = sent down, via <i>rasul</i> = prophets (the sent ones), inimitable (S.2:23, 10:37-38, 17:88); Bible is corrupted,	8) progressive & authoritative -General Revelation = nature -Special Revelation = prophets -Personified Revelation = Jesus Christ -Ongoing Revelation = Holy Spirit (Heb.1:1-2; Jn.14:16-26 ; 16:7-15)
9) Predestination:	9) <i>Insh=allah</i> (S.9:51; 16:93-95),no personal choice, destiny (<i>Kismet</i>)	9) foreknowledge (God woos, we respond), salvation = personal choice
10) Theocracy:	10) <i>Khilafa</i> , controlled by Caliph, <i>Ulema</i> , <i>Shari=ah</i> , <i>Jihad</i> = <i>Dar-al- Islam</i> ; states role to do <i>Da=wah</i> , apostasy = treason.	10) Sojourners, Kingdom of God in our hearts, controlled by Holy Spirit, Church/state separation, Christian culture secondary, mission to convict humanity (Matt.28:19-20)
11) Spirit World:	11) Dualistic: Folk Islam, <i>Jinns</i>	11) exists, controlled by Holy Spirit
12) Prayer:	12) Verbatim & memorized, one-way communication.	12) Communication with God, two-way, praise, request, responses
13) Paradise:	13) Garden = carnal delights, river of wine, houris (S.55:56; 56:35-36), Allah absent.	13) Eden revisited, God centred, relationship with God realised eternally.