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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH PERSECUTION,  
WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, AS FOUND IN SELECTED  
PASSAGES OF THE KORAN AND THE BIBLE

by

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A Thesis

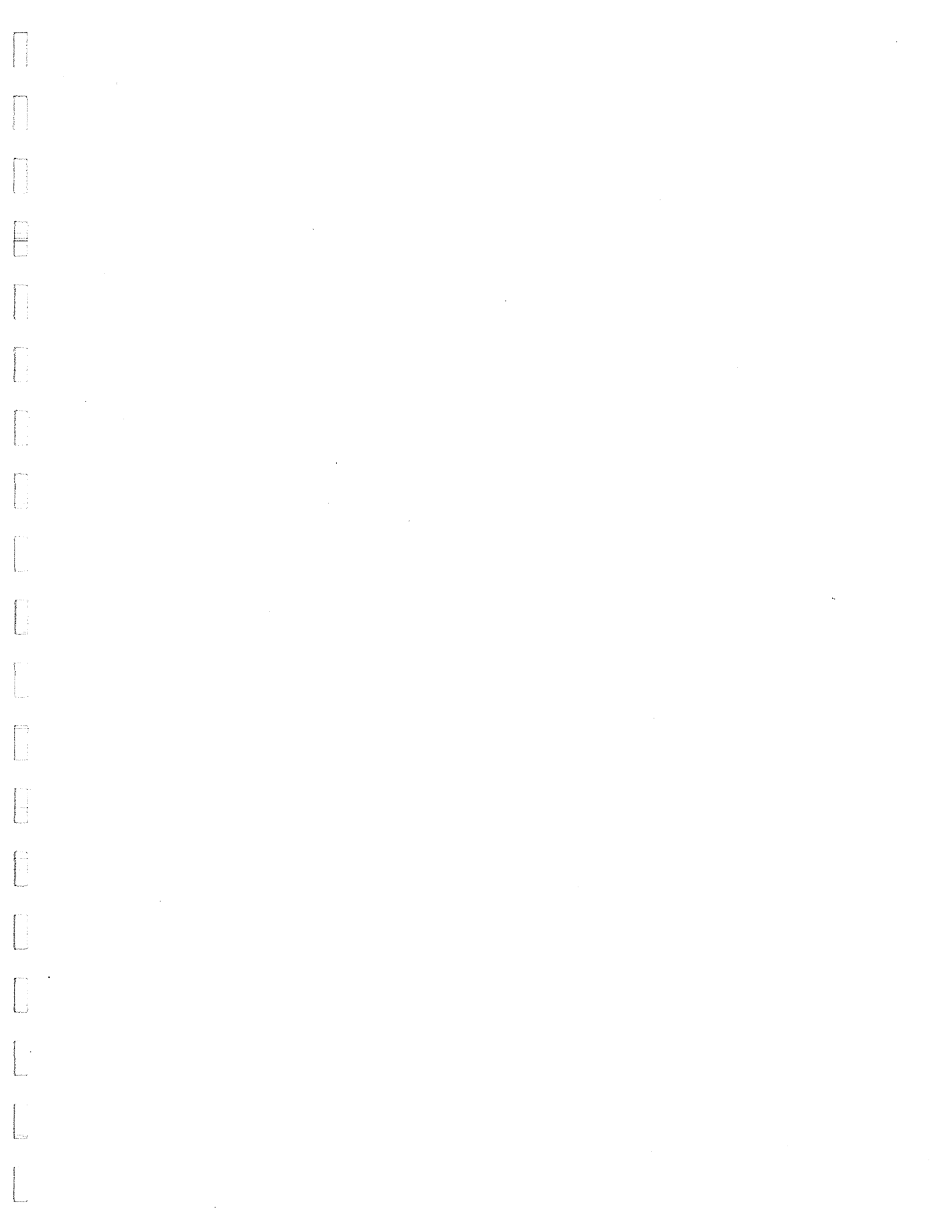
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DEDICATION

To Mother and Dad whose loving sacrifices  
have nurtured and liberated the first of  
their flock to follow the Good Shepherd  
"whithersoever He goeth."

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**INTRODUCTION**

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH  
PERSECUTION, WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, AS FOUND  
IN SELECTED PASSAGES OF THE KORAN AND THE BIBLE

INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject

1. The Subject Stated and Explained

The existence of suffering in the world is a fact that requires no demonstration. It is not new and it is not simple. Throughout the ages this problem has been most perplexing to man for it has touched and disturbed believer and non-believer, rich and poor, young and old of both East and West.

It is recognized that there are two aspects of evil. One comes from within as a result of the choices of the will; this is called "sin." The other comes from outside, from the environment of society or of the natural universe; this is called "suffering."<sup>1</sup> Few find difficulty in understanding why one should suffer as a result of folly or sin, but there is question when the innocent suffer.

The special field of inquiry of this thesis concerns this problem which continues to haunt mankind: unmerited suffering.

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1. E. Stanley Jones, Christ and Human Suffering, New York, Abingdon Press, 1933, p. 21.

## 2. The Subject Justified

The importance of the subject has been recognized for generations by philosophers, theologians and other individuals disturbed by the ever-recurring pressure of suffering.

As man has a natural craving for happiness implanted in his being by the Creator, this universal presence of suffering in our midst calls for an explanation in every system of religious belief.<sup>1</sup>

Yet many Christians would be in agreement with E. Stanley Jones, missionary statesman, who writes concerning the suffering of the innocent:

The more I thought on the matter, the more was I convinced that on scarcely anything is Christendom more confused, more pathetically tangled than on this matter of suffering and the way to meet it. But if Christendom is confused, then non-Christendom is more so.<sup>2</sup>

In a survey of the non-Christian religions of the world, statistics show that one-seventh of all the human race professes Islam.

The contemporary household of Islam presents a fascinating scene whatever the angle of interest to the intelligent observer. To the statistician it offers an ever enlarging and variegated population involved in some of the most rapid progression of human increase anywhere in Asia and aggregating probably more than 350 million . . .<sup>3</sup>

This religion which Mohammed proclaimed

has a gripping power over the human heart, it sways innumerable lives along channels which are by no

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1. Edmund F. Sutcliffe, *Providence and Suffering in the Old and New Testament*, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1953, p. 1.
  2. E. S. Jones, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
  3. Kenneth Cragg, "The Muslim World," *World Christian Handbook*, 1962 Edition, p. 35.



means those of least resistance, it manifests a real vitality. Christianity cannot brush Islam aside, but must prove that it deals more satisfactorily with the universe.<sup>1</sup>

If many of the adherents of these two leading world religions are confused on the matter of unmerited suffering and how to meet it, a study of their teaching on this subject is of great value.

The importance of such research is realized also in the fact that Islam is the greatest rival religion of Christianity and that Christian workers seem to agree that the Moslem lands are the most difficult of all for missionary endeavors.<sup>2</sup> In these countries of the mosque and minaret, the converts to Christ, as well as the "small vulnerable minority"<sup>3</sup> of Christians suffer privation of some kind. J. B. Phillips addresses the problem:

Do we at home realize what sort of problems may easily arise for the Moslem who becomes a Christian? His conversion may be perfectly genuine but so closely-knit is the Moslem community and so deep is its devotion to the Moslem faith that he . . . will find himself completely cut off from his former relations and relationships. He will lose his wife and family, possibly even his life. Employment will prove almost impossible in the Moslem community and practically the only way in which the convert can live at all is as a servant under the Mission's roof, or else he must go to some country where the community is not predominantly Moslem . . .<sup>4</sup>

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1. Board of Missionary Preparation, The Presentation of Christianity to Moslems, Report of a Committee Appointed by the Board of Missionary Preparation, New York, Dec., 1916, p. 77.
  2. J. Christy Wilson, Introducing Islam, New York, Friendship Press, n.d., [1950], p. 55.
  3. J. B. Phillips, The Church under the Cross, London, The Highway Press, 1956, p. 28.
  4. Ibid.

A proper understanding of the teachings of one's faith concerning the purpose and the response to suffering is of the utmost significance to every Christian, but those who would attempt to understand and/or minister to those of the second largest religion of the world must be familiar also with the teachings of Islam.

Therefore in a study of the problem of unmerited suffering with ethical implications, this thesis will focus upon the teachings of the Islamic and Christian religions.

### 3. The Subject Delimited

Because of the vastness of the problem and the dearth of writings now available, this study will consider only certain aspects of the problem of unsought suffering. Neither time nor space would permit a presentation of every kind of suffering experienced by the innocent. For this reason, the subject will be so delimited that the only sufferings to be dealt with will be those which come unsought to men and women through the instrumentality of other human beings in religious persecution.

Both Islam and Christianity are alike in enthusiastic missionary endeavors; and, as stated by writer-historian Robert M. Grant:

. . . Persecution . . . is the other side of aggression. [It is] the inevitable outcome of a truly missionary spirit; the two are linked together as action and reaction.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Robert M. Grant, *The Sword and the Cross*, New York, Macmillan Company, 1955, p. 56.

In order to ascertain what these two religious groups teach their followers regarding the purpose of persecution and the manner in which it is to be met, the research will deal with selected passages of sacred scripture: The Glorious Koran of the Moslems, and the New Testament portion of The Holy Bible of the Christians.

#### B. The Sources of Data

The Koran and the New Testament books of the Bible are to be the primary sources of this study. The passages selected are those which the writer finds to portray best the teachings concerning suffering through persecution, with ethical implications.

Translations of the Arabic Koran into English by such authorities as Maulvi Muhammad Ali, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall and George M. Lamsa are to be employed. The Biblical text to be used is the Revised Standard Version.

The research will not be limited to primary sources, for commentaries on the Koranic and Biblical passages will be referred to, as well as to other writings by authorities on such subjects as Islamics, Christianity, ethics and suffering.

#### C. A Statement Regarding Terms Employed

Because so many English readers are unfamiliar with Islam, i.e., the religion, doctrines, customs and ways of the Moslems, the following statement is made regarding terms to be

utilized in this study:

1. Islam: The name given to the religion established by Mohammed, its chief prophet. According to commentator Maulvi Muhammad Ali:

'Islam' [signifies] literally, 'submitting oneself' or 'resigning oneself,' . . . Islam is therefore the religion of entire submission to Allah.<sup>1</sup>

The word . . . does not only signify 'submission,' it also signifies 'entering into peace' [with another].<sup>2</sup>

This alludes to the fact that he who embraces Islam in an Islamic state becomes free from all those penalties and disabilities incumbent upon one who does not adhere to that faith.<sup>3</sup>

2. Moslem: A term synonymous with "Muslim" which refers to one who is a follower of Islam. "One who submits [to the will of God] is designated by the term 'Moslem,' a participial form of the root 'Islam.'"<sup>4</sup> Moslems abhor being called "Mohammedans" for their claim is to be worshippers of Allah and not Mohammad, the chief prophet of Islam.

3. Koran: The title given to the Moslem sacred scriptures; a common variation in spelling is "Quran." The word is derived from the Arabic "qara" which has the same meaning as the Hebrew "kara" meaning to read or recite, whether from memory or

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1. The Holy Quran, Containing the Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary by Maulvi Muhammad Ali, Lahore, W. Pakistan, 1920, p. 56, footnote #156.
  2. Ibid., p. 146, footnote #400.
  3. Kundan Lal Nasir, "A Comparative Study of the Ethical Teachings of the New Testament and the Koran," New York, The Biblical Seminary in New York, Thesis, 1951, p. vi.
  4. L. Bevan Jones, The People of the Mosque, Calcutta, Association Press, 1932, p. 59.

from the written page.<sup>1</sup>

The [Koran] is a recitation or thing to be recited, and that not only for the benefit of those who are to be instructed in the divine revelation, but also as the expression of worship due to Allah; it is the treasury of faith, duty and worship in the very words uttered by Allah, who is throughout held to be the speaker. Its division is partly literary, partly liturgical; the former is original, the latter is secondary.<sup>2</sup>

Moslems believe that their holy scriptures were sent down complete by the hand of Allah to the lowest heaven, and then revealed over a period of years to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel.

- a. Sura has the same meaning as "chapter."
- b. Ayat signifies the short sections or verses of the Koran.

4. Allah: A word best understood to mean "God." It is a contraction of [the Arabic word] 'Al Ilah' [meaning] 'The Deity'; the article emphasizing His uniqueness. 'Ilah' corresponds to the Old Testament 'Eloah,' the root of which is 'El' from 'Ul' [meaning] 'to be strong'; it therefore signifies the Mighty One.<sup>3</sup>

In accordance with its overmastering conception of God, the fertility of [Koranic] diction is chiefly manifested in its wealth of names setting forth the different aspects of the Divine Being and action. 'Most excellent names hath Allah; by these call ye on Him and stand aloof from those who pervert His names.' (Koran 7:179; 59:22ff.). These names are reckoned by the traditionalist Abu Hurairah as ninety-nine; and this is the generally accepted number for which rosaries are made to control the recital.<sup>4</sup>

These attributes of Allah, derived from His ninety-

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1. Nasir, op. cit., p. vii.
  2. H. U. Weitbrecht Stanton, The Teaching of the Quran, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919, p. 12.
  3. Ibid., p. 32.
  4. Ibid., p. 33.

nine names, can be conveniently considered "under the heads of self-subsistent Unity, Omnipotence, Omniscience, Justice [and] Mercy."<sup>1</sup>

5. Ethics: In considering the ethical implications of the problem of suffering as a result of persecution, a simple but clear definition of ethics must be established. Wilbur M. Urban questions:

Why . . . do we study ethics? The simplest answer is: It tells us how to act rightly; what actions are right or wrong, good or bad. We frequently find ethics defined as the science which deals with conduct in so far as this is considered right or wrong, good or bad.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis will be concerned with the scriptural teachings given the followers of Islam and Christianity regarding the purpose of persecution, and the attitude and conduct to be maintained by a sufferer toward his God and his tormentor, in order to determine the value of such an experience for the sufferer and others. The primary question involves the ethic role of each of these religious groups: What concrete expression does the Koran and the New Testament give as to the responsibility of its adherents to the world during a time of persecution?<sup>3</sup>

#### D. The Method of Procedure

The research of this thesis will be presented in three

- 
1. Stanton, op. cit., pp. 33-34.
  2. Wilbur Marshall Urban, Fundamentals of Ethics, An Introduction to Moral Philosophy, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1930, p. 3.
  3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ethics, ed. by Everhard Bethge, New York, Macmillan Company, 1962, p. 289.

chapters. Chapter One will deal with the passages of the Koran under the following headings in order to discover the Islamic teaching concerning the problem of unmerited suffering through persecution: (1) The Purpose of Persecution for the Moslem; (2) The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Moslem toward Allah; and (3) The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Moslem toward His Persecutor.

In Chapter Two, selected passages from the New Testament portion of the Bible will be studied under similar topic headings in order to determine the Christian view of the stated subject: (1) The Purpose of Persecution for the Christian; (2) The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Christian toward God; and (3) The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Christian toward His Persecutor.

A comparative study of the insights noted in the two preceding chapters will be the concern of Chapter Three. A summary and conclusion of the entire research will then follow.

CHAPTER I

UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH PERSECUTION,  
WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, AS FOUND IN  
SELECTED PASSAGES OF THE KORAN



## CHAPTER I

### UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH PERSECUTION, WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, AS FOUND IN SELECTED PASSAGES OF THE KORAN

#### A. Introduction

Before considering the problem of unsought suffering through persecution, as found in the Koran, a few fundamental facts must be mentioned concerning the book itself.

Moslem scholars maintain that the Islamic scriptures were written originally in the purest Arabic, and that Mohammed continually appealed to its extraordinary, even superhuman beauty and purity as an evidence of the divine source from which he declared it to come.

Mohammad M. Pickthall, in his English translation of the Koran states:

The Koran cannot be translated . . . The Book is here rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy.<sup>1</sup>

#### Authorities in the Arabic language

inform us that in its purest type it is in the highest degree copious, musical, and elegant; and that these qualities all meet in the Koran. Consequently there is scarcely any book in the world which loses so much by translation. The charm of its graceful,

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1. The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, an Explanatory Translation by Mohammad Marmaduke Pickthall, New York, The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1953, p. vii.

harmonious, rhythmical, sonorous sentences utterly evaporates, and the matter, stripped of its gay attire, appears to the ordinary reader unsufferably dull and commonplace.<sup>1</sup>

Judged by its own definition, the Koran:

. . . is not a narrative which could be forged, but a verification of what was before it and a distinct explanation of all things and a guide and a mercy to a people who believe.<sup>2</sup>

From this verse it is seen that the Islamic scriptures claim to be a complete supplement to all preceding revelation, "to be the final statement of God's will, both concerning dogmatic belief and practical conduct."<sup>3</sup> Yet viewed in its claim to be the ultimate revelation of both theological and moral truths, the linguistic "inability to stand the test of translation"<sup>4</sup> seems to exhibit a notable weakness of the Koran.

A study of the Koranic view of suffering as a result of persecution must also be considered in the context of Mohammed's general understanding of suffering. The prophet had a strong sense of divine sovereignty, yet not necessarily with the idea of blind and impersonal faith. This doctrine of predestination, known as "the last article [and] the keystone in the arch of the [Moslem] faith,"<sup>5</sup> is interpreted to mean that everything that happens, either good or bad, is foreordained by the

- 
1. W. R. W. Stephens, *Christianity and Islam*, New York, Scribner, Armstrong, 1877, p. 59.
  2. M. M. Ali, *op. cit.*, 12:111.
  3. Stephens, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
  4. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
  5. Samuel M. Zwemer, *A Challenge to Faith*, New York, Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, 1908, p. 95.

unchangeable decrees of Allah. To Mohammed all the sorrows of life were to be attributed to Allah's will, whether they were punishment for human sin and rebellion, or not. As stated in the Koran:

Nothing will afflict us save what Allah has ordained for us.<sup>1</sup>

No evil befalls on the earth nor in your own souls, but it is in a book before we bring it into existence . . .<sup>2</sup>

Mohammed seemed to be less concerned about the mechanics of divine control than with the fact of that control. He clearly exhorted his followers to regard all that happened as coming from Allah. He stated this as follows:

And if a benefit comes to them, they say: This is from Allah; and if a misfortune befalls them, they say: This is from you. Say: All is from Allah.<sup>3</sup>

Say (O Mohammed): Who is Lord of the heavens and the earth? Say: Allah! Say: Take ye then (others) beside Him for protectors, which, even for themselves, have neither benefit nor hurt? . . . Say: Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Almighty.<sup>4</sup>

It is not ye who slew them; it was God: When thou threwest (a handful of dust), it was not Thy act, but God's: In order that He might test the believers by a gracious trial from Himself: for God is He who heareth and knoweth (all things). That, and also because God is He who makes feeble the plans and stratagems of the unbelievers.<sup>5</sup>

Whether or not Allah is the author of man's actions, the Koran

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1. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 9:51.
2. Ibid., 57:22.
3. Ibid., 4:78.
4. Ibid., 13:16.
5. The Holy Quran, Text, Translation & Commentary by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, 2 vols., New York, Hafner Publishing Company, 1946, 8:17,18.

. . . would seem to establish that the Prophet held Him to be the determiner of men's fortunes. But this is not necessarily . . . the later degrading type of fatalism prevalent in the world of Islam.<sup>1</sup>

Critics such as Stanton have contended that the Koranic view of predestination "is very explicit though not very logical."<sup>2</sup> Even within Islam the matter has been hotly debated, giving rise to three schools of thought:

- (a) The Jabarians . . . who deny all free agency to man. God is responsible for all man's actions.
- (b) The Qadarians who . . . say that evil and injustice ought not to be attributed to God, but to man, who is an altogether free agent.
- (c) The Asharians [who] hold that God has one eternal will . . . [but] allows some power to man.

. . . The orthodox Muslim is thus inevitably a fatalist.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore the two points presented as basic to the study of the Islamic view of suffering as a result of persecution are as follows: (1) The unique linguistic feature of the Koran which proposes a great difficulty in translation; (2) the Koranic doctrine of the predetermination of Allah which is variously interpreted as to its absoluteness, both within and outside the Moslem brotherhood.

#### B. Passages from the Koran Specifically

##### Related to Persecution

With the foregoing as groundwork, an investigation will

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1. H. H. Rowley, *Submission in Suffering*, Great Britain, University of Wales Press, 1951, p. 52.
  2. Stanton, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
  3. L. B. Jones, *People of the Mosque*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

be made of some of the verses of the Moslem scriptures which seem specifically directed toward those undergoing unmerited suffering in the form of persecution.

1. The Purpose of Persecution for the Moslem

Though there are verses pertaining to suffering scattered throughout the Islamic scriptures, there is only one chapter which treats the subject of persecution to any length. In a preface to this twenty-ninth sura, or chapter, M. M. Ali writes that it refers chiefly to

the persecutions of the Moslems and the trials which they underwent, and hence some have thought that some portions . . . were revealed at Medina and refer to the battles which the Moslems fought. But to consider that the persecution and the trials of the Moslems began at Medina and with fighting is to ignore the whole of their earlier history . . . The Moslems had a very hard time at Mecca, and even if no account of the cruel persecutions of the early converts to Islam had been left, the earlier flight to Abyssinia and the later one to Medina should be sufficient testimony of the great trials which the Moslems suffered at Mecca.<sup>1</sup>

This passage "gives comfort to the Moslems in a time of persecution," states Pickthall in his expanded translation of the Koran.<sup>2</sup> The chapter is entitled "The Spider," illustrating the extreme frailty of the false beliefs of other religions. It begins with the assertion that "trials and persecutions purify and are necessary."<sup>3</sup>

Do men think that they will be left alone on saying,

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1. M. M. Ali, op. cit., p. 774.
  2. Pickthall, op. cit., p. 284.
  3. M. M. Ali, op. cit., pp. 774, 775.

'We believe,' and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them, and God will certainly know those who are true from those who are false. Do those who practice evil think they will get the better of us? Evil is their judgment! For those whose hopes are in the meeting with God (in the Hereafter, let them strive); for the Term (appointed) by God is surely coming: and He hears and knows (all things).<sup>1</sup>

The next sections make brief references to the histories of Noah, Abraham, Lot, Pharaoh and others seemingly to substantiate the teaching that "belief is tested by trial in life and practical conduct."<sup>2</sup> According to commentator A. Y. Ali:

Mere lip profession of Faith is not enough. It must be tried and tested in the real turmoil of life. The test will be applied in all kinds of circumstances, in individual life and in relation to the environment around us, to see whether we can strive constantly and put God above Self.<sup>3</sup>

These verses abound with the message of the ultimate triumph of the faithful and the judgment of evildoers. According to translator M. M. Ali:

Allah . . . will not allow the exertions of the faithful in the cause of truth to remain unfruitful, and that those who strive hard and earnestly will be guided in the right way, which is the way to success.<sup>4</sup>

Moslems are exhorted to "strive" or "make exertion" during a time of trial, both for their individual spiritual growth, and for the defense of their faith. The promised result of this action is "success." Success may take the form of per-

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 29:1-5.
  2. Ibid., p. 1028.
  3. Ibid., p. 1029, footnote #3423.
  4. M. M. Ali, op. cit., p. 775.

sonal spiritual growth:

And if any strive (with might and main), they do so for their own souls: For God is free of all needs from all creation.<sup>1</sup>

To this verse A. Y. Ali comments:

All our striving inures to our own spiritual benefit. When we speak of serving God, it is not that we confer any benefit on Him. For He has no needs, and is independent of all His creation. In conforming to His will, we are seeking our own good . . .<sup>2</sup>

At other times, success resulting from striving may mean complete deliverance from persecution. An instance is cited as having happened to the prophet Abraham:

But the answer to his folk was only that they said: 'Kill him or burn him.' Then Allah saved him from the fire. Lo! herein verily are portents for folk who believe.<sup>3</sup>

Such a salvation is interpreted by A. Y. Ali to mean that

. . . righteous people suffer no harm from the plots of the wicked. But they must leave their environment of evil even if they have to forsake their ancestral home, as Abraham did.<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, success will always come to the truth (of Islam). Islamic scholars maintain that the truth of their religion "will always prevail; truth does not suffer . . . it is the rejectors who suffer and perish in the end."<sup>5</sup>

. . . The righteous had always to undergo trials . . . and were subjected to persecutions, but false beliefs had no basis and had always been swept away by truth.<sup>6</sup>

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 29:6.
  2. Ibid., p. 1030, footnote #3428.
  3. Pickthall, op. cit., 29:24.
  4. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 1034, footnote #3443.
  5. Ibid., pp. 1028, 1044, footnote #3484.
  6. M. M. Ali, op. cit., p. 774.

Though the truth of Islam is said to triumph always, it appears that a believer of that truth may fall away under persecution:

O you who believe! if you obey those who disbelieve, they will turn you back upon your heels, so you will turn back losers.<sup>1</sup>

M. M. Ali comments on this translation:

The war was carried on only with the object of making the Muslims renounce their religion, and hence they could not think of accepting the unbelievers as their rulers, for obedience on their part was sure to lead to persecution, which the enemy would not have stopped until they had made the Muslims renounce their faith.<sup>2</sup>

Through sorrows Allah is said to test what is in the heart. "He knows it, and His testing it means making it manifest to others."<sup>3</sup> One who fails to remain steadfast in the face of such testing must strive to be reinstated as a believer:

Yet surely your Lord with respect to those who fly after they are persecuted, then they struggle hard and are patient, most surely your Lord after that is Forgiving, Merciful.<sup>4</sup>

Here it is understood that the Moslem deserter must first prove himself before being taken again into fellowship with his God.

M. M. Ali comments on this:

Even after this (desertion) Allah forgives them if they repent and show perseverance in the pursuit of truth and righteousness.<sup>5</sup>

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1. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 3:148.
  2. Ibid., p. 183, footnote #500.
  3. Ibid., p. 186, footnote #512, (cf. 3:152-153).
  4. Ibid., 16:110.
  5. Ibid., p. 556, footnote #1404.



A. Y. Ali interprets such striving as effecting atonement, for he states: "Their past would be blotted out and forgiven."<sup>1</sup>

He also suggests that one of the major proofs of true Islamic discipleship is being "patient at the time of trial."<sup>2</sup>

[Islam] teaches that through misfortunes, God often tests His servants so as to make manifest the spirit of resignation with which they humbly submit themselves to His wishes, saying, 'We belong to God and we shall return to Him.'<sup>3</sup>

This attitude of mind is the effect of "trust" or "submission" to Allah, for the Moslem faithful are "resigned to what follows, taking the consequences with a cool mind."<sup>4</sup>

. . . an excellent reward for those who do (good)! Those who persevere in patience, and put their trust in their Lord and Cherisher.<sup>5</sup>

However, Stephens in his work, Christianity and Islam, contends that this spirit of resignation or

patience is inculcated . . . chiefly as a condition of success in propagating the faith of Islam; for unless the believer was patient under insult and adversity, the cause of his religion might be injured by the provocation of an attack.<sup>6</sup>

Travail in persecution also causes the Moslem believer to turn in prayer to his Creator.

(Can there be another) god besides God . . . who listens to the (soul) distressed when it calls on

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 686, footnote #2147.
  2. Ibid., p. 181, footnote #494.
  3. Laura V. Vaglieri, An Interpretation of Islam, Washington, D. C., The American Fazl Mosque, 1957, p. 57.
  4. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 187, footnote #516.
  5. Ibid., 29:57, 58.
  6. Stephens, op. cit., p. 122.

Him, and who relieves its suffering?<sup>1</sup>

Pakistan's past Foreign Minister, Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, who was also once elected President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, states his view of such a verse:

The reaching out of the soul toward its Creator --particularly when it is in travail and seeks to pour forth its anguish to the Almighty, Who possesses the knowledge and the power to come to its aid, to bestow solace and comfort, to grant relief, to raise it up from its lowly estate--is a natural urge that will not be denied.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of prayer in Islam finds expression both in the five obligatory, daily, congregational prayers and in personal prayer where "no time is prescribed, no formalities have to be observed, [and] there is no set form of words."<sup>3</sup>

In all areas of worship, the Christian needs to understand the Moslem. Missionary statesman Max A. C. Warren suggests:

There is no better way of doing this . . . than to try to understand what it means to [the Moslem] when he says his prayers.<sup>4</sup>

There are other passages that refer to merit gained only as a result of faithfulness while suffering persecution:

And how many a prophet has fought with whom were many worshippers of the Lord; so they did not become weak-hearted on account of what befell them in Allah's way . . . So Allah gave them the reward of this world and better reward of the hereafter.<sup>5</sup>

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 27:61,62.
  2. Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, Islam, Its Meaning for Modern Man, New York, Harper & Row, 1962, p. 100.
  3. Ibid., p. 107.
  4. Max A. C. Warren, "Whither Islam?", C.M.S. News-Letter, No. 239, London, C.M.S. Publishing Department, June, 1961, p. 2.
  5. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 3:145, 147.

. . . they, therefore, who fled and were turned out of their homes and persecuted in My way and who fought and were slain, I will most certainly cover their evil deeds, and I will most certainly make them enter gardens beneath which rivers flow: a reward from Allah, and with Allah is yet better reward.<sup>1</sup>

Though the nature of the "reward of this world" is seldom expressed, the greater emphasis of the Koran concerns promises of rewards in a life after death that far exceeds anything of human existence.

The second reference cited above seems to imply that steadfastness in persecution can, in some manner, atone for one's evil deeds. M. M. Ali's comment speaks directly to this view:

The Quran points out that the true 'atonement' for evil deeds is the doing of good deeds, so that the latter, taking the place of the former, change the whole course of a man's life. The atonement of sin by virtue is the true doctrine of nature, while atonement by blood is absolutely unnatural and incomprehensible.<sup>2</sup>

Persecution gives opportunity to receive other benefits from Allah if one remains faithful:

Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive with might and main, in God's cause, with their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of God: They are the people who will achieve (salvation). Their Lord doth give them glad tidings of a mercy from Himself . . . and of gardens for them, wherein are delights that endure: They will dwell therein forever. Verily in God's presence is a reward, the greatest (of all).<sup>3</sup>

Moslem scholar A. Y. Ali writes that there is a gradation in the

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1. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 3:194.
  2. Ibid., p. 776, footnote #1906.
  3. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 9:20-22.

promises of God revealed in the above verses:

[First] there is a special mercy . . . [then] a consciousness of God's good pleasure, [followed by] a state of permanent spiritual assurance, [and lastly] the Presence of God Himself . . .<sup>1</sup>

Referring to an occasion when Mohammed had to flee from persecution and hide in a cave, the Koran states the following:

So Allah sent down His tranquility upon him and strengthened him with hosts which you did not see . . .<sup>2</sup>

Here the prophet seeks to encourage his followers by citing his own experience of receiving renewed strength and peace from Allah while in the midst of strong persecution. Ministering angelic beings are also alluded to as another of the mercies of Allah for the faithful.

Persecution also makes possible a reward to those who are strong in Allah:

How many of the Prophets fought (in God's way), and with them (fought) large bands of godly men? But they never lost heart if they met with disaster in God's way, nor did they weaken (in will) nor give in. And God loves those who are firm and steadfast. All that they said was: 'Our Lord! forgive us our sins and anything we may have done that transgressed our duty: Establish our feet firmly, and help us against those that resist faith.' And God gave them a reward in this world, and the excellent reward of the hereafter. For God loveth those who do good.<sup>3</sup>

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 444, footnote #1271.
  2. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 9:40.
  3. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 3:146-148.

In his explanation of this translation, A. Y. Ali writes:

There is a slight touch of irony in this. As applied to the archers . . . who deserted their posts for the sake of plunder . . . they nearly lost their souls. On the other hand, those who took the long view and fought with staunchness and discipline, their reward was swift and sure. If they died, they got the crown of martyrdom. If they lived, they were heroes honoured in this life and the next.<sup>1</sup>

The Koranic teaching of the purpose of persecution is varied. In some respects such suffering is a spiritual thermometer revealing the extent of belief, or lack of belief in Allah. The manifestation of belief is submission to divine will. Under certain situations, persecution is a goad to gain personal, spiritual merit or deliverance from evil. Such testing also gives opportunity to receive an assortment of benefits for this life, or for a life after death; the Moslem believer must remain faithful to the truth of Islam when under assault to receive these promises.

## 2. The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Moslem Toward

### Allah

The prophet of Islam called men to patient submission as the wise response in a world where good and evil alike come through the ordinance of Allah, the Creator. He preached: "Allah loves the patient."<sup>2</sup> There are, in fact, many passages in the Koran where the patient endurance of suffering, especially

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 160, footnote #461.
  2. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 3:145.

of persecution, is encouraged. Islam teaches that this patience evidences submission to the will of Allah. The following are a few representative verses:

Allah has indeed been gracious to us; surely he who guards (against evil) and is patient (is rewarded) for surely Allah does not waste the reward of those who do good.<sup>1</sup>

And what reason have we that we should not rely on Allah? and He has indeed guided us in our ways; and certainly we would bear with patience your persecution of us; and on Allah should the reliant trust.<sup>2</sup>

O ye who believe! seek help with patient perseverance and prayer: for God is with those who patiently persevere.<sup>3</sup>

Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say when afflicted with calamity: 'To God we belong, and to Him is our return' . . .<sup>4</sup>

In a comparative study of Eastern thought, entitled Submission in Suffering, Rowley makes the following statement concerning patience in affliction:

It will be observed that [such] endurance is accompanied with trust. It is not merely helpless and uncomplaining acceptance of suffering that is enjoined, but a quiet confidence in God.<sup>5</sup>

Some disagree with this attitude, contending that the patience taught is a passivity leading to moral degradation.

Wilson has judged that

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1. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 12:90.
  2. Ibid., 14:12.
  3. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 2:153.
  4. Ibid., 2:155, 156.
  5. Rowley, op. cit., p. 53.

. . . [it] is all too evident in the daily life of individuals over the whole world of Islam . . . that the worst calamities are often accepted with no more than a stoic shrug of the shoulders.<sup>1</sup>

E. S. Jones says, in effect, that the acceptance of inequalities and sufferings as the will of God can lay a paralyzing hand on any civilization.<sup>2</sup>

The Koran teaches that Allah can fully meet the needs of all who call upon Him in true submission and faith. Past incidents of history are frequently referred to in order to inspire faith in the believers.

. . . Allah is sufficient . . . and most excellent is the Protector. So they returned with favour from Allah and (His) grace; no evil touched them and they followed the pleasure of Allah. It is only the devil that causes you to fear from his friends, but do not fear them, fear Me if you are believers.<sup>3</sup>

And obey not the unbelievers and hypocrites, mind not their evil treatment: but trust in God; and God is a sufficient protector.<sup>4</sup>

Allah, the all-sufficient One, is portrayed also as hearing and answering the prayers of believers who cry in the midst of persecution:

(Remember) Noah, when he cried . . . We listened to his prayer and delivered him and his family from great distress. We helped him against people who rejected our signs . . .<sup>5</sup>

. . . establish regular prayer: for prayer re-

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1. Wilson, op. cit., p. 26.
  2. E. S. Jones, Christ and Human Suffering, p. 61.
  3. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 3:172-174.
  4. The Short Koran, ed. by George M. Lamsa, Chicago, Ziff-Davis Company, 1949, 33:40, p. 192.
  5. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 21:76, 77.

strains from shameful and unjust deeds; and remembrance of God is the greatest (thing in life) without doubt. And dispute not . . . unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury) . . .<sup>1</sup>

But none believed in Moses except some children . . . because of the fear of Pharaoh and his chiefs, lest they should persecute them . . . Moses said: 'O my people! If ye do believe in God, then in Him put your trust if ye submit (your will to His).' They said: 'In God do we put our trust. Our Lord! make us not a trial for those who practise oppression; and deliver us by Thy Mercy from those who reject (Thee).'<sup>2</sup>

The Islamic scriptures teach that Moslems are to hope in Allah, even when facing possible death through persecution. The inference of the following verses is that there is life after death, and that those believers who die in faithfulness rejoice both in Allah and for the sake of those still living on earth. This message, of course, is a vital concern to all who undergo the agonies of physical suffering resulting from persecution.

And do not speak of those who are slain in Allah's way as dead; nay (they are) alive, but do not perceive.<sup>3</sup>

And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay, they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord; rejoicing in what Allah has given them out of His grace, and they rejoice for the sake of those who (being left) behind them have not yet joined them, that they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.<sup>4</sup>

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 29:45-46.
  2. Ibid., 10:83-85.
  3. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 2:154.
  4. Ibid., 3:168-169.



The Koran is constant in a message of hope to the followers of Islam that Allah will reward the faithful and punish evil doers. L. Vaglieri in An Interpretation of Islam, gives a concise explanation of the Islamic view of Allah as Judge:

Like other religions, Islam gives an explanation of an age-old problem that continues to puzzle the human mind, namely, why is it that the wicked appear to enjoy the favors of fortune while the good are often hit by great misfortunes. Islam teaches that God grants to rebels, tyrants and unjust ones, a waiting period which may even go as far as their death. But the moment will come in which He will reward and punish.<sup>1</sup>

The author also includes a traditional Islamic saying which encourages the Moslem who is suffering under the hand of affliction:

. . . Don't let insults take you away from the way of God, [and] often repeat--'there is no strength and power outside of God'--because this is a part of the treasure which is hidden under the throne of God.<sup>2</sup>

The Moslem suffering persecution is exhorted to patiently submit to Allah, who is all-sufficient. He will hear the cries of afflicted believers and answer either by sustaining or completely delivering them. The Koran teaches that Allah is worthy of hope for He will reward the faithful and give retribution to unbelievers.

3. The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Moslem toward  
His Persecutor

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1. Vaglieri, op. cit., p. 57.
2. Ibid., p. 58.

To the Moslem, the ultimate triumph of Islam is revealed in the promise of the coming punishment of all persecutors. Torment and defeat are prophesied for their enemies in this life and in the hereafter. A few representative verses follow:

They shall meet with disgrace in this world, and they shall have great chastisement in the hereafter.<sup>1</sup>

And apostles before you were certainly mocked at, but I gave respite to those who disbelieved, then I destroyed them; . . . They shall have chastisement in this world's life, and the chastisement of the hereafter is certainly more grievous, and they shall have no protector against Allah.<sup>2</sup>

Surely (as for) those who persecute the believing men and believing women, then do not repent, they shall have the chastisement of hell . . .<sup>3</sup>

Thus the Moslem is taught from his scriptures that persecution is merely a temporary experience, and that the sufferer can be assured of being on the winning side, regardless of his present circumstances. The possibility of being spared the predicted judgment is offered in these verses to a persecutor who will repent. This would tend to soften the attitude of the suffering Moslem toward those who afflict him.

The doctrine of retaliation is taught in the Koran.

And if you take your turn, then retaliate with the life of that with which you were afflicted; but if you are patient, it will certainly be best for those who are patient. And be patient and your patience is not but by (the assistance of) Allah, and grieve not for them and do not distress yourself at what

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1. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 2:114.
  2. Ibid., 13:32, 34.
  3. Ibid., 85:10.

they plan. Surely Allah is with those who guard (against) evil, and those who do good (to others).<sup>1</sup>

Translator A. Y. Ali says that patience is both "recommended and commanded"<sup>2</sup> in the two verses above:

In the strictest equity you are not entitled to give a worse blow than is given to you. But those who have reached a higher spiritual standard do not even do that. They restrain themselves, and are patient . . . Here patience is recommended.<sup>3</sup>

. . . (But) a command is directly addressed to the Prophet, 'Do thou be patient.' His standard as the Great Teacher is much higher: and he carried it out in his life.<sup>4</sup>

In situations "wide enough to cover all human struggles, disputes, and fights," the Moslem is permitted retaliation within limits.<sup>5</sup> Yet the higher standard of self-restraint is set as the ultimate of Islamic faith in action.

In two verses similar to the one just cited, the right of self-defense is offered the Moslem undergoing persecution:

Permission (to fight) is given to those upon whom war is made because they are oppressed, and most surely Allah is well able to assist them . . .<sup>6</sup>

And whoever defends himself against his being oppressed, these it is against whom there is no way (to blame). The way (to blame) is only against those who oppress men and revolt in the earth unjustly . . .<sup>7</sup>

A. Y. Ali recommends that Moslems "actively right wrongs" by

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1. Ibid., 16:126-128.
  2. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 690, footnote #2164.
  3. Ibid., footnotes #2163, 2164.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Ibid.
  6. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 23:39.
  7. Ibid., 42:41.

forgiveness and love in situations where retaliation is permitted. But concerning the right of self-defense, he makes the following statement:

. . . This active righting of wrongs, whether by physical, moral or spiritual means, which are recommended as better, is an antithesis to the monkish doctrine, when you are smitten on one cheek, to turn the other also. This would not suppress, but encourage wrong-doing. It is . . . preached only by hypocrites, or men who want to make slaves of others by depriving them of the power of self-defense.<sup>1</sup>

However it is important to note that religious war against infidels is a duty plainly taught in the Moslem holy scriptures. Several representative verses follow:

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them . . . and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war);<sup>2</sup>

Fighting is enjoined on you, and it is an object of dislike to you; and it may be that you dislike a thing while it is good for you, and it may be that you love a thing while it is evil for you, and Allah knows, while you do not know.<sup>3</sup>

Let those fight in the cause of God who sell the life of this world for the Hereafter. To him who fighteth in the cause of God, whether he is slain or gets victory--soon shall We give him a reward of great (value) . . . Those who believe fight in cause of God.<sup>4</sup>

And fight (the unbelievers) on until there is not more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God altogether and everywhere . . .<sup>5</sup>

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 1317, footnote #4581.
  2. Ibid., 9:5.
  3. M. M. Ali, op. cit., 2:216.
  4. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., 4:74, 76.
  5. Ibid., 8:39.

A. Y. Ali states that it is a privilege to fight in the cause of God and

those who understand the privilege are prepared to sacrifice all their interests . . . and this life (for it). Whether they win or lose, in reality they win the prize for which they are fighting, viz., honour and glory in the sight of God . . . The true fighter knows no defeat.<sup>1</sup>

Zwemer speculates concerning this teaching:

It is unaccountable why the greatest force in Islam, religious warfare ('Jihad'), is not mentioned as a pillar of religion . . . [for many Koranic] passages command believers to make war, to kill and to fight in the path of God.<sup>2</sup>

The follower of Islam who is suffering as a result of persecution is taught to be patient, since all such suffering is temporary and Allah ultimately will assist him in the punishment of his tormentors. According to the spiritual maturity of the Moslem, he can exercise either the right of retaliation in kind or self-restraint. The Koran also sets forth the right of self-defense for all situations of conflict and permits fighting, killing and wars in the cause of Islam. However, forgiveness from Allah is offered also to any persecutor who will repent.

### C. Summary

At the outset, difficulty was discovered in working with any translation of the Arabic Koran. It was noted that Moslem authorities claim that the Islamic holy book cannot be

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1. Ibid., p. 202, footnote #591.
  2. Zwemer, Islam, p. 114.

translated because of its unique language. This is a factor vital to any comparative study involving the Koran which claims to be the latest, and therefore the only complete revelation of all theological and moral truth to mankind.

One other point considered basic to this study of the Koranic view of persecution is the Islamic doctrine of predestination. This doctrine, which greatly affects any understanding of the teachings of the Koran, is found to be variously interpreted as to its absoluteness, both by Moslem and Christian authorities.

With this background material, the study first focused on the Koranic view of the purposes of suffering in the life of the Moslem believer. It is taught that persecution has a purifying effect and is, therefore, an inescapable necessity to all. It can act as a test of steadfast belief in Allah, as well as to teach His worshipers to be submissive and patient. Unsought suffering is sometimes ordained to provoke a Moslem to strive in his faith and thereby afford him the experience of success in three possible areas: benefit to his spiritual life, deliverance from evil, or the triumph of the truth of Islam. The trial of persecution can cause a believer to turn in prayer to his Creator for assistance and comfort. Lastly it was discovered that persecution gives opportunity to the persecuted Moslem to be the recipient of an assortment of benefits, if he remains faithful during the test of affliction. Such an act of submission to Allah can effect atonement for sin, grant high rank in

the sight of Allah, achieve salvation of life after death, and impart gifts of strength and peace, ministering angels, and a hero's or martyr's crown of reward.

Next, research was done to ascertain what the Koran teaches concerning the proper attitude to be maintained toward Allah by a persecuted Moslem. When in a state of suffering, the follower of Islam is exhorted to patient submission to an all-sufficient God. Allah is portrayed as hearing and answering the prayers of His afflicted subjects; therefore, the believer is taught to be faithful in prayer. The suffering Moslem is to view his God as worthy of hope because Allah is revealed as a Judge who rewards the faithful and punishes the unbeliever.

In conclusion, a study was made of Koranic verses which best reveal the Moslem view regarding the attitude and conduct a persecuted believer is to maintain toward his tormentor. In some ways the teaching appears paradoxical, as the Koran teaches both Allah's assistance in the punishment of all persecutors, and ultimate victory for all sufferers who will submit patiently to the will of Allah. The right of retaliation in kind is offered but this seems a concession, for a higher standard of self-restraint is recommended as the ultimate of Islamic faith in action. The possibility of forgiveness by repentance is offered the enemies of Islam; yet the teaching of religious warfare is quite prominent in the Koran. Moslems are commanded to fight and kill for the cause of Islam.

CHAPTER II

UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH PERSECUTION,  
WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, AS FOUND IN  
SELECTED PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE



## CHAPTER II

### UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH PERSECUTION, WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, AS FOUND IN SELECTED PASSAGES OF THE BIBLE

#### A. Introduction

The special field of inquiry in the discovery of the Christian view of suffering as a result of persecution is that presented by the New Testament books of the Bible. Yet this view would not be complete without some consideration of its Jewish heritage as revealed in the Old Testament scriptures.

There is much in the teaching of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament which suggests that there is no innocent suffering, but that justice is invariably done.<sup>1</sup>

One of the primary teachings of the Books of Law of the Old Testament is that man always reaps the just reward of his own planning and action. Throughout the historical and prophetic books, the dominant theme is that the nation

. . . that flouted the will of God in its internal, social, and religious life, and that ignored Him in its foreign policies, was bound to reap a harvest of disaster.<sup>2</sup>

In a survey of the problem of suffering as seen in the Psalms, Sutcliffe concludes:

The prevalent view was that God, as the just and omnipotent guardian of the moral order, visits the

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1. Rowley, op. cit., p. 2.  
2. Ibid.

sinner with punishment and protects and rewards the good.<sup>1</sup>

Yet the object of this teaching was "not to make speculative denial of the possibility of innocent suffering," but to issue a practical call to the nation of Israel to fear God and to reverently heed His will.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the Jewish nation as a whole interpreted such teaching to mean that God would deal favorably with His own people; i.e., that He would deliver the righteous from all their troubles (Psalm 35), let no plague come near their dwellings (Psalm 91), return to them double for any loss (Zechariah 9:12), and satisfy them with prosperity and long life (Psalm 91:6). To these Israelites misfortune and suffering were always a sign of some sin. "Hence men who suffered without consciousness of guilt were apt to be puzzled and complain."<sup>3</sup>

Yet this is not the complete Hebraic view of suffering for

while this may have been the orthodoxy of a particular age, or of a particular circle, it was never the orthodoxy of the Old Testament. For innocent suffering was from the first recognized to be one of the facts of experience.<sup>4</sup>

In the earliest of the main documents of the Pentateuch, innocent suffering, "unredressed by subsequent honor," is seen to make "its appearance in the first human family in the

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1. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 2.
  2. Rowley, op. cit., p. 3.
  3. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 109.
  4. Rowley, op. cit., p. 4.

murder of Abel."<sup>1</sup> In a later historical narrative, the patriarch Joseph is cast into prison for his piety and faithfulness.

Ultimately . . . he attains position and honor, but his sufferings are still left without explanation in terms of justice.<sup>2</sup>

The "psalmists in their hours of pain and sorrow repeatedly protest their innocence."<sup>3</sup> Some of the prophets, such as Habakkuk, go beyond mere complaint of innocent suffering to affirmation of faith in God:

Though the fig tree [does] not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.<sup>4</sup>

Isaiah and Jeremiah are outstanding examples of the sorrow, afflictions and even persecution endured by a servant of God in the course of, and on account of, his divinely-appointed mission.<sup>5</sup> "Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him . . . the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand," declares the prophet Isaiah concerning God's suffering servant.<sup>6</sup>

When, therefore, the book of Job maintained that there is innocent suffering in the world, it was not propounding any new doctrine, but only enunciating afresh what experience had always proclaimed, and what had only been obscured by a false theological deduction from the justice of God.<sup>7</sup>

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1. Ibid.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Habakkuk 3:17, 18.
  5. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 100.
  6. Isaiah 53:10.
  7. Rowley, op. cit., p. 4.

In the light of the general trend of ancient Jewish thought, the story of Job could be said to transcend both the Old Testament concept of suffering and yet remain within it.

It transcends it in that it definitely teaches that suffering may in God's providence fall on a good man to test the reality of his virtue. Virtue is not necessarily co-extensive with prosperity; calamity is no sure sign of misdeeds. The book yet remains within the purview of the Old Testament in that the story ends and, given the stage of revelation reached at the time of its composition, could not but end in the renewed prosperity of the sufferer . . . The epilogue conveys the lesson, though in an incomplete form, that continued suffering for the just is no part of God's plan. Whatever they may have to endure and endure in the right spirit will in God's good time be met with a great reward.<sup>1</sup>

According to Old Testament teaching as a whole, suffering is not to be looked upon solely as an evidence of God's displeasure. The old orthodox view gave way gradually, "in spite of abundant biblical warrant, to the more satisfactory view"<sup>2</sup> that suffering can be a proof of God's favor.

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.<sup>3</sup>

The afflictions of the pious are attestations of God's fatherly love and care.

Indeed, that suffering atoned for all was a favorite and often repeated teaching of the later rabbis. Affliction reconciled and attached the son to the father--that is, Israel to God.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 119.
  2. Morton Scott Enslin, *The Ethics of Paul*, New York, Abingdon Press, 1957, p. 222.
  3. Proverbs 3:11, cf. Deuteronomy 8:5; Psalm 94:12; Job 5:17.
  4. Enslin, op. cit., p. 223.

Therefore the Hebraic background to the New Testament teaching of unmerited suffering through persecution is two-fold: A greater emphasis is given in the Old Testament scriptures to the revelation of a just and omnipotent God who protects and rewards the righteous, and who requites the sinner with punishment. This tended to make men think that the converse is true also and that suffering is always an indication of sin and the displeasure of God.

Yet another less explicit theme, present also in the earliest writings of the Jewish scriptures, is that unmerited suffering is in accordance with the will of God. Only a few of the prophets and other men of God came to realize that their mission involved persecution and suffering. Only this small nucleus came to understand that "what they endured was for the sake of God, whose cause they had at heart and strove to promote."<sup>1</sup>

#### B. Passages from the New Testament Specifically Related to Persecution

With the foregoing as background, a study will be made of some of the passages of the New Testament scriptures specifically related to Christians undergoing unmerited suffering in the form of persecution.

Since the Epistle of First Peter lends itself espe-

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1. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 109.

cially well to the subject of Christian suffering, the research that follows will be based upon the "so called persecution passages"<sup>1</sup> from this book: 1:6-7; 3:13-17; 4:12-19 and 5:9.

The study will radiate from Peter's writing, but relevant passages from the teachings of Jesus and of the Apostles Paul and John will also be included.

### 1. The Purpose of Persecution for the Christian

It should be remembered that the writing to be examined was first dispatched and circulated as a letter. The object of the author, the Apostle Peter, is "didactic and hortatory from first to last;"<sup>2</sup> and

. . . the phrase in verse 6 of chapter 1, 'to suffer various trials,' may be taken as symbolic of the large context of trouble within which the apostle sees these believers whom he is addressing. The Greek word for trials ('peirasmoi') . . . covers 'every kind of opposition and slander . . . whether coming from Jewish leaders, or from the leaders of Gentile religions . . . or from Roman authorities, or from society at large.'<sup>3</sup>

Paul S. Rees states in his book on Peter's epistle that he agrees with A. F. Walls and J. B. Phillips in seeing Rome, A.D. 63 or 64, "as the scene of the writing shortly before Nero lifted the floodgate of savagery against the Christians."<sup>4</sup>

The Christians of Asia Minor who received this letter, whether they were Jews or Gentiles, had

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1. Paul S. Rees, *Triumphant in Trouble*, Studies in I Peter, New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1962, p. 12.
  2. Frederick W. Farrar, *The Message of the Books*, New York, E. P. Dutton and Company, n.d., p. 424.
  3. Rees, op. cit., p. 13.
  4. Ibid., p. 12.

one thing in common, and that was trouble.<sup>1</sup>

Under the stress of that fiery trial there grew a feeling of perplexity and hesitation, therefore the author emphasizes hope to remind the sufferers of the resources of their faith.

But the responsibilities of hope are also urged; there is a constant stress upon reverent submission to the will of God as well as upon the duty of living innocent and peaceable lives which will commend the faith to outsiders.<sup>2</sup>

At the very outset of his "bracing message to his buffeted brethren"<sup>3</sup> in Christ, Peter says in effect:

Brothers in the faith, I know your troubles, and I am going to write to you about them, but first I want to lead you in gratitude to God for: (1) the promise you may cherish beyond all your torture and troubles; (2) the power that you may experience in the midst of all your troubles; (3) the profit you may derive from all your troubles.<sup>4</sup>

"In this you rejoice," the Apostle continues, "though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials."<sup>5</sup> The suffering of persecution is an integral part of living a godly life in Christ Jesus. The apostle's simple philosophy is that troubles are not accidental, but designed by God to test and attest the faith of the Christian. James Moffatt writes:

The variety of trials which beset Christians are permitted only to prove something; persecution shows, as nothing else can, whether Christians are loyal to their convictions. Trouble is part

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1. Ibid., p. 22.
  2. James Moffatt, General Epistles, New York, Doubleday, Doran and Company, Inc., 1928, p. 85.
  3. Rees, op. cit., p. 23.
  4. Ibid., pp. 25-30; cf. I Peter 1:3-7.
  5. I Peter 1:6.

of . . . discipline, to show that . . . faith is sterling, not mere emotion or words.<sup>1</sup>

Like Peter, the Apostle Paul's view of suffering rings true to his Jewish heritage:

It is no sign of sin, but, on the contrary, [is] what the Christian must expect in his struggle for the right.<sup>2</sup>

In letters to Timothy and the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul affirms:

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.<sup>3</sup>

You yourselves know that [these afflictions are] to be our lot.<sup>4</sup>

Paul's own life had been one of intense suffering. His experiences of persecution,<sup>5</sup> hardship,<sup>6</sup> and imprisonment<sup>7</sup> could be interpreted as a sign that he was under the wrath of heaven. But his writings do not testify to this. Enslin writes concerning Paul's understanding of persecution:

Fearing that his opponents in Thessalonica were whispering . . . this and were insinuating that their neighbor's suffering might well indicate that the gospel which they had accepted was futile, Paul reminded the church that he had constantly affirmed that conformity to the life worthy of the gospel must of necessity bring suffering, and that they too must expect persecution . . . . Their constancy in the face of severe testing had revealed their true nature. Far from being an evidence of their error, it afforded a proof of their righteousness

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1. Moffatt, op. cit., pp. 96-97.
  2. Enslin, op. cit., p. 224.
  3. II Timothy 3:12.
  4. I Thessalonians 3:3.
  5. Acts 13:50.
  6. II Corinthians 12:10.
  7. Philippians 1:17.



(cf. II Thessalonians 1:5; II Corinthians 4:17; Romans 5:3). Even Jesus and the prophets had gone the same way. . . . For Paul . . . suffering was very real, but it came from God and should be recognized as a real gift of grace.<sup>1</sup>

Peter reminds his fellow-believers that suffering from God's point of view "is never without point or value. The Church of Christ [is] tested, judged and proved by suffering!"<sup>2</sup>

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice . . . for the time is come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?<sup>3</sup>

In both verses the controlling idea is that of testing or proving, because judgment here is not of doom, but rather of revelation, of chastening, of discipline.<sup>4</sup> Such ordeals "reveal, strengthen and develop character," writes J. H. Jowett in his commentary.<sup>5</sup>

Further, the Apostles did not neglect to console and exhort the faithful by the consideration that persecutions provide an opportunity to exercise constancy and perseverance in the practice of patience:

. . . We rejoice in our sufferings ('troubles'), knowing that suffering ('pressure, affliction and hardship') produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy

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1. Enslin, op. cit., p. 224.
  2. Rees, op. cit., p. 118.
  3. I Peter 4:12, 13a, 17.
  4. Rees, loc. cit.
  5. J. H. Jowett, The Epistle of St. Peter, New York, A. C. Armstrong and Company, 1906, pp. 175-177.

Spirit which has been given to us.<sup>1</sup>

James writes that Christ's followers should consider wholly joyful any sort of trial because the testing of faith produces steadfastness. "And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing," he exhorts.<sup>2</sup>

God's people grow spiritually because He purposes trials for their correction and discipline. "Therefore endure," says the author of The Letter to the Hebrews, and

consider [Jesus] who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or faint-hearted . . . God is treating you as sons . . . He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness . . . Later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.<sup>3</sup>

Such steadfastness is worthy of praise for it results in increased faith in God and in love toward one's fellowmen. In commendation Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica:

We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren, as is fitting, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions which you are enduring.<sup>4</sup>

As in the Koran, the New Testament teaches that suffering offers opportunity to receive an assortment of merits.

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1. Romans 5:3-5 (with annotations from The Amplified New Testament, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing Company, 1958).
  2. James 1:2-4.
  3. Hebrews 12:3, 7, 10-11.
  4. II Thessalonians 1:3, 4.

Christ Himself promised that there is reward in heaven for those who are persecuted for a righteous cause:

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.<sup>1</sup>

"Rejoice and be glad," He enjoined, "for you are blessed to suffer in such a worthy cause, joining such noble precedents as the saints and martyrs in all ages."<sup>2</sup>

Peter writes that the persecuted Christian should humble himself and give all his anxieties to God, as well as to be watchful of, and resist the devil; and God will strengthen such a one:<sup>3</sup>

[Remain] firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.<sup>4</sup>

In a similar manner the Apostle Paul records his reactions to a revelation given him concerning divine power to overcome human infirmities:

. . . But [the Lord Jesus] said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my [Christ's] power is made perfect in weakness.' I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ

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1. Matthew 5:10-11.
  2. "Persecution for Righteousness Sake, A Sermon on Matthew 5:10, 11, 12," London, T. Scollick, 1883, p. 6.
  3. I Peter 5:6-8.
  4. Ibid., vss. 9-10.

may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong.<sup>1</sup>

The writer to the Hebrew Christians encourages them in the fight of faith by reminding them of their past triumphs and of the promises of God yet to be received:

But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction . . . and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised . . . We are . . . of those who have faith and keep their souls.<sup>2</sup>

Lastly, a crown of life was promised in a vision received by the Apostle John to all who are faithful unto martyrdom:

I know your tribulation and . . . the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not . . . Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life . . . He who conquers shall not be hurt by the second death.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in addition to unmerited suffering purposed by God for the good of the afflicted, it is seen also

in the New Testament [that] the sufferings of Christ are frequently held up to men, not merely as an example but as something into which they

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1. II Corinthians 12:9-10.
  2. Hebrews 10:32-36, 39b.
  3. Revelation 2:9-11.

may enter . . . . This suffering is conceived of as an active force of service, potent to bless not the sufferer alone, but others.<sup>1</sup>

This introduces the unique doctrine of vicarious suffering which pervades the whole of the New Testament teaching on suffering. It is based on the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, who not only prophesied of His passion, but "also proclaimed openly His complete freedom in accepting it and in accepting it" for the sake of others.<sup>2</sup> Jesus expressed this vicarious purpose to His disciples by saying:

. . . whoever would be great among you must be your servant . . . even as the Son of man came not to be served but to<sub>3</sub> serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.<sup>3</sup>

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you . . . Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you . . . But all this they will do to you on my account.<sup>4</sup>

Peter tersely summarizes:

You know that you were ransomed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined [for this] before the foundation of the world . . .<sup>5</sup>

To such verses as these, Sutcliffe writes:

The ineffable value of this supreme example of vicarious suffering is written large across the pages of the . . . apostolic writings. Indeed the dominant thought of Christ in those writings is that of the suffering Christ . . . who suffered on

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1. Rowley, op. cit., p. 72.
  2. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 132.
  3. Matthew 20:26-27.
  4. John 15:18, 20, 21.
  5. I Peter 1:18-20.

account of [sin for the redemption of others].<sup>1</sup>

Rowley continues:

And God's will was done, not in the mere experience of Christ's sufferings, but through the instrumentality of those sufferings. In the passivity of His sufferings there was the activity of His redemption.<sup>2</sup>

The fulfilment of Jesus' prediction to his disciples was not slow in coming, for the history of the early church contains many examples of persecution suffered by the followers of Christ for their Lord and Savior:

The double thread running through the Acts of the Apostles is . . . the growth of the numbers of the faithful, and . . . the hatred and opposition that . . . their success evoked. It may be said that wherever the Gospel was preached, persecution was aroused . . . The Apostles rejoiced, not because suffering borne for Christ would bring its great reward, but because in their personal devotion to Christ they were glad to endure some measure of the suffering He had endured, and to endure it in His cause. He had suffered for them; they counted it joy to suffer for Him.<sup>3</sup>

This exemplifies a later New Testament teaching regarding vicarious suffering: all Christians knit together into one mystical Body with Christ as the Head. "Now you are the body of Christ," Paul instructs, "and individually members of it."<sup>4</sup> All share in the fortunes and sufferings of that Body. "So the members of a Head crowned with thorns cannot expect to escape without a share of suffering."<sup>5</sup> In the fellowship of the crucified

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1. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 133.

2. Rowley, op. cit., p. 72.

3. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 135, cf. Acts 5:41ff.

4. I Corinthians 12:27.

5. Sutcliffe, op. cit., p. 134.

and glorified Body of Christ, there is participation in both His suffering and glory.

This conformity with Christ's sufferings . . . may be judged from the fact that the pastors [of the faithful] did not consider this motive too elevated to put before them.<sup>1</sup>

Peter encourages afflicted believers by writing:

. . . if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps . . . But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings.<sup>2</sup>

The Apostle Paul writes to his charges of his own experience in ministering:

Remember Jesus Christ . . . as preached in my gospel, the gospel for which I am suffering and wearing fetters like a criminal. But the word of God is not fettered. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory.<sup>3</sup>

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body . . .<sup>4</sup>

Such experiences were not reserved for the Apostle Paul alone; he was sharing in a process which is common to all true Christians. To the church in Philippi he explains:

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake . . .<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., p. 136.
  2. I Peter 2:20-21; 4:13.
  3. II Timothy 2:8-10.
  4. Colossians 1:24.
  5. Philippians 1:29.

Although Christ has fulfilled all the vicarious suffering necessary for our redemption, "his suffering on earth is not finished yet."<sup>1</sup> Sutcliffe comments on this subject:

[He] deigned to leave some share of His work and His sufferings to His members, not to redeem the world, but to act as His ministers in the application to men of the atoning power of His redemption.<sup>2</sup>

In some manner this suffering ordained by God is beneficial to others. Bonhoeffer confirms this in The Cost of Discipleship:

God grants one man the grace to bear special suffering in place of another . . . Such suffering is joy indeed (Col. 1:24; Phil. 2:17), enabling the believer to boast that he bears the dying of Jesus Christ and the marks of Christ in his body (II Cor. 4:10; Gal. 6:17). The Christian may now serve so that 'Christ may be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death' (Phil. 1:20). Such vicarious activity and passivity on the part of the members of the Body is the very life of Christ, who wills to be formed in his members (Gal. 4:19).<sup>3</sup>

This mysterious and high privilege is a consolation to the followers of Christ of all ages because

. . . their sufferings borne as Christians are Christ's sufferings and are accepted by Him as sharing in His sufferings to make His redemption effectual for the salvation of men.<sup>4</sup>

It has been seen that persecutions are taught to be a vital part of the Christian life. They are purposed by God to test and attest the faith of believers in Christ. Through such unsought suffering character is both revealed and developed.

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1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, New York, The Macmillan Company, 1963, (first published 1937), p. 273.
  2. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 137.
  3. Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 274.
  4. Sutcliffe, *loc. cit.*



The trial of persecution also produces patience and steadfastness in the faithful, causing an increased faith in God and love to man. The New Testament teaches that persecution is used by God, the Father, to correct and discipline His own children. Furthermore, those who are faithful while suffering receive such merits as: happiness in this life and heavenly blessings in a life after death, power from God for human weakness, salvation of the soul, and a martyr's crown of life. A unique and prominent New Testament teaching is that of vicarious suffering. Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the Example and Enabler of all who become mystically united to Him through faith in His death and resurrection. Even as Christ suffered for the redemption of others, so a Christian may be privileged to undergo suffering in the form of persecution for the benefit of another within or outside the Church of Christ.

2. The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Christian  
toward God

The core of the message of the New Testament scriptures is that a believer comes into immediate fellowship with Christ by faith in Him and the power of His resurrection.<sup>1</sup> The life of the Christian is then to "conform to his new exalted status of being 'in Christ,' i.e., mystically and intimately united with Christ."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Acts 2:22-24; cf. Romans 1:4; I Corinthians 15:3, 4; Philipians 3:10.
  2. Enslin, op. cit., p. 63.

G. F. Moore writes in The Birth and Growth of Religion:

. . . In Christianity a character conformed to God's own is the consequence of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit. The possession of such a character is therefore the criterion of the genuineness of man's faith and the reality of his union with Christ.<sup>1</sup>

It was noted previously that the Apostle Peter set forth Christ as the Supreme Example in life for all believers.<sup>2</sup>

Peter writes further, "Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought . . ."<sup>3</sup>

He committed no sin . . . but he trusted [himself] to [God] who judges justly . . . 'whatever the Jewish priests and the Roman judge might do in their unjust procedure.'<sup>4</sup>

Rees comments that the example set by Jesus

was that of undeserved . . . and unfrustrated suffering. Literally, He 'handed Himself over' . . . with unshatterable confidence into the keeping of the Father who judges with perfect equity.<sup>5</sup>

Peter therefore implies that Christians must so conduct themselves while suffering persecution. He writes specifically concerning a patient, trusting attitude toward God while experiencing tribulation:

. . . One is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly . . . If when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval.<sup>6</sup>

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1. George F. Moore, The Birth and Growth of Religion, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923, p. 176.
  2. Cf. ante., p. 45; I Peter 2:20-21.
  3. I Peter 4:1.
  4. Moffatt, op. cit., p. 127; I Peter 2:22-23.
  5. Rees, op. cit., p. 63.
  6. I Peter 2:19-21.

But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord.<sup>1</sup>

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you . . . If one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God . . . Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful creator.<sup>2</sup>

James, like Peter, assures his troubled fellow-believers that "history and prophecy, the past and the future, are alike in God's strong hands;"<sup>3</sup> therefore, patience and steadfastness should be the response of one persecuted.

As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.<sup>4</sup>

As in the Koran, the Bible as a whole abounds with references to a God who hears and answers the prayers of His people. Jesus Christ is again the New Testament model of a life of prayer. A. J. Gossip writes concerning Jesus and prayer:

Jesus . . . was constant in communion with His Father; felt the need of it, and exulted in the joy of it; walked with God and talked to God; knew He was never alone because the Father was with Him; and so came through that disappointing life of His in glory . . . and honor.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Ibid., 3:14, 15a.
  2. Ibid., 4:14, 16.
  3. Rees, op. cit., p. 14.
  4. James 5:10-11.
  5. Arthur J. Gossip, In the Secret Place of the Most High, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947, pp. 13, 14.

Peter and Paul remind and exhort those under their care:

. . . the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer . . . The end of all things is at hand; therefore keep sane and sober for your prayers.<sup>1</sup>

Rejoice in your hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.<sup>2</sup>

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving, and pray for us also, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear, as I ought to speak.<sup>3</sup>

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.<sup>4</sup>

The New Bible Commentary states that throughout the pastoral letter written by James there is an insistence

on the necessity for and the value of prayer . . . His counsel to those who are afflicted ('ill-treated, suffering evil'), therefore, is to pray, for thereby comes help and comfort.<sup>5</sup>

Yet not only is the suffering believer invited to pray, the New Testament teaches that God Himself will pray through His own people. The Christian is not absolutely dependent upon himself; the Holy Spirit will assist him to intercede aright. Paul writes that those in Christ may pray with both the mind and the Spirit.

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1. I Peter 3:12; 4:7.
  2. Romans 12:12.
  3. Colossians 2:2-4, cf. Ephesians 6:18-20.
  4. I Thessalonians 6:16-18.
  5. F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, and E. F. Kevan, The New Bible Commentary, Chicago, The Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship, 1953, p. 1127; James 5:13.

. . . the Spirit [of God within] helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.<sup>1</sup>

. . . If I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. What am I to do? I will pray with the Spirit and I will pray with the mind also . . .<sup>2</sup>

Rees comments concerning Peter's writing: "If the epistle is one of suffering, it is also [one] of hope."<sup>3</sup> This could be said, too, of the New Testament teaching of Christ and the life in Him. Christians are frequently exhorted to hope and joy in God in every circumstance.<sup>4</sup> Peter writes to those whose faith was being tested by the fires of persecution:

As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls . . . Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Through Christ you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence . . .<sup>5</sup>

The Apostle Paul teaches that nothing can separate the Christian from the love of God in Christ Jesus; not "tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword."<sup>6</sup>

Enslin contends that it was Paul's understanding that

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1. Romans 8:26-27.
  2. I Corinthians 14:14-15.
  3. Rees, op. cit., p. 14.
  4. Philippians 4:4; Romans 12:12; I Thessalonians 5:16.
  5. I Peter 1:9, 13, 21; 3:15b.
  6. Romans 8:35-39.

[the] nature of the Christian hope was such that 'rejoicing in hope' was a natural sequel to 'serving the Lord'. . . . It was not enough to refrain from complaining. One's whole life must be a constant expression of joyful thanksgiving to God . . .<sup>1</sup>

He elaborates by saying that this hope or joyful anticipation is one of the four fundamental principles of Paul's ethical teachings, and that the Apostle developed the ground for this confidence in Romans, chapter eight.<sup>2</sup>

The fact of suffering was not to be denied . . . But the suffering, while severe, was never to dim their confidence and hope.<sup>3</sup>

Then he refers to three grounds given by Paul for the encouragement of suffering believers in the Lord:

(1) The future glory [will] so far outweigh the present suffering that the latter [is] not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath.<sup>4</sup>

(2) . . . The Holy Spirit support[s] them. . . . God's own Spirit, nay God himself, [is] at work in them, supplying that which was lacking . . .<sup>5</sup>

(3) . . . God [causes] all things to work for the best interests of those who love Him. With God for them opposition from evil [is] unavailing; though it might be fierce, in the end it [cannot] prevail.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion Enslin states concerning Paul's doctrine:

Such an outlook on life could not fail to have a tremendous effect on moral conduct. This wonderful hope that lay before the Christian, the consciousness that he was to have a place in the eternal destiny of the world, did not free from moral responsibility . . . The fact of divine

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1. Enslin, op. cit., p. 296.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ibid., Romans 8:18-25.
  5. Ibid., p. 297, Romans 8:26, 27.
  6. Ibid., Romans 8:28-39.

retribution on the basis of moral action was constantly stressed.<sup>1</sup>

The Christian suffering as a result of persecution is exhorted to imitate the patience and trust in God that was exhibited by Jesus Christ. He is reminded also to pray at all times as His Lord did. God promises not only to give help and comfort in answer to the prayers of His people, but also to aid the very prayers of the believer in whom He dwells.

The New Testament exhorts a suffering believer to live in constant joy and hope because of the knowledge that God indwells to enable. He also promises those who love Him that everything shall happen for their good and that there is waiting a future glory that will exceed any present circumstance.

### 3. The Attitude and Conduct of the Persecuted Christian toward the Persecutor

In the Epistle of First Peter there are numerous appeals concerning the manner in which Christians should deport themselves in troublous circumstances. God is portrayed as a righteous Judge of evil in such verses as follows:

. . . The face of the Lord is against those that do evil . . . For the time has come for judgment . . . what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?<sup>2</sup>

"Therefore," continues Peter,

. . . if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the

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1. Ibid., pp. 298, 299.  
2. I Peter 3:12b; 4:17.

futile ways inherited from your fathers . . .<sup>1</sup>

Both Peter and Paul proclaim the fight against sin to be severe and the suffering real, but brief in actual experience. The day of victory and the end of all things appear near in their writings.

In the interim the saint [is to] strengthen himself to avoid the only real disaster he need fear, losing the glorious hope of final acquittal, of appearing faultless in the presence of the Lord.<sup>2</sup>

Based upon such knowledge of God and of the struggle against evil, the New Testament standard of behavior towards one's persecutors for a people "ransomed from their futile ways" and "guarded by God's power through faith"<sup>3</sup> is characterized as follows: Peter writes to his flock:

Beloved, I beseech you . . . maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

When [Christ] was reviled, he did not revile in return . . .

Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing . . . Turn away from evil and do right; seek peace and pursue it.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker . . .<sup>4</sup>

Jesus teaches:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer

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1. Ibid., 1:17-18a.
  2. Enslin, op. cit., p. 217.
  3. I Peter 1:18, 5.
  4. Ibid., 2:11-12; 2:23; 3:9-11; 4:15.



the other also . . .<sup>1</sup>

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Do not resist one who is evil . . . pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good . . .<sup>2</sup>

Paul teaches:

When reviled, we bless; when persecuted we endure; when slandered, we try to conciliate . . .

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all . . . Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink, for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.<sup>3</sup>

Again Jesus is the New Testament example in teaching and conduct regarding one's relation to those who oppose. He exemplifies His own doctrine of non-resistance while suffering persecution. Though He is always "unembittered and unretaliating"<sup>4</sup> in requiting evil, He teaches His disciples to flee into another city if they are persecuted.<sup>5</sup> Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul steal away from pursuers;<sup>6</sup> yet both Christ and

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1. Luke 6:27-29, 35-36a.
  2. Matthew 5:39, 43-45.
  3. Romans 12:14, 17, 19-21.
  4. Rees, op. cit., p. 63.
  5. Matthew 10:23; John 8:59; 10:39.
  6. John 6:15; Acts 9:25.

Stephen, while dying innocently, pray for the forgiveness of their murderers.<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament teaching is that the best and only self-defense is to escape from danger when possible; otherwise the suffering believer is permitted only to love his enemy in whatever way possible. The human body is held in high regard in the Christian scriptures.

It is the temple of God, the organ of the Holy Spirit, the basis of the future resurrection body which is to be fashioned in the likeness of Christ's glorious body. It must not, therefore, be abused, but rather defended . . . without malice or revenge. Nowhere in the New Testament is a Christian justified to take the life of a man on grounds of self-defense.<sup>2</sup>

In The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes:

The cross is the only justification for the precept of non-violence, for it alone can kindle a faith in the victory over evil which will enable men to obey that precept. And only such obedience is blessed with the promise that we shall be partakers of Christ's victory as well as of his sufferings . . . The cross is the only power in the world which proves that suffering love can avenge and vanquish evil.<sup>3</sup>

The New Testament scriptures expound the true meaning of the Hebraic law: the will of God, the Father, is that men should defeat their enemies by loving them. Those who are persecuted are not only instructed to bear patiently with evil and

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1. Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60.
2. Nasir, op. cit., pp. 27-28, cf. I Corinthians 6:19; Romans 6:13, 19; Philippians 3:21.
3. Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 161.

to refrain from ill-treatment in return, but they must actively engage in heart-felt love towards their tormentors. Again the Christian is called to a ministry which is vicarious.

Perfect, all-inclusive love is the act of the Father, it is also the act of the sons of God as it was the act of the only-begotten Son . . .<sup>1</sup>

In effect, Bonhoeffer says that the suffering Christian does vicariously what his enemy cannot do for himself. Every insult uttered by the tormentor only serves to bind the Christian sufferer more closely to God and his persecutor. In this way, persecution "only serves to bring [the enemy] nearer to reconciliation with God and to further the triumphs of love."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore the New Testament doctrine of love towards one's persecutors takes the believer in Christ "along the way of the cross and into fellowship with the Crucified."<sup>3</sup> The persecuted Christian is promised only that his suffering is temporary and that God will righteously judge all evil-doers. He is instructed to follow His Lord's example of unembittered and unretaliating conduct while suffering persecution. A believer in Christ must meet his persecutor with love, blessing, intercession, good deeds and thoughts. Retaliation in any form is absolutely forbidden in the New Testament, and the only self-defense permitted is fleeing harm, when possible. By actively engaging in a ministry of love, the suffering believer vicariously brings his persecutor nearer to reconciliation with God.

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1. Ibid., p. 167.
  2. Ibid., p. 166.
  3. Ibid.

### C. Summary

In the opening paragraphs of this study on the Christian view of suffering as a result of persecution, consideration was given to the Jewish heritage of the New Testament scriptures. It was discovered that the Old Testament teaches that suffering is not necessarily an indication of the displeasure of God because of the presence of some sin; suffering can be a proof of God's favor when experienced by the righteous.

With this as a foundation, research was conducted in selected passages of the New Testament specifically related to Christians undergoing unmerited suffering in the form of persecution. The basis from which the study radiated was The Epistle of First Peter, but other pertinent passages were added to give a representative picture of the whole of New Testament teaching.

The first subject considered was the purpose of suffering in the life of the believer in Christ. It was seen that persecution is ordained as an integral part of the Christian life. Such unsought suffering is used by God to test, judge and mature His Church. These trials are said to produce patience and steadfastness which is manifested in an increased faith in God and love to man. The suffering of persecution is used by God, the Father, to correct and discipline His children, as well as to give them opportunity to receive a variety of merits. The merits promised those who are faithful in affliction are: divine power for human weakness, happiness in this life, heavenly bless-

ings after death, salvation of the soul, and a martyr's crown of life. A unique New Testament doctrine concerning the divine purpose of persecution in the life of a Christian is that of vicarious suffering. Jesus Christ is presented as the Example and Enabler of all who become mystically united to Him through faith in His death and resurrection. As Christ suffered for the redemption of mankind, so, through Him, a Christian may suffer for the benefit of others within or outside the Body of Christ.

Next, a study was conducted to ascertain the Biblical teachings of the attitude and conduct to be maintained by any persecuted Christian toward God. The New Testament scriptures again present Jesus Christ as the believer's model for behavior. As evidenced in the life of Jesus, the suffering Christian is to be patient and trusting toward God who is faithful. He is to pray, for God will help and comfort. He is to have a joyful hope in God, knowing that a future glory is promised that outweighs any present situation, and that every earthly circumstance works for the good of all God's loved ones. Not only this, but God Himself indwells His own and supplies any need so that those who suffer are enabled to maintain the standard of thought and action set forth in the scriptures.

In conclusion, the focus of study was upon those verses which best reveal the New Testament view of the attitude and behavior a suffering believer is to maintain towards his persecutor. The Christian scriptures do not promise that one's persecutors will be punished in this life, but only that one day

God will judge righteously all evildoers. Suffering is taught to be a temporary experience, unknown in the glory promised after death. All persecuted believers are exhorted to follow Christ's unembittered and unretaliating example of conduct. Because God's power guards and His Spirit rests upon a believer, the New Testament teachings of responding to a tormentor with love, blessing, prayer and good deeds can be carried out. Retaliation of any kind is prohibited, but self-defense that flees harm without malice and revenge is permissible. By actively engaging in such a ministry of love, the persecuted believer in Christ does vicariously what his enemy is incapable of doing for himself: he draws his tormentor nearer to reconciliation with God.

CHAPTER III

A COMPARISON OF KORANIC AND NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS  
CONCERNING UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH PERSECUTION,  
WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

## CHAPTER III

### A COMPARISON OF KORANIC AND NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS CONCERNING UNMERITED SUFFERING THROUGH PERSECUTION, WITH ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

#### A. Introduction

The earlier chapters of this study considered the teachings of Islam and Christianity regarding the purpose of persecution, and the attitude and conduct to be maintained by a persecuted believer toward his God and toward his tormentor. This research was based upon selected passages of the sacred scriptures of these two major religious groups: the Koran, and the New Testament portion of the Bible.

The purpose of this chapter is to point up significant similarities and differences taught regarding persecution in order that the reader may have a clearer understanding of the value of such an experience for both the sufferer and others. It is also the design of this chapter to aid the reader in determining his own conclusions regarding the concrete expression given in the Koran and the New Testament as to the believers' responsibility to the world during a time of persecution.

The comparison will be conducted utilizing the three major topic headings of this thesis: (1) The Purpose of Persecution in the Life of a Believer; (2) The Attitude and Conduct of a Persecuted Believer toward His God; and (3) The Attitude and Conduct of a Persecuted Believer toward His Persecutor. A summary will then be prepared of the conclusions drawn solely



from the comparison of the teachings of these two religions.

B. A Comparison of Koranic and New Testament Teachings  
concerning the Purpose of Persecution  
in the Life of a Believer

Both the Koran and the New Testament teach that persecution is purposed by God as a discipline of life. Though suffering is said to have a purifying effect upon the life of a believer, the manifestations are not expressed similarly by these two religious groups. The Koran is not explicit in its teaching of the outworkings of the purification of one's belief, whereas the New Testament states that character matures and hope deepens.

A subtle difference is seen also in the Koranic and Biblical teaching that persecution tests and affirms faith. According to commentator A. Y. Ali, the test is to see whether a Moslem can constantly strive or make exertion to put Allah above self. Such effort is met by divine reward: personal spiritual growth, possible deliverance from tribulation, and the triumph of truth (Islam). New Testament doctrine accords with this, except in proclaiming that God is within the Christian to enable him to remain faithful in persecution.

Another reason given in both Islam and Christianity for the purpose of suffering is that it produces patience and steadfastness in the life of a believer. This attitude is stated to be the evidence of trust and submission to the will

of the sufferer's God. But again the outward manifestation of this within and outside the Moslem brotherhood is not definite in the teaching of the Koran. The New Testament explains that God requires submission in all essential structures of society: government, trade, and family. This is to be accomplished in love and peace.

The ordered life of men in community demands, as an underlying principle, the voluntary subordination of individual interests to the maintenance of the order. . . . It remains to be added that submission is not of necessity the same as obedience. After the healing of the lame . . . Peter and John were arrested and jailed for their disobedience . . . To this they offered no resistance. They submitted. Their sole defense was: 'We must obey God rather than man.'<sup>1</sup>

While the Koran teaches that suffering causes the believer to turn in dependence to Allah through prayer, the Christian scriptures do not specifically state this as a purpose. However from the teaching on prayer in the Bible as a whole, it could be assumed that Christianity considers this an inevitable result of tribulation in the life of the faithful.

On the other hand, the Koran does not specify that affliction has a corrective and disciplinary design, but the New Testament does. Here again, it could be stated that though this teaching is not explicit in the Muslim scriptures, it is implied in the whole Koranic view of the testing nature of persecution.

Some of the Koranic and New Testament promises are identical for those who remain faithful while suffering persecu-

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1. Rees, op. cit., pp. 56, 57.

tion. Merits of strength, peace, ministering angels and salvation are promised for life, and a martyr's crown and heavenly reward with God are promised those who are faithful unto death.

One radical difference in these promises of merit is the Islamic teaching of atonement by virtue. In order to understand this more clearly, some mention must be made of the Islamic and Christian view of the nature of man. Stanton contends that the Koran

represents man as universally sinful in act, but this comes from his weakness, not from a sinful taint. Man is prone to sin, but not of a sinful nature.<sup>1</sup>

This is substantiated by Khan who states:

Islam teaches that man has been endowed with a pure nature (30:31) . . . Evil comes from outside and can be kept out, or having entered, can be discarded. Therefore an essential element in the effort toward achievement of moral and spiritual excellence is the certainty that however low a person may have fallen, it is always possible for him to rise.<sup>2</sup>

The Koran abounds with exhortations to overcome sin and failure by the performance of good deeds. M. M. Ali comments that such virtuous action "changes the whole course of a man's life . . . [and] is the true doctrine of nature, while atonement by blood is absolutely unnatural and incomprehensible."<sup>3</sup> Stephens writes concerning the contrast in the Koranic and Biblical views of this doctrine:

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1. Stanton, The Teaching of the Quran, p. 56.
  2. Khan, Islam, Its Meaning for Modern Man, p. 137.
  3. M. M. Ali, Koran, p. 176, footnote #1906.

. . . There is no foundation [in the Koran] for that keen sense of sinfulness, unworthiness, insufficiency, distrust of self and reliance on one higher and mightier than ourselves . . . [But] the essence of Biblical ethics is the insufficiency of man to fulfil the divine law of righteousness, the hopelessness of his obtaining the favor of God, or opening the gates of Heaven by the strength of his own merits. The necessity, therefore, of propitiation and atonement [by blood] runs through the teaching of the Bible from beginning to end. Every offering under the Jewish law was an acknowledgement of the offerer's inability to meet God's demands; it was a cry for mercy. All the offerings were summed up and completely discharged for man in the Life crowned by the death of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Bonhoeffer states that it is the immense responsibility of Christ's followers to make known to all

. . . that it is precisely to the depths of downfall, of guilt and of misery, that God stoops down in Jesus Christ; that precisely the dispossessed, the humiliated and the exploited, are especially near to the justice and mercy of God; that it is to the undisciplined that Jesus Christ offers His help and His strength; and that the truth is ready to set upon firm ground those who stray and despair.<sup>2</sup>

Stephens adds:

. . . the attitude of the Christian towards God is that of humility and hope--his moral motive is gratitude and love.<sup>3</sup>

The concluding topic regarding the purpose of persecution is one totally absent from the teaching of the Koran, but abundantly present in the New Testament: vicarious suffering. Jesus Christ is proclaimed as the Example and Enabler of all who become mystically united with Him through faith in His death and

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1. Stephens, Christianity and Islam, pp. 124, 126.
  2. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 94.
  3. Stephens, op. cit., p. 124.

resurrection. The New Testament view of the doctrines of the nature of man and of God are vital to the understanding of this unique teaching. Bonhoeffer clearly portrays the Christian understanding of this mysterious experience of suffering vicariously:

No greater glory could [God] have granted to his own, no higher privilege can the Christian enjoy, than to suffer 'for Christ.' When this happens, something comes to pass which is inconceivable under the law. For according to the law we can only be punished for our own sins. Under the law there is nothing that a man can suffer for his own good, still less for the good of another, and least of all for the good of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

Even as Christ suffered for the redemption of others, so a Christian may undergo suffering in the form of persecution for the benefit of another who is within or outside the Church of Christ. Because Christianity proclaims that suffering is of value to the afflicted believer, and sometimes through him to another, writers such as Bonhoeffer and Cragg state:

Suffering is the badge of true discipleship.<sup>2</sup>

The 'ecclesia'--whose badge is the new heart and suffering--a community that lives in grace, recognizes the law and grows by a spiritual contagion.<sup>3</sup>

C. A Comparison of Koranic and New Testament Teachings  
concerning the Attitude and Conduct of a  
Persecuted Believer toward His God

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1. Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship, p. 273.
  2. Ibid., p. 100.
  3. Kenneth Cragg, Sandals at the Mosque, London, SCM Press, Ltd., 1959, p. 37.

Both the Koran and the New Testament scriptures instruct a suffering believer to trust patiently his God who is all-sufficient. This is not meant to be a helpless and uncomplaining resignation to affliction, but rather a quiet confidence in God.

In order to determine whether this truth has become reality, a differentiation must be made between an attitude of trust and hope and of passive resignation. Authorities such as Wilson, Rowley, Zwemer, and E. S. Jones contend that a view of the conditions prevalent in the lands of Islam affords sufficient evidence to state that a degrading fatalistic view of the doctrine of predestination predominates. The average Moslem accepts everything as inescapably predetermined and predestined by the will of Allah. Zwemer writes that this doctrine of predestination has been as fiercely discussed in Islam as it has in the Christian Church and

what might be called ultra-Calvinism has carried the day. The terminology of [Moslem] teaching is Calvinistic, but its practical effect is pure fatalism . . . Whatever the Koran may teach on the subject, [fatalism] is the ruling principle in Moslem countries [and] this has paralyzed progress . . . To the Christian, God's will is secret until He reveals it; when He does, [the Christian] feels the imperative of duty. Were a Moslem to pray to Allah, 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' he would be guilty of folly, if not of blasphemy.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly E. S. Jones states:

There is no doubt that this attitude has produced

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1. Zwemer, Islam, pp. 95, 96.

'the patient East'--patient, yes, but not progressive . . . Islam, great and noble in many ways, has nevertheless sterilized the life of vast portions of the East, because its acceptance of inequalities and sufferings as the will of God lays a paralyzing hand on any civilization that adopts it. It is an opiate.<sup>1</sup>

Yet he also states that an attitude of hopeless resignation to suffering is not uncommon among Christians and

is scarcely to be distinguished from the attitude of Islam . . . The results are much the same: patience, resignation and stagnation.<sup>2</sup>

The doctrine of God as it relates to prayer in the life of His creatures appears quite similar in the sacred scriptures of Islam and Christianity. Both religions teach that God is all-knowing and yet desires His people to pray, and promises to hear and answer. Believers are given the assurance that God delivers, aids, sustains, and comforts those who plead divine intervention. Though both Islam and Christianity recognize constancy as a factor vital to prayer, the general Moslem interpretation of the Koran's teaching is one of ritual, rather than spontaneous prayer. Zwemer writes concerning this:

What the Bible calls prayer and what the [Moslem] calls by the same name are, however, to a degree, distinct conceptions . . . Three-fourths of the [Moslem] world pray five times daily in an unknown language. Yet their prayers are persistent and often sincere.<sup>3</sup>

This is the kind of prayer that is considered to be one of the "Five Pillars of Islam."

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1. E. S. Jones, Christ and Human Suffering, p. 61.
  2. Ibid., p. 67.
  3. Zwemer, Islam, pp. 103, 104.

An emphasis of New Testament teaching, not seen in the Koran, is to rejoice and give thanks in all prayer. The Christian who prays is not promised deliverance from his suffering, but rather victory in the circumstance.

But perhaps the point of greatest contrast in this subject on prayer is the New Testament teaching concerning God indwelling those who believe. This is vital to a complete understanding of prayer in the life of the Christian. The Christian scriptures reveal that man does not always know how to pray properly, yet God will help by interceding through His Holy Spirit who resides within the believer. The Apostle Paul writes also that prayer not only has many forms of expression, but that it is possible for the Christian to pray with both his mind and spirit. The Christian is not totally dependent upon himself even in the area of prayer.

The concluding significant teaching regarding the attitude and behavior to be maintained by a suffering believer toward his God is that of hope. Here, too, the Koran and New Testament agree in proclaiming God as worthy of hope in all circumstances of life. The faithful are promised earthly blessings as well as rewards from God Himself in a life after death. Though each of the holy books portrays God as a just Judge who rewards the faithful and punishes evildoers, there is a slight difference in the absence of explicit teaching in the New Testament regarding the torment or punishment of one's persecutors in this life. The kind of confidence given the Christian is



the knowledge that God works in every circumstance for the good of those who love Him. Also unique to the New Testament are the abundant exhortations to joyful assurance in the face of persecution because God promises to reside within the believer to empower and supply any lack. This is the basis for the New Testament emphasis on giving thanks always for everything. As Enslin writes concerning the ethics of Paul's teaching:

The spirit of gratitude which should characterize the Christian appears in almost every page of his writings . . . In every act of life God's blessing was to be seen and man's gratitude expressed.<sup>1</sup>

D. A Comparison of Koranic and New Testament Teachings  
concerning the Attitude and Conduct of a Persecuted  
Believer toward His Persecutor

Moslems and Christians suffering as a result of persecution are given scriptural assurance that their experience is to be both temporary and victorious. The meaning of the term victorious might be variously interpreted in the light of the several factors which are to follow.

Though the Koran and the New Testament proclaim that vengeance ultimately belongs to God, they are in opposition regarding the teaching of retaliation. Moslems are permitted to retaliate in kind, though self-restraint is recommended as evidence of a more mature faith. Christians are absolutely forbidden to retaliate in any manner.

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1. Enslin, op. cit., p. 303.

The Koran not only permits self-defense without restraint, it also teaches fighting and killing to be right and proper for the cause of Islam. Jesus Christ is continually the New Testament example for the suffering Christian. His life and teachings are the basis of the New Testament doctrine of non-resistance while facing persecution. The only self-defense allowable in scripture is that which is without malice or revenge. Otherwise, the only other avenue of thought and action for the suffering Christian toward his tormentor is love. Religious warfare is totally adverse to New Testament doctrine or practice.

The Moslem scriptures teach that forgiveness is not possible or advisable in all situations. It is therefore understandable why Moslem commentator A. Y. Ali interprets the Christian teaching of no retaliation to be harmful and unreasonable.

He states:

. . . it encourages wrong-doing . . . [and] is preached only by hypocrites, or men who want to make slaves of others by depriving them of the power of self-defense.<sup>1</sup>

The Islamic doctrine of God is responsible for such an interpretation of suffering love. It has been stated in a paper prepared by the Study Program on Islam of the Near East Christian Council that there is an "exclusion of God" in Islam; its theology has in effect forbidden to Him what it holds unworthy of His greatness.<sup>2</sup>

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1. A. Y. Ali, op. cit., p. 1317, footnote #4581.
  2. "The Exclusion of God," Operation Reach, Near East Christian Council, 1962, pp. 21, 25.

Majesty must be immunity and greatness exaltation . . . Emmanuel can never be one of His names. That is why the Koran prefers 'Lord' to 'Father,' and avoids metaphors like 'shepherd' and 'redeemer.' For a Father is necessarily so in pains and yearning and being vulnerable . . . The shepherd too fulfils himself not only by having a fold, but by leaving it. A shepherd, unlike a prince or lord, cannot preserve authority from compassion, or rule from love . . . The father in the story of the prodigal does not cease to be father because of the son.<sup>1</sup>

The article states further that the Islamic view of the relationship of God to wayward, frail man includes mercy, forgiveness and compassion, but does not pass on into action that brings God to the rescue of man.

There is no 'then said I: "Lo! I come"' (Heb. 10:7) in the Islamic scheme of things . . . But the Divine authority which presides maintains what we might call a Divinely 'official' relationship as legislator, judge, not the 'personal' relationship of saviour . . . His mercy energises no policy by which He himself bears our iniquities and carries our sorrows . . . In the evil of the human situation, He judges but does not suffer . . . The Koran is very silent on the theme of suffering, even among men. It does not see it as belonging with the very stuff of Divine majesty. Hence it is unthinkable [in Islam] that there should be in God a broken-heart, a travail, an agony.<sup>2</sup>

Two questions are then addressed to these facts:

How shall we serve to enlarge men's understanding of God that they may know and love the fulness of His nature as the suffering Lover of their souls? How may we act to reverse these many exclusions of God until men open their minds and hearts and allow Him to be to them the God He is?<sup>3</sup>

The answers will not be found "in the tasks of thought

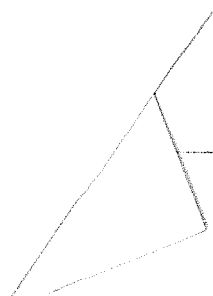
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1. Ibid., pp. 26-28.
  2. Ibid., p. 28.
  3. Ibid., p. 29.

alone,"<sup>1</sup> but it would seem that this unprecedented New Testament teaching of Jesus Christ mystically living in and through His followers makes possible in life the ultimate solution to these questions. As the Father loved the evil world and gave His only Son for it, and as the Son loved evil men and gave His life for them, so the sons of God, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, must love their enemies and suffer, perhaps even unto death, for them. ". . . God is at work in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure."<sup>2</sup>

#### E. Summary

This chapter has purposed to compare the significant similarities and differences in the teachings of the Koran and the New Testament regarding unmerited suffering through persecution. The object was to determine the value of such an experience for the sufferer and others.

The Koranic and New Testament views of the purpose of persecution in the life of the believer reveal many similarities; however, a few subtle but significant differences are discernible. It was observed that Islam and Christianity agree on several basic reasons for persecution being divinely ordained as necessary to the life of the believer. Both holy books teach that persecution tests and affirms faith, produces patience and steadfastness, causes dependence on God in prayer, and provides

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1. Ibid., p. 30.
  2. Philippians 2:13.
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opportunity to gain, through faithfulness, blessings for this life and the hereafter. Yet the manner in which this testing is effected in the life of the sufferer was found to be a matter of great contrast. The Moslem view is that the suffering believer strives to remain faithful, to become patient, and to pray; whereas the Christian view is that the believer, indwelt by the Spirit of God, is assisted in his efforts to maintain the scriptural standard of thought and action set before him. These didactic emphases which concern the nature of man were found to clash again in the Koranic presentation of atonement for sin through the virtuous act of faithfulness during persecution. The Christian view of atonement by blood is as foreign to the Moslem as the doctrine of vicarious suffering. The Moslem scriptures have no references to vicarious suffering, as they teach that man is endowed with a pure nature and able to make the effort to rid himself of sin and reach Allah through obedience to all His commands. The New Testament teaching that God redeems and then indwells the Christian to enable him to bear a faithful and powerful redemptive witness in every circumstance is unknown to the Koran.

The second area of comparison involved the Moslem and Christian scriptural teachings regarding the thoughts and actions to be maintained by the suffering believer toward his God. It was found that both religious groups stress the need for a patient trust in God and a consistency in prayer during a time of duress. In the actual working out of this patient trusting, it

is seen that a passive resignation tends to be predominant in Moslem life. This hopeless attitude toward tribulation is not uncommon among Christians, but in contrast to the Koran, there are many references in the Bible to God's meeting and enabling Christians to realize a trust and joyful confidence in all circumstances of life. While prayer for the Moslem can be more than ritual, for the Christian there is assurance that he can pray in accordance with God's will, for he is indwelt by the Holy Spirit who enables him to pray. Regarding hope, it has been seen that the hope of the Moslem is primarily eschatological. In contrast to this, the study revealed that the Christian hope is both present and future with much emphasis upon God's working in the life of the believer, that is, in his circumstances and within him.

The comparison of the Koranic and New Testament teaching concerning the attitude and conduct to be maintained toward the persecutor revealed the following: The Moslem is allowed to retaliate in kind. He is also permitted unrestricted self-defense and may engage in religious warfare. Finally, the Moslem learns from the Koran that forgiveness is not advisable in all situations. In contrast to these Islamic doctrines, the Christian is allowed no retaliation in kind, is to be non-resistant and is to forgive and love his enemies as Jesus his Example and the One who indwells him enables him to do.

The comparative study of unmerited suffering through persecution, with ethical implications, as found in selected

passages of the holy scriptures of Islam and Christianity revealed many similarities and a few subtle but significant differences. These differences, which are unique to Christianity, could be summed up in the following verse of New Testament scripture: ". . . God is at work in you, both to will and to do His good pleasure."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Philippians 2:13.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION



## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### A. Summary

The intent of this thesis was to discover and compare the teachings of the Koran and the New Testament regarding the problem of unmerited suffering through persecution, with its ethical implications. The question concerning the purpose of persecution and how the believer is to respond to it has been the basic consideration. Chapter One has dealt with the teaching of the Koran regarding the problem of innocent suffering as a result of persecution. The study centered in the purpose of persecution for the Moslem, and the attitude and conduct to be maintained by the persecuted Moslem toward Allah, and toward his persecutor. Chapter Two has treated the teaching of the Christian scriptures on this subject in a similar manner. The third and concluding chapter has concerned itself with a comparison of the insights noted in the preceding chapters, pointing up significant similarities and differences taught regarding persecution, with ethical implications.

The study of the Koranic teaching in regard to the purpose of unmerited suffering revealed that persecution purifies belief and is a necessary experience of life. It acts to test belief in Allah, as well as to teach submission and patience to his followers. Unsought suffering is sometimes designed to provoke a Moslem to strive in his faith and thereby afford him the experience of growth in his spiritual life, possible deliverance from evil, and the triumph of the truth of

Islam. It is taught also that prayer, manifesting a dependence upon Allah, is a possible outcome of suffering. Finally, persecution gives opportunity to the afflicted Moslem to be the recipient of a number of benefits, if he remains faithful during the test of affliction. Such an act of submission to the will of Allah can effect atonement for sin, grant high rank in the sight of Allah, achieve salvation of life after death, and impart gifts of strength and peace, ministering angels, and a hero's or martyr's crown of reward.

Concerning the attitude and conduct to be maintained by a persecuted Moslem toward Allah, the study revealed that the follower of Islam is exhorted to be patient and submissive to an all-sufficient God. Allah is portrayed also as hearing and answering the prayers of His afflicted subjects; therefore the believer is taught in the Koran to pray faithfully when persecuted. The Moslem is to have hope in Allah because He is a rewarder of the faithful and a judge or punisher of the unbeliever.

As to the Islamic view concerning the attitude and behavior of the believer toward his persecutor, it is seen in the Koran that the Moslem is afforded the right of retaliation in kind, although self-restraint is set as a higher standard. The holy scriptures of Islam also permit believers to defend themselves in any circumstance of threat or conflict. Though the possibility of forgiveness by repentance is offered to any persecutor, the teaching of fighting and killing for the cause

of Islam is quite prevalent in the Koran.

Consideration of the New Testament teaching regarding the purpose of persecution revealed also that such unsought suffering is ordained by God as an integral part of the Christian life. As a result of this affliction, character is revealed and matured, and patience and steadfastness are produced in the life of the Christian. Persecution is taught also to be used of God to correct and discipline His children, as well as to give them opportunity to receive such blessings as happiness, divine power for human weakness, salvation of the soul, a martyr's crown of life, and heavenly blessings in a life after death. Vicarious suffering is seen to be a mysterious and unique purpose of persecution in the Christian life. As Jesus Christ suffered for the redemption of mankind, so through Him, a Christian may be privileged to suffer for the benefit of others who may or may not be members of the Body of Christ.

Concerning the attitude and conduct of the Christian toward God in time of persecution, it is seen that his example is to be Christ who was patient and trusted God to be faithful and all-sufficient. The Christian who is persecuted is taught to pray, for God will assist him in prayer, as well as give aid and comfort in suffering. He is to be joyful in hope for God indwells each believer, and has prepared an eternal glory for His people that exceeds any earthly circumstance.

As to the attitude and behavior to be maintained by the suffering Christian towards his persecutor, the scriptures

again exhort believers to follow Christ's unembittered and un-retaliating example of conduct. Though afflicted, the Christian is to respond to his tormentor with love, blessing, prayer and good deeds. Retaliation of any kind is prohibited, but self-defense that flees harm without malice and revenge is permissible.

A comparison of Koranic and New Testament teaching points up some significant similarities and differences. While both the Christian and Islamic scriptures agree that persecution is divinely purposed as vital to the life of the believer, the outworking of this in life is radically different. Whereas the Moslem sufferer strives unaided to remain faithful, to become patient, and to pray, the Christian, being indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, is enabled in his efforts to maintain a similar, scriptural standard of ethics. As has been seen, too, the Christian view of atonement by blood, along with the concept of vicarious suffering, is foreign to the Moslem and in direct opposition to the Islamic view of the innately pure nature of man.

In the second area of comparison involving the Moslem and Christian teaching regarding the thoughts and actions to be maintained by the suffering believer toward his God, it was found that while both scriptures stressed the need of a patient trust in God and of being constant in prayer, in the actual working out of such behavior there is some variance. The average Moslem tends toward a passive resignation to divine will and a ritualistic prayer life, while the Christian is enabled by God's

indwelling to realize a joyful trust in the Lord's will and a meaningful prayer life. Finally, while the hope of the Moslem is primarily eschatological, the assurance of the Christian is not only of future hope, but of God's working in his present situation and in his individual life.

The final comparison was that of the Koranic and New Testament teaching concerning the attitude and conduct of the persecuted believer toward his tormentor. It was discovered that the Moslem is allowed to retaliate in kind, is permitted unrestricted self-defense, may fight and kill for the cause of Islam, and forgives his enemies only in certain situations. The Christian, on the other hand, must never retaliate, must remain non-resistant and must freely love and forgive his enemies, as Jesus his Example and the One who indwells him enables him to do.

#### B. Conclusion

As a result of the research of this thesis, the writer believes that the following conclusions may be drawn:

1. Persecution fulfills its divine appointment and has value for man when it reveals the frailty of humanity and the knowledge of the availability of a loving Redeemer, who in power indwells. The theology of Islam regarding the nature of God and of man seems to weaken the Koranic teaching regarding the place of suffering in the life of a Moslem. It appears that only the innately strong can gain the highest awards for faithfulness to

the truth of Islam. God as "Emmanuel"<sup>1</sup> and the Holy Spirit<sup>2</sup> are unknown in Islam.

2. The concept of the value of suffering as a result of persecution is self-centered in Islam, while the New Testament view affords the Christian the unique opportunity of sharing in the divine work of redemption. Following in the steps of his Savior and Lord along the pathway of suffering love, the Christian vicariously accomplishes what his enemy cannot do for himself, that is, drawing him closer to reconciliation with God.

3. Although we respect the great truths and high accomplishments of Islam, our perspective could be neither clear nor honest if we did not recognize the unique spiritual values that are found in Christ alone.<sup>3</sup>

These words penned by J. Christy Wilson aptly express the concluding thought of this thesis. Uniquely among the religions of the world, the Christian scriptures reveal that man needs resources outside of himself to live a satisfying and purposeful life, and that these unseen spiritual resources are to be realized in a mystical union of the sons of God with the Son of God. And yet how few, even among professing Christians, deliberately and consistently draw upon the depths of the provisions in Christ Jesus for this life. But God's truth, as revealed in the Bible, stands clear in exhortation and encouragement for times of peace and of suffering; it is for man to appropriate and proclaim.

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1. Matthew 1:23.

2. John 14:16-17, 26.

3. Wilson, *Introducing Islam*, p. 3.

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