



IN SEARCH

OF ASSURANCE

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This is my story. But it is not only my story. It is the story of God's goodness to me: how he loved me and showed me his salvation. Let me begin at the beginning.

MY CHILDHOOD

I was born on Friday, July 15, 1951. My father was a *mulla* (a Muslim religious leader) in the small village of Cherukunnu in the South Indian state of Kerala. Everyone in the village respected my family because we were strictly religious. My father's special duty was to read from the Qur'an in Arabic to our Muslim neighbors. Yet he did not forget to teach his own children.

I can still remember sitting on my father's knee after evening prayers, hearing him recite the Qur'an and learning from him. Every day began and ended with readings from the Qur'an and prayers. This strict discipline affected our whole home life.

At the age of five I went to the nearby *madrasa* (Muslim religious school) to learn Arabic, so that I could study the Qur'an. We also had ordinary lessons. When I was ten years old, I was sent to a regular school at Kottakal not far from home, where I studied for a year and a half. However, I could not finish my education there for reasons that will become clear.

AN EVENTFUL DAY

One Saturday, the market day at Kollakkal, when I was going home from school with my friends, we saw a large crowd in the market place. We went over and found a group of Christians there. They were telling the crowd about their faith — stories from the life of Jesus and selling Christian booklets. At first we laughed at the Christians and made fun of them. In spite of this, we bought two of the booklets. Mine was called “The Heart of Pak” and my friend got one about “The Way of Salvation.” On the way home we talked about the booklets and about Christians. My friend tore his copy into pieces. I kept my booklet although I despised Christians. When I reached home, I sat down in a quiet place and started to read “The Heart of Pak.” There was an interesting conversation in the book between a Christian and a boy. As I read, I wondered if the Jesus of this booklet was the same ‘Isa whom I knew about as a prophet. To my mind, the Jesus of this booklet was different from the Jesus of the Qur’an. Now I read that this Jesus could forgive sins. Yet this very forgiveness of Jesus had changed (transformed) the boy, and it made me love Jesus.

When I read of this boy’s spiritual plight, I felt as though the Christian was speaking to my heart also. In fact, I considered my heart to be in worse condition than the heart of this youth. How could I find freedom from this spiritual disease? The booklet offered the cure. I

rejected it because I had been taught that God alone forgave sins — not Jesus, the prophet.

Nevertheless, I could not free myself from the strong argument in the booklet. I became uncomfortably aware of my own sinfulness. What would become of me when I died? I could not escape death or the Day of Judgment. I made up my mind to find out more about Jesus with the help of a correspondence course advertised in this booklet.

FURTHER STUDY

The correspondence course center promptly sent the course. Unfortunately, the postman delivered it to my uncle to give to me. He opened it and discovered its Christian contents. The next day he showed it to my father and my uncles. They decided to end this study before it began!

That same evening when I came back from school, my father tied me to a pillar of our verandah and beat me with a stick until I felt weak. The next morning he called me and spoke lovingly to me. He said, “We Muslims should not read such books. They are forbidden, especially the books of the Christians. Since their books are so attractive, we, too, will become Christians if we read them. What will happen to our family then? It will ruin our whole life. Our community will reject us, and it will be a curse on Islam.” I promised my father that I would never again read these books.

I tore up the booklet and burnt it cursing myself for failing to do what my friend had done earlier with his book. From that time on, I became a devout Muslim reciting daily prayers. Yet as the days went by, I lacked peace of mind whenever I remembered the booklet and thought about the condition of my heart.

How could I forget the name “Jesus” when I repeated it every evening in my recitation of the Qur’an! So I decided to make a study of Jesus in the Qur’an and in other Muslim books. I did not know much Arabic, but I persevered in my study with help of a friend — Yusuf Mawlawi. He was a Muslim teacher in an Arabic school near our house and a close friend of our family. I found that ‘Isa has a very important place both in the Qur’an and in the Hadith or Muslim tradition. In the Qur’an it seemed to me, ‘Isa was even more important than my prophet Muhammad. Soon both the teacher and my family became suspicious about my desire to learn more about Isa. They gently suggested that I concentrate more on Muhammad. Still I continued to wonder about those Quranic passages which referred to Jesus, to his unique birth, and to his marvelous deeds.

إِذْ قَالَتِ
 الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِكَلِمَةٍ قَدْ نَزَلَتْ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ سَمَوَاتٍ مَرْبُوعَةٍ ۖ
 عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿١٠﴾
 وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي السُّهُودِ وَكَهْلًا وَنَجْوًا مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١١﴾ قَالَتْ
 رَبِّ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ يَمَسِّنِي بَشَرٌ قَالَ كَذَلِكَ إِتَىٰ

يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ إِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُن فَيَكُونُ ﴿٢٧﴾
وَيُعَلِّمُهُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَالتَّوْرَةَ وَالْإِنْجِيلَ ﴿٢٨﴾
وَرَسُولًا إِلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ أَنِّي قَدْ جِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ
أَنِّي أَخْلُقُ لَكُمْ مِنَ الطِّينِ كَهَيْئَةِ الطَّيْرِ فَأَنْفُخُ فِيهِ
فَيَكُونُ طَيْرًا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُبْرِئُ الْأَكْمَهَ وَالْأَبْرَصَ
وَأُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا تَأْكُلُونَ وَمِمَّا تَخْرُجُونَ
فِي بُيُوتِكُمْ إِنِّي فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةٌ لَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾
وَمُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَلَأُحِلَّ لَكُمْ
بَعْضَ الَّذِي حُرِّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَجِئْتُكُمْ بِآيَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ
فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا

“(And remember) when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah).

He will speak unto mankind in his cradle and in his manhood, and he is of the righteous.

She said: My Lord! How can I have a child when no mortal hath touched me? He said: So (it will be). Allah createth what He will. If He decreeth a thing, He saith unto it only: Be! and it is.

And He will teach him the Scripture and wisdom, and the Torah and the Gospel.

And will make him a messenger unto the Children of Israel, (saying): Lo! I come unto you with a sign from your Lord. Lo! I fashion for you out of clay the likeness of a bird, and I breathe into it and it is a bird, by Allah's leave. I heal him who was born blind, and the leper, and I raise the dead, by Allah's leave. And I announce unto you what ye eat and what ye store up in your houses. Lo! herein verily is a portent for you, if ye are to be believers.

And (I come) confirming that which was before me of the Torah, and to make lawful some of that which was forbidden unto you. I come unto you with a sign from your Lord, so keep your duty to Allah and obey me.” (3:45-50)

I noticed also that the Qur'an refers especially to the Tawrat (Old Testament) and the Injil (New Testament), exhorting me to believe in them because they are “guidance and light” (5:46). Another verse in particular came to my mind often:

فَإِنْ كُنْتَ فِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ
فَسْأَلِ الَّذِينَ يَاقُرْءُونَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَقَدْ جَاءَكَ
الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَلَا تَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُمْتَرِينَ ﴿٤٦﴾

“And if thou art in doubt (Muhammad) concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture before thee...” (10:94)

When I read this verse, I remembered the Christians and their booklet. According to Islam, Christians also are *ahl ul-kitab* (the People of the Book). If the Qur'an

encouraged Muhammad to share his doubts with Christians, then why not me? Yet it was difficult for me to approach Christians. I had so little contact with them. Besides, my family would hardly approve!

Not far from my home there is a Christian Mission Hospital. One day a friend, Abdulla, and I determined to go there secretly. When we arrived the hospital pharmacist, Mr. Kunyukunyu, kindly directed us to the missionary. We were young and nervous and did not know what to expect. But the missionary greeted us in a friendly way and made us feel at ease.

After some discussion the missionary suggested that we attend Sunday School classes and directed us to the Christian reading room. There we met the reading-room worker. Later he became my very close friend and a true brother who helped me in many troubles. He enrolled me in a correspondence course based on the Gospel according to John. Both Abdulla and I attended Sunday School for several weeks without the knowledge of our parents. Sometimes my friend kindly gave us bus fare; sometimes we walked the five mile distance. On one occasion some of our neighbors caught us. They questioned Abdulla and beat him until he finally revealed our secret activity.

Next evening, when I returned from school, I saw my mother and younger sister crying. They knew what my father had already prepared for me. As I entered the house, my father suddenly appeared, shouting. He caught me, tied me up, put me against a wall, beat me and rubbed ground, green chili on my face and in my

eyes — all the while asking me why I read Christian books and associated with Christians. My mother fainted. After some time, with the help of a neighbor woman and my sister-in-law, I was taken to a water tank and washed.

The following morning my father called me and asked me to repeat the Muslim creed: "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." He led me through the recitation. Then he warned me about Christianity, its false teaching about Jesus Christ, the corruption of the Holy Injil and the bad lives of Christians. He asked my sister-in-law to burn my Christian books which she did. All this affected me greatly, and I cried bitterly. I had no peace of mind, for my opportunity to learn more about Jesus from the Gospels and from Christians friends had been frustrated.

When I went to the place where I burnt "The Heart of Pak," I sorely regretted the destruction of the booklet. As I recalled the conversation in this booklet, the same tension once more confronted me: the boy's joyful experience of forgiveness and the heavy burden of sin which lay on my own heart. As a Muslim, I had learned that we ourselves are responsible for our sins; no one else can bear another's burden (Qur'an 6:165). Then how, could Jesus forgive anyone? Nevertheless, I prayed to God for further guidance.

An awareness of my own sin never left me. It gnawed at my heart continually. After two weeks, I felt again a strong desire to see my Christian friends. I had to share my difficulties and doubts. The missionary encouraged

me and answered my questions about Christian beliefs and practices. Most of his answers satisfied me because he also knew the Qur'an and Muslim faith.

I returned home with a copy of the whole Gospel which my friend had given to me. Although I was very glad to have it, I was afraid that someone at home might see it. So I put the Injil in a plastic bag and hid it under a stone in the forest. I often went to the forest to read it, especially St. John's Gospel. One verse, the words of Jesus, gave me some consolation:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” John. 14:1

The words “believe also in me” impressed me greatly at that time. Although I was anxious and troubled, this verse comforted me.

The next Sunday, while on my way to Sunday School, I noticed my uncle on the same bus. I trembled at the thought of what my father would do to me after my uncle reported to him. In spite of this, I attended Sunday School and spent some time with the missionary.

Before I met my new Christian friends, I had strong feelings against Christians because I had heard such bad reports about them. Yet when I observed the missionary's character, his way of life, and his attitude toward Muslims, I knew that the accusations I had heard against Christians certainly did not apply to him. This made me think. Was his love greater than that of the Muslims? Had the Messiah Jesus done more for him than my prophet had done for me? I was confused for I held the

opinion that apart from Muslims, anyone else, including the Christians who believe that God is the Messiah, is an unbeliever (*kafir*) and is rejected by God. As the Qur'an says:

لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْمَسِيحُ
 ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَقَالَ الْمَسِيحُ بَلْأَنِّي إِسْرَائِيلُ عَبْدُ اللَّهِ وَرَبِّي
 وَرَبِّكُمْ إِنَّهُ مَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ
 الْجَنَّةَ وَمَأْوَاهُ النَّارُ وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ ﴿٧٦﴾
 لَقَدْ كَفَرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ ثَالِثُ ثَلَاثَةٍ وَمِمَّا
 إِلَيْهِ إِلَّا إِلَهٌ وَاحِدٌ وَإِنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُوا عَمَّا يَقُولُونَ لَيَمَسَّنَّ
 الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٧٧﴾

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. The Messiah (himself) said: O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. Lo! Whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah, for him Allah hath forbidden Paradise. His abode is the Fire. For evil-doers there will be no helpers.

They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the One God. If they desist not from so saying a painful doom will fall on those of them who disbelieve. (5:72, 73)

I remembered also how I thought that because I was a Muslim who had submitted myself to God, I was holier than Christians. But as I became more aware of my own

sinfulness, I realized that the missionary was the one who had submitted himself to God, for his character proved it. I could tell that his love came from Jesus Christ, just as “The Heart of Pak” had described it.

Like a magnet the love of Jesus attracted me. I thought that if Jesus were my master too, how I would love him! Yet, when the idea of becoming a Christian crossed my mind, I rejected it as an evil thought from Satan —for I was a Muslim.

I returned from Sunday School in great fear. I was ready to accept whatever my father did to me, but for two days nothing happened. On the third day, after school my father caught me and threw me into a bush. Then he seized a stick and beat me so severely that I almost died. My mother ran to rescue me, but she was beaten also. It was only by the grace of God that I recovered. Again I confessed the Muslim creed and promised my father that I would have no more contact with Christians. Was my confession only an escape from further beating?

My friend Abdullah had spread this news throughout the district, and my life became very difficult. People jeered at me, called me names, and even threw stones at me. On the way home from school they called out, “There goes the cursed one!” and “Here comes Mathai, the Nasrani (Christian)!” Even my relatives, friends, and teachers were cruel to me. I was confused, weary, lonely, and troubled. During this period the Holy Gospel was my only constant companion. Every time I had an opportunity, I went to the forest to read and study it.

Again the old tension arose in my heart as I read the Gospel in secret. On essential points it clearly differed from my own Islamic beliefs. How puzzling for a Muslim and yet how thought-provoking were the following words of Jesus!

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
John 14:6

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” John 17:3

“Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12

“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” John 14:23

I had no one who could explain the meaning of these verses to me. Yet I continued to ask God for guidance.

CHAINED BY LOVE

The pain and wounds of my body were healed, but the marks produced by the love of the Christians and the effects of the booklet remained. I felt something forcing me to renew this friendship and decided to meet my friends again. As I set out, relatives and neighbors saw

me, and I felt afraid. In fact, I decided to leave that place. When I reached the home of the missionary, I shared my problems with him. I showed him the scars of my wounds and asked him to help me to go to Mysore where my married sister lived. My sister loved me, and she and her husband would let me stay there. The missionary, however, advised me to return home. He told me that later, when I became older, I could leave. Until then, I should live quietly at home, and growing in faith and love, influence my family and friends. God, he said, would be my Savior, Protector, and Friend. At that time I was in the seventh standard at school.

Since it was evening and I was afraid, I begged them to let me stay overnight in the Christian reading-room. I stayed there an extra day with my friend C. R. George. Some people from my area, knowing that I was there, came with the police to get me. They asked my friend to give me up, and even accused him of kidnapping me. He replied, "Alavi is here of his own accord. You can take him, but do not beat him any more." When some Muslims came to the support of their Christian friends in the reading-room, a quarrel started among the Muslims themselves. While they were all arguing, I ran out the back door and across the field, jumped into a canal, and pretended that I was taking a bath.

After a while some Muslims came and found me. They took me to a Muslim reading-room called "MAPPILA NADU" where they asked questions, shouted at me, and abused me. During this time, my mother had been searching for me in the homes of my

relatives. Just at that moment my brother-in-law found me and rescued me. As soon as we reached home, my father sent my younger sister to call my uncles. By this time a crowd of people had gathered in front of my house.

When they had all come together, my father asked each one, "What shall we do with Alavi? We have tried our best to keep him away from Christians. What else can we do?" The first uncle told my father to kill me by cutting my throat. The second uncle decisively answered the same. The third had a different idea. He suggested death by starvation. If they killed me as my first uncle had said, the whole family would go to jail. Then my mother cried out, "Kill me first and then my son!" This made me cry bitterly. I cannot describe the pain and fear that was in my heart while I wondered what they would do to me. Then the group accepted the advice of the third uncle. One of my uncles then beat me cruelly until my father stopped him. My father then tied my hands behind my back, and I stayed like that for three weeks. He ordered that I should be given food only once a day, but when he was away, my mother gave me food.

One day my father and his younger brother came home, along with a blacksmith. My uncle asked me to confess the Muslim creed again before my father. The words would not come out of my mouth. My mother, sisters, and others shouted at me to recite it, but still I could not. I do not know what happened to me. I could not speak. Finally, my father ordered the blacksmith to place two iron shackles and a chain on my legs and lock

it. I was chained up like this for the next six weeks. My former friend Abdulla, who had torn up his booklet, visited me and asked me what had made me do this. He knew it was the booklet! I did not answer him, but as I lay chained, I remembered the words of the Holy Gospel:

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” John 14:1

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:32

When I looked at my chains, was I mocking myself in recalling these words of Jesus? Perhaps it is in such hard circumstances as these that we best experience the comfort of Jesus. He was very near to me, even more so than when I secretly read these words from the Gospel in the forest.

GOD DELIVERS ME

After six weeks I escaped. My mother's cousin helped me. One day, when no one else was at home, he broke open the chains. From that time on, I was allowed to be free since no one wanted to chain me again. In fact, my family and relatives treated me kindly. For two weeks I remained at home. Yet I wondered why I should live in a home and community that created more fear than peace in my heart. I made up my mind to leave.

One day, after my noon meal, I looked at my mother's face and my eyes filled with tears — for my mother did not know my plan. It was my farewell to my home. I told my mother I was going to take a bath and left the house. May God forgive me for telling this and other lies that I should never have told! I walked nearly ten miles to a railway station TIRUR and caught a train to the city of Calicut, thirty miles away. There I wandered about looking for work. At last I found a job in a café. But my life continued to be very unsettled.

Later I learned that during my imprisonment, my Christian friends shared my sufferings. They were praying for me and trying to find some way of helping me but could not. In the meantime, Muslim religious leaders commanded the people to stay away from the Christian Mission Compound and to withdraw their children from the nursery school. My friends were attacked by name over the loudspeaker. Guards were placed at the compound gates to see that no one entered. Muslims were allowed to go only to attend the Christian dispensary for treatment. Soon, however, the situation returned to normal. Over another loudspeaker someone called out, "Let us stop troubling the Christians and pay more attention to the works of Allah!" After some weeks the trouble ended.

The owner of the café, a Muslim, was not pleased when I enrolled in another Bible correspondence course. I continued to work in the café for five months. Then I left Calicut and went to my sister's home in Mysore. There I wrote a letter to my friend George who told my

other friends. This was the first news they had that God had delivered me from my chains. I ended my letter with the words, "I am all right. I keep praying the Lord's Prayer."

After working a year at Mysore with my brother-in-law and another eighteen months on a merchant ship out of Calicut, I returned to my own area. Again I met my friend and other friends who were happy to see me. I could not meet the missionary because he had returned to his homeland. From there I returned to Mysore where my brother-in-law employed me in his hotel. Then through his recommendation I obtained an apprentice's post as a lineman in the telegraph department. But again misfortune struck. Hip trouble forced me to give up this job.

I decided to return to Malabar for medical treatment. By this time my friend was working in a mission hospital. He helped me obtain a medical examination. The missionary, who had now come back to India, was very glad to see me and asked about all that had happened to me while I was in chains and during my wanderings. He told me that many people had been praying for me. Then he gave me an introduction to another missionary who could help me with my physical problem. I was very happy to meet this new friend. Later he became one of my spiritual fathers, and his wife became my spiritual mother. With the help of this missionary and a doctor, I was able to go for treatment to the Christian Medical College Hospital in Vellore.

After I returned from the hospital, I joined the India

Every Home Crusade at Mysore for three months. In this way I could distribute tracts and share the good news of Christ. When my sister and her husband came to know about this, however, they were angry and forbade me to come to their house. The missionary then found a place for me to stay with a Christian pastor and his family at Gundulupet. It was a wonderful experience to be with them, and I had the opportunity to study Christian doctrine for four months. After this I joined a bookmobile project with the India Evangelical Lutheran Church and spent a year distributing Christian books in different parts of South India. God was leading me into his service.

I was eager to study the Bible in more detail, so I joined a one year Bible course at Concordia Seminary, Nagercoil, in June, 1970. I remember how glad I was to have this chance to study the Bible! In the library there I also found many good books on Islam which helped me to clear many of my doubts.

FINDING THE LIGHT

Now at college I was able to study, and I concentrated on the Person and work of Christ. I did this by studying again the passages in the Qur'an that spoke of Christ in the light of my growing faith in Jesus and increasing knowledge of the Bible.

One of my chief doubts concerned the sinlessness of Jesus and his authority to forgive the sins of others. It

was difficult to avoid the contrast between the sinlessness of Jesus and the Quranic records of the sins of the other prophets. Thus the Qur'an, addressing Muhammad in particular, says:

لِيَغْفِرَ لَكَ اللَّهُ مَا تَقَدَّمَ مِن ذَنْبِكَ
وَمَا تَأَخَّرَ وَيُتِمَّ نِعْمَتَهُ عَلَيْكَ وَيَهْدِيَكَ صِرَاطًا مُسْتَقِيمًا ﴿٤٨﴾

“That God may forgive thee thy former and thy latter sins, and complete His blessing upon thee, and guide thee on a straight path.” (48:2) (CF: 40:55; 47:19)

Since no laden soul can bear another's burden (35:18) then how can he or anyone of these prophets bear another's burden?

But the Qur'an quoting the angel Jibra'il, says of Mary's son:

قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَنَا رَسُولُ رَبِّكِ لِأَهَبَ لَكِ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا ﴿١٩﴾

“He said, I am only a messenger of thy Lord, that I may bestow on thee a faultless son.” (19:19)

This fact is supported by a Hadith which says: “Each human baby is touched by Satan's finger at birth, save Mariam and her son.”

The Injil also clearly indicates the purity and sinlessness of Jesus. “Can any of you prove me guilty of Sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me?”

(John 8:46) The Injil further states that he takes away our sins:

“Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he (Jesus) appeared to take away our sins. And in him is no sin.” (1 John 3:4, 5)

Was it in order to bear the burdens of others that Jesus himself was an unburdened soul? Though the Qur’an declares Jesus as pure, it really offers no clue to the purpose of God in bestowing upon Mary a faultless son.

Further the Qur’an attributes qualities to Jesus which it attributes to no other prophets or apostles. He is described as God’s Word and a spirit from God:

يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لَا تَغْلُوا فِي دِينِكُمْ وَلَا تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا
الْحَقَّ إِنَّمَا الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَكَلِمَتُهُ
الْقَالِيهَا إِلَىٰ مَرْيَمَ وَرُوحٌ مِّنْهُ فَعَامِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَلَا
تَقُولُوا ثَلَاثَةٌ انَّهُمْ أَحْيَاءُ الْكُفْرِ إِنَّمَا اللَّهُ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ سُبْحَانَهُ
أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُ وَلَدٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَكَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ وَكِيلًا ﴿١٧١﴾

“O People of the Scripture! Do not exaggerate in your religion, nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and *His Word*, which He conveyed unto Mary, and a *spirit from Him*. So believe in Allah and His

messenger and say not 'Three' — Cease! (it is) better for you! — Allah is only One God..." (4:171)

Thus also the angel Jibra'il addresses Mary with the following words:

قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ
رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّنٌ ۖ وَلِنَجْعَلَهُ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَرَحْمَةً مِنَّا
وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مَّقْضِيًّا ﴿۱۹﴾

"... He said: So (it will be). Thy Lord saith: It is easy for Me. And (it will be that We may make of him a *revelation for mankind* and a *mercy from Us*, and it is a thing ordained." (19:21 cf. 21:91)

Whatever else the Qur'an has stated about Jesus, it surely has established him as a unique person: his relation to God as God's Word and a spirit from God; his creative activities, his healings, his raising of the dead (3:49); his ascension into heaven and his presence in heaven today.

Through further study I also began to understand how the Biblical significance of the term "son of God" differs from the Quranic understanding of "son of God." The Qur'an denies that God begets, or is begotten, in a physical sense (*Lam yalid wa lam yulad*). In this sense the Bible also rejects the term "son of God". Eventually, however, I accepted that Jesus could be called "the Son of God" (as the Bible explains this term) in a *spiritual*

sense, in the same way that he is called God's Word. Here again I was grateful to the Qur'an for serving as a bridge to a fuller comprehension of the Biblical significance of the term "Son of God" when uniquely applied to Jesus.

No doubt, on the basis of *Surat un-Nissa*, Muslims have rejected the Biblical account of Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension:

وَقَوْلِهِمْ إِنَّا قَتَلْنَا الْمَسِيحَ عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ
 رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ وَمَا صَلَبُوهُ وَلَٰكِن شُبِّهَ لَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ
 اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ لَفِي شَكٍّ مِّنْهُ مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِلَّا اتِّبَاعَ الظَّنِّ
 وَمَا قَتَلُوهُ يَقِينًا ﴿١٥٧﴾

"And because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah's messenger — They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them; and lo! those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture; they slew him not for certain..." (4:157-159)

Elsewhere, of course, the Qur'an refers to the death of Jesus. But Muslim expositors offer conflicting opinions on some of these relevant verses. The following are significant passages, as translated by Pickthall:

وَالسَّلَامُ عَلَيَّ يَوْمَ وُلِدْتُ وَيَوْمَ أَمُوتُ وَيَوْمَ أُبْعَثُ حَيًّا ﴿١٥٨﴾

“Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I shall be raised alive!” (19:33)

إِذْ قَالَ اللَّهُ يُعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ بَرَأْنِي وَارْفَعْنَا
إِلَى وَمُطَهِّرْكَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَجَاعِلِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوكَ
فَوْقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ مَرْجِعِكُمْ
فَأَحْكُمْ بَيْنَكُمْ فِي مَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

“(And remember) when Allah said: O Jesus! Lo! I am gathering thee and causing thee to ascend unto Me, and am cleansing thee of those who disbelieve and am setting those who follow thee above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then unto Me ye will (all) return, and I am judge between you as to that wherein ye used to differ.” (3:55)

مَا قُلْتُ لَهُمْ إِلَّا مَا أَمَرْتَنِي
بِهِ أَنْ أَعْبُدُ وَاللَّهَ رَبِّي وَرَبَّكُمْ وَكُنْتُ عَلَيْهِمْ شَهِيدًا مَا دُمْتُ
فِيهِمْ فَلَمَّا تَوَفَّيْتَنِي كُنْتُ أَنْتَ الرَّقِيبَ عَلَيْهِمْ وَأَنْتَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ
شَهِيدٌ ﴿١١٧﴾

“I spake unto them only that which Thou commandest me, (saying) Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord. I was a witness of them while I dwelt among them, and when Thou tookest me Thou wast the Watcher over them. Thou art Witness over all things.” (5:117)

But is Picktall's interpretation of *mutawaffika* ("I am gathering thee": 3:55) and *tawaffaitani* ("Thou tookest me": 5:117) correct? Some respectable Muslim commentaries translate this verb: "to cause to die," indicating that the death of Jesus preceded his ascension into heaven.

In any event the Biblical accounts leave no room for various interpretations about the time, place and circumstances of Jesus' death. He was crucified, he died, and he was buried. His crucifixion took place outside the walls of Jerusalem. It happened when Pilate was governor of Judea. These are facts of history. The Bible repeatedly refers to the death of Jesus in unambiguous language. Just as clear in the Bible is the connection of the death of Jesus with his resurrection from the dead and his ascension, as well as the intent of these three great events in his life.

Thus these and other passages of the Qur'an became clear to me in the light of my reflection on the New Testament portrayal of Christ. Not only did all these passages reveal the special relation which Jesus had with God; surely they indicated also God's special purpose in sending Jesus, his Word and Servant, into this sinful world. Once more I recalled the booklet, "The Heart of Pak." I concluded that God has spoken his word of forgiveness to all sinners through Jesus alone, through his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. As I read the Bible more and more, it spoke to me and cleared my doubts, one by one.

Yet this question perplexed my mind: What about

Muhammad whose coming, according to the Qur'an, Jesus had prophesied?

وَأَذَّ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا
بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدٌ فَلَمَّا
جَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا هَذَا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٦١﴾

“And when Jesus son of Mary said: O Children of Israel! Lo! I am the messenger of Allah unto you, confirming that which was (revealed) before me in the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a messenger who cometh after me, whose name is the Praised One. Yet when he hath come unto them with clear proofs, they say: This is mere magic.” (61:6)

The Arabic for “Praised One” is *ahmad*, which has the same root meaning as *Muhammad*. Does this passage not mean that Jesus prophesied the coming of Muhammad? That is what I had been taught and believed.

I examined the Bible to see what it says about Muhammad, but I could find nothing. I asked my professors the same question and they too said that there is nothing. But when I looked into a Muslim commentary on the Qur'an, it quoted several Bible passages in support of this understanding of Surah 61:6. The main passage quoted was:

“And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another counsellor, to be with you forever.” (*John 14:16*)

The Greek word for Counsellor is *Parakletos*. (Greek is the original language of the Injil.) The commentator said that the original Greek word was *perikultos*, which means "Praised One." Christians, he said, substituted *Parakletos* for *Perikultos* to remove the reference to the prophet Muhammad.

I did not know Greek, and since it was really difficult for me to give up faith in Muhammad, I felt really troubled. Muhammad still held a great place in my heart, and I found it hard to give up that belief in him as a prophet. I asked the Greek professor about these words. He replied that the word *perikultos* is not in the Greek text of St. John. He then explained clearly the original Biblical word, *Parakletos*, and how the promise of Jesus (John 14:16) was fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-11) who lives always with God's people as their Comforter and Guide.

I placed the problem before God and asked him to give me clear understanding. One night, after I had prayed and gone to bed, I could not sleep. I heard a voice or felt as though I had heard a voice. It said, "Get up and read!" I thought it was only my imagination. But I heard it again and again. I got up and opened my Bible. Several times I read the passage in John 14:15-17:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever — the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept

him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

As I read these verses, many questions came into my mind. Did you read in the Qur'an or Hadith, I asked myself, that Muhammad is the Spirit of truth who is always with you, a Counsellor whom the world cannot see nor know, or who lives inside you? Then I realized that these words do not contain any prophecy of a coming prophet and cannot possibly be applied to any human being. Moreover, I remembered the fulfillment of that prophecy in Acts 2:1-11, during the life of the first believers in Christ. Now I understood this great truth. The Counsellor whom Jesus promised is the Holy Spirit, the eternal Spirit of the Living God, not the angel Jibra'il.

Later I experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in my own life. Through him I came to Christ. Glory to God! Amen!

I continued to read the Holy Bible with care and attention. In it I found treasure such as I had never dreamed of — it has the power to speak to those who really want to find God's revelation and guidance. It showed me my real self, my sinful and guilty heart, and showed me also that I was spiritually blind. It asked me to bring all my sins and problems to God in the name of Jesus the Messiah. He came to this world searching for me! He died for my sins and rose again; he went up to

heaven, and he will come again. I became convinced that the Holy Bible is indeed the Word of God.

The Holy Bible brought the answers to the problems which worried me. Its living water was able to satisfy my soul. What I had never found before in my religious experience, I now discovered. I became sure that the Holy Bible faithfully and accurately recorded the works and teaching of Jesus — this mystery of God's eternal Word coming into our world as man. Now I became convinced of the truth of his death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming, which before I had not understood and had even hated. The Bible contains the message of God's power to save, and his love for me and all men, and this brings us peace. This love of God focuses sharply on Jesus, his death and resurrection for sinners — as Paul, echoing Jesus and his other apostles, says in the New Testament,

“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” I Corinthians 15:3, 4

No doubt, many Muslim friends will continue to think that the Holy Bible is corrupt and abrogated by the Qur'an.

Yet let him — especially if he is conscious of God's holiness and his own sins — give serious thought to its message. Then let him, as I have done, draw his own conclusions.

A GREAT DECISION

On July 19, 1970, I surrendered to Jesus the Messiah. I confessed all my sins and my doubts, and by baptism I was joined to him and his forgiving love. My whole body trembled. I could feel divine power entering into me. I rose from my knees a changed man with peace in my soul, joy in my heart, and assurance in my mind. And today I still have that same joy, hope, and assurance. Although I could not explain it, in my heart I believed that all my sins were washed away through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, that I had received power for a new life of love, and that the Lord Jesus himself was reigning in my heart.

IN HIS SERVICE

Soon the opportunity came to work with a group called Operation Mobilization. This gave me a chance to go to different parts of India to tell the Good News. I continued to do this for about two years. During that time I learned more about what it means to be a follower of Jesus. I am grateful to the Lord and to my friends in Operation Mobilization who gave me the opportunity to work with them. They helped me during difficult times. Later I went back to Concordia Theological Seminary and completed my theological studies in 1975.

My present concern is to bring the Good News of God's light to my own people wherever they are, espe-

cially in my own area. May they accept the invitation of Jesus Christ which he gives to all to know the great Salvation of God.

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”
John 14:6

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” John 17:3

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” John 8:12

CONCLUSION

I have accepted Jesus Christ as my own Savior. He has been able to change my life to a real life of happiness, peace, and hope. He has been able to give me strength in my weakness. As the living Lord, he comes into my life to give it new purpose, and promises me life in heaven that will never end. I know that I belong to God's heavenly family. I believe what David, the great prophet and king, said, “Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me” (Psalm 27:10).

In all my troubles, doubts and temptations it is enough to look into his face. In times when I have been lonely, tired, and disappointed, I have praised him for his grace.

Jesus said:

“You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” John 15:16

I did not choose him, but he chose me. Through him the story of Pak has become the story of Alavi. To God be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

If I can help you, please write to me at this address:

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In an acceptable time
I have heard you,
and in the
DAY OF SALVATION
I have helped you.

Now
is the day of
SALVATION.

2. Corinthians 6:2