

saying, not just what Christians are saying about Muslims. I will not interpret the Islamic materials to make them fit Christian doctrines. But I will challenge Muslims to examine those of their own materials and documents which are very similar to, if not the same as, what is written in the Bible. My goal is not debate, but to show that the official Islamic view does not jibe with Qur'an or Hadith.

Article One: The Islamic view of Humanity

Overview

All people are born as true Muslims, innocent, pure, and free as shown in Sura 30:30. There is no single act which has warped the human will. Any concept of original sin is very much contrary to the teachings of Islam. It is not sin for man to be imperfect and fallible. As a finite creature he is bound to be so. However, sin is committed when a man has the ways and means of perfection and decides not to avail himself of them. Man is not responsible for committing sin in childhood. He only becomes responsible after he grows up, is able to exercise his God-given intellect, and can thus distinguish between right and wrong. This is the only time when he can bear responsibility for his actions before his Creator. Having been born good, what he becomes after birth is largely the result of external influence and environment.

Since man is a good and responsible being, committing sinful acts is the responsibility of the actual offender only. According to orthodox Muslim interpretation, sin is not hereditary. Neither is it communal in nature, nor

is it transferable. God has given man freedom of will, and man is therefore personally responsible for his own actions, good or bad, right or wrong. A man can misuse his freedom and fall into corruption and all other vices, but at the same time he is capable of reform and receiving forgiveness if he sincerely chooses to submit to God's guidance. Sin is acquirable, but not innate. Therefore, if man rightly uses those special qualities with which he has been endowed, he can easily avoid sin. Sin is not inevitable, because man is not sinful

Fitrah

To understand the Islamic view of humanity we have to define the term and the doctrine of *Fitrah* (الفطرة) in Islam. Fitrah is defined as an inborn natural predisposition which exists at birth in all human beings and which can not change. It is inclined towards right action and submission to Allah. It can be described as the concept of original goodness, in contrast to the Christian concept of original sin. Fitrah is defined in both linguistic and religious terms.

Linguistically the word comes from the Arabic radicals, ف-ط-ر the verbal

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noun being فاطر. The root action means to cleave, split, slit, rend or crack. The first form فطر is also used in the sense of "to create," that is, to bring into existence for the first time. Thus the terminology فاطر السماوات the originator or creator of the heavens. So فطر (created) is equivalent to طبع printed, stamped, impressed. Faatir (علي شئ) فاطر is also synonymous to the verb ختم (sealed) and with خلق (created or formed). So Fitrah, linguistically, means an inborn natural disposition.

Religiously, Fitrah means to be born either prosperous or unprosperous [in relation to the soul]. It is associated with Islam and being born as a Muslim. Repeating the confession the *Shahada* (الشهادة) that there is no god but Allah, and that Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, which makes a person a Muslim, puts one in a state of Fitrah. In this sense Fitrah is the faculty of knowing Allah, which he has created in mankind. It is the natural constitution with which the child is created in his mother's womb and whereby he is capable of accepting the religion of truth. Fitrah is also related to true religion, الدين الصحيح. The prophet taught a man to repeat certain words when lying down to sleep, and said, "...then if you die that same night, you die upon the Fitrah (in the true din)." This is confirmed by Sura 30:30

So Man is distinguished from the rest of creation by having been endowed with intellect عقل and free will إرادة. The intellect enables him to discern right from wrong and the will enables him to choose between them. He can use these

faculties to complement his Fitrah and to please Allah or to be untrue to it and displease him. The choice is his. Mr. Yasin Mohamed, in his book *Fitra*,¹ states the following: "*The concept of Fitrah as original goodness, in my view, does not merely connote a passive receptivity to good and right action, but an active inclination and a natural innate predisposition to know Allah, to submit to him and to do right.*" P.21. Every individual is endowed with the innate knowledge of the unity of god, *Tawhid* (التوحيد). He is held accountable for his belief in Allah precisely because of his Fitrah. The volitional implication of Fitrah is that man is responsible for his own wrong actions. It is inconceivable to Muslim thinking that a person should be punished for wrong actions that others have done. Yasin goes on to state emphatically, "*Neither Islam, common sense or modern Western law hold a person responsible for the deeds of someone else.*" This is also based on many Qur'anic verses such as the following:

Say: 'Shall I seek another than Allah for Lord, when He is Lord of all things? Each soul earneth only on its own account, nor doth any laden bear another's load. Then unto your Lord is your return and He will tell you that wherein ye differed.' Sura 6:164

قل أغير الله ابني ربا وهو رب كل شئ ولا تكسب كل نفس إلا عليها ولا تزر وازرة وزر أخرى ثم إلى ربكم مرجعكم فينبئكم بما كنتم فيه تختلفون

Whosoever goeth right, it is only for (the good of) his own soul that he goeth right, and whosoever erreth, erreth only to its hurt. No laden soul can bear

another's load, We never punish until we have sent a messenger. Sura 17:15

من اهتدى فإتينا بهتدي لنفسه ومن ضل فإتينا يضل عليها ولا تزر وازرة وزر أخرى وما كنا معذبين حتى نبعث رسولا

Fitrah, then, is defined in official Islam as an innate predisposition for good and for submission to the one God. It is the concept of original goodness, in contrast to the Christian doctrine of original sin. But do the Qur'an and Hadith confirm this or not? Let us see what they both say.

Qur'an

Islam has a popular optimistic analysis of the human condition as seen in the following verses:

So set thy purpose (O Muhammad) for religion as a man by nature upright – the nature (framed) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not. Sura 30:30

This perspective is mirrored by contemporary Muslims like Badru Katar-egga who say that the conclusion drawn from this by the late scholar Isma'il al-Faruqi is, "Islam denies, therefore, that God had to ransom humanity by means of oblation and sacrifice." Human nature does not need divine transformation to do that which is right. Only divine guidance. After Adam is driven from the Garden of Eden, he is promised guidance from God and freedom from fear if he follows it (cf. Sura 23:38/36-39)

Surely We created man of the best stature Sura 95:4

And further (thus): 'set thy face towards

religion with true piety, and never in any wise be of the Unbelievers; And, (O Muhammad) set thy purpose resolutely for religion, as a man by nature upright, and be not of those who ascribe partners (to Allah). Sura 10:105

Abraham was indeed a model, devoutly obedient to God, (and) true in Faith, and he joined not gods with God: Lo! Abraham was a nation obedient to Allah, by nature upright, and he was not of the idolaters. Sura 16:120

He who has made everything which He has created Most Good: He began the creation of man with (nothing more than) clay. And made his progeny from a quintessence of the nature of a fluid despised: But He fashioned him in due proportion, and breathed into him something of His spirit. And He gave you (the faculties of) hearing and sight and feeling (and understanding): Little thanks do ye give! Sura 32:7-9

Alongside this optimistic assessment of humans there is also a pessimistic one. It bewails how few in previous generations restrained others from corruption (11:116/118). Instead, most people are disbelievers (12:103, 106; 13:1). Humankind is sinful (14:34/37; 33:72) and rebellious (96:6). The conclusion is, *If God were to punish men for their wrongdoing, He would not leave a single creature on earth.* (Sura 16:61)

ولو يؤاخذ الله الناس بظلمهم ما ترك عليها من دابة ولكن يؤخرهم إلى أجل مسمى فإذا جاء أجلهم لا يستأخرون ساعة ولا يستقدمون

The fundamentalist theologian Ibn Hazm (994-1064) reflected this pessimism, believing that the human soul,

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when left to itself, spontaneously inclines to dishonesty.² Even the most celebrated Muslim theologian al Ghazali (1058-111), with his mystical Sufi awareness of inner sin, identified four base inclinations in humans, those of savage animals, those of the beast, those inspired by the devil, and those arising from pride and ambition.³

Shiite Muslims have normally been more aware of the "carnal soul" than their Sunni coreligionists. The late Ayatollah Khomeini said: "You should pay attention and all of us should pay attention (to the fact) that man's calamity is his carnal desire, and this exists in everybody, and it is rooted in the nature of man." (Quoted from *Islamic Government Does not Spend for its Own Grandeur*, Kayhan International, September 4, 1985, p.3)

Joseph is quoted as having said in Sura Yusuf 12:54: *And I do not hold my own self to be free from weakness; for, the soul is surely prone to enjoin evil, save that whereon my Lord has mercy. Surely, my Lord is Most Forgiving, Merciful.*

وما أبرئ نفسي إن النفس لأمارة بالسوء إلا ما رحم ربي إن ربي غفور رحيم

He does not place the blame on Satan or circumstances but points to a problem at the core of human nature!

In Sura 16:61 the universal effect of the problem is made plain: *And if Allah were to punish men for their wrongdoing, He would not leave thereon a living Creature, but he gives them respite till an appointed term...*

The following are other Qur'anic references to the sinfulness of mankind:

Allah doth wish to lighten your (difficulties): For man was created weak (in flesh). Sura 4:28

Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude. Sura 14:34

واتاكم من كل ما سألتموه وإن تعدوا نعمة الله لا تحصوها
إن الإنسان لظلوم كفار

Most ungrateful is man! Sura 17:67

Yet when we bestow our favors on man, he turns away and becomes remote on his side (instead of coming to Us), and when evil seizes him he gives himself up to despair! Sura 17:83

Man is (ever) niggardly! Sura 17:100

That which is on earth we have made but as a glittering show for the earth, in order that We may test them – as to which of them are best in conduct. Sura 18:7

And verily We have displayed for mankind in this Qur'an all manner of similitudes, but man is more than anything contentious. Sura 18:54

ولقد صرفنا في هذا القرآن للناس من كل مثل وكان الإنسان أكثر شئ جدلاً

And He it is who gave you life, then He will cause you to die, and then will give you life (again). Lo! Man is verily an ingrate. Sura 22:66

وهو الذي أحياكم ثم يميتكم ثم يحييكم إن الإنسان لكفور
Lo! We offered the trust unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And man assumed it. Lo! He hath proved a tyrant and a fool. Sura 33:72

انا عرضنا الأمانة على السماوات والأرض والجبال فأبين أن يحملنها وأشفقن منها وحملها الإنسان انه كان ظلوما جهولا

It was We Who created man, and We know what dark suggestions his soul makes to him: for We are nearer to him than (his) jugular vein. Sura 50:16

Truly man was created very impatient: Fretful when evil touches him; And niggardly when good reaches him. Sura 70:19-21

Truly man is to his Lord ungrateful. And to that (fact) he bears witness (by his deeds). And violent is he in his love of wealth. Sura 100:6-8

Hadith

The Hadith also has a popular optimistic analysis of the human condition, as seen in the following:

Sahih Al Bukhari صحيح البخاري

The Prophet (peace-be-upon-him) said, "Every child is born on Fitrah (with a true faith i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone), but his parents convert him to Judaism or to Christianity or to Magianism, as an animal delivers a perfect baby animal. Do you find it mutilated?" Then AbuHurayrah recited the holy verses: "The pure Allah's Islamic nature (true faith of Islam) (i.e. worshipping none but Allah) with which He has created human beings. No change let there be in the religion of Allah (i.e. joining none in worship with Allah). That is the straight religion (Islam) but most of men know not." (AbuHurayrah 2:440, 441)

I heard the Prophet (peace-be-upon-him) saying, "Five practices are characteristic of the Fitrah: circumcision,

shaving the pubic hair, cutting the moustache short, clipping the nails, and depleting the hair of the armpits." (AbuHurayrah 7:779)

Allah's Apostle (peace-be-upon-him) said, "To shave the pubic hair, to clip the nails and to cut the moustache short, are characteristic of the Fitrah." (Abdullah ibn Omar 7:778)

Sahih Muslim صحيح مسلم

The Messenger of Allah (peace-be-upon-him) said, "Ten are the acts according to Fitrah: clipping the moustache, letting the beard grow, using the tooth-stick, snuffing up water in the nose, cutting the nails, washing the finger joints, plucking the hair under the armpits, shaving the pubes, and cleaning one's private parts with water." The narrator said, "I have forgotten the tenth, but it may have been rinsing the mouth." (Aisha 0502)

The Messenger of Allah (peace-be-upon-him) used to attack the enemy when it was dawn. He would listen to the Adhan; so if he heard an Adhan, he stopped, otherwise made an attack. Once on hearing a man say: Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest, the Messenger of Allah (peace-be-upon-him) remarked, "He is following al-Fitrah (al-Islam)." Then hearing him say, "I testify that there is no god but Allah, there is no god but Allah," the Messenger of Allah (peace-be-upon-him) said, "You have come out of Fire (of Hell)." They looked at him and found that he was a goat-herd. (Anas ibn Malik 0745)

Abu Daoud أبو داود

The Apostle of Allah (peace-be-upon-him) said, "Ten are the acts according

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to Fitrah (nature): clipping the moustache, letting the beard grow, using the tooth-stick, cutting the nails, washing the finger joints, plucking the hair under the arm-pits, shaving the pubes, and cleansing one's private parts (after easing or urinating) with water." The narrator said, "I have forgotten the tenth, but it may have been rinsing the mouth." (Aisha 0052)

الموطأ Al Mawtta

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "Every child is born on the Fitrah and it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian. Just as a camel is born whole—do you perceive any defect?" They said, "Messenger of Allah, what happens to people who die when they are (very) young?" He said, "Allah knows best what they used to do (or would have done)". (AbuHurayrah 16.16.53)

The following show that the Hadith, as the Qur'an, presents a pessimistic assessment of humanity as well as the optimistic one we have just seen:

صحيح البخاري Sahih Al Bukhari

The Prophet (peace-be-upon-him) said, "On the Day of Resurrection Allah will say, 'O Adam!' Adam will reply, 'Labbayk, our Lord, and Sa'dayk.' Then there will be a loud call (saying), 'Allah orders you to take from among your offspring a mission for the (Hell) Fire.' Adam will say, 'O Lord! Who is the mission for the (Hell) Fire?' Allah will say, 'Out of each thousand, take out 999.'

At that time every pregnant female shall drop her load (have a miscarriage) and

a child will have grey hair. (When the Prophet, peace be upon him, mentioned this) the people were so distressed (and afraid) that their faces paled whereupon the Prophet (peace-be-upon-him) said, "From Gog and Magog nine hundred ninety nine (999) will be taken out and one from you.

"You Muslims (compared to the large number of other people) will be like a black hair on the side of a white ox, or a white hair on the side of a black ox, and I hope that you will be one-fourth of the people of Paradise."

On that, we said, "AllahuAkbar!" Then he said, "I hope that you will be) one-third of the people of Paradise." We again said, "AllahuAkbar!" Then he said, "(I hope that you will be) one-half of the people of the Paradise." So we said, "AllahuAkbar." (Abu Said Al Khudari 6:265)

I heard Allah's Messenger (peace-be-upon-him) saying, "If the son of Adam had enough money to fill a valley, then he would wish for another similar to it, for nothing can satisfy the eye of Adam's son except dust. And Allah forgives him who repents to Him."

Ibn Abbas said, "I do not know whether this saying was quoted from the Qur'an or not."

Ata said, "I heard ibn az-Zubayr saying this narration while he was in the pulpit." (Abdulallah Ibn Abbas 8:444, 445)

The Prophet (peace-be-upon-him) said, "The first man to be called on the Day of Resurrection will be Adam who will be shown his offspring, and it will be said

to them. 'This is your father, Adam.' Adam will say (responding to the call). 'Labbayk and Sa'dayk.' Then Allah will say (to Adam), 'Take from your offspring the people of Hell.' Adam will say, 'O Lord, how many should I take?' Allah will say, 'Take ninety-nine out of every hundred.'” (AbuHurayrah 8:536)

Conclusion

It is important to understand the full Islamic view of humanity. We tend to hear only one side. I have found it helpful to show from the Qur'an that man is sinful by nature even according to Islam.

In the Qur'an as well as the Hadith we find an awareness that human beings will become corrupt once they are created, if not born corrupt. About Adam we read: *And when thy Lord said to the angels: 'I am about to place a vicegerent in the earth,' they said, 'Will Thou place therein such as will cause disorder in it, and shed blood? - And We glorify Thee with Thy praise and extol Thy holiness.'* He answered, 'I know what you know not.' Sura 2:30

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

The following verses confirm this fear of the angels:

Iblis said, after disobeying Allah: *...I will most surely bring his (Adam's) descendants under my sway except a few.* (Sura 17:62) In another account of the same story Iblis is reported to have said: *Then will I surely come upon them (Adam's descendants)...and Thou wilt not find most of them to be grateful.*

(Sura 7:18). As the terrible history of humanity shows continually, these verses have proved true. In the light of all the horror they cause on a worldwide scale it is very difficult to explain how human beings can be basically good.

The observant reader will have picked up the similarities to the Christian understanding of man's natural state, as well as the intrinsic differences. The main points can be summarized thus:

1. Man is a creation of God
2. Man was created good, but is also weak, a sinner, poor in character – in the Qur'an by creation, in the Bible as a result of the fall.
3. The purpose of creation was for man to serve Allah (Sura 51:56); to toil and to struggle (Sura 90:4); a glittering show (Sura 18:7).
4. The character of man = man was created weak (Sura 4:28); with dark suggestions in his soul (Sura 50:16); impatient (Sura 70:19); fretful towards evil (Sura 70:20); niggardly (Sura 70:21; 17:100); ungrateful (Sura 100:68); given up to injustice and ingratitude (Sura 14:34); violent in love and wealth (Sura 100:8).
5. It is clearly stated in Islam that man is sinful.

I have found that people in the street do know and acknowledge this fact, even though the official view is quite to the contrary. I have also found that most Muslims are not sure if they are going to heaven because none of them have confidence in their own goodness.

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It is obvious that the Islamic view does not coincide 100% with either the Qur'anic and Hadith records, or with life on the street. It seems to me that the Christian view is more compatible with Islam and Arab culture than is the Islamic view. I will explore this further in a later article.

In the next article we will discuss original sin, Adam's relationship to the human race as far as sin is concerned, and the Islamic understanding of what sin is. We can not understand the solution to the sin problem with out understanding how sin is defined. You have to study the ailment before you prescribe the medication.

As they say in Arabic, "till we meet again." إلى اللقاء Abu Atallah

1. Yasin, Mohamed, *Fitra: The Islamic Concept of Human Nature*, TaHa Publishers Ltd., London, 1996
2. Arnaldez, R., "Ibn Hazm," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd edition, S.V.
3. A.J. Wensinck, *La Pensee de Ghazali*, Paris, Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1940, pp. 47-49