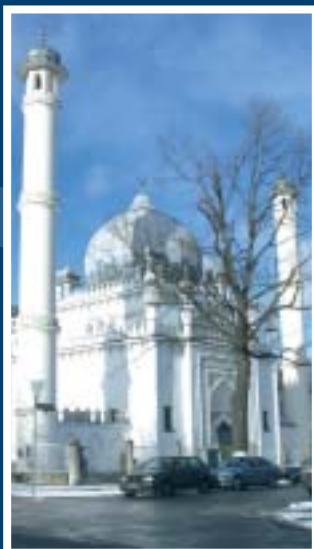Muhammad Wolfgang G. A. Schmidt

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MUHAMMAD WOLFGANG G. A. SCHMIDT

Born in 1950. Graduated in Lingistuics, African Studies, Chinese, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Theology and Religious Studies from universities in Germany, China and the USA. Ph.D., M.A., M.R.S., Eccl.D. At present, he is a professor in Comparative Religion at the Graduate School of Nations University in West Monroe, La., USA with focus on Islamic Studies and Chinese Religion and Philosophy. He has gained rich teaching and research experience at universities and colleges in China, Korea, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Germany. His publications include works on Linguistics, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and Religious Studies and Theology. His German translation of the the oldest written document of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the "Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internatl Medicine" with an age of over 2000 years, includes extensive introductions and annotations on the main text and has more than 1000 pages in print. It was completed after 10 years of extensive research and translation work. Since its publication in 2003, it has become one of the standard works in the field of Traditional Chinese Medicine.

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NATIONS UNIVERSITY®
ISLAM AND ITS THEOLOGY
MASTER OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES CURRICULUM
FOCUS AREA: COMPARATIVE RELIGION

The structure and content of the Qur'an, the Arabic language, main doctrines, cult, and practices of Islam, comparative and critical issues between Islam and Christianity

By

Muhammad Wolfgang G. A. Schmidt, Ph.D., M.A., M.R.S.

Description

This three-semester hour course addresses Islam and its theology and is organized in three modules. Module 1 is comprised of (1) An Introduction, (2) Foundations and Pre-Islamic Period, and (3) The Qur'an and Islamic Law. Module 2 contains a discussion on (1) Developments and Expansion of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula and (2) Islamic Society Past and Present. Module 3 addresses (1) Important Socio-cultural Considerations and (2) Central Issues in the Theology of Islam.

The Introduction covers some preliminary essential information relating to the methodical approaches in the study of religions in general and of Islam in particular. It also provides some preliminary information about the structure and contents of the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Muslims, and about the Arabic language in which the Qur'an (Koran) was written.

The student is then introduced to basic facts about Islam, the Qur'an, its main doctrines, cult, and practices. This is to provide those students with no prior knowledge of Islam the factual basics required for a more-in-depth study of important selected topics when comparing Islam to Christianity towards the end of the course.

Following the factual basics of Islam, the student will be introduced to a more-in-depth study of topics in Islamic theology. At this stage, we will confine ourselves to merely studying the various topics more in depth and detail on their own regard without relating them comparatively to issues in Christianity. For, it is important that one first study such topics on their own merits and try to see (1) how Muslims think and approach the issues under discussion, being free from any preconception from outside Islam, and (2) how such issues and the doctrines relating to them developed in Islam during the course of time. This is merely necessitated on grounds of general academic standards for studies at the University level.

Only after an introduction to factual basics of Islam and a more in-depth-study of central issues in Islamic theology on its own merits, the course moves to comparative issues of religion in Islam and Christianity. Here, a major part of the study activities will consist of reading and evaluating selected passages from the Holy Qur'an and viewing them in relation to what Christianity teaches. The student will be also required to apply what he/she has learned in the preceding units and be asked to view central issues critical between Christianity and Islam from both a clear (1) historical and (2) Christian theological perspective. Thus, one will become aware of things that both religions may have in common and those issues dividing the two.

Competencies and Exams

Upon successful completion of the exam, the student will be assigned a grade and a three (3) semester hour credit within the Graduate Studies curriculum at Nations University. There is only **one** exam for all the three modules of this course, equivalent two a three (3) semester hour credit. This is in consideration of the many student activities within the course the student will be asked to perform and which will be reflected to some extent also in the final exam of this course.

The standard for receiving graduate credit for this course will be in the attainment of the following competencies aimed at in this course:

1. A general understanding of the religious concepts in Islam; factual acquaintance with its major doctrines, major lines in the history of Islam, and its culture.
2. An ability to describe and analyze central issues in Islamic theology on its own merits.
3. An ability to compare central comparative religious issues in Christianity and Islam in terms of their (1) Theology and (2) historical perspective and implications, and then be able to clearly identify common and divergent traits of such issues in both religions.
4. An ability to converse with Muslims according to general academic standards

Credit for the course requires a score of 70% or greater on an examination. The exam will cover a section with multiple-choice questions and essay problems. They may be as outlined in the following samples:

1. Mark the **incorrect** statement: According to Islam and to Qur'anic doctrine, Jesus in Islam is
    (A) the Son of God and the Savior of mankind,
    (B) entirely human and not divine in nature,
    (C) a prophet sent by God (Allah),
    (D) the Son of Mary.
2. The other authoritative sources of Islamic doctrine in addition to the Qur'an are
    (A) the Sunna,
    (B) the Hadith,
    (C) later theological works by various Islamic scholars.
3. Write a two-page essay on the concept of Sharia and Fiq.
4. Write a two-page essay on the person of Jesus according to Biblical and Qur'anic text sources. Compare the different approaches and account for their similarities and differences.

Required Textbooks

Lippman, Thomas W. *Understanding Islam. An Introduction to the Muslim World.*
    2nd rev. ed. New York: Meridian Books, 1995.
Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law.* Trans. from the
    German by Andras and Ruth Hamori, Princeton: Princeton University Press,
    1981. (Optional)
Any Holy Qur'an in either English-Arabic bilingual edition or in the Arabic original only.

While Lippman (1995) is not primarily a scholarly text, it is helpful as a descriptive text introducing the student to the factual basics of Islam in a systematic and clear manner. Although Goldziher (1981) is a scholarly text, its original text dates back to 1910 when Goldziher, a Western scholar on Islam originating from Hungary, conducted a series of lectures on Islam which covered the materials contained in this book. In the German original, his "Vorlesungen über den Islam" (Lectures on Islam) were held at Heidelberg University in Germany in 1910. Today, more is known in the West about Islam than had been in Goldziher's time, but the work of this outstanding scholar has not been outdated in view of subsequent research done by succeeding generations of scholars in the field of Western Islamic Studies ("Islamwissenschaften"). On the contrary, succeeding generations of scholars have been able to build on the pioneer work done by Goldziher and other contemporary colleagues. Thus, Goldziher is still quite an important standard text. The author, unlike many other Western scholars in the field, had even spent some time in studies at the famous Al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. He was not only able to read the

Qur'an and related theological works by ancient and contemporary Islamic authors in the Arabic original, but he could also draw on his rich knowledge of standard theological works in traditional Islamic theology. He thus bridges the cultural gap Western scholars in the field generally have with such important original literary Islamic sources.

Finally, while you study this course, you will devote a considerable portion of your time to the study of selected passages from the Qur'an itself. It is important for a student of Islam to know what the Qur'an says on certain issues instead of merely confining oneself to what other authors say about the Qur'an and its contents.

MRS 717 Islam and Its Theology

The structure and content of the Qur'an, the Arabic language, main doctrines,
cult, and practices of Islam, comparative and critical issues
between Islam and Christianity

By
Muhammad Wolfgang G. A. Schmidt, Ph.D., M.A., M.R.S.

Procedure

Read the syllabus first and complete the Reading Assignments and Study Activities. Follow the order of sequence in which the various study items and materials are presented. You will complete the course with an examination. When you are ready for the exam, e-mail your request to student.services@nationsu.org. Include your name, student identification code, and the course number (MRS 717). After the exam is sent to NationsUniversity for evaluation, you will receive feedback with your exam score and eventually some other helpful comments on your achievements.

MODULE 1

Three units comprise Module 1: (1) Introduction, (2) Foundations and Pre-Islamic Period, and (3) The Qur'an and Islamic Law. To move directly to Units 2 or 3 within Module 1, click on the desired link.

Unit 1. Introduction

The Introduction sets the stage for the course. It deals with preliminaries which offer aid in understanding Islam as a system of thought and as a unique religion.

Below is an outline of the material covered in this unit. To move directly to a particular section within this unit, click on the desired link.

I. Two Approaches in the Study of Religions and in the Study of Islam
    A. The Question of "Science"
    B. Implications with Respect to Approaches in the Field of Islamic Studies

I. Two Approaches in the Study of Religions and in the Study of Islam

In German, there is a proverb running like this: "You have a glass of water only filled to the half. The optimist would claim it to be half filled (full); the pessimist might criticize that it is half empty." This proverb illustrates a situation where you could view one and the same phenomenon from two entirely different perspectives. In commenting on the very same state of its being, your evaluations still might differ according to one's perspective . With the study of religion, it is very often much the same. You may approach the study of Islam, for example, from an entirely secular point of view and be interested in its doctrines, its historical development, and its underlying socio-culture without being a Muslim. You may be only interested in it from a merely academic or scholarly point of view. On the other hand, as a faithful Muslim, your approach to the study of Islam, even at a scholarly and academic level, may be slightly different. In such case, you may take its basic doctrines and messages for granted, and most important of all, you may take the Holy Book of Muslims, the Qur'an, as God's Holy Word of Revelation by way of His prophet--Muhammad, peace be upon him--for granted. Thus, your approach as a Muslim in the field of Islamic studies may differ in respect to that adopted by a Western, secular scholar. The Western scholar may raise and answer questions that a faithful Muslim would never ask since this may be a point of mere blasphemy consisting in an unforgivable insult with respect to the Majesty and Holiness of God.

These two basic approaches constitute principal ways upon which studies of any religion may be undertaken. The first of these we may label an **"empirical" approach** to contrast it with the second that we may call an **"ontological-dogmatic" approach**. In the field of academic studies, the difference in these two approaches also constitutes the basic dividing line between what we call "theology" (in the sense that there is a Christian, Islamic, perhaps also Buddhist theology or theologies) and that what first in German came to be called "Religionswissenschaft" (science of religion). The latter stands for what in English generally has been termed "Comparative Religion" or "History of Religion."

Basically, "theology" constitutes the study of (a certain) religion, say Christianity--its doctrines, history, literary sources, etc.--from a believer's point of view. It is thus confessionally based in terms of its preconception and approach. This approach matches more or less largely the ontological-dogmatic approach.

The alternative and opposite approach is the study of a certain religion, say again Christianity--its doctrine, history, literary sources, etc.--from a non-Christian or non-believer's point of view. Here, you may occupy yourself with the same topics, facts and questions as a Christian theologian does, but your approach is "neutral" and "free" of any preconceptions and faith-based creeds, and your personal interest may be entirely empirical and/or descriptive. Here, you would not ask if the Christian approach to salvation of mankind is "more correct" or "true" than any other taken, as for example by Buddhism or

Islam. In fact, you may have no personal religious commitment yourself and you even may be an atheist or agnostic. One still can study religious phenomena with an entirely academic interest.

The basic difference in these two approaches to the study of religion in general, and to the study of Islam in particular, is important enough to be mentioned here. If our aim is to be able to enter into inter-religious dialogue with Muslims according to generally approved academic standards and discussion, we need to be aware of the difference in perspectives that the partners involved may bring into the dialogue. As a dialogue partner from a mainly Western based culture, and perhaps as a faithful Christian, you may understand Islam as a religion alien to you from a purely empirical point of view, while you may view your own faith in the light of a theological approach to Christianity. Your Muslim dialogue partner may be well versed in the doctrines of Christianity, but he may approach his criticism and doubts about Christianity from a perspective entirely theological-Islamic.

In this course, we will adopt an empirical descriptive approach. Here, we are concerned with the presentation of facts as they are known to us, and we will attempt to present them as befits general academic standards. That means we may be "critical" in various respects.

A. The Question of "Science"

In science (including arts subjects), we are use to doubt. We only accept those things as facts that have been proven on the basis of evidence. With respect to Christianity, we even approach the literary sources of our faith in some way "empirically." The Bible is viewed as a sacred Word of God in which God revealed Himself to us and to mankind in general. We ask various questions about the making of the text—date of composition, authorship, transmission from the moment it was written through thousands of years to us in our times. The time span between its composition and its reception by a present-day audience is an immense one. Although we commonly believe in the working of the Holy Spirit and the divine origin of what is contained in the texts as God's Holy Word, we still are concerned with minor textual variants in the copies of copies of copies made from its original, with literary style, and with different sources that comprise a text. These are the kind of questions that biblical scholars typically are concerned with and also teach their students!

It is legitimate to ask "empirical questions" with respect to our own literary sources of religion, despite the divine origin and the human factors involved in the composition and transmission of the biblical text. If so, we adopt something like a double strategy that is neither entirely "empirical" nor "ontological-dogmatic." Our strategy lies somewhere between these two extreme approaches. This is a common standard in Western based academic Christian theology, and such a "double strategy" employed is due to what we generally term the "Period of Enlightenment" in Western philosophy and culture. Historically, this Period of Enlightenment was a counter-reaction or "post-mortem" to the Period of the "Dark Middle Ages." The strictly bound ideology of Scholasticism was mainly represented by the Medieval Catholic Church. Scholasticism served mainly to prevent asking new questions and developing arguments of doubt towards that which had been taught and was commonly acceptable in the Medieval church and universities. The Enlightenment, with its new approaches in philosophy and other realms, was revolutionary in just questioning and doubting official beliefs. The Enlightenment ended the monopoly of Scholasticism in the philosophical, theological, and cultural life in the 17th/18th centuries.

Such a period of Enlightenment has been, for all that is known so far, unique to Western culture. It allows for the development of such a double strategy as outlined above. Such has not been the case in Islamic culture. The most reputable authorities in Islamic theology and science itself would rather adopt a fundamentalist view with respect to making and transmitting Qur'anic texts. Again, we must be aware of such differences in the history of science within both cultures to make clear the perspectives from which a

Muslim dialogue partner may "argue" and develop his arguments. He even may not fully accept our statements concerning the composition and transmission of the Holy Qur'an referred to in a later section of this introduction.

B. Implications with Respect to Approaches in the Field of Islamic Studies

The field of Islamic studies as an academic discipline of higher learning and scholarly research is relatively young, having developed during the latter half of the 19th century. This was the period when Western European Colonialism in Africa and Asia was at its height. Naturally, the colonial ruling powers were in urgent need of specialists who could understand and "deal" with the respective native cultures and religions of the colonized areas. Christian missionary work was regarded as an integral part of either establishing or promoting colonial rule. Not only in Africa, but also in other colonized areas, Islam had been present since pre-colonial times. With the new religion of Christianity propagated, Islam became one of Christianity's strongest "competitors" and perhaps also one of its strongest "opponents." It is under this general impression that Western scholars of the late 19th century approached the study of Islam in presenting their own view of its history, doctrine, cult, etc. Their view was essentially an ethnocentric one. They tended to ask how Muslims looked at these issues themselves and tried to perceive their approaches from that perspective. The late 20th and early 21st century scholars in the field of Islamic studies, even when non-Muslims and Western-based, would nowadays adopt a much less radical ethnocentric view than had their colleagues in the latter half of the 19th century.

II. The Qur'an as a Literary Source of Islam

Here, we will present some essential factual preliminaries in a brief overview that may later, in the reading of textbook portions, come up again and be treated more in detail. However, the following preliminaries may be helpful to the newcomer in the study of Islam at this initial stage.

A. The Structure of the Qur'anic Text

The Qur'an is a book of Islamic religious texts consisting altogether of 114 surahs (more or less the equivalent to our Western "chapters") of different lengths. Each surah is divided into ayats (verses), most of which have the entry formula at the beginning: "Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim--in the Name of Allah the Most Gracious and Merciful." These entry formulas normally do not form part of the verse counting and numbering in each surah with respect to the Arabic original, although this may be the case in various Western translations. The term "surah" itself may perhaps best be translated as "the magnificence overwhelming Man"--with respect to its contents claimed to be of divine origin.

B. The Sequential Order of Surahs in the Qur'an

Sometimes, the order of the sequence in which individual surahs appear in the Qur'an is equated with the order in which they were revealed to the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. This concept is certainly a grave error, and even Muslim scholars commonly reject such a view. Here is what we know about the surahs.

1. Surah 1. Surah 1 is a very short surah and, according to Muslim belief, a summary of what Islam is all about. Surah 1 (Al-Fatiha) reads (in my own translation from the Arabic original):

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious and Merciful!
1. All Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.
2. The Beneficent and Merciful.
3. The Lord of the Day of Judgement.

4. It is You we serve, and it is You whom we approach for Help.
5. Keep us following the Right Path . . . .
6. The Path of those upon You have bestowed favors and not the Path of those upon whom Your Wrath comes down nor those who go astray!

Vv. 1-4 refer to attributes of Allah. He is the Lord of the World, the Beneficent and Merciful, etc. Vv. 5-6 refer to the Path Allah has intended for the faithful believer, and most ideally for Mankind in general, to follow. It is the "Right" Path (of every faithful Muslim), to be contrasted with the path followed by those upon--and now, pay attention, please!–whom His Wrath has come down. Most commentators agree that the reference is to the Jews. Those who go astray, according to the commentators, refers to Christians.

The fact that this surah, commonly regarded as a summary of Islamic faith, comes first in the Holy Qur'an, does not mean that it had been reveled first to the Messenger and Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. Its arrangement at this place is due to later editorial work when the Qur'anic texts were laid down in written form some time after the death of Muhammad on June 8, 632. Until then, the Qur'anic texts had been only transmitted orally.

The way in which these surahs were originally transmitted is actually unknown. Even Muslim scholars do not seem to have a clear view on this question. Theodor N. Nöldeke, one of the German pioneers in Islamic studies of the 19th century, in 1860 presented the following probable sequence based on his research of the surah texts and hypothetical reconstructions of those sources. According to Nöldeke, four periods can be distinguished in which the following surahs were laid down orally in the following sequence.

Period I: from the first to fifth year of Muhammad's appearance as a prophet: surahs 96, 74, 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, 97, 86, 91, 80, 68, 87, 95, 103, 85, 73, 101, 99, 82, 81, 53, 84, 100, 79, 77, 78, 88, 89, 75, 83, 69, 51, 52, 56, 70, 55, 112, 109, 113, 114, 1.

Period II: fifth and sixth years: surahs 54, 37, 71, 76, 44,50, 20, 26, 15, 19, 38, 36, 43, 72, 67, 23, 21, 25, 17, 27, 18.

Period III: seventh year until the year of Hijra, the escape from Mecca to Medina, on June 16, 622: surahs 32, 41, 45, 16, 30, 11, 14, 12, 40, 28, 39, 29, 31, 42, 10, 34, 35, 7, 46, 6, 13.

Period IV: the Medina period (ca. 622 - 630): surahs 2, 98, 64, 62, 8, 47, 3, 61, 57, 4, 65, 59, 33, 63, 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5.

Thus, a difference has to be made with respect to the editorial sequence of order in which the surahs appear in the Qur'an after having been fixed in written form and the order or sequence in which they have been transmitted originally.

2. Other observations on surahs of the Qur'an. Surahs in the Qur'an are numbered according to the final editorial making when they were fixed in written form. In addition, these surahs are titled by certain headings such as "Al-Baqqarah" (The Cow, Surah 2). Such a title refers to some key concept or key word appearing in the actual surah text. The conventions and criteria of such titillations are by no means clear and common in all cases. The grouping of surahs by editorial making of the Qur'an seems to have been much more in terms of structuring of content and its relative lengths of the texts, with the longer ones preceding the shorter ones. But again, here are exceptions as can be seen in a comparison of Surah 1 with Surah 2, the longest in the entire Qur'an. It seems, after all, that a multitude of criteria determined the order of appearance in the Qur'an.

Many surahs seem, at first glance and at a surface level, not well-structured in terms of contents. At times they are even contradictory in their doctrinal or legal statements. Surah 2, the

longest of all surahs, treats various topics whose inter-relatedness in a single text appear difficult to perceive. In fact, contextual analysis of the textal structure may rather suggest that different topics have been mixed together with their logical relationship among each other being unclear.

Secondly, you may find references to Jews in the Qur'an of opposite and contradictory nature. At times, they are being referred to as those who (with the Christians) are the owners of a religious book (having a religious code laid down in written form). They are the "human" brothers of Muslims (but not so in faith). At other times, you may find instances where they are cursed in the name of Allah.

It would be too simple and certainly not do real justice to the text of the Holy Qur'an to say that its text is an arbitrary mixture of attitudes and doctrines incoherent and inconsistent in themselves. Even Muslim scholars, at times, have been aware of such problems in the constitution of the Qur'anic texts.

With respect to the first and second aspect of "superficial contradictions," Muslim scholars have, during the course of time, developed the following approaches to deal with problems such as these:

1. The surahs of the early period, i.e., before the period of Hijra (pre-Medinah period), are surahs of Meccan origin. In the Qur'an, each period applicable to each surah is normally stated explicitly. The later period of surahs is from the Medinah period.

2. The surahs of the early, pre-Medinah and thus the Meccan period, are rather lyrical and poetical in style. In terms of content, more tolerant attitudes are adopted towards Jews and Christians as "owners of a Holy Book." Here, the elements of grace, mercy, and mutual tolerance dominate as motifs, even emphasizing the common traits of all three Abrahamic monotheistic religions. For this period, it is even reported in the Ahadith (plural of Hadith, "Traditions") that Muslims held their prayers in the prayer houses of either Christians or Jews, and that vice versa, Christians and Jews were allowed into the mosques of Muslims (if existent).

3. The Medinah period shows a form of rhyme dominating the surahs and most of the surah content refers to practical and legal matters (of how a Muslim should live in an Islamic community). In this period also, the confrontations between Jews and Christians assumed a more violent and aggressive style (probably not only on the part of the young Muslim community alone). Consequently, the statements on these other religious groups opposing Islam became more polemic and aggressive.

4. According to Islamic tradition, Allah chose to reveal Himself in different stages. This accounts for obvious, superficial contradictions on surah statements dating from different times. For a Muslim, a later stage of revelation and its respective statement overrules the earlier one. Thus, the statements found in the surahs of the later period are thus finally binding and make those in the surahs of an earlier period "obsolete."

5. Finally, even Muslim scholars would recognize that the Qur'an may not be clear on everything. Thus, a second source, the *Ahadith,* ("Traditions") or the sayings of the Prophet in certain situations were recorded. These Traditions have become, once their genuine authenticity was verified, a second authoritative source in addition to the Qur'an. However, Muslims believe that all these sources recognized so far give evidence of Allah's Holy Word to which nothing else is to be added and from which nothing may be omitted.

C. Important Observations on Arabic, the Holy Language of the Qur'an

The following observations concerning the Arabic language serve (a) to give the student some hints on the common rules of transcribing Arab terms and proper names in Latin in Western publications on Islam, and (b) to provide some insights into the basic structure of the Arabic language with important implications for translation of the Qur'anic text into Western languages.

1. Arabic as the language of the Holy Qur'an. All written documents of the early Islamic period from the first half of the 7th century to about 800 A.D. have been written in a form of literary Arabic common at that time. This was about 1400 years ago, and it is clear that present-day Arabic has changed tremendously in relation to the spoken vernacular of present day Standard Arabic. But the ancient form of Arabic has been strictly retained in the writings of the early Islamic period because it was the language in which, according to the Muslim view, Allah (God) has chosen to reveal Himself through His Messenger, the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. Not a single letter had to be changed in order to preserve the originality and authenticity of this sacred text. This especially applies with respect to the Qur'anic texts and that of Ahadith. This form of ancient Arabic is still retained today in the publication of Qur'anic texts, its recitation, etc. In contrast to the modern vernacular of spoken Arabic, we call the ancient form of Arabic found in the sacred texts of Islam "classical Arabic." Classical Arabic is linguistically based upon the vernacular spoken in the days of Muhammad, the Prophet, in Mecca. Muhammad himself originated from the Hashemi line of the Quraishite tribe living around Mecca. The Mecca dialect was the prevalent linguistic variety of Arabic spoken (and not yet commonly written) at that time.

2. Transcription of Arabic key terms and proper names in Latin in Western literature. Arabic has only three basic vowels that in Western literature on Islam are transcribed alternately either as *a, o, e* or as *a, u, i*. There is no common standard rule to transcribe these basic vowels in Latin but please note that "a" is always "a" but that "o" may also at times be transcribed as "u," and that "e" may at times also be transcribed as "i." Those alternate transcriptions, however, stand for one and the same vowel mark in the native Arabic script. Thus, "Mohammed" may also read "Muhammad," etc. Please note that the pronunciation of these vowels is as in Italian, Spanish, French, or German.

Furthermore, Arabic has a couple of consonants that do not exist in English or any other Indo-European language, which, on the other hand, it shares with other Semitic languages to which also Arabic belongs. There is for example a sound commonly transcribed as "q," a very special "k" sound. At times, the "q" is also transcribed as "k." You therefore may find such renderings as either "Qur'an" or "Koran" for the Holy Book of Muslims in Western literature. To indicate that there is a pause between the two syllables "Qur" and "an" of "Quran," a " ' " sign is put between these two syllables in more exact transcriptions according to the Arabic original. Hence, "Quran" becomes "Qur'an."

3. The Arabic script. The Arabic script is, like Hebrew script, a consonant based script. This means that normally the consonants of a word are written with the vowels omitted. Thus, the Arabic word for "book" *(kitab),* would be rendered as *k-t-b* with the respective vowels *i* and *a* omitted. The plural form *"kutub"* would also be rendered in the native Arabic script normally as *k-t-b*. Its plural reading can thus only be determined by the reader on the basis of context alone. That this can be done without any negative effect on efficient communication is due to a special trait in the structure of all Semitic languages. The consonants of a word provide the basic "frame" for the root and root meaning of a certain word stem. The vowels inserted between these consonants as the root of a word account for variations in either word or grammatical meaning. Thus, the insertion of *"u-u"* in *"k-u-t-u-b"* adds a grammatical meaning of plural, "books," to the root *"k-t-b."* Likewise, *"i-a"* in *"k-t-b"* stands for the singular form of this noun. In addition, Arabic makes use of prefixes and suffixes to indicate a large variety of grammatical and other meanings. The same applies to verbal stems and not only to nouns.

4. Word order. The basic word order of immediate sentence constituents is predicate (normally a verb)-subject-object. This basic word order may vary at times and give the sentence meaning a special emphasis or other meaning normally not conveyed in the basic word order of a simple sentence.

5. Articles, nouns, and adjectives. As normally in all Romance languages, the noun precedes an attributive adjective in Arabic with the adjective following the noun also being preceded by the definite article, e.g. *Al-Jumhuriyya Al-Arabiyya* "Arab Republic." This conforms to a common Semitic

grammatical pattern of repeating the definite article before an attributive adjective following the noun (cf. Hebrew: *Habeyth hagadol*--the big house).

In Arabic, the form of the definite article is Al. It is the same form before masculine and feminine nouns in singular, dual, and plural forms. In certain cases, the consonant -l of Al may be assimilated to the initial consonantal value of a noun or adjective that this definite article precedes. For example, *al-salam* "the peace" becomes "assalam."

The indefinite article in English is actually no article in Arabic by virtue of its grammatical form because the functions of the indefinite article in English are indicated in Arabic by suffixing -n (a phenomenon called "nunation" linguistically by grammarians of Arabic). Compare the following examples:

al-kitabu	the book	*kitabun*	a book
al-kitabi	of the book	*kitabin*	of a book
al-kitaba	the book (accusative)	*kitaban*	a book (accusative)

In Ancient (Biblical) and Modern Hebrew, on the other hand, there is no extra form to indicate indefinite reference by means of an indefinite article or a suffix. In this case, the definite article *ha-* or any of its morphological variants would simply be omitted.

6. Verbs. The primitive root of a verbal stem in Arabic is mainly trilateral, i.e., consists of any three consonants. Vowel changes in combination with pre- and suffixes added to this primitive root then indicate a wide range of grammatical and other meanings. Consequently, in non-Semitic languages at times different words must be used. Thus, the primitive root *k-t-b* in Arabic may, according to vowels and other pre- and/or suffixes added, indicate either "reading" or "writing."

Linguistically, we call this phenomenon primitive root inflection, and it is typical for the structure of most Semitic and related languages (Hamitic, Cushitic). By means of this mechanism of primitive root inflection, Arabic can not only convey a wide range of meanings but can also convey more intricate of subtleties of meanings. Most of the Indo-European languages have no formal means of expression--either by words or grammatical forms. It is exactly this that makes the Arabic language so distinctive in comparison to other languages. The implication for making an exact translation of the Holy Qur'an into any other language is very difficult, if not perhaps impossible.

7. Participial forms of the Arabic verb. The root of an Arabic verb (equivalent of "infinitive" in Indo-European languages, although infinitive forms are lacking in Arabic) is normally considered to be the verbal perfect form in the third person singular masculine. This is also the form under which a verb may be found in any dictionary. This dictionary form of any Arabic verb consists then of a triliteral consonantal root. For example: *qatal--* kill(ed) (actually "he killed").

To form the active participle "killing" from *"qatal,"* add the prefix *mu- ,* and change the last vowel of the dictionary form from *"a"* to *"I,"* which then yields *"muqatel"* meaning "killing" and also "the one who is killing." The name Muhammad is formed on a similar pattern, with the *"e"* wrongly substituted sometimes by *"a"* in English versions when *"a"* is pronounced more like *"e"* as in "understand." The verbal root underlying "Muhammad" is "to praise" and is also found in the proper name Ahmed (male forename).

8. Recitation of Qur'anic texts. Normally, you pronounce an Arabic written text according to certain specific conventions. Such conventions also exist in English as well as in any other written language. In the recitation of Qur'anic texts, which may include entire surahs or even several surahs together, special rules of pronunciation apply. For example, the nunation suffixes are not

pronounced when appearing at the end of certain sentences or verses. We need not go into further detail here; it is enough to mention the fact of such differences and the rules underlying them are specific to the art of recitation of Qur'anic texts in the form of Classical Arabic. The author of this text has had some special training in the art of recitation of Qur'anic texts, and you would need special training to do this. In the Muslim world, special training programs exist for acquiring a working competency in this art.

D. Terminology

In older Western literature on Islam, those who are faithful believers of Islam have been perhaps wrongly called "Mohammedans," so labeled after the Holy Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. Themselves, they would prefer to be called "Muslims"--those believing in Islam (note here again the active participial form preceded by mu- !). Muslims do not claim to believe "in" Muhammad but "in" Allah. However, they accept Muhammad as His Messenger and Prophet. We thus should pay special attention to our terminology when speaking about Islam and its adherents. Instead of using the outdated term "Mohammedan," in itself carrying a certain arrogance of the former Western colonial powers, we should respect Muslims and their faith and thus call them what they would think appropriate to call themselves -- "Muslim" or "Muslima" (when referring to a female adherent of Islam). The Qur'an refers to Christians normally as "Nazarenes," so consider if you in your inter-religious contacts with Muslims would not prefer to be referred to as "Christian" rather than "Nazarene." Thus, you should pay Muslims the same respect that you would expect on their part in approaching you. Otherwise a fair and open inter-religious dialogue would hardly be possible.

Unit 2. Foundations and the Pre-Islamic Period

This unit provides (a) an historical perspective with regard to the state of Christianity in the 6th and 7th century A.D., (b) an historical perspective on the state of Judaism at the time of Muhammad, and (c) a view of the geopolitical state of the Middle East world during pre-Islamic times. Islam entered the stage of world history during the early 7th century. The Qur'an and other early authoritative sources of Islam such as the Sunnah in form of the Ahadith (Traditions) make constant reference to Christianity and aspects of its doctrine in a critical way. This must be seen as a reaction of Islam to certain developments having taken place in the doctrine of Christianity. The Qur'anic criticisms and rejections with regard to these can best be understood by viewing the state of Christianity at this time. Similarly, understanding the state of Judaism at the time leads to greater understanding of why Islam became critical of it as well.

Before the spread of Islam, Egypt was Christianized and an ancient Semitic language known as "Coptic" was used in speaking and writing. The Middle East was enclosed and bordered by the Persian and Roman-Byzantine empires. The geopolitical scene raises important questions. What impact did Islam have on them? Specifically, what impact did the sociocultural and religious state of being of other political states have on the spread of Islam into their respective native areas?

In **Reading Assignments**, you will also be introduced to (a) the basic elements of faith and cult practices of Islam and to (b) the initial stages in the forming of Islam. **You will need a copy of the textbook by Thomas Lippman, *Understanding Islam: An Introduction to the Muslim World* (2nd rev. ed., Meridian Books, 1995).** In **Study Activities**, you will use textual portions of the Qur'an. Below is an outline of the material covered. To move quickly to the major points, click on the desired link.

I. Basic Beliefs and Practices of Islam
II. Initial Stages in the Development of Islamic Faith--the Life of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam
III. Historical Background

A. An Historical Outlook on the World of the Middle East and Adjacent Areas on the Eve
of Islam
1. Christianity
2. Judaism
3. Observations on the Middle East World and the adjacent areas
B. Some Key Data on the Life of Muhammad and the Early Period of Islam

I. Basic Beliefs and Practices of Islam

Read Lippman, pp. 1-32. Although Lippman is not a scholarly text explicitly, the descriptive account and overview Lippman gives in this part of his book is assumed to be helpful in getting a first overview and impression of Islam with regard to its basics teachings and the practices (duties) required of a faithful Muslim. At the institutional level, note first of all that Islam originally was opposed to a laity-clergy division as had developed in Christianity with emphasis on the point that all Muslims, whether rich or poor, of higher or lower social standing, were totally equal before God (Allah). Secondly, Islam rejected the doctrine of original sin inherited by man from the times of Adam and Eve. This unbiblical doctrine had developed in the post-Apostolic era under Church Fathers such as Augustine (4th/5th centuries A.D.) (cf. Lippman, pp. 2-3).

II. Initial Stages in the Development of Islamic Faith--the Life of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam

Read Lippman, pp. 33-55. This chapter covers the period from the birth of Muhammad in 570 A.D. to his rise to the Prophet of Islam around 610 A.D. to his death on June 8, 632. The material covered in Chapter 2 of Lippman's text is more than a mere biographical account of the life of this remarkable and holy man to Islam. It shows the struggles, the up and downs in the spread and forming of this new faith in that very early period.

III. Historical Background

In each unit of this course, we will attempt to provide you with a frame of historical data relevant to the history of Islam, its background, spread, and development. We believe this is essential for adopting and developing an approach that is "empirical," in addition to the comparative-theological approach. In this unit, we will first give a general historical perspective with respect to the state of Christianity and Judaism as the primary sources stimulating the doctrines of Islam and the geopolitical environment in which Islam first came to grow. Then, we will list some key data on the life of Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam and may Allah give him Peace, which also reflect the initial stages in development and spread of this new faith.

A. An Historical Outlook on the World of the Middle East and Adjacent Areas on the Eve of Islam

Here, as already stated, three points seem to matter:

1. Christianity. Christianity of the 6th and 7th centuries found itself in a controversial state. In the preceding periods, it had seen the first controversial debates on the Trinity and the divine and/or human nature of Jesus, including the question of whether Jesus was equal or "only similar" to the Father. Christianity at that time also had developed the laity-clergy division opposed by Islam, and it also had developed the institution of monks and monasteries where Christian believers sought to lead a life especially close and devoted to God, refraining from all pleasures and desires of earthly life. It was this

asceticism that basically was opposed by early Islam. Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was neither a monk nor did he reject any of the normal pleasures that earthly life had to offer. On the contrary, his message in the Qur'an emphasizes at times that these are God-given and that man is to enjoy and regard them as a gift from Allah bestowed upon man in His grace.

Christianity also had developed the doctrine of original sin inherited by mankind from the times of Adam and Eve. This development came in the post-Apostolic period by the first Church Fathers, the latter of which seems to lack any real serious biblical foundation. (We cannot go into further detail here on how these debates developed in Christianity, their origins, conclusions, and effects. For a more thorough study of these aspects, you are strongly advised to study the relevant church history period from other sources available (any good comprehensive text on church history or the courses on church history offered by NU).

Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam, is believed to have drawn on various Christian sources initially in his becoming acquainted with the faith of Christianity in the early 7th century A.D. Legend has it that Muhammad was first introduced to the Christian Faith and its doctrines in his contacts with a hermit of Syrian Christianity. The hermit's name is said to have been Bahira. Early paintings show Muhammad sitting next to Bahira in discussion. From a standpoint of Muslim tradition, this would indicate the recognition by Christianity of Muhammad as a Messenger of God and God's Message as having been revealed to this prophet of Islam. However, from an "empirical" point of view, scholars generally believe that Muhammad largely drew on sources of Christian faith that were peculiar to Eastern Christianity at that time including Nestorianism and Monophysitism as well as other apocryphal sources with respect to Christianity. (For further details of these sources mentioned, consult any reliable church history text or the materials on church history provided by NU).

2. Judaism. After the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Palestine-based Jewish community seems to have become more or less "extinct," and Jewish communities were scattered throughout the Roman Empire and beyond. But even before, in the Intertestamental Period and in the days of Jesus, many Jewish communities were already existent in the form of diaspora communities throughout the Mediterranean world and adjacent areas such as Persia, Mesopotamia, and the Arabian Peninsula.

Judaism in general was highly Hellenized during the first century, and certainly by the time of Muhammad. With reference to the immortality of the soul and/or the "body-soul division," Hellenized Judaism claimed that the body was of a timely nature and would cease and fall apart at physical death, while the soul was immaterial. Being more worthy than the body, the soul would live on forever. These concepts originally of Hellenistic origin crept into Judaism and are reflected in the differences between Pharisees and Sadducees in the days of Jesus and the first apostles. The Pharisees believed in the immortality of the soul, while the Saducean fraction rejected it. However, the position adopted by the Pharisees became the more "common" view in Judaism. Thus, also Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, was introduced to this position in his contacts with Judaism. By the time of Muhammad, Jewish communities (called "clans" and "tribes" in the Qur'anic texts) had already settled in various places of the Arabian Peninsula (Mecca, Yathroub (the latter known later as "Medina"). Above all, these places were linked to important major trade routes towards the northeast in Mesopotamia and towards the northwest in direction of ancient Damascus (Syria). Thus, constant intercultural and inter-religious contacts were normal. This fact became a major historical factor as Islam drew on various sources.

3. Observations on the Middle East World and the adjacent areas. The Middle East bordered the powerful Byzantine Roman Empire in the West and the Pre-Islamic Persia in the East. In Persia, the Zoroastrian religion prevailed and the Roman Byzantine Empire carried Christianity on its flags. These were two competing regional and perhaps world powers at that time. Palestine, Syria, and adjacent areas in the Near East seem to have been partly influenced and controlled be either of these big powers. The rulers of the Byzantine Roman Empire had certain Christianized and other pagan Arab-based tribes as their "vassals," the most prominent being the "Ghassanides." At the time, there were Arab-based tribes of similar ethnicity, linguistic backgrounds, and socioeconomic organization and production, but there was no common united Arab nation. These Arab-based vassals were military allies

of the Byzantine Roman Empire at the immediate outskirts of the borders of the Empire, having an important function as "watchers" and "guards" of border fortresses.

To the southwest, there was Christianized Egypt and Abyssinia (Ethiopia) to which reference is made at times in the Holy Qur'an. It even seems that early Muslims under persecution from their mainly Meccan-based opponents found refuge in Abyssinia and her Christian rulers. To the east, Mesopotamia still had its ancient non-Arab based Semitic culture and religion. And on the Arab peninsula itself, its inhabitants were divided into a variety of more or less powerful clans and tribes with a common linguistic background. The majority of these people were rooted in a nomadic Bedouin background. In some rural areas, the most prominent of which were Mecca with its Ka'aba and Yathroub (later called Medina), the inhabitants were mainly rich traders. The socio-culture of the inhabitants in the Arabian Peninsula was marked by polytheism.

The Qur'an makes occasional reference to pre-Islamic polytheistic-based deities. It also seems that Allah was one of the higher deities known. "Allah" is simply a word for "God." Its linguistic Semitic root is a cognate and related to the ancient Hebrew root *el* (God). The society seemed to have been a rather "lawless" society with the arrogance of arbitrary power of the stronger over the weaker ones. Women are reported to have been deprived of, and denied, any basic rights and social security in case of divorce from their husbands. Slaves were treated badly, and the rest of society largely depended on the good will and well-being of the ruling oligarchic elites. Thus, there is a certain justification in the claim of early Islam to have made an end to all this arbitrariness of rule in setting the first legal principles applicable to all irrespective of background, ethnic origin, and social standing. In relation to its time, these legal provisions provided a gradual progress for those having no rights at all. From a modern perspective, we may doubt all this with respect to the position of women in Islam. But in doing justice, we cannot assume modern 21st century Western standards when treating such progressive innovations Islam brought about in the early 7th century. In forthcoming units, we will elaborate on further details of such socio-cultural implications. At present we must confine ourselves to these rudimentary remarks.

B. Some Key Data on the Life of Muhammad and the Period of Early Islam

For convenience of reference, we provide here the following short table of data:

A.D. 570, April 20	Birth of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam (date commonly given)
A.D. 595	At the age of about 25, marriage with the rich widow Khadidja, Muhammad is entrusted with leading her caravans
A.D. 600+	Muhammad's first visions
A.D. 610	First claim of being the called Messenger of God, first disciples inside his family
A.D. 610-622	Early mission in and around Mecca, resistance from the ruling clans in Mecca, persecution
A.D. 622	The year of Hijra, escape from Mecca to Yathroub (later called "Medina," "city"). From Medina fighting against opponents to Islam in Mecca
A.D. 624	Battle at Badr, with the small troops of Muslims gaining victory over the troops of Meccan opponents; at Nahla, battle with Jews of Medina, successful for Muslims

A.D. 625	Battle at Uhud, with the Muslims loosing the battle; successful battle with the Nadir tribe (Banu Nadir)
A.D. 629	Expulsion of the last Jews from Khaibar, armistice with Meccan troops agreed at Hudeibia
A.D. 628-630	Stabilization of the early Islamic community; Muhammad sends envoys to the rulers of Yemen, Egypt, Abyssinia, Persia, and the Byzantine Roman Empire to convince them to accept Islam; members of the powerful Meccan-based Quraishite clan convert and accept Islam
A.D. 630	Muhammad and his followers return triumphantly to Mecca; Muslims win another battle at Honein
A.D. 630-631	Muslim conquering troops come as far as Tabuk, bordering with the Roman Byzantine Empire
A.D. 632	Muhammad's last but triumphant pilgrimage to Mecca, visiting the Ka'aba and preaching to thousands of listeners
A.D. 632, June 8	Death of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam in presence of his wife, Aisha
A.D. 632	Abu Bakr became the first Caliph (successor to the prophet)

Subsequently, two dynasties ruled the Muslim world after the institution of the Caliphate began to develop "dynastic" traits: the Omayyads (until 750), with all the main conquering of areas to be Islamized and Arabisized successfully done. The Omayads were succeeded by the Abbasides, the rule of whom lasted until 1240.

Unit 3. The Qur'an and Islamic Law

It is now time to take a closer look at the contents of the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, and to examine the function of law in Islam. Below is an outline of the material covered. To move quickly to the major points, click on the desired link.

I. The Qur'an and Its Contents
      A. Reading Assignment
      B. Study Activities
            1. Study activity 1
            2. Study activity 2
            3. Study activity 3
            4. Study activity 4
            5. Study activity 5
            6. Study activity 6
            7. Study activity 7
            8. Study activity 8

I. The Qur'an and Its Contents

Be reminded of what was said in the Introduction about the structure and contents of the Holy Qur'an. Eventually, you would like to re-study this section.

A. Reading Assignment

Now prepare to read Lippman, Chapter 3, pp. 56-69. In this text, Lippman discusses the status of the Qur'an as the Holy Book of Muslims (pp. 56-58), reflects on its translation into Western languages (pp. 58-59), and gives some information on the recitation of Qur'anic texts (pp. 59-61).

The compilation of the Qur'an was undertaken after the death of the prophet. Until then, all texts of the surahs known so far were only transmitted and delivered orally. The task of fixing the Qur'an into written form was begun in the period of the first caliph, Abu Bakr, and only completed by the time of third caliph, Uthman (644-656). The work was done by a committee under the guidance of Zaid Ibn (son of) Thabit, who was responsible for gathering all the text fragments from the memory of various people. The text was fixed first in a written form on parchment and bone. From these, an official complete Qur'anic text was made by careful editorial work, which then was declared official and binding under the third caliph. Some text critics claim that amendments on certain surahs were made. To those of Meccan (earlier) origin, pieces from the later Medinese period were added, and vice versa. More on the compilation of the Qur'anic text can be found in Lippman, pp. 61-68.

The need for commenting upon the Qur'anic texts by means of annotations was felt not much later. The tradition of commenting Qur'anic texts (known by the technical term *Tafseer*) dates back to 9th and 10th centuries, i.e. only three centuries after the earthly life of the prophet of Islam (cf. Lippman, pp. 68-69).

B. Study Activities

Now let us turn to the Qur'anic text directly and work on some selected reading. Hopefully, here you can begin to apply what you have learned and studied initially. For the following activities, you will need a copy of the Qur'an.

You may use any edition of the Holy Qur'an in either English or any other language, with or without parallel Arabic original text. However, we suggest strongly that you also make use of the Qur'anic text materials provided along with this course syllabus: a Freeware Program called "The Noble Qur'an" that gives the text of the Holy Qur'an in parallel English and Arabic original text. The English rendering of the text is found to be reliable with respect to the Arabic original (as much as it can be by way of "translation"). The English used here is easy to understand and free from linguistic archaisms such as "thou," "thee," "thy" for "you" and "your" commonly found in some English Bibles and Qur'an translations stemming from an earlier period of English. It also has a commentary providing important explanations

on the individual surahs and its verses. It has a search function to look up key terms in the text, and textual portions can be printed out. In fact, this program provides you with all that you need for your study activities. In quality, it can easily match with competing commercial programs.

Below are three procedures for accessing a copy of the Qur'an.

1. Internet link: To load directly from the website, click on http://www.islamasoft.co.uk/

2. Computer installation:

(1) Insert floppy disk or CD--in whatever form provided along with this course syllabus--into the appropriate drive of your PC (commonly A: for floppy disks and D: for CDS).

(2) Unzip the file provided along with this course syllabus into any sub-directory on the hard disk of your PC.

(3) Run Setup.exe. This will install the Noble Qur'an Program. It is recommended that you have a shortcut made to your desktop platform of WINDOWS 98. The program will work on all PCs with WINDOWS 98 or better.

3. Print version

Secure your own print copy of a Qur'an

You will be expected to make constant use of the Qur'an. Parts of the exam will also assume that you have constant and easy access to this source.

1. Study activity 1. Open Surah 1, Surah Al-Fatiha. It is a very short Surah that summarizes the essentials of Muslim faith. Read the surah in the English text (and compare with the Arabic text if you can). Then turn to the commentary. To do this, you need to follow a simple procedure:

1. After starting the program and the main window of the program is opened, click on "001-Al Fatiha" in the window to the left of your screen. The window with the text of Surah 1 will be loading and be displayed in the window to the right.

2. Then click on VIEW in the menu bar above and then on the menu option INFORMATION. The commentary window will be opening and display the commentary text on the surah text loaded.

3. For viewing the entire text in either window (surah or separate commentary window), scroll the window text. Now, read the text and then the commentary. Think about it. What does it say? What are the main topics treated in the surah? Obviously, the first part of the surah describes certain qualities attributed to Allah, the God revealing Himself by His Messenger of Islam. These attributes center around the Oneness of God. Now, try to answer the following questions:

a. What are the attributes of Allah referred to in this surah?
b. How do they account for the Oneness of Allah?
c. What is the topic in the latter part of the text?
d. Who are the two groups referred to in verse 7 of this surah--those who "have earned" His anger and those who went astray? And who are those upon whom Allah has bestowed His Grace in leading them in the right path? You should be able to answer these questions easily after having read attentively this short surah text and the commentary on it.

2. Study activity 2. Now study Surah 2, vv. 87, 136, 253; Surah 3, vv. 45, 48, 49, 52-3 and find out what these textual portions say about Jesus? Which basic differences/similarities do you find with respect to the Biblical account in the Greek Scriptures?

3. Study activity 3. Now do the same with respect to references concerning Noah in Surahs 3:93; 4:163; 6:84; 7:61, 69; 9:70; 10:71; 11:25.

4. Study activity 4. Use the Search Function in the Menu bar above and enter "Moses" (or "Musa") in the search field. Find the first 6 references, read the relevant verses of the surahs indicated, and give a summary of the statements on Moses found there.

5. Study activity 5. Do the same with respect to Abraham.

6. Study activity 6. Do the same with respect to Isaac.

7. Study activity 7. Do the same with respect to Joseph (son of Jacob).

8. Study activity 8. Now stop and think over for a moment what you have read and summed up. What basic difference you have found in the Qur'anic and the Biblical accounts of these patriarchs. What factors may have determined such differences?

II. Legal Provisions

"Islamic Law" has been of primary importance from the moment that the first rudiments of an Islamic community began to take shape. This was when the first Muslims found temporary refuge in Medina after the year of Hijra (622 A.D.). This was in view of two main objectives: (a) to give the new Islamic community a set of legal rules needed for the community to function, and (b) in terms of its contents and the spiritual intentions behind it, to provide a better order than that existing on the Arabian Peninsula. The old society had known no legal provisions and terms to protect the weak and the poor from the arbitrariness of power exercised by the ruling elites.

A. Reading Assignment

Prepare to read Chapter 4, "Law and Government in Islam," of Lippman's book, pp. 70-105. Note how Lippman develops the material covered in this chapter. He begins with a description of the sources of Islamic law and its status in Islamic society (pp. 70-74).

The concept of *shariah (*cf. pp. 71 below) is of primary importance in this context. In fact, it is not only secular but theocratic law, claimed to be of divine origin and given by Allah (God) with the purpose of benefiting man. Its detailed provisions mirror very much the kind of ideal theocratic society that Muhammad and his early followers may have had in mind in the early period of Islam. A theocratic society under the rule of law was to replace the old, lawless society giving no justice to anyone not in power and not forming part of the ruling elites, who were mainly clan-oriented and hereditary. Pay attention to the context of the question of law and justice. In the subsequent 8th and 9th centuries, different schools of thought evolved inside Islam centering on the topic of predestination and fatalism. This issue was linked in a controversial discussion with respect to the central doctrine of the Oneness of God. In turn, this led to the evolvement of different theological and Islamic legal schools of thought, finally ending in the question involving which parts of the Qur'anic text should be given a literal or an allegoric interpretation. This discussion around various exegetical-hermeneutical interpretative issues can more or less be regarded as a coincidental by-product of the discussion on justice and divine law under way. In consequence, this gave rise to different legal schools of thought (pp. 75-78). Certain legal provisions not laid down in the Qur'anic texts but applying to practical questions of secular life in society at that time needed clarification. This is where the Sunnah in form of the Ahadith comes in.

With respect to law and government in Islam, Lippman describes the Sunnah and Ahadith and other sources of law established and coming to be officially recognized during the course of time on the following pages (pp. 78-82). The different schools of law already referred to and having arisen in consequence of the issues first raised by the Mutazilites (cf. p. 75) are sketched briefly on pp. 82-86. The application of law and government in Islamic society/societies and the attitudes/approaches underlying it have, of course, changed during the course of time in 1400 years of Islamic history. Lippman now goes on to treat traditional approaches rooted in ancient theocratic Islamic society of the caliphs and, later, in relation to modern contemporary changes under the impression of the common popular call for democratic rights and their implementation in contemporary Islamic nations. This also includes the application of Islamic criminal law (cf. pp. 86-94). In terms of social law and etiquette, the status of women in Islamic society is a crucial and controversial one with respect to standards in Western contemporary secular society, but we Westerners should be very careful indeed in *a priori* assuming social backwardness in Islamic societies with respect to this question (cf. pp. 94-100). The same also applies with respect to the implementation of Shariah based law in contemporary societies (pp. 100-103). Some final statements on formal offices and functions in traditional Islamic society form the conclusion of this chapter (pp. 104-105).

B. Study Activities

Again, we will look at some selected textual portions from the Holy Qur'an with respect to legal provisions as laid down in the Qur'anic texts. In fact, they can be found more or less "scattered" around in various parts of various surahs. They may refer to such topics as legal provisions for widows, inheritance matters in the realm of "civil law," or the treatment of thieves in terms of Criminal Law.

1. Study activity 1. Study Surah 2:228, 231-32 et seq. with respect to legal provisions on divorce. Read the commentary notes and give a short summary of its contents.

2. Study activity 2. Study Surah 2:222 with respect to provisions for the menstruation of women. Proceed as indicated under Study Activity 1.

3. Study activity 3. Do the same with respect to legal provisions on orphans in Surahs 2:83, 177; 4:2,6,36.

4. Study activity 4. Do the same with respect to legal provisions on thieves in Surahs 3:7; 12:70, 73.

5. Study activity 5. Do the same with respect to provisions on witnesses in legal procedures in Surahs 2:285; 4:6, 15.

6. Study activity 6. Read Surah 4:135 and think over what this passage says on the principle of the rule of law that should dominate society. With respect to lawlessness in pre-Islamic society, what kind of relative progress did all those legal provisions present with respect to the legal provisions and the people concerned by it? If they were to be regarded as progressive in relation to *their time,* could they also be with respect to standards of contemporary Western secular society?