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**PRINCIPAL SECTS OF ISLAM: THEIR ORIGIN  
AND BELIEFS**

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**A thesis presented to  
The Faculty of Concordia Seminary  
Department of Old Testament Theology**

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**In partial fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree  
Bachelor of Divinity**

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**by  
John Gall  
May, 1948**

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DIFFERENT SECTS OF ISLAM: THEIR ORIGIN AND BELIEFS  
(Outline)

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**PRINCIPAL SECTS OF ISLAM: THEIR  
ORIGIN AND BELIEFS**

**I. Introduction**

Probably one of the most popular of the grounds of attack against Christianity is the fact that it is split into so many sects and factions. The sects in Christendom range the whole gamut from extreme liberalism to extreme fanaticism. This situation is certainly to be deplored, not only because it gives an opening for attack, but especially because it is our Savior's wish that Christians be like-minded one to another.<sup>1</sup>

There are a great many both in Christendom and outside of Christendom who seem to think that such divisions are to be found only in Christianity. However, this is not at all the case. The same phenomenon is encountered also in other religions of the world. This is especially true in Mohammedanism. As a matter of fact, Mohammed himself was astute enough to realize that his new-found religion would split up into many divisions. He is reported to have said:

"Verily, it will happen to my people even as it did to the children of Israel. The children of Israel were divided into seventy-two sects and my people will be divided into seventy-three. Every one of these sects will go to hell, except one sect."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> St. John 18:21

<sup>2</sup> Mishkat, Book I, Chap. 6, part 2, quoted by S.M. Zwemer, Islam: A Challenge to Faith, p. 134.



The number of sects, however, far exceeds the number that Mohammed predicted. Some Moslem scholars have prepared lists of the sects of Mohammedanism so that they number exactly seventy-three. But they are hard pressed to scale the actual number down to that sum. Actually, the sects of Islam outnumber the Christian sects. Sheikh Abd ul Kader stated that there were one hundred and fifty Mohammedan sects. Most of these believe that of all the sects only they have the correct way of salvation. There is much hatred, bloodshed and bitterness among them.<sup>1</sup>

What gave rise to all these divisions? Lammens wrote that the sects in Mohammedanism are not a result of doctrinal differences as they are in Christianity, but that political differences gave birth to the heresies and schisms.<sup>2</sup> The jealousy and rivalry of Mohammed's own family was the cause of the first great split.<sup>3</sup> At the death of the prophet there was one great question left unsolved: Who should the successor of Mohammed be as leader of Islam? As we shall later see in greater detail, the struggles for the

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<sup>1</sup> S.W. Zwemer, op. cit. p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> H. Lammens, Islam Beliefs and Institutions, p. 141.

<sup>3</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 136.



caliphate were the chief reason for many of the divisions.

There is another reason why many of the sects came into being. The Koran, which is the chief source of Mohammedan doctrine, is totally devoid of any system. It is a collection of stories, exhortations, denunciations, etc. Such a holy book was good enough for the simple Arab folk of Mohammed's day. But when Islam traveled to other countries and encountered Christianity with a fully formed system of doctrine, and also when it encountered the older Brahmanic and Zoroastrian thought, people of Islam began to ask questions and express doubts. Then, too, newly won converts in many cases were not ready to accept all of the Moslem teachings and some were ready to dispute orthodox Moslem belief. Thus, differences of opinion caused cut and dried divisions in Islam.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zwemer, op. cit., p. 135.



## II. The Sunnis or Orthodox Sect

Before any sort of an investigation into the sects of Mohammedanism can be made, it is necessary to know something of orthodox Moslem belief. For this reason, a brief statement of orthodox Moslem belief is made in this section of the paper before any of the sects are considered.

The orthodox sect of the Moslems is called the "Sunnis". This sect far out-numbers the others, numbering 150 million out of 235 million.<sup>1</sup> Their name is derived from the word "Sunna" which means "path" or the traditional practice of Mohammed. The Sunna is composed of the deeds, sayings, observances, and even the unspoken approval of Mohammed as set down in the "Hadith" or traditions. Thus, the Sunnis are those who do not deviate from the doctrine and practice of Mohammed. Great stress is laid on the words of Mohammed who is reported to have said that all those who tire of his Sunna do not belong to him.<sup>2</sup> Hence, it can be readily seen that the Sunnis are foes of all innovations.

The Sunna rose to such great importance quite naturally. While Mohammed was alive, all problems and difficulties were settled by him. Upon his death, however, there was no one

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<sup>1</sup> "Islam" in Encyclopedia Britannica, 14th ed., XII, p. 709.

<sup>2</sup> "Sunna" in Houtsma, Encyclopedia of Islam, IV, p. 555.



to take up this task. The Koran was the recognized authority, but it was found to be inadequate for solving all the problems arising in daily life among the early Moslems. For instance, the Koran enjoins prayer, but nowhere does it state how often the Moslem is to pray. It assumes that these details are already regulated by the prophet's example.<sup>1</sup>

The Sunna, then, is definitely a source of doctrine in Islam. Not only is the Sunna of Mohammed held as valid but the Sunna of the companions is likewise valid for the orthodox believers. The companions are those who visited the prophet and gained advice and favor from him. Agreement of these companions is considered infallible. Sometimes the Sunna of the immediate followers of the companions are also considered infallible.<sup>2</sup>

It has already been stated that the Sunna is derived from the Hadith. The Hadith consists of notes and observations written in the first century A.H. These notes concern the actions and teachings of Mohammed and his companions, and include all sorts of minute details. They record how Mohammed performed his prayers and ablutions, how he ate and dressed, and even the way he

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<sup>1</sup>

H. Lammens, op. cit. p. 67.

<sup>2</sup>

H. Lammens, op. cit. p. 68.



behaved at home and in public. It goes so far as to give the items in his wardrobe and the arrangements of his rooms.<sup>1</sup> All these traditions have been collected and they form, together with the commentaries on the traditions, an enormous library.

This mass of material was hastily collected and set down meticulously. Much was borrowed from the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Talmud. Whole quotations were often lifted from these sources.<sup>2</sup> From this mass of detail it was a simple matter for people to emphasize those sections of the Hadith which suited their purpose. When the various sects arose they were quick to utilize the traditions which suited them and to disregard the others.

To the Koran and the Sunna, the orthodox Moslems have added a third authority or basis of doctrine. This third authority is called Ijma', which is the justification of practice and belief by universal consent. Some of the practices and beliefs that have been justified in this manner are not consistent with the Koran or Hadith. As a matter of fact, many of the beliefs falling under Ijma' had their origin in pre-Islamic times and found their way into Islam by the path of

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 72.



converts. Moslem scholars have seen the difficulties of permitting Ijma' as an authority and have sought to make the consent more particular. As a result, some Sunnis recognize only the Ijma' of the teachers and doctors of Islam, while others seek to narrow it down still more by asserting that only the Ijma' of the people living in the city of Medina is valid.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth basis or authority of the Sunnis is "Qiyas" or analogy. This authority is the process of justifying a belief or a practice on the ground of something similar but not the same as items that are found in the Koran, the Sunna or Ijma'. Originally this authority seems to have been instituted as a check on private opinion. The institution of this authority caused another difficulty, however. That difficulty is the question where the line should be drawn. Endless analogies could be drawn from the other three authorities with full justification. Individuals anxious to spread their own ideas could easily find a basis for them. Therefore, Moslem theologians, realizing the difficulty, have sought to draw the line for the Qiyas somewhere. Some have said that the authority is valid only when there is a "material

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<sup>1</sup>"Islam" in Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit. p. 710.



similarity", while others go so far as to say that it is valid if the similarity is one of cause or motive as well.<sup>1</sup>

At different times during the history of Islam there have been different theological schools among the Sunni Moslems. All but four of these theological schools have died out.<sup>2</sup> These theological schools are not sects, though they have been called sects by some Islamic scholars. They agree in principle on all essentials, but have disputes on unimportant trivialities. For example, they argue over questions as: Should one first wash the elbow or wrist before prayer? Should a cat be permitted to enter a mosque? Each of these schools has its special place at the Kaaba in Mecca.<sup>3</sup> All four of those still in existence are represented at Al Azhar, the great Mohammedan university at Cairo.<sup>4</sup>

The Hanifite school, the first one of the four, holds sway in central Asia, northern India, and in Turkey.<sup>5</sup> The school was founded by Abu Hanifa

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1

Ibid.

2

"Fikh" in Houtsma, Encyclopedia Of Islam, op. cit. p. 104.

3

Zwemer, op. cit. p. 138.

4

"Fikh" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 104.

5

Zwemer, op. cit. p. 137.



who at one time was a slave but arose from his humble origin to become a scholar.<sup>1</sup> He attached very little importance to tradition and placed the emphasis on his own judgment.<sup>2</sup> It is doubtful whether Abu Hanifa himself ever wrote anything. However, his disciples did, and down to this day they teach the same doctrines that Abu Hanifa set down.

The second theological school of the Sunnis is the Shafi'ite school, founded by al-Shafi'i who was born about 150 A.H.<sup>3</sup> He sought to lay down rules for Qiyas or analogy so that the doctrine would not be abused. The adherents of this school are predominant in southern Arabia, Malay Archipelago, and in eastern Africa.<sup>4</sup>

The third great school of Moslem theologians was founded by Malik b. Anas who is frequently called simply "Imam of Medina."<sup>5</sup> He probably lived about the year 90 A.H. Many legends have sprung up about his life, such as the one which asserts that he spent three years in his mother's womb.<sup>6</sup> This teacher of theology gave more prominence to the practice in Medina at his time than he

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1

"Abu Hanifa", Houtsma, op. cit. p. 90.

2

"Islam", Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit. p. 709.

3

"Al-Shafi'i" in Houtsma, op. cit. III, 2, p. 205.

4

"Al-Shafi'i" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 253.

5

"Malik b. Anas," Houtsma, op. cit. p. 205.

6

"Malik b. Anas," Houtsma, op. cit. p. 206.



did to the Hadith, especially where the two differed. He believed in using private judgment to a large extent.<sup>1</sup>

The fourth and last theological school of the Sunnis is the Hanbalite school which is the strictest of the four schools.<sup>2</sup> This school was founded by Ibn Hanbal who was born in 164 A.H. and was a disciple of al-Shafi'i.<sup>3</sup> Ibn Hanbal wanted to derive all laws from traditional sources wherever possible and believed that private judgment should be used only at a minimum. His emphasis was always on the authority of the Hadith, and he went so far as to claim validity for traditions which had very little substantiation. He also taught that Ijma' was not a basis for Islamic doctrine.<sup>4</sup> The Hanbalites fought bitter hand-to-hand battles with the Shafi'ites in the fifth and sixth centuries.<sup>5</sup> The Hanbalites are confined to central and eastern Arabia.<sup>6</sup>

The Sunni Moslems have a very high estimate of their founder, Mohammed. Indeed, their estimation of him is much higher and they ascribe greater works and attributes to him than Mohammed ever claimed for

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<sup>1</sup> "Malik b. Anas", Houtsma, op. cit. p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> "Ahmed", Houtsma, op. cit. p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> "Ahmed", Houtsma, op. cit. p. 189.

<sup>5</sup> "al-Shafi'i", Houtsma, op. cit. p. 253.

<sup>6</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 138.



himself. The Koran gives us a good impression of what Mohammed thought himself to be.

"Mohammed is but an apostle. . ."<sup>1</sup>

". . . a man from amongst yourselves, to warn you, and that ye may fear. . ."<sup>2</sup>

". . . believe then in God, and His apestles, the illiterate prophet, . . ."<sup>3</sup>

From these passages it is evident that Mohammed thought of himself as an ordinary man sent by God. He claimed no divine attributes. When he was challenged to prove his apostleship by the performance of miracles, he admitted that he could do no miracles but pointed to the Koran as proof of his apostleship.<sup>4</sup> As a matter of fact, in the Koran Mohammed is directed a number of times to ask forgiveness from God, as for example, in sura 48:2. And yet, the Sunnis claim that he was sinless, that he had superhuman power which enabled him to perform many miracles, and they claim even that he was pre-existent, having existed before the creation of the world in the form of the "light of Mohammed."<sup>5</sup> As will be pointed out below,

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1

Note: All references and quotations of the Koran are from Palmer's translation. Sura 3:138.

2

Sura 7:61.

3

Sura 7:158. See also 7:156.

4

R.E. Hume, The World's Living Religions, p. 219.

5

Hume, op. cit. p. 220.



this phenomenon is not unique in Mohammedanism. Many extravagant claims are made for certain individuals even though the claims have no foundation on facts.

The orthodox Moslems have six cardinal beliefs which are binding on every Moslem. The first and most important of these beliefs is the doctrine that there is but one God, Allah. This doctrine forms the first half of the Moslem creed and is the main teaching of the Koran. Allah has seven important characteristics. He is absolutely unitary, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-speaking, all-knowing, all-willing, and all-powerful.<sup>1</sup> Love, kindness, mercy and like attributes are not deemed as essential to Allah, if, indeed, they are attributed to him at all. The average Sunni Mohammedan thinks of his God as an oriental despot whose will is law and who pre-determines all things. Hume summarizes the attributes of Allah very aptly when he says that Allah is represented as an "Arab sheikh glorified and magnified to cosmic proportions."<sup>2</sup> Salvation depends simply on submission to the will of this despot.

Allah has ninety-nine different names which are zealously repeated over and over again on the Moslem

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<sup>1</sup> Hume, op. cit. p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, op. cit. p. 225.



rosary. The most frequent of these names is "Lord". Others are: "The One," "The Mighty", "The Powerful", "The King", "The Compassionate", "The Merciful". He is also loving and forgiving. But his love is very limited since he loves only those who do good and follow Mohammed.<sup>1</sup> Not only are his love and forgiveness exclusive, but they are also arbitrary. He not only guides those he loves, but he misleads those whom he does not love.<sup>2</sup>

However, says the Sunni Moslem, when all is said and done, the attributes of God are really unknowable.<sup>3</sup> As a result of the work of the al-Ghazzali, the great philosopher of the Sunnis, the attributes of God are not above reason by opposed to reason. Common sense, for instance, is looked upon as a human attribute, and the reverse is always expected from the deity. God's ways, therefore, are unpredictable and unknowable.<sup>4</sup>

The second important doctrine of the Sunnis is the doctrine of the Koran. It has already been stated above that this is the most important authority of the Mohammedans since it is the revelation of Allah through the mouth of his Prophet, Mohammed. As part of this

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<sup>1</sup> Hume, op. cit. p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> Sura 13:33, 14:32.

<sup>3</sup> T.J. Browne, The Prospects of Islam, p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 137.



doctrine, the Sunnis believe that Allah has sent down various books to the people on earth among them being the "Torah" of the Hebrews which Allah revealed to Moses, the Psalms which he revealed to David, the Evangel (Injil) which was revealed to Jesus, and lastly the Koran, the most perfect of these revelations which nullifies the rest, was revealed to Mohammed.<sup>1</sup>

In the Koran the main speaker is Allah. Sometimes he is represented as speaking to Mohammed and sometimes as bidding Mohammed to speak as the mouthpiece of God. The book is made up of 114 suras or chapters which together form a book slightly shorter than the New Testament. The suras are arranged in order according to their length, except for the first sura which serves as an introduction. More than one hundred passages of the Koran refer to its excellence. Theologians claim plenary inspiration, verbal infallibility, and self-attesting truth for it.<sup>2</sup>

Traditional Arabic beliefs and folk-lore can be found in the Koran. Some elements originally may have been Zoroastrian. Many references to the persons and events of the Old Testament are made and there are also many allusions to the New Testament and to Christianity in general.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>  
Hume, op. cit. p. 226.

<sup>2</sup>  
Hume, op. cit. p. 222.

<sup>3</sup>  
Hume, op. cit. p. 221.



The third cardinal doctrine of the orthodox Moslems is their belief in angels. According to the doctrine, there are three different types or kinds of spiritual beings: angels, jinn, and devils. Belief in these beings is not merely theory, but it is a practical belief which touches the everyday life of the Sunnis.<sup>1</sup> The angels are numerous, their chief work being intercession with Allah for the forgiveness of men.<sup>2</sup> There are four archangels. Gabriel reveals the truth, Michael is the protector of the Jews, Israfil who will sound the trumpet on the last day, and Israil is the angel of death.<sup>3</sup> Eight angels support the throne of Allah while nineteen guard hell.<sup>4</sup> The angels also assist in the punishment of the non-Moslems at the judgment.<sup>5</sup>

The jinn are either good or evil. They are a group of spirits midway between men and angels, some of whom have become Moslems.<sup>6</sup> Solomon is the lord of the jinn, who are mortal and able to propogate. One of these jinn was expelled from the Garden of Eden when he refused to prostrate himself before Adam at God's command.<sup>7</sup> This jinn became

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<sup>1</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Sura 42:3

<sup>3</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 88

<sup>4</sup> Hume, op. cit. p. 225.

<sup>5</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p 88.

<sup>6</sup> Suras 46 and 72.

<sup>7</sup> Sura 7:10-17.



the devil whose proper name is Azazil. He is surrounded and served by his satanic hosts.<sup>1</sup>

Belief in the prophets of Allah constitutes the fourth main doctrine of the Sunnis. The Moslems divide them into two main parts; the major prophets and the minor prophets. Adam, the chosen of God, Noah, the preacher of God; Abraham, the friend of God, Moses, the spokesman of God; Jesus, the spirit of God; and Mohammed, the apostle of God are the major prophets with their specific titles.<sup>2</sup> Twenty-two others mentioned in the Koran are minor prophets. Among these are Enoch, Ishmael, Aaron, John the Baptist, David and Solomon. Moslems say they love all the prophets, but Mohammed is above them all.<sup>3</sup> He is the last, "the seal" of the prophets whose way was prepared and who was attested to by all the prophets before him. Incidentally, it might be interesting to note that Alexander and Aesop are also considered as minor prophets, although in all fairness, it should be stated that some Moslems doubt whether they really were prophets.<sup>4</sup>

The fifth great doctrine of the Sunnis is the belief in judgment. This doctrine with its horrible

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1

Ibid.

2

Zwemer, op. cit. p. 91

3

Ibid.

4

Ibid.



and vivid descriptions occupies much space in the Koran. Moslems believe in a literal resurrection of the body from a living principle which is situated in the sacral bone.<sup>1</sup> Paradise, a place of sensual pleasures, awaits those who have been pious believers during their lifetime. More than twenty passages in the Koran refer to the gardens, flowing rivers, luxurious food, and other sensual pleasures in paradise. Wine and beautiful maidens abound there. According to al-Ghazzali the believer in paradise will marry five hundred houris, four thousand virgins, and eight thousand divorced women.<sup>2</sup> In this connection Ghazzali quotes the words, "Things which eye saw not and which did not enter the heart of man!"<sup>3</sup>

Hell is the everlasting place for the wicked, i.e., those who did not believe in the tenets of Mohammedanism. It is a place of eternal fire, terribly hot, where the evil-doers broil and roast and where serpents and scorpions sting their victims. The drink of the inhabitants of hell is described as being liquid pus!

The doctrine of the pre-determination of all things forms the sixth article of Moslem faith. This is the "keystone" of the whole structure of Mohammedanism.<sup>4</sup> The Koran sets forth this doctrine in the following

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<sup>1</sup> Hume, op. cit. p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 94.

<sup>3</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



passages and in others much like them:

"It is not for any soul to die, save by God's permission written down for an appointed time.<sup>1</sup>

Nought shall befall us save what God has written down for us.<sup>2</sup>

This is the only philosophy of orthodox Islam and has very disastrous effects on the Moslems' daily life. This teaching resolves itself into pure fatalism. All freedom of will is denied. God wills both good and evil. For this reason progress has been paralyzed and hope has died in Islam. The deadening influence of fatalism is felt in every Moslem land.<sup>3</sup>

Along with the six cardinal doctrines of Islam, there are five essential duties usually referred to as "pillars," that every good Moslem must carry out. The first of these duties is the daily repetition of the Moslem Creed. "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is the prophet of Allah". This creed is not found in the Koran, but its two parts recur frequently. A repetition of this creed is accepted as conversion to Islam.

Prayer is the second pillar. The traditions decree that each believer must pray five times daily facing Mecca, the birthplace of Mohammed and resting place of the Kaaba. The Moslem may pray wherever he happens to

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1

Sura 3:139.

2

Sura 2:51

3

Zwemer, op. cit. p. 95.



be, but must be ceremonially clean. All sorts of ablutions and motions are connected with these prayers which often do not amount to any more than a mechanical repetition of set prayers in a language not understood by the worshipper.<sup>1</sup>

Almsgiving, the third pillar of orthodox Islam, is binding upon every believer; sura 8:42 states, ". . . and know that whenever ye seize anything as a spoil, to God belongs a fifth thereof, and to his apostle, and to kindred and orphans, and the poor and the wayfarer. . . ." However, there is no set proportion of the Moslem's income to be given for alms in the Koran. Thus, the example of the prophet is used as the criterion. But there is much disagreement as to what the rate Mohammed gave really was. One fortieth of the total income is about the usual rate.<sup>2</sup> Almsgiving is also a requirement of all new converts.

All Mohammedans are obligated to fast from dawn to sunset every day during the month of Ramadan, the ninth of the Moslem calendar. This fast is the fourth pillar of Islam. Since the calendar is lunar, the month sometimes falls in the middle of summer when the

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<sup>1</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 104.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 109.



heat is oppressive. Yet, even then the Moslem is to partake of no food or water during the daylight hours. However, there is much feasting and merrymaking at night.

During his life-time the believer should make the pilgrimage to Mecca, for this is the fifth duty of the Moslem. It is commanded in the Koran in sura 22:28 and 3:91. The words of the latter passage are, "There is due from man a pilgrimage to the House, for whosoever can find his way there." It is permissible for a Moslem to fulfill this duty by hiring someone to make the pilgrimage to Mecca in his stead and perform all the ceremonies at the Kaaba such as kissing it and circumambulating it seven times.<sup>1</sup>

So much for the orthodox faith of the Sunnis. It should be borne in mind that among them there are many shades of strictness and liberalism. There are those who say that some of the tenets stated above are not binding and should, in fact, be discarded in this modern day and age. Others vehemently denounce such liberalism and claim that only what was believed and practiced during the lifetime of Mohammed in Arabia is true orthodox Mohammedanism. These are the two extremes.

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<sup>1</sup>

Hume, op cit. p. 229.



### III. Sects Arising from Political Differences in Islam

We have mentioned above the fact that the chief cause of divisions in Islam was political. Most of the sects, though not all, were brought into being because of disputes over questions involving the caliphate. Some knowledge of the historical background will be necessary to set the stage for consideration of the sects which have sprung up because of political disputes.

Even during the lifetime of Mohammed the Moslem community divided itself into parties. The line of division between the parties was not very distinct as yet, but there was, nevertheless, a faint one. Probably the chief reason for the existence of these parties was the knowledge that the prophet would not live forever and that the Moslem community would need a leader after his death. Who would be the successor? There were two men who had reasonable claims to succeed Mohammed. One was Abu Bakr who was an early convert to the precepts of Mohammed and who was respected by all who knew him for his faithfulness and sound judgment. He became the chief adviser and closest friend of the prophet. In addition to this, Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr became the favorite wife of Mohammed, an



occurrence which strengthened the claim of Abu Bakr not a little. On the other hand, Ali was the closest blood relation of the founder of Islam. He was reputedly the first convert to Islam after Khadijah, the first wife of Mohammed, and what was even more important, Ali married Fatimah, the daughter of Mohammed. Mohammed himself had no living sons. However he had two fine grandsons, sons of Ali and Fatimah. Was it not natural that the leadership of Islam should go to Ali, the nearest blood relation of Mohammed, and then descend to one of his grandsons?

There were a number of incidents which aggravated the division between the two parties during the life-time of Mohammed. One incident especially is made much of by Islamic scholars. It was the habit of Mohammed, so the story goes, to take along one of his wives whenever he went on an extended trip. On one of these trips, taken to put down a rebellion, he took along Aisha, the daughter of Abu Bakr. She was carried on a covered litter in order to make the journey as pleasant as possible. The mission of the journey was accomplished and on the way back the party camped for the night. The next morning Aisha left her litter and walked out of sight into the desert to perform a natural function. When she returned she found that her necklace was gone. She walked back to look for it. During her absence the camp broke up, and the company began to move on. The litter bearers, seeing that Aisha had entered the litter the first time,



thought she was still there, and they also moved on. When Aisha returned she found the company gone without her. Knowing that someone would return for her as soon as her absence was discovered, she lay down on the sand and fell asleep. Presently, she was awakened by a young Moslem who was not a part of the company. He brought her back. But then the talk began. What was Aisha doing in the desert with the young Moslem? It was to Ali's advantage to discredit Aisha which would in turn discredit Abu Bakr. This caused a wider rift between the parties. Aisha hated Ali more than ever.<sup>1</sup>

At the death of Mohammed, Abu Bakr became the first caliph. He was succeeded by Umar and Uthman. The party of Ali still sought its opportunity. Uthman, for various reasons, was an unpopular leader. He was asked to abdicate but refused to do so. Finally, Uthman was murdered at the instigation of the party of Ali and others who were dissatisfied with the bad rule of Uthman.<sup>2</sup> Much to the displeasure of Aisha, Ali became Caliph. She, under the pretext of avenging the death of Uthman, gathered an army and fought the forces of Ali at the Battle of the Camel and lost the battle. Ali treated her kindly after her capture.

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<sup>1</sup>

E. Bey, Mohammed, pp. 230-31.

<sup>2</sup>

N. Abbott, Aisha, the Beloved of Mohammed, pp. 125ff.



During the Caliphate of Ali, Muawiyah Abu Sufyan, governor of Syria, coveted the caliphate. He gathered an army to fight Ali. Again Ali was victorious, but he came out second best in the negotiations. In 39 A.H. Ali was murdered by a fanatic and Abu Sufyan ascended the throne. He was a member of the hated Ummayad family. Civil war raged for forty years in Islam. During the war Hasan and Husain, sons of Ali, fell at the hands of the Ummayads.<sup>1</sup>

Ali's war with Abu Sufyan resulted in a schism. The differences between the two men were entrusted to two referees for settlement according to the Koran. Ali's army consented to this procedure except for one segment that broke away because they rebelled against the idea of human judgment being placed above the Koran. "Judgment belongs to God alone," they said.<sup>2</sup> This segment left the army and withdrew to the village of Harura near Kufa. They called themselves the al-Hurariya or al-Muhakkima, holding as their chief principle the phrase above. The judgment of the two referees went against Ali. As a result of this, another larger segment broke away from Ali's army and joined the al-Hurariya. They later came to be known as Kharijites, i.e., "Those who have sold their souls for God's cause."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> E. Bey, op. cit. pp. 306-8.

<sup>2</sup> "Kharijites", Houtsma, op. cit. p. 904.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



The community of the Kharijites became theoretically very democratic. They said that the leadership of Islam was not to be limited to any family or tribe, but that the caliph should be elected by the believers from among the worthiest of the Moslems. Even negroes should have a right to the caliphate, they said.<sup>1</sup> This pronouncement was against the popular belief that the caliph had to come from the tribe of Koreish, which was the tribe of Mohammed.

Their democratic ideas attracted many other adherents. Many dissatisfied people and even non-Arabs were among the number. The Kharijites were extremely fanatic. They plundered and murdered unmercifully. Everyone who did not accept the opinions of the Kharijites was branded as an infidel by them. Their fanaticism coupled with growing numbers made them a force to be reckoned with. Ali became alarmed. He gathered his army to destroy them. He killed a majority of them but not without heavy losses of his own number. But the remainder of the Kharijites continued to kill and plunder and it was one of their own number who finally assassinated Ali.<sup>2</sup>

The Kharijites kept on playing a big part in Islamic history, but we are more concerned with their beliefs. All

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> "Kharijites", op. cit. p. 904.



of them agree that anyone who has the necessary moral and religious qualifications can be a caliph. Hence, they say that only the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar were valid and only part of the caliphates of Uthman and Ali were valid. They proclaim that besides those, only their own leaders have been legitimate caliphs. Their agreement on the doctrine of the caliphate, however, seems to be virtually the only thing on which they do agree.<sup>1</sup> They have never had true military, political, or doctrinal unity. Some authorities claim that the Kharijite sect is divided into no less than twenty sects, while others assert that there is only one sect but many differences of belief in that one sect.

The Kharijites greatly stress the doctrine of salvation by works. Morally they are very strict, refusing to call anyone who has committed a mortal sin a believer. One group of the Kharijites says that one who has become an infidel by committing a mortal sin can never re-enter the faith and should be killed along with his wife and children. They regard all Moslems other than themselves as apostates and justify the principle of religious murder.

They are, however, very tolerant to Christians and Jews. Some Kharijites regard all who will say, "Allah

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<sup>1</sup>

Ibid.



is God and Mohammed is his prophet to the Arabs, but not to us" on an equal plane with themselves. Some of them go so far as to state that Allah will reveal a new Koran to the Persians and that he will found a religion for them as divine as Christianity, Judaism and Islam.<sup>1</sup>

The Kharijite sect reverences the Koran but this has not stopped them from deleting sura XII from it because of its worldly nature which could not possibly come from Allah. They refuse also to admit that the Koran is uncreated. They deny that Mohammed intercedes for the believers; they denounce the cult of saints in Islam and pilgrimages to their tombs. The denounce also the Sufi fraternities.<sup>2</sup>

The Abadites or Ibadites, a branch of Kharijites, have developed especially among the Berbers, and this sect has become a national one with them. They are also found in Oman in Arabia. The Abadites resent being called heretics by the Sunnis. They claim that they alone of all the many Moslem sects have the right to salvation. They believe that Allah pardons venial but not mortal sins unless they are blotted out by repentance. They further believe that it is their duty and the duty of every Moslem to enjoin good and reprove evil at every opportunity. They have a type of excommunication in their ritual.

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<sup>1</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>

Lammens, op. cit. p. 142.



This sect recognizes the Koran and Hadith but rejects Qiyas and Ijma'.<sup>1</sup>

Except for these general principles, not much is known about their beliefs.<sup>2</sup> They keep their beliefs jealously and do not mix with the orthodox. Marriage with them is a rare exception and frowned upon by the community. These practices make them a homogeneous group easily distinguished from the Sunnis of north Africa by their behavior, character, and tendencies. The Abadites in Arabia have split into several sects among which are the Hafsiya, Harithiya, and Yazidiya.<sup>3</sup> Those in north Africa have split up into the Nakharites, Khalifites, and Nafathites.<sup>4</sup>

The great political question of Islam, "Who should be the successor of Mohammed?" eventually caused a larger schism than that of the Kharijites. The party of Ali did not die out after he was murdered. On the contrary, it became more aggressive and the split became wider and wider until it solidified into the Shiah sect.

The Shiah sect, or the Shi'ites, lay great emphasis on a tradition that when Mohammed was returning from his farewell pilgrimage to Mecca, he stopped at the place called Ghadir Khum, and there announced that he wanted Ali, his son-in-law and cousin, to be his successor.

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<sup>1</sup> "Abadites" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Kharijites" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 904.

<sup>3</sup> "al-Ibadiya" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 350.

<sup>4</sup> "Abadites" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 1.



The precise words of Mohammed are reported to be: "Whoever recognizes me as his master, will know Ali as his master."<sup>1</sup> That this really did happen is entirely possible.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, though it is generally conceded that Mohammed died in the arms of his beloved Aisha, the Shi'ites have another tradition which gives prominence to Fatimah and Ali during the last moments of the prophet. The tradition is ascribed to Ali and is recorded by several Shi'ite authorities. It states that Mohammed died with Ali and Fatimah ministering to him and sorrowing over him. At that time the dying prophet is said to have predicted that Fatimah would be first to follow him to the grave.<sup>3</sup>

Later during the caliphate of Uthman an itinerent preacher by the name of Abd Allah ibn Saba achieved some prominence. He took a leading part in the conspiracy in favor of Ali. Among other things he taught that the first three caliphs were usurpers, that every prophet had a "wasi" or executor, and that Ali was the executor of Mohammed. He further preached that "the divine Spirit, which dwells in every prophet and passes successively from one to another, was transferred at Mohammed's death to Ali, and from

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<sup>1</sup> D.M. Donaldson, The Shi'ite Religion, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 8-9.



Ali into his descendants who succeeded him in the Imamate (caliphate)."<sup>1</sup>

These teachings took hold among some of the party of Ali and were expanded by them.

During succeeding years many legends sprung up about Ali. They extolled his might and bravery in battle and recorded glorious feats, which he performed. According to these legends Ali was also mighty with the pen, and, among other writings, helped formulate the first grammar in Arabic. Another of his literary accomplishments is said to be a secret book which contained all the knowledge of the prophets, of the representatives of the prophets, and of the scholars of Israel. This book was left in the hands of his successors to the Imamate who continually referred to it for aid and counsel.<sup>2</sup>

The Shi'ites further teach that when Mohammed took his trip through heaven, Jesus, Moses and Abraham all inquired about the health of Ali, and that they congratulated Mohammed on having picked such a fine successor. They Shi'ites also state that the prophet once said, "There is no God but God, Mohammed is the Apostle of God, and Ali ibn Abu Talib is the commander of the Faithful."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 48-9.

<sup>3</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 53.



Thus the Shi'ites have expanded and developed their doctrines. They have also grown in number so that this sect is now the largest of the heterodox sects. S.M. Zwemer wrote that they number about twelve million. Lammens lists them as having seven million adherents in Iran, five million in Iraq. It is the state religion of Iran (Persia).<sup>1</sup> Their subdivisions are also numerous though there is disagreement as to the actual number of divisions among the Shi'ites. Zwemer states that there are thirty-two of them,<sup>2</sup> but Lammens states that there are about seventy sub-sects each anathematizing the others.<sup>3</sup> Be that as it may, the differences among them are great and varied. The sect consists largely of Persians who brought their old religious and political doctrines with them when converted to the new faith.<sup>4</sup>

There are five fundamental doctrines in Shi'ite theology. These are: the unity of God, the justice of God, the authority of the prophet, the Imamate, and the Resurrection.<sup>5</sup> Of these five doctrines only one is not found in Sunni theology.

<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> "Islam" Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit. p. 710.

<sup>5</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 364.



This doctrine is the Imamate which forms the center of Shi'ite theology and gets the most emphasis from their theologians. The doctrine of the Imamate is a development of the belief that Ali was the true successor of Mohammed and, therefore, the first caliph. The Shi'ites have expanded and added to the caliphate until now it is their most important doctrine. It gradually arose from the idea that in the house of Ali there was a particle of divinity which passed on from generation to generation.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the only true caliphs or Imams according to the Shi'ites are Ali and his descendents. Following is a list of the twelve Imams of the Shi'ites.<sup>2</sup>

1. Ali, son-in-law of the prophet
2. Al-Hasan, son of Ali
3. Al-Husain, second son of Ali
4. Ali, surnamed Zainu'l-abidin, son of Al-Husain
5. Muhammad al-Bagir, son of Zainu'l-abidin
6. Ja'far as-Sadiq, son of Muhammad al-Bagir
7. Musa al-Kazim, son of Ja'far
8. Ar-Reza, son of Musa
9. Muhammad at-Taqi, son of Ar-Reza
10. Ali an-Naqi, son of Muhammad at Taqi
11. Al-Hasan al-'Ashari, son of Ali an-Naqi
12. Muhammad, son of Al-Hasan al-Ashari

According to the Shi'ites the Imams are necessary for salvation for several reasons. They protect the believers from evil, they guard the law, restrain men from violence, oppression and disobedience. Imam is the instrument of God on earth through whom God causes

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<sup>1</sup>

Zwemer, Across the World of Islam, p. 284.

<sup>2</sup>

Zwemer, op. cit. p. 285.



his kindness to flow. The Imam is also the proof of God on earth.<sup>1</sup> The Imam is perfect in all things and entirely free from sin.<sup>2</sup> The real origin of this belief is in the Shi'ite interpretation of the Koran, especially sura 2:118. The Imams are mediators in the same way that Mohammed is the mediator of modern orthodox Islam. They are addressed in prayer and the belief is popular that there is no salvation outside of the Imams.<sup>3</sup>

The doctrine of the hidden Imam is also common among all orthodox Shi'ites. This doctrine was also a development and arose from the fact that the twelfth Imam died without children. Seeing themselves without a leader, the Shi'ites invented this doctrine,<sup>4</sup> which states that the last Imam was a mysterious person who is immune to death. He disappeared in the year 365 A.H. and is believed to be still alive and ruling the Shi'ite community by choosing various men from time to time to carry out his bidding.<sup>5</sup>

The hidden Imam will come into the world again near the end of time as the Mahdi, an eschatological individual that Mohammed said would come with good news in the last

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 307.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 314.

<sup>3</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 320.

<sup>4</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 146.

<sup>5</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 150.



days.<sup>1</sup> The Mahdi will usher in the golden days of Islam. He will rule over all Moslem kingdoms in righteousness. He will be a real guide to men and make the life of all living pleasant. Much rain will fall during the Mahdi's days. The concensus of opinion seems to be that he will rule for seven years and then die.

Many traditions have been built around the figure of the twelfth Imam or Mahdi. Upon his birth he is said to have spoken in fluent Arabic, "Praise to God, the Lord of the Worlds, and salutation to Muhammad, and his family."<sup>2</sup> Angels instructed him from birth. Apparently, the eleventh Imam, the father of the Mahdi, died while the latter was still young and a short time later, the Mahdi himself died.

Belief in the Mahdi has penetrated orthodox Sunni belief but has not assumed great importance and is not considered an article of faith.<sup>3</sup> Some of the Sunnis say he will be the precursor to the end of the world, others claim that he will be the restorer of Islam, and still others seem to identify him with the second coming of Jesus, who will come again, marry, and raise a family. From time to time self-styled Mahdis have appeared and have exhorted the people and succeeded only in causing unrest.

The Shi'ites have the Koran and the "Akhbar" as

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 150.



their authorities. The Akhbar corresponds to the Hadith of the Sunnis and are filled with Shi'ite traditions fully as extensive as the Hadith. Their exegesis of the Koran is described by Lammens as being very often "puerile." Their sole object in dealing with the Koran seems to be to find grounds for belief in the doctrine of the Imamate. In order to do this more easily they employ allegorical interpretation. For example, the cow which is to be sacrificed is interpreted by the Shi'ites to mean Aisha, the mortal enemy of Ali.<sup>1</sup>

The Koran to the Shi'ites is not the first or the best version. They assume variant readings and slip in glosses. Much to the embarrassment of the Shi'ite theologians, Ali is not mentioned in the Koran. But by using allegorical interpretations and sometimes even doing violence to the text they try to substantiate Ali's claim and the doctrine of the Imamate.

The Shi'ites have some interesting ceremonies in connection with their worship. Some of these ceremonies are performed at the various shrines which the Shi'ites hold in high regard. One of the most important of these shrines is at Kerbala where Hasan and Husain fell in battle at the hands of the Ummayyads. Thousands of faithful Shi'ites make pilgrimages to Kerbala every year. These people are in

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<sup>1</sup>  
Lammens, op. cit. p. 153.



many cases old and weak, whose life ambition is being realized. Visit to this shrine guarantees the pilgrim certain privileges. Among these are assurance that the roof of the pilgrim's house will never fall on his head, that he will never be drowned, burned or injured by wild beasts.<sup>1</sup>

All of Kerbala is sacred. However, the area around the tomb of Husain is especially sacred. This area is marked off by chains. If any unbeliever steps upon this sacred ground, the penalty is death by mob violence. Clay is taken from the ground where Husain died and made into rosaries. These rosaries consist of thirty-four beads. For each bead phrases such as "God is great" or "Praise to God" are repeated. Traditions say that four thousand angels surround the tomb weeping night and day because of the great tragedy that befell him. Angels also go to meet the pilgrims who come to this tomb and they pardon the sins of the pilgrims for the next fifty years.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes additional years of life are given to a particularly pious pilgrim to this spot. A pilgrimage to the tomb of Husain is equal in merit to the total merits of one thousand pilgrimages to Mecca, one thousand martyrdoms, one thousand days of fasting, and of freeing one thousand slaves. In addition, the

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 93.



pilgrim is protected from evil spirits for a full year. In the event that the pious pilgrim dies within a year, the angels will see to his being buried.

Many traditions and legends claim that angels began to prepare for the burial of Husain a thousand years before his death. For that occasion they brought back sacred dust from Jerusalem to Kerbala. Then, too, according to these legends, the Virgin Mary miraculously came from Damascus to visit Kerbala and she bore Jesus on the very spot where Husain was to be buried.

For a Shi'ite to be buried within the sacred precincts is very efficacious, but costs at least five hundred rupees. The bodies are placed in boxes and stacked up in a vast underground cave. No higher honor could come to any Shi'ite than to be buried there.<sup>1</sup>

In commemoration of the deaths of Hasan and Husain there is a Passion Play held by the Shi'ites on Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram which is the day that some Shi'ites accept as being the day when Adam and Eve were created. A description of this Passion Play might be both interesting and enlightening.<sup>2</sup>

The preparations for this play go on for a week or more and include singing, parading, and acting out the death of Mohammed. On the tenth of Muharram the Play

<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> "The Passion Play of Islam" in The Moslem World, XXII, p.3.



actually begins. It is divided into two parts; the first is a dramatization of scenes that led up to the death of the two patron saints. This part consists of many horses and camels, lavishly decorated. Two of the horses are riderless. Their masters, Hasan and Husain, have been slain in battle. The scenes move down the main street of the village until the second section comes along. This section consists of mourners who fall into four types: the chest beaters, chain beaters, head cutters, and mud throwers. These mourners try to share in the suffering which the saints have endured. Each mosque enters a group into each of the four types of mourners. Each group tries to outdo the other in inflicting punishment upon themselves. Only men and boys take part in this play.

The chest beaters are so called because they strip to the waist and inflict punishment on themselves by slapping their hands against their chests. In time to the beating of a drum, the tempo is increased so that they beat themselves faster and harder. The second type, the chain beaters, beat their backs with chains. The chain is made by hand from bale wire and weighs almost four pounds. In time to the drum they sling the chain across one shoulder and then



the other, the chain striking their naked backs. They do this harder and faster until their backs are purple and mangled. The most distressing of the four types are the head cutters. Each participant wears a long white apron hanging almost to the ground. These white aprons catch the blood from the cuts which are self-inflicted with sharp two-edged knives or bayonets to the tempo of the drums. These men work themselves into a frenzy. Some have to be stopped in order that they may not destroy themselves. Some faint because of loss of blood and have to be carried away. The mud throwers cover themselves with mud and straw and walk along weeping and wailing which moves the crowd to do likewise. Tears from these mourners are collected in bottles because they believe them to be very efficacious in healing. The whole procession stops when the predetermined terminating point is reached and verses from the Koran are then recited in unison. This Passion Play always ends in some deaths and suffering from infected wounds. In some cities this Play has been outlawed.

Faithful Shi'ites also make pilgrimages to the tomb of Ali at Najaf. It is written that whoever visits this tomb of his own free will, believing that Ali was the true Imam, will receive merit equal to one hundred



thousand martyrdoms. Many traditions have also arisen about Najaf including one that Abraham and Isaac visited and lived there for a time, and that Abraham bought a valley near the town because he knew that Ali would one day be buried there.<sup>1</sup>

The ethics of the Shi'ites are lower than those of the Sunnis.<sup>2</sup> They practice the doctrine of "kitman" or secrecy. The Hanifite school of Sunni theologians make legal a mental reservation where personal safety or protection of one's relatives is involved. The Shi'ites go far beyond the Hanifites in this, however. The Shi'ite not only feels it his privilege but his duty, to hide his religious beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Among his enemies he is entitled to speak and act as one of them. In this connection it is perfectly proper for him to bear false witness or commit perjury. The Shi'ites claim that this type of religious deception was also practiced by Abraham, David, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed. This has a tremendous lowering effect on character. All sincerity and honesty is undermined. A missionary among them says that religious deceptions is as common among them as tea drinking and that it hinders the work of missionaries very greatly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. pp. 54-5.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 286.

<sup>3</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 286-7.



Part of their low ethical standard is due to the custom of temporary marriages. This is a wide-spread practice and Zwemer claims that it is nothing but a cloak for adultery. Their interpretation of sura 2:222 is supposed to drag marriage down into depths of licentiousness that is unmentionable but prevalent everywhere among the Shi'ites.

Since the Shi'ites are so slip-shod in their beliefs, one might be led to assume that they are more tolerant of other religions than the orthodox Mohammedans. But this is not the case. On the contrary, they are markedly more intolerant toward other religions than the other sects. They follow a literal interpretation of the Koran which states that the infidel is unclean and that touching him is a moral defilement. They refuse to eat food from a utensil touched by the infidels or partake of food when one of them has prepared it.<sup>1</sup> They curse all enemies of Ali, that is, those who do not uphold his cause, even though they may be friends of the prophet, Mohammed.

Shi'ite doctrine has run to all extremes. For example, in the eighteenth century a school of Shi'ite theologians arose who believed that the body of man was composed of the nine heavens and the four elements. They regarded the Imams as creative forces working

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 154.



with Allah. In fact, according to them, the twelve Imams were the "effective cause of creation" since they are the interpreters of God's will. The leader of these theologians was Sheikh Ahmed Ahsai who was declared to be a heretic when he was seventy-five years old.<sup>1</sup> At his death there was no successor until Mirza Ali Muhammad proclaimed himself the "Bab" or gate. This man and his claims will be discussed more fully below.

Many schisms have occurred in the Shiah sect. Among those who have broken off from the Shi'ites are the Ismailis. This sect arose when the sixth of the Imams of the Shi'ites died. The Shi'ites accepted Musa al-Kazim as their seventh Imam, but a group contested this decision and claimed that Ismail was the true seventh Imam. This was greatly disputed because Ismail either was disowned by his father or death came to him before it came to his father.<sup>2</sup> The group who held that Ismail was the true Imam broke away and became the Ismailis or the "Seveners" because they accept only seven Imams.

This sect has had a long and varied history. They would have sunk into obscurity or died out altogether if it were not for the fact that the Carmathians seized

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<sup>1</sup> Donaldson, op. cit. p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 156.



control over it. Under them the sect turned into a receptacle for all malcontents. During the ninth and tenth centuries this sect engaged in violent revolution which drenched Syria in blood and finally overthrew the Abbasid Caliphate. They ushered in the Fatimid caliphs who ruled from 287 to 549 A.H. They became nothing more than a political party using their religious doctrines for a mask to hide their program of social revolution. They were in the habit of using mystery and scientific novelty as an attraction. Their book of instruction was so arranged that it was adapted to all sects or religions. But then the reaction set in. The reformation of the sect brought back the doctrines of Ismailism.

A study of the little that is known about their theology shows how far they are removed from orthodox Islam. Admission into the sect, first of all, is permitted only after initiation. They carry the doctrine of the Imamate to extremes, proclaiming the doctrine of "ta'lim", or teaching above human discussion which can be taught only by the Imams. To them, the Imams are infallible and superhuman, and therefore, they follow blindly their teaching of ta'lim.

In general, Ismailism seems to be closer to Gnosticism than to anything else. They say that

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Lammens, op. cit. p. 159.



God is without attributes of any kind and is inaccessible. There are seven degrees of emanation: God, Universal Reason, Universal Soul, Primitive Matter, Space, Time, World. God created the world through Universal Reason and Universal Soul.

The Ismailis seem to have built up a system around the number seven which no doubt is derived from their belief in the seven Imams. It has already been mentioned that they believe in seven emanations. In addition, they believe that time is divided into seven cycles and that each cycle corresponds to a manifestation of the divinity. According to them, the prophets are also seven in number: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and the Ismailite Imam. These prophets are believed to be incarnations of the Universal Reason. These incarnations were helped by seven helpers which, in turn, are incarnations of the Universal Soul. Among these helpers are Aaron for Moses, Peter for Jesus, and Ali for Mohammed.

This sect has also seven degrees or ranks. The first degree is blind submission to ta'lim or the secret doctrines of the Imams. The second degree is a stabilization which results in complete freedom from all religious obligations. Because of this step, the Ismailis have been accused of being libertines who indulged in gross immorality. This charge has



never been proven, however, The third degree is a self-deliverance to the authority of the Imam. The majority of the adherents of this sect never go beyond this degree.<sup>1</sup>

The "Assassins" who flourished during the time of the Crusades were Neo-Ismailis which was the religion of Sheikh al-Jabal, "The Old Man of the Mountain."

This Ismaili sub-sect got its name from the Arabic "Hashahashin" because the adherents were addicted to narcotics, especially hashish. About twenty thousand of them still exist in the mountains of Latakia and another twenty thousand in Iran and Afghanistan. Their chief center is in India where they are called the Khodjas or Maulas or Mawalis.

In India the Khodjas number 296,458 according to the India census reports of 1921.<sup>2</sup> Besides India, these people can be found in Zanzibar and along the east coast of Africa. In the Punjab and Bombay they are largely converted Hindus and are mostly engaged in commercial occupations and still follow the Hindu customs.

The Khodjas had their origin in the fifteenth century A.D. when Hajiji Saiyid Sadr al-Din, an Ismaili preacher from Khorasan, came to the Punjab and presented the Ismaili doctrines to the Hindus in a form that would most likely appeal

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> "Khodjas", Houtsma, op. cit. II, 2, p. 960.



to their traditions. They have a tradition that their origin was really earlier than the fifteenth century. According to this tradition, the Khodjas first came into being in the twelfth or thirteenth century A.D. when Nur Satagur came to preach to them.

The community of the Khodjas in India and their off-shoots in east Africa gather around the Agha Khan who is their spiritual head or Imam. He is counted as their forty-seventh Imam from Ali.<sup>1</sup> The man is deified by the Khodjas who say that a visit to him is equal to one to Mecca. The Khodjas all pay their tithe which is a tenth of their income to the Agha Khan who, in turn, provides for the poor.

They differ from the orthodox Moslems chiefly in their customs regarding marriage, divorce, and burial. Their marriage customs show traces of old Hindu ceremonies. No divorce is permitted unless sanctioned by the leader of the community, who is usually appointed by the Agha Khan, but often elected. This leader usually grants the divorce only after the consent of the both parties. The husband is not permitted to take a wife during the lifetime of the first unless the leader gives his permission, which he usually does upon the depositing of two hundred rupees for the

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<sup>1</sup>

Lammens, *op. cit.* p. 161.



maintainance of the first wife. In any case, if a wife is divorced, she must be supported by her former husband until she again marries.<sup>1</sup> Upon death, holy water is usually sprinkled over the body with the reading of the Das-Avatar, their holy book which was reputedly written by Hajiji Saiyid Sadr al-Din.

The Ismailis have also broken up into various other sub-sects. In Iran and central India they adhere to the Naziri branch and in Egypt and Arabia they belong to the Musta'ali branch. Also in the sixteenth century A.D. the Momnas broke away from the Khodjas because of their refusal to pay the tithe. The Bohoras of India are also derived from the Ismailis.

The Bohoras belong to the Musta'ali branch of the Ismailis. They claim that al-Musta'ali was the rightful successor to his father al-Mutanser and not Nizar as the Khodjas claim. This sect numbered about 146,255 in 1901 of which 118,300 resided in the Bombay Presidency.<sup>2</sup> As were the Khodjas, the Bohoras were converted by Ismaili missionaries, the first of whom was named Abd Allah and came from Yemen in 445 A.H. During the course of their history, they have been exposed to severe persecutions. The head of their sect lived in Yemen up to the year 913 A.H. The Bohoras

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<sup>1</sup> "Khodjas" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 960.

<sup>2</sup> "Bohoras" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 738.



made pilgrimages to him paid their tithes, and referred their disputes to him for settlement. After this date the headquarters moved to Sidhpur in Baroda State.

In 966 A.H. a schism of the Bohoras occurred. This schism took place at the death of Da'ud b. Ajab Shah who was the head of the sect at that time. Two men, Da'ud b. Kutb and a certain Sulaiman, claimed to be his successor. The majority recognized Da'ud b. Kutb. The head of this majority is the Mulla whose decisions on all questions is final and who enforces discipline by fines and excommunication. To him is paid a fifth part of the adherent's income as well as other dues on the occasion of births, deaths, or marriages. The head Mulla has a deputy in every community where Bohoras are represented.

Their religious books are secret.<sup>1</sup> Only a few unimportant prayer books of this sect have ever been published. Therefore, it is most difficult to get any information about their doctrines and rites.

The most moderate of the Shi'ites are the Zaidis who broke away from the Shiah sect because they consider the fifth Imam of the orthodox Shi'ites a usurper. They claim that Zaid is the true fifth Imam. The most remarkable thing about this is that Zaid himself was a Sunni.<sup>2</sup> However, he considered it his privilege to

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<sup>1</sup>

Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>

Lammens, op. cit. p. 155.



restore the rights of the family of Ali by arms if necessary.

The Zaidis are very democratic at least in theory. They teach that the caliph must be voted into office. Their Imamate is of the family of Ali, but is independent of the Shi'ite Imamate. Ali should be caliph not because of his relationship to Mohammed, but because of his "super-eminent qualities", (Lammers), with which they endow him. But they refuse to believe that either Ali or the other Imams were infallible. They do not believe in the hidden Imam and deny belief in a temporary hell for impenitent Moslems. Their ethics are higher than the orthodox Shiah ethics because they allow no temporary marriages and do not practice religious deception.

The Zaidis can be still found in Yemen.<sup>1</sup>

The Nosairi or Ansariyya sect went the farthest along the road with the Shi'ites. They carried the veneration of Ali and his descendants much too far. Some of them proclaimed Ali superior to Mohammed or at least his equal. Some went so far as to say that the Archangel Gabriel made a mistake when he delivered the words of the Koran to Mohammed. They say Gabriel should have delivered it to Ali! These Nosairis curse Gabriel for his blunder.<sup>2</sup> Finally, some went a step farther and called Ali God.

<sup>1</sup> "Islam", Encyclopedia Britannica, op. cit. p. 710.

<sup>2</sup> Lammers, op. cit. p. 161.



This sect still exists today and numbers about 300,000. They are located chiefly in northern and central Syria and in Turkish Cilicia. They carry on no propaganda at the present time and their writings show great intellectual poverty.<sup>1</sup>

This sect is a good example of those sects who have arisen in Islam and have gone so far away from the precepts of Mohammed that they can no longer be classed as being in the pale of Islam. They are bitter enemies of the orthodox Moslems and in their liturgy heap curses upon them and pray for the destruction of their power. These curses are uttered in retaliation of the Sunni accusation that the Nosairis are very licentious in connection with their festivals, especially since they are so secret. For the same reason the adherents of this sect are bitter enemies of the Ismailis.

The religious system of the sect is a strange mixture of Christian, Moslem and pagan elements. The Moslem elements are borrowed from the most fanatic Shi'ite doctrines. Their religion is one of mystery. Their beliefs seem to center around a divine triad: the Idea, the Veil, and the Door (Bab). The Idea is the very essence of God. The Veil is the outward manifestation of the Idea and the Door is a kind of Paraclete which makes easier the access to the Idea.

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<sup>1</sup> Lammen's, op. cit. p. 176.



The numerical system based on seven has been borrowed from the Ismailis. The history of the world is divided into seven cycles by the Nosairis. In each cycle each of the divine triad comes in the flesh. The last of the seven cycles occurred during the time of the Hegira when the triad appeared as Ali, Mohammed and Salman al Farisi, an obscure companion of the prophet. The triad is inseparable, but the two latter persons are lower than Ali and are emanations from him since Ali created Mohammed and Mohammed created Salman.<sup>1</sup> The triad is denoted by the word "Ams" composed of the first letters of the names of the triad.

The adherents of this sect believe in metempsychosis. The "milky way" is made up of the souls of believers who have been transformed into stars. According to them, hell is the transmigration of the souls of men into the bodies of animals. They admit a kind of a Fall. In the beginning, they say, all souls were stars enjoying the vision of Ali. But pride was their downfall. Instead of taking their joy in Ali they delighted in their own brilliance. As punishment these stars were banished to earth and imprisoned in human bodies.

The believers are divided into the profane and the Chosen or initiated. Initiation starts at the age of

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<sup>1</sup>  
Lammens, op. cit. p. 171.



eighteen and lasts nine months. Women are not admitted into the chosen class. These people have no edifices of worship but visit their shrines which cover the tombs of their saints and are generally located on the hilltops. The tombs are surrounded by trees and are venerated. The profane class especially worships these trees.

The Nosairis have both festivals and liturgy. Many of their festivals were adopted from the Shi'ites. The greatest of these is "Ghadir Khomm" which to the Shi'ites commemorates the day when Mohammed designated Ali as his successor. Of course, this theme does not satisfy the Nosairis who say that Ali is the essence of divinity. They commemorate Kerbala. And what is more astonishing they have adopted the Christian festivals of Christmas, New Years' Day, Epiphany or the Baptism of Jesus, Palm Sunday, Easter, and Pentecost. From the Eastern Church they have borrowed the festivals of St. Barbara, St. John Chrysostym, and St. Catherine.<sup>1</sup> Incidentally, many Nosairis have Christian names such as Matthew, John, Helen and Catherine.

Their festivals are secret and often held at night to guard their secret character. These are held in private homes and only the initiated are permitted to participate. Candles, wine, fragrant plants and incense are used in the ceremonies. Wine is consecrated

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 173.



and drunk ceremoniously with prayers. (This is certainly a strong analogy to Christian Holy Communion!) In their catechism these words are found: "The greatest of God's mysteries is that of the body and blood of which Jesus said, 'This is my Body and my Blood, eat and drink of them for they are life eternal.'" Their liturgical language is also Christian.<sup>1</sup>

The penalty for the violation of the secrecy of Nosairi beliefs and festivals is death. The Nosairi is permitted to conform outwardly to the predominant religion in his territory, a practice which they justify with doubtful logic.

The Nosairis have been divided into four sects: the Haidaris, the Shamahs, the Kilazis, and the Ghaibis. This division came about over a disagreement as to what the external symbol of the deity was. The Shamalis said the sun was the symbol; for this reason <sup>they</sup> are called sun-worshippers. The Kilazis said the moon was the proper symbol and thus are called moon-worshippers. Other disagreements arose over whether these symbols were symbols of Ali or of Mohammed, or of Salman.

The Ali-Ilahi sects, closely related to the Nosairis, are another example of the sects which have risen in Islam and have gone so far from the teachings of Islam that they are now outside of it. Their name indicates that they are worshippers of the God Ali. They call themselves Ahl-i-Haqq

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<sup>1</sup> Lammers, op. cit. p. 174.



or people of the truth.<sup>1</sup> These people are scattered throughout Anatolia, Persia, Turkestan, and south Russia. They are also found in northern Syria among the Kurds where they number about fifteen thousand. In these places they form compact groups and are in the habit of hiding their identity by outwardly conforming to the dominant local religion. Because of these different countries and nationalities in which they exist, they do not communicate with each other very often and for this reason we find that they have very little unity of doctrine or practice. They are divided into many sects. All are agreed that Ali is divine but in a manner that is confused. They say that he is not God, yet is not separate from God.<sup>2</sup> Their liturgy seems to be uniform also. Most of them say that Ali is the only truth and that all revelations are from him. He has spoken through his prophets Moses, Christ and Mohammed.<sup>3</sup>

In Persia Ali does not play as large a part in the lives of the people as their name Ali-Ilahi would lead one to believe. In this country the partisans of this sect

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<sup>1</sup> Lammen's, op. cit. p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> F.M. Stead, "The Ali-Ilahi Sect in Persia" in The Moslem World, XXII, 2, p. 184.

<sup>3</sup> Lammen's, op. cit. p. 177.



revere and invoke two persons, David and Benjamin. Some say David was a servant of Ali but others identify him with the David of the Old Testament and therefore buy and read the Psalms eagerly.<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin is a more mysterious person than David among the Persian Ali-Ilahis. The people do not seem to know much about him and often hesitate to speak his name. It has been said that the name Benjamin, "Son of the Right Hand", is merely another name for Jesus Christ and that the Ali-Ilahis in Persia were originally Christians who at the time of the Moslem conquest were forced to change their religion.

They, like the Nosairis, have some strangely Christian-like festivals. They have a three day fast followed by a feast, alleged to commemorate the days that Jesus spent in the sepulchre and His resurrection. They have a ceremony at which bread and raisins are distributed. Many of them readily accept the doctrine of the deity of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, they believe in the transmigration of souls and claim even that the Bible teaches the doctrine. They are also noted for their fire festivals in which by means of music and dancing the participants work themselves into a frenzy and dance on glowing coals with bare feet and also clap coals on various parts of their

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<sup>1</sup> Stead, op. cit. p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Stead, op. cit. p. 185.



bodies with their hands. The coals are even crammed into their mouths and they seem to be unharmed thereby. Their explanation is that they are filled with divine power. They make it clear, however, that only a favored few can do this and they only at certain times.<sup>1</sup>

Their religious leaders are known as "seyyids." Their position is hereditary and confers much power and honor, some of them actually being worshipped. The "seyyids" are the custodians of the sacred book known as Sar Anyam which exists only in manuscript and is never given to outsiders. Ali-Ilahis exist today, but they have no books or printed literature in circulation.

Many of these people have marked Jewish characteristics and the conjecture has been made that perhaps these are remnants of the ten lost tribes.<sup>2</sup>

From time to time strange heresies have arisen among them. One of the branches of the Ali-Ilahi cult, the Tausis or Peacock sect, actually venerates the devil who is represented as a peacock. They fear and placate him, and in their presence no one says anything disrespectful of Satan.

The Bahas or Baha'i movement is another cult which branches off from the Shi'ites and is no longer in the bounds of Islam. This sect arose when Sheikh Ahmad

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<sup>1</sup> Stead, op. cit. p. 137-8.

<sup>2</sup> Stead, op. cit. p. 186.



Ahsai, a heretic Shi'ite theologian (see above) died and left no successor as leader of the theological school that he founded. Mirza Ali Muhammad then arose and not only proclaimed himself the successor, but also the "Bab" or gate. This man was born in Shiraz, Persia, in 1821. He borrowed the idea of Universal Intelligence from the Ismailis and proclaimed himself to be one of the emanations of the Universal Intelligence or Allah. He claimed to be the particular emanation which was the gate or door to the hidden Imam of the Shi'ites.<sup>1</sup> Under this title he set out to refashion Shiah Islam. He favored equality of the sexes, abolition of the veil, circumcision, and the ablutions connected with prayer. He also desired to legalize interest on loans which orthodox Moslems do not believe in.<sup>2</sup> He was finally branded as a dangerous heretic by the Persian government and was executed in July, 1850. There was also a severe persecution of his followers at this time, but they showed so much steadfastness of faith that many people were impressed and were converted to the new faith.

Two sons of Mirza Ali Muhammad wanted to succeed him. Baha-Allah proclaimed himself the new leader, but his half-brother, Sub-i-Azal was chosen the official successor.

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<sup>1</sup> Browne, op. cit. p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.



A schism occurred and Baha-Allah won out as leader of the Bahas. The followers of Azal broke away and became known as the Azalites which number about fifty thousand today.<sup>1</sup>

Baha-Allah founded a new religion. He called the "Bab" his fore-runner and claimed to set forth a new revelation in his book, Kitab-i-aqdas, which is an imitation of the Koran.<sup>2</sup> He preached a universal language and tribunal. He wanted universal peace and brotherhood of all men. Monogamy was recommended, but bigamy was tolerated. At one time they numbered almost one million in Persia but have dwindled to a very few.<sup>3</sup> Many of them have turned to agnosticism and others have merged with liberal Islam.

The oldest son of Baha, named Abbas, founded a new sect, the Abbas-Effendi. He called himself the "Son of the Highest" and said that he was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Drusism is the last cult which we shall consider that had its origin in Mohammedanism, but can no longer be classed as part of that religion. Drusism is a development of Ismaili theology. About 100 A.D. Hakim gave birth to the Druses by declaring that he was the final incarnation of the divinity. The Druses, however, received this name from his disciple Darazi who preached that faith

<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 192.

<sup>3</sup> Browne, op. cit. p. 86.



in Syria where the soil was already prepared by the Ismailis. These people still exist in Syria where they number 100,000. They are very independent and have been a source of much trouble to the government of Syria.

Their beliefs all center around Hakim who disappeared mysteriously. His followers refused to believe that he died. If he did die, it was only his body that expired, and the incident was meant as a test of the faith of the believers and was to serve to separate the hypocrites from the faithful. They believe that the God Hakim will appear again on earth to give the rule over to the faithful and punish the wicked. No other incarnation is expected until then.

The rival of Darazi in the early days of Drusism was Hamza ibn Ali. He proclaimed himself the prophet of the God Hakim, who, according to Hamza, is the chief of the five ministers who have played a part in the history of the Druses. These five ministers are incarnations of the Universal Soul, Universal Intelligence, The Word, the Fore-runner and the Follower. Of himself Hamza said that he was the Universal Intelligence and to him all creatures owe their existence. He claimed to be the channel of all supernatural knowledge and the sole mediator between Hakim and man.

Hakim is one. He has no attributes since he is too



exalted for definition. He has a human and a divine nature which is a great mystery that only the Druses can interpret. Hakim is gracious because he has lowered himself to speak to men so that he could be worshipped in tangible form.<sup>1</sup> They also believe that the number of souls is invariable. According to them there is a constant balance between birth and death. Upon death souls pass immediately into the body of another.

Their ethics are of a very low standard. They have borrowed the "seven" idea from the Ismailis and in keeping with this number have added two pillars on to the five pillars of Islam. These are holy war and submission to authority. However, the five regular pillars have come to be interpreted allegorically. For example, fasting for the month of Ramadan is taken to mean a renunciation of all other religions.

The first duty of Druses is truthfulness. But this only applies to fellow Druses. With all others, not only religious deception, but all sorts of deception can be practiced. For purposes of recognition they have all sorts of secret signs and passwords. They are sworn to help one another only.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Lammens, op. cit. p. 166.



#### IV. The Sufis or Mystics Sects

Orthodox Islam is a religion of externals. There is little in the Koran or Hadith which touches inner life and stirs one spiritually. It is largely legalistic. Sunni Islam does not recognize spiritual progress or moral ascent. People of finer sensibilities in past ages have found themselves cramped in this religion of legalistic externals. They have received no food for the life of the spirit. Something which intensifies this situation is the great gulf between Allah and people. He is a monarch ruling with an iron hand. The greatest attribute is justice, harsh justice. Furthermore, the concept of love in orthodox Islam is largely nothing more than taking and giving.

To this cold externalism it was inevitable that there would be a reaction. Many tended towards mysticism in order to bring Allah closer to his people through love.<sup>1</sup> At first these pursued their own ways, but later they tended to gather together and form groups. This development in the second century was gradual until two large groups emerged; one with headquarters at Basra and the other at Kufa.<sup>2</sup> The colony at Basra tended to be realist and critical while the Kufa colony was traditionalist and idealist in temperament. It was the latter

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<sup>1</sup> T. Arndt and A. Guillaume, The Legacy of Islam, p. 213.

<sup>2</sup> "Tasawwuf" in Houtsma, op. cit. p. 681.



group which gained the ascendancy. Leaders of this group settled in Baghdad which after 242 A.H. became the chief center of Sufism. It is about this time also that public meetings and lectures began to take place for the purpose of spreading their tenets. In this period the first conflicts with orthodox Islam occurred.

These conflicts were sometimes physically violent. Often, however, they took on a more subtle nature. The orthodox used various means to discourage these groups of mystics and even invented traditions to discredit them. The Sufis were in the habit of wearing woolen garments which was to stamp them as ascetics and from which they got their name "suf", meaning wool. According to one of the invented traditions, Mohammed is reported as saying that he hated woolen garments. Slogans were also invented to discredit the Sufis. The Sufis were celibates and therefore slogans like, "Celibates are brothers of the devil", and, "Two prostrations by a married man are worth more than seventy by a celibate" were directed against them.<sup>1</sup>

However, such persecution only tended to strengthen the mystics. They were ascetics and counted persecution as fitting for the true man of God. The few ascetic and mystical elements in the Koran gave them great encouragement.

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<sup>1</sup> Lammers, op. cit. p. 116-7.



They seized upon various texts to prove that they were following the path that Mohammed marked out. Some of the passages are:

"And wherever ye turn there is God's face."

(Pantheistic)<sup>1</sup>

"God is the light of the heavens and the earth."<sup>2</sup>

"For he to whom God has given no light, he has no light."<sup>3</sup>

"He is the first and the last, the outer and the inner."<sup>4</sup>

They also point to the fact that Mohammed led a simple life, and though he could have had great riches, he did not desire them.

Other religions had much influence on the beliefs and practices of the Sufis. The Koran praises the humility of the Christian monks. (5:85) It also praises monasticism. (57:27) These passages coupled with the intercourse of Moslems and Christians had its influence. In fact, some Sufis profess to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and place Him above Mohammed in His role of ascetic and prophet.<sup>5</sup> From Christian monks they borrowed solitary meditations, prolonged vigils, and the recitation

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<sup>1</sup> Sura 2:109

<sup>2</sup> Sura 24:35

<sup>3</sup> Sura 24:40

<sup>4</sup> Sura 57:3

<sup>5</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 115.



of long passages from the Koran. Gnostic and Manichean ideas were also borrowed. Later on Buddhist and Yogi teachings such as annihilation of self and the passing of their own human personality into Allah were adopted.

One of the early Sufi mystics who had great influence on their future speculations was Hallaj. He said that the essence of God was love and that loving God will transform the creature and tend to unite the creature into God's nature and will.<sup>1</sup> His system was not pantheistic, but he did put the emphasis on a mystical union with God. He said that a saint in union with God is superior to a prophet and that the model of God was not Mohammed, but Jesus, whom he described as a deified man. Hallaj's doctrine did not live long, but it served as a basis for future teachings. The century after the death of this Sufi teacher produced the first systematic and general works on Sufi doctrine. They were drifting farther and farther away from orthodox Islam and nearer pantheism and antinomianism. Some began to despise the system of set prayers and pilgrimages.<sup>2</sup> Hallaj himself was persecuted by the orthodox and was finally put to death and his body burned. During his time another Sufi mystic, following the lines of Hallaj, proclaimed himself to be Allah since he was in union with him. The

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold and Guillaume, op. cit. p. 216.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold and Guillaume, op. cit. p. 220.



death sentence was also demanded in his case, but those who tried him had Sufi sympathies and found him guilty only of "uttering a truth too high for earthly minds." (Lammens)

The breach between orthodoxy and Sufis would no doubt have become wider and wider since the whole structure of the two systems were at odds. However, al-Ghazzali, a great Moslem theologian stepped into fill the breach. He was a convert to Sufism through a mystical experience. He determined to spend the rest of his life in search of absolute truth. The man was convinced that truth lay with the Sufis. Al-Ghazzali was at the same time a teacher highly regarded by the orthodox. He took it upon himself to reconcile orthodox Islam and Sufism. He succeeded in making orthodoxy mystical, but did not succeed quite so well in making Sufism orthodox.<sup>1</sup>

Al-Ghazzali taught that there were three stages that one had to go through. The first was purgative, the second illuminative, and the third was union with God. The first step enabled the soul to cast off its imperfections. Repentance for all sins was necessary for this. He also recommended confession, an opening of the conscience for the admission of all fault and guilt.<sup>2</sup> The purgative stage was necessary for the illumination to set in. The illumination had to be built up until there

<sup>1</sup> Arnold, op. cit. p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 119.



was a union with the Almighty. To travel along the road of illumination the best food was meditation. Three powers of the soul are to be used in meditation: the memory, intelligence and will. Ghazzali was able to substantiate all these teachings from the Koran and tradition.

The reward of illumination is union or ecstasy. Preparation for ecstasy should be made by fasting, silence, retreat, and can be stimulated by music and dancing. However, he denied the tenet of Hallaj that the personality of the mystic should be annihilated and his soul absorbed in God.<sup>1</sup> He also put forth warnings that certain phenomena in connection with mystic ecstasy are not an indication of piety or moral perfection. He was in the habit of quoting from Christian sources and stated that Christianity would be the absolute expression of the truth if it were not the doctrine of the Trinity and its denial of the prophetic office of Mohammed.

From the earliest days the mystics were accustomed to banding together. In time these bands assumed the form of brotherhoods or fraternities. Each of these fraternities had its own organization, hierarchies, monasteries, special dress, rituals, and ceremonies.<sup>2</sup> The head of each fraternity was called a "Sheikh".

<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 120.

<sup>2</sup> S.M. Zwemer, Heirs of the Prophets, p. 98.



Besides being the general head he was also in charge of all admissions to the fraternity. Usually the aspirant to membership went through a trial period or novitiate. After this period the "murid", or aspirant, received his habit which was supposed to denote poverty and detachment for the world. Some of these fraternities practiced the habit of bestowing membership upon women also. Others of them frowned upon the practice. Though they had monasteries and thought they were detached from the world, there was no insistence on celibacy. Only the Bektashi Sufis, many of whom are found in Albania, practiced celibacy as a rule.<sup>1</sup>

The principle orders of the Sufis number thirty-two. In addition there are one hundred and fifty sub-orders and fraternities.<sup>2</sup> Some of these orders date from the second century after the Hegira. Some of the principal orders are Qadiris, Shadhilis, Badawis, Stat-taris, Bektashis, and Sanusis. The headship of the orders usually remains within one family. There is a great greed for supremacy among them and quarrels of revenue are frequent. This disagrees with the whole purpose of Sufism which is the cultivation of the inner life.

The Sufis maintain many buildings which are used

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, *op. cit.* p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, *op. cit.* p. 99.



for meeting places. In these meeting places they form liturgical services called "dhikr". In the early days of Sufism these liturgical services consisted in a recitation of Koranic passages followed by meditation on them. Later they degenerated and the liturgical services were used to develop purely the emotional side and were made to appeal to feelings, not to the spirit.

Mental prayer is used in their liturgical services. Often this type of prayer consists of nothing more than the incessant repetition of "Allah" with the whole attention concentrated on that name. This repetition is kept up so long that often the participant's lips become swollen and the tongue can no longer move. The name remains as an impression on the mind. The concentration is to be continued until "the sensory image fades and the immaterial idea of the divine name remains so vivid that the spirit can no longer depart from it."<sup>1</sup> This is usually done in chorus.

Each fraternity possesses its own special form of dhikr. Sometimes the liturgy takes the shape of the recitation of mystical poems in which God's love is extolled with language adapted from the language of erotic poetry. Music is often added to the recitation of these poems and then they are recited in cadence. During the recitation the participants sway and bend their bodies and motion with their limbs. This is done

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<sup>1</sup>Lammens, op. cit. p. 132.



until one of the mystics, beside himself, with ecstasy, begins to shout and dance. When this happens, the entire congregation joins in.

If the ecstasy is long in coming, other poems and different music are used. They claim that in their ecstasy God is working in them giving them supernatural communications and the revelation of great mysteries. The orthodox Moslems often view this type of exhibition with disgust, especially when the Sufis go so far as to use narcotics and various stimulants to aid them in producing ecstasy.

Many Sufis who were more pious and more conscientious in observing the Sufi tenets have come to be venerated as saints. This has developed everywhere among Mohammedans, but especially in north Africa. Worship of these saints is an established practice. Among the Sufis the tombs of the saints outstrip Mecca in popularity as far as pilgrimages are concerned.<sup>1</sup> The saints are called "walis" and are assigned higher rank than the prophets. In north Africa they are called "marabouts." They are called upon as mediators. Sufis believe that the saints can heal the sick, bring temporal and eternal happiness, turn the tide of battles, bring rain, and even that they govern the universe.<sup>2</sup> Worship of these saints is indispensable to the Sufi because they believe that Allah is too exalted

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<sup>1</sup>  
Zwemer, op. cit. p. 108.

<sup>2</sup>  
Zwemer, op. cit. p. 194 and 107.



to trouble himself with the petty wants of human beings.

The veneration of saints has penetrated also to orthodox Islam. It was al-Ghazzali who put the stamp of approval on this by the authority of Ijma'. Every Moslem village has its patron saint and each country its national saint.<sup>1</sup>

As far as beliefs of the Sufis are concerned, the only thing that is consistent is diversity. There are two classes among them. One adheres to the law of Islam, the other adheres to no law, yet they call themselves Moslems.<sup>2</sup> Those who adhere to the law of Islam justify their existence by saying that their aim is simply to revivify the spirit of practicing religion vigorously. The others go farther and say that they are trying to revivify the spirit and claim all outward things tend to detract from the spiritual ascent, and therefore, orthodox Mohammedanism is actually harmful. Some of them think that they have reached a higher level than Mohammed reached. Thus they are consistent when they claim that the Sufi saints are higher than the prophets. The extreme Sufis, and there are many, are firm believers in pantheism and moism. They consider themselves exempt from external works. Some Sufi theorists say that instead of shunning evil practices, they should be indulged in so that their vanity could become self-evident, and, in this

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<sup>1</sup> Zwemer, op. cit. p. 108.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, Islam: A Challenge to Faith, p. 147.



way, could be purged from the soul more easily and quickly. The Malamsatiyya order professed to humiliate themselves and conquer their pride by indulging in excesses. Among the Sufis there are complete agnostics.<sup>1</sup> They seem to run the whole doctrinal gamut from complete doctrinal indifference to the most extreme fanaticism.

Furthermore, some believe that there are seventy thousand veils separating the One Reality, Allah, from the sensual world. Before birth every soul passes through these veils and is separated from Allah by them. The baby is born weeping because it realizes its separation from Allah.<sup>2</sup> God is all in all. Nothing exists outside of him. Religion is a matter of indifference, but Islam is the best in this life. There is no difference between good and evil because God is the cause of them both. Man has no free will; he is entirely controlled by God. Man's soul is like a bird in a cage. It is good to release it and let it fly up to God. The spiritual union of the soul with God is the highest good, and meditation is man's chief duty to God.

The perfect man is perfect in four areas: good words, good deeds, good principles, and good knowledge. He has four characteristics, which are renunciation, retirement, contentment, and leisure.<sup>3</sup>

In general it can be said that Sufism is typical mystic-

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit. p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> Zwemer, Heirs of the Prophets, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Zwemer, Islam: A Challenge to Faith, p. 143.



ism as it is found among all mystics who exist outside of the Christian church. Their God is pantheistic, their religion pure subjectivism. Some authorities have claimed that the sect must have had its origin outside of Mohammedanism because it is so contrary to the spirit of Islam. But it is a proven fact that its origin was in Islam. It was a reaction to externalism which went further and further away from orthodoxy as it progressed, and by this century it probably would have been outside the pale of Islam if it had not been for the work of al-Ghazzali in at least partially reconciling the two systems. Some have gone outside the circle of Islam in their beliefs, but continue to exist in it, even though they are hated by many of the orthodox Sufis and by other sects. In some sections such as Anatolia they are oppressed. In other sections it is western influence that is the chief enemy. Attempts have been made to unify them under one Grand Master, but these attempts have never been successful.



## V. The Reform Sects

Western influences have been in contact with Islam more or less for many years. These influences have not been without effect. The Moslem, as he is broadened by education and as he comes into contact with true Christianity, very often begins to realize the narrowness and deficiency of Islam. The effects of realizing these lacks have been exerted in two directions. The one direction is the falling away from Islam into agnosticism. The other direction has been an effort to reform Islam. Likewise, the reformation of Islam has had two general directions. The first direction has been to get back to original Islam, the Islam of the days of Mohammed. The second general direction of reformation has been the effort to revise Islam to make it conform to modern scientific views. The most notable example of the attempt to reform Islam by getting back to early Islam is the Wahhabi Movement. It can be argued as to whether this group of reformers really constitute a sect or whether it is merely a movement. The fact remains, however, that they are a group set apart from orthodox Mohammedanism as it is today. Not only is it set apart, but there is much ill feeling and even condemnation between the Wahhabis and the Sufis.



In orthodox Mohammedanism every innovation is viewed with suspicion because the very nature of Mohammedanism is traditionalism. However, life pays no heed to the traditions of Islam. It goes on. To keep pace with life, Islam has had to make certain changes.

Ordinarily, the authority of Ijma', or concensus of opinion, takes care of keeping Islam in step with life. It makes the necessary changes in the structure of Mohammedanism. Wahhabism is a revolt against these changes. The whole spirit of the sect is "Down with innovations!" and "Back to custom!"

The Wahhabis are found almost exclusively in Nejd, central Arabia. They had their beginning in the eleventh century A.H. (18th century A.D.) However, their roots and inspiration sink much deeper into the past.<sup>1</sup> Ibn Taimiyya, a Hanbalite theologian of the seventh century A.H., was a fanatic who objected to the doctrine of Ijma' and claimed that speculative reasoning had no place in theology. He argued that the only two real authorities were the Koran and the earliest traditions. Ibn Taimiyya made himself so obnoxious that he was finally thrown into prison to silence him, and there he stayed until he was executed.

The teachings of this fanatic were soon forgotten. In

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<sup>1</sup> Browne, op. cit. p. 87.



the year 1703 A.D., however, a young man, Mohammad ibn Abdul-wahhab by name, went from Nejd to the city of Medina to study. There, it is most likely, he came into contact with the works of Ibn Taimiyya. He became enthusiastic about the principles of the old Hanbalite and began to preach against innovations, especially against the pilgrimages made to the tomb of Mohammed in Medina, and against the ceremonies performed there, which he saw with his own eyes. Later he settled in his own country, Nejd, and tried, without success, to convert the Arab chieftains to his doctrines.

About the year 1745 he became friends with Ibn Sa'ud, Emir of Nejd. The Emir was converted, and he, in turn, imposed the doctrines of Ibn Abdul-Wahhab on the people both by force and persuasion.<sup>1</sup> It became the state religion of Nejd and was propagated by the government. They took up arms for the cause. First they attacked the holy cities of the Shi'ites, pillaging the rich sanctuaries of Najaf and Kerbala. In 1804 they seized Mecca and Medina and the Wahhabis thus became masters of central Arabia. In these latter places the edifices of the tombs were destroyed, the ornate fixtures were ruined, and even the silk veils of the Kaaba were replaced by common cloth. Finally they even stopped pilgrimages to the Kaaba.<sup>2</sup> Other

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<sup>1</sup> Lammers, op. cit. p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Lammers; op. cit. p. 184.



Moslems became alarmed. The Egyptian Pasha was asked to aid in the subduing of this sect. The Pasha consented, but accomplished the task only after twenty-five years.

After that time not much more was heard of the Wahhabis. They split into the northern and southern groups. There was fierce fighting between the two groups until another Ibn Sa'ud, leader of the southern group, defeated Ibn Rashid, leader of the northern group, and massacred his family. Then Ibn Sa'ud attacked Husain ibn Ali, Grand Sheriff of Mecca and king of Hejaz, and defeated him. Ibn Sa'ud was now the most powerful sovereign in Arabia.

He continued active in proselytizing. He spread the Wahhabi doctrines as far as Mesopotamia, and the reformist tendencies traveled as far as India where similar reform groups arose, among them the Salafiyya, the Ahl al-hadith, the Faraidiyya. Ibn Sa'ud created the Ikhwan Brethren movement which is a propagating agency for the Wahhabis.

The Wahhabis claim to teach the pure doctrine of Mohammed and say that they adhere to the teachings of the old Kharijites. They forbid all luxuries such as music, theatre, coffee, and the use of tobacco. They say that every word of the Koran is law and that the



slightest misinterpretation of it is heresy. Adoration or veneration of the Kaaba is also forbidden.<sup>1</sup> As was stated before, they reject Ijma' and the agreement of all the later interpreters. They do not believe in praying to the prophets, including Mohammed, or to the saints, be they local or national. They vehemently deny that Mohammed is now the intercessor of believers. According to them, he will become the intercessor only on the last day. Women are not permitted to visit the graves of the dead. They allow only four festivals and the birthday of Mohammed is not one of them. The knuckles of the two hands are to be used in counting prayers instead of a rosary. Their ideas about God are strictly anthropomorphic. These ideas arise from their literal interpretation of the Koran which describes Allah as sitting, standing, etc. The jihad, or holy war, they believe to be still binding on all believers of Islam. In short, their doctrine is that everything which was not practiced or believed in Arabia in the days of Mohammed is heresy, and everything that was practiced and believed in those days is still the true faith of Islam.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>

Bey, op. cit. p. 331.

<sup>2</sup>

S.M. Zwemer, Islam: A Challenge to Faith, p. 149.



This puritanism, however, is not being upheld in modern Wahhabism. The prohibition of drinking coffee, for instance, is no longer heeded. The smoking of tobacco is prohibited, but the importation or taxation of tobacco is not, and it is a fact that a main source of Ibn Sa'ud's revenue comes from taxing it.<sup>1</sup> All innovations are frowned upon, yet roads are built to Mecca and the king has a fleet of automobiles. Still, the Wahhabis believe themselves to be a new core for the resurrection of Islam. They are preparing for the fight of Islam with both "sword and spirit".<sup>2</sup>

The Ahmadiya Movement is a reform sect which seeks to reform Islam by revising it to conform to modern religious ideas. It is syncretistic in that it seems to make itself a basis for the union of all Christians, Hindus and Mohammedans into one group. The objects of this sect are: a liberal Islam, believing that all religions are of divine origin; a united Islam, forgetting all sectarian differences not worth mentioning; a rational Islam, using reason freely in the interpretation of the Koran; a triumphant Islam, that will live in all nations.<sup>3</sup> They themselves are not

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<sup>1</sup>

W.F. Smalley, "The Wahhabis and Ibn Sa'ud" in Moslem World, p. 240.

<sup>2</sup>

Bey, op. cit. p. 333.

<sup>3</sup>

Browne, op. cit. pp. 81-2.

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united, however, and instead of uniting all Islam, they have created at least two more sects.

The Ahmadiya sect was founded in the nineteenth century A.D. by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. He was born in Qadian, Punjab in 1839. As a young man he was in the habit of discussing religion especially with Christian missionaries. This later on had much effect on his teaching.<sup>1</sup> On March 4, 1889, he announced a divine revelation giving him right of homage. Around him gathered a group of individuals who accepted his guidance in all things spiritual. Two years later he announced that he was the promised Messiah and the expected Mahdi of the Mohammedans. From then on his life was one of bitter controversy with both Moslems and Christians. Many times he was brought to trial for prophesying calamity on his enemies, some of which were so literally fulfilled that there was strong suspicion that some of the followers undertook to make certain that these prophecies were fulfilled. The man was clever and forceful in controversy, and he had a winning personality, but he did not have an honest and discriminating judgment and could not be classed as a scholar in any field. He made such stupendous claims that many

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<sup>1</sup> H.A. Walter, The Ahmadiya Movement, p. 14.



thought he was insane.

Ghulam Ahmad claimed to fill both Christian and Jewish, as well as Islamic, eschatological hopes. For Christian consumption he declared that there were two streams of divine revelation. The one was through the Children of Israel, of whom Moses was the great law-giver, and which culminated in Jesus Christ. The other stream of revelation was through the children of Ishmael, of whom Moses was law-giver and Ghulam Ahmad the culmination. He also declared that as John the Baptist came in "the spirit and power" of Elijah, he was coming in the "spirit and power" of Jesus.

For Hindu consumption he claimed to be the incarnation of Krishna. Krishna and the promised Messiah, he said, are one and the same person, there being no difference between the two except in terminology. His last claims were that he was the fulfilled hope of all religions, including the latter day reformer of the Zoroastrians, and the Buddha of the East.<sup>1</sup>

As for Islam Ghulam Ahmad stated that he was completely orthodox and that he was sent to correct the errors that had crept into Islam. He claimed that Mohammed was the last of the prophets, but that

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<sup>1</sup> Walter, op. cit. p. 51.



he himself was a prophet, "in and through Mohammed," in whose spirit he had come. He taught a spiritual and ethic code of law rather than one of mechanical obedience. He loaded each of the five pillars of Islam with spiritual meaning, e.g., the pilgrimage to Mecca represented the last stage of spirituality where the believer has cut off all his lower connections and has been engrossed in divine love. Incidentally, he himself never made the pilgrimage to Mecca because of ill health.

As for Jesus, Ghulam Ahmad said that He had imparted pure and simple teachings to his disciples but that these teachings were perverted. Ghulam Ahmad believed that Jesus was a flesh and blood person who was never crucified and never taken into heaven, but that He was buried in Sringar, Kashmir, where His tomb is pointed out today. He denounced Jesus for drunkenness, vulgar abuse of the Jews, cowardice, disrespect to his mother, friendliness to women of ill-repute, and for blasphemy. Ghulam Ahmad described the doctrine of the atonement as a "blood bath" which gives all Christians a fancied immunity from sin which leads them to indulge in all sorts of vices.

The followers of Ghulam Ahmad grew slowly. In 1900 they officially termed themselves "Ahmadiya". By 1913 there were great disagreements which split



the sect into two parts. The first party held that Ahmad had to be considered as one of the prophets in spite of the claim of the Sunnis that Mohammed was the seal of the prophets. They further claimed that all those who did not accept Ahmad as a prophet were unbelievers. The other party took the opposite view. The former became the Qadian party, which is active in establishing primary and secondary schools, in publishing much propaganda, and in having elaborate plans to send missionaries to many countries. They have also translated the Koran into English, which is definitely slanted to the Ahmadiya view. Today they hold that the Koran is a perfect and final code of law, that revelation has not stopped, but is now-a-days given through the righteous servants of God, and that Mohammed was a man free from sin, perfect in all respects, a guide for human conduct, the mediator between God<sup>1</sup> and man.

The other party of the Ahmadiyas call themselves the Anjuman-Isha'at-i-Islam and have their headquarters in Lahore, India. They also maintain schools and have translated the Koran. At present Mauli Muhammad Ali, M.A., Ll.B. seems to be the leader. The group produces

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<sup>1</sup> Walter, op. cit. p. 122.



some propaganda and has one mission station in England.

The Ahmadiyas aspire to become a universal religion. However, at present their number is quite small.

Estimates have run from seventy-five thousand to five hundred thousand.<sup>1</sup> Both translations of the Koran that the Ahmadiyas have brought forth have been condemned by the ulema of the Al-Azhar in Cairo.

From the fore-going it is evident that disunity in Islam is great. The various sects have exceeded all bounds of discretion in their doctrines. They have carried orthodox teaching to all extremes. Yet, the chief schisms have arisen not from doctrinal differences, but from political disagreements. The Pan-Islamic movement that is trying to make headway in Islam, therefore has a hard and long road to travel in order to achieve any sort of unity. Indeed, one who looks into the subject may very conceivably believe that it is an impossible task.

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<sup>1</sup> Lammens, op. cit., p. 188.



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