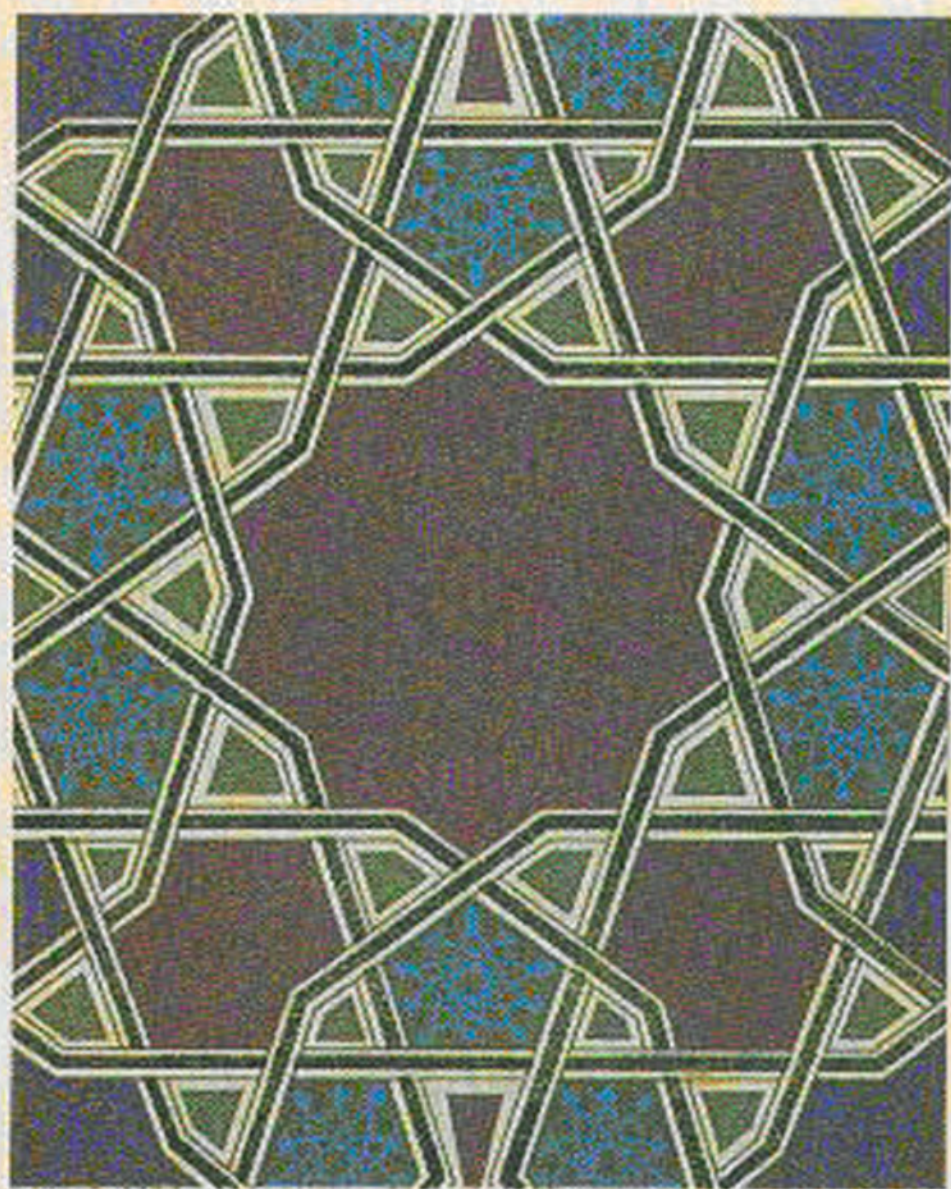


MAJOR THEMES  
OF THE  
QUR'ĀN



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by

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### ***Fazlur Rahman, 1919-1988***

Fazlur Rahman was born September 21, 1919, in what is today Pakistan. His early education was in Islamic schools followed by an M.A. degree from Punjab University, Lahore, in 1942, with a First Class in Arabic. He was awarded the D. Phil. degree by Oxford University in 1949 for his thesis, *Avecenna's Psychology*.

He was lecturer in Persian Studies and Islamic Philosophy at Durham University from 1950-1958. In 1958, he was appointed Associate Professor in the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University in Montreal, where he remained until 1961. In 1962, he was named Director of the Central Institute of Islamic Research in Pakistan and continued in that capacity until 1968.

In 1969, he was appointed Professor of Islamic Thought at the University of Chicago and in 1987 the University made him Harold H. Swift Distinguished Service Professor in recognition of his contributions to scholarship.

The author of ten books and hundreds of articles, he was the ninth recipient of the Levi Delia Vida award for Islamic scholarship presented by UCLA.

Professor Rahman passed away on July 26, 1988, due to complications of heart surgery. He was 68 years old.

Arabic Letter or Mark	Name	Symbol Used in English Text
ا (vowel)	alif	aa or ā
ب	baa	b
ت	taa	t
ث	thaa	th
ج	jeem	j
ح	ḥaa	ḥ
خ	khaa	kh
د	daal	d
ذ	dhaal	dh
ر	raa	r
ز	zaay	z
س	seen	s
ش	sheen	sh
ص	ṣaad	ṣ
ض	<u>d</u> haad	<u>dh</u>
ط	ṭaa	ṭ
ظ	<u>th</u> aa	<u>th</u> or <i>z</i>
ع	‘ayn	‘
غ	ghayn	gh
ف	faa	f
ق	qaaf	q
ك	kaaf	k
ل	laam	l
م	meem	m
ن	noon	n
ه	haa	h
و	waaw	w
و (as vowel)	waaw	ū
ي	yaa	y
ي (as vowel)	yaa	ee or ī
ء	hamzah	’
َ	fathah	a
ِ	kasrah	i
ُ	dhammah	u
ّ	shaddah	doubled letter
◌	sukoon	absence of vowel

## Chapter 1 - God

The Qur'ān is a document that is squarely aimed at man; indeed, it calls itself "guidance for mankind" (*hudan lil-nās* [2.al-Baqarah:185] and numerous equivalents elsewhere). Yet, the term *Allāh*, the proper name for God, occurs well over 2,500 times in the Qur'ān (not to count the terms *al-Rabb*, The Lord, and *al-Raḥmān*, The Merciful, which, although they signify qualities, have nevertheless come to acquire substance). Still, the Qur'ān is no treatise about God and His nature: His existence, for the Qur'ān, is strictly functional—He is Creator and Sustainer of the universe and of man, and particularly the giver of guidance for man and He who judges man, individually and collectively, and metes out to him merciful justice.

This "merciful justice" has often been represented as "justice tempered with mercy" by modern writers, but, as we shall soon see, orderly creativity, sustenance, guidance, justice, and mercy fully interpenetrate in the Qur'ānic concept of God as an organic unity. Since all these are relational ideas, we shall have to speak of God a great deal in the following pages. In the present chapter we wish to discuss briefly questions of the necessity of God and of one God, and what according to the Qur'ān these immediately imply (hoping thereby to reduce overlapping to the minimum).

The immediate impression from a cursory reading of the Qur'ān is that of the infinite majesty of God and His equally infinite mercy, although many a Western scholar (through a combination of ignorance and prejudice) has depicted the Qur'ānic God as a concentrate of pure power, even as brute power—indeed, as a capricious tyrant. The Qur'ān, of course, speaks of God in so many different contexts and so frequently that unless all the statements are interiorized into a total mental picture—without, as far as possible, the interference of any subjective and wishful thinking—it would be extremely difficult, if not outright impossible, to do justice to the Qur'ānic concept of God.

First, why God at all? Why not let nature and her contents and processes stand on their own without bringing in a higher being, which only complicates reality and puts an unnecessary burden on both man's intellect and his soul? The Qur'ān calls this "belief in and awareness of the unseen" (2.al-Baqarah:3; 5.al-Mā'idah:94; 21.al-Anbiyā':49; 35.Fāṭir:18; 36.Yā Seen:11; 50.Qāf:33; 57.al-Ḥadeed:25; 67.al-Mulk:12); this "unseen" has been, to a greater or lesser extent, made "seen" through Revelation for some people like the Prophet (examples: 81.at-Takwīr:24; 68.al-Qalam:47; 52.aṭ-Ṭūr:41; 53.an-Najm:35; 12.Yūsuf:102; 11.Hūd:49), although it cannot be fully known to anyone except God (examples: 72.al-Jinn:26; 64.at-Taghābun:18; 59.al-Ḥashr:22; 49.al-Ḥujurāt:18; 39.az-Zumar:46; 35.Fāṭir:38; 32.as-Sajdah:6; 27.an-Naml:65; 23.al-Mu'minūn:92; 18.al-Kahf:26; 16.an-Naḥl:77; 13.ar-Ra'd:9; 12.Yūsuf:81; 11.Hūd:31; 7.al-A'rāf:188, etc.). God's existence can, however, be brought home to those who care to reflect so that it not only ceases to be an "irrational" or "unreasonable" belief but becomes *the Master-Truth*. This is the task of the Qur'ān: if the task is accomplished, everything has been accomplished; if not, nothing whatever has been achieved.

But in order to achieve this, students also must do something; if they do not, they cannot be called students at all. It is, therefore, not an extraordinary or an unreasonable or a supererogatory demand. The student must "listen" to what the Qur'ān has to say: "Who is humble before the unseen and brings with him a heart such that it can respond [when the truth hits it]" (50.Qāf:33); "it is a reminder to him/her who has a heart and surrenders his/her ears in witnessing" (50.Qāf:37). Such

verses are everywhere: "These people are [as though] they are being called from a long distance" (41.Fuṣṣilat:44). Yet God is not so far that His signals cannot be heard: "We created man and We know what the negative whisperings of his mind are and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein!" (50.Qāf:16).

So near and yet so far! The problem is not how to make man come to belief by giving lengthy and intricate "theological" proofs of God's existence, but how to shake him into belief by drawing his attention to certain obvious facts and turning these facts into "reminders" of God. Hence the Qur'ān time and again calls itself (and also the Prophet) "a reminder" or "The Reminder".

The main points in this ceaseless, tremendous thrust for "reminding" man are (1) that everything except God is contingent upon God, including the entirety of nature (which has a "metaphysical" and a "moral" aspect); (2) that God, with all His might and glory, is essentially the all-merciful God; and (3) that both these aspects necessarily entail a proper relationship between God and Man—a relationship of the served and the servant—and consequently also a proper relationship between man and man. By a natural necessity, as it were, these normative relationships entail the law of judgment upon man both as individual and in his collective or social existence. Once we have grasped these three points, we will have understood the absolute centrality of God in the entire, system of existence, to a very large extent *because* the aim of the Qur'ān is man and his behavior, not God.

We shall elaborate in greater detail in Chapter IV that, for the Qur'ān, the whole of nature is one firm, well-knit structure with no gaps, no ruptures, and no dislocations. It works by its own laws, which have been ingrained in it by God, and is, therefore, autonomous; but it is not autocratic, for, in itself, it has no warrant for its own existence and it cannot explain itself.

This lack of rational and moral ultimacy raises the all-important question of whence it derives its being. In particular, the crucial questions must be answered: Why nature and the richness and fullness of its being? Why not just nothing and pure emptiness—which is, on all counts, the easier and the more "natural" of the two alternatives? From the Greeks through Hegel it has often been said that "nothing" is an empty word without any real meaning since "there can be no nothing and we cannot imagine it." But the question then is: Why can we not imagine it? It is certainly theoretically possible that there might be no nature at all. Those who think that nature is "given" and therefore somehow "necessary" are like a child for whom toys are a "given" and therefore somehow "necessary."

This is exactly the meaning of contingency. But a contingent cannot be thought of without that upon which it is contingent, although it is possible to be so immersed in what is contingent that one may not think of that upon which it is contingent—again, like a child who may be so engaged with his toys that he does not care to know what is beyond them. But, according to the Qur'ān, once you think of the whence (and the whither) of nature you must "find God." This is not a "proof" of God's existence, for in the thought of the Qur'ān, if you cannot "find" God, you will never "prove" Him: "The only straight path leads to God—[all] other paths are deviant" (16.an-Nahl:9). For reasons that will follow, "find" is not an empty word; it entails a total revaluation of the primal order of reality and throws everything into new perspective with new meanings. And the first consequence of this discovery is that God cannot be regarded as an existent among other existents. In the metaphysical realm, there can be no democratic and equal sharing of being between the Original, the Creator, the Self Necessary, and the borrowed, the created, the contingent; such a "sharing" rather

exists within the second category itself. The Qur'ānic condemnation of *shirk* ("assigning partners to God") has its roots firmly in this metaphysical realm and then, as we shall see, issues forth in the moral field.

God is that dimension which makes other dimensions possible; He gives meaning and life to everything. He is all-enveloping, literally infinite, and He *alone* is infinite. All else carries in the very texture of its being the hallmark of its finitude and creatureliness: "Everything thereon [literally: 'on the earth,' but meaning the whole gamut of nature] is vanishing, there remaining only the Face of Your Lord, the Possessor of Majesty and Generosity" (55.ar-Raḥmān:26-27); "Say: If the ocean were to turn into ink [for writing] the [creative] Words of my Lord, the ocean will be expended before the Words of my Lord are—even if we were to bring another ocean like it" (18.al-Kahf:109). In the very nature of the case, there can be only one God, for whenever one tries to conceive of more than one, only one will be found to emerge as the First: "And God has said, "Do not take two gods [for] He is only One" (16.an-Naḥl:51); "God bears witness that there is no god, but He" (3.Āli 'Imrān:18); "Say [O Muḥammad!] if there were other gods besides Him, as these people assert, they would all [necessarily] seek their way to the [one] Lord of the Throne" (17.al-Isrā':42).

Since nature is well-knit and working with laws that have been made inherent in it, there is undoubtedly "natural causation," and, as we shall see more fully in Chapter IV, the Qur'ān recognizes this. But this does not mean that God creates nature and then goes to sleep; nor, of course, does this mean that God and nature or God and the human will (as will be elaborated in Chapter II) are "rivals" and function at the expense of each other; nor yet does it mean that God operates in *addition* to the operations of man and nature. Without God's activity, the activity of nature and man becomes delinquent, purposeless, and self-wasting. Things and humans are, indeed, *directly* related to God just as they are related to each other, and we must further interpret our statement that God is not an item among other items of the universe, or just an existent among other existents. He is "with" everything; He constitutes the integrity of everything: "Do not be like those who forgot God and [eventually] God caused them to forget themselves" (59.al-Hashr:19). And just as everything is related directly to Him, so is everything, *through* and *in* relation to other things, related to God as well. God, then, is the very meaning of reality, a meaning manifested, clarified, and brought home by the universe, helped even further by man. That everything in the universe is God's "sign" will be elaborated in Chapter IV; that His meaningful and purposeful activity is furthered by man will be discussed particularly in Chapter III.

That is how the Qur'ān comes to emphasize and re-emphasize the power and majesty of God. But while this metaphysical truth is the real reason, there is a historical dimension to this emphasis as well and that is the polytheism of the pagan Arabs, who invoked and worshipped many deities besides God. To overcome this, the Qur'ān would say:

O you who believe! Spend of the wealth We have given you by way of sustenance, before the Day comes when there shall be no bargains, nor friendships, nor yet any intercession, and it is the disbelievers who are unjust. Allāh alone [is God], there is no God but Him, the Alive, the Sustainer; neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and on the earth—Who can, then, intercede with Him except whom He permits? He knows what is before them and what is behind them, while they encompass none of His knowledge, except what He permits.

His Throne envelopes the heavens and the earth and their preservation fatigues Him not He is the High, the Great (2.al-Baqarah:255).

Again:

He is the God, other than Whom, there is none; He is the knower of the unseen and the seen, the Merciful, the Compassionate. He is the God other than Whom there is none, the Sovereign, the Holy, the One with peace and integrity, the Keeper of the Faith, the Protector, the Mighty, the One Whose Will is Power, the Most Supreme! Glory be to Him beyond what they [the pagans] associate with Him. He is the God, the Creator, the Maker, the Fashioner, to Whom belong beautiful names; whatever is in the heavens and the earth sings His glories, He is the Mighty One, the Wise One (59.al-Ĥashr:22-24).

And once again:

And who other than Him created the heavens and the earth and sent down for you water from the sky, whereby We cause to grow lush orchards—for it is not up to you to cause their trees to grow! Is there, then, a god beside God? Yet these are the people who ascribe partners to Him!

And who other than Him made the earth a firm abode [for you], and set rivers traversing through it, and put firm mountains therein and sealed off one sea from the other? Is there, then, a god beside God? Indeed, most of them do not know!

And who other than Him responds to the distressed one when he calls Him and He relieves him of the distress and Who has made you [mankind] His viceregents on earth? Is there, then, a god beside God?—little do you reflect!

And who other than Him guides you in the darkneses of the land and the sea? And who sends forth winds heralding His mercy [rain]? Is there, then, a god beside God? Far exalted be He above what they associate with Him!

And who other than Him brings forth His creation and then re-creates it? And who gives you sustenance from the heaven and the earth. Is there, then, a god beside God? Say [O Muḥammad!]: Bring your proof if you are right [in associating others with God] (27.an-Naml:60-64).

While these passages emphasize God's lordship and power, they equally underline His infinite mercy. As these five verses make clear, God's lordship is *expressed through* His creation; His sustenance and provision of that creation, particularly and centrally of man; and, finally, through re-creation in new forms. His creation of nature and man and of nature *for* man is the most primordial mercy of God. His power, creation, and mercy are, therefore, not only fully co-extensive but fully interpenetrating and fully identical: "He has imposed the law of mercy upon Himself (6.al-An'ām:12), and "My mercy comprehends all" (7.al-A'rāf:156). His very infinitude implies not a one-sided transcendence but equally His being "with" His creation; note that He is nearer to man than is man's jugular vein (50.Qāf:16). Whenever a person commits a lapse and then sincerely regrets it and "seeks God's pardon," God quickly returns to him—indeed, among His often-mentioned attributes besides the "Merciful" and the "Compassionate" are the "Returner" (as the opposite of "forsaker": 2.al-Baqarah:37, 54, 128, 160; 5.al-Mā'idah:39, 71; 9.al-Tawbah:117, 118; 20.Ṭā Hā:122, etc.) and the "Forgiver" (40.Ghāfir:3; 2.al-Baqarah:173,182, 192, 199, 218, 225, 226, 235; and about 116 other occurrences), which are almost invariably followed by "Compassionate." For those who genuinely repent, God transmutes their very lapses into goodness (25.al-Furqān:70).

God is, in fact, that Light whereby everything finds its proper being and its conduct:

God is the light of the heavens and the earth: the likeness of His Light is that of a niche wherein is set a lamp; the lamp is [encased] in a glass; this glass is [so brilliant] as though it were a pearly star. [The lamp] is lit by [the oil of] a blessed olive tree which is neither Eastern nor Western, and whose oil is apt to catch light even though fire hardly touches it. [God is] Light upon Light and He guides to His Light whom He wills. . . . (24.an-Nūr:35).

The anti-God forces, on the other hand, are

like multiple darknesses in a stormy sea which is covered by one wave upon another and these are themselves covered by [dark] clouds-layer upon layer of darkness. If one were to stretch out his own hands, he is apt not to see them; he whom God has denied His Light, can get no light (24.an-Nūr:40).

While God's power and His greatness are, as it were, a tautology—for His power and greatness are the primary meaning of His all-comprehensiveness—the point of their being so often emphasized in the Qur'ān is to show up the dangerous silliness of humans who come either to equate and identify finite beings with the Infinite one, or to posit intermediary gods or powers between Him and His creation, when He is directly and even intimately related with His creation. But even more important for us is the fact that God exercises His greatness, power, and all-comprehensive presence primarily through the entire range of the manifestations of mercy—through being and creation, sustenance of that creation, guiding that creation to its destiny, and, finally, through a "return" to the creatures who, after willful alienation, sincerely wish to be reconciled to the source of their being, life, and guidance.

While we shall treat of creation and the human use of nature more fully in Chapter IV on nature; of guidance in Chapter V on prophethood; and of judgment in Chapters III on society and VI on eschatology, we shall discuss these briefly here to the extent that they relate to God.

First, God does not create as a frivolity, pastime, or sport, without a serious purpose. It is incompatible with the power of the Powerful and the mercy of the Merciful that He should produce toys for amusement or as sheer whim—a blind Fate can do this but God cannot: "Those [are believers] who remember God standing and sitting and lying down and reflect upon the creation of the heaven and the earth [and say]: Our Lord! You have not created all this in vain" (3.Āli 'Imrān:191); "We have not created the heaven and the earth and whatever is between them in vain" (38.Şād:27); "We have not created the heaven and the earth and whatever is between them in sport. If We wished to take a sport, We could have done it by Ourselves [not through Our creation]—if We were to do that at all" (21.al-Anbiyā':16-17); finally, with regard to the creation of man, "Do you then think that We have created you purposelessly and that you will not be returned to Us? The True Sovereign is too exalted above that" (23.al-Mu'minūn:115); "Does man think that he will be left wandering [at his own whim]?" (75.al-Qiyāmah:36).

Thus, not only does the Qur'ān part company with atheists and those who believe that the universe is a product of chance and a play matter, but also with all those who believe that God produced the universe as a sport, including those Sufis who hold literally that God said (according to a famous Hadith-report which they attribute to the Prophet), "I was a hidden treasure, but I wished to be known, therefore I created the

creation." As the words of the Qur'ān have it, "If We wished to take a sport, We could have done it by Ourselves," and displaying oneself to oneself, if meant literally, is nothing but a sport. Also, if the world is a sport, all talk of guidance and misguidance and judgment in the Qur'ānic sense (not in the sense of the rules of the sport!) is not only beside the point, but a massive delusion.

The whole matter turns on a faith that is not blind but is rooted in the consideration whether this entire universe, organized and functioning the way it is, could be pure chance or whether it points to a purposeful creator. The Qur'ānic dicta must also destroy belief in the cyclic universes, for no matter how attractive the idea of a cyclic universe may be to many—particularly Greek—thinkers and some modern astronomers, cyclic motion is incompatible with any purposefulness; it belongs more to the world of merry-go-rounds.

While the purpose of man is to "serve" God, i.e., to develop his higher potentialities in accordance with the "command" (*amr*) of God, through choice, and to use nature (which is automatically *muslim* "obedient to God"), he must be provided with adequate means of sustenance and of "finding the right way." Hence God, Who in His outgoing mercy brought nature and man into being, in His unbroken sustained mercy has endowed man with the necessary cognition and volition to create knowledge and use it to realize his just and fair ends. It is at this point that man's crucial test comes: will he use his knowledge and power for good or for evil, for "success or loss," or for "reforming the earth or corrupting it" (as the Qur'ān constantly puts it)? This is an extremely delicate task. The question of questions for man is whether he can control history towards good ends or whether he will succumb to its vagaries.

For this reason, God's mercy reaches its logical zenith in "sending Messengers," "revealing Books," and showing man "the Way." This "guidance" (*hidāya*) is also kneaded into man's primordial nature insofar as the distinction between good and evil is "ingrained in his heart" (91.ash-Shams:8) and insofar as men have made a covenant with God in pre-eternity to recognize Him as their sovereign (7.al-A'rāf:172). Man often little heeds these and hence, particularly at times of moral crisis, God sends His messages, for it is the moral aspect of man's behavior which is most slippery and difficult to control and yet most crucial for his survival and success. Hence judgment is an imperative upon this whole process of mercy from creation through preservation to guidance, since it is through guidance that man is expected to develop that inner torch (called *taqwā* by the Qur'ān) whereby he can discern between right and wrong. As we shall detail in Chapters II and III, he is to use the torch primarily against his own self-deception in assessing and judging his actions.

This entire chain—creation-preservation-guidance-judgment, all as manifestations of mercy—is so utterly reasonable that the Qur'ān states surprise and dismay that it is questioned at all. The two points primarily questioned are the beginning and the end: God's role as Creator and His role as Judge.

Even some of those who believe in God (in some sense of "believe") think that judgment, calling to account, is too harsh an idea for a merciful God. But such religious ideologies as have put their whole emphasis on God's love and self-sacrifice for the sake of His children have done little service to the moral maturity of man. It is correct that children cannot be really judged; they can only be punished after a fashion. But it is surely unreasonable to hold that man is still a child even though his *taqwā*-torch is expected to spark and sparkle? There is a world of difference between a child and a mature delinquent—else, when is man supposed to come of age? This

picture of a doting father and a spoilt child is hit directly by the Qur'ānic verses that prohibit child-play and frivolity on God's part, as well as those verses (see Chapter III below) that criticize Jews and Christians for laying proprietary claims upon God.

But the most vicious for the Qur'ān are those who formally or substantively deny God's existence: materialistic atheists and "those who assign partners to God." This last phrase is the real high-stress point. Given faith in God, the rest follows in a logical nexus; but if faith in God is not there, then all the rest—preservation of and order in nature (i.e., Providence), guidance, and judgment on "the end of affairs" (*'āqibat al-umūr*; i.e., eschatology)—either become simply dubious or at least become so many discrete issues, each to be discussed separately and accepted or rejected, that the entire chain falls to pieces. This is why God is the cementing piece of the whole chain, giving it meaning.

It is in this context that our earlier outline of the Qur'ān's argument from nature and its orderly working (pp. 2-4) assumes its full significance: the Qur'ān does not "prove" God but "points to" Him from the existing universe. Even if there were no ordered universe, but only a single being, it would still point beyond itself because it is a mere contingent; but there is not a mere single contingent, there is a whole ordered and perfectly working universe. To many, this order, where all parts are interdependent, is less in need of a God than is a single contingent being, for in an ordered whole all parts play a role in supporting it and each other, without the need for an exterior being. Yet, although the parts of any organism are mutually supportive, the organism as a whole does not explain its own genesis. Some contemporary thinkers have suggested that the very concept of "order" in the Universe is meaningless: "order" presupposes a function or a norm with reference to which order is spoken of, and hence any concept of order is related to the subjectivity of our own minds. (My office is ordered if books, files, desk, etc., are in places where they facilitate my work rather than hinder it.) Therefore, the application of the term to the universe is unwarranted.

This argument, which seeks to counter the first, unjustifiably assimilates an objective order to a subjective expectation born of certain human practices. Regularity, correspondence, and proportionate variations in natural phenomena were termed "order" by natural scientists without any necessary reference to expectations born of human practices; which is why this objective order is "discovered." Hence many atheistic and agnostic scientists could recognize a natural order without recognizing God.

Now comes the most crucial point in the thought of the Qur'ān. Is it more rational to believe that this natural order, so vast and so complex, is also a purposive order, or is it more rational to believe that it is pure chance? Can chance order be cohesive and lasting order? Does not chance itself, in fact, presuppose a framework of more fundamental purposiveness? Faith in God, though indeed a faith, for the Qur'ān rests on stronger grounds, in fact, is stronger, than many pieces of empirical but contingent evidence. For, it is much less reasonable—indeed, it is *irrational*—to say that all this gigantic and lasting natural order is pure chance. Hence the recurring Qur'ānic invitations and exhortations, "Do you not reflect?" "Do you not think?" "Do you not take heed?" And let us repeat that this "reflecting," "pondering," or "heeding" has nothing to do with devising formal proofs for God's existence or "inferring" God's existence, but with "discovering" God and developing a certain perception by "lifting the veil" from the mind.

A person who is endowed with such perception becomes correctly attuned to reality, for the very basis of being supports him; "he fears nothing but God," i.e., he is not afraid of losing anything except God's support. His personality becomes so fortified that it is immune from any assailant. God is his only helper, the sole refuge; all other imagined havens are hopeless: "Those who have taken friends besides God, their likeness is that of the spider which takes for itself a house, but the weakest of all is the spider's house—if only they knew!" (29.al-‘Ankabūt:41) The short but emphatic sura 112.al-Ikhlāṣ—which has been rightly regarded by the Islamic tradition as presenting the essence of the whole Qur’ān—calls God "aṣ-Ṣamad," which means an immovable and indestructible rock, without cracks or pores, which serves as sure refuge from floods. To base oneself on anything short of this rock, this basis of all being, is "to be a loser" (as the Qur’ān puts it recurrently), for it means that one has chosen to live in a spider's web. The deeds of men based on other than the rock "have no weight," no matter how highly they themselves might regard them. These deeds are without reference to the ultimate basis of life and the source of all value; they are, therefore, "like motes scattered around" (25.al-Furqān:23). Only God gives that value and unity and wholeness to life which make thoughts and deeds worthwhile and meaningful; any partialization of reality, parochialism, fragmentation of truth, is shirk ("assigning partners to God") and "God will not forgive *shirk*, but may forgive any sin lighter than that" (4.an-Nisā’:48).

God, then, becomes the friend of and cooperates with a person who has "discovered" Him. Yet, God's friendship may not be presumed at any point by either any individual or any community, even though the Qur’ān speaks of God's promises to individuals and communities. One must exercise *taqwā*, meaning that if one has the proper perception, then one must be constantly "on one's guard" (which is the literal meaning of *taqwā*). One cannot take God for granted, since no individual or community in the world can at any time appropriate Truth; in fact, the very claim, whether made by an individual or a community for itself or by a community on behalf of its real or putative founder, amounts to a confession of lack of *taqwā*. Muḥammad (PBUH), the bearer of the Qur’ānic Revelation, is told in the Qur’ān that God can cut off Revelation from him and "seal your heart" (17.al-Isrā’:86; 42.ash-Shūrā:24). While speaking of the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus, the Qur’ān says, "Who is to prevent God if He wished to destroy Jesus son of Mary and his mother and whoever lives on the earth for to God belongs the rule of the heavens and the earth" (5.al-Mā'idah:17).

We now come back to the doctrine of the power of God. This power issues forth in the merciful creativity of God, in terms of "measuring" things, producing them "according to a certain order or measure," not haphazardly or blindly. We shall discuss this "measuring" and "ordering" in Chapter IV, but it should be noted here that in Arabic the term for both power and measuring out is *qadar* and the Qur’ān uses *qadar* in both senses. In pre-Islamic Arabia, this term, more often in its plural form *aqdār*, was used to mean "Fate," a blind force that "measured out" or predetermined matters that were beyond man's control, in particular his birth, the sources of his sustenance, and his death. It was a pessimistic belief, but it was not a belief in Fate's predetermination of *all* human acts.

The Qur’ān took over this term but changed the concept of a blind and inexorable Fate into that of an all-powerful, purposeful, and merciful God. This all-powerful God, through His merciful creativity, "measures out" everything, bestowing upon everything the range of its potentialities, its laws of behavior, in sum, its character.

This measuring on the one hand ensures the orderliness of nature and on the other expresses the most fundamental, unbridgeable difference between the nature of God and the nature of man: the Creator's measuring implies an infinitude wherein no measured creature—no matter how great its powers and potentialities (as in the case of man)—may literally share. It is precisely this belief in such sharing that is categorically denied by the Qur'ānic doctrine of *shirk* or "participation in Godhead."

Let us make the concept of this measuring more precise: God, not anyone else, has created the laws by which nature works. This does not mean that man cannot discover those laws and apply them for the good of man, for this is what a farmer or a scientist does. The Qur'ān invites man to discover the laws of nature and exploit it for human benefit. God has made certain laws whereby a sperm fertilizes a female egg and, after due process, a baby matures in the mother's womb; and the Qur'ān comments, "So We determined [these laws] and how fine measurers We are" (77.al-Mursalāt:23). This in itself does not mean that man cannot discover the laws of the process whereby a sperm and an egg meet and then, at a certain temperature and with certain materials and other conditions, produce a perfected baby; and then apply those laws to produce a baby in a tube, for example. Many people think that this is "vying with" God and trying to interfere in His work and share His divinity, but the real worry is not that man is trying to displace nature or imitate God, for man is encouraged to do so by the Qur'ān. The fear, on the contrary, is that man may "vie with" the devil to produce distortions of nature and thus violate moral law.

If the Qur'ān expresses power and measuring through the same term, *qadar*, it uses another term, *amr* ("command"), in close association with "measuring" and, so far as nature is concerned, to mean the same thing: the laws of nature express the Command of God. But nature does not and cannot disobey God's commands and cannot violate natural laws. Hence the entirety of nature is called *muslim* by the Qur'ān, for it surrenders itself to and obeys the command of God: "Do they, then, seek an obedience [or religion] other than that to God, while it is to Him that everyone [and everything] in the heavens and the earth submits?" (3.Āli 'Imrān:83) "The seven heavens and the earth and whatever is therein sing the glories of God" (17.al-Isrā':44; also 57.al-Hādeed:1; 59.al-Ḥashr:1; 61.aṣ-Ṣaff:1; 13.ar-Ra'd:15; 16.an-Nahl:49; 22.al-Hajj:18; 55.ar-Raḥmān:6; 7.al-A'rāf:206; 21.al-Anbiyā':19).

From the concept of *qādir*, the powerful and the measurer, there necessarily follows that of *āmir*, the Commander. Just as everything is under His "measurement" (*maqḍūr*), so is everything under His Command (*ma'mūr*). The fundamental difference between man and nature is that whereas natural command disallows disobedience, commands to man presuppose a choice and free volition on his part. Hence what is natural command in nature becomes moral command in man. This gives man a unique position in the order of creation; at the same time it charges him with a unique responsibility which he can discharge only through *taqwā*. Hence man is called upon to serve God alone and abandon all false gods, including his own desires and the wishful whisperings of his soul, for all these bar him from an objective perception of the whole reality, narrow his vision, and fragment his being. The following categorical declarations are typical of the very frequent Qur'ānic statements on the subject:

Say, O disbelievers! I serve not what you serve and you are not about to serve what I serve. Neither am I going to serve what you have been serving, nor are you willing

to serve what I serve. For you your obedience [or religion], for me, mine! (109.al-Kāfirūn:1-6)

To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and in the earth—He is the High, the Great. The heavens above them are apt to be rent asunder [because of the worship of others than God], while angels glorify the praises of their Lord. (42.ash-Shūrā:4-5)

Say: Shall I take a protector-friend other than God, the Maker of the heavens and the earth, He Who feeds and is not fed? Say: I have been commanded to be the first to surrender [to God]. . . . Say: I fear, should I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a mighty day. (6.al-An‘ām:14, 15)

The heavens are apt to split asunder and the earth is about to be cleft and the mountains about to go to pieces that they [the Christians, like the Meccan pagans] have called a son for the Merciful, while it does not behoove the Merciful to take a son. (19.Maryam:90-92)

Say: God guides to the truth; is He who guides to the truth more deserving of being followed or he who cannot find the way unless he is guided to it—what is wrong with you? How do you judge? (10.Yūnus:35)

Did you see the one who has taken his own desire to be his god? Can you be a guardian over him? (25.al-Furqān:43)

O people! A parable is being cited, listen well to it. Those [gods] whom you call upon besides God can never create a fly, even if all of them came together to do so. And if a fly were to take away something from them, they can never get it back from it! Both the seeker and the sought are equally helpless. They have not estimated God rightly [in assigning partners to Him]—God is powerful, mighty. (22.al-Ĥajj:73-74)

This, then, is the general picture of God that emerges from the Qur’ān. What shall we say about the frequent statements of so many Westerners, in some cases even made in the name of scholarship, that the God of the Qur’ān is a loveless, remote, capricious, and even tyrannical power which arbitrarily causes some people to go astray and others to come to guidance, creates some people for hell and others for paradise, without any rhyme or reason? Even the blind Fate of the pre-Islamic Arabs was not quite like this, let alone the creative, sustaining, merciful, and purposeful God of the Qur’ān. Further, the picture is utterly incompatible with the most fundamental outline of the doctrine of God described above. If the Western allegations are correct, they must square with this outline; otherwise, our outline, based on numerous verses of the Qur’ān, must be rejected as false.

There is no doubt that the Qur’ān does make frequent statements to the effect that God leads aright whom He will and leads astray whom He will, or that God has "sealed up" some people's hearts to truth, etc. (2.al-Baqarah:7, 142, 213, 272; 14.Ibrāheem:4; 16.an-Nahl:93; 24.an-Nūr:35; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:56; 30.ar-Rūm:29; 35.Fāṭir:8), although far more often it says that "God does not lead aright the unjust ones," "God does not guide aright the transgressors," "God guides aright those who listen, are sincere, fear God". (2.al-Baqarah:26, 258, 264; 3.Āli ‘Imrān:86; 5.al-Mā’idah:16, 51, 67, 108; 6.al-An‘ām:88, 144; 9.al-Tawbah:19, 24, 37, 80, 109; 12.Yūsuf:52; 13.ar-Ra’d:27; 16.an-Nahl:37, 107; 28.al-Qaṣaṣ:50; 39.az-Zumar:3; 40.Ghāfir:28; 42.ash-Shūrā:13; 46.al-Aḥqāf:10; 61.aṣ-Ṣaff:5: "when they went crooked, God bent their hearts crooked" (61.aṣ-Ṣaff:7; 62.al-Jumu‘ah:5; 63.al-Munāfiqūn:6). This means that man does something to deserve guidance or misguidance. Nature and God are not two different factors; God is more of a dimension or meaning than an item among items. Similarly, with regard to man's actions and his destiny vis-à-vis God, God and man are not rivals therein—as the later

Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite theologians thought, so that the former made man the sole agent and denied God's role totally in order to make men "completely responsible," while the latter denied any power to man in order to safeguard the "omnipotence of God." The Qur'ān is true to the realities of moral life, for it affirms both sides of the tension, as will become more clear in the next chapter.

If this kind of analysis shows anything, it is that the Qur'ān must be so studied that its concrete unity will emerge in its fullness, and that to select certain verses from the Qur'ān to project a partial and subjective point of view may satisfy the subjective observer but it necessarily does violence to the Qur'ān itself and results in extremely dangerous abstractions. It is notorious how frequently Muslims themselves, let alone Westerners, have mutilated the Qur'ān by projecting their own points of view or that of their "schools" of thought; except that with so many Westerners both unconscious prejudice and deliberate distortion have played roles, as well as the study of verses of the Qur'ān in abstract isolation. The Qur'ān, as the Word of God, is as concrete as the Command or the Law of God—indeed, as God Himself—and represents the depth and breadth of life itself; it will refuse to be straight-jacketed by intellectual and cultural bias.

Yet, we must keep clear of pantheism and relativism, the most attractive and powerful of all spiritual drugs. When we say that God is not an item among items, we certainly do not mean to suggest that God *is* everything or *is* in everything, even though His presence is all-pervasive. When we say that God is concrete and that He cannot be narrowed by interpretations or approaches that are intellectual and cultural abstractions, we certainly do not imply that if all these approaches are mechanically combined, the aggregate could represent the truth. On the point that God is not in things and that creation is other than God, the whole of the Qur'ān upholds this, but verses like "if We wished to take a sport, We could have done it by Ourselves" (21.al-Anbiyā':17) make it absolutely clear that the creation is not some kind of an intra-God drama, although it is witnessed by God as His creation and it witnesses God as its Creator.

As for the point that all paths actually taken by man do not, put together, represent the truth about God, this is evidenced by 16.an-Nahl:9: "the only straight path goes to God, while others are deviant." This path is the full recognition of God as God, the path that is of sole interest and importance to man. All others are sectarian and divisive of mankind:

Those people who have cut up their religion into sects, you have nothing to do with them [O Muḥammad!]: their affair is up to God and He shall let them know what they have been doing. He who does one good thing, shall get back ten times of it in reward, while he who does one wrong, will not be requited except equal to it—and they shall not be wronged. Say [O Muḥammad!]: My Lord has guided me to the straight path—an upright faith, the religion of Abraham the *Hanif* [one who recognized the unity of religion rather than followed sects]—and he was not one who assigned partners to God. Say: My prayer and my piety, my life and my death are for God, the Lord of the World. There is no partner with Him. This is what I have been commanded and I am the first of those who surrender to God [I am the first of the *muslims*] (6.al-An'ām:159-163).