

time; rather, it is man's limitations within his constitution and role in life. Since this role is only limited, its restriction is compounded by the fact that the time of life on earth given to the human race is also limited. Hence, all means of discovery at man's disposal in this world, and all the conclusions they arrive at, remain within this restricted area.

Now we can identify the role of the message, and the special nature God has given to His messengers so that they may respond to the central law that governs the whole universe. How they respond remains unknown to us, but we can see the effects of their response. This special nature is able to receive God's revelations, as it has been specially equipped for the task. This means that it receives the same signal as the rest of the universe, because it has a direct link with that central and governing law. How does it receive that signal, and by what faculty of perception? To answer such questions we need to have the same nature which God grants to His chosen messengers, but "God knows best whom to entrust with His message." (6: 124) The basis of His choice is a far more serious matter than the greatest secrets of the universe.

All messengers were sent with the essential message of the oneness of God and they fully understood it. That has been possible because the effect of the single law governing the universe on their whole being directed them clearly to its one and only source. It cannot be anything but a single source, because there would otherwise be more than one law, giving more than one effect on them. Their understanding of this truth was made very early in the history of humanity, when knowledge based on observation and experiment was still in its early days, before many human discoveries concerning the laws of the universe were made and all confirmed this oneness. Every one of God's messengers called on people to worship God alone. That is the truth he received and was commanded to convey to people. Their fulfillment of their mission, which is simply to convey the message, was a natural result of their absolute conviction of its truth, as they have received it from God, the one and only God in the universe who has no equals or partners.

They were strongly committed to this truth and to the fulfillment of their mission. We note their commitment in some of their statements reported in the Qur'an, or in the way they are described in God's revelations. One such example is evident in what Noah (Nuh) says to his people: "Think, my people! If I take my stand on clear evidence from my Lord and He has favoured me with grace from Himself to which you have remained blind, can we force it upon you when you are averse to it? And, my people, I do not seek of you any money for it; my reward rests with none but God. Nor will I drive away those who believe; they will surely meet their Lord, whereas in you I see a people that are ignorant. Were I to drive them away, my people, who would protect me from God? Will you not reflect?" (11: 28-30)

gathered indicators and measured them, like what happens in a scientific experiment. They have used their special faculty of perception, which receives directly the messages of the single unifying and governing universal law. They were thus able to conclude that the single law which gives such consistent messages must come from a single source. Their special faculty of perception was thus able to make a far more accurate and comprehensive conclusion, realizing that beyond the single source, combining both will and action in the universe, there must be a single divine entity that controls the universe. Hence, they readily, unhesitatingly and completely believed in God.

I have not written this because modern science claims to have been able to understand one or two phenomena pointing to the unity of the universe. Science has an area of investigation in which it may prove or disprove anything. Whatever 'truth' it concludes remains partial and limited. It simply cannot arrive at a single truth that is final and absolute. Besides, whatever theories science makes are always liable to change, amendment and refutation. Nor have I mentioned the unity of formation and unity of movement so as to endorse the accurate perception by God's messengers of the single unifying law of the universe. My aim is totally different. I simply wish to point out the only reliable source for the formation of the right, comprehensive concept of the truth of existence.

The special nature of God's messengers has been able to identify this source, and its conclusion is correct, whether it is corroborated by science or not. Scientific conclusions remain subject to review and amendment through scientific experiment. They are neither final nor absolute. Hence, we cannot use scientific conclusions to judge whether God's message is correct or not. Our measure must be true, final and subject to no change or modification. Hence, it is God's message that provides such ultimate measure.

This leads to another truism of vital importance. The special nature of the messengers, which responds directly to the single law governing the universe, is the one which is able to define the direction humanity should take in order to be on the same line with the nature of the universe and its constant laws. It receives its inspiration directly from God, so it cannot make a mistake or deviate. It tells no lies and hides no information. It is not hindered by any factor of time or place from seeing the truth clearly, because it receives that truth directly from God, who is not bound by time or place.

The divine will has determined to send messengers, from time to time, to give mankind a clear vision of the absolute truth, of which they cannot hope to learn a few aspects through observation or experiment for hundreds of centuries to come. They would certainly never attain it in full, through these methods, at any time.

Part 3 Surah 2 Al-Baqarah Verses 253-254

The Nature of God and Faith

Those are the Messengers! We have exalted some of them above others. To some God spoke directly, and some He raised in rank. We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Had God so willed, those who succeeded them would not have fought against one another after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed with one another: some of them accepted the faith and some rejected it. Yet had God so willed, they would not have fought one another. But God does whatever He wills. (253) Believers, spend [for God's cause] out of that with which We have provided you before there comes a day when there will be no trading, or friendship or intercession. Truly, the unbelievers are the wrongdoers. (254)

The Unity of the Divine Message

The first thing we note in this passage is its opening phrase, which carries special significance: "Those are the Messengers!" The Qur'an does not refer to them as, 'these messengers', as we would normally refer to a group of people. Reference to them is started in a rather unusual way to highlight certain strong implications.

"Those are the Messengers!" They are a special group of people, with a special nature, but they are at the same time ordinary human beings. Who are they, then? What is the nature of their message? How are they given it? And why are only these people made Messengers? These are questions I have always felt reluctant to try to answer, because when I consider the significance of a divine message given to man, I experience a host of feelings and identify several meanings which I cannot adequately express in words. Yet put them in words I must, in order to explain the concept involved, however inadequately.

The world we live in has certain basic laws supporting its existence. These are the laws of nature which God has set in operation. They govern everything in the universe. Man discovers certain peripheral aspects of these laws as his knowledge increases. But what he discovers remains naturally within the scope of his faculties of perception and understanding. These are suitable to the role assigned to him during his life duration on earth. His efforts to discover these laws rely on two basic methods: observation and experiment. By nature, both are partial, and their conclusions are by no means absolute. They occasionally lead to the discovery of some aspects of natural laws, but this takes place very infrequently and over long periods of time. Whatever man discovers remains of a temporary and partial nature, neither conclusive nor absolute. That is because the overall law that governs the inter-relationship and harmony between all natural laws will remain hidden from man: it cannot be discovered by human observation, which remains limited, over any period of time. The point here is that the ultimate factor in this respect is not

It is similarly evident in the statement of Prophet Salih, quoted in the Qur'an: "Think, my people! If I take my stand on clear evidence from my Lord who has bestowed on me His grace, who will save me from God should I disobey Him? You are, in such a case, only augmenting my ruin." (11: 63)

We also see it in Abraham's argument with his people: "Do you argue with me about God, when it is He who has given me guidance? I do not fear those beings you associate with Him, [for no evil can befall me] unless my Lord wills it. My Lord embraces all things within His knowledge. Will you not, then, reflect? And why should I fear anything you worship side by side with Him, when you are not afraid of associating with God partners without His ever giving you any warrant? Which of the two parties has a better right to feel secure, if you happen to know?" (6: 80-81)

Another example is that we note in the story of Shu'ayb, when he says to his community: "Think, my people! If I take my stand on clear evidence from my Lord and He has provided me with goodly sustenance which He alone can give? I have no desire to do behind your backs that which I ask you not to do. All that I desire is to set things right so far as I am able to do so. My success rests with God. In Him I have put my trust, and to Him I turn repentant." (11: 88)

We find a similar example in what Jacob says to his sons when they remonstrated with him over his continued sorrow: "It is only to God that I complain and express my grief. For I know of Him what you do not know." (12: 86)

In all these statements we find that their very nature has been strongly affected by the single law governing the whole of the universe. They feel that effect deep in their consciences.

Day after day, man was able to discover certain phenomena which pointed rather remotely to the central unifying law in the universe. Scientists were able to discern the unity of formation and the unity of movement throughout this vast universe. It was discovered, within the limited scope of human knowledge, that the atom is the basic unit of the whole universal structure and that the atom is energy. Thus matter and power were combined in this basic unit, the atom. Since matter is formed of a mass of atoms, it becomes energy when nuclear fission takes place. It was further discovered that there is continuous movement within the atom, which consists of electrons orbiting a nucleus in a continuous movement. Thus, as a poet has recently put it, every atom is like a complete solar system, with planets orbiting a sun.

What man has been able to discover, through observation and experiment, of the unity of formation and unity of movement in the universe, pointing to the single governing law, is something that the special nature of God's messengers, endowed with whatever He has given it, has understood at the outset. Their nature receives direct inspiration which enables it to grasp this truth. God's messengers have not

Now the choice open to humanity is a simple one. It can conduct its; 'life within the framework provided by the divine message which can accommodate its progress and, at the same time, shows it the absolute truth it cannot achieve through any other means. The other option open to humanity is to go the wrong way and to be in utter loss.

The Ranks of God's Messengers

Those are the Messengers! We have exalted some of them above others. To some God spoke directly, and some He raised in rank. We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Had God so willed, those who succeeded them would not have fought against one another after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed with one another: some of them accepted the faith and some rejected it. Yet had God so willed, they would not have fought one another. But God does whatever He wills. (253)

This verse summarizes the essence of the mission of God's messengers, whom it speaks of as a distinct group of human beings. It asserts that God has placed some of the messengers higher than others, pointing out some of the reasons for, and signs of, doing so. It refers to the dissension and disagreement among their followers and successors, which in some cases escalated to fighting, confirming that some of those successors believed while others did not. It points out that the fighting was part of God's scheme in order to establish the truth and defeat evil.

"Those are the Messengers! We have exalted some of them above others..." (253) The relative elevation of God's messengers is determined by the environment, the nature and the scope of their respective missions. Some messengers were sent to single tribes, some to larger nations, some to single generations, and some to all nations and all generations. It also relates to the various distinctions they had received or brought to their people.

The verse makes a general reference to all messengers, and mentions two of them: Moses and Jesus, saying: *"... to some God spoke directly, and some He raised in rank. We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit..." (253)*

When reference is made to a messenger to whom God spoke directly, the immediate conclusion is that the reference is made to Moses. Hence, he is not mentioned by name.

Most Qur'anic references to Jesus describe him as the "son of Mary", for obvious reasons. When the Qur'an was being revealed, numerous myths surrounding the birth, sonship, and dual divine-human nature of Jesus had found their way into the culture and folklore of the time. Christian churches and councils of the Byzantine, and the Roman, empires were immersed in endless doctrinal disputes, some of which turned to bloody conflict, over the nature and status of Jesus. The Qur'an often

For these reasons, Muhammad was the last and final Prophet and his message, Islam, was the last and final message which brought divine revelations to an end. Islam became the greatest unifying Message for all mankind, encompassing the entire gamut of human activity and providing the framework within which the human intellect and potential could be exercised to the full, without need for further divine revelations.

God Almighty, the Creator who knows all, has willed that the final message of Islam, and the entire way of life based upon it, are the most competent to guarantee the growth, development and progress of human life. Anyone who presumes for himself a better knowledge of where the human good might lie, or alleges that Islam is no longer appropriate for the organization of human life, or claims to have a better system than the one God has laid down — anyone making any or all of these assertions is undoubtedly and undeniably an unbeliever who wishes to bring the worst upon himself and the whole of mankind. He stands in open defiance to God Almighty and to humanity, towards whom God has shown great mercy and generosity by presenting it with a universal divine order that preserves and regulates life for all time to come.

Endless Disputes over a Single Truth

Despite the unity of 'those messengers' and the continuity of their messages, their followers quarrelled and fought among themselves. *"But they differed with one another: some of them accepted the faith and some rejected it. Yet had God so willed, they would not have fought one another. But God does whatever He wills..." (253)*

Conflict among human groups, evident throughout history, has not come about in spite of God's will, for nothing in this whole world happens in spite of God's will. Man is created with the dual ability to accept guidance or to reject it, and is given the freedom to go one way or the other. All actions resulting from this human disposition are, therefore, determined and governed by the will of God.

The variance in aptitudes and abilities from one individual human being to another is an essential feature of God's scheme of creation. Despite the unity of human origin, such diversity is necessary to fulfil the requirements of the complex multifarious role man is destined to play as God's representative on earth. God does not wish for human beings to be clones of one another, especially in view of the diversity of functions and roles required for the construction, development and growth of life. It is a complementary, self-fulfilling process, in which every individual is urged to seek his or her route to guidance and faith, fully applying their latent disposition in that direction and benefitting from all the facilities and evidence

Through the divine message human beings can achieve complete harmony between their direction, movement and nature and those of the universe.

This means that there is only one source from which people can receive a true, complete and comprehensive concept of the truth and purpose of existence in general and human existence in particular. It is this concept that can lay the basis for the only proper and true code of living which is in harmony with the universe. It is a code of living that leads to true and genuine peace with their own nature and with the universe around them. That gives them peace with one another that governs their activity, direction and progress. That source is God's messages. Everything else is false and erroneous, because it does not derive from the only true source.

What we need to understand is that all means of knowledge that man uses, other than the divine message, work within their respective limitations. They have been given to man so that he may be able to discover some phenomena and laws of the universe, as he needs these for the fulfilment of his role on earth, and to allow human life to progress and prosper. He may go very far indeed in this respect, but whatever progress he achieves will not get him anywhere near the absolute truth he needs to shape his life in accordance with the constant universal laws and with the overall objective of human existence. This objective is clearly determined by God, but remains unknown to man who is subject to the limitations of time and place.

Only the one who sees the whole road ahead can formulate a plan to follow the road to the ultimate destination. But man cannot see the whole length of the road. Indeed he cannot see what will happen in the next moment. That immediate future is completely hidden behind a thick curtain that is not drawn aside for anyone to see. How can man, then, plan the way ahead when that way is unknown to him? There are only two options for man: either confusion and error, or acceptance of the code defined by God's messengers, whose nature responds directly to the inspiration they receive from God, the Creator of all.

God's messages came in succession to take humanity by the hand and guide it along to new horizons of guidance and light. People and communities often tried to deviate from the way of God, going this way or that. They closed their ears and their minds to the tender call addressed to them by a messenger of God. They would sink into error until a new call is addressed to them by a new messenger. Each time the same truth is given to them in a new and more advanced form to suit their greater experience. The final message, given when humanity reached its maturity, addresses the human mind with all fundamentals of the whole truth, providing it with broad lines to determine its footsteps with certainty and reassurance. The lines it has painted for the ultimate truth were so clear that humanity would need no further message in future. Man will find in it what he needs over the coming centuries.

makes the point of emphasizing the human nature of Jesus, underlining the fact by relating him to his mother, Mary. In the Qur'an, the 'holy spirit' always refers to the Archangel Gabriel (Jibril), who conveyed God's revelations to human messengers. He would inform them of their commissions and instructions, and act as aide and ally to the messengers in their demanding and arduous task of preaching God's Message. He would, as in the case of Jesus, provide them with reassurances and encouragement.

The 'clear signs' given to Jesus include the revealed Gospel and the miracles he was able to perform, detailed elsewhere in the Qur'an, as supporting evidence of his claim to be God's Messenger to the obstinate Israelites with whom he had to deal.

Muhammad is not mentioned here by name because these verses are addressed to him, as is clear from the preceding verse which says: *"These are the revelations of God. We recite them to you in all truth, for you are indeed one of Our messengers..." (252)*

From whichever angle one looks at the merits of God's messengers, Muhammad always occupies the highest position by virtue of the universal and all-inclusive nature of his Message as well as its scope.

Islam offers by far the most perfect understanding of the greatest and most fundamental truth in the world: the oneness of God (tawhid). This oneness epitomizes the unique nature of God and the divine will, which is done at the mere mention of the word: 'be.' That is indeed the cause of all existence. This existence, and all the laws governing it, form an integral whole.

This oneness is manifested in all aspects of existence: in human life which starts from a simple single cell; in the unity of humanity from Adam to the last human being on earth; in the synthesis of the system of beliefs revealed by God to mankind, in the unanimity of the messengers commissioned to champion and preach those beliefs; and in the integrity of the community of believers who uphold God's message. It is reflected in the patterns of human behaviour that constitute worship and are aimed at the pleasure and glorification of God; in the complementarity of life in this world, as a period of activity, and life in the hereafter, as a time for accountability; in the integrity of the divine world order to which all human beings are bound; and in the single source from which all knowledge and wisdom flow.

Muhammad has shown full and complete response to the great universal truth of God's oneness. He fully absorbed its meaning and significance and was able to interpret its principles in his daily life in full view of all his people.

He was the one Messenger sent with a message addressed to all mankind in his and all future generations. The advent of his mission marked the maturity of the human mind. Hence, it is addressed to the human intellect in a rational, persuasive manner without compulsion or the need for worldly and fantastic miracles.

that with which We have provided you before there comes a day when there will be no trading, or friendship or intercession. Truly, the unbelievers are the wrongdoers.” (254)

God addresses the Muslims in a most intimate and touching way, using the title they most love and value: believers. He calls on them to give out of the wealth He has given them, before it is too late, in order to secure the greatest gain and the highest reward. He calls upon them to give for His cause; to uphold and defend His way of life and to subdue and uproot wrongdoing and injustice.

The unbelievers “*are the wrongdoers*” by virtue of their denial of the truth. They wrong themselves by choosing a doomed course in life. They wrong others by misleading and confusing them, depriving them of God’s generosity and compassion which brings them peace, security, reassurance and serenity of faith.

People who stand in opposition to God’s world order, and employ their energy to persuade others not to believe or to prevent God’s laws from taking root in society, are undoubtedly the vilest enemies of mankind. Their efforts must be resisted and frustrated by all means available. Muslims are expected to be at the forefront of this fundamental and highly commendable duty.

available throughout the universe, as well as from divine revelations received by God’s messengers all through the ages.

Nevertheless, people over the generations “... *differed with one another: some of them accepted the faith and some rejected it...*” (253) Once disagreements among people develop into a dispute over faith and belief in God, use of force becomes inevitable in order that the struggle between good and evil can be settled, and the truth clearly established. There is no room for confusion, ambiguity or obfuscation, nor would it suffice for any group of people to plead their following of, or association with, one messenger or another.

When these verses were revealed, the pagan Arabs of Makkah claimed to be the true followers of the religion of Abraham, while the Jews of Madinah professed to practise the religion of Moses and the Christians that of Jesus. In fact, all three groups were far removed from the teachings and principles of the faiths they declared themselves to uphold. Some of them could be fairly said to have abandoned their declared faith altogether.

At that time also, the Muslims were already in conflict with the idolatrous Arabs. They were about to be ordered to confront the Jews and Christians. These Qur’anic statements came to affirm that such conflict among proponents of various religious faiths was part and parcel of God’s will and scheme of life.

“Had God so willed, they would not have fought one another. But God does whatever He wills.”

(253) It was God’s will, therefore, that good and evil should clash in order to reinforce the principles of true faith, preached and upheld by all messengers. God, in His infinite wisdom, knew that evil would not relent or stand idle, and that for His order to be established, evil had to be confronted and driven back.

God’s will is absolute and unconditional, and His power to make things happen is totally unrestricted. He has predetermined that human beings shall vary in their abilities and aptitudes; that they shall be free to decide their own destiny in life; that those who do not follow the right path shall deviate and fall; that evil will strive to prevail; that conflict between good and evil is inevitable; that faithful believers will have to struggle and make sacrifices in order to establish the truth and the integrity of their beliefs; that idle claims to following God’s messengers is of no consequence and will not prevent one’s faith being questioned and challenged.

These facts which God reasserted through revelations are timeless and universal, and not restricted to the Muslims of Madinah at that time. The use of a single incident to illustrate an absolute principle is a device used frequently in the Qur’an.

The surah then addresses believers directly, urging them to give part of their wealth, which God has bestowed upon them, for the cause of God, complementing the earlier call to fight for God’s cause and reinforcing it. “*Believers, spend [for God’s cause] out of*