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Acknowledgements

Some years ago, during a time of personal study perhaps best described as wondrous and in which my Western mind was to have its earliest glimpse, if not grasp, of the interplay of light between the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith and those of Islam, a translated copy of Muhammad Mustafa's manuscript was brought to my attention by Mr. 'Ali Nakhjavani. It was a text that would push me down the path toward greater understanding, and at his suggestion, I contacted Mr. Rowshan Mustafa, who very kindly permitted preparation of his father's manuscript for publication and assented to its modification and the inclusion of footnotes following review. I remain grateful to Mr. Nakhjavani, who, in the process of encouraging so many, encouraged me as well, and whose expertise took over where mine left off. Jackie Silver, ever a dear friend, saw to the preparation of the final manuscript.

Laura M. Herzog

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Foreword

This book was prepared to assist English-speaking Bahá'ís to acquire a basic understanding of issues frequently raised by Muslims with regard to the Qur'an and the Bahá'í Faith. It was originally written in 1959 when the writer was asked to undertake such a task by Bahá'ís in Liberia, during his visit to

that country. Recently it has been rewritten and expanded, so that it addresses many subjects of particular interest to Muslims.

In *The Promised Day Is Come*¹, Shoghi Effendi writes of the attitude of the Bahá'í Faith towards Islam, from which the following excerpt is taken:

As to Muhammad, the Apostle of God, let none among His followers who read these pages, think for a moment that Islám, or its Prophet, or His Book, or His appointed Successors, or any of His authentic teachings, have been, or are to be in any way, or to however slight a degree, disparaged. The lineage of the Báb, the descendant of the Imám Husayn; the divers and the striking evidences, in Nabíl's Narrative, of the attitude of the Herald of our Faith towards the Founder, the Imáms, and the Book of Islám; the glowing tribute paid by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán* to Muhammad and His lawful Successors, and particularly to the "peerless and incomparable" Imám Husayn; the arguments adduced, forcibly, fearlessly, and publicly by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in churches and

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synagogues, to demonstrate the validity of the Message of the Arabian Prophet; and last but not least the written testimonial of the Queen of Rumania, who, born in the Anglican faith and notwithstanding the close alliance of her government with the Greek Orthodox Church, the state religion of her adopted country, has, largely as a result of the perusal of these public discourses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, been prompted to proclaim her recognition of the prophetic function of Muhammad—all proclaim, in no uncertain terms, the true attitude of the Bahá'í Faith towards its parent religion.

It is with this attitude toward Islam and its Book that this compilation is offered. The task of presenting logical proofs and arguments regarding the meanings enshrined within the Qur'an is somewhat complex, however, because there is no reliable translation of the Book. As the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic, translations that have been made were necessarily based on "interpretations". Indeed, the titles given to English versions of the Qur'an, such as *The Koran Interpreted*, a translation by A. J. Arberry, and *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, an explanatory translation by M. M. Pickthall, indicate that an "interpretation" of the Qur'an has been translated, not the Book itself.

The greater part of the Qur'an is comprised of verses that are "figurative" (*Mutashabihat*), as compared with the "clear" or "perspicuous" (*Muhkamat*) verses which cover the laws and ordinances. While it was undoubtedly a relatively straightforward matter to translate the clear verses, translation of the figurative verses required interpretations, which were provided by the Muslim clergy, 'ulama (lit. learned). In many

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cases this resulted in translations devoid of beauty or lacking the richness of meaning conveyed by the original Arabic text. An example may be found in the opening verses of the Surih of the Fig (XCV) [95], which reads:

I swear by the fig and by the olive,
By Mount Sinai,
And by this inviolate soil!

In the verses cited, God swears by the fig and the olive, by Mount Sinai and inviolate soil. The literal translation is correct, but the reader of English might well ask: "What relationship is there between figs and olives, a mountain, and inviolate soil, that God should swear by them, all in one sequence of verses?" The beauty and meaning conveyed by these verses becomes more readily apparent when one considers passages revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán² concerning four Manifestations: Abraham, Who appeared on the Mount of Figs, Jesus, on the Mount of Olives, Moses on Mount Sinai, and Muhammad in Mecca, the inviolate soil.

An example of a more subtle problem may be identified in the translation of the Surih of Power (XCVII) [97]. In some English translations of the Qur'an, the Arabic word "qadr" has been translated as "power", although it has a more profound connotation than the English word choice implies. The term "decree" provides a closer rendering of the Arabic original³ its usage resulting in the following translation:

Verily, We have caused It to descend on the night of decree.
And who shall teach thee what the night of decree is?

See Kitáb-i-Íqán pp. 62-5

The translations of J. M. Rodwell and A. J. Arberry use the word "power". Sale's translation of the Qur'an, however, uses "Al Kadr" [Qadr] within the English text, addressing the problem by providing the following footnote: "The word Al Kadr [Qadr] signifies power, and honor or dignity and also the divine decree: and the night is so named either from its excellence above all other nights in the year, or because, as the Mohammedans believe, the divine decrees for the ensuing year are annually on this night fixed and settled ..."

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The night of decree excelleth a thousand months:
Therein descend the angels and the spirit by permission of their Lord for every matter;
And all is peace till the breaking of the morn,

Interpretations of the Qur'an, developed over time by the 'ulama, have been an ongoing source of disagreement and today present an obstacle to Muslims in understanding the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. The main point of opposition is the Muslim belief that there shall be no further Divine Revelation after Islam. The verses in the Qur'an that prove the legitimacy of the Declaration of the Báb, as well as those which anticipate the glad tidings of the Message of

Bahá'u'lláh, have been interpreted and subsequently understood in a manner that precludes acceptance of the Bahá'í Faith. The argument that the Muslims present to the Bahá'ís is essentially the same as that leveled by the Jews at the Christians, and in turn by the Jews and Christians at the Muslims. Moreover, it is one which has been adopted by both the Sunni and Shi'ih Muslims, the two principal sects which together constitute the vast majority of those of Islamic persuasion.

Bahá'ís believe that the true interpretation of the Qur'an has been made available through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, an interpretation sent down from God through His Manifestation for this Day. It is not the product of man's thought, but the interpretation promised by God in the Qur'an, revealed at the

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appointed time. It is interesting to note in this connection that in recent decades, Islamic scholars have introduced interpretations of a number of verses from the Qur'an which are consistent with Bahá'í understandings.

In His commentary on the Surih of the Sun (XCI) [91],⁴ revealed in response to a request for its interpretation, Bahá'u'lláh explains that as the Words of God are limitless, there is no limit to their meaning. It is therefore important to emphasize that the writer's interpretations as presented in this text are no more than his personal understanding of a few of the meanings of the verses of the Qur'an, as viewed from the perspective of the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. Muhammad Mustafa

See Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, pp. 175-6, for an excerpt from this commentary

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chapter 1

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