

The Church of Ireland held a national in-service training day in Dublin in 2006 at which Chris Hewer spoke and later contributed the following paper to the *Church of Ireland Journal*, June 2006. It serves as a useful first introduction to Islam.

## **A brief introduction to Islam**

### **Beginning with God**

Muslims never understand Islam as a new religion that began with the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE. Rather, to understand Islam, we need to go back to the starting point of all theology, that is the doctrine of God. According to Islamic understanding, God is one, indivisible, eternal, transcendent, omniscient, and omnipotent (Q. 6:59, 34:22). God is like no other being and does not share divinity with any created being or thing (Q. 112). Indeed the sin of *shirk*, that is to associate partners with God, is the one sin that God will never forgive (Q. 4:48). Because God is totally transcendent and thus stands outside of all time and space, God is ineffable or transcategorical, beyond all our human categories or abilities to know God in God's essence. We can only have any God-talk because God freely chose to create and thus to begin a process of revelation. The scholars of Islam have searched the Qur'an and the recorded sayings and actions of Muhammad, the Hadith, to find all the names by which God has been called (Q. 7:180, 17:110, 20:7, 59:23-24). These give human beings some insight into the characteristics of God, whilst still being limited by human speech and analogous understanding, so God is known as Merciful, Compassionate, Just, Wise, Self-sufficient, the First and the Last, the Loving Friend, the Guide, the Almighty, the Source of Peace and so on. In all there are 99 such names used of God and they form the Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names.

### **Creation**

In the beginning, God created everything that exists. God is by definition the quintessence of perfection and therefore a perfect being can only create a perfect creation, or rather as perfect as the creation can be given that it is limited by time and space (Q. 39:5). This perfect state means a state of harmony with God and within the creation between every element thereof (Q. 32:7, 95:4). Harmony between the Creator and the creature is not a partnership of equals, it entails a degree of submission to the divine will; it is in such submission that a created being or thing finds perfect peace. This state of peace, submission and harmony is the meaning of the Arabic word *islam*, thus we can say that God creates the world in the state of *islam*, that is, that everything is created *muslim*. Everything here means literally "everything that exists", the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms, not just in our small planet but throughout the cosmos. Minerals, plants and animals have their

character imprinted in their beings, so that in their natural state they are created *muslim*.

### **Anthropology**

The human being too is created *muslim* as the highpoint of creation. One of the characteristics of being human is to possess freewill, which in the Islamic understanding is value-laden, that is to say that we are created with the freedom freely to submit to the divine will in all things, thus to be fully *muslim*, or to be the '*abd* or Loving Servant of God. This unique human being is placed upon the earth to cherish it and to keep it in the state of *islam* or natural submission to the imprinted order; this is the duty to be the *khalifa* or the Regent of God upon earth (Q. 2:30). As creation is in time and space, it is liable to corruption or to degenerate from its pristine beauty; in the case of the human being, this is a liability to be forgetful of the divine will. An essential function of religion is to promote a sense of the awesome remembrance of God, or God-consciousness (*taqwa*), so that there is no room for rebellion or sin to enter into a human being's life.

Every human being is created for the worship of God, to be the Loving Servant and the Regent of God (Q. 51:56). This is universally applicable to every human being, male and female, that ever lived or will live in the future, thus all human beings are essentially equal, part of one universal human family descended from Adam and Eve (Q. 7:189). As this is a free act required from each person, it is not unreasonable that everyone will be judged by God at the end of time on the basis of how they have discharged the duty laid upon them; based upon this judgement will be eternal reward in heaven or eternal punishment in hell. In order that we may know how we should act, God sends guidance to human beings in the form of revelation. As the human project is one and common, then all revelation sent by God is in essence the same, even though particularities might differ.

### **Revelation**

As the first human beings, Adam and Eve stood in need of this revelation. God sent guidance upon every people upon earth who have ever lived (Q. 2:30). This guidance takes two forms: first in importance is revelation in the form of Books or scriptures, and second is the revelation in the created order around us, we can read the signs of God in the handiwork of God's creation (Q. 6:98-99). When revelation is sent to the earth, through the messenger angel Gabriel (*Jibril*), it is given to a human being who becomes a Prophet. A Prophet in Islamic understanding is a human being, nothing more or less, who is the recipient of revelation from God, who exemplifies it in a sinless life, and who leads others on the same path (Q. 33:21, 6:50, 14:11, 25:7-8, 43:44). Prophets are not incapable of sin but are protected from sin by the power of God in the form of knowledge. Adam was thus the first Prophet. Although Adam and

Eve, being in a state of pure innocence, committed an error of judgement that resulted in their being sent from the Garden to the earth, they repented and sought the forgiveness of God. God is capable of forgiving repentant sinners totally and restoring them to the state of pure *islam* or submission to the divine will, thus there is no concept of Original Sin in Islam and thus no need for a saviour or a doctrine of atonement; in Islamic understanding each human being is capable of living a life based on revelation and thus being judged by God worthy of Paradise. God alone is the judge of every human being, each of us will stand alone and naked before God on the Day of Judgement and should there be intercession on that day, it will be only through the exercise of divine favour granting each of the Prophets the privilege of interceding for their community (Q. 88:21-26). God is not bound by any decree, except such that God might ordain for himself, thus we are told that God has taken upon himself the law of mercy, and that at the judgement, the mercy of God will outweigh the wrath of God.

### **Prophets**

Beginning with Adam, there is a chain of Prophets in human history that stretches up to Muhammad as the Last and the Seal of the Prophets. How many Prophets there may have been is unknown but we are told that no people has been left without at least one Prophet, thus all humankind stand liable to the judgement of God (Q. 25:51, 35:24, 40:78). In the Qur'an twenty-five Prophets are named, twenty-one of them being biblical figures, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Ishmael, David, Solomon, Moses, Aaron, Elijah, John (the Baptist) and Jesus (Q. 6:84-87, 19:56-57, 38:41-49). The remaining four comprise three earlier Prophets that were sent to the Arabs plus Muhammad, although the Qur'an is clear that Muhammad was foretold by Jesus. Each of these Prophets taught pure *islam* and thus all were *muslim*.

### **Revealed Books**

Some of the Prophets were chosen by God to receive a revealed Book whilst others, like Elijah, were charged with reinforcing the Book sent to an earlier Prophet (Moses). God is revealed through the Speech of God, which is an eternal act and therefore outside of time. The Speech of God, the *Kalam Allah*, is uncreated and belongs to the transcendent world. It is through this Speech or Word of God that God creates by divine command "Be and it is" (Q. 2:255, 36:81-82, 54:50). When God reveals a Book, it is this Speech of God, as guidance for human living, that descends into the earthly realm as a literal, verbal revelation (Q. 32:2, 41:2, 46:2, 55:1-2). It descends upon the recipient Prophet but authorship lies with God and the intellect of the Prophet is not engaged in the process. The Book is thus literally "The Word of God" sent down to the earth. The Qur'an lists five Books and the Prophets to whom they were sent but this is not an exhaustive list; there were other Books that are unknown to us. The five listed are Abraham, who received the *Suhuf* (Q.

4:163); Moses, who received the *Taurat* (Q. 6: 91-92); David, the *Zabur* (Q. 17:55); Jesus, the *Injil* (Q. 5:46); and Muhammad, who received the Qur'an. In their pure form as received by the respective Prophet, they were the literal Word of God, sent to guide people on the Straight Path that would lead to Paradise.

This prompts the question as to the relation of the *Taurat* sent to Moses with the Hebrew *Torah* as preserved in the Hebrew Bible or similarly the *Zabur* and the Book of Psalms attributed to David. Even more problematic is the reference to Jesus receiving the *Injil* of which he was not the author and its relationship to the four canonical Gospels of the New Testament. This has been widely debated by scholars through the centuries. The Qur'an indicates that these earlier scriptures are no longer in their pristine form as received by the Prophets, but over the centuries have been subject to loss, carelessness or even perhaps deliberate alteration (Q. 2:75-79). Whilst they may contain some, perhaps much, that was originally revealed, they do not today constitute certain guidance to live the Straight Path of divine guidance for human living that will lead their followers to Paradise. Hence the need for a final Book in the form of the Qur'an as revealed to the Last Prophet, Muhammad.

### **The Prophet Muhammad**

We now enter the realm of recorded history in which Muhammad was born in Makka, Arabia in c.570 CE. He was born into a family of monotheists in the midst of a culture that had lost the purity of the worship of the one true God and succumbed to polytheism. He was an Arab, a descendant of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael, a man of pious life, trustworthy, honest and upright in the fear of God. He was in search of greater knowledge of God and used to take himself into seclusion to seek such knowledge. Some of the Arabs of that time knew of the existence of one supreme God. The word in Arabic, Allah, was used for this one supreme God, meaning literally "the one and only God". Like the English word God, Allah has no plural form and thus is a denial of any form of polytheism or henotheism.

On an odd-numbered night towards the end of the month of Ramadan in the year 610 CE, Muhammad was in meditation in a cave outside Makka when he was visited by the Angel Gabriel (Jibril, in Arabic) during which he was taken in an embrace and purified by the transfer of revealed knowledge in the form of the Qur'an. Muhammad was a man without book-learning (*ummi*) who received the Qur'an from God without the action of his own intellect in formulating the Book; like all other Books, in Islamic understanding, this was a literal, verbal revelation from God. From that time onwards, the words of the Qur'an were revealed, as God so willed, over a period of the next twenty-two years until the death of Muhammad in 632 CE.

## **Preservation of the Qur'an**

Gradually Muhammad began to proclaim an ethical monotheism, to call people to repent of their polytheistic and sinful ways, and to return to the worship of God alone. Muhammad's first followers committed the verses of the Qur'an to memory as they were revealed. Those who could write made their own written collections; Muhammad appointed scribes who recorded the Qur'an in written form in the best written Arabic available at that time. This meant that two deposits of the Qur'an were preserved, one in the hearts of the memorisers and the other in written form. Eventually these two deposits were transcribed onto a manuscript, which was completed at some stage either towards the end of the Prophet's life or certainly within a few years after his death. Written Arabic at this time lacked the grammatical niceties fully to carry the message in written form and so the early text acted as an *aide memoire* to those who carried the verbal form of the Qur'an in their memories, which were of course much more developed in a pre-book culture than in our own times, which are dominated by everything being written down. The earliest extant written manuscripts of the Qur'an in a standardised Arabic script and grammar date from the 8<sup>th</sup> century CE.

## **Hadith**

Possessing a Book of the Revealed Word is not sufficient in itself for people to live according to that guidance, they need also a human exemplar to put it into practice in every respect so that they know that it can be done and how it should be interpreted in daily living. This living example of a *muslim* life was one of the responsibilities of the Prophet. Prophets had to be human in every respect so that they could be an example to other human beings. Muhammad was the exemplar of the guidance of the Qur'an. His followers noticed and recorded everything that he did so that they had a record of his conduct to guide them. Likewise they recorded his teaching and what he said as an unfolding commentary on living the life of a Muslim. Muhammad was not born onto a blank page of history but deeply steeped in the culture of the society in which he grew up; those things that did not accord with the guidance of the Qur'an, he changed, and those things that were acceptable practices, he followed and thus endorsed as part of the Muslim way of life. These sayings, actions and the things of which Muhammad approved were circulated amongst his followers and carefully memorised as the Hadith or Traditions of Muhammad. In time, these were gathered together, classified and codified into systematic written collections in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. As such they form the secondary deposit of Islamic guidance.

## **Shari'a**

In time the scholars of Islam developed the guidance contained in the Qur'an and Hadith into a systematised code for living called the Shari'a (literally a

well-beaten pathway that leads to a definite goal, namely Paradise). As the Qur'an was revealed over a period of twenty-three years in a variety of circumstances, it rarely gives all the guidance on any one question at one time. In order to discern the teaching of the Qur'an as a whole it is necessary to take every verse of the Qur'an that touches on a question and understand it against the particular context into which it was revealed. From such study, the "golden message" of divine guidance can be determined. This led to an exhaustive science of Qur'an commentary, which has continued through the centuries building into a monumental collection by Muslims around the world. To this must be added the teaching and example contained in the Hadith and then the agreed consensus of the Muslim community and scholars down through the ages. In this way it can be seen that the Shari'a is a living discipline that is constantly evolving to embrace the ever-changing conditions in which human beings live.

In the year 622 CE, Muhammad and his nascent band of Muslims migrated to the city that came to be called Madina, around 300kms to the north of Makka. Here the foundations of an established community were laid and the verses of the Qur'an changed from being *kerygmatic* to being constitutional. The polity of Islam was developed at this time, so that Islamic practice can be seen in the conduct of the city-state. This saw the development of personal law in marriage, divorce, and inheritance; corporate law in the conduct of war, and the process of consultation of the people; and criminal law in the process of justice and punishment. Muhammad was the single leader of the community as the spiritual guide, the final arbiter in law, the constitutional leader and the commander of the Muslims in battle. In this way, the Shari'a is seen as a complete code of human living covering every aspect of life.

After the death of Muhammad, the leadership of the community was disputed. Everyone was clear that there would not be another Prophet and that final authority should rest in a single pair of hands. What turned out to be the majority position, which came to be called the Sunnis, held that the leader, to be called the Caliph, should be chosen on the basis of merit, the man amongst the Muslim community who was most pious and wise. Although this position recognised no hereditary principle, within decades dynasties had developed and these dominated the history of Sunni Islam until the modern period when the Ottoman Empire was replaced with a series of nation-states. Sunnis are generally reckoned as 90% of Muslims and are found all over the world. The group that became the minority, later called the Shi'a, interpreted a verse of the Qur'an that speaks of the purification or "rendering the best of creation" of the family of Muhammad descended through his daughter Fatima and his cousin Ali and their two sons Hasan and Hussain, as an indication of divine favour that meant that all the leaders of the community, called Imams, should be direct descendants of this family, called the *Ahl al-Bayt* or Family of the Household. The Shi'a likewise hold that Muhammad designated Ali as his successor but that his position was usurped by the opposing leading families. Much of the

history of the Shi'a has been characterised by suffering, as they would see it, in the cause of right. The Shi'a split into different groups due to disputes about the succession of Imams but for the majority amongst them, who recognise a chain of twelve Imams leading up to the last Imam "going into occultation" in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, authority now lies with the most senior religious scholars, the Ayatollahs. The Shi'a are a majority in Iran, Iraq and Bahrain, and minorities in several other countries, e.g. Lebanon, Pakistan, the Gulf States, and India. One characteristic of the Shi'a system is that a clerical hierarchy has developed that gives a clear locus of teaching authority, whilst amongst the Sunnis, any man or woman with the necessary education and knowledge can take and defend a position of their own, thus making authority much more diffuse.

### ***Taqwa***

Observance of a code of law is not sufficient for living a life of total submission to the divine will. Each Muslim needs also to cultivate a sense of God-consciousness, or *taqwa*, which connotes something of the awesomeness of "the Fear of the Lord". This does not develop automatically but is the result of bringing every aspect of human life under divine guidance through the practices of religion. These are summarised as "the five pillars of Islam".

### **Belief**

The first pillar of Islam is to profess the *Shahada*, the basic creed: "I bear witness that there is no god (nothing worthy of worship) save God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God". The first part is the abstract statement of belief in the one and only being worthy of worship, God. The second part gives concrete content to the abstract by linking it to the revelation given to the Prophet and his ministry. This is the declaration that is needed for someone to convert to Islam, or revert as some Muslims prefer, as all human beings are born *muslim*. Of course before the Prophethood of Muhammad, the *Shahada* would have stated: "I bear witness that there is no god save God, Abraham (or Moses, or Jesus etc.) is the Messenger of God". This is not just a one-off declaration but it is repeated by observant Muslims many times each day. It thus serves as a reminder that they must allow nothing, neither traditional idols nor modern day idols such as wealth, rank, nationalism, power, military might etc., to come between them and the worship of God alone.

### **Prayer**

All Muslim men and women over the age of puberty are required to turn to God in formal prayer or *Salat* five times each day according to the passage of the sun from before sunrise until night-time, thus the whole day is punctuated with prayer. To prepare for *Salat*, the Muslim needs to perform ritual ablutions, find the direction of prayer, and declare their intention before God. Each formal prayer, which is performed in Arabic, is made up of a number of

units (*rak'at*), each of which comprises an acknowledgement that it is God alone who is worshiped, the recitation of verses from the Qur'an (which guidance is acknowledged in a profound bow), short verbal prayers, and the symbolic acknowledgement of total submission to God alone through prostration with the forehead and both hands laid on the floor before God. The number of units varies from two to four at different times of the day. Once the prescribed number of units has been performed, there is a profession of faith, invocation of blessings on Abraham and Muhammad and their families, and an exchange of peace with the whole of creation to right and left. There typically follows a time of intercession.

As never more than a few hours passes between one formal prayer and the next, the believer is drawn back into the presence of God to seek mercy, forgiveness and guidance during the day. However, this spirit of God-consciousness is promoted by prayers of supplication (*du'a*) that can accompany every action during the day. These can be in any language and either from prayer books or extempore. Even when the mind and body is engaged in other activities, the heart can be trained to remember God by the performance of *dhikr* so that eventually the Muslim lives in a constant state of God-consciousness (*taqwa*), knowing that one stands before God at every moment and in all circumstances (*ihsan*).

### **Social welfare**

On many occasions, the Qur'an commands Muslims to perform the prayers and to bring their socio-economic life under divine guidance; thus is the whole of human life submitted to the will of God (Q. 2:43). The socio-economic system of Islam stands under the key concept of *zakat* but this needs to be placed within a context.

God is the owner of everything and human beings are mere custodians to use God's creation for the benefit of all and for the enjoyment of the individual trustee. Every element within creation must be brought into and maintained in that state which God intended, that is the state of being *muslim*; thus ecology and respect for the environment are integral parts of the Islamic system. All human beings are members of one family and thus economic activity must be conducted under the welfare principle of *sadaqa* (bearing one another's burdens). Muslims are taught that only three things live on to one's benefit after death: God-conscious children, contributions to education, and welfare projects, whether the latter two were founded during life or endowed by testament. Not surprisingly then, Muslim society abounds with libraries, schools, educational establishments, almshouses, hospitals, orphanages, etc. supported by such charitable trusts. Humanitarian aid, relief and development agencies have been established to relieve human suffering wherever it may occur.



All forms of economic exploitation are forbidden in Islam. The labourer's wages are to be paid before his sweat dries. Usury (*riba*) is forbidden as it takes advantage of people in their need and unfairly privileges capital over the labour of the borrower. Muslims should support those in need by a loan if it is possible but without interest. Money is not allowed to make money without human effort and risk. Rather than giving a bank loan at interest secured against assets to expand a company, Muslim financial institutions will take a share in the equity of the company so that their investment is open to both profit and loss, as is that of the company's owner. Gambling is forbidden, as is investment in anything in which a Muslim is not permitted to partake, e.g. consumption of alcohol is forbidden (*haram*) and therefore a Muslim cannot invest pension funds in a brewery, public house or liquor distribution company. This is accommodated in modern Western society by establishing ethically-screened unit trusts and pension schemes.

There is nothing wrong with being rich under the Islamic system, provided that the wealth was accumulated in permitted (*halal*) ways and used according to the divine guidance. Extremes of asceticism are not encouraged in Islam but rather the balanced, middle way. Muslims are encouraged to make provision for their families and for the future and then to allow their surplus wealth to circulate (*infaq*) amongst those who are in need of assistance to help them take responsibilities for their own lives and their families, e.g. a Muslim with surplus money might give some to a workers' cooperative, without any personal interest or gain, so that it could be equipped to permit the workers to earn a living and thus support their families. This sense of the purification of wealth is contained in the concept of *zakat* in which an annual calculation is made by each adult Muslim of how much money they have in excess of what they need for basic living, then 2.5% of this is to be passed on to a list of suitable causes (the poor, stranded travellers, to free slaves and debtors, etc.) so that the remainder is purified for personal use. Of course, there is no limit to the amount that can be given in charity, provided that one does not neglect the responsibilities of one's family etc.

## **Fasting**

A life lived in total submission to the will of God requires some moral fibre and relies on self-discipline rather than externally imposed rules. It is towards this end that all adult Muslim men and women past the age of puberty are required to fast from all food, drink and sexual relations from before dawn (first light) until after sunset each day for the lunar month of Ramadan. This is not to imply that these things are in some way bad, far from it; these three represent some of the most powerful urges that humans possess and so by bringing them under discipline during this month, strength of character is built up to enable believers to implement the divine guidance in every aspect of life throughout the year. Fasting also promotes a sense of thankfulness to God for all bounties received and a sense of solidarity with the poor and starving for

whom hunger is not a regulated temporary condition but a dread daily reality in a world of plenty and dire shortage.

The month of Ramadan is also characterised by a review of life in which each seeks to bring every thought and activity under scrutiny and guidance. How one earns one's living and spends one's money are considered, how one controls one's tongue, eyes and ears, and whether one is bearing grudges that need to be reconciled before the end of the month. Additional time is spent in prayer and devotions, such as the reading of the Qur'an. Charity is especially favoured during this month and none can celebrate the festival of the Feast of Fast-breaking ('Id al-Fitr) before first giving money to those in need to ensure that they can have an adequate celebration too. Naturally, according to the balanced middle-way of Islam, fasting is not allowed to become a torture or to do serious harm to the person concerned. If a fast seriously endangers one's health, then it must be broken because in the hierarchy of importance, the preservation of life is near the top. There are exemptions for those who are too young or old, for the sick, travellers, pregnant or nursing mothers, and for women during the days of their monthly periods. Those prevented from fasting by some transient cause make up for missed days later, and those permanently exempted, such as the elderly, will give money in charity to enter into the spirit of the fast.

### **Pilgrimage**

When Muslims say their formal prayers, they are required to turn in the direction of Makka in modern Saudi Arabia. As Muslims are scattered all over the world, this acts like the hub of a wheel. As prayer times are regulated by the passage of the sun, it is always rising and setting somewhere on earth at every second, therefore never a moment goes by without Muslims somewhere on earth turning towards Makka in prayer. Thus Makka, or more precisely the Ka'ba (a cuboid building in Makka held to have been built by Abraham and Ishmael), acts as the earthly focus of prayer for the worldwide Muslim community (*umma*). Once each year, for five days, this becomes the centre of the annual pilgrimage of the Hajj, when currently around three million Muslims from every ethnic group, language and part of the world gather together at the command of God. This pilgrimage is compulsory once in a lifetime for every Muslim who enjoys sufficient good health and the necessary wealth to perform it. Before the pilgrims enter the sacred precincts of the Ka'ba, they take off all jewellery and ornamentation and the men dress in two unsewn sheets of white cloth to symbolise their common humanity and as a reminder that when we die we take nothing with us from this world except pious acts (the sheets serve men as their burial shroud when the time comes). In this way, the absolute unity and equality of humankind is symbolised.

All the rites of the Hajj, although they were codified by Muhammad, point back not to him but to the chain of Prophets that passes through Abraham and

Ishmael, right back to Adam himself. The Ka'ba is circumambulated following the example of Abraham and Ishmael, and pilgrims re-enact the frantic search of Hagar for water for her infant son. The willingness of Abraham and Ishmael to sacrifice and be sacrificed in accordance with the divine will is recalled in the Feast of Sacrifice ('Id al-Adha) that marks the end of the pilgrimage but this is preceded by symbolic stonings of the Devil to renounce all temptations to evil. The highpoint of the Hajj is the Standing on the Plain of Arafat, when all the pilgrims gather together on a vast plain where tradition has it that Adam and Eve were reconciled to God after they repented of their error of judgement in the Garden. Here the pilgrims stand as though on the Day of Judgement itself, when all will be known and accounted for before God as judge. God has taken upon himself the law of mercy and so forgiveness is available for those who are truly penitent, acknowledge their sins, resolve to amend their lives and to make restitution wherever possible. The only thing that can prevent the mercy of God reaching the believer is the disposition of the believer her/himself. There is no sacramental priesthood or intermediary in Islam; every human being has direct access and personable responsibility for their life. The sinner who is truly repentant can be assured of the forgiveness of God.

### **Conclusion: *jihad***

The whole of this life is a test and preparation for the Day of Judgement and eternal reward or punishment. Life is an integrated whole; there are no boundaries between the sacred and the secular in Islam, all must be brought under divine guidance. This has been sent to every people on earth but the only secure deposit of this guidance today is contained in the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad. All human beings, including those who follow earlier revelations, such as Jews and Christians, are called to embrace this revelation and embark on the Straight Path as trodden by Muhammad and his followers. This path is not always easy, temptation is real and there must be a constant struggling and striving to follow the Straight Path that leads to Paradise. This is the principal meaning of *jihad*; to struggle and strive against temptation and to live according to the guidance. In this sense, *jihad* is sometimes spoken of as the sixth pillar of Islam; the guidance must be implemented through loving service and submission to God, for human beings were created to worship God alone and, provided that they do so, can throw themselves on the divine mercy.