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## ORIGINAL SIN AND THE QUR'AN<sup>1</sup>

**SUMMARY:** The present article addresses the common view that the Qur'an has no doctrine of original sin. It begins by defining original sin with attention to the Bible and Christian tradition. Thereafter the author addresses Qur'anic language on "bearing the burden of another" and the Qur'an's generally pessimistic anthropology. Finally the author examines the Qur'anic material on the fall of the devil, the permission that God grants the devil to lead humans astray, and the descent of Adam and his wife to the world with its adornments after their sin. The subsequent history of the humanity in the Qur'an is punctuated with punishment stories. All of this leads to the conclusion that humanity's tendency to sin (and God's tendency to punish humans for their sin) is connected to this proto-history. Accordingly, while it is right that the Qur'an does not embrace much of Christian teaching on original sin, it is nevertheless the case that in the Qur'an Adam's sin has serious consequences for his progeny.

It is an axiom among scholars of Islam that the Qur'an rejects the doctrine of original sin. According to the Qur'an, we are told, humans are unaffected by Adam's sin (if Adam ever sinned at all). His descendants are free to obey or disobey God as they choose and will be judged only on the basis of their choices. As the Qur'an has no place for a doctrine of original sin it also has no place for a doctrine of redemption. Jesus (even if he is given the title, or name, Christ) appears in the Qur'an not as redeemer but as a prophet who preaches (like other prophets) submission to the one God.

In the present article I will argue that this axiom is partly wrong. The Qur'an certainly does not embrace every aspect of Christian teaching on original sin. A number of verses in the Qur'an relate that humans are to be judged according to their own merits or faults (although other verses suggests that one's faults can be given to another). However, the Qur'an also teaches that humans incline principally towards

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evil<sup>2</sup>. This pessimistic anthropology, I will argue, is connected to the fall of Adam (and Eve) from the garden of paradise. Adam's progeny, trapped in this lower world as a direct consequence of Adam's sin and subsequent expulsion (or rather, descent) from paradise, incline towards evil. They are susceptible to heeding the lies of the devil and to evil. This is evident already in the person of Adam's first son, whose soul (*nafs*) prompts him to murder (Q 5:30).

Scholars have missed this point, in part, because they have been eager to distance the Qur'an from Christian doctrine. For some the supposed absence of original sin in the Qur'an is a sign of the ethical superiority of Islamic teaching. This perspective has been highlighted recently by Damian Howard in his article, "The Nature of the Human in Contemporary Christian-Muslim Relations"<sup>3</sup>. As Howard explains, certain contemporary scholars (including Isma'il al-Faruqi and Shabbir Akhtar) have made the question of original sin a point of sectarian disputation, insisting that Islam holds a more optimistic anthropology<sup>4</sup>.

In this article I do not mean to debate whether Islam or Christianity's vision of the human person is more optimistic. Indeed I would not presume to tell Muslims what an Islamic anthropology looks like (which, after all, is connected to the believing community's own engagement with their revelation). My interest here is only in a close reading of what the Qur'an teaches of the human condition. This will lead to the argument that while the Qur'an's anthropology is not the same as that of Christian tradition, it is closer than commonly assumed.

In order to advance this argument I will begin by defining original sin. This will involve an examination of not only the Bible but also of Christian tradition. For while

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<sup>2</sup> My analysis of the Qur'an's anthropology is informed by, and close to, that of Ida Zilio-Grandi in her work *Il Corano e il male*, Einaudi, Turin 2002. As Jon Hoover explains, the Hanbali Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) sees human sin as a sort of catalyst for divine mercy. See J. Hoover, "God's Wise Purposes in Creating Iblis: Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyyah's Theodicy of God's Names and Attributes", in C. Bori and L. Holtzman (ed.), *A Scholar in the Shadow: Essays in the Legal and Theological Thought of Ibn Qayyim Al-Ġawziyyah (Oriente Moderno XC)*, Istituto Per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, Rome 2010, 113-134.

<sup>3</sup> D. Howard, "The Nature of the Human in Contemporary Christian-Muslim Relations", in D. Thomas (ed.), *Routledge Handbook on Christian-Muslim Relations*, Routledge, London 2018, 320-328.

<sup>4</sup> Howard ("The Nature of the Human", p. 322) notes the intensity (and imprecision) of Isma'il al-Faruqi's critique of Christian anthropology, which involves his idea of Paul's obsession with sin or "peccatism". See I. Faruqi, *Christian Ethics: A Historical and Systematic Analysis of Its Dominant Idea*, McGill University Press, Montreal 1967, esp. pp. 199ff. Howard also quotes Akhtar's simplistic comparison of Islamic and Christian anthropology: "If the essential element in human nature is, for Muslims, an intellect endowed with the capacity to know and appropriate a salvifically significant theological truth, it is, for Christians, a will defiled by sin. The Fall, in Christian thought, was a unique event which fully determined the total nature of man". S. Akhtar, *A Faith for All Seasons: Islam and the Challenge of the Modern World*, Dee, Chicago 1990, 154 (quoted by Howard, 321). Howard comments: "This juxtaposition of a healthily optimistic Islam with a bleakly grim Christianity has become something of a meme, rehearsed frequently in forums of debate and dialogue". Howard, 321. To add another voice to the chorus one might compare the thoughts of Timothy Winter on original sin in an interview published online: <https://www.abc.net.au/sundaynights/stories/s1237986.htm>.

the doctrine of original sin has its basis in the Bible, it is ultimately a product of the Church's exegesis. In fact, Christian theologians have understood original sin in a variety of ways through the centuries (and some have completely denied it). I will not attempt to classify here the various expressions of this doctrine, but instead describe its Biblical roots and summarize its most common articulations. This will allow us to consider whether the Qur'an communicates something analogous to the Christian notion of original sin.

I do not mean to assert that the Qur'an has inherited a notion of original sin from the religious currents of its historical context. Instead I mean only to discuss the Qur'an's perspective on sin in relationship to Christian teaching. This will show that the Qur'an's view of sin is closer to that of Christianity than is commonly assumed.

### *Original Sin in Christianity*

In Catholic tradition the standard dogmatic definition of original sin is that of the Council of Trent (1564). In its fifth session the Council fathers promulgated the following teachings regarding original sin (*peccatum originale*): 1. That Adam lost his "holiness and justice" when he sinned; 2. That Adam injured not only himself but also "his posterity"; 3. That only by the mediation of Christ is the sin of Adam removed; 4. That infants are to be baptized for the remission of original sin; and 5. That concupiscence remains<sup>5</sup>. To some extent the formulations of Trent on original sin are responses to the reformers, although Luther's thoughts are not far from the eventual formulations of Trent. In his *Commentary on Romans* Luther explains that original sin involves "the proneness toward evil; the loathing of the good; the disdain for light and wisdom but fondness for error and darkness; the avoidance and contempt of good works but an eagerness for doing evil"<sup>6</sup>. Luther had a relatively limited sense of the effect of baptism on original sin, which he describes elsewhere as a "wound" that "remains in Christians until they die"<sup>7</sup>. For Luther, baptism does not remove the stain of original sin, although it does exonerate the baptized from imputation (or guilt) of that sin before God. Calvin was still more pessimistic regarding the effect of baptism on original sin. In his *Institutes*, he writes: "Now it is clear how false is the teaching ... that through baptism we are released and made exempt from original sin"<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, "Decree Concerning Original Sin", (sessio 5) ed. and trans. J. Waterworth, Dolman, London 1848, 21-24

<sup>6</sup> M. Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, trans. W. Pauck, *Library of Christian Classics* XV (Westminster 1961) 167; cited from J. Endres, "The Council of Trent and Original Sin", *Proceedings, Catholic Theological Society of America* 22 (1967), (70-91) 55-56.

<sup>7</sup> Endres, "The Council of Trent and Original Sin", 56 [quoting Kerr, *A Compendium of Luther's Theology*, 86].

<sup>8</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J.T. McNeill and trans. F.L. Battles, *Library of Christian Classics* 20 (Westminster 1960) XXI:IV:XV:10, p. 1311. Cited from Endres, "The Council of Trent and Original Sin", 58.

How closely connected is Trent's doctrine on original sin (or that of Luther, or Calvin) to the Bible's teaching on sin and salvation history? According to the German Jesuit Karl Rahner the Bible suggests that sin was not a part of God's design, but is now a universal human experience:

Consequently we know nothing except that man was created by God as God's personal partner in a sacred history of salvation and perdition; that concupiscence and death do not belong to man as God wills him to be, but to man as a sinner; that the first man was also the first to incur guilt before God and his guilt as a factor of man's existence historically brought about by man, belongs intrinsically to the situation in which the whole subsequent history of humanity unfolds<sup>9</sup>.

In the Biblical account humans are created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), a point not shared by the Qur'an, which relates instead that man is created as a "vicegerent" or, perhaps, "successor" (*halifa*; Q 2:30)<sup>10</sup>. The story of Adam and Eve's sin in Genesis 3 thus appears to be a sort of "fall" (although the Bible does not use this term) inasmuch as they anger the creator who had given them such a high station. Outside of the garden the woman will have pain in childbearing and be ruled by her husband (Gen 3:16). The man will toil and eat bread "in the sweat of [his] face" (Gen 3:17-19).

Although it is not said explicitly, most readers understand that these punishments (which are likely etiologies) are experienced also by their progeny. That human nature has been changed outside of the garden is further suggested by the account which follows in Genesis 4: the conflict between the sons of Adam and Eve and Cain's subsequent murder of Abel. Cain's sin is not an exception. Sin spreads and possesses mankind to the extent that all humans, with the sole exception of Noah and his family, are wicked (Gen 6:5). Sinfulness and disobedience are a regular part of the biblical narratives that follow the flood, such that Solomon (1Ki 8:46) will explain: "There is no man who does not sin"<sup>11</sup>. The author of Ecclesiastes (by tradition, also Solomon) will wisely reflect: "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins" (Ecc 7:20).

The Christian debate on original sin was especially shaped by certain passages in Paul's letters. In Romans Paul writes: "Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rom 5:12). A few verses later he continues: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). In Ephesians Paul speaks of human nature before conversion (and baptism) as follows: "Among these we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of body and mind, and so we were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (Eph 2:3).

<sup>9</sup> K. Rahner, *Hominisation*, 35-36 in Endres, "The Council of Trent and Original Sin", 72.

<sup>10</sup> There is, however, a hadith which seems to reproduce the perspective of Genesis 1:26, although its precise meaning is disputed. See C. Melchert, "'God Created Adam in His Image'", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 13 (2011) 113-24.

<sup>11</sup> Bible translations are from the Revised Standard Version.

Already Irenaeus (d. AD 202), reflecting on the Bible, concludes that separation from God and mortality are consequences of the sin of Adam, who had been created to be immortal<sup>12</sup>. Irenaeus holds that Adam's sin "affected not only himself but the whole of mankind"<sup>13</sup>, and that all sinned in Adam<sup>14</sup>. John Hochban, summarizing Irenaeus' doctrine of the Fall, writes: "From its first father the human race inherited not only the natural death of the body but also the supernatural death of the soul, the loss of divine life"<sup>15</sup>. As Hochban explains, this doctrine is closely connected to Irenaeus' teaching on the baptism of infants<sup>16</sup>. Irenaeus also held that the fall in no way reduced God's love for humanity. Immediately after Adam's sin God promised redemption to humanity (Gen 3:15) and remains always a "lover of mankind"<sup>17</sup>.

The doctrine of original sin is developed still more fully by Augustine (d. 430)<sup>18</sup>. Jesse Couenhoven argues that original sin for Augustine involves fundamentally the concept of inherited sin<sup>19</sup>. More generally Augustine is moved by Paul's description of the contrast between Adam and Christ. If all are able to participate in the righteousness achieved by Christ, then all may similarly participate in the sin occurred by Adam. In this sense Augustine's thinking begins with Christ, and only then is connected to Adam. Augustine develops his ideas of original sin in part on the basis of Romans 5 (cited above) but also in light of 1 Corinthians 15:22: "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive"<sup>20</sup>. He explains that all humans have a sort of solidarity with Adam and that his sin is transmitted from generation to generation<sup>21</sup>. Importantly,

<sup>12</sup> See *Adversus haereses*, III:23:3; V:15:2. The reference is from J.I. Hochban, "St. Irenaeus on the Atonement", *Theological Studies* (525-557) 532.

<sup>13</sup> Hochban, "St. Irenaeus on the Atonement", 532.

<sup>14</sup> *Adversus haereses*, V:16:3. Reference from Hochban, "St. Irenaeus on the Atonement", 533.

<sup>15</sup> Hochban, "St. Irenaeus on the Atonement", 533.

<sup>16</sup> Hochban, "St. Irenaeus on the Atonement", 533.

<sup>17</sup> *Adversus haereses*, III:18:6; Hochban, "St. Irenaeus on the Atonement", 534.

<sup>18</sup> Augustine's notion of original sin is generally not considered to depend on Irenaeus (who wrote in Greek, not Latin), but instead to rest in part on Augustine's own reading of scripture along with the thought of Ambrose and especially the pseudonymous Ambrosiaster. See further E. Bonaiuti and G. La Piana "The Genesis of St. Augustine's Idea of Original Sin", *The Harvard Theological Review* 10 (1917) 159-175, especially p. 168 where they point out that Augustine's reading of Romans 5:12 (see below) has a precedent in Ambrosiaster (although Augustine considered them to come from St. Hilarius of Poitiers).

<sup>19</sup> "The doctrine does not merely claim that all adult human beings are sinners, having sinned at some point or another; more radically, it maintains that all human beings are *born* culpably misrelated to God", J. Couenhoven, "St. Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin", *Augustinian Studies* 36 (2005) (359-96), 360.

<sup>20</sup> As Couenhoven explains, part of Augustine's argument for original sin was his particular reading of Romans 5:12. Whereas (as cited above) the final phrase in this verse is often (as in the RSV translation cited) read as: "because all men sinned", Augustine reads this phrase as "in whom all have sinned", meaning "in Adam all have sinned". See Couenhoven, "St. Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin", 362.

<sup>21</sup> *City of God* (12:27): "Among the terrestrial animals man was made by Him in His own image, and, for the reason I have given, was made one individual, though he was not left solitary. For there is nothing so social by nature, so unsocial by its corruption, as this race. And human nature has nothing more appropriate, either for the prevention of discord, or for the healing of it, where it exists, than the

however, Augustine also holds that his sin has certain effects beyond guilt or debt, effects that include “disordered desire and ignorance”<sup>22</sup>. Thus for Augustine original sin redounds not only to the need of humanity for salvation (which for Augustine involves baptism) but also to the struggle of humans (even after baptism) to live righteous lives, pleasing to God. This perspective, essentially taught later by Trent (that concupiscence remains), will be important to our analysis of original sin in the Qur’an.

### *Original Sin in the Qur’an*

That the Qur’an contains any notion of original sin is, to my understanding, a minority, if not completely heterodox, position<sup>23</sup>. The majority view is captured by Fazlur Rahman in his *Major Themes of the Qur’an* (originally published in 1980): “The Qur’an does not hold to original sin as such but states that Adam and Eve were forgiven their sin after he had received his Lord’s Words [Q 2:37]”<sup>24</sup>. Rahman is right that the Qur’an does not hold to original sin “as such”, if thereby one understands the full doctrine of original sin as developed by Augustine and followed by certain currents of Christian theology (as introduced above). However, while the Qur’an has God forgive Adam and Eve, it does not necessarily follow that the Qur’an teaches nothing like original sin. If we understand original sin more broadly as the teaching that all humans are negatively affected by the sin of Adam, then the issue is more complicated.

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remembrance of that first parent of us all, whom God was pleased to create alone, that all men might be derived from one, and that they might thus be admonished to preserve unity among their whole multitude”. Trans. A. Dods, Scribner’s Sons, New York 1887, 243b-244a.

<sup>22</sup> “Augustine also speaks of original sin as an inherited state of disordered desire and ignorance, a constitutional fault with which we are born. According to this account, original sin is more than participatory or imputed guilt; it is our own vitiated state – a state of disordered love and ignorance – which we have in our own proper lives”. Couenhoven, “St. Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin”, 371. Closely related to the notion of disordered desire is Augustine’s notion of concupiscence, meaning more precisely, “desire for things forbidden, and thus, the desire for sin”. Couenhoven, 373.

<sup>23</sup> Jon Hoover has drawn my attention to the thought of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) who (in an opinion preserved in his *Mağmū’ al-Fatāwā*) describes evil itself as non-existent (so as not to ascribe evil to God) but agrees that humans tend (out of ignorance) to fall into sin. See J. Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya’s Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, Brill, Leiden 2007, 200-205.

<sup>24</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2009, 19. This opinion is commonly found among non-Muslim scholars as well. Edmund Beck, explaining why in certain Suras the Qur’an refers to the fall of Iblīs without recounting the story of Adam’s sin in the garden, relates: “Der Fall Adams war für ihn [that is, Muhammad] nur rein Sonderfall ohne jede eigene, übergreifende Bedeutung”. E. Beck, “Satan und Adam. Der Werdegang einer koranischen Erzählung”, *Le Muséon* 89 (1976) (195-244) 210; cited by K.-F. Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans: neue Erkenntnisse aus Sicht der historisch-kritischen Bibelwissenschaft*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2012, 92. Similarly Marcia Hermanson writes: “According to [Q] 2:37 a repentant Adam turned to God and received words of guidance. This not only initiates Adam as a prophet but is taken to indicate that there is no Fall into original sinfulness within qur’anic anthropology”. M. Hermansen, “Eschatology”, in T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2008 (308-24), 313.

I will argue that the Qur'an shares with Augustine the idea that humans are universally marked by "disordered desire and ignorance" and that, in its own way, the Qur'an attributes this condition to the sin of Adam (and Eve).

To begin with, however, it is worth noting that the accounts of Genesis and the Qur'an (including Q 2:37, paraphrased by Rahman above) are not as far apart as Rahman implies. It is true that the Qur'an speaks of Adam's repentance and alludes to God's subsequent forgiveness of him. However, God's relationship to Adam and Eve (and their descendants) in the Bible is not principally one of wrath but rather one of providential care (despite the sins of humankind). Genesis 3:21 relates that God made garments for Adam and Eve after their sin, implying that God had not forsaken them but instead was intent on caring for them<sup>25</sup>. Some pre-Qur'anic Christian traditions, notably the Syriac *Cave of Treasures*, develop this idea by reporting explicitly that God forgave Adam<sup>26</sup>. Genesis 4 relates that God looked with favor on the sacrifice of Abel, Adam and Eve's son. God furthermore has mercy on Cain even after his murder of his brother Abel by placing a mark of protection on him (Gen 4:15). Indeed the entire Biblical account that follows suggests that neither Adam nor his descendants had been forsaken by God (as though He never forgave them for Adam's sin). This does not mean, however, that the sin of Adam had no consequences for his progeny. Similarly, the Qur'an might teach that God forgave Adam and nevertheless that later humans were affected by his sin.

Yet it is not only the report of Adam's forgiveness that leads scholars to deny the doctrine of original sin in the Qur'an. No less important in this regard are those passages in the Qur'an which declare that individuals cannot bear the sins of others. In his entry "Sin, Major, and Minor" in the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Muhammad Qasim Zaman summarizes a common opinion when he writes, "Islam, like Judaism, has no concept of an 'original sin'. Every soul bears its own burden"<sup>27</sup>. In support of this argument Zaman refers to the following Qur'anic verses:

Say: 'Shall I seek a Lord other than God, when He is the Lord of everything? No one earns (anything) except against himself, and no one bearing a burden bears the burden of another. Then to your Lord is your return, (and) then He will inform you about your differences' (Q 6:164)<sup>28</sup>.

Whoever is (rightly) guided, is guided only for himself, and whoever goes astray, goes astray only against himself. No one bearing a burden bears the burden of another. We never punish until We have raised up a messenger (Q 17:15).

Those who disbelieve say to those who believe, 'Follow our way, and let us bear your sins'. Yet they cannot bear a single one of their own sins. Surely they are liars indeed! (Q 29:12).

<sup>25</sup> Certain eastern Christian traditions (which may lie behind Qur'an 2:37) explicitly declare that God forgave Adam. For example, the sixth century Syriac text *Cave of Treasures*, 5:2-4, ed. Ri. See also G.S. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2018, 39.

<sup>26</sup> See *Cave of Treasures*, 5:2-4; Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible*, 39.

<sup>27</sup> M. Qasim Zaman, "Sin, Major and Minor", *EQ*, 5 (19-28) 22.

<sup>28</sup> All Qur'an translations are from A.J. Droge, *The Qur'an: A New Annotated Translation* (Equinox, 2013), unless otherwise identified.

Other verses too speak of the impossibility of sharing the burden of sin (see Q 2:286; 4:111; 29:12; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38-42; 82:19). Intriguingly, however, a few verses suggest the contrary, at least in part. While I know of no passage in the Qur'an which suggests that one can accrue merit or forgiveness of sins from another's actions<sup>29</sup>, there are passages which suggest that one can be held responsible for another's sin. In Qur'an 5:29, for example, Abel (not identified by name) says the following to Cain before the latter kills him: "Surely I wish that you would incur my sin and your sin, so that you may be one of the companions of the Fire. That is the reward of the evildoers"<sup>30</sup>.

In any case, the Qur'an is clearly more interested in denying the possibility that one person could bear others' sins and achieve forgiveness or salvation for them. Its interest in doing so may be principally a manner of distancing itself from (perhaps polemicizing against) the Christian doctrine of atonement. Qur'anic soteriology has no place for the Christian understanding of atonement, itself rooted in the Jewish sacrificial system. Jesus in the Qur'an is named *Masih*, but there is no hint that he is messianic. He is not named redeemer or savior, and the only passage to mention the Crucifixion (Q 4:157) seems to deny it<sup>31</sup>.

According to the Qur'an individuals are judged individually. They are saved by their faith and trust in God and obedience to his law as revealed by the Prophet Muhammad. Humans are saved by living in gratitude (*šukr*) and pious fear (*taqwā*), by forsaking sin and unbelief or ingratitude (*kufr*)<sup>32</sup>. According to the Qur'an, however, humanity generally, and only certain individuals, tend towards sin and ingratitude.

### *Pessimistic Anthropology*

In Sura 2 the Qur'an has the angels express concern, if not foreknowledge, that humans will be unrighteous:

<sup>29</sup> One possible exception is the sacrifice of Abraham that acted as a ransom for his son (*fadaynāhu bi-dibhīn 'aẓīm*). Q 37:107.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to Q 5:29, see also 6:31, 119; 16:25; 29:13. On Cain and Abel in the Qur'an see I. Zilio-Grandi, "La figure de Caïn dans le Coran", *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 216-1 (1999) 31-85; J. Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton 2011, 111-53; K. Suriano, "Les longues chemins de la fraternité. Le récit coranique de Caïn et Abel", *Islamochristiana* 45 (2019) 89-109.

<sup>31</sup> Basetti-Sani argues that the Qur'an alludes to Jesus' as the suffering servant (prophesied by Isaiah 53) when it declares "The Messiah does not disdain to be a servant of God" (Q 4:172). G. Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: A Christian Interpretation of the Sacred Book of Islam*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago 1977, 177. He also suggests that the allusion to a man who was killed (Q 2:72) is an allusion to Christ, with reference to Hebrews 9:11-14. Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ*, 166-167. He argues (pp. 168-174) that the Qur'an affirms the crucifixion.

<sup>32</sup> For a clear presentation of Qur'anic soteriology see T. Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung*, Keio University, Tokyo 1964, especially, ch. 6: "Ch. 6 Communicative Relation Between God and Man: Non-linguistic Communication" (and note the chart on p. 147).

(Remember) when your Lord said to the angels, 'Surely I am placing on the earth a ruler'. They said, 'Will You place on it someone who will foment corruption on it, and shed blood, while we glorify (You) with Your praise and call You holy?' He said, 'Surely I know what you do not know' (Q 2:30).

This passage is connected to a theme developed in Jewish tradition of the angelic resistance to the creation of humankind. In the tractate Sanhedrin (b. San 38b) it is God who announces the future evil deeds of humans to the angels. Two companies of angels are destroyed before a third company thinks better of it and acknowledges God's right to create even sinful creatures<sup>33</sup>. In the Qur'an the angels already know of future humanity's sinfulness, although it is not clear how they came to this knowledge. The *tafsīr* tradition will explain that they had seen the bad behavior of the first residents of earth, the *jinn*<sup>34</sup>.

In fact the Qur'an relates in a number of passages that humans really are bad<sup>35</sup>. Humans *always* mock the messengers sent to them (Q 30:30) and turn way from the signs revealed to them (Q 36:46). Thus humans have become God's adversary (Q 36:77). This is why God has His way (*sunnat Allāh*; Q 33:38, 62; 40:85; 48:23) of dealing with humans, namely punishment:

How many a town (which) was doing evil have We smashed, and produced another people after it! And when they sensed Our violence, suddenly they began fleeing from it. 'Do not flee, but return to what luxury you were given to delight in, and (to) your dwellings, so that you may be questioned'. They said, 'Woe to us! Surely we have been evildoers'. This cry of theirs did not stop until We cut them down (and) snuffed (them) out (Q 21:11-15).

But their belief did not benefit them when they saw Our violence – the customary way of God (*sunnat Allāh*), which has already occurred in the past concerning His servants – and then the disbelievers were lost (Q 40:85).

The Qur'an repeatedly affirms that humans tend towards unbelief and sin. Humans were created in (or "of") haste (*min 'ağalin*; Q 21:37) and are hasty (Q 17:11). Humans are ungrateful to their Lord (*kanūd*; Q 100:6). As soon as humans are deprived of mercy or blessing they despair and become ingrates or unbelievers: "If indeed We give a person a taste of mercy from Us, (and) then We withdraw it from him, surely he

<sup>33</sup> See Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible*, 35-36.

<sup>34</sup> See for example Muqatil b. Sulayman, *Tafsīr*, ed. 'Abdallāh al-Shihāta, Dār al-Turāth al-'Arabī, Beirut 2002; reprint of Mu'assasat al-Ḥalabī, Cairo, n.d., 1:96, on Q 2.30.

<sup>35</sup> On the Qur'an's pessimistic anthropology Devin Stewart comments: "Human nature, it seems, causes peoples to be stubborn and to reject the messages of the prophets sent, who deliver God's message to them, and God also has a customary way (*sunnat Allāh*) of treating these recalcitrant unbelievers, which is annihilation after a suitable delay and ample opportunity to heed the prophets' warning and accept correct belief". D. Stewart, "Wansbrough, Bultmann, and the Theory of Variant Traditions in the Qur'an", in A. Neuwirth and M. Sells (ed.), *Qur'anic Studies Today*, Routledge, London 2016, (17-51) 30. Also Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 24; N. Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical Critical Introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2017, 165 (with an emphasis on the "early" passages of the Qur'an).

is indeed despairing (and) ungrateful (*kafūr*)” (Q 11:9; 42:48)<sup>36</sup>. Intriguingly the Qur’an also seems to affirm something of the opposite, namely that humans call on God when they are in trouble, but return to ingratitude or unbelief when they are safe.

When hardship touches a person, he calls on his Lord, turning to Him (in repentance). Then, when He bestows blessing on him from Himself, he forgets what he was calling to Him for before, and sets up rivals to God to lead (people) astray from His way. Say: “Enjoy (life) in your disbelief for a little. Surely you will be one of the companions of the Fire” (Q 39:8; cfr. 23:75; 39:49; 41:50).

In several verses the Qur’an uses the example of seafarers in trouble to articulate this idea: “When hardship touches you on the sea, (all those) whom you call on abandon (you), except Him, but when He has delivered you (safely) to the shore, you turn away. The human is ungrateful (*kafūr*)” (Q 17:67; 6:63-64; 10:22-23).

God is the very origin of human existence, and yet humans are ingrates: “He (it is) who gave you life, then He causes you to die, (and) then He will give you life (again). Surely the human is ungrateful indeed (*kafūr*)” (Q 22:66; cfr. 43:15). God’s blessings are without number and yet humans persist in evil and ingratitude/disbelief: “He has given you some of all that you have asked Him for. If you (try to) number God’s blessing, you will not (be able to) count it. Surely the human is indeed an evildoer (and) ungrateful (*kaffār*)!” (Q 14:34; cfr. 80:23). In these passages the Qur’an does not qualify or nuance its assessment: its point is not that *some* humans sin or disbelieve. Instead the Qur’an is judging human nature. Humans are ontologically ungrateful, unbelieving: *inna al-insāna la-kafūrun*. This is something they share with Satan, who is also *kafūr* (Q 17:27).

Although the Qur’an speaks of God’s leading people astray, and “sealing their hearts” (among other similar expressions)<sup>37</sup>, it also insists that God is not responsible for human sinfulness. God “does not do the people any evil” (Q 10:44; cfr. 4:40; 9:70; 11:101)<sup>38</sup>. Nevertheless, because generation after generation of humans have been sinners God has repeatedly destroyed them. Destruction has been such a notable part of human history that the ruins thereof are visible all around Muhammad’s own people. In Qur’an 30:42 God has Muhammad tell people to look around and see what is left

<sup>36</sup> On the response of humans in the Qur’an to hardship see Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 34-39. She comments: “Secondo il Corano, il male e il bene rientrano entrambi in un disegno pedagogico, ma l’uomo deve riconoscere la presenza di Dio dietro l’altalena della sventura e della liberazione, dell’afflizione e della felicità, della depravazione e della bontà, e ci deve credere” (pp. 37-38).

<sup>37</sup> I will not enter here into the long and tortuous theological debates over the meaning of these phrases. Rahman insists that these turns of phrase do not redound to any ill doing on God’s part: “Phrases like ‘God has sealed their hearts, blinded their eyes, deafened them to truth’, in the Qur’an do have a *descriptive* meaning, in terms of the psychological processes described earlier; but even more primarily in such contexts, they have a definite psychological intention: to change the ways of men in the right direction”. Rahman, *Major Themes*, 23. For more detail on the Qur’an’s theology see G.S. Reynolds: *Allah: God in the Qur’an*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2020, esp. ch. 8.

<sup>38</sup> On this see Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 53-56.

of the sinful people before them: "Travel the earth and see how the end was for those who were before (you). Most of them were idolaters". Similar is Q 47:10: "Have they not traveled on the earth and seen how the end was for those who were before them? God destroyed them. The disbelievers have examples of it". This idea, that the earth is littered with the ruins (still visible) of peoples whom God has destroyed for their waywardness, is found in a number of other passages of the Qur'an (cfr. Q 16:36; 22:45-46; 30:9; 40:21-22)<sup>39</sup>.

### *The Origins of Sin*

Yet why, according to the Qur'an, do humans tend towards sin and unbelief? One answer is that humans wrong themselves (Q 10:44). Some innate part of the human person, in certain places identified as the *nafs*, "commands" them to evil (Q 12:53). This *nafs* has qualities of miserliness (*ṣuḥḥ*; e.g., Q 4:128), envy (*ḥasad*; Q 2:109), fear (*ḥawf*; Q 20:67-68), anxiety (*dīq*; Q 9:118), distress (*ḥaraġ*; Q 4:65), pride (*kibr*; Q 25:21), and grief (*ḥasra*; Q 35:8, 39:56). It has desires (*hawa*; Q 79:40-41), appetites (*ṣahwa*; Q 21:102), and needs (*ḥāġa*; Q 12:68). The *nafs* not only "commands" (Q 12:53) to evil but is also enticing (*sawwalat*; Q 12:18, 20:96), subjecting (*tawwa'at*; Q 5:30), and tempting (*tuwaswis*; Q 50:16)<sup>40</sup>.

On the other hand, the idea that there is something innately sinful about humans may appear to contradict Q 30:30 which suggests that humans were created according to a good way or instinct (*fiṭra*)<sup>41</sup>.

Set your face to the religion (as) a Ḥanīf – the creation of God for which He created humankind. (There is) no change in the creation of God. That is the right religion, but most of the people do not know (it).

Why this tension? The answer is that there is a difference between the way in which humans were initially created and their current condition.

This idea is developed in a certain way by Fazlur Rahman. From Rahman's perspective humans are unique in all creation by the freedom they are given to choose good or evil. Unlike the heavens and the earth (and the mountains; see Q 33:72)

<sup>39</sup> As Devin Stewart explains in a forthcoming article which he generously shared with me, the Qur'an emphasizes the proximity of these ruins to its audience. The Qur'an's audience is able to walk among ruins and contemplate their meaning (see Q 20:128 and 32:26). D. Stewart, "'There are Truly Signs in This for Those Who Can Read Them': Ancient Ruins and History in the Qur'an", forthcoming.

<sup>40</sup> On the *nafs* in the Qur'an see further G. Picken, "Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm", *JQS* 1 (2005) 101-127. As Picken points out, the *nafs* also can have some positive qualities, including the ability to endure patiently (*ṣabr*) (e.g., Q 18:28), to comprehend (*idrāk*) (e.g., Q 31:34), and to be tranquil (*muṭma'inna*) (e.g., Q 89:27-30).

<sup>41</sup> It is worth emphasizing that not all classical Muslim theologians closely identified *fiṭra* with Islam, although this has become a standard view in recent centuries. On the diversity of classical Muslim views on *fiṭra* see J. Hoover, "Fiṭra", *EI3*. Consulted online on 01 July 2020 [http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.nd.edu/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_27155](http://dx.doi.org.proxy.library.nd.edu/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27155). First published online: 2016

humans agreed to take on the “trust” (*al-amāna*) of creating a moral order on earth. This, according to Rahman, is the fundamental task of humans<sup>42</sup>. It is this task that marks humanity’s role as God’s vicegerent (Q 2:30).

Yet Rahman also recognizes a tension between what he sees as humanity’s natural goodness, their primordial nature (or *fiṭra*), and their tendency to sin. From his perspective humans have distorted this natural goodness: “Their primordial nature has been distorted almost beyond recognition; they became ‘Satan’s brothers’ after God had breathed His own spirit into Adam”<sup>43</sup>. Indeed he concludes that humans generally incline to sinfulness:

It appears that man does not require much effort to be petty, self-seeking, submerged in his day-to-day life, and a slave of his desires, not because this is ‘natural’ to him – for his real nature is to be exalted – but because ‘gravitating down to the earth’ as we have quoted the Qur’anic language, is much easier than ascending to the heights of purity<sup>44</sup>.

Humans, Rahman continues, are not alone in their struggle for goodness. God acts not only as man’s judge but also as his ally, or “partner” in this struggle<sup>45</sup>. Humans also have an enemy, Satan, who seeks to lead them away from *ṣukr* and *taqwā* towards *kufṛ*. He writes:

Satan therefore starts his career together with Adam; they are coevals, and the Qur’ān constantly speaks of Satan not so much as an anti-God principle (although he is undoubtedly a rebel against God, and, indeed, personifies this rebellious nature) but rather as an anti-man force, perpetually trying to seduce man away from his natural “straight” path into deviant behaviour<sup>46</sup>.

In fact, fourteen of the nineteen occurrences of the term ‘*aduww*’ “nemesis, enemy” in the Qur’an involve Satan<sup>47</sup>. It seems that at least part of the explanation for humanity’s proclivity for sin and unbelief is the nefarious work of Satan. As we will see below, in the Qur’an Satan makes it his job to lead humans away from God, to be their enemy. Rahman accordingly insists that in the Qur’an Satan is more an “anti-man force” than an “anti-God principle”<sup>48</sup>. In her work *Il Corano e il male* Ida Zilio-Grandi makes (unlike Rahman) Iblīs the enemy of God, competing over the human<sup>49</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* This contrasts with the perspective of Hermanson (p. 313) who insists there is no place for original sin in Islam by quoting a hadith that humans are born according to their *fiṭra*, and by quoting Q 95:4, which relates that God, “created the human composite according to an ideal stature (95:4)”. However, she omits the next verse: “then We restored him the lowest of the low”.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>45</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes*, 21.

<sup>46</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18.

<sup>47</sup> Q 2:36, 98, 168, 208; 6:142; 7:22, 24; 9:114 (Abraham’s father); 12:5; 20:39 (Pharaoh), 117, 123; 26:77 (pagan gods, Abraham); 28:15, 19 (Moses and man quarrelling); 35:6; 36:60; 43:62, 67 (friends on Day of Judgment).

<sup>48</sup> Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> “La corrispondenza spaziale di Dio e del Suo antagonista è perfetta – Iblīs si apposterà sulla Sua via diritta – come perfetta è la loro coincidenza temporale: entrambi occupano il medesimo tempo della

However one describes the relationship between God, Iblīs, and humanity, one sees clearly in the Qur'an that humans are not alone in the arena of the world. They must contend constantly with an opponent who prowls about seeking their demise. The Qur'an articulates this opposition in different ways, in one place suggesting that Satan can whisper in humans' breasts: "I take refuge with the Lord of the people...from the evil of the whispering one, the slinking one, who whispers in the hearts of people" (Q 114:1, 4-5)<sup>50</sup>.

What is worse, Satan is a trickster: he leads humans away from God and then abandons them to their judgment:

(They are) like Satan, when he said to the human, 'Disbelieve!', and when he disbelieved, he said, 'Surely I am free of you. Surely I fear God, Lord of the worlds'. So the end of both of them is: they will both be in the Fire, (and) there they both will remain. That is the payment of the evildoers (Q 59:16-17; cfr. 25:29)<sup>51</sup>.

This corresponds with Rahman's perspective that Satan's strategy is principally to beguile<sup>52</sup>.

Accordingly the Qur'an exhorts its audience to be on guard against the plots of the devil, to beware of Satan, and indeed to treat him as an enemy: "Surely Satan is an enemy to you, so take him as an enemy. He only calls his faction so that they may be among the companions of the blazing (Fire)" (Q 35:6).

#### *Adam, Eve, and the Devil in the Qur'an*

Satan's enmity to humanity begins at the beginning. Developing an account found in early Christian literature, including the *Life of Adam and Eve* and the *Cave of Treasures*, the Qur'an relates how the devil (here called always Iblīs, from Greek δiάβoλoς) refuses to comply with God's command to prostrate before Adam<sup>53</sup>. This

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sfida pattuita tra loro, il tempo concesso cioè il tempo della tentazione, dalla creazione fino al giorno del giudizio". Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 15.

<sup>50</sup> Intriguingly, another passage (Q 50:16) has the *nafs* itself whisper to the human.

<sup>51</sup> Cfr. Q 14:22.

<sup>52</sup> "Iblīs or Satan thus appears more cunning and artful than strong, more deceitful and contriving than forthrightly challenging, more beguiling, treacherous, and 'waylaying' than giving battle". Rahman, *Major Themes*, 124.

<sup>53</sup> On the Qur'anic material regarding the fall of the devil, and the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve from the heavenly paradise, and the relationship of this material to pre-Islamic Jewish and Christian literature see (among other sources): A. Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*, Baaden, Bonn 1833, Reprint, Kaufmann, Leipzig 1902, 96-98; M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde*, Brill, Leiden 1893, 60-61; D. Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes*, Geuthner, Paris 1933, 9-11; H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Schulze, Gräfenhainichen 1931, Reprint, Olms, Hildesheim 1961, 41-60; Beck, "Iblīs und Mensch", 195-244; A. Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts (Part I)", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2.1 (2000) 25-41; Ead., "Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts (Part II)", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2.2

story unfolds in a primordial moment, before the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise. Indeed it explains why the devil (later called *šayṭān*) seeks to lead Adam and Eve astray in the garden.

According to the logic of this account humanity does nothing to merit the opposition of the devil. It is the devil's frustration with the high station that God gives to humans (despite their creation from dirt), and with the punishment that unfolds after his refusal to prostrate, that engenders his enmity to humanity. On the other hand it is intriguing that the devil is one of the angels who seems to know in Q 2:30 of humanity's future sinfulness. Perhaps the flames of his jealousy are stoked by his knowledge that humans are (or will be) evildoers and yet they are still favored by God.

The account of the fall of the devil, and the subsequent fall of man, appears in seven different Qur'anic Suras (Q 2:34; 7:11-2; 15:28-33; 17:61-2; 18:50; 20:115-6; 38:71-8). In two Suras (Q 7:11-25; 20:115-24) it is followed immediately by a conversation between God and the devil, and then by the account of Adam and his wife in the Garden<sup>54</sup>. By way of example I will discuss this three part sequence as it appears in Sura 7, which is the more detailed sequence<sup>55</sup>:

(7:11) Certainly We created you, (and) then fashioned you. Then We said to the angels, 'Prostrate yourselves before Adam', and they prostrated themselves, except Iblīs. He was not of those who prostrated themselves. (7:12) He said, 'What kept you from prostrating yourself when I commanded you?' He said, 'I am better than him. You created me from fire, but You created him from clay'. (7:13) He said, 'Go down from here! It is not for you to be arrogant here. Get out! Surely you are one of the disgraced'. (7:14) He said, 'Spare me until the Day when they are raised up'. (7:15) He said, 'Surely you are one of the spared'. (7:16) He said, 'Because you have made

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(2000) 1-18; Ead., "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory: The Qur'ānic Path towards canonization as Reflected in the Anthropogenic Accounts", in A. Neuwirth and A. Pflitsch (ed.), *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies*, Beirut 2001, 113-152. See also N. Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 2009, 86-96. The *Cave of Treasures* is mentioned as a source in M. Seligsohn, "Adam", *ET* 1:127. On this account and the *Cave of Treasures* see also S.M. Zwemer, "The Worship of Adam by the Angels", *The Muslim World* 27 (1937) 115-127; P.J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology*, Brill, Leiden 1983, 18-22; G.S. Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, Routledge, Abingdon – New York 2010, 43-64; W. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs: Narrative Theology in the Qur'ān*, Harvard Theological Studies, Cambridge, MA 2011; J. Witztum, *The Syriac Milieu of the Quran*, 69-110; Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 81-146. M. Azaiez, G.S. Reynolds, et al. (ed.), *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2016, 58-67; Reynolds, *The Qur'an and the Bible*, esp. pp. 250-252.

<sup>54</sup> Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, groups accounts into those in which "Iblīs" appears along with "Shayṭān" (Q 2:30-38; 7:11-24; 20:116-24) and those in which only Iblīs appears (Q 15:26-43; 17:61-65; 18:50-51; 38:71-85).

<sup>55</sup> In this paper I am interested in a synchronic reading of the Qur'an and will not comment on diachronic theories that would put these accounts in a row. By way of reference, however, the Suras involved appear in the following order in Nöldeke's chronology: 20, 15, 38, 17, 18, 7, 2, 4. Angelika Neuwirth argues for the following order of these accounts: 15:26-48; 38:67-85; 20:29-39; 17:61-65; 18:50-51; 7:10-25; 2:28-39. See A. Neuwirth, "Negotiating Justice: A Pre-Canonical Reading of the Qur'anic Creation Accounts (Part I)", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1/2 (2000) (25-41) 39, n. 20.

me err, I shall indeed sit (in wait) for them (on) Your straight path. (7:17) Then I shall indeed come upon them, from before them and from behind them, and from their right and from their left, and You will not find most of them thankful'. (7:18) He said, 'Get out of here, detested (and) rejected! Whoever of them follows you – I shall indeed fill Gehenna with you – all (of you)!' (7:19) 'Adam! Inhabit the Garden, you and your wife, and eat freely of it wherever you please, but do not go near this tree, or you will both be among the evildoers'. (7:20) Then Satan whispered to them both, to reveal to them both what was hidden from them of their shameful parts. He said, 'Your Lord has only forbidden you both from this tree to keep you both from becoming two angels, or from becoming two of the immortals'. (7:21) And he swore to them both, 'Surely I am indeed one of your trusty advisers'. (7:22) So he caused them both to fall by means of deception. And when they both had tasted the tree, their shameful parts became apparent to them, and they both began fastening on themselves some leaves of the Garden. But their Lord called to them both, 'Did I not forbid you both from that tree, and say to you both, "Surely Satan is a clear enemy to you"?' (7:23) They both said, 'Our Lord, we have done ourselves evil. If You do not forgive us, and have compassion on us, we shall indeed be among the losers'. (7:24) He said, 'Go down, some of you an enemy to others! The earth is a dwelling place for you, and enjoyment (of life) for a time'. (7:25) He said, 'On it you will live and on it you will die, and from it you will be brought forth'<sup>56</sup>.

This account opens with the creation of Adam and the command to the angels to worship him, a command which Iblīs refuses (Q 7:11). When asked, Iblīs explains (Q 7:12) that he is better than Adam, as he is created from fire while Adam is created from clay (here the Qur'an is in agreement with the *Cave of Treasures*, 3:2). God punishes Iblīs for his disobedience and arrogance by sending him *down* (7:13; the command is *ihbiṭ*) from the angelic station of heaven (apparently to a lower station in heaven, where the Garden of Paradise is found), and by making him small (*min al-ṣāḡirīn*), a fitting punishment for one who was arrogant (Q 2:34; *istakbara*). In Q 7:24 he will be sent down a second time, with Adam and Eve, from the Garden to the world. Before Iblīs descends, however, he asks (Q 7:14) that he be "spared" (*anzīrī*) until the Day of Resurrection. It is not exactly clear from what he is spared (or perhaps "reprieved"), as the punishment of banishment is still carried out (perhaps it is from punishment in hell). Also curious is the devil's address in verse 16: he accuses God of causing him to err, or better, deceiving him (*aḡwaytanī*). It is not clear what he means by this accusation, and indeed the exegetes offer a variety of proposals<sup>57</sup>.

The key point for our purposes, however, is that Iblīs is "spared" (v. 15) and he means to make the most of it. In his anger at God (and man), he announces his plan to set up ambushes for humanity on God's "straight path"<sup>58</sup>. This announcement of Iblīs sets the stage for his subsequent temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Paradise.

<sup>56</sup> For a careful analysis of the relationship of the Sura 7 account to the other Adam accounts in the Qur'an see Pohlmann, *Die Entstehung des Korans*, 91-131. After reviewing earlier scholarship he offers an insightful source-critical analysis of this material.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī records the opinions that *iḡwā'* here might really mean *iqḏāl* ("leading into error") or *ihlāk* ("to destroy"). See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr*, ed. Muḥammad Zuhayr al-Shāwīsh, Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Arna'ūt, 9 vols., al-Maktab al-Islāmī, Beirut 1404, 3:175-176.

<sup>58</sup> In Q 15:39 Iblīs announces that he will deceive humans (*uḡwiyannahum*) because God has deceived him (*aḡwaytanī*).

Notably, however, his sights are already set on all of humanity, and not only on Adam and Eve. Iblīs announces that he will “sit [in ambush]” for *them* (plural, not dual): *la-aq‘udanna lahum* (Q 7:16).

In the Garden we find the devil, now named exclusively Shayṭān (perhaps indicative of a different origin for the Garden accounts), making good on his enmity. He whispers lies to Adam and Eve (*fa-waswasa lahumā l-šayṭānu*; cfr. 20:120, where Satan whispers only to Adam). It is through whispering that Satan will continue to tempt humans after the fall of Adam (Q 114:4-5).

When the devil announces his plan to ambush humanity in Sura 7, God does not object (Q 15:39-42 is similar). Indeed in Q 17:64 God actively spurs Satan on to carry out his plot: “‘Scare any of them you can with your voice, and assemble against them with your cavalry and your infantry, and associate with them in (their) wealth and children, and make promises to them’. Yet Satan does not promise them (anything) but deception”<sup>59</sup>.

In other words, by the end of the first two parts of this three part sequence, that is, even before the account of Adam in the garden, Satan is established as humanity’s foe (*‘aduww*)<sup>60</sup>. Adam has done nothing to deserve this. Satan’s enmity is a result of the devil’s reaction to God’s command that he bow down before Adam (and perhaps his knowledge that humans will sin in the future), and to God’s acceptance (more or less willing) of the devil’s plot to conspire against humans and lead them off the straight path. The third part of the sequence, however, is not without consequence.

The Qur’anic Garden of Paradise, or Garden of Eden, where this part unfolds is apparently within the heavenly realm<sup>61</sup>. As mentioned above, if the devil is told to “get down” after his refusal to bow to Adam (Q 7:13), the devil, Adam, and Eve are all three told to “get down” (this time to the earth, *dunyā*) after the sin of Adam and Eve (Q 7:24; for which reason we can speak of Adam’s “fall” in the Qur’an). This picture does not match Genesis (which seems to have the Garden of Eden in Mesopotamia) but it does match a late antique New Eastern cosmology, as I have argued elsewhere<sup>62</sup>, that

<sup>59</sup> In *The Qur’an and the Bible* I compare this agreement between God and Satan to the prologue of the book of Job. See *The Qur’an and the Bible*, 253-54.

<sup>60</sup> Fourteen of the nineteen occurrences of the lexeme *‘aduww* in the Qur’an relate to the enmity between humanity and Satan: Q 2:36, 98, 168, 208; 6:142; 7:22, 24; 12:5; 20:117, 123; 28:15, 19; 35:6; 36:60; 43:62.

<sup>61</sup> “Garden of Eden” appears in eleven verses of the Qur’an: 9:72; 13:23; 16:31; 18:31; 19:61; 20:76; 35:33; 38:50; 40:8; 61:12; 98:8. In each case it refers to the heavenly abode of the righteous after the resurrection. In part because of that some translators (for example, Asad, Shakir, Yusuf Ali) follow the explanation of the classical Islamic exegetes and lexicographers that the term has its meaning from the Arabic root *‘d-n* (“to be firmly established”) and render “gardens of perpetual bliss” (Asad), “gardens of perpetuity” (Shakir), or “Gardens of Eternity” (Yusuf Ali). More likely the Qur’an does mean the Biblical Eden (Hebrew *‘ēden*; Gen 2:8), and follows a cosmology which has the righteous return after their resurrection to the Garden of Adam and Eve.

<sup>62</sup> See *The Qur’an and Its Biblical Subtext*, 59-64 (with references to earlier literature); *The Qur’an and the Bible*, 33-34, 40, 253, 315, 391.

associates the Garden of Adam and Eve with the Garden (Hebrew *gan*; Syriac *gantā*; Arabic *ǧanna*) of Paradise into which the righteous will enter in the afterlife.

In the Qur'an, as in late antique Syriac Christian texts such as the *Cave of Treasures*, Satan (and not merely a serpent, as in Genesis) conspires against the first human couple such that they eat from the tree (in Q 20:120 we learn it is "the tree of immortality")<sup>63</sup> which God has forbidden them (Q 7:19).

The Qur'an also follows these texts in suggesting (although this is not explicit) that the first human couple were stripped of some of their original garments. In Genesis 3:7 Adam and Eve simply "know" (Hb. *yēd'ū*; LXX *ἐγνώσαν*) they are naked. However, according to a number of late antique Jewish and Christian works Adam and Eve become naked once they eat from the forbidden tree. In other words, God had clothed them with original garments (often said to be garments of "glory" [Syriac *shūbhā*]) and as a punishment these are stripped from them when they sin<sup>64</sup>. This indeed seems to be the understanding of the Qur'an. Satan's goal in whispering to Adam and Eve is explicitly to "reveal to them both what was hidden from them of their shameful parts" (*li-yubdiya la-humā mā wuriya 'anhumā min saw'ātihimā*; Q 7:20). When Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden tree, their "shameful parts" are revealed to them (*badat la-humā saw'ātuhumā*; Q 7:22). Adam and Eve are changed by eating from the tree. They no longer wear their original heavenly garments, but now only "some leaves of the Garden" (Q 7:22). A few verses later (Q 7:27) the Qur'an warns humans not to let Satan tempt them as he once did to Adam Eve, "stripping both of them of their clothing".

In Q 7:23 Adam and Eve ask for forgiveness. In other Qur'anic passages we read that Adam "received words [presumably, of forgiveness] from his Lord" (Q 2:37) and that "His Lord chose him, and turned to him (in forgiveness) [*tāba 'alayhi*], and guided (him)" (Q 20:122). In all of these passages, however, humans are sent down, together with their enemy Satan, into the world, immediately after their sin: "He said, 'Go down,

<sup>63</sup> Regarding the tree see my comments in *Qur'an and Bible*: "Genesis has God command Adam not to eat from the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and refers to a separate tree, the "tree of life" (Gen 2:16-17; 3:21-24). The Qur'an has God tell both Adam and Eve, "Do not *approach* this tree" (v. 19; cfr. 2:35) and nowhere refers to a second tree. Elsewhere (Q 20:120), the Qur'an speaks of the "tree of immortality", presumably an allusion to the "tree of life" (note also how in 7:19 there is an allusion to Adam becoming like an angel, that is, immortal). Like the Qur'an, the "Oriental" version of *Cave of Treasures* makes no mention of the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" but rather connects the sin of Adam and Eve with the "tree of life". It does so to make a parallel between the one tree of life and the one cross of salvation (*Cave of Treasures* [Or.], 4:2-5; on this see Witztum, *Syriac Milieu*, 81-83, who refers to the work of E. Beck, "Iblis und Mensch", 235, and M. Radscheit, "Der Höllenbaum", in T. Nagel (ed.), *Der Koran und sein religiöses und kulturelles Umfeld*, Oldenbourg, München 2010, 113-14)", p. 255.

<sup>64</sup> See *The Qur'an and the Bible*, 255. See also G. Anderson, "The Garments of Skin in Apocryphal Narrative", in J. Kugel (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2001, 101-143; J.-L. Déclais, "Le tenue d'Adam," *Arabica* 46 (1998), 111-18 (esp. 111-12); reprinted in J.-L. Déclais, *Quand les musulmans lisaient la Bible*, Cerf, Paris 2017, 15-30. As Déclais (pp. 113-15) notes, most Jewish traditions (both in midrash and in the Palestinian Targums) include the opinion that the original garments of Adam and Eve were made of a substance like fingernails.

some of you an enemy to others! The earth is a dwelling place for you, and enjoyment (of life) for a time” (Q 7:24; Q 2:37; 20:123). It is this change of habitation, more than the change of garments, that marks the lasting legacy of Adam and Eve for their descendants. Humans will now live in the world (*ard*; elsewhere *dunyā*) where they will be susceptible to its ephemeral pleasures. What is more, they are not alone. In the world they are now far from the heavenly realm and close instead to their enemy.

Moreover, it is instructive to note, as Zilio-Grandi does, that in the Qur’anic account of Cain and Abel, it is Cain’s *nafs* that “prompts” (*tawwa‘at*) him to kill his brother (Q 5:30)<sup>65</sup>. In other words, there is already an evil within Cain.

### *Human Depravity*

The trouble of living in the world is expressed by Qur’an 3:14: “Enticing (*zuyyina*) to the people is love of desires (*ṣahawāt*): women and sons, qinṭārs upon qinṭārs of gold and silver, and the finest horses, cattle, and fields. That is the provision of this present life (*al-ḥayāti l-dunyā*). But God – with Him is the best place of return” (cfr. 2:212; 6:122; 9:37; 10:12; 13:33; 35:8; 40:37; 47:14; 48:12). In the world humans are led off the straight path by the tempting things (*ṣahawāt*) that they found around them. Notably, this verse insists that these things, literally, have been adorned (*zuyyina*) for them. Here this verb is passive, but elsewhere we learn who does this adorning of bad things (in this case sinful actions): “If only they had humbled themselves when Our violence came upon them! But their hearts were hard, and Satan made what they were doing appear enticing to them (*zayyana lahumu l-ṣayṭān*)” (Q 6:43)<sup>66</sup>. Elsewhere in the same Sura it is not Satan himself but rather the associates (*ṣurakā’*) of the idolaters, that is their false gods (who seem to be identified as demons), who adorn things for them:

In this way their associates made the killing of their children appear enticing (*zayyana*) to many of the idolaters, in order that they might bring them to ruin and confuse their religion for them. If God had (so) pleased, they would not have done it. So leave them and what they forge (Q 6:137; cfr. 41:25).

To complicate things further, God too is involved in this act of “adorning” bad things to make them look good (and therefore to lead humans astray)<sup>67</sup>. Again in Sura 6 we find the following:

Do not revile those (gods) on whom they call instead of God, or they will revile God in enmity without any knowledge. In this way We make their deed(s) appear enticing (*zayyannā*) to every community. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they have done (Q 6:108).

<sup>65</sup> Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 18.

<sup>66</sup> For further examples of Satan leading people astray through “adornment” (*tazyīn*) see Q 8:48; 15:39; 16:63; 27:24; 29:38.

<sup>67</sup> On the larger problem of divine deception in the Qur’an, see Reynolds, *Allah: God in the Qur’an*, 184-191.

This is not the only example of God “adorning” bad deeds to make them look good, and thus to lead people astray<sup>68</sup>. A similar case (although not involving *tazyīn*) of God’s leading humans astray is found in Qur’an 25:17-18. Here God gathers together the false gods (who are able to speak). It is the false gods who explain what God has done to lead humans astray:

On the Day when He will gather them and what they serve instead of God, He will say, “Did you lead astray these servants of Mine, or did they (themselves) go astray from the way?” They will say, “Glory to You! It was not fitting for us to take any allies other than You, but You gave them and their fathers enjoyment (of life), until they forgot the Reminder and became a ruined people” (Q 25:17-18)<sup>69</sup>.

In this world humanity has collectively succumbed to sin. In Sura 17 the Qur’an insists that God will destroy *every* human city: “(There is) no town that We are not going to destroy before the Day of Resurrection, or are not going to punish (with a) harsh punishment. That is written in the Book” (Q 17:58). Among the many punishment stories of the Qur’an there is one famous exception, one case of a city that repented in time to save itself from destruction: the city of Jonah. However, in alluding to the repentance of Jonah’s city the Qur’an adds an attenuating note: “Why was there no town which believed, and its belief benefited it, except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from them the punishment of disgrace in this present life and gave them enjoyment (of life) *for a time*” (Q 10:98). The repentance of Jonah’s city (one presumes, Nineveh), saves them only “for a time”. They too are doomed eventually.

The centrality of punishment in the Qur’an’s view of the divine economy suggests that sin, to the Qur’an, is not simply a possibility that humans may or may not avoid. Instead it implies that humans are universally sinful and indeed that there is something in human nature that is fundamentally wrong. We might call this “disordered desire and ignorance”. This perspective on the divine-human relationship conforms with the Qur’an’s call to universal repentance in a number of passages. The God of the Qur’an demands repentance (*tawba*) even from its believing audience: “You who believe! Turn to God in sincere repentance. It may be that your Lord will absolve you of your evil deeds and cause you to enter Gardens through which rivers flow” (Q 66:8)<sup>70</sup>. In the Qur’an God calls humanity collectively to repentance because humans are all sinners. The problem is not bad choices by certain individuals. The problem is the human condition in this world.

<sup>68</sup> See also Q 27:4. In 49:7 God, on the contrary, adorns belief to the believers.

<sup>69</sup> The notion of God’s giving good things to sinners in order to keep them from repenting is often referred to in classical scholarship as *istidrāğ*. See Reynolds, *Allah: God in the Qur’an*, 186-188.

<sup>70</sup> “La sequenza dei termini impiegati esprime un nodo fondamentale nel sistema religioso islamico: l’uomo peccatore (radice *ʾīm*) è condannato a subire il male (radice *swʾ*), a persistere nella perdizione (radice *ḥsr*) fino alla ricompensa del Fuoco; nulla lo salva, se non il miracolo (radice *ʾğz*) che il suo pentimento (radice *ndm*) può, forse, suscitare”. Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 24.

Even prophets, those who hear God's voice, who sometimes see angels, can be sinners (the traditional doctrine of *'iṣma* notwithstanding)<sup>71</sup>. For this reason God forgives (*tāba 'alā*) Adam (Q 2:37; 20:122), Abraham and Ishmael pray for God's forgiveness (*tub 'alaynā*; Q 2:128), Moses repents (Q 7:143; cfr. 28:15-17), David prostrates in repentance (*anāba*; Q 38:24), Solomon is repentant (*awwāb*; Q 38:30 see also 38:34), as is Job (Q 38:44), and Jonah is regretful (Q 21:87). Even the Qur'an's own Prophet is included in the need for repentance. The Qur'an declares in Q 9:117: "Certainly God has turned (in forgiveness) to the prophet, and (to) the emigrants and the helpers who followed him in the hour of hardship". In Q 42:10 the Prophet turns to God in repentance (*unību*).

The God of the Qur'an does not expect humans to be perfect or sinless. He expects them instead to be repentant (*tā'ibūn* or *tawwābūn*; see Q 2:222; 9:112; and 66:5, where *tā'ibāt* is among the aspirational virtues of the Prophet's wives). All humans sin, and all are called to repent<sup>72</sup>.

### Conclusion

As mentioned above, one explanation for human sinfulness is the *nafs*, the element of human nature itself that commands all humans towards evil, or tempts them in whispers. The rest of the explanation, however, is connected to their companion in this world, the devil. According to the Qur'an humans are faced with an enemy who lurks in ambush alongside their path through life. The devil uses the things of this lower world, he adorns those things, to distract humans from following the straight path. This was not the situation that God had originally planned for humans when he set them down in the heavenly garden. Humans are in this situation, in this lower world, trapped with the devil and far from God, because of Adam's sin and subsequent fall from paradise. Zilio-Grandi writes that the world is a place of hostility even among humans, noting Q 2:36 which speaks of God's sending humans down as enemies to each other "Go down, some of you an enemy to others!" She writes (alluding to Q 2:30): "La corruzione e lo spargimento di sangue sono inevitabili"<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>71</sup> On *'iṣma* see E. Tyan, "'iṣma", *EP*, 4:182-84. B. Abrahamov, "Ibn Taymiyya and the Doctrine of 'iṣmah", *Bulletin of the Henry Martin Institute of Islamic Studies* 12 (1993) 21-30. More recently G.S. Reynolds, "A Flawed Prophet? Noah in the Qur'ān and Qur'ānic Commentary", in M. Daneshgar and W. Saleh (ed.), *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, Brill, Leiden 2016, 216-273.

<sup>72</sup> On repentance in the Qur'an, see G.S. Reynolds and A. Moghadam, "Repentance and the Construction of Piety in Ibn Qudāma's *Kitāb al-Tawwābīn*", *JAOS*, forthcoming; and A. Khalil, *Repentance and the Return to God: Tawba in Early Sufism*, Suny Press, Albany, NY 2018.

<sup>73</sup> Leading up to this statement she writes: "Il luogo è intriso di inimicizia, la condizione storica degli uomini si inaugura all'insegna dell'ostilità... Le creature hanno trasgredito; negligenti, posando altrove lo sguardo, hanno oltrepassato di corsa l'estremità superando i limiti segnati da Dio, e ora si aggrediscono, continuamente oltrepassano ciascuno l'ambito dell'altro, si trasmettono il loro male, si contagiano, si infettano a vicenda". Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 16.

From this perspective it is only partially true that the Qur'an denies original sin. According to the Qur'an, all humans are indeed negatively affected by Adam's sin. Many have been led astray, and ultimately destroyed by God and condemned to eternal hellfire, because of the way Adam's fall affected subsequent humankind. The ruins of their cities are all around.

It is true that humans, from the Qur'an's point of view, are not culpable for Adam's sin as some articulations of original sin in Christian tradition would have it. In particular, the Qur'an has no place for the mediation of Christ as redeemer or baptism for the remission of sins, two of the five declarations of Trent on original sin. It agrees, however, with one of Trent's declarations on original sin: "That Adam injured not only himself but also 'his posterity'". In the Qur'an human history after Adam's fall is punctuated with one punishment story after another because of the inability of his descendants to cope with the enmity of the devil in this world. For this reason the Qur'an insists, time and again, that humans – not some of them, but all of them – are ungrateful and unbelieving (*kafār*). This explains why humans are consistently unable to recognize the signs of God's existence, power, and goodness in nature:

(It is) God who created the heavens and the earth, and sent down water from the sky, and brought forth fruits by means of it as a provision for you. And He subjected the ship to you, to run on the sea by His command, and subjected the rivers to you. And He subjected the sun and the moon to you, both being constant (in their courses), and subjected the night and the day to you. He has given you some of all that you have asked Him for. If you (try to) number God's blessing, you will not (be able to) count it. Surely the human is indeed an evildoer (and) ungrateful (*kaffār*)! (Q 14:32-34)

This explains why God has intervened in human history not only with punishment and destruction, but also with the ministry of prophets, with guidance. Humans are victims of Adam's sin<sup>74</sup>, and need the help of God to worship Him. While God in the Qur'an does not "save" humans from their sin, He does guide them to a path of repentance and righteousness, principally through the work of prophets.

It is also telling, as Sarra Tlili has shown, that non-human animals in the Qur'an come across better than humans. All animals glorify God, "with the exception of the vast majority of humans"<sup>75</sup>. This distinction between animals and humans may not be simply a question of free will. As Tlili notes<sup>76</sup>, the hoopoe bird who speaks to Solomon

<sup>74</sup> In her reflections on Cain's murder of Abel in the Qur'an Zilio-Grandi sees a pre-existent evil that prompted him to the deed. She wonders if the pre-existent sin of his father was "superimposed" on him: "Il male dell'omicidio si aggiunge a un'empietà che preesisteva nell'empio alla sua azione di male, così come la trasgressione di Adamo si sovrappose alla preesistenza in lui delle vergogne 'fino ad allora coperte' (Q 7:20)". Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 18.

<sup>75</sup> "More importantly, according to the Qur'an, all animals, with the exception of the vast majority of humans and jinn, glorify God. In this respect they become superior to most humans (who do not), according to the Qur'an". S. Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2012, 72; see also the section chs. 3 and 4.

<sup>76</sup> See the discussion in Tlili, *Animals*, 182-186.

in Q 27 gives a thoughtful report of the impious deeds of the people of Sheba, and the way Satan has adorned (*zayyana*) bad things for them (Q 27:24). Solomon wonders if the bird is telling the truth or lying (Q 27:27), suggesting that deceit is a possibility for an animal. Non-human animals are better in the Qur'an, I would suggest, because they do not face the enmity of the devil.

Put otherwise, of all animals in the Qur'an only humans are categorically sinful. Their sinfulness is in part a consequence of the work of the devil, and the fall of Adam from the heights of paradise, away from the presence of God. Yet the Qur'an also suggests that there is something problematic with the very nature of humans, even before the fall from paradise. As Zilio-Grandi notes, the Qur'an has God explain how He created humans from "despicable water" (Q 77:20; cfr. 4:28; 90:4)<sup>77</sup>, and the Qur'an has the angels know before the creation of humans that they will foment corruption and shed blood (Q 2:30).

The term "original sin" of course never appears in the Qur'an and it is wrong to imagine that the Qur'an teaches original sin as Christians understand it, a doctrine after all, that is only understandable in light of the Christian doctrine of redemption. It is also wrong, however, to deny the Qur'an's emphasis on the sinfulness of humanity and the consequences of Adam's fall.

#### RÉSUMÉ

Le présent article s'intéresse au lieu commun selon lequel le Coran n'a pas de doctrine sur le péché originel. Il commence par une définition du péché originel selon la Bible et la tradition chrétienne. Ensuite, l'auteur souligne les traits généraux de l'anthropologie pessimiste du Coran. Enfin, il examine les textes coraniques au sujet de la chute du diable, de la permission que Dieu accorde au diable de détourner le genre humain et la descente d'Adam et de sa femme dans ce monde après la faute. Le reste de l'histoire de l'humanité dans le Coran est ponctué d'histoires de punitions. Tout cela nous amène à la conclusion que la tendance de l'humanité est de pécher (et que la tendance de Dieu est de punir les hommes pour leurs péchés), ce qui est lié à cette proto-histoire. Bien qu'il soit juste de dire que le Coran ne partage pas beaucoup la doctrine chrétienne du péché originel, cependant il faut reconnaître que dans le Coran le péché d'Adam a de sérieuses conséquences pour sa descendance.

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<sup>77</sup> Zilio-Grandi, *Il Corano e il male*, 26.