



**A Modern Example of Discourses Between Christians and Muslims:
Samiha Ayverdi's Correspondence with Christian Missionaries and Her Views on Certain Doctrines in
Christianity Through the Lenses of Sufism**

**Hristiyanlar ve Müslümanlar Arasındaki Münâzaralara Modern Bir Örnek:
Sâmiha Ayverdi'nin Hristiyan Misyonerlerle Mektuplaşması ve Tasavvufî Perspektiften
Hristiyanlıktaki Bazı Doktrinler Hakkındaki Görüşleri**

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Abstract

It is well-documented that from approximately the 8th or 9th century onward, Christians and Muslims engaged in theological discourses and even composed refutations against one another. This article examines the correspondence of Samiha Ayverdi, a contemporary Turkish Sufi, with Protestant missionaries operating in the country, through which she engaged in intellectual and theological discourse. Her interpretations of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, such as the Trinity, the Bible, the crucifixion, and original sin, have been discussed in detail. What makes the article original is her approach to these doctrines from a Sufi perspective. In this context, our study presents a unique example of Muslim-Christian discourses in modern times within the field of the comparative history of the religions.

Key words: Comperative Religions, Samiha Ayverdi, Christianity, Sufism, Missionary.

Özet

Hristiyanlarla Müslümanların yaklaşık 8-9. yüzyıldan başlayarak münazaralar ettiği ve hatta birbirlerine reddiyeler yazdıkları vakidir. Bu makalede çağdaş bir Türk sûfî olan Sâmiha Ayverdi'nin Türkiye'de faaliyet gösteren Protestan misyonerlerle mektuplaşmak sûretiyle mücadelesi ve misyonerlik, teslis, çarmih, aslî günah, İncil gibi Hristiyanlık doktrinlerini bilhassa tasavvufî perspektiften yorumlaması ele alınmıştır. Bu bağlamda araştırmamız dinler tarihinde modern zamanlarda Müslüman-Hristiyan münazaralarına kaydadeğer bir örnek teşkil etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karşılaştırmalı Dinler, Sâmiha Ayverdi, Hristiyanlık, Tasavvuf, Misyonerlik.

Introduction

Our research focuses on the correspondence of Samiha Ayverdi², a 20th-century Turkish thinker, Sufi, and writer, with Protestant missionaries. In this context, the article is based on her book *Misyonerlik*

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² Samiha Ayverdi, born in 1905 in Istanbul, was a Turkish novelist, writer, and Sufi. She completed her education at Süleymaniye İnâs Rüşdiyesi in 1921 and subsequently pursued private studies, acquiring proficiency in French and taking violin lessons. Her intellectual curiosity was greatly nurtured by the availability of an extensive library, which played a pivotal role in shaping her knowledge and cultural development. By the age of twelve, she had already read several works from her father's collection. From an early age, she attended gatherings alongside her father, where she became acquainted with prominent figures of the time. The knowledge she absorbed from these discussions, combined with her exceptional memory, provided a rich source of material for her literary works. Having witnessed the reigns of Sultan Reşad and Sultan Vahdeddin, the Second Constitutional Era, the rule of the Committee of Union and Progress, the Balkan Wars, World War I, the Turkish War of Independence, and the Republican period, Samiha Ayverdi reflected her observations, impressions, and, most notably, the values lost by society throughout these years in her works. The most formative influence in her life was her spiritual mentor, Kenan Rifâî (Büyükkaksoy), The *postnîshin* (Master of the lodge) of the *Hırka-i Şerif Ümmü Kenan* Lodge, to whom she was introduced through her mother. Beyond her literary career, Ayverdi led an active social life, encouraging the establishment of various social and cultural institutions through her dynamic and unifying personality while also serving as an active member of many of them (Uluant, 2020).

Karşısında Türkiye (Turkey in the Face of Missionary Activities), which she published in 1969. This work examines the correspondence that Samiha Ayverdi initiated in 1965 with M. Kern, the head of the Protestant Missionary Organization based in Switzerland, and his associates. In this book, Ayverdi incorporates numerous historical records and frequently references events that have taken place between Christians and Muslims throughout history. However, the present study does not aim to analyze Ayverdi's work from a historical perspective but rather to assess it in relation to the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. In this context, her perspective on Christian missionary activities, as well as her views on key Christian doctrines—including the concept of the Trinity, the Bible and its alleged textual corruption, original sin, and religious rituals—will be examined. It is important to note that Ayverdi employs a comparative approach in evaluating these concepts, analyzing Christian doctrines from an Islamic/Sufi standpoint and articulating her views within this framework.

As is well known in Christianity, the term *missionary* carry a distinct theological meaning. In the early period of Christianity, the term *mission* was closely linked to the doctrine of the Trinity, as it referred to the divine will concerning the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit by both the Father and the Son. In this theological context, the concept signified a fundamental aspect of Christian belief. It was not until the 16th century that the term began to be used in the sense of an official commission to preach, particularly by the Jesuits. Christian tradition reveals a two-stage approach to the transmission of Jesus' message. The first stage pertains to the period before the crucifixion, during which Jesus restricted his mission to the Israelites¹. The second stage emerges after the crucifixion, following his resurrection, when he commands that his message be conveyed to all nations². From a Christian theological perspective, missionary work entails sending an individual to a foreign country or people to partake in the messianic mission of the divine Son, Jesus Christ (Gündüz, 2020; Robinson, 1915).

The earliest examples of missionary activities targeting Muslims can be traced back to the 8th century. Egilon (also known as Ummu Asim), who attempted to convert her husband, the Andalusian governor 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Mūsā b. Nuşayr (713–716), is considered the first Western Christian missionary engaged in proselytizing among Muslims. Another early missionary figure was Cluniac Abbot Hugh, also referred to as the "French monk." Furthermore, it is suggested that Pope Gregory VII conducted a covert missionary initiative targeting North African Muslims in the 11th century. In the history of Christianity, the 18th and 19th centuries mark the emergence of institutionalized missionary organizations. This period is also regarded as the era in which Christianity successfully positioned itself as a universal religion. From the 18th century onwards, missionaries affiliated with various Protestant churches also became active in Muslim-majority regions. Henry Martyn, a chaplain for the British East India Company, is recognized as the first Protestant missionary to operate in the Middle East around 1810 (Gündüz, 2020). According to Christian sources, the early Church modeled its holistic mission on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, drawing upon the words of Isaiah mentioned in Luke 4:18–19. Accordingly, Jesus was sent to proclaim the good news to the poor and to announce freedom from both physical and spiritual captivity. The four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—depict Jesus as the one who was sent.³

It should also be noted that, the missionaries state to Ayverdi that Muslims also engage in missionary activities by propagating Islam and that they do not find this "bothersome" (Ayverdi, 1969:58-59). In this context, it is important to highlight the difference between the concept of *tabligh* (to convey a revelation) in Islam and the notion of "missionary work" in Christianity. In Islam, *tabligh* refers to the act of conveying the divine revelation to people, as stated in the Qur'an (5:67). As previously

¹ Matthew, 15/24, Matthew, 101/42, Matthew, 10/5-6.

² Matthew, 28/19-20.

³ See: Jesus was sent by God with a purpose to save the world (John. 3:16), to do God's will (John 4:34), teach in synagogues, preach the good news, and heal people (Matthew 9:35-38), suffer on behalf of his people (Mark 8:31). God sent Jesus (John 15:26), after resurrection Jesus returns to God and sends the Holy Spirit to his followers (John 15:26). In the power of Holy Spirit Jesus sends his disciple into world to do what Jesus did on earth (John 20:21-22, Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-18, Luke 24:47 (Ugbedinma, 2024).



mentioned, the Christian understanding of missionary work is expressed in Matthew, 28:19-20. In this context, the aim is to “Christianize individuals and do whatever is necessary for this purpose.” In contrast, in Islam, the message is simply “conveyed,” but there is no intervention in whether the individual accepts it or not. However, in Christianity, making people Christian in the regions visited is designated as a goal, and assimilating the culture and beliefs of that region is considered a necessary part of the faith (Gündüz, 2002).

Missionary history is studied by researchers in five distinct periods. These are, in order: the Apostolic Period (33-100 AD), the Age of Church Founders (100-800 AD), the Medieval Period (800-1500 AD), the Reformation Period (1500-1650 AD), and the Post-Reformation Period (1650-1793 AD). Furthermore, the Modern Missionary Period began in 1793 with the arrival of the missionary William Carey in India. In the Ottoman Empire, missionary activities started in the 1500s as a result of the friendship between the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of France. In this context, with the permission of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, the Catholic Jesuit order began its activities in the Ottoman territories, opening schools such as St. Joseph, St. Michel, St. Louis, and Notre Dame de Sion. Another Christian denomination that became influential in the Ottoman Empire was Protestantism. In the distribution of missionary organizations across the world, the Ottoman Empire mainly fell under the influence of the United States. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the most influential missionary organization in the Ottoman lands, particularly in Anatolia, was the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM or BOARD) (Cantaş et. al, 2012). In the 20th century, Samiha Ayverdi, who fought against the activities of Protestant missionaries in her own country and even wrote an article titled “Complaint About Missionaries” to complain to Pope Paul VI, emphasizes in the preface of her book that the reason for such a work was the interference of Christian missionary activities with the faith of Muslims. She highlights that Muslims have never thought to intervene in the affairs of Christians, a neighboring religion. However, she states that, faced with the shameful attacks of the Christians, she was forced to defend her own cause (Ayverdi, 1969). However, Ayverdi expresses deep sorrow over the relentless increase in missionary activities by Christians, particularly towards Muslims in Turkey, and she expresses her sadness in these words: “In 1965, we were compelled to write the first warning letter against the organization that presumed itself to be performing a duty by sending anonymous brochures, books, and declarations to our homes, workplaces, even to our places of worship and to our religious leaders. This was followed by a response from the other side. After continuing this correspondence until 1968, we decided to compile these letters into a book and present it to the Muslim-Turkish public for its benefit” (Ayverdi, 1969). Thus, Samiha Ayverdi opposes the missionary understanding in Christianity and regards it as an intrusion into other beliefs.

This article will examine Ayverdi’s views based on her book *Misyonerlik Karşısında Türkiye* and the reasons behind them in detail, with a focus on her evaluations regarding the core concepts of Christianity. While analyzing Ayverdi’s letters, we have kept her views in the main text of the article and evaluated her comments in the context of the history of religions in the footnotes. In this way, the reader will be able to focus on Ayverdi’s explanations more easily. Given that it contains a discourse between a Muslim Sufi woman and a Christian missionary, this work holds significant and unique value as a source in the comparative history of religions in the 21st century.

Samiha Ayverdi’s Views on Missionary Institutions and Missionary Work

In her letters, Samiha Ayverdi frequently emphasizes that the nature of Islam does not involve an attack on the faiths of the followers of other religions, supporting her argument with historical records from the time of the Prophet, extending to the period of the Ottoman Empire in which she lived. Ayverdi underscores this point by writing out the specific articles of the Prophet’s covenant of protection given to the Christian communities of Sinai¹, illustrating that Muslims, throughout history, have followed the example set by their own prophet. Furthermore, it is particularly noteworthy that during the conquest

¹ This covenant is discussed in detail in the second chapter of John Andrew Morrow’s work *The Covenants of The Prophet Muhammad with The Christians of The World*. See: (Morrow, 2013). Additionally, other covenants given by the Prophet Muhammad to the Christians are also included in this book.

of Jerusalem by Caliph ‘Umar, he divided the Al-Aqsa Mosque between Christians and Muslims, uniting them under the same roof¹, and that this ethical practice continued uninterrupted for centuries, particularly during the reign of Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror in the Ottoman Empire. In contrast, Ayverdi also emphasizes that numerous historical records, especially those related to the Crusades, highlight the hostile behavior of Christians towards Muslims.² According to her, the Qur’ān, 109:6, which is one of the fundamental principles of Islam, is an important indication of how Muslims should respect the free faith of others. Ayverdi draws a parallel between tyrannical rulers and Christianity, describing missionary activities. According to her, the rulers who have committed the greatest injustices in world history have, in contrast, very small inner worlds and spiritualities. In order to cover the smallness of their inner worlds, they attempt to impose themselves on others through brute force. In this context, Christianity behaves similarly. Due to its weaknesses, which it is well aware of but unwilling to accept in the face of Islam, it behaves aggressively, much like these tyrannical rulers. According to Ayverdi, the fanatical missionary organizations that harass followers of other religions and whose activities have no civil or humane justification, under the guise of missionary work, receive significant support and financial aid from the states to which they belong, particularly in assisting the political ambitions of these states. She argues that the Islamic world has nothing to learn from Christianity. Because Islam is a religion that has transcended the Trinity and reached unity, meaning it has evolved. While Crusader Europe, caught in the arbitrary and bloody competition of feudalism, monarchy, and the papacy, was groaning in ignorance and darkness, the Muslim East, with its inherent wisdom, knowledge, technology, prosperity, and justice, was holding the torch of science and civilization at the gates of Andalusia and Sicily, illuminating that land of darkness. While Europe still turns a blind eye to this reality, Ayverdi emphasizes that the academic community has now proven these truths (Ayverdi, 1969).

In contrast, according to Ayverdi, the Crusades have marked an indelible stain on the forehead of Christianity, and in the present day, the same mission has been entrusted to missionary organizations. Through organizations such as missionary companies, churches, hospitals, schools, and Bible societies, these missionaries play their games on consciences and beliefs, resorting to every means possible to achieve their goals (Ayverdi, 1969). The missionaries’ response to Ayverdi’s accusations, emphasizing that she is a very intelligent and truth-seeking individual, and sending her the verse from the Bible, “You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart” (Jeremiah, 29:13), is also noteworthy (Ayverdi, 1969). Samiha Ayverdi, however, responds by saying, “You probably did not have my response properly translated or you chose not to understand it,” emphasizing that she had complained about this missionary organization to Pope Paul VI. She warns that if they continue their activities, she will escalate her complaint to international authorities more powerful than the Pope. According to Ayverdi, missionary activities are nothing more than ‘interference with freedom of conscience and belief’ (Ayverdi, 1969). It should be noted that Ayverdi sent a copy of her complaint letter to the Pope to missionaries as well. This is a significant indication of her determination in the tackling against missionary work.

Ayverdi also explains the true meaning of freedom to the missionaries who describe themselves as “very open-minded people.” According to her, true freedom of thought entails tolerance, sincerity, and transparency. However, the *Students’ Volunteer Missionary Society* operates covertly, assuming various forms and disguises in its efforts to influence the masses. This, she argues, is the clearest evidence that they are not truly open-minded. Ayverdi emphasizes that, like everything else, the concept of freedom is relative. In her view, actions and activities that do not harm others can be considered legitimate. However, any endeavor aimed at undermining others’ freedom of conscience and thought cannot be regarded as freedom—it is an act of aggression. She criticizes missionaries for their presumptuous attitude, encapsulated in the slogan: “Your faith lacks lofty ideals; therefore, you must believe what I believe!” According to her, this is a blatant overreach, and Muslim Turks will not tolerate it (Ayverdi, 1969). Ayverdi further clarifies the concept of relativity through the metaphor of a *carcass*. She argues that what Christians perceive as “beneficial” may, in fact, be harmful to others. For instance, a decaying

¹For more information see: Taberî, *Tarih*, 3/609 (2405-6/I; Abu-Munshar, 2007).

² For detailed information see: (Bradbury, 1992; Willermus, 2016; Polat, 2019).



carcass emits a foul odor, making it repulsive and something to be avoided. However, for the earth, that same carcass is a source of nourishment. The soil absorbs it, breaks it down, integrates it through transformation, and ultimately enhances its fertility (Ayverdi, 1969). In this context, Ayverdi asserts that the doctrine which Christians regard as a means of salvation from their own perspective may, in fact, be harmful to others. Thus, Ayverdi emphasizes that missionaries disrupt not only Muslims but also people of different religious backgrounds. She argues that Christians should first resolve the discord stemming from their own sectarian divisions before attempting to influence others. According to her, Christians, who have yet to achieve unity among themselves, should begin by addressing their internal conflicts. In this context, she asserts that Bible institutions are not only religious traps but also organizations driven by underlying political concerns and ambitions. Ayverdi also recounts a conversation in her letter between a British missionary and an experienced African elder: “When you arrived in our land, we had the land, and you had the Holy Book. Now, we have the Holy Book, and you have our land” (Ayverdi, 1969). Ayverdi emphasizes that missionary work has become a profession and a means of livelihood. According to her, missionary activity serves as a “source of income,” meaning that even individuals without faith can become missionaries, and indeed, many missionaries fall into this category. Ayverdi also finds it “ridiculous” that missionaries frequently address her with statements such as: “You are a seeker of truth. Your questions interest us. We will provide answers to your difficulties.” In response to this, she states:

“It is as if I had said, ‘My conversion to Christianity was delayed. Now that I have come to my senses, I accept your invitation and am on my way,’ portraying myself as the one asking questions and you as the one providing solutions to my difficulties. I see that the missionary establishment has either lost its ability to distinguish and discern or has never possessed it, assuming for itself the privilege and authority to look down upon the world from a position of superiority. Let me reiterate: I have never posed any questions to you. For every difficulty I have ever encountered, I have found answers within Islam. The Islamic faith possesses the power to satisfy and uplift both myself and the entire world. Therefore, as Muslims, we do not feel the need to affirm or validate our beliefs by attacking the faith of others.” (Ayverdi, 1969)

She firmly asserts that she will never accept Jesus Christ as “God and Savior,” emphasizing that any efforts by these missionaries to persuade her are futile. Ayverdi prays that in both this world and the hereafter, God will not deprive her of the honor of Islam, while also expressing her hope that Christians, who remain bound to the doctrine of the Trinity, may ultimately be enlightened by the light of the Qur’ān (Ayverdi, 1969). In light of these statements, it is evident that Ayverdi perceives Islam as a religion that encompasses previous faiths while also being the most perfected and complete form of divine revelation. As will be further explored, Ayverdi frequently emphasizes that Christianity has deviated from the original message of Jesus and has undergone significant alterations when evaluating Christian doctrines.

Discussion in the Context of Doctrines

In her letters, Ayverdi provides commentary on the doctrines of Christianity and evaluates various concepts within it. Among these concepts are the Bible, the Church, the issue of original sin, the death of Jesus for the sins of humanity, and religious practices. However, it would be appropriate to first address Ayverdi’s comments on the three Abrahamic religions, which she views as interconnected and sequential.

The Comparison of the Three Abrahamic Religions

Ayverdi views Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as different stages of the same truth’s evolution. According to him, Allah has always sent the same message through His prophets, but this message reached its perfection with the Prophet Muḥammad. In this context, Islam contains the message of the previous religions but reveals it in its ultimate, perfected form. For Ayverdi, just as “when one says ninety-nine, ninety-nine is included,” when one says “Muslim,” it should be understood as the evolved

form of Judaism, and Christianity (Ayverdi, 2005). She points out the differences between these three religions. According to her, Christianity has failed to reconcile individual and social issues within its doctrine. In contrast, Judaism has fully presented itself as a social religion, with no consideration for anything outside the community. The “Chosen/Superior People,”¹ a closed society, have taken it upon themselves to carry out a sacred duty to restore the chaotic world after the coming of the Messiah². In this context, a Jew who does not participate in this mission is considered insignificant. Jews have focused on this world as the central point for their beliefs and have not been concerned with matters of the afterlife. The Old Testament also lacks satisfying verses related to life after death. According to Jews, anyone who fulfills the commandments of the Old Testament is promised fame and wealth in this world. In this regard, their “reward” is purely worldly.³ According to Ayverdi, Islam emerges as the perfect religion that maintains the balance between the worldly and the afterlife, standing in stark contrast to these two conflicting beliefs. The Allah of Islam is not the jealous⁴, stern lawgiver who separates His creatures (whether Jewish or not) as conceived in the worldview of the Israelites. Moreover, the Allah of Islam is not the one who turns His followers’ eyes away from the world, teaching that happiness exists only in the dominion of the heavens⁵. Rather, He encompasses all of creation, and His compassion embraces all races. The Qur’ān emphasizes that the most honorable of people in the sight of Allah are those who show the greatest respect towards Him. He encompasses all realms, and His compassion embraces all races. The Qur’ān emphasizes that the person who is most esteemed in the sight of Allah is the one who shows the greatest reverence to Him.⁶ According to Ayverdi, the world is neither a land of curses nor a valley of tears for Muslims.⁷ The world, created by the eternal Allah, is given to humanity for their service, with everything in it—whether on land, at sea, or in the air—designed to serve human beings. The Qur’ān never permits the abandonment of worldly life. In this regard, for Ayverdi, the attempt to separate the worldly and the otherworldly is an effort to distort the idea of eternal unity and to create a dualistic regime (Ayverdi, 1969). Ayverdi also supports this view by providing examples from the history of Islam. She emphasizes the respect shown by the Islamic caliph ‘Umar when he conquered Jerusalem and the Prophet Muḥammad’s Farewell Sermon⁸, as well

¹ It is seen that, Samiha Ayverdi points to the Jews’ view of themselves as superior to other people, based on verses from the The Old Testament such as Deuteronomy, 7:6; Exodus, 19:6.

² In this context, the concept of the Messiah holds significant importance in Judaism. Jews do not accept Jesus as the “Expected Messiah.” They base this belief on the fact that Jesus did not fulfill the characteristics that were expected of the Messiah. For example, according to Judaism, the future Messiah, the son of David, will follow the laws of the The Old Testament and will compel the Jewish people to adhere to its teachings. Additionally, when the Messiah appears, the Israelites will be saved and will experience prosperity. However, Jesus, in their view, annulled the laws of the The Old Testament, and after his arrival, the Jews endured even greater hardships. Furthermore, the idea that the Messiah would be born of both a mother and a father is also a crucial criterion for the Jews. In this regard, Jews often refer to Jesus with derogatory terms and actively resist the idea that he was the Messiah. See: (Meral, 2021). Some of the verses in the Old Testament related to the Messiah include: Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 9:7, Malachi 4:5, Numbers 24:19, Psalm 110:4, Genesis 49:10, Psalm 110:1.

³ From these statements, it can be understood that Ayverdi is referring to Chapter 28 of the Book of Deuteronomy in the Old Testament. Based on the Book of Deuteronomy, God promises Jews who follow His commandments a healthy and peaceful life in this world, respect among other peoples, the blessing of their fields, the prosperity of their livestock and dough, and eternal superiority. However, if they fail to follow the commandments, the opposite fate awaits them.

⁴ Exodus, 20:5.

⁵ It can be seen that Ayverdi draws attention to the concept of the “Kingdom of Heaven” (or “Kingdom of God”) that frequently appears in the New Testament. In this context, the following verses may be cited: Matthew 3:2; Matthew 13:31-32; Matthew 7:21; Matthew 18:3.

⁶ Qur’ān, 49:13.

⁷ Ayverdi primarily draws attention to the notion in Judaism that the world is a cursed place, referencing the verse, Genesis 3:17. Furthermore, she refers to the Christians’ interpretation of the world as a land of suffering and tears, based on Psalm 84:6. Although this expression does not appear explicitly in the Bible, Revelation 21:4 indicates that God will wipe away their tears, offering a future promise of comfort.

⁸ According to Ayverdi, the Farewell Sermon of Prophet Muḥammad, which contains a directive of truth and justice lasting until the Day of Judgment, was delivered in 632. In contrast, the Declaration of the Human Rights, which was an attempt by Western states to awaken from their slumber and ignorance, was published in 1789. In this context, she argues that Islam is a belief system that declared and implemented human rights centuries before Western nations (Ayverdi, 1969).



as the positive opinions of Western Christians, such as Will Durant¹ and Rene Grousset², regarding Islam. Ayverdi also highlights Lord Davenport's book *An Apology for Muḥammad and the Koran*, where he mentions that the Spanish, while destroying 12 million Indians, justified their actions based on Biblical verses³, further emphasizing that the history of Christianity is far removed from the "ideal order." In contrast, Ayverdi shares a passage from a letter written by the Prophet Muḥammad to the monks of Najran, as an example of the peaceful and respectful approach Islam had toward other religious communities:

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, from the Prophet Muḥammad to the Monk Abu'l-Hārīt, the monks of Najran, their priests, and all those who follow them, as well as their clerics: Whatever they possess, whether in small or large quantities, their churches, small churches, and monasteries shall remain their own. They shall have the protection of Allah and His Messenger. No monk shall be removed from his religious position, no priest shall be removed from his monastery, and no cleric shall be distanced from his duties. There shall be no changes in their practices, rights, or traditions. As long as they act with sincerity and perform their duties properly, the protection of Allah and His Messenger shall always be ensured for them. They will neither be subjected to oppression nor will they oppress anyone" (Ayverdi, 1969; Morrow, 2013).

The Bible

Under this heading, the responses given by Ayverdi in comparison between the Qur'ān and the Bible will be addressed, in response to the statement made by the missionaries: "Please buy a copy of the Bible from a bookstore in Istanbul. It is probably available in many places. If you cannot find one, write to me and I will send it to you free of charge. I am sure that you will find nothing but extraordinary truths in the Bible. You will be amazed by it" (Ayverdi, 1969).

It should be stated that Ayverdi argues that the Bible was written after Jesus and has been altered. According to her, there are very few statements attributed to Jesus in the current Bible, and it is nothing more than a biography of Jesus Christ. These accounts are the expressions that the apostles remembered and wrote down to the extent that they could recall them. In this context, Ayverdi emphasizes that the Bible began to be disseminated 50 years after the death of Jesus, and at that time, the number of Bible copies reached over 100.⁴ According to her, the Church, anticipating the problems that would arise from

¹ Will Durant (d. 1981) was an American historian and philosopher, known for his monumental work *The Story of Civilization*. Ayverdi references a quote from Durant's aforementioned work: "The Qur'ān has, for thirteen centuries, adorned the memories of millions of people, stimulated their imaginations, shaped their character, and made their consciousness and understanding tremble with joy." See: (Ayverdi, 1969; Durant, 1952).

² René Grousset (d. 1952) was a renowned French orientalist, famous for his historical and art history works on Asian peoples. In her letters, Ayverdi refers to his words: "If we ask how the Muslim world reached such a high level in such a short period, the answer must be sought in both the personal genius of Prophet Muḥammad and the loftiness of his religion." See: (Ayverdi, 1969; Grousset, 1955).

³ See: (Davenport, 1869).

Some of these verses include: Exodus 32:27; 1 Samuel 15:3; Deuteronomy 20:16. According to Ayverdi, in contrast to Christianity, the Qur'ān contains no commandments that contradict humanity's inherent capacity for mercy, compassion, and empathy.

⁴ Sources indicate that Jesus died around 30-33 AD. Biblical scholars date the first written Gospel, the Gospel of Mark, to around 70 AD. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written later, between 80-100 AD. The last Gospel to be written, the Gospel of John, differs in content from the first three Gospels and is known to have been written in the 2nd century. In this context, the late dates of the texts lead researchers to question the theory that the Gospels were written directly by the apostles. Additionally, based on the writings of early church fathers like Clement (d. 99) and Ignatius (d. 110-115), the term "Good News" used in their texts does not refer to the Gospels as we know them today. This suggests that Christian writers did not view the Gospels as sacred or binding texts until the first half of the 2nd century. In other words, during this period, the term "Good News" did not refer to written texts. Furthermore, the original copies of the Gospels do not exist, and the surviving manuscripts date from the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Sources also note that the Gospels as we know them today were attributed to the apostles starting from the 2nd century. For more detailed information see: (Duygu, 2023). Another important issue is the fact that in the 2nd century, the four Gospels were recorded without specific names, and none of their

such a large number of versions, decided at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD to reduce the number of Gospels to four¹, and ordered the burning of the remaining copies (Ayverdi, 1969). Additionally, Ayverdi emphasizes that historical records indicate that before Jesus' ascension, only twelve individuals had faith in him, and these individuals, known as the Apostles, were illiterate. Accordingly, they neither memorized nor recorded the Gospel that was conveyed to them in secluded places. Furthermore, due to the persecution faced by Christianity, it remained largely clandestine for approximately a century. During this period, not only had the Apostles who received the Gospel directly from Jesus disappeared, but even those who had heard it from the Apostles were no longer present. Consequently, the Gospels available today are not direct writings of Jesus' Apostles but rather texts composed by individuals who transmitted the accounts at third or fourth-hand (Ayverdi, 1969: 92-94). Ayverdi also evaluates the issue of the Gospel's alteration from a linguistic perspective. According to her, Jesus was Jewish, and his Apostles spoke Hebrew. However, the earliest Gospel was addressed to the Greeks and was written in Greek. As a result, both accurate and inaccurate narratives found their way into these texts. Ayverdi further emphasizes that the New Testament contains statements that could not have been spoken by Jesus as a prophet. In this regard, the letters of Peter, John, Jude, and James fall into this category (Ayverdi, 1969). Referring to the verse from the Gospel of Matthew (5:17), "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them," Ayverdi highlights that Jesus adhered to the The Old Testament, whereas the present-day Gospels suggest that the The Old Testament is no longer valid. In her view, such contradictions in the Gospels do not provide clarity or comfort to the reader but instead create further confusion. Ayverdi notes that when she

authors are known for certain (Sheller, 2000), points out that Ehrman argues that the phrases at the beginning of the Gospels, such as "The Gospel according to Mark" and "The Gospel according to Matthew," should be understood as indicating that these texts were written by others and later attributed to the apostles (Ehrman, 1999), also notes this point. In this context, David Benjamin, a former Christian Chaldean priest who converted to Islam, raises the issue that the Gospels are not the original revelations given to Jesus and have been altered. He poses the following questions: Could it have been possible for Jesus and his apostles to leave the Gospel revealed by God in the language it was revealed? If such a Gospel existed, who lost it? Was this original Gospel translated into Greek? If these questions are answered negatively, then why didn't the Jewish apostles or the Gospel writers, who lived in the countryside, write the Gospels in their own language but in Greek? Where did these apostles learn Greek well enough to write the sacred texts? If the answer is "The Holy Spirit taught them," then the explanation becomes even more absurd, as the Holy Spirit is not a teacher of language and grammar. If such a claim is made, the question arises as to why the Holy Spirit would have taught the apostles Greek after revealing the message in Hebrew to Jesus, a Nazarene Israelite, and urged the apostles to write parts of the same revelation in Greek. David Benjamin further emphasizes that no matter how faithful a translation is to the original, it can never fully encompass the meanings of the original text. See: (Davud, 1992). In this context, Ayverdi similarly draws attention to these issues and underscores the need for caution when approaching the information in the modern-day Gospels, considering their formation process.

¹It should be noted that there are disputes regarding whether the reduction of the number of Gospels to four took place at the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). Some sources suggest that while the nature of Jesus was being debated at the council, clergy inclined toward deifying him favored these four Gospels over those emphasizing his servanthood. Ayverdi is among those who hold this view. According to this perspective, various Christian communities across different regions possessed distinct versions of the Gospel. Consequently, hundreds of Gospel manuscripts and epistles were sent to the Council of Nicaea for examination, and the clergy selected four Gospels along with additional epistles from among thousands of texts, elevating them to the status of sacred scripture. In this context, it is argued that the Church did not have a standardized Gospel in its present form until 325 A.D. See: (Dâvûd, 1999; Kavlak, 2019). The primary topics of the Council of Nicaea were the nature of Jesus Christ, the debate over Arius' position, which portrayed Jesus as subordinate to the Father, and ultimately, the affirmation of Jesus' divinity, leading to Arius' excommunication. Other issues discussed included the appointment of bishops, admission into the clergy, the status of those who had been excommunicated, and the precedence of certain cities in the Christian hierarchy, among others. For the decisions adopted at the council, see: (Kaçar and et al., 2023). In this context, some scholars argue that by the time of the Council of Nicaea, the traditional four Gospels had already distinguished themselves among their counterparts and that the decision to limit the number of Gospels to four was not made at this council. See: (Duygu, 2019). However, it should also be noted that discussions at the Council of Laodicea (363–364) regarding the books and epistles to be included in the New Testament, as well as the exclusion of the Book of Revelation, indicate that even at that time, there were uncertainties about the final form of the New Testament. The version of the New Testament closest to its present form was ultimately approved at the Third Council of Carthage in 397. See: (Westcott, 1875).



documented the atrocities committed by Christians throughout history¹ in her letters, missionaries responded by asserting, “True Christianity is the Christianity as we understand it.” In reply, Ayverdi pointed out, “So you acknowledge that there is a Christian mass that has deviated from the truth,” thereby cautioning the missionaries that their priority should be to reform their own co-religionists first. According to her, when even within Christianity there exist large groups who are misguided, it becomes difficult to believe in the saving power of the Gospel. Ayverdi then emphasizes that the Qur’ān encompasses the scriptures that preceded it. In her view, the pre-Qur’ānic scriptures are like summaries, containing certain truths, but the Qur’ān, being a complete and comprehensive revelation, serves as their fulfillment. She argues that it is as if God, acting as the supreme educator of humanity, imparted divine knowledge progressively. First, He sent the Old Testament to a world steeped in ignorance and idolatry, serving as a form of elementary education for humanity. Once mankind was somewhat refined through this, the New Testament was revealed, elevating human understanding to a secondary level. After these two stages, the Qur’ān was revealed, completing humanity’s higher education in divine knowledge (Ayverdi, 1969). Ayverdi examines this issue through another example as well. She emphasizes that the world was created by God and that the religious traditions of all nations are like rivers flowing toward this ultimate truth. According to her, the revelations brought by Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, and other prophets are tributaries of a river that fulfills the purpose of human creation. This purpose is the realization of God’s oneness. However, this objective cannot be fully achieved through the Old Testament alone, as it speaks only of the God of Israel. Likewise, the Vedas fail to accomplish this, for according to the Rishis, molten lead should be poured into the ears of non-Hindu listeners of the Vedas. Buddhism, too, does not present a comprehensive framework and remains confined to India. Similarly, the religion of Jesus cannot fulfill this goal, as Jesus was not a universal teacher. He instructed his disciples, “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matthew 10:5-6). Consequently, his mission was not addressed to all nations but was restricted to a specific people and region. According to Ayverdi, prior to the Prophet of Islam, no one had ever brought a message encompassing all of humanity. Likewise, before the Qur’ān, no scripture had addressed all of humankind. In this context, the Qur’ānic verse, “O people, indeed I am the Messenger of Allah to all of you” (Qur’ān, 7:158), serves as evidence that Prophet Muḥammad was sent as a messenger to all of humanity (Ayverdi, 1969). Despite these points, Ayverdi emphasizes that Muslims have great respect for the Gospel, as well as for Jesus and Mary. However, she also highlights the lack of reciprocal tolerance from Christians toward Muslims by citing an incident involving Lord William Ewart Gladstone (d. 1898), the leader of the British Liberal Party. In 1877, during a speech in the House of Commons, Gladstone held up a copy of the Qur’ān and exclaimed, “As long as this book remains on earth, atrocities like the Batak Massacre will never cease” (Ayverdi, 1969; Muslim News International, 1967). In this context, Ayverdi also draws attention to Prophet Muḥammad’s letter of protection to the Christians of Sinai, using it to challenge missionaries with the remark: “Instead of asking what Christianity can teach the Muslim world, you should be asking what Christianity can learn from Islam” (Ayverdi, 1969).

Finally, Ayverdi’s response to the missionaries’ persistent recommendation that she read the Gospel will be examined. In reply to their insistence, she states: “You advise me to read the Gospel. I have read it—many times. But while I have the Qur’ān, an unaltered Divine Word, I leave the Gospel to the Christian world” (Ayverdi, 1969). She then explains the reasoning behind her perspective, noting that the Gospel frequently refers to the “God of Israel.” This led her to question, “What does the God of Israel have to do with me? Am I Jewish? If not, then this is not my God.” Further, upon reading passages where Jesus identifies himself as the teacher of Jewish children and instructs his disciples to reject others (Matthew 15:21-26), Ayverdi states that she discarded the Gospel, concluding that it had nothing to offer her. According to Ayverdi, the instances of harsh and unjust practices found in the Gospel further deepened her respect for Islam (Ayverdi, 1969). As can be seen, Samiha Ayverdi believes that

¹ In this context, Samiha Ayverdi cites historical events such as the Crusades, the persecution of Muslim-Turks by Russian tsars, and the massacre of thirty thousand Muslims in a single instance by Serbian leader Mihailović as examples of such atrocities.

the Gospel is not the original revelation given to Jesus, that it has been gradually altered over time, and that the Qur'ân is the final, unaltered, and complete divine book. According to her, due to its internal contradictions, the Gospel confuses readers rather than providing them with solace. Furthermore, Ayverdi emphasizes that Christianity, as a religious institution, is based on two fundamentally opposing worldviews. In her view, on one side, there is an ethnocentric perspective rooted in Jewish history, while on the other, there is a patchwork of metaphysical and mythological elements derived from Western and Indian traditions—something that, she argues, cannot constitute a universal religion (Ayverdi, 1969).

The Trinity

As is well known, the Trinity is the most fundamental belief in Christianity, and all other rituals are shaped by this belief. In this context, it is noteworthy that a discourse regarding the concept of the Trinity also took place between Ayverdi and the missionaries. The missionaries argue that the true unity is the Trinity and offer several reasons to support their view. According to them, if everything is singular, it would be impossible to reach anything beyond the singular, and therefore, great thinkers emphasize the necessity of both unity and multiplicity. Christianity, through the theory of “Triune Unity,” has resolved the potential problems arising from this issue, a problem for which neither Muslims, nor Hindus, nor adherents of other religions have any answers. In this context, the singular God exists in three persons: “The Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.” The Bible also records that this triune unity manifests through eternal love (Ayverdi, 1969).

Ayverdi, in response to the missionaries’ interpretation, expresses her view that a human cannot be God. According to her, although prophets are beloved by God, they are still His servants and are never His sons. Anyone who is born and gives birth is mortal, but since God is eternal, He neither gives birth nor is born, He only creates. For this reason, the Qur'ân does not refer to Jesus as the son of God, but rather describes His birth as occurring through the Holy Spirit, that is, Gabriel’s breath (Ayverdi, 1969).¹ Ayverdi also expresses her views on the term “the Trinity” used by the missionaries. According to her, Islam itself is the very embodiment of unity. The perception of multiplicity does not hinder the perception of unity, nor does unity hinder the perception of multiplicity. She emphasizes the verse, “God is neither born nor gives birth,”² indicating that Jesus was born. In Ayverdi’s view, while Muslims accept Jesus as a servant and prophet of God, Christians view Him as “God in human form.” Christians, who zigzag between the three persons³ like the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, have nothing to say about unity (Ayverdi, 1969).

¹ Ayverdi here refers to verses 17-22 of Surah Maryam.

² Qur'ân, 112:3.

³ Samiha Ayverdi emphasizes the concept of “personhood” and argues that the idea of three persons cannot adequately reflect the unity of God. This issue is one of the most significant theological debates, which has been discussed for centuries. When examining the Gospel, it is seen that Jesus is referred to with various titles such as the Son of Man (Matthew 8:20), prophet (Matthew 21:10-11), (Luke 7:16), (John 6:14), the Son of God (Matthew 3:17), (Matthew 11:27), or one who does not claim to perform miracles on his own but asserts that he came from the Father (John 8:28). Additionally, the divinity of Jesus was officially confirmed during the Nicene Council in the 4th century. However, throughout Christian history, there have been debates about the human-God nature of Jesus and the extent of his divinity. The Gospel does not explicitly state that Jesus is God, but instead, it points to Jesus worshiping the Father as God (Acts 2:22). See: (Brown, 1965). The verses in the Old Testament that indicate God cannot become human (Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hosea 11:9; Job 9:32) are also noteworthy in this context. The concept of the Trinity in Christian doctrine expresses the idea of one God in three natures. According to this view, the three natures of the one God are fundamentally identical, but distinct in their personhood. The Father’s role is creation, the Son’s role is salvation, and the Holy Spirit’s role is sanctification (İnanlar, 2000). The term “Trinity” was first used by Patriarch Theophilus of Antioch and was officially established in the 4th century at the Nicene Council. See: (Michel, 1992). Abdulahad Davud critiques the idea that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit share the same essence, questioning their roles. According to him, none of the three can independently be the Creator, the Savior, or the Sanctifier. Therefore, equality among them is not possible. Davud argues that the doctrine of the Trinity, where each person is considered a separate God, is logically incoherent. He points out that referring to each person as “persona” contradicts the concept of monotheism, as it presents the unity of God as three separate persons. He also discusses how in Islam, the attributes or names of Allah are not given separate personhood. For example, when Allah shows mercy, the believer may



As seen, Ayverdi does not consider the Christian concept of the “Trinity” as a notion of unity. According to her, while God can manifest through different names, interpreting a manifestation upon a servant as “God taking form” contradicts the concept of unity. To better understand her view on this matter, it is useful to examine a commentary she makes on the Trinity in her work *Mülâkatlar (Interviews)*. In this context, Ayverdi is present in a gathering where enlightened individuals discuss the concept of the “Trinity.” One person mentions how a lady she encountered praised Christianity and said, “I love the Trinity,” while another person states, “The weakest part of Christianity is the Trinity.” Upon hearing this, Ayverdi ends the discussion with the statement, “To engage in a debate over such a trivial idea is itself a disgrace” (Ayverdi, 2005). Clearly, Ayverdi refers to the concept of Trinity as “trivial” and considers further discussion on the subject as diminishing.

The Concept of Original Sin and Salvation Through the Cross

In the letters, the missionaries also address the issue of original sin and how Jesus was crucified to save all humanity from these sins and grant salvation. They make the remark to Ayverdi, “I am sure you will be convinced that Jesus suffered 2000 years ago because He loved you.” According to this view, humans are sinners. In fact, they have committed such grave sins against God that the effect of their sins is infinite, and the punishment for their sins is also infinite. It is written in every person’s fate that they are condemned to infinite punishment. God is exalted, but He does not smile upon sin and does not forgive sins without punishment. This is a requirement of God’s sacred nature (Ayverdi, 1969). According to the missionaries, the cause of a bomb falling in the Far East can be traced back to the time when Adam rebelled against God. In this context, Adam’s sins are seen as enormous, and the consequence of all the sins placed upon humanity is that they are condemned to eternal punishment. In this situation, there are two options: either humanity will endure this eternal suffering, or the eternal God will come and suffer for humanity. Since God is loving towards His servants, He came Himself and endured this suffering, and those who accept this truth among people will attain salvation. Those who do not accept it will remain under God’s wrath. In this sense, if God were to send humanity to Hell due to their sins, He would be just. However, God has treated them with love and has shown His mercy through this path (Ayverdi, 1969). As a result, God did not consent to humanity enduring eternal punishment and demonstrated His love by saying, “As God, I am capable of enduring suffering on the cross for a few hours.” Therefore, God is love (Ayverdi, 1969). The insistence of missionaries who addressed Samiha Ayverdi with the question, “Why don’t you lower your rebellious arms and accept Jesus as your God and Savior?” is also striking (Ayverdi, 1969).

It is seen that Ayverdi responded to the missionaries’ letter by saying, “We believe in the prophethood of Jesus, but your faith is incomplete because you do not recognize Prophet Muḥammad.” According to her, the community that is truly in need of salvation is the Christian community. Ayverdi compares their constantly repeated words to “the monotonous sounds produced by someone sitting at a piano, pressing the same keys over and over again.” While Christians may be satisfied with these sounds, she emphasizes that others will never be satisfied (Ayverdi, 1969).

Later, Ayverdi addresses the issue of Jesus’ death on the cross. According to her, the idea that God suffered on behalf of humans is a subjective and imaginary conception. The belief that those who accept this theory will be saved is, in her view, a naive belief. Ayverdi emphasizes that she does not condemn Christians for their belief, but she underlines that they should not interfere with those who follow their own path (Ayverdi, 1969). She states that Muslims respect and accept Jesus as a prophet. After Prophet Muḥammad, the respect shown to Jesus, who is a past prophet with an abolished law, includes the

describe Him as “He is beautiful,” but not as “He is beauty.” In this way, beauty is linked to God but does not exist as a separate entity. Similarly, the elements of the Trinity are connected to the Father and cannot exist independently of Him. In this context, Davud argues that Christians forget that God cannot be divided into the Father before creation, the Son before speech, and the Holy Spirit before life, as these attributes cannot be eternal. (Davud, 1999). This view aligns with Ayverdi’s critique of the concept of personhood in the Trinity and her argument that unity in God cannot be discussed in terms of three separate persons. Both Ayverdi and Davud reject the idea of a divine essence split into distinct personages, reaffirming the monotheistic nature of Islam and its rejection of the Trinitarian view of God.

Christian world. However, this respect should not imply that Christians, by overstepping their bounds, would attack the faith of Muslims, nor should Muslims remain silent in the face of such attacks. According to Ayverdi, although Islam does not endorse unnecessary attacks, it permits retaliation against an attacker. This permission, however, must not deviate from justice, fairness, and compassion.¹ Although the Islamic understanding does not suggest “to turn the other cheek to the one who strikes you on the cheek”², this passive and lax command in Christianity could not keep Christians away from evil. Ayverdi concludes her letter with the question, “Which of the bloods shed in the name of the Gospel over the past two thousand years has this command been able to prevent?” (Ayverdi, 1969). As seen, Ayverdi considers the idea of God dying on the cross for humanity’s sin, which is one of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, as a fanciful belief, and refers to believing in this theory as innocence.

Prayers

Throughout the letters, another issue that sparks discourse is the topic of worship practices. According to the missionaries, the reason people do not accept Christianity as a religion is the absence of outdated written prayers, rituals, and ceremonies found in other religions. In this context, they argue that Jesus came to give life, not to provide written prayers. He did not command to fast on this or that day, but he stated that whoever’s soul is guided by Allah to fast will be rewarded.³ The missionaries then criticize the five daily prayers (salāt) in Islam, stating, “Jesus did not say, ‘Pray five times a day at specific hours and recite this prayer in a language that neither you nor those around you understand.’ Instead, he taught that prayer should come from the heart, and such prayer would be answered.” They also criticize the practice of zakat in Islam, emphasizing that Jesus said that one cannot be part of his community unless they give up everything, not just one-fortieth of their wealth.⁴ Furthermore, they argue that Islam seeks “cheap grace,” pointing out that Jesus already died on the cross for humanity’s sins, and those who do not accept this truth are deprived of the “good news.” The missionaries’ comparison of Islam and Christianity, claiming that Christianity is superior, is also noteworthy. According to them, the high ideals of Christianity are absent in Islam. They also argue that prophecies regarding the coming of Jesus were written a century before his birth, and this is one of the greatest proofs of his divinity and role as the Savior (Ayverdi, 1969).

Samiha Ayverdi responds to their claim of “outdated rituals and customs” by saying, “As you said, religions, especially Christianity, have outdated ritual forms and customs. What difference is there between the statues, decorations, toys, curtains, and fringes of a church and any other decoration?” According to her, a Christian is bound to worship in these ornate churches, while a Muslim can worship Allah anywhere—whether in a mountain, at home, on the street, or even in a synagogue. For her, love for Allah is not confined to a specific place. Allah is everywhere, and He is the One who manifests through all created things. Furthermore, Ayverdi responds to the missionaries’ attempt to view Christianity as superior to other religions with the statement “everything is a manifestation of Allah.” This perspective, known as “Waḥdat al-wujūd” (unity of being) (“Ibn Arabi Society”, 2025) in Sufi terminology, posits that everything in creation is a manifestation of one of Allah’s names. Therefore, nothing in the universe is meaningless. According to Ayverdi, some of these creations are manifestations of the names of misguidance, while others are manifestations of the name of guidance. For just as the existence of the negative is as necessary as the positive on Earth, the multiplicity in the world does not obstruct unity. She emphasizes that, just like the mixture of yellow, red, green, purple, and black colors creates white, the abundance of diversity and different beliefs do not prevent the existence of one ultimate reality (Ayverdi, 1969). It is observed that Ayverdi responds to missionaries who criticize the acts of worship in Islam through the Bible and the history of Christianity. In response

¹ “Ayverdi here refers to the verse from the Qur’ān: ‘So, if anyone attacks you, retaliate in the same manner. But be mindful of Allah and know that Allah is with those who are mindful of Him’ (Qur’ān, 2:194).”

² “Ayverdi here refers to the verse: ‘If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also’ (Matthew, 5:40).”

³ Matthew, 6:18.

⁴ Luka, 14:33.



to the missionaries' statement, "Jesus did not say, 'Fast on this day, fast on that day,'" Ayverdi replies, "You are right, because only Allah knows what Jesus' followers were told. The Bible, after all, was written fifty years after Jesus and is composed of the words that his disciples remembered, whether correctly or incorrectly." Additionally, Ayverdi emphasizes that the expression in the Bible where Jesus says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹ is unacceptable. According to her, even the most humble and ordinary servant of Allah knows that Allah will never forsake him under any circumstances, so it is paradoxical that Jesus, a monumental figure, would not know this. In response to these paradoxical expressions in Christianity, Ayverdi underscores that the acts of worship in Islam are divine commands that provide numerous benefits for both the material and spiritual aspects of human life. She concludes by saying, "I wish the whole of humanity would follow these commands and attain peace," as she explains the significance of each act of worship (Ayverdi, 1969).

According to Ayverdi, who first explains the act of fasting in Islam, fasting purifies an individual both physiologically and spiritually. Performing prayer five times a day means turning away from worldly worries and anxieties and directing oneself toward the Divine. In this way, the believer withdraws from the attacks of human desires. Giving one-fortieth of one's income annually to those in need serves to prevent extreme poverty and economic crises. She responds to the missionaries by stating, "As you assume, zakat is not given to beggars but to those in need," emphasizing that the institution of zakat (alms) is a declaration of war against poverty. In this way, both the needy person benefits, and the giver, in seeking to regain what they have given, is motivated to strive harder. Thus, the well-being of society is ensured. After the missionaries cite the verse, "None of you can be my disciple unless you give up everything you have" (Luke 14:33) and critique the Islamic commandment of zakat, Ayverdi characterizes their argument as "self-contradiction." She then questions the internal contradiction in Christian thought by asking, "To whom will you renounce everything you possess? Surely not to kings, princes, or the wealthy. Moreover, are you expected to give up everything and remain utterly destitute?" Ayverdi associates the missionaries' mockery of the Muslim pilgrimage by referring to it as "traveling to a distant city to earn divine merit" with their failure to grasp the profundity of this act of worship. According to her, the pilgrimage fosters movement and prosperity among the diverse Muslim nations scattered across the globe. Once a year, they gather, establish bonds of closeness, consult each other regarding their challenges, and collectively share in the spiritual experience of visiting the Prophet's sacred resting place. She further exposes another contradiction in the missionaries' perspective by asking, "If the birthplace of Jesus is not established as an authentic fact, why do Christians symbolically visit Jerusalem?" Additionally, it is noteworthy that Ayverdi interprets the Islamic pilgrimage through a Sufi lens, emphasizing its deeper spiritual significance. In this context, Ayverdi responds to the missionaries' statement—which alludes to Jesus—that "he taught us not to seek merit by traveling far, but rather to allow the rebirth of the divine spirit through the confession of sins" by emphasizing that the purification of one's animalistic traits can only be achieved through self-discipline. According to her, a person who attains spiritual purification and self-discipline frees themselves from egoism—that is, from base characteristics—and becomes the master of their own soul, always accompanied by God. These base traits include malice, arrogance, falsehood, hypocrisy, and discord. The Qur'ān also elucidates this idea with the verse: "Indeed, We are closer to them than their jugular vein" (Qur'ān, 50:16). In this regard, Ayverdi asserts that there is no need to confess sins to a priest in order to draw closer to God. Realizing that God is always with an individual, even closer than they are to themselves, serves as the strongest deterrent against sinning. She argues that purging oneself of base attributes is not as simple as merely confessing sins; rather, it is a long and arduous journey of self-discipline, through which divine attributes are cultivated. According to Ayverdi, the growing number of converts to Islam in the modern era is a testament to the religion's superior principles, which provide profound spiritual fulfillment. Because in Islam, withdrawing from the world in an attempt to become a good person is not considered a commendable virtue. What truly matters is to live as a faithful and righteous person amidst worldly blessings—without being led astray, falling into heedlessness, or succumbing to one's lower self (Ayverdi, 1969). It is noteworthy that Ayverdi describes the missionaries' mockery of Islamic obligatory practices, particularly zakat, as "ignorant." Furthermore, she states that she excuses them on the grounds that they "do not know Islam at all." In this context, it is possible to conclude that

¹ Matthew, 27:46.

Ayverdi attributes the missionaries' attacks on Islam to their ignorance of the religion. According to her, without even realizing the extent of their own ignorance, these missionaries have presumptuously taken on a challenge beyond their capacity—attempting to pit Christianity, which struggles with the doctrine of the Trinity, against the absolute oneness of God in the Muslim world (Ayverdi, 1969).

Conclusion

In her letters, Samiha Ayverdi advocates the idea that individuals adhering to a particular faith should refrain from interfering with the beliefs of others. According to her, spreading one's faith is one matter, but engaging in activities that instill doubt in others about their own beliefs is problematic. It has been observed that Ayverdi's engagement with Christian doctrines was primarily a response to the provocative statements of missionaries. While missionaries justified their activities through biblical verses, they also attempted to pressure Ayverdi into accepting Jesus as "God." Ayverdi's responses to Christian doctrines are original within the context of "Muslim-Christian discourses" due to their Sufi perspective. She addresses topics such as the Trinity, the Bible, original sin, the crucifixion, and worship practices, offering explanations both from a rational standpoint and through their esoteric meanings. According to her, everything in the universe represents a different level of perception, and individuals may find a particular belief system more compatible with their own comprehension. Therefore, no one should be forced to change their faith, as each person perceives God from a different level of understanding. The real struggle, in her view, should be against atheistic systems, such as communism, which deny the existence of God. Within this framework, Ayverdi considers Islam the final and most perfected form of all faiths, emphasizing that salvation lies in adhering to the last prophet and the scripture revealed to him. In her view, abandoning Islam to adopt Christianity would be a regression in spiritual evolution.

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