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Abstract- This article aims to present some of the main issues relating to *fiṭra* - a term generally understood as designating an innate monotheistic disposition in humans - in the Qur'an alone, without any subsequent exegetical or traditional contribution[1]. On the other hand, it gives pride of place to the intertextual approach, which allows us to situate this notion in a thematic line going back to Ancient Greece, and which gave rise to theories developed in various monotheistic circles of Late Antiquity, particularly Jewish, Judeo-Christian and Christian.

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A Quranic Concept with Universal Appeal: The Innate Monotheistic Disposition (*Fiṭra*)

Geneviève Gobillot

Abstract- **This article aims to present some of the main issues relating to *fiṭra* - a term generally understood as designating an innate monotheistic disposition in humans - in the Qur'an alone, without any subsequent exegetical or traditional contribution[1]. On the other hand, it gives pride of place to the intertextual approach, which allows us to situate this notion in a thematic line going back to Ancient Greece, and which gave rise to theories developed in various monotheistic circles of Late Antiquity, particularly Jewish, Judeo-Christian and Christian.**

The Qur'anic Co-Text

Although the fields of thought mobilized by *fiṭra* are particularly numerous and extensive, the "*brevitas*" (*ījâz*), or "condensation of meanings", quality of the Qur'anic text, is such that much of them can be detected at first glance in verse (Q 30, 30) - the only one that mentions it - as well as in its immediate context.

"Raise your face for worship as a pure monotheistic believer (*aqim wajhaka li-d-dîni ḥanîfan*) following God's original nature according to which He created humans (*fiṭrata-l-Lâhi allati faṭara-n-nâsa ʻalayhâ*). No change to God's creation (*lâ tabdîla li-khalqi-l-Lâhi*) (or: no change in the state conferred by God on humans). This is the unchanging worship (*hâdha-d-dînu-l-qayyimu*). But most people do not know it (*wa akthar an-nâsi lâ yaʻlamûn*)."

In referring solely to the content of the verse, it is possible to highlight eight semantic fields relating to *fiṭra*, which appear in the following order:

- The physical ability to raise one's face to the sky in order to render due worship to God.
- The fact that this worship (*ad-dîn*) is the only authentic one, by differentiation from the multiple erroneous cults (*al-adyân*) that exist in the world.
- The fact that this behavior is that of the pure monotheistic believer (*ḥanîfan*; complement of manner (*ḥâl*) in this sentence).
- The fact that *fiṭra*, affixed to the preceding term, designates a way of believing, being, and behaving, and not an instituted religion.
- The origin of *fiṭra*, which is "of God", an expression that can cover several levels of relationship and belonging.
- The assertion that *fiṭra* is the direct result of an act of creation, designated by the same verbal root (*faṭara*).
- The fact that it is a specific characteristic of the human being (*insân* plural : *nâs*), both universal and impossible to modify, that leads to authentic and unchanging monotheistic worship (*ad-dîn al-qayyim*).
- Finally, the fact that most human beings have no practical science (meaning of *ʻalima* in the Qur'an) - of this process, even when they have some theoretical knowledge of it.

These semantic fields, which overlap and complement each other in the Qur'anic text, correspond to intertextual references from different periods and origins. For convenience, we will approach them in an order different from that of the verse, grouping them under headings that enable us to grasp their scope and thematic resonances.

Fa.ṭa.ra in the Qur'an: Semitic origins and attestations in pre-Qur'anic religious corpuses

F.Ṭ.R. is a triconsonantal Semitic root whose earliest attestation dates back to hieroglyphic texts, in which it designates the slits or "the openings of the celestial windows" through which the gods observe our world.[2] In Syriac it means " to open by separation", to get out by spiting a husk or bursting a pod and it is used for mushrooms and fruits that have just hatched. In Arabic, it refers to the appearance of a camel's tooth that has just pierced the gum[3], or to the "emergence" of a well dug by a Bedouin in the desert.

In five verses (Q 19,90), (Q 42,5), (Q 67,3), (Q 73,18), (Q 82,1), F.Ṭ.R. takes on several nuances of this meaning in verbal forms such as *tafaṭṭara* or *infaṭara*: to split, to be dislocated, separated, shattered, used to describe the disintegration of the universe at the end of time.[4]

In Hebrew, the meaning of aperture and opening extends to the designation of first-born children

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[1] We have dealt with all these issues in our publication: G. Gobillot, *La conception originelle, fiṭra, ses interprétations et fonctions chez les penseurs musulmans,* Cahier des Annales islamologiques 18, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Le Caire, 2000.

[2] *Pyramid Text,* 1078, A-C, *Coffin Text,* III, 215 B-C.
[3] According to the definitions of the dictionary *Lisân al-ʻarab.*
[4] It is the case, for example, of verse (Q 73, 18), which speaks of 'the day when the sky will split' *(as-samâ'u munfaṭir bihi*).

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who have literally "split the womb".[5] This idea of inaugural appearance is associated with that of purity (already attested in ancient Babylonian, a language in which the root *puturu* means : to free from disease, to purify), which is also used to designate the non-fermentation of food, as in the case of the azymes consumed at the breaking of the fast (*fiṭr*), designated by the same root in Arabic.[6]

The meaning of "to create" is first attested in Gue'ez (classical Ethiopian), in the 5th- century translation of the Gospels. We find the expression *fâtrè samâya wa-mdra*, creator of the heavens and the earth (in Arabic translation-transcription: *fâṭir as-samawâti wa-l-arḍ*) present in six Qur'anic verses (Q 6, 14); (Q 12, 101); (Q 14, 10); (Q 35, 1); (Q 39, 46); (Q 42, 11)), as well as the word *ftrât*, equivalent to *fiṭra* (Q 30, 30), with the meanings of: creation, beginning, principle, a created thing, but also nature, for example : the nature of Christ (*Ka'ase ftrât*) .[7]

Finally, a passage in the *Wisdom* translated into this language uses the verb *faṭara* to convey the idea that "God created man for incorruptibility. He made him the image of his own nature." (2, 23).

This vocation to immortality is evoked by several Quranic uses of the root F.Ṭ.R., in cases where it refers to the creation of humans.[8] Particular mention should be made of the verses (Q 17, 49-51), which provide a decisive argument in this direction by establishing a link between the evocation of the return to life and the verb *faṭara*: "(49): They said: "When we are bones and dust, shall we be resurrected into a new creation? (50) Answer: "Be stone, or iron, or any created thing, that you can conceive..."(51) They will say "Who then will bring us back?" Answer: "He who created you (*faṭarakum*) for the first time".

In this respect, it should be remembered that, according to the Qur'an, the Resurrection may occur after they emerge from the earth for the Judgment, in the manner of plants, following the descent of a celestial water,[9] a metaphorical formulation designating the "sound wave" of the cry that will call them back to life.[10] After this first stage, the moment of their entry into eternity, corresponding to the new creation, will depend on how each person reacts at the precise moment of their emergence from the grave,[11] by approving or refusing to follow the call that all have heard, God giving man freedom to determine what will happen to him, until the end.[12]

Thus, as in the Gospel passages translated into Gue'ez, in the Qur'an the root *faṭara* is used to describe two types of creation: that of all the components of the universe, which is "creation arising", and that specific to human beings, which is at the same time "creation differentiation". From this point of view, the condition of being created takes on a double meaning when it comes to them :

1) The "coming into being" they share with all living creatures. It occurs through birth when they come into the world, and is partially repeated in the revival

[5] *Exodus,* 13-2.

[6] In Hebrew, the word *fatîr*, borrowed from Aramaic around the 15th century, is used to designate unleavened bread. In Christian Syriac vocabulary, the term *fatîra* is used to refer to Passover, the day of unleavened bread. Thesaurus de Payne Smith STP, oxinii et typographes clarendoniano, 1879, root F.T.R.

[7] Translation of Judith 13, 18: "Blessed be the God who created heaven and earth" See *Lexicon linguae Ethiopicae*, Lipsiae, T.O. Weigel, 1865.

[8] As we showed in detail in our article: "*Faṭara* et *Fiṭra,* quelques acceptions oubliées"*, En hommage au père Jacques Jomier, o.p,* Le Cerf, Patrimoines, Paris, 2002, pp. 101-120.

[9] Numerous mutually complementary passages confirm this comparison by evoking a creation of humans described by *faṭara* in contexts where the theme of the Resurrection dominates, preceded by a revival by water descended from heaven. The verse (Q 36, 22): "Why should I not worship the one who created me (*faṭaranî*), you will be brought back to him" comes just before the following statement (verse 34): "Here is a sign for them: the dead earth which we revive and from which we bring forth grain which they eat". The verse (Q 30, 30) "Raise your face for worship as a pure monotheistic believer following God's original nature according to which He created humans (*fiṭrata-l-Lâhi allati faṭara-n-nâsa 'alayhâ*), is preceded by the following descriptions: (verse 24): "He sends down water from heaven by which he gives life to the earth when it is dead" and (verse 27) "It is he who gives a beginning to creation, then he will renew it, that is easy for him". Finally, the verse (Q 11, 51): "O my people! I do not ask you for a wage for this. My wages belong only to him who created me (*faṭaranî*). Do you not understand?" is directly adjoined to the following passage: (verse 52) "O my people! Ask forgiveness of your Lord and then return to Him. He will send you abundant rain from the sky, and He will add strength to your strength", and a little further on we find verse 61: "O My people, worship Allâh! You have no God but Him; it is He who has produced you from the earth and made you dwell therein".

[10] The Qur'an devotes several passages to this question, one of the most remarkable being the one in which Abraham asks God how he brings the dead back to life. The answer is given in a parabolical representation: (Q 2, 160): "God said: -Take an aviary (literaly: "a four of birds ") and accustom them to you (to your voice). Then arrange some of them on each mountain (*kulli jabalin*= on different mountains) and call them. The fact that this special water represents "a sound wave" is confirmed by the description of the *zajra,* the cry that will call back the dead - (Q 37, 14-21): " (16) When we are dead and become dust and bones, will we be raised (17) ourselves and our first ancestors too? (18) Say: "Yes, and you will humble yourselves! (19) There will be but one cry (vocal signal which is a reviving wave) (*zajratun wâḥidatun*); then they will see (20) and they will say: "Woe to us! This is the Day of Judgement! - which echoes Ezekiel's vision (43, 2) of the "sound of many waters": "And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory".

[11] The Qur'an presents the example of those who, too attached to the things of earthy life, will not understand what is happening on the Day of Rising (or of awakening: *yawm al-qiyâma*). For this reason, they will exclaim, convinced that there is no life except in this world, "Who then has torn us (*ba'athanâ*) from our beds (literaly: propelled or sent us out of our beds (*marqadinâ*)?" (Q 36, 52). On that day, they will not be heading toward the Resurrection with the chosen ones.

[12] (Q 14, 4): "We have never sent a messenger except in the language of his people so that it (the message) may be clear to them. God lets go astray whoever wants to go astray and guides whoever wants to be guided" (*Allâhu yahdî man yashâ' wa-yudillu man yashâ')*. He is the Glorious, the Wise" and (Q 18, 29) "whoever wills, let him believe; whoever wills, let him disbelieve".

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that will take place when they leave the tomb for the Last Judgment at the end of time, the "Day of Riding" (*yawm al-qiyâma*) (Q 22, 69). This is to be followed by the Resurrection, second creation comparable to a second birth.

2) The "differentiation" that distinguishes them from all other creatures. This is the exceptional possibility offered to them, thanks to the particular type of consciousness with which they have been endowed, of participating in the fulfillment of their resurrection by conforming or not their earthly life to their true vocation, and consequently accessing or not, from the Day of Riding, to a happy eternal existence.

In this sense, their *fiṭra* bears witness to the freedom conferred on them by God in all matters concerning their adherence to faith, and their access to the path leading to salvation.

The coherence of the various aspects of this last meaning is completed in the Qur'an by the recall of the fundamental impact of the upright posture "raise your face (*aqim wajhaka*)" (Q 30, 30), which is specific to the human being, a posture he will regain at the time of the Final Rising (*qiyâma*).

The innate monotheism of the human being as related to his upright posture and the bashar's transmutation into insân.

The relationship between man's upright posture and his natural ability to access authentic monotheistic worship is the continuation of the theological thinking of late antique authors who sought to highlight the harmony existing between the state of creation and the economy of salvation.

The Qur'anic notion of *fiṭra* is, in this perspective, the culmination of the historical unfolding of a very ancient philosophical-religious tradition that goes back, in part, to Epicurus (342-270 BC), considered to be the first to have argued in favor of the existence of divinity through the observation that every human being has a prenotion (*anticipatio*), or innate knowledge of it.[13]

The idea of a natural and universal apprehension of the divine was then developed by the Stoics (300 BC-200 AC), who declared that the gods had created "standing man", as opposed to animals whose faces are turned towards the ground, so that he could raise his face to heaven to find celestial deities in place of earthly idols.[14] These philosophers were alluding to the astral divinities of the Greek pantheon, celestial bodies animated by regular movements having been considered the true gods since the "Pythagorean revolution", a term covering a set of doctrines that had drawn this consequence from the discovery, by the Babylonian Magi, of their regular cyclical revolutions.[15] This theme is also found in the corpus of Hermes Trismegistus.[16]

In monotheistic circles, the question was first developed by Philo of Alexandria, who argued that only the Jewish people, by their fidelity to the one transcendent God, had made themselves worthy of the religious knowledge conferred on all human beings by their original nature. He added the statement that the Creator having deemed it profitable for his work, man, to be able to form an idea of the One who, in making him, sent him from above a breath of his own deity, the invisible divinity has therefore imprinted in the human soul the marks of his own being, which differentiates him from the rest of creation.[17]

It is in the thought of his Christian disciple, Clement, that we find the same theme in a form that more significantly resembles the Qur'anic verse, in connection with a criticism of the philosophers, in this case the Stoics: "On this point the chorus of philosophers is mistaken, who acknowledge that man is truly born for the contemplation of heaven, but who adore celestial phenomena and the spectacle that is revealed to their eyes. Let none of you worship the sun, but direct your desires to the maker of the sun; let you not divinize the world, but seek the creator of the world."[18] These are the main elements of the hoopoe's denunciation of the leader of the Sabâ (queen of Sheba in the Bible), for having fallen into the error of worshipping the sun, the verse (Q 27, 24) echoing

[13] Cicero (106-43 BC), *De natura deorum*, Book I, XVI, 65, mentioning *the Canon of Epicurus*.

[14] Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations,* I, 70.

[15] Louis Rougier, *La religion astrale des Pythagoriciens*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1959.

[16] The theme of the verticality of human stature was addressed by Xenophon (430-355 BC) in his *Memorabilia* as follows: "They (the gods) created man to be the only upright person among all the animals, an attitude that enables him to see further, to look more easily at the objects above him, and to avoid danger more easily". From the time of the *Tusculan Disputations,* onwards, this upright posture had been linked to the purpose of worshipping one or more celestial deities: "Man himself, placed here below as if to contemplate and honor with worship the sky and the gods (stars)". Cicero takes up this argument in his *De Natura Deorum* (330-7,11)., where he talks about the upright position, the exclusive privilege of man, who has received it to be able to see the sky and, consequently, to attain knowledge of the gods: "Man alone has an upright stature, so that he can look up to heaven as to the place of his kinship and his first abode". H. Festugières notes that this same argument is put forward in *Corpus Hermeticum* XI, 20. The Hermetic texts state that: "Man contemplates the sky" and that "Everything is clear to him : the sky does not seem too high". See : *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste,* II, *Le Dieu Cosmique*, par le R. P. Festugière, Société d'édition les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1981, ch. XIII, "le témoignage de Cicéron sur la religion cosmique", pp. 370-468. Nevertheless, this is the only common element between the Hermes texts and the Qur'an, since their points of view diverge radically afterward, this characteristic of man having as its result, for the former, his ability to "grasp" divine power in the sky, which he brings down into the idols to confer it on them.

[17] *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat,* 86-90.

[18] Clement of Alexandria (*Protrepticus*), *Le Protreptique*, Introduction, translation and notes by Claude Mondésert, S.J., Sources Chrétiennes, Le Cerf, Paris, 1949, IV, 63, 4-5.

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Deuteronomy 17, 2. We also find here the reflection attributed to Abraham in verses (Q 6, 76-77).

The anonymous Christian text *Letter to Diognetus* includes a reminder of this question: "God gave men reason and understanding; to them alone he allowed to lift up their eyes to heaven; he formed them in his image" (Gn. I, 26, 1).[19] The reference to this passage from Genesis is particularly significant insofar as it echoes Philo's assertion that all men are born with a spiritual gift that is "something from God". Finally, in a similar vein, the *Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions* state that: "The souls of men, by the secret power of God, recognize the One they must love even before they are instructed."[20]

The hermeneutic threshold of Divine Institutes: the monotheistic vocation of the Anthropos

The Fathers of the Church, as well as the Christian theologians of late antiquity, pondered this concept, reorganizing its many aspects in various ways. Among them, Lactantius was the first and, it would seem, the one to establish a direct link between three ideas expressed and presented separately until then:

- The universal consensus around the innate natural knowledge of divinity.
- The fact that this stems from the defining characteristic of man's ipseity, created to stand on his own two feet in order to renounce earthly idols and seek his religion in heaven.
- Finally, the decision to reject the stars as celestial divinities in favor of the one transcendent God.

In this case, the natural recognition of an ineffable divinity is linked to man's primary vocation, since he has been created capable of looking up to heaven, and of drawing the ultimate consequences from this state. God guides those who remain faithful to the contemplation of heaven, enlightening them on their vocation.

The same process is described in the Qur'an, as the following passages testify:

Divine Institutes, VI, 8, 4, 5.	Qur'an (2, 144)
Look not to the earth, but to heaven (...) follow God, serve not our idols of the earth, but (turn) to the god of heaven (...) Stretch out our gaze towards heaven (...) our steps will be directed on the right path.	"We often see you with your face turned towards heaven. We will give you a direction that pleases you (...)".

Just as the vocation of the human being, created in such a way as to be able to stand upright and turn his face towards the sky to find there the signs of a unique divinity, constitutes the true meaning of the word *anthropos* according to Lactantius,[21] so the Qur'an completes the meanings of the notion of *fitra* with that of *hanîfiyya*, (the quality of the true believer who rejects astral cults after having turned away from earthly idols)[22] :

[19] Letter to Diognetus (A Diognète) (anonymous text composed around the second century), Introduction, translation and commentary by Henri Irénée Marrou, 2nd ed. Sources Chrétiennes, no. 33 bis, Le Cerf, Paris, 1965, X, 2.

[20] Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, IV, 4, 6.

[21] Lactantius trusted to explain the word *anthropos* by man's ability to look upwards (*sursum spectare = ano atrein),* " he who looks upwards " : "While all the other animals look down on the earth, man has been given a high face, turned towards the sky, and he has been ordered to contemplate the heavens, to look up towards the stars." See *Divine Institutes*, II, I, 15 et 16.

[22] As we showed for the first time in our article: Geneviève Gobillot, "Les Pères de l'Eglise et la pensée de l'Islam", *L'Orient chrétien dans l'empire musulman,* collective work, edited by G. Gobillot and M.Th. Urvoy, expanded edition of the proceedings of the colloquium held on 15 and 16 October 2004 in homage to Gérard Troupeau, Les éditions de Paris, Paris, 2005, pp. 59-90.

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Divine Institutes, II, 1, 17.	Qur'an (30, 30-31)
If God wanted us to look up to heaven, it's not without reason. We have been given our own right to fix our gaze on heaven, standing firm, so that we may seek religion up there (*ut religionem ibi quaeramus*) and contemplate God with our spirit, who has his seat up there, since we cannot do so with our eyes. This is precisely what he who worships bronze or stone, earthly objects, does not do". (Lactantius alludes in this same passage to the rejection of the worship of celestial bodies, but in a more abbreviated form than the Qur'an. He specifies, in order to differentiate the religion of the transcendent god from astral cults): (*Divine Institutes*, II, V, 20-25) "As the philosophers did not distinguish between skill and divine power in the organization of the courses of the stars, they mistook these stars for living beings. If, then, it is not possible for the planets to be gods, neither can the sun and moon be gods."[23] (See also *Epitome of the Divine Institutes* 21, 1-5). This rejection of the divinization of the stars in favor of the one, transcendent God corresponds point for point to the Qur'anic notion of *ḥanîfiyya*.	Raise your face (towards heaven) in view of worship (the worship of God which consists in turning away from all material idols) as a pure monotheist (*ḥanîfan*), (as a man who has also rejected the worship of astral divinities) in accordance with the innate nature according to which God created mankind. No substitution for God's creation (or: no substitution for God's conception of man). This is unchanging worship (*ad-dîn al-qayyim*). But most people have no knowledge of it. Return repentant to God, fear Him, perform the prayer, do not be among the polytheists. (*Ḥanîf* is the characteristic that most often refers to Abraham in the Qur'an. It refers to a particularity of this patriarch: his refusal to worship idols, but also heavenly bodies, divinized, as the following verse indicates): (6, 76-77): "When night enveloped him, he saw a star and said, 'Behold my Lord'. But when it had disappeared, he added: "I do not love those who disappear". When he saw the moon rising, he said: "This is my Lord. But when it disappeared, he said: "If my Lord does not guide me, I shall be among those who go astray". When he saw the sun rising, he said: "This is my Lord, he is the greatest. But when it was gone, he said: "O my people, I disown what you associate with God". This argument is itself very old and widespread; one of its earliest known attestations appears in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (VII, 1, 7).[24] Following Philo, it was taken up by almost all theologians and Church Fathers.[25]

The demonstrative elements follow one another and are organized in both corpora according to an almost identical argumentation, the only difference being that the Qur'an adopts a mostly allusive and discontinuous formulation. In contrast Lactantius' text develops each stage of the demonstration in an explicit and linear manner.

This supports the hypothesis that the earliest readers and listeners of the Qur'anic text were able to refer to the hermeneutical threshold represented by the Christian theologian's thought, at least for grasping these passages.

Both texts refer to the argumentation that had developed in monotheistic circles, especially from the first century of the Christian era onwards, in response to the theories of Greek philosophers. In addition to the views of Philo of Alexandria, the injunction to abandon false astral divinities is present in several texts of Late Antiquity, for example in the Book of Jubilees.[26] Such a reaction is alluded to in verse (Q 37, 89), which shows Abraham sickened by the idea of worshipping the stars, thereby referring to the content of verses (Q 6, 76-79) which define this attitude of the patriarch as that willed by God, following way he created (*faṭara*) the world (Q 4,

[23] See also Epitome of the Divine Institutes, 20, 10.

[24] "More than the earth, I will call the sun worthy of veneration, because it illuminates the world and the different atmospheres with its rays. But neither will I place it among the gods, for at night its course is obscured by the clouds" and "Nor will I call the moon and the stars "gods", for they too, in their time, at night, obscure their light". P. Crapon de Caprona, Le Coran aux sources de la parole oraculaire : structures rythmiques et sourates mecquoises, Publications orientalistes de France, Paris, 1981, p 105 considers that this attitude of the hanîf who turns away from idols in the same way as Abraham turns away successively from the moon, the sun and the stars is reflected in the concordance of the two paragrammatical roots h.n.th and h.n.f, one of whose primary meanings is "to turn away".

[25] For Philo (De vita contemplativa, 3, 5) : "Will they be those who adore the celestial influences, the sun, the moon, the other stars, fixed or wandering, the whole sky and the world? These beings, no more than the others, are not self-made; they are the work of a demiurge, of a profound science". The theme of the standing man, looking up at the sky in search of pure worship, was not exclusive to monotheistic circles, as this passage from the Mathésis of Firmicus Maternus, written before his conversion to Christianity, a period when he seems to have been sensitive to a neo-Platonist type of henotheism, proves: "We must not entertain any earthly thoughts, especially since we know that God, our creator, has made us, with the mastery of a divine craftsman, in such a way that the shape of our erect body remains free from any humiliating abasement, and that we see nothing else, as soon as we open our first gaze, but the Sun, the Moon, the stars and their magnificent and immortal home, the world" Mathesis, VIII, I, 3. edition and translation by Pierre Monat, books III-V, CUF, Paris, 1994, t. III, p. 232.

[26] For the Apocalypse of Abraham, see VII, 1-7, Jubilees XII, 16-17; for Philo: De decalogo, 53; De specialibus legibus, II, 255; Letter of Jeremiah, 59-62. See also: Targum Neofiti on Genesis, XVIII, 1; Chronicle of Nestor, year 6494.

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79): "I direct my face towards him who created the heavens and the earth in *ḥanîf*, and I am not among the polytheists". To be *ḥanîf* is, therefore, according to the reminds us by evoking Anaxagoras (a pre-Socratic who died in 428 BC).[27]

The transmutation of bashar into insân according to the Qur'an

According to the Qur'an, *ḥanîfiyya*, like *fiṭra*, is one of the specific capacities conferred on each human being when they come into the world. Insofar as these are what determine his ipsity, it seems logical that the mode of creation that characterizes them is that which gave existence to the first man, represented by Adam.

To explain this creative process, the Qur'an uses two technical terms: *bashar* and *insân*. The former represents in all its occurrences a "being in human form" endowed with all the apparent characteristics of man: physical appearance, intellectual capacities, and psychological sensitivity. This is evidenced by the fact that, when the Qur'an refers to a man by the mere fact that he eats, drinks, reproduces, thinks and speaks, or that he is mortal, it gives him the name *bashar*[28]. All that he lacks are the traits corresponding to *fiṭra*, namely "the perfection of form accomplished by the very hand of God, (*aḥsan al-taqwîm*), whose etymology recalls the straightening of his stature, and the infusion of spirit.

A verse also states that, when God wanted to create Adam, he took a "*bashar* of clay", a fine dust particularly suited to being molded, and that by a command: "kun" (« be » !) he was a man.[29] God then taught him all the names directly (*wa-'allama Âdama-l-asmâ'a kullahâ*) (Q 2, 31), so that he could turn to what was right and away from what was wrong, knowing that, according to the Qur'anic theory of divine language, there is no gap between the name and the object named, the appellation being directly related to the essence of the being it designates.[30]

One passage bears witness to the subtelty that characterized this transformation of the *bashar* so that it may have remained invisible to some. It is the episode in Qur'an, as Lactantius indicates in his definition of *anthropos*, the upright man, to turn away from earthly idols and to refuse, as an extension of this attitude, the divinization of celestial bodies, an error that this author himself explicitly attributed to the philosophers, as he which God orders the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam. Iblîs, the only one to refuse, is questioned by God about the reasons for his behavior. (Q 38, 71-76) "When your Lord said to the angels: Behold, I create a bashar of clay (*ṭîn*). When I have fashioned it harmoniously (*sawwaytuhu*) and breathed into it of my spirit (*nafakhtu fîhi min rûḥî*), begin to prostrate yourselves before it. The angels prostrated themselves, except for Iblîs, who became proud and was among those who covered up truth (with lies) (*wa-kâna min al-kâfirîn*). The first answer he gave when God asked him about the causes of his attitude is comparable to the one shown in the apocryphal text entitled: *The Questions of Bartholomew.*[31]

[27] "God fashioned us and endowed us with life not to look at the sky and the sun, as Anaxagoras thought, but to worship him, the creator of the sun and the sky, with a pure and blameless conscience". *Divine Institutes,* VI, pp. 117-119. The editor of volume IV of the *Divine Institutions*, *Institutions divines,* Sources Chrétiennes nº. 377, Le Cerf, Paris, 1992, Pierre Monat, refers for a study of this theme in Lactantius to the work of A. Wlosock, *Laktanz und die philosophische Gnosis, Untersuchungen zu Geschichte und terminologie des gnostischen Erlösungsvorstellung*, Heidelberg, Winter, 1960, p. 259.

[28] As Mary says: (C 3, 47) "I am going to have a child when no *bashar* (being with the apparent characteristics of a human being) has touched me".

[29] (Q 3, 59) : "The likeness of Jesus in Allah's sight is that of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be," and he was".

[30] This language corresponds to the one of the Qur'an, an Arabic language perfected or "made clear" (*lisân 'arabî mubîn*) through which God transmits his message to humankind.

[31] It is a text whose original language is Greek and which has also been preserved in Latin and Old Slavonic. It most certainly predates the Council of Ephesus (431), and some scholars even believe that it dates back to the second century. See : *Apocryphes chrétiens* I, Pléiade edition, edited by François Bovon and Pierre Geoltrain, Gallimard, 1997, pp. 263-295. The passage quoted here is on page 290.

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The Questions of Bartholomew	Qur'an
4, 54-56. "When I (the Demon) returned from the ends of the world, Michael said to me: 'Prostrate yourself before the image of God, which he fashioned according to his likeness. But I replied: I, who am fire from fire, the first angel to be fashioned, should bow down before clay and matter. Michael said to me: "Prostrate yourself so that God will not be angry with you. I answered, "No, God will not be angry with me, but I will set up my throne in front of his throne,[32] and I will be like him. Then God was angry with me and cast me down, commanding the floodgates of heaven to be opened.	(7, 12-13) "God said: -What prevents you (Iblîs, the Demon) from prostrating yourself (before Adam) when I command you? He said: -I am better than him; you created me from fire and him from clay. God said: "Come down from here, you don't have to be proud in this place, come out! You are among the humiliated (*saghîrîn*)!"

But, according to the Qur'an, Iblîs also gave another answer relating to Adam's nature: (Q 15, 33) : "Shall I prostrate myself before a *bashar* (a being in human form) whom you have created from a clay similar to that used in pottery, taken from malleable mud?". This speech expresses his refusal to see that Adam, having received ontological completion and spiritual breath from God, is no longer a *bashar*. In this sense, he behaves like a *kâfir* (concealer of the truth), in the sense that he remains fixed on the first characteristics of a being whose transmutation corresponding to the *fitra* that characterizes him he refuses to take into account.

It means that the straightening of man's stature, the only physical difference between *bashar* and *insân*, has been almost imperceptible. On the other hand, the moral and spiritual aspect of this transformation was decisive for human beings who, from that moment on, embarked on an exceptional earthly adventure, being endowed with such capacities that God entrusted them with the caliphate, i.e. responsibility for the world around them.

A Qur'anic passage, to which many hermeneutical thresholds correspond, points out that the angels themselves took a step backwards when God announced His decision to them, since they too apparently knew only the weaknesses of the *bashar*. Particular mention should be made of the *Apocalypse of Paul* (dated to the 2nd-3rd centuries AD) and *Pseudo Clementine Recognitions*:

Apocalypse of Paul (4a-7a)	*Recognitions* V, 27, 4-5.	Qur'an 2, 30
5a: "Sometimes the moon and stars called out to the Lord: 'Lord, Almighty God, you have given us the empire of the night. How far must we contemplate the impiety, fornication and homicide committed by the sons of men? Leave it to us. We will show them what we can, so that they may know that You alone are God." *5b:* "Then a voice came to them and said, 'I know all this, my eye sees and my ear hears, but my patience bears with them until they turn and repent. If they do not return to me, I will judge them."	"Creation is eager to unleash its vengeance on the ungodly. Yet God's goodness restrains it and restrains his indignation against the ungodly by forcing it to yield to his mercy, rather than flare up against the sins and crimes of men; for God's patience awaits the conversion of men as long as they are in this body."	"When your Lord said to the angels, 'And behold, I appoint a caliph over the earth'. They said, "Are you establishing someone who will do evil and shed blood, while we praise and glorify you and proclaim your holiness?"[33] The Lord said, "I know what you don't know".

[32] Note that this attitude of Satan is also described by Ephrem in his Commentary on the Diatessaron, Commentaire de l'Evangile concordant ou Diatessaron, introduction, traduction et notes par Louis Leloir, Sources chrétiennes n° 121, Paris, 1966, p. 191: "I will set my throne on the stars". J.M. Rosenstiehl has collected a large number of testimonies on this Christian theme (he refers to : Jean-Marc Rosenstiehl, "La chute de l'ange (origines et développements d'une légende : ses attestations dans la littérature copte)", Ecritures et Traditions dans la Littérature Copte, Journées d'Etudes Coptes, Strasbourg, 28 May 1982, in Cahiers de la Bibliothèque Copte, I, Louvain, Peeters, 1983, p. 37-60. He refers first to the Latin Life of Adam and Eve, then to the Questions of Bartholomew and later, in passing, to the Syriac Cavern of Treasures and suggests that Bartholomew's Questions on this subject can be seen as a reading of Ezekiel 28:2.

[33] On the subject of the behavior of men just after their creation, we can also refer to Lactantius: "Les hommes devenus comme des bêtes sauvages", a theme linked to that of man's fall into animality. *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, *22*, 6-9

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The allusion to "what they didn't know" is precisely what distinguishes man's abilities from those of the *bashar*. While both can behave violently, their ability to change and improve is very unequal.

Men thus accepted the responsibility entrusted to them, despite the faults and the weaknesses of their character, which soon began to play nasty tricks on them, as evidenced by the fact that they began to turn away from the innate monotheism of the first generations of antediluvians to behave like polytheists.

In this respect, the Qur'an contradicts the opinion of those who claimed that polytheism came first and that humanity then slowly progressed towards monotheism. In fact, from the very beginning and throughout its history, humankind could live on the straight path of monotheism, from which it has strayed both through negligence and indulgence of its passions and because of their erroneous dogmas and their false representations of the sacred. For this reason God, in his latest revelation, reminds us of the existence of the *fiṭra*, from which humans should never have strayed.

The fiṭra, characteristic of insân, invalidates Euhemerus' theory and abolishes the notion of original sin,

The Qur'an's concept of the *anthropos* as characterized by *fiṭra* goes hand in hand with a view that Euhemerus' theory, which was the subject of much polemic, particularly in Christian circles of late antiquity, cannot be considered relevant. Indeed, insofar as the tendency to monotheism is innate in man, the cult that corresponds to it must necessarily have preceded any form of polytheism.

Without explicitly mentioning euhemerism, the Qur'an, in keeping with its often allusive approach, clearly demonstrates its obsolescence. To do so, it draws a clear distinction between the "Fathers", close relatives and ancestors who directly transmit cults of a polytheistic nature to their descendants, and the "first Fathers" or "most ancient Fathers", distant ancestors close to the first two antediluvian generations, characterized by their monotheism. On this point, it is particularly enlightening to parallel its reasoning with that of the Divine Institutes :

Divine Institutes	Qur'an
V, XIX, 3: "If they are asked the reason for this belief (in false gods), they can offer none, but have recourse to the authority of the ancestors (maiorum), saying that they were wise men whom they had approved, that they knew what was best; and they themselves strip themselves of their own ideas and renounce the use of their reason in order to believe in the errors of others. Thus, trapped in total ignorance, they know neither themselves nor their gods".	(5, 104): "When it is said to them: - Come to what God has revealed to the Messenger, they reply: - The example we find in our fathers is enough for us. What if their fathers (*abâ'*) knew nothing, if they were not guided? O you who believe, you are responsible for yourselves. Whoever goes astray will not harm you if you are well guided".
II, VI, 7: "These are the religions handed down to them by their ancestors, which they insist on protecting and defending with the utmost fervor; and they do not examine what they are, but consider them to be true and proven, since they were handed down by the ancients.	(7, 27): "When they commit an abominable act (giving partners to God), they say: 'We found that our fathers did the same; God ordered us to do it'".
II, VI, 10: "What will you do? Will you rather follow the ancients or reason, which was not introduced into you by a stranger but which you yourself found and discovered, when you tore down all religions from top to bottom? (11) If filial piety tells you to follow the ancients, then confess that they were stupid to have put themselves at the service of religions established against reason."	(7, 69) : "Have you come to us so that we may worship God, the only One, and abandon what our fathers worshipped?"
II, VI, 15: This is what these fathers (patres) are, men dressed in skins, men with rustic hearts, to whose decisions learned and competent people scrupulously submit.	(43, 22): They say: "We found our fathers all following the same path. We follow in their footsteps.
	(39, 9) "Are those who know and the ignorant equal? The only ones who think are those who have intelligence of heart".
	(2, 170) : "When they are told, 'Follow what God has revealed', they reply, 'No! They answer: No! We follow the custom of our fathers. What if their fathers understood nothing and they were not on the right path? The unbelievers are like cattle that are shouted at and only hear a cry and a call: deaf, dumb, blind, they understand nothing."

The warning against mindlessly relying on patriarchal tradition was a well-known theme among Christian and Judeo-Christian apologists of late antiquity. Numerous texts insist on the need for a reason to overcome an aberrant custom, even if it is supported by the ethic of respect and attachment to one's parents. In the same way, the *ḥanîfiyya* of Abraham consists, according to the Qur'an, of resolutely turning away from the habits of the fathers in matters of false religion: (Q 43, 26): "Abraham said to his father and his people: 'I disavow what you worship'.

In addition to this motif, the two corpora share the theme of the animalization of ancestors adhering to improper beliefs, a situation into which they can drag their descendants if the latter do not decide to put an end to the transmission of misguidance imposed on

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them by authority. This is evoked by Lactantius through the image he gives of men dressed in skins, and by the Qur'an through the expression "like cattle".

Following these initial observations, other passages that can be paralleled establish a clear difference between close and distant ancestors:

Close ancestors are the progenitors and the few generations that preceded them over a limited period. They take the child away from his natural monotheism and educate him according to a false religion or even pagan polytheism.

The distant ancestors represent the first people to populate the earth. They were not polytheists. They were true monotheists, as the Divine Institutions affirm. For the Qur'an, this monotheism was the object of a testimony directly inspired by God, which tradition has named "the first covenant" of the Sons of Adam:

Divine Institutes	Qur'an (7, 172)
II, 13, 12 They are mistaken who maintain that the worship of gods has existed since the beginning of the world and that paganism is prior to belief in God, which they believe to have been invented later, because they are ignorant of the source and origin of truth".	"When your Lord drew offspring from the loins of the sons of Adam, He made them testify against themselves, 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: "Yes, we bear witness! And this is so that you will not say on the Day of Rectification (yawm al-qiyâma): We were caught unawares, or that you will not say: Our fathers were once polytheists, we are their descendants. Will you make us perish because of the deeds performed by impostors?".
IV, I, 4-5 "Men ceased to lift their faces to heaven, while their minds, nailed to the ground, remained fixed there by everything earthly in their possessions as in their religions. The result (of belief in the multiple gods represented by idols) was a division of mankind, as well as all kinds of deception and sacrilege.	2, 213 "Men formed a single community. God sent them the prophets (al-nabiyyîna) to bring them good news and to warn them".
II, 13, 8 - 12 As for the direct descendants of the father, they were called the Hebrews; it was among them that the religion of God remained. But as their numbers multiplied enormously, they went into exile to seek new lands (...) The others (descendants of Ham) who were scattered over the earth (after the flood), contemplated the elements of the world with admiration and began to venerate the sky, the sun, the earth and the sea. In time, they began to build temples and statues for their most powerful kings, and decided to worship them with victims and perfumes. Thus were formed the nations (gentes) who have no knowledge of God.	7, 168 "We divided them (the Sons of Israel) on earth into communities, there are among them the righteous and others who are not". 7, 69 "Remember! When your Lord made you caliphs after the disappearance of the people of Noah, He developed your expansion in the world." (The Qur'an speaks here of the people of 'Âd, i.e. ancient Arabs, to whom it attributes this expansion on earth. They will be followed by the Thamûd, then the Madian, all of whom will refuse Noah's inheritance of the true faith, which was intended for them).

Both texts convey the idea that a fraction of the Sons of Israel, despite having received the true monotheistic religion, had a share of responsibility in the subsequent communal divisions of humanity. However, the Qur'an attaches greater importance to the fact that, after the Deluge, the torch of monotheism was first offered to the Arabs, who, having accepted from the caliphate only the earthly power conferred on them by God to exercise it,[34] disowned and persecuted the prophets sent to them (Hûd, then Sâlih), thereby delaying the triumph of Truth in the world.

Finally, each corpus defines in its way the distinction between two categories of forefathers: those close to us, polytheistic or misguided, and the most distant ancestors, the first men on earth, monotheistic and united, according to the Qur'an, in a single community that later divided. Lactantius explains this phenomenon by the fact that men belonging to the generations that had succeeded the first Hebrews no longer "raised their faces to heaven,"[35] i.e. no longer

[34] See for example (Q 41, 15) "As for the 'Âd, they were unjustly proud on earth. They said: "Who will be more powerful than us? Did they not see that God, who created them, is greater than they in strength? Yet they denied our signs".

[35] *Epitome of Divine Institutes* (*Epitomé des Institutions divines*) 20, 4) "If they had raised their eyes and looked up to heaven (...) to worship

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followed their natural monotheistic inclination, their *fiṭra-ḥanîfiyya* according to the Qur'an.

According to the latter, the deviation of humanity would have begun much earlier, in the antediluvian period, which logically corresponds to the fact that Noah's people would have been destroyed, according to verses 22 and 23 of Sura 71 after expressing their attachment to polytheism: "They plotted an immense ruse and said: do not forsake (***lâ tadharunna***) your deities (*alihatakum*) and do not forsake (***wa lâ tadharunna***) neither Wadd, nor Suwâ', nor Yaghûth nor Ya'ûq nor Naṣr. They have led many astray. O God, do not increase the unjust except in misguidance (...). The inaugural monotheistic period would thus be restricted to the first generation of the sons of Adam's sons, in other words that of his grandsons, as attested by the formula of the testimony of the descendants of Adam's sons. Indeed, it should be emphasized that the first generation corresponding to the appellation "descendants of the Sons of Adam" is represented by an emblematic figure: Enoch son of Seth, who should not be confused with Enoch son of Jared, the seventh patriarch after Adam, to whom Enochian literature is attributed. This third generation of men to have lived on earth would logically seem to have been the ones who had to testify before God, since they were already no longer living in his intimacy and meeting him directly, like the representatives of the two previous generations. Indeed, according to the Bible and the Apocrypha, Adam had been created by His hand, and his sons had still been in regular contact with Him. The Enochian generation is, from this point of view, emblematic in the sense that, according to certain rabbinic traditions, it was the last to practice pure monotheistic worship. In the *Targum of the Pentateuch* (Genesis, 4, 26), it is said: "To Seth (the second human generation) a son was born, and he called his name Enoch. Then the children of men began to make idols for themselves and to call them by the name of the word of Yahweh".

While in Lactantius' terminology there is a synonymy between the terms *maiores* and *patres*, which designate the two classes of ancestors indifferently, the Qur'an draws an exact distinction between the *abâ'* (parents and close ancestors) and the *abâ' al-awwalûn*, the "first ancestors", which illustrates the absence of synonymy of the "made clear" Arabic language (*lisân 'arabî mubîn*) that characterizes it.

The first ancestors are those who recognized the absolute divine suzerainty, the kingship of a single God: (C 37, 125-126): "(Elijah said): Will you invoke the Baals? Will you forsake the best of creators? God, your Lord and the Lord of your first ancestors?"; (Q 44, 8): "There is no God but him. He gives life and causes death. He is your Lord and the Lord of your first ancestors.[36]

Another expression is used to designate these great ancestors as opposed to the most recent. It is found in (Q 26, 70-76), a passage whose context is Abrahamic. (70) He said to his father and his people, "What do you worship? (71) They said, "We worship our idols. We remain attached to them (72) He said: "Do they hear you when you invoke them? (73) Are they useful or harmful to you? (74) They said: No! But we found our fathers (close ancestors) devoted to their worship (75). He said: Have you considered what you worshipped (76) in the time of your most distant ancestors?" He thus asks them to pay attention to what they (i.e. their people) worshipped "in the time" of their most ancient ancestors (*antum wa-abâ'ukum al-aqdamûna*), the particle "*wa*" here having the value of a temporal positioning. To do this, it virtually places the interlocutors in chronological conjunction with their earliest ancestors: lit: "You (your people as a whole) in the time of your earliest ancestors", i.e. the time when all were monotheists.

The expressions *al-abâ' al-aqdamûna* (the most ancient Fathers) and *al-abâ' al-awwalûn* (the first Fathers), therefore, both have the function of designating the "great ancients" with, however, two distinct connotations. The first expression distinguishes them from the "fathers" (*abâ'*) in the sense of progenitors and close ancestors; the second refers directly to the first antediluvians.

This theorization of the existence of a primordial monotheism, common to the Qur'an and the *Divine Institutes*, seems initially to have been intended as a response to the positions of late antique theologians who, like Firmicus Maternus in his *De Errore* (A History of Human Progress towards Truth)[37], defended the idea that polytheism had been the first form of religion adopted by humankind. Only then did humankind progressively move towards monotheism. Tertullian takes a similar approach to Lactantius, defending the

earthly objects is to bow down to the ground. Multiple gods are powerless. The attitude received from God (the upright posture), which is in the image of God, makes it possible to know and confers salvation".

[36] The use of this expression twice in (Q 23:24) and (Q 23:68) should be noted here. Its first occurrence may cast doubt on the monotheism of *al-abâ' al-awwalîn* since Noah's people say they never heard their ancestors talk about the cult the wanted to teach them. But the second restores the balance by highlighting their bad faith: "Did something come to them that their first ancestors did not know about?" The implication is that this is in no way the case, and that their first ancestors had indeed taken part in monotheism, to which Noah merely urged them to return.

[37] *De Errore profanarum religionum*, XVII, 4, new translation with text and commentary by G. Heuten, Brussels, 1938, p. 115. On this subject, see the article by Béatrice Caseau, "Firmicus Maternus, un astrologue converti au christianisme ou la rhétorique du rejet sans appel", *La religion que j'ai quittée*, dir. Daniel Tollet, Presses de l'Université Paris Sorbonne, Paris, 2007, pp. 39-63, p. 54.

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authority of the Scriptures and proclaiming their "very high antiquity".[38]

The question of original sin

For the Qur'an, just as human beings are not justified, because of their *fiṭra*, in invoking the responsibility of the generations that preceded them to excuse their shortcomings, it would be absurd for them to gather, for the same purpose, a transmissible original stain.

Indeed, admitting the existence of an innate disposition to monotheism and all that it implies renders null and void all theories relating to an original fault, since it is inconceivable that man are born with two opposing predispositions that cancel each other out. Thus, if it is accepted that the first parents may have committed a severe fault, despite their innate disposition towards monotheism and all the virtues it entails, it is out of the question to envisage that their descendants are affected by a harmful ontological state transmitted in the form of original sin.

Since it is not possible here to set out all the data concerning the sin of Adam and his female *alter ego*, we will simply point out that nowhere does the Qur'an mention or even suggest anything about a transmissible stain. The most evident proof that, according to its teaching, this concept has no foundation is the verse (Q 7, 27) which presents this fault, not as a handicap transmitted to all, but as a misstep of the first couple simply liable to be reproduced by anyone at any time, and against which God warns: "O sons of Adam! Do not let the Devil tempt you as he did on the day he took your parents out of the garden, tearing off their clothes so that they could see their nakedness". In this way, the Qur'anic text openly attacks the dogma of original sin, which some people use as a pretext for their unacceptable behavior: (Q 7, 28) "We have given demons as friends to those who have no faith (in God, here in the sense of doubting His goodness) (*lâ yu'minûn*) (29) When they commit a terrible act (*fâḥisha*), they say: "We found that our fathers had qualified themselves by this same act. God has ordained that it should be so for us".

Thus, the Qur'an proposes to correct the concept of original fault by reminding mankind that God has never deprived them of anything, but on the contrary, He endowed them with the garments and spiritual finery that they will be able to wear on the Day of Judgment, such as piety and natural monotheism.[39] It clearly demonstrates that the fault of the First Parents has done nothing to alter this divine provision, which is unchangeable by nature. Their descendants, therefore, are not born with any handicap or original blemish. On the contrary, they are endowed with the most beautiful and noble spiritual aptitudes, for God does not punish children for the faults of their parents, as confirmed in particular by the Qur'an abrogation of the tenth plague of Egypt.[40]

It follows that human baptism with water has no raison d'être, as humans are born in a state of absolute purity. The Qur'an replaces it with the notion of "God's baptism" (*ṣibghat Allâh*). This baptism is purely spiritual, in line with this declaration of Ephrem : "He has made it clear about the last heralds who baptize in the Spirit that they are greater than he who baptized in water (John)",[41] and reflects the sacramental nature of the administration of *fiṭra*. This baptism by God is therefore definitive, and its effects immutable, to the extent that man's heart remains accessible to the Good, whatever faults he may have committed, and he will always be able to return to God by following the path indicated by his *fiṭra* as 'Abd al-Karîm al-Jîlî clearly understood.[42]

A certain precariousness of the human condition is conducive to keeping fiṭra active.

The notion of *fiṭra* provides at least part of the answer to a crucial theological problem that raised at every period and in every philosophical and religious circle, from antiquity to the present day: why do human beings find themselves subjected to more or less terrible trials throughout their lives?

The relationship between the two motives is shown in the two verses that immediately follow the "*fiṭra* verse" (Q 30, 33 and 34) (33) And when evil afflicts people, they call upon their Lord, returning to Him repentant. (34) And if He gives them a taste of mercy from Him, behold, some of them give their Lord partners.

This verse itself refers, by verbal and thematic analogies, to a parabolical story whose most likely hermeneutical threshold is a passage from Lactantius' *Divine Institutions* : the example of the ship in distress.

[38] Pierre Monat, the editor of book IV of Institutions divines (Sources chrétiennes, n° 377, Le Cerf, 1992) refers, in his introduction, p. 15 and note 5, to the Fragmentum Fuldense of the *Apologeticum* (19, 1).

[39] Spiritual adornment (*zînat-Allâhi*) "belongs to believers during their life in this world, but especially on the Day of Rising (*yawm al-qiyâma*, which will be the Day of Resurrection for them)" (Q 7, 32).

[40] In the Qur'an there is no mention of plagues, but of "signs" (Q 17, 101): "We gave Moses nine clear signs (*ayât*). So ask the Children of Israel, when he came to them and Pharaoh said to him: "O Moses, I think you are bewitched" and in (Q 27, 12) "Put your hand in the opening of your tunic. It will come out white and without any harm. This is one of the nine signs (*ayât*) to Pharaoh and his people, for they are truly perverse people". These signs are not all the same as those cited in the Bible, the most important of which is the death of the eldest sons of the Egyptians.

[41] Ephrem of Nisibe, *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* ; *Commentaire de l'Evangile concordant ou Diatessaron,* introduction, traduction and notes by Louis Leloir, Sources chrétiennes n° 121, Paris, 1966, p. 177.

[42] This mystical author in fact mentions the existence in Hell of a door adjoining the part of Paradise called the "garden of *fiṭra*". Through this opening, those who reach the required state of purity after a certain period of time pass directly from one (p; 103) to the other, as one enters this garden by right, by virtue of *fiṭra* alone. *Al-insân al-kâmil*, Muḥammad 'Alî Ṣubayḥ edition, 2 volumes, 1 volume, Cairo, undated, p. 34.

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Divine Institutes, II, I, 8-12	Qur'an
"This (recognizing and proclaiming a supreme god) they do not do when their situation is prosperous; but as soon as some heavy difficulty overwhelms them, there they are who remember God. If someone is tossed about at sea by a furious wind, it is he (God) whom he invokes (...) So they never remember God, except when they are in misfortune, but once fear has left them and perils have passed, there they are, running all gaily to the temples of the gods, offering them libations, sacrifices and crowns. As for God, whom they had implored in the midst of their needs, they don't even have a word to thank him for" (Here the worship given to God is non-sacrificial, as opposed to that given to the gods of paganism).	(17, 67) "When misfortune befalls you at sea, those you call upon go astray, except him, but when he has saved you and brought you to land, you turn away. Man is very ungrateful." (29, 65) "When they get on a boat, they invoke God with pure worship (monotheistic non-sacrificial). But when God rescues them by bringing them ashore, they give Him associates."

In both the Qur'an and the *Divine Institutes,* the theme of the usefulness of fear is part of the controversy against polytheism. This motif is included in demonstrations relating to the argument that Pierre Monat, editor of many of Lactantius's works, describes as a "commonplace of ancient philosophy", according to which worshippers of the gods often recognize and even proclaim a supreme God. Starting from this line, Lactantius produced a demonstration that was both polemical and rhetorical of the existence of an "*anima naturaliter christiana*", which in many respects fulfills the role of a prefiguration of the Qur'anic *fiṭra* and is evoked in slightly different forms by Tertullian and Minucius Felix.[36] He draws on the theme of the impact of the sudden and violent fear experienced by a man on a sinking ship.

It would seem, moreover, that the Nicomedian rhetorician drew his parable from the figuration of the boat in the storm in Aesop's fable *The Navigators*: "Some people embarked and set sail. One of the passengers, while tearing off his clothes, cried out and moaned to the gods of his homeland, to whom he promised ex voto if he survived. The storm ceased, and calm returned: then the passengers began to feast, dance and caper, like people who escape of an unforeseen predicament". It is this first part of the fable that probably served as Lactantius' inspiration. Indeed, it ends with a different conclusion which is that fortune varies and that having been saved once does not bod well for the future. The text ends as follows: "But the pilot, a man of strong character, spoke to them as follows: "Let us rejoice, my friends, but as people who may be in for another storm."[37]

Lactantius did not keep this epilogue, but replaced it with the observation that men, having proclaimed themselves faithful to a monotheistic conception of the divine at the moment of danger, turn to idols as soon as the threat has passed, an attitude identically mentioned in the Qur'an.

It is also likely that Lactantius' use of the concept of fear as catharsis has a Greek basis, and more specifically an Aristotelian one. His approach is based on the view that divine wisdom sustains this catharsis of fear, which awakens in human nature a readiness to listen to the word of God, just as ancient tragedy, according to Aristotle, produced an upheaval which, through the pity felt for the hero, awakened in the spectators a fear for themselves likely to enable them to open up to the word of the gods.[38]

Similarly, the Qur'an uses a description of the fear felt by sailors in danger to stimulate the reader to turn to the one God.

Finally, it insists that it would be unreasonable to weigh the suffering caused by fear against the benefit it ultimately brings to humanity: (Q 2, 155): "We test you with a little fear (...)". Moreover, he affirms that there are individuals to whom the experience of fear confers a lasting, and even definitive, benefit: (Q 31, 32) "After God has saved them by bringing them back to dry land, some of them remain on the right path. Only the fickle (*khabbâr*) and the ungrateful (*kafûr*) deny our signs".

By taking account of the diversity of human psychological dispositions in this way, he clearly steps back from theological thinking such as that in the *Homilies*, which is based on the idea that human weaknesses are incurable and that, once the fear has passed, everyone, without exception, returns to their

[43] Tertullien, *Apol.* 17, 3-6 : *Ô testimonium animae naturaliter christianae!* Minutius Felix, *Octavius,* 18,

[44] Aesop, *Fables,* trad. Daniel Loayza, Flammarion, Paris, 1995, p. 105.

[45] See *Poetics*, ch. VI, 2 : "Tragedy is the imitation of a serious and complete action, of a certain extent, presented in a pleasant language and in such a way that each of the parts which compose it survives separately, developing with characters who act, and not through a narrative, and operating by pity and terror, the purgation of passions of the same nature", and XIII, 2.

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idols, which also seems to be the point of view of Lactantius.

Finally it should be noted that the Qur'an does not just mention the impact of fear. It also recalls hope, which leads human beings to turn to the mercy of the one God to overcome the difficulties that beset them, such as the calamities caused by drought, which leads them to hope for beneficial water from heaven. His thinking on this point corresponds to the hermeneutical threshold of the pseudo-Clementine corpus with which he shares this theme, which Lactantius, on the other hand, seems not to have addressed:

Homilies XI, 13, 3-4	Qur'an
(3) Why then, when the rains cease, do you always turn your eyes towards heaven with your prayers and supplications and, when you have obtained satisfaction, hasten to forget? (4) For once the harvest or the grape harvest is done, you soon offer the first-fruits to idols who are nothing, soon forgetting the author of the blessing, who is God".	29, 62: "If you ask them, 'Who sent down water from heaven by which the earth is revived after its death? They will surely reply: "It is God." Say, praise be to God, but most men do not understand.
Recognitions (Reconnaissances pseudo clémentines) V, 30, 5-6	112, 2 : "God is the only one to be implored for what we desire".
How is it that, when the rain is held off for a long period without clouds, we raise our eyes to the heavens and ask Almighty God for the gift of rain and, pouring out our prayers at his feet, all of us with our little children implore his compassions? "But in reality, as soon as they have obtained an answer, ungrateful souls immediately forget. In fact, after harvesting the crops or the grapes, men immediately bring the first fruits of their wealth to deaf and dumb statues, and for the gifts that God has granted them, they fulfil their vows in the temples or sacred groves where they offer sacrifices to the demons; they have received a benefit, but they are mistaken about the author of the benefit.	13, 14: "True invocation is addressed to Him. Those whom men invoke apart from him do not answer them in any way; any more than water reaches the mouth of one who stretches out his two hands towards it so that it reaches it. The invocation of the unbelievers is nothing but vanity". 10, 21: "When we give men a taste of mercy (rahma, such as rain) after a misfortune has befallen them (drought), behold, they use stratagems against our signs". 11, 10: "If we make a man taste a benefit after misfortune has befallen him, he will say: 'Evil has departed from me' and he will be joyful and proud". 14, 16: "Say, will you take masters besides him who have neither profit nor damage for themselves?

Despite his many weaknesses, man remains, according to the Qur'an, the only creature capable of caring for creation, provided that he remembers the abilities he received at birth. Indeed, it shows that his *fiṯra* not only enables him to form an accurate idea of the Creator and his goodness, but also to understand that he is destined by this specific trait of his nature to conform his behavior as far as possible to the models God proposes to him. One of the most remarkable of these is the harmony that the Creator has established between the object of authentic faith and the disposition to attain it.

Fiṯra goes hand in hand with the non-violence of monotheism and predisposes humankind to establish universal peace.

The exclamation: "no compulsion in the true worship", with its double connotation of statement and injunction, appears almost identically in the Qur'an and the *Divine Institutes*.

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Divine Institutes, II, 4, 7:	Qur'an
"Where is truth? (*Ubi ergo veritas est*?) Where no constraint can weigh on religion (*Ubi nulla vis adhiberi potest religioni*), where nothing can fall victim to violence (*ubi nihil quod violari possit apparet*), where there can be no sacrilege. But everything that falls under the eyes or under the senses, all that, because it is perishable, remains totally foreign to the notion of immortality." This passage is preceded in *Divine Institutes* by a critique of the fragility of idols, which, as material objects, are liable to destruction, fire or plunder, and the author concludes: "How can one seek protection from that which cannot protect itself?" This is followed almost immediately by the assertion that: "Only he is God who has not been made, and who, for this reason, can destroy others, but he himself cannot be destroyed. He will therefore always remain in the state in which he was, because he was not begotten from outside, and his origin and birth do not depend on any other thing, which could modify and destroy him. God is as he willed to be: impassible, immutable, incorruptible, blessed and eternal" *Divine Institutes*, II, 8, 44. This same idea is completed in another passage, which adds the assertion that "There is no need for violence and injustice to convince, because religion cannot be born of constraint (*non est opus vi et injuria quia religio eogi non potest*). We must use the verb rather than the rod if we are to achieve a voluntary act. This is why no one is ever held back by us in spite of himself, and yet no one moves away, for truth alone holds back our ranks." (*Divine Institutes* V, 19, 11-13)	(2, 255-256): "God, there is no God but He, the living One, He who subsists by Himself! Neither slumber nor sleep has any power over Him! All that is in the heavens and on earth belongs to Him. Who can intercede with him without his permission? He knows what lies before men and what lies behind them, while they embrace from his knowledge only what he wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth: their continuance in existence is no burden to Him; He is the Most High, the unapproachable. (256) No compulsion in religion. The right path is distinct from error."

The logical succession of ideas, condensed in the Qur'anic text and developed more fully in Lactantius, is nonetheless identical in both texts: the only true religion is that which worships a god who can undergo neither constraint nor change: he neither sleeps nor tires, the maintenance of his creation in existence does not weigh heavily on him (reminiscent of Psalm 121:4).[46] Everything depends on him, since even intercession can only be heard and achieved with his approval (Q 20:109).

In other words, the truth of a religion that recognizes a transcendent God is self-evident and unambiguously distinct from error. It imposes itself on the mind of every human being, like *a priori* knowledge, corresponding to the natural religious tendency. It is, therefore totally superfluous to use violence to impose it. What's more, a monotheistic community acting in this way would be degrading itself to the rank of polytheists, and doing irreparable harm to the true worship due to God.[47]

From this, Lactantius' expression *Ubi nulla vis adhiberi potest religioni* corresponds point by point to the Qur'anic injunction: *lâ ikrâha fî-d-dîn*: the only true religion is that which is addressed to a totally transcendent God, who is not subject to any constraint. Consequently and jointly, this true religion has no need to use violence to impose itself. It spontaneously attracts the support of all those who become acquainted with it. And they remain faithful to it, without the need to hold them back by force. This same idea is expressed in the pseudo-Clementine Homilies: "Truth springs from the intelligence, which is innate and pure, and is given by reflection to the good."[48]

So to engage in violence of any kind for religious reasons is to attribute error and weakness to oneself; in other words, it is to display the falsity of one's religion for all to see. The rationality of Qur'anic thought therefore dictates that, contrary to those who have claimed the contrary, even for commentators who accept the principle of the abrogation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an, this verse is intangible since it sets out the necessary condition that the "right" worship must fulfill if it is to lay claim to truthfulness.[49] "No compulsion in

[46] Ephrem of Nisibe mentions, *in his Hymns on Paradise* (VI, 10) ; *Hymnes sur le Paradis*, Introduction and notes by Fr. Graffin, Collection Sources Chrétiennes, no. 137, Le Cerf, Paris, 1968, first edition, p. 85: "Power without effort And an arm without fatigue Planted Paradise".

[47] "Les Pères de l'Eglise et la pensée de l'Islam", contribution in homage to G. Troupeau, *L'Orient chrétien dans l'empire musulman*, Les éditions de Paris, October 2005, pp. 59-90.

[48] *Homilies*, XVII, 17, 5.

[49] However, not all commentators read it in this way, and it even led to a chain of enlightening reactions following Pope Benedict XVI's

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religion" means that divine transcendence manifests itself in such perfection that it imposes itself naturally and without violence. In this respect, the monotheistic religion is the only one that suits his nature, since it does not need to be imposed by coercion. On the other hand, polytheistic religions, which are at odds with natural reason, need to resort to this kind of practice. As a result, it is clear that polytheism breeds violence, whereas authentic monotheism can only be accompanied by peace.

The immediate result of the concept of a natural monotheistic tendency is the need to abstain from all violence, especially when working in the service of true religion and true faith, which are destined to impose themselves on beings with this innate capacity. False cults, on the other hand, are contrary to human nature and are characterized by their use of violence and coercion to convince.

The irenic behavior that accompanies true religion is recalled on several occasions by the attitude of Abraham, a model of monotheism. The Qur'an says that he was gentle and compassionate (*halîm*) (Q 11, 75) and that he was kindness itself (Q 9, 114), which explains why he spontaneously wanted to intercede on behalf of Lot's people (Q 11, 74), as well as for his father (Q 19, 47), until he was told that this was impossible (Q 11, 76).

These traits attributed to Abraham by the Qur'an correspond to a model found in the Torah in Genesis 18, 16-33, which relates his intercession on behalf of Sodom. It is mainly developed and generalized in apocryphal literature. According to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, for example, he tries to draw God's attention to the righteous, while asking God to overlook the evil committed by the unrighteous (XXVII, 5-8): "O Lord, O Mighty One, let the evil deeds of the unrighteous now pass away, but let the righteous who have fulfilled the commandments remain, for you can do this. He shares this compassionate character with many of the heroes of the apocalyptic heavenly journeys, such as Sedrash, Ezra and Baruch.

The Qur'an indicates in numerous details that the wisdom of the ancient prophets and patriarchs, such as Solomon and Moses, already transcended earthly laws in favor of the rules of peace and mercy that Jesus describes as being those of the Kingdom of God.[50]

On the other hand, he underlines that belonging to a religion of the Book is not a guarantee of non-violence on the part of its followers. Were they not the first to kill the messengers and prophets sent to them by God, as verses (Q 3, 21) and (Q 3, 112) indicate? In doing so, they behaved like unbelievers and polytheists.

This situation reminds us that authentic and efficient monotheism in all its dimensions must be a personal acquisition, corresponding to the injunction addressed to believers to behave as *hunafâ'*, taking Abraham as an example, both for his faith and for the mercy that characterized him.

Here we come to a final aspect of the functions of *fitra*, which is to seek the model of ideal worship in heaven. To raise one's head towards heaven is turning towards a double model. Its first aspect is the visible model of the "harmony of the spheres", which, by its very existence, pays homage to the Creator.[51] By its very existence, it pays homage to the one who conceived it and gives access to its second aspect, which is the awareness that having created such a work, the creator must, in addition to his omnipotence, be good and merciful and love peace and harmony. It is from this

conference in Regensburg on 12 September 2006. Before quoting Manuel II Palaeologus on Islam's relationship with violence (*Entretiens avec un musulman*, 7ème controverse, ed. Théodore Khoury, Sources chrétiennes no. 115, Le Cerf, Paris 1996), the Pope takes up this verse and notes: "The emperor addresses the theme of *jihâd*, of holy war. Surely he knew that in Sura 2, verse 256, it says: 'No compulsion in religion'. This is one of the suras from the initial period, say the specialists, when Muhammad himself had no power and was under threat. But of course the emperor was also aware of the provisions on holy war that were subsequently developed and laid down in the Qur'an. As he later clarified, he was merely paraphrasing T. Khoury, the editor of the text, who had expressed himself in the following way, in which the allusion to the abrogation of the Qur'an by the Qur'an appears even more clearly: "This verse (an expression in this case more precise than that of the Pope, who speaks of "sura". Sura 2 is in fact made up of strata from different periods) dates from the period preceding Muhammad's great struggles. Determinations relating to *jihâd* can be found in Sura 9: it is the expression of Muhammad's last will on the subject". Following various indignant publications and demonstrations of discontent, this position was called into question, from a scientific point of view, in "La lettre des oulémas au Pape Benoît XVI" signed by 38 imâms from all over the world, published in the book by Jean Bollack, Christian Jambet and Abdelwahab Meddeb, *La conférence de Ratisbonne, enjeux et controverses*, Bayard, 2007, pp. 101-116, which declared that the verse (C 2, 256) was not only unwritable, but was also addressed to Muslims in a position of power, inviting them not to use violence against those they wished to convert. On 13 October 2007 this open letter, drafted on the initiative of the Ahl al-Bayt Royal Institute for Islamic Thought in Amman, Jordan, was signed by 138 imâms. However, in the meantime, another response had sadly confirmed the position of some on this issue: the murder on 17 September 2006 of Sister Leonella Sgorbati, who worked in a pediatric hospital in Mogadishu, with local Islamic representatives telling the Reuter agency that the murder was a sign of protest against the words spoken by Benedict XVI on Islam.

[50] See *Matthew* 18:32-35: "(32) Then he (the Master) sent for him (his servant) and said to him, 'Evil servant! I had forgiven you all this debt because you had begged me; (33) should you not, in your turn, have mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" The Qur'an invites us to note, for example, that although Solomon had learned that the people of Sheba worshipped the sun after having been monotheists, instead of applying the law of *Deuteronomy* (17, 2) in such cases, namely stoning, he brought their leader to him in order to get her back to the true faith at the end of an initiation (Q 27, 38-42).

[51] (Q 24, 41): "Do you not see that what is in the heavens and on earth and the flying celestial bodies (*tayr*) lined up in order (*sâfât*) celebrate the praise of God?" and (Q 67, 19) "Have they not seen the flying celestial bodies (*tayr*) above them, lined up in order (*sâfât*), and soaring (*yaqbidna*)? Nothing keeps them (balanced in the air) but the Merciful. He sees everything perfectly (20), Would such beings, who are an army for you, protect you without (the intervention of) the Merciful? The disbelievers are deluded".

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double model that man can conclude that the worship approved by God consists above all in paying homage to these attributes by endeavoring to put them into practice by the establishment of peace in the world.

Conclusion: What is at Stake in the Qur'anic Invitation to a Universal Awareness of the Implications of *Fiṭra* Before the End of Time?

All the intertextual comparisons to which the Qur'an invites us on the question of the innate monotheistic disposition bear witness to the fact that this principle of philosophical origin, which is close to a Lactantian model, but also to themes present in the pseudo-Clementine Roman, is integrated into a theological construction of remarkable coherence. By repealing a notion such as original sin by referring to Judeo-Christian and Christian commentaries, he invites everyone to gather around the testimony of the first Fathers, the most ancient ancestors: (Am I not your Lord? They said: - Certainly yes!) *A lastu birabbikum? Qâlû balâ*!

It recalls the universality of this "Adamic" profession of faith, corresponding to man's innate tendency, by referring to Abraham's model of unfailing trust in the goodness of God. In expressing his intention to realize the vision in which he saw himself sacrificing his son in the certainty that God would never harm to this child, which turned out to be true,[52] Abraham presents an example of absolute fidelity to the implications of faith in the *tawḥîd* : the oneness of a good and merciful God, which characterises *ḥanîfiyya*.

In this context, the verse (Q 41, 53) reminds us that humankind is called to seek the signs of God in three areas: "We will show them our signs clearly, in the universe and in themselves, until they see clearly that this (the Qur'an) is the Truth-Life (*al-ḥaqq*). If not, would it not be enough (to be convinced) that your Lord knows everything?

The first of these is none other than the last Revelation which, among other things, through its commentaries on biblical examples, speaks directly to them by highlighting the signs they can observe in the other two: on the one hand, the creation that surrounds them, and on the other what they can see in themselves if they consider their interiority. The most remarkable of these is the harmony that governs these three areas equally. In this sense, *fiṭra*, which makes it possible to access both Truth and eternal Life, is itself a proof of the truthfulness of the harmony of creation. Not only does it enable us to see celestial harmony when we contemplate the heavens, but it also allows us to understand that God's perfecting of the human being is an integral part of this overall harmony.

The innate monotheistic disposition thus represents the pivot not only of the anthropological aspect of the Qur'an's theological thought, but of the entire "human science" that it proposes to its readers.

Understanding his importance purely intellectually is not enough, as many examples that demonstrate how essential it is for humans to appropriate upright, authentic, and unchanging worship (*ad-dîn al-qayyim*) to which he guides.

This same expression appears three other times in the Qur'an: in (Q 9, 36), a verse in which the sacred calendar used for the pilgrimage is defined; in (Q 12, 40), to enjoin humans to worship God alone; finally in (Q 30, 43), to remind us that this way of living the innate religious feeling is destined to be adopted by all before the end of time comes "Turn to the right (and unchanging) worship (*ad-dîn al-qayyim*) before an inescapable Day from God comes".

Just as the Books transmitting divine revelations are "upright books" (*kutub qayyima*), (Q 98, 3) corresponding to the Divine Book, the "Mother of the Book", made up of all the passages of the revealed books "founded in truth" (*muḥkamât*),[53] so humans were created with a body erect, which allows them to participate positively in God's plan for creation. This plan animates "the worship of the community of upright men" (*dîn al-qayyima*), an expression that designates a gathering of "upright" men who do not change their options (Q 98, 5). Their worship is pure. It consists, above all, in fulfilling the universal duties of piety towards God and kindness towards creatures.

It is not a pure intellectual speculation, but a vital issue, and the statement in verse (Q 30, 43) should be seen in the context of the many warnings in the Qur'an that aim at making people understand that it is vital for them to adopt an attitude in keeping with what Divine Mercy implies before it is too late. The verse (Q 5, 64) reminds us that "Every time they lit the fire of war, God immediately extinguished it", that is to say, He has limited it so that it did not spread to the whole of humanity and, through it, to the whole world, which invites us to understand that one day he may tire of acting in this way.

From this point of view, his injunction, which proves that all the passages in the Vulgate that call for combat must be seen as reflections of historical circumstances alien to the Qur'an's axial metaphysical and moral teaching,[54] invites us to question the situation

[52] (Q 37, 103): "After they had both shown unshakeable trust and Abraham had thrown his son to the ground" and (Q 37, 107) "We redeemed his son with a consequent sacrifice (*dhabḥ 'aẓîm*).

[53] (Q 3, 7): "It is He (God) who has sent down (*anzala*) the Book to you. There are verses *muḥkamât* "founded in truth", the mother of the Book (*Umm al-kitâb*), and others *mutashâbihât* "founded only outwardly on the truth".

[54] Some Muslim thinkers are now beginning to subscribe to theses such as that of Maḥmûd Muḥammad Ṭâha (d. 1985). In his opinion, the authentic thought of the Qur'an presented by the "Mekkois Qur'an",

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in which humans will find themselves when facing the imminence of the Hour. Will they have been able to conform, through the practice of mercy towards all beings, to the requirements of the vocation to universality for which they were created; or will they have allowed the fire of passions to overwhelm and destroy them, and with them all creation?

which, although it was revealed first, conveys "the second message of Islam", destined to impose itself in modern times as the only one that should be preserved, the "Medinese Qur'an" only responding to the needs - the reasons of State - of a bygone era: *Al-risâla al-thâniyya min al-islâm* (The Second Message of Islam), first published in 1967, was translated into English in 1996 (The Second Message of Islam, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press) and into French by Mohamed El-Baroudi-Haddaoui and Caroline Paihe: Un Islam à vocation libératrice, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2002.

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