

# PRESIDENT THOMAS JEFFERSON - WAS HE A MONOTHEIST?

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[112:1] In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

[112:2] Say 'He is Allah, the One!

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

[112:3] Allah the Independent and Besought of all.

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

[112:4] 'He begets not, nor, is He begotten,

لَمْ يَلِدْهُ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

[112:5] And there is none like unto Him.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

## FIRST MUSLIM IN USA CONGRESS

United States Congressman Mr. Keith Ellison, a Democrat from Minnesota places his hand on an English translation of the Koran published in the 1750s and once owned by Thomas Jefferson as he is sworn in as the first Muslim member of Congress on Capital Hill.



MR KEITH EILLISON TAKING OATH

Keith Ellison made history in January 2007 by becoming the first Muslim member of Congress of USA and embellishing the occasion by taking a ceremonial oath on the copy of the Holy Quran once owned by the third President of USA Thomas Jefferson. Mr. Ellison is an Afro-American who converted to Islam during his college years. In a very strategic move he succeeded in taking his oath of office, using Thomas Jefferson's own copy of the Holy Quran. Mark Dimunation, The chief of the Library of Congress' rare book and special collections division walked the Quran across the street to the Capitol and then walked it back to the Library after the ceremony. Although the Library of Congress is right across the street from the Capitol, library officials took extra precautions in delivering the Quran for the ceremony. They placed the Quran in a rectangular box and handled it with a green felt wrapper once inside the Capitol. Instead of using surface streets, they walked it over via a series of winding, underground tunnels — a trip that took more than 15 minutes. Guards then ran the book through security machines at the Capitol. The Quran was acquired in 1815 as part of a more than 6,400-volume collection that Jefferson sold for \$24,000 to replace the congressional library that had been burned by British troops the year before, in the War of 1812. The book's leather binding was added in 1919. Inside, it reads, "The Koran, commonly called 'The Alcoran of Mohammed.'" Jefferson marked his ownership by writing the letter "J" next to the letter "T" that was already at the bottom of pages, according to Mark Dimunation, chief of the Library of Congress' rare book and special collections division.

Speaking to ABC News in a broadcast Ellison said it was only natural that he would take his oath on the Holy Quran, the book of his Islamic faith. "It's the scripture that I read every day and it's the book that I draw inspiration from," said the incoming lawmaker, who converted from Roman Catholicism to Islam while a student in college. Ellison, who is also the first black US lawmaker from Minnesota, said that as he goes about the business of learning to be a lawmaker, he will take a page from the book of baseball legend Jackie Robinson, who made history as the first black player in the sport's major league. "It's like Jackie Robinson: Did he worry about being the first black baseball player? No. He worried about getting a hit. He worried about getting on base," said Ellison. He also remarked that he chose this copy of the Holy Quran because it showed that a visionary like Jefferson believed that wisdom could be gleaned from many sources.

### **THOMAS JEFFERSON**

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was the principal author of the Declaration of Independence (1776) of the United States and the nation's first secretary of state (1789-94), second vice president (1797-1801), and, third president (1801-09). He was responsible for the Louisiana Purchase. An early advocate of total separation of church and state, he also was the founder and architect of the University of Virginia and the most eloquent American proponent of individual freedom as the core meaning of the American Revolution.

Edwin Gaustad has written a religious biography of Thomas Jefferson titled *Sworn on the Altar of God*. He writes, "Jefferson would gather ideas as a reaper gathered corn, selecting and retaining the most delectable, ignoring or discarding what he regarded as unsuitable to his taste. Many of Jefferson's fellow deists found English and Scottish thinkers more congenial, less radical, less unnerving than those of France. But Jefferson reaped there too."<sup>1</sup> In other words he sought ideas from all sorts of philosophers from all different times. Jefferson seemed to have a special ability to decipher right from wrong and useful from useless. He showed that in so many different spheres of life. Jefferson liked books as those gave him new and good ideas. He was a great collector of books. When Thomas Jefferson went abroad as an emissary to France in 1785, the opportunities for book buying marvelously multiplied. Reading readily in French, Jefferson

devoted every free afternoon to examining all the principal bookstores, turning every book with his own hand and trying to absorb everything which related to America, and indeed whatever was rare and valuable in every science. Edwin Gaustad writes:

“Besides haunting the bookstalls in Paris, ‘I had standing orders,’ Jefferson wrote, ‘during the whole time I was in Europe on its principal book-marts, particularly Amsterdam, Frankfort, Madrid, and London.’ By the time he sold his books to the government in 1815 to launch the Library of Congress, he estimated his collection to be between nine and ten thousand volumes, adding that “nearly the whole are well bound, abundance of them elegantly, and of the choicest editions existing. Jefferson was a remarkable collector but an even more remarkable and voracious reader of these thousands of volumes.”<sup>2</sup>

Jefferson achieved distinction as an horticulturist, architect, paleontologist, author and inventor. President John F. Kennedy welcomed forty-nine Nobel Prize winners to the White House in 1962, saying, “I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent and of human knowledge that has ever been gathered together at the White House -- with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”<sup>3</sup> Who was this genius Jefferson? What were his religious beliefs? What ideas did he borrow from the Holy Quran? Were his ideas closer to the Holy Quran or to the Holy Bible?

It was generally not customary in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe or America to give credit to the Muslims, the Holy Prophet Muhammad or to the Holy Quran. We will examine this issue later in the article. But if this be true the result of this phenomenon is that we cannot examine the question as to what Jefferson borrowed from the Holy Quran in any reasonable fashion, as there is no written proof of that. On the contrary it is much easier to examine as to whether his ideas were closer to the Holy Quran or to the Holy Bible? By answering this question we can make some judgment to the first issue as to what he may have borrowed from the Holy Quran.

The balance between human knowledge gained by experimentation or observation and the ‘revealed truth’ has been a constant dilemma for mankind. This was a burning struggle for Jefferson also. His struggle was compounded by the fact that main revelation that he was familiar with was the Bible. He may have read the Holy Quran in a period which was extremely hostile to Islam; he could not possibly fully embrace it. Moreover, George Sale English translation that he owned was not unbiased either. Did revelation as he knew it in the form of Bible had any role in human affairs. “And if God spoke to humankind mainly or even exclusively through the medium of nature, what did nature tell us about that God? About His eternal truths? about the nature and destiny of women and men?”<sup>4</sup> The adulterated accounts of Bible did not satisfy Jefferson. After extensive studies of different books Jefferson concluded, “Christianity had traditionally rested not upon reason or experience but upon mystery and miracle. **The Bible, moreover, portrayed a deity quite different from that revealed in nature, a deity that reason could neither explain nor defend.** How rational could it possibly be for the God of the whole universe to reveal himself solely to one small nation in the eastern Mediterranean and to leave the rest of the world in utter ignorance of his existence? It seemed even more irrational to believe that the Supreme Being of the cosmos had “sent his only begotten son, who had not offended him, to be sacrificed by men, who had offended him that he might expiate their sins, and satisfy his own anger.”<sup>5</sup>

Jefferson, like many of those authors whom he had read in his youth, had no trouble accepting the argument for God's existence from the magnificent design evident in Allah’s creation. His

thoughts were perfectly in keeping with the verses of the Holy Quran quoted above and the verses of Sura Hashr:

He is Allah, the creator, the Maker, the Fashioner. His are the most beautiful names. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him, and He is the Mighty, the Wise. Al Hashr 59:25

هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ  
يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ  
الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٥٩﴾



‘It was impossible’, Jefferson wrote to John Adams, ‘for the human mind not to perceive and feel a conviction of design, consummate skill, and indefinite power in every atom of its composition.’ This was the case whether one contemplated the heavens above (‘the movement of the heavenly bodies, so exactly held in their course by the balance of centrifugal and centripetal forces’) or the earth below (‘the structure of our earth itself, with its distribution of lands, waters, and atmosphere, animal and vegetable bodies ..... insects as mere atoms of life, yet as perfectly organized as man or mammoth’).<sup>6</sup>

### **QURAN AND STUDY OF NATURE**

Every enlightened reader of the Holy Quran knows that it urges us to reflect on the Laws of Nature. It draws examples from cosmology, biology and physics among other branches of science, as signs for all men of understanding.

For example the Holy Quran says:

Do they not then look at the camel, how it is created? And at the heaven, how it is raised high? And at the mountains how they are rooted, and at the earth how it is outspread?<sup>7</sup>

and again:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of night and day, and in the ships which sail in the sea with that which profits men, and in the water which Allah sends down from the sky and quickens therewith the earth after its death and scatters therein all kinds of beasts, and in the change of the winds, and the clouds pressed into service between the heaven and the earth -- are indeed Signs for the people who understand.<sup>8</sup>



Seven hundred and fifty verses of the Quran (almost one-eighth of the Book) exhort believers to study Nature, to reflect, to make the best use of reason in the search of ultimate, the Creator, the Almighty Allah. This contrasts with 250 verses in the Holy Quran in regards to different legislations.<sup>9</sup>

### **ONE CREATOR OF UNIVERSE**

**The God of Islam is the same God who is visible in the mirror of the laws of nature and is discernible in the book of nature. Islam has not presented a new God but has presented the same God who is presented by the light of man's heart, by the conscience of man, and by the universe.<sup>10</sup> Promised Messiah<sup>as</sup>**



Jefferson was not only a genius but also a free and an independent thinker. It was easy for him to see that our Universe speaks of one Creator, call him Allah or by whatever name but there cannot be three creators of this world.<sup>11</sup> There are no creations of the Holy Ghost or of Jesus Christ that we can see.<sup>12 13 14</sup> We Muslims love Jesus Christ dearly and applaud him as a prophet. But he did not create anything to merit a status equal to Allah All-Mighty.<sup>15 16 17</sup> The Holy Quran says: Is He, then, Who creates like one who creates not? Will you not then take heed?<sup>18</sup> There is one theme in the creation of this universe be it living or non-living. In the living beings there is similar RNA and one kind of DNA. Theory of evolution ties all living beings to one ancestry or lineage. The physicists are working on a string theory that will unite all forms of matter and energy into one. If there had been in the heavens and the earth other gods besides Allah, then there would have been chaos in the Universe.<sup>19</sup> This is the fundamental nature of multiple egos and entities, with contradicting visions, struggling with each other.<sup>20</sup> A detailed study of this subject will merit a separate article.

Sir Isaac Newton saw that there is no changing of the laws of nature and that the Universe follows the rules of mathematics. In other words he understood the true meaning of the verse of Sura Rum

So set thy face to the service of religion with single-minded devotion. And follow the nature made by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind. There is no altering the creation of Allah. That is the right religion - but most men know not. Al Rum 30:31

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ  
 النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ  
 الْقَيُّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣١﴾

Pertaining to Jefferson, Edwin Gaustad writes, "Newton taught Jefferson that God's world was orderly, dependable, regular and predictable. From his *Principia* (1687), the whole Western world learned that patient observation and careful mathematical calculation could reveal previously unknown truths about the nature of the universe. Planets did not "wander," but moved according to specific laws; like all matter in motion, they proceeded not by chance but by design. England's

"greatest and rarest genius" (in David Hume's words) placed science firmly in the center of the modern world; indeed, Newton helped create the modern world."<sup>21</sup>

For Jefferson the laws of Nature were God's laws; they did not have an independent status all their own. They came into being by God's decree, and they continued to operate, as Newton demonstrated, through God's unceasing providential direction. Unlike many other deists, Jefferson did not hold that God created the world and then retired from the scene; rather, he believed that God continued to create and sustain the world moment by moment. Gravity was not a property of matter: it was God's law for the orderly operation of matter, one of the means by which he brought order out of chaos.<sup>22</sup> To a close observer of Nature, which Jefferson surely was, the conclusion could not be denied: we see 'evident proofs of the necessity of a superintending power to maintain the universe in its course and order.'<sup>23</sup>

Here again his thoughts were perfectly in keeping with the throne verse of the Holy Quran, "The Allah - there is no god save Him, the Living, the Self-Subsisting and All-Sustaining. Slumber seizes Him not, nor sleep. To Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth. .... His knowledge extends over the heavens and the earth; and the care of them wearies Him not; and He is the High, the Great."<sup>24</sup>

Jefferson views were far more in line with the sublime teachings of the Holy Quran than any rudimentary mention of this subject in the Holy Bible. Yet the Holy Quran historically got no credit for these views. Why? Why! I believe the answer is obvious. The political and the religious atmosphere of the West was not conducive to giving any credit to the Holy Quran, to the Holy Prophet Muhammad may peace be upon him or to Islam. It does not allow that even today. Perhaps Karen Armstrong an Orientalist who used to be a catholic nun knows best the reasons for this. Explaining the prejudices of the west towards Islam she writes:

"In the 12th century, Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, initiated a dialogue with the Islamic world. 'I approach you not with arms, but with words,' he wrote to the Muslims whom he imagined reading his book, 'not with force, but with reason, not with hatred, but with love.' Yet his treatise was entitled Summary of the Whole Heresy of the Diabolical Sect of the Saracens and Segued repeatedly into spluttering intransigence. Words failed Peter when he contemplated the 'bestial cruelty' of Islam, which, he claimed, had established itself by the sword. Was Muhammad a true prophet? 'I shall be worse than a donkey if I agree,' he expostulated, 'worse than cattle if I assent!'"<sup>25</sup> She concludes her essay by stating that this prejudice is still all too pervasive, "Neither the Danish cartoonists, who published the offensive caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad last February, nor the Christian fundamentalists ....., would ordinarily make common cause with the Pope; yet on the subject of Islam they are in full agreement."<sup>26</sup>

## **HISTORY OF SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT**

The West did learn a lot from the Muslims. What does the west owe to the east? To give the reader a glimpse of that let us go back in history, the place is Baghdad. Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi was a mathematician and an astronomer whose major works introduced Arabic numerals and the concepts of algebra into European mathematics. Al-Khwarizmi lived in Baghdad, where he worked at the "House of Wisdom" under Caliph al-Ma'mun. The House of Wisdom acquired and translated scientific and philosophic treatises, particularly the ones in Greek. It also published original research. Al-Khwarizmi's work on elementary algebra, Al-kitab al-mukhtasar fi hisab al-jabr wa'l-muqabala was translated into Latin in the 12th century, from which the title and term Algebra derives. The English translation for the name of the book is "The Compendious Book on Calculation by Completion and Balancing".

Al-Khwarizmi made many contributions to mathematics and gave mankind the concept of zero and Arab numerals. Before him the Roman numerals were followed that are actually alphabets like X, C, L, XII etc. It was not possible to make simple additions. It was Al-Khwarizmi and other Arab mathematicians who showed that if we line up 1000, 100,005 and 101 in proper order it is easy to add these three numbers.

1000  
100,005  
101

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101106

Contrast the simplicity of this addition to adding relatively smaller numbers XXIV and LXXVI to get C. Roman numbers were used in Europe until the middle ages. Today simple additions appear as common sense to us but in the past vast majority of population could not do simple calculations. There used to be specialists like modern day accountants who were in charge of the tedious tasks of addition and subtraction, and earned their living as such.

The very first step in the development of science was accurate quantification of different parameters. Mathematics and Algebra were absolutely essential for the young tree of science in Europe to blossom. Carly Firoina, Ex CEO of Hewlett-Packard, had this to say in 2001, "Although we are often unaware of our indebtedness to Islamic civilization, its gifts are very much a part of our heritage. The technology industry would not exist without the contributions of Arab mathematicians."

Dr Abdus Salam, the first Muslim Nobel laureate in Physics, writes about the contribution of Muslims to science and the process of transmission of knowledge from the Muslims to Europe in the following words:

"To emphasize that science is the shared heritage of mankind, and that the history of scientific discovery, like the history of all civilization, has gone through cycles, I recalled in my Nobel lecture, a historical episode, when some 760 years ago, a young Scotsman left his native glens to travel south to Toledo in Spain. His name was Michael, his goal to live and work at the Arab universities of Toledo and Cordova. Michael reached Toledo in 1217 AD. Once there, Michael formed the ambitious project of introducing Aristotle to Latin Europe, translation not from the original Greek, which he knew not, but from the Arabic translation which was then taught in Spain. From Toledo, Michael traveled to Sicily, to the Court of Emperor Frederick II. Visiting the medical school at Salerno, chartered by Frederick in 1231, Michael met the Danish physician Hendrik Harpestraeng, later to become Court Physician of King Eric IV Waldermarrson. Hendrik the Dane had come to Salerno to compose his treatise, preserved in seven volumes at the National Library in Stockholm, on blood-letting and surgery. Hendrik's sources were the medical canons of the great clinicians of Islam, Al-Razi and Avicenna, which only Michael the Scot could translate for him. The schools of Toledo and Salerno mark the beginning of the creation of Sciences in the West. At these schools a candle was lit from a candle already burning brightly in the lands of Islam."<sup>27</sup>

Mr. Zakaria Virk, a Canadian historian of Muslim intellectual history, has examined this subject in greater depth in some of his writings. In his article published in *Review of Religions* in 2003 and available online, he starts his description by quoting from Robert Briffault, 'It was under the influence of Arabian and Moorish revival of culture and not in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, that the real renaissance took place.' Robert Briffault in *The Making of Humanity*.<sup>28</sup> For a more exhaustive study of this subject search Zakaria Virk's name on the website: [www.alislam.org](http://www.alislam.org).

Jefferson was a believer; he was a believer in one God. He unhesitatingly rejected the atheism of some of the French philosophers, finding it illogical and untenable. For the atheist, said Jefferson, the universe had simply always existed. It has no cause, no beginning in time. For the deist, on the other hand, the great canvas of creation cried out for a First Cause, possessing intelligence and power; power in the production, and intelligence in the design and constant preservation of the system.<sup>29</sup>

Jefferson belief in a God, who is the creator of the universe, can be seen from the clues in the US Declaration of Independence in terms like, "Creator" and "Nature's God".

### **CORRUPTIONS OF CHRISTIANITY**

Joseph Priestly was a chemist who had created a big name for himself for discovering oxygen and carbon dioxide. But he was as notorious in Europe as he was famous. He received his notoriety from writing a book: *History of the Corruptions of Christianity* originally published in 1782. Priestley was besieged by mobs in Birmingham, England, and having lost both his home and his laboratory to their fury, had retreated in 1791 to London. Even there his radicalism in religion and his embrace of France magnified his unpopularity and aggravated the danger he faced. So in 1794, at the urging of Jefferson and others, he migrated to America, settling in Pennsylvania for the last decade of his turbulent life. In 1797 in Philadelphia, Priestly delivered a series of lectures on Christianity. It was here that Jefferson met him and learned much from Priestley's lectures, but he gained even greater intellectual satisfaction from reading his book. In any case, this one book - influenced Jefferson's religious views profoundly. And in reading it, often, Jefferson made a critical discovery for and about himself. He thought that he had utterly rejected Christianity; now he found to his relief and perhaps to his delight as well, that he had only rejected a hopelessly corrupted form of Christianity. Somewhere underneath all that dross, pure gold could yet be found. Priestley argued, for example, that the real "mystery" of the Trinity was that so many Christians believed it. For Jesus did not teach it, the Bible did not proclaim it, and Reason could not honor it. Jesus lived as a human being, claimed to be nothing more than the "son of man," whose mission was to show all humankind how they should live and what God expected of them. The Old Testament honored monotheism, as did the New Testament, rightly read.<sup>30</sup>



THOMAS JEFFERSON MEMORIAL IN WASHINGTON DC

Jefferson embraced Priestly views whole heartedly. The description of President Thomas Jefferson in Wikipedia.com is very revealing:

“Miracles and references to the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus are notably absent from the Jefferson Bible. The Bible begins with an account of Jesus’ birth without references to angels, genealogy, or prophecy. The work ends with the words: “Now, in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus. And rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed.” There is no mention of the resurrection.”

In August of 1804, Jefferson wrote Benjamin Rush that "I shall some of these days ask you to read" the "little volume" on Jesus. Rush, who had responded positively to an earlier writing by Thomas Jefferson named 'the Syllabus' sent the year before, now gave a disconcerting reply. Rush was not ready to give up his ideas about the divinity of Jesus. So he wrote back, unless Jefferson's "little volume" advanced the divinity of Jesus "and renders his death as well as his life necessary for the restoration of mankind, I shall not concur with its author." Jefferson, who had abandoned all notions of atonement and divinity, therefore declined to send his modest editing effort to his good friend.<sup>31</sup>

### **DIVINITY OF JESUS**

In the Gospel according to John, where Jesus makes the most unambiguous claims to divinity ("the Father is in me, and I in him"; "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me"; "I am in the Father, and the Father in me"; etc.), Jefferson repeatedly turned away from all such claims. One of the most striking examples of this occurs in chapter 13, where Jefferson included the verses (21-26) relating to the Last Supper. Then verse 31 begins,

"Therefore, when he was gone out, Jesus said. . ." What Jesus said at that point was, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him." But Jefferson dropped that and the two following verses to jump abruptly to the moral message, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (v. 34). When quoting from John, Jefferson kept his blade busy. Finally, in passages treating the last days of Jesus, Jefferson stayed with the mortal man who died on the cross and was buried. After the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a sword, "Joseph of Arimathea . . . besought Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus: and Pilate gave him leave" (John 19:38). After preparing the body for burial, disciples transported it to a new tomb in the crucifixion garden. At that point, taking fragments from John and from Matthew, Jefferson's scriptures concluded, "There laid they Jesus and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed." No resurrection, no appearances of a risen Lord, no ascension into heaven. A great teacher, the greatest of all moral teachers, had died and was buried.<sup>32</sup>

John Adams was an early advocate of American independence from Great Britain, major figure in the Continental Congress (1774–77), author of the Massachusetts constitution (1780), first vice president (1789–97) and second president (1797–1801) of the United States.<sup>33</sup> The origin of evil, John Adams noted, was perhaps known only to omniscience, but we can be sure that it did not all begin in a garden. We poor mortals have nothing to do with it, but to fabricate all the good we can out of all inevitable evils." One way to eradicate a large class of evils, Adams added, was to employ our reason to dispose of our own unnecessary apprehensions and imaginary fears. Original sin, if such a thing even existed, was ignorance, said Volney. It was definitely not, for the Jeffersonian, an Edenic action that forever after paralyzed humankind, corrupted one's nature, or destroyed one's moral sense. Man was not a worm, not a moral midget, but one designed by God and empowered by him to conquer the infirmities, moral or physical, of this world.<sup>34</sup> These were again the views completely in agreement with the teachings of the Holy Quran. The Quran gives a repeated message of personal responsibility and stresses one's good deeds for one's salvation. The concept of atonement is totally foreign to the teachings of the Holy Quran and also to teachings of Torah for that matter.

Jefferson, after his presidency years, expressed general agreement with his friend Joseph Priestley's Unitarianism that is the rejection of the doctrine of Trinity. In a letter to a Ohio pioneer he wrote, "I rejoice that in this blessed country of free inquiry and belief, which has surrendered its conscience to neither kings or priests, the genuine doctrine of only one God is reviving, and I trust that there is not a young man now living in the United States who will not die a Unitarian."<sup>35</sup> His dream, however, of large scale conversion to the belief in One God was not to come true in the time of his cotemporaries. It had to wait until the advent of Islam in the West. But it certainly seems that he was laying down the ground work for the grand prophecy of the Holy Quran:

He it is Who has sent His Messenger with the guidance and the Religion of truth, that He may cause it to prevail over all religions, however much those who associate partners with Allah may dislike it. Al Saff 61:10

هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ  
 لِيُظَاهِرَهُ عَلَىٰ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ ٥

## HIS BELIEF IN ONE GOD

Jefferson wrote at length on religion and most scholars agree with the claim that Jefferson was a deist, a common position held by intellectuals in the late 18th century.<sup>36</sup> He believed in One God and was a Unitarian. Historically Unitarianism believed in the oneness of God and not the Christian doctrine of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in one God) proclaimed at the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. Historic Unitarians believed in the moral authority, but not the deity, of Jesus. Throughout the world, many Unitarian congregations and associations belong to the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists. In the United States and Canada many Unitarians are Unitarian Universalist or UU, reflecting an institutional consolidation between Unitarianism and Universalism. Today, most Unitarian Universalists do not consider themselves Christians, even if they share some beliefs quite similar to those of mainstream Christians.<sup>37</sup> There is a small percentage of Unitarian Universalists who have a Christian-centric belief system.



INSIDE THE MEMORIAL DEPICTING HIS QUOTE, 'GOD ETERNAL'

If the Holy Quran has a fundamental claim to any idea then it is to the idea of monotheism. It is said that one third of the Holy Quran is dedicated to this fundamental Islamic doctrine. Torah also has a claim to monotheism but it is only Holy Quran that offers monotheism which is not limited to select few and available for each and every human being and is preserved in its pristine purity and unparalleled beauty.

It is hard to know whether Thomas Jefferson borrowed the idea from the Holy Quran directly or indirectly. But the fact remains that the Holy Quran has been the best and the most articulate advocate of monotheism. So, it will not be partiality to give it credit whenever a good case is made for monotheism in more recent history. Even if Thomas Jefferson learnt monotheism completely from the Holy Quran, it was not possible for him to give credit to it. In his autobiography talking about the year 1769 Thomas Jefferson writes, "Our minds were circumscribed within narrow limits by an habitual belief that it was our duty to be subordinate to the mother country in all matters of government, to direct all our labors in subservience to her

interests, and even to observe a bigoted intolerance for all religions but hers."<sup>38</sup> However, he was certainly a strong proponent of One God and denied Trinity in very unambiguous terms. This was as if he was professing his belief in the first half of the Creed of Islam, "There is no God but Allah."

Jefferson formulated a bible for his own use. He took two copies of the New Testament in the King James Version and cut out those verses from the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that in his view best conveyed the "pure and unsophisticated doctrines" of Jesus. Having undertaken the task of separating the authentic and original Jesus from the later Platonized and mythical Jesus, Jefferson told John Adams that he found the true sayings of Jesus Christ 'as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill.' His letter stated, "We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus, paring off the amphibologisms into which they have been led, by forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from him, by giving their own misconceptions as his dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves. There will be found remaining the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man. I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter which is evidently his, and which is as easily distinguishable as diamonds in a dunghill."<sup>39</sup>

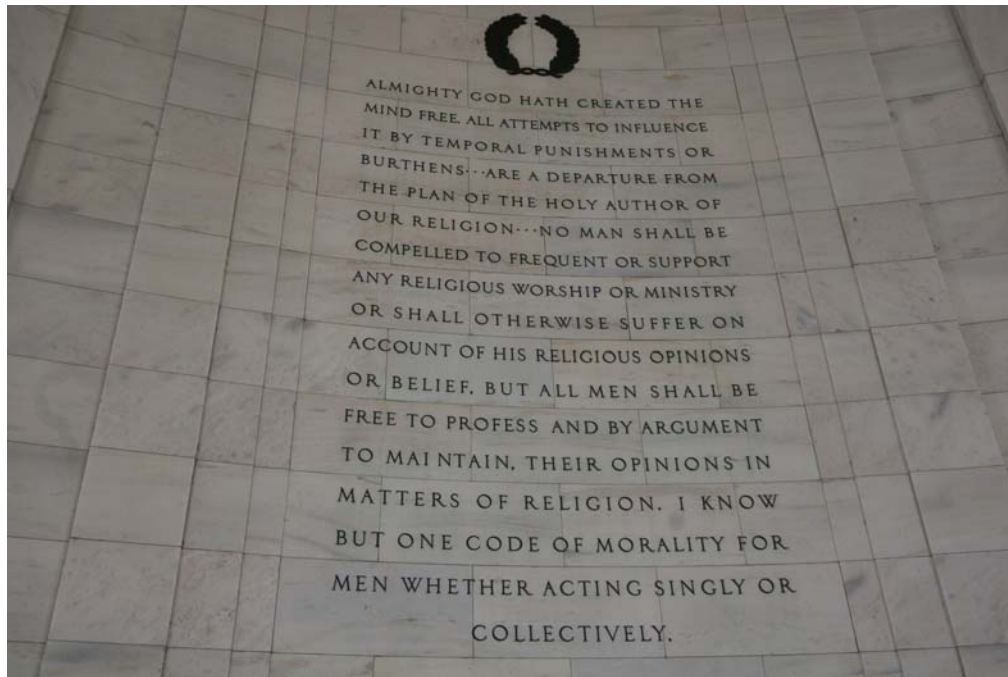
Jefferson worked without knowledge of manuscript transmission or oral traditions or any of the biblical apparatus that later centuries would introduce. Rather, taking Reason and Nature as his trusted guides, he determined by sense and sound what had fallen from the lips of Jesus himself. And the result was pure gold, gold separated from the dross, as he told William Short much later. In examining the Gospels carefully, Jefferson found 'many passages of fine imagination, correct morality, and of the loveliest benevolence.' Jefferson noted that all that beauty sat trapped in 'so much ignorance, so much absurdity, so much untruth, charlatanism, and imposture.' Something had to be done to extract the gold. He also pointed out and 'I found the work obvious and easy'.<sup>40</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Jefferson was not just an individual he held several institutions in himself. It is important to study him from different angles, especially his ideas on the separation of church and state. The world is badly in need of his ideas on religious tolerance and keeping the politics away from religious intolerance and bigotry. It is hoped that other Muslim writers with background in politics, law and history will endeavor in this rich field.

ONE OF THE FOUR QUOTES INSIDE THE MEMORIAL ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

As we study different subjects we need to inculcate a state of constant cognizance of the attributes of Allah. In the words of the Holy Quran: And say, 'All praise belongs to Allah who has taken unto Himself no son, and who has no partner in His kingdom, nor has He anyone to help Him because of any weakness of His.' And proclaim His greatness and glorifying Him on every occasion.<sup>41</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 25.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 19-20.

<sup>3</sup> April 29, 1962 dinner honoring 49 Nobel Laureates (Simpson's Contemporary Quotations, 1988, from Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1962, p. 347).

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 22-23.

<sup>5</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 36.

<sup>7</sup> The Holy Quran. Al-Ghashiyah 88:18-21.

<sup>8</sup> The Holy Quran. Sura Baqarah 2:165

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- <sup>9</sup> Dr. Mohammad Iqbal. Life: its meaning and origin. Review of Religions; 88(2): 26-30, February, 1994.
- <sup>10</sup> Tableegh-e-Risalat, Roohani Khazain Vol. VI, p. 15. Also mentioned in Essence of Islam, under the heading Allah.
- <sup>11</sup> The Holy Quran. Al-Mu'minun 23:118.
- <sup>12</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Ahqaf 46:5.
- <sup>13</sup> The Holy Quran. Al A'arf 7:192.
- <sup>14</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Luqman 31:12.
- <sup>15</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Nahl 16:21.
- <sup>16</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Furqan 25:3-4.
- <sup>17</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Hajj 22:74.
- <sup>18</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Nahl 16:18.
- <sup>19</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Anbiyya 21:23.
- <sup>20</sup> The Holy Quran. Al-Mu'minun 23:92-93.
- <sup>21</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 21.
- <sup>22</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 36.
- <sup>23</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 36.
- <sup>24</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Baqarah 2:256.
- <sup>25</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1874653,00.html>
- <sup>26</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,1874653,00.html>
- <sup>27</sup> Dr. Abdus Salam, a Nobel Laureate. Ideals and realities. World Scientific Publishing Company.
- <sup>28</sup> [http://www.alislam.org/ror/July\\_2003i.pdf](http://www.alislam.org/ror/July_2003i.pdf)
- <sup>29</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 37.
- <sup>30</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 112.
- <sup>31</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 120.
- <sup>32</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 130-131.
- <sup>33</sup> [www.eb.com](http://www.eb.com) under John Adams.
- <sup>34</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 37.
- <sup>35</sup> Letter to Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse June 26, 1822
- <sup>36</sup> Avery Cardinal Dulles, "The Deist Minimum" First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life Issue: 149. (Jan 2005) pp 25+  
<http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0501/articles/dulles.htm>
- <sup>37</sup> <http://www.uua.org/news/011205.html>
- <sup>38</sup> Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson Writings. The Library of America, eighteenth printing. ISBN 0-940450-16-x. Page 5.
- <sup>39</sup> [http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/jefferson\\_m\\_03.html](http://www.cooperativeindividualism.org/jefferson_m_03.html)
- <sup>40</sup> Edwin Gaustad. Sworn on the altar of God: A religious biography of Thomas Jefferson. William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p 119.
- <sup>41</sup> The Holy Quran. Al Bani Israel 17:112.