

Sins of Followers

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RIDAWI
رضا
PRESS

EXPOSITORY NOTES

Clarification of the meaning of 'sin' when attributed to Prophets in the Qur'ān, which antagonists seek to exploit to defame Islām and question the integrity of the Qur'ān.

Sins of Followers

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Praise be to Allāh. Blessings of Allāh and greetings of peace be upon His beloved Messenger, his progeny and followers.

Introduction

Alahazrat¹ was asked about the objections made by an individual named ‘Rama Sangham’ who was, apparently, a Hindu from the Arya Samaj.² It was later clarified (in a follow-up *istiftā*) that he had become a Christian.³ Arya Samaj was a reformist movement among Hindus founded by Dayanand Saraswati in the early 20th century, and they would engage in polemical debates with Muslims, trying to find faults with Islām or to justify their own religion by misquoting Islamic scriptures. Mister Ḥasan, mentioned in the question below, seems to be a Sunni antagonist of the Arya-Samaji, as is apparent from his response. The correct Sunni creed is that Prophets are divinely protected from sin. However, the word *dhanb* – meaning sin – is attributed to Prophets; this apparent contradiction is clarified by Alahazrat in this fatwā,⁴ which is very useful in answering similar objections made by critics of Islām in our time.



¹ Alahazrat Imām Aḥmad Ridā Khān al-Ḥanafī al-Māturīdī al-Baraylawī [1272-1340 AH/ 1856-1921 CE].

² Due to his association with Arya Samaj and the name.

³ Thus the first fatwā addresses the objections and replies to Rama Sangham as an Arya Samaji and in the second, relevant parts are replaced with answers citing Christian scriptures.

⁴ The first is #143 in Fatāwā Ridawīyyah, 29/394-401; the second is #144, 29/402-403.

THE QUESTION⁵

What do religious scholars say in this matter, that in this issue of [a periodical dated] 10th January, Rama Sangham has presented three verses of the Qur'ān and said that Muḥammad RasūlAllāh ﷺ is [therefore] a sinner [we seek Allah's refuge].

In the first two, he has [cited that] the beloved Messenger ﷺ is addressed thus: “*you seek forgiveness for your sins*” and the meaning of the third verse is: “**In fact, We have undoubtedly given you success - so that God forgives your prior and later sins.**”⁶



Mister Ḥasan assures us that the [pronoun] “you” in these verses does NOT specifically mean ‘you’ [i.e. the Prophet ﷺ being addressed] – rather, this is a pointer to the sins and mistakes of the followers of the Prophet of Islam.

It is difficult to accept this argument as plausible because, if Arabic is such a complicated language, that any reader can interpret it according to his own desire, then anyone can draw meanings from the Qur'ān suiting his or her whims. Regardless, Mister Hasan says that he believes the meaning of the Qur'ānic verses cited above to be as he has explained, and trusts the interpretation of the exegetes.

I fear that Mister Ḥasan has not read the commentaries properly, because I will demonstrate below that authorities among exegetes clearly accept that Muḥammad RasūlAllāh ﷺ is a sinner [*māādih-Allah* we seek Allah's refuge]. They point out that at times, certain specific/special sins occurred and that it is for such [sins] that he was asked to seek forgiveness. We will take three verses that Rama Sangham has cited.

The first is from Surah Muhammad ﷺ, verse 19, whose meaning is: “*you seek forgiveness for your sins and for those of your admirers, whether men or women.*” Here, “you” cannot mean: “your followers” in any way, because they [i.e. followers] are also mentioned separately. The conjunction [*ḥarf ātf*] clears all confusion: the Prophet ﷺ was first asked to seek forgiveness for himself and then for the forgiveness of his followers. The second is verse 25 of surah mu'min, and its meaning is: “*you seek forgiveness for your sins*”

It is difficult to believe that Mister Ḥasan has actually cross-checked with the exegetes [*mufassirin*]; because, if he had indeed done so, he would never claim that they [*mufassirin*] will clarify it to Rama Sangham that the Prophet of Muslims has divine immunity [*māṣūm*] from every sin. Far from it, they would clearly tell him [i.e. Mr. Ḥasan] that they [*mufassirin*] accept that RasulAllah ﷺ sinned (*al-iyadhu billah*).⁷

⁵ Sent by Maulvi Sayyid Quṭbuddīn, probably on behalf of an Arya, Pardesiji Brahmachari; dated 3rd Rabīy al-Awwal, 1339 AH.

⁶ As alleged by the Arya Samaji.

⁷ These expressions are distasteful, but are cited as they are present in the istiftāa. May Allāh forgive us.

Ibn Ábbās is a heavyweight among exegetes and he has said in his *tafsir*: [Arabic text cited]⁸ the meaning of which is:

seek forgiveness for your sins; and for your negligence in thanking for the favours of Allah upon and your Companions.

Zamakhshari is a heavyweight exegete, who has said in his *Al-Kash'shaf*: [Arabic text cited], the meaning of which is:

may God forgive your sins, those which occurred before revelation - and thereafter, that is, until your demise.

Please answer [or clarify] and be rewarded.



⁸ The questioner has cited the Arabic incorrectly and further distorted the translation; only his Urdu translation is rendered in English above - to retain the context of the answer.

THE ANSWER

This question of the Arya is composed of slander, ignorance, lack of comprehension and deceit.

1. The purported citation from *Al-Kash'hāf* is a mere fabrication; such a passage does not exist in *Al-Kash'shāf*.
2. Suppose, such a passage existed in *Al-Kash'shāf*; even then, why would the work of an insolent Mútaẓilī heretic be considered reliable?
3. The tafsīr attributed to Sayyidunā Ibn Ábbās ؓ is not a work of his authorship, nor proven to be his; this is transmitted through the chain of: Muḥammad ibn Marwan from Al-Kalbī from Abū Ṣāliḥ, which is described by scholars as “chain of falsehood”. It is said in *Al-Itqān*:

The weakest of all chains⁹ is the route of Kalbī through Abū Ṣāliḥ from Ibn Ábbās; and if this is appended to the narration of Muḥammad ibn Marwān al-Suddi Junior, then it becomes a chain of falsehood.¹⁰

4. Even such [an already unreliable] passage is distorted by the Arya; the actual passage should be thus [translated]:

Seek forgiveness for your not thanking enough for the favours of Allāh upon you and your companions.

How can ‘less in thanks’ be equated with ‘negligence’?¹¹

The favours of the Almighty upon every individual are countless in reality and infinite in possibility, according to Muftī Abu’s Súūd¹² in his *Irshād al-Áql al-Salīm*,¹³ in the verse:

وَإِنْ تَعُدُّوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ لَا تَحْصُوهَا

If you seek to enumerate the blessings of Allāh, you will never be able to count them¹⁴

When one cannot even count the blessings of Allāh, then how is it possible for anyone to give adequate thanks for every favour?

[Persian couplet:] *Whose hand or tongue is capable of fulfilling the obligation of thanks to Him?*

Not giving adequate thanks is not a sin, as in the commonly understood meaning – rather, it is concomitant to human nature.¹⁵ The numerous favours of Allāh are upon everyone, every

⁹ Through which Tafsīr Ibn Ábbās is transmitted; in *Itqān*, Suyūṭī mentions many routes among which the flimsiest is that of Kalbī via Abū Ṣāliḥ.

¹⁰ *Al-Itqān*, p.877, *The Eightieth Category: Ranks of Exegetes*.

¹¹ Less or ‘not enough’ means falling short in being thankful; negligent means not giving thanks at all.

¹² Muftī Abu’s Súūd: Shaykh al-Islām Qādī al-Qudāt Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ímādī al-Ĥanafī (d. 896-982 AH).

¹³ Also known as *Tafsīr Abu’s Súūd = Irshād al-Áql al-Salīm ilā Mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm*.

¹⁴ Sūrah Ibrāhīm, 14:34.

¹⁵ It is impossible for a human to thank adequately for every favour of the Lord Almighty.

moment and in every state, and they keep multiplying, especially upon His chosen slaves. Our Master ﷺ is the leader of all the select slaves of Allāh and therefore, favours upon him are more than upon anyone else. It is among human needs to eat and sleep – even though, these actions of select slaves of Allāh are also a form of worship – but certainly, these actions are one level lesser than a pure form of worship. This shortfall is described as a ‘shortcoming’ [*taqṣīr*] – and this shortcoming is described as ‘sin’ [*dhanb*].

5. In fact, the cited passage is itself proof that the ‘*dhanb*’ mentioned, is not a ‘sin’ in the commonly understood meaning. [Consider the following argument:]

What meaning does the Arya derive from: ‘*that which occurred before*’ [*mā taqaddam*]?
[According to him:] ‘*that before revelation*’.

What is sin? Sin is the opposition or disobedience to a [Divine] Command.

How do you learn about [Divine] Commands? By Revelation [*wahy*].

Thus, until there was Revelation [*wahy*], where were Divine Commands?

And when there were no Commands, then how can one oppose or disobey them?

And when there is no opposition or disobedience, then where is the sin?

6. Just as ‘*those prior*’ [*mā taqaddam*] does not refer to a sin in reality, as demonstrated above, so also ‘*those after*’ [*mā ta’akh-khar*] refers to a period of time. That is, certain actions were permitted before a Divine Command had come down in the Qur’ān;¹⁶ the Command prohibiting such an action was revealed afterward, and was described as sin – even though there is no reason for such actions to be described as ‘sin’ in the commonly understood meaning. Similarly, even after Proclamation of Prophethood, those permissible actions which were hitherto not prohibited are actually included in ‘*those after*’ [*mā ta’akh-khar*] – because Revelation [*wahy*] was not a one time event – rather, Divine Commands were continually revealed¹⁷ over many years.¹⁸

7. Neither is every commentary [*tafsīr*] reliable, nor is every exegete [*mufassir*] correct [all the time]. The gross injustice of the idolator¹⁹ is, that he mentions the Qur’ānic verse [as his

¹⁶ We have seen in the previous argument that sin is wilful opposition of a Divine Command. For example, wine was not prohibited in the early period of Islām and many Companions would drink wine. It was not a sin for them at that time. It BECAME a sin after the Divine Command prohibiting wine was revealed. Thus, an action that later became sin (due to Divine Command being revealed) is forgiven when committed prior to revelation of the prohibition. The example is given to clarify the concept, and bear in mind, that the Prophet ﷺ NEVER drank wine or worshipped an idol or committed any gross or indecent act in his life, neither before nor after revelation. In the context of Prophets, some actions which were inherently permissible, but did not behoove the high station of Prophethood were deemed and described as ‘sins’ for them.

¹⁷ In some cases, changed.

¹⁸ Until the passing of the Prophet ﷺ.

¹⁹ That is the Arya Samaji who raised these objections.

evidence], but instead, grabs the mantle of unreliable commentaries.²⁰ If you wish to argue like this, then the inane, ridiculous, hilarious and profane statements that a decent person would feel embarrassed to utter – rather even to cite as another’s speech; such descriptions are found in the Vedas, which the worshippers of Vedas themselves translate in the same ugly and profane words! How can the Arya Samaji run away from it? For example, in Yajur Veda, the illness of Ishwar²¹ is described thus, when he cries out in sickness from his sick bed:²²

O those who have knowledge and understanding of hundreds! You have hundreds and thousands of medicinal herbs; use them and cure my illness. O mother! You too do it thus.

He then says: “O mother goddess, who gives benefit like medicinal herbs, I am a son giving you counsel.”

The mother says: “O worthy son! I am the mother of your horses, cows, clothes and protector of life; do not give me your advice.”

In the same Yajur Veda, chapter 31, verse 1 about Ishwar:²³

He has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He is present everywhere on the earth. Whether left or right, he is sitting in front of every man at a distance²⁴ of 10 fingers!

In the Vedas, his name is “sarv bayapak”²⁵ meaning filled everywhere, present in everything, penetrating all space – in the backside of every animal and the genital of every female and in a pile of fecal matter – Ishwar is everywhere. Dayanand²⁶ forcibly removed these obscenities and transformed his scriptures, but they remain in the translations of others.²⁷ An exegete explains the meaning as *he* understands it; the translator conveys the original text in the words of another language. If there is an error in translation, it will be in one or two words, not in the entire passage – such that one can transform profanities into words of wisdom. If Sanskrit is such a complex language – that entire lines can either be translated as obscenities or as profound wisdom, then what can such speech be termed other than an elaborate fraud?²⁸

²⁰ Instead of sticking to the Qur’ān, he resorts to citing unreliable commentaries as his proof.

²¹ They claim he is one of the three top gods – they have maybe a million; but the top three, the triumvirate are Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, called as *trimurti* in Sanskrit/Hindi.

²² The Arya Samaj tried to reform Hinduism and sought to free it from idol worship; together, they tried to fault Islām by trying to draw parallels with their scriptures. This attack is one such, and Alahazrat is referring to this motive of the Aryas.

²³ Devi Chand’s translation is does not correspond to the literal Sanskrit (see p.302); it is more of a meaningful interpretation. For comparison, see Griffith’s translation p.260.

²⁴ *Das ungli* in Urdu; in ancient Indian measurement, each ‘finger’ or ‘angul’ was about 2 cm. Devi Chand in his translation disputes this translation and claims that it is metaphorical. This is Alahazrat’s counter to the Arya: If you are allowed to interpret it according to rules of your language, then why shouldn’t we do it within the established framework of Arabic?

²⁵ *Sarv Vyapak* in Sanskrit, meaning all-wide, filling in everything.

²⁶ Dayanand Saraswati was a major figure of the Arya Samaj movement, who attempted to cleanse and clarify these

²⁷ Alahazrat’s objection is to counter the Arya’s presenting of the exegete’s opinion.

²⁸ *Bhanumati ka gorakh dhandha* – a Hindustani idiom to mean ‘fraud’ or ‘scam’.

How can anybody trust it, as one cannot tell if he was reciting religious litanies or uttering egregious profanities.²⁹

8. Establishing evidence is a serious responsibility, and what does the poor fellow from Arya Samaj know about it!

[**Couplet:**] Principles of research and evidence are not required // to establish whether it is kachori or poori or bhujia or lentils!³⁰

The condition for evidence to be absolute is that it should be devoid of any alternate interpretation. The accepted principle in the law of evidence is when the possibility of multiple interpretations exists, one single interpretation cannot be used absolute evidence.³¹ Where is the absolute proof that the verses of Sūrah Mu'min³² and Sūrah Muḥammad ﷺ are undoubtedly addressed to our Master ﷺ? Sūrah Mu'min has only this much:

وَأَسْتَغْفِرُ لَذَنبِكَ

O person! Seek forgiveness for your sin.³³

There is no specific name, nor any proof that it is restricted to a specific individual. The Qur'ān was revealed for the guidance of the entire world – not just for those present at the time of the revelation of the Qur'ān. Rather, it addresses all who shall come until Judgement day: “**Establish prayer..**”³⁴ This was addressed to the Companions – may Allāh be pleased with them all; and so also, it is addressed to us, and generations that will come after us until Judgement Day. In the same Qur'ān:

لِيُنذِرَكُمْ بِهِ وَمَنْ بَلَغَ

So that I may warn you by it and everyone to whom it reaches³⁵

The general principle concerning books is that they address every hearer (or the reader). “*Thus know, may Allāh give you eternal felicity*”³⁶ does not address any specific reader; for example, the Qur'ān says:

²⁹ Alahazrat has countered the Arya's criticism of Arabic in his bid to insist on the literal meaning and ignoring context. Alahazrat gave this example from a scripture the Arya respects and says, then it can apply to your texts as well.

³⁰ Wordplay on 'daal' – in Persian/Arabic it means: 'that which proves' and in Hindustani it means 'lentils'. The couplet, most likely Alahazrat's own extempore, means this fellow has no insight in the art of establishing evidence – this is not the same as differentiating between simple foods such as kachori, poori, bhujia [Indian snack made from gram flour and spices] or lentils.

³¹ *idhā jā'a al-iḥtimāl baṭala'l istidlāl*: if there is a possibility of alternate explanation, it ceases to be absolute evidence.

³² Also known as Sūrah al-Ghāfir, #40; this is different from Sūrah al-Mu'minūn which is #23.

³³ Sūrah al-Ghāfir, 40:55.

³⁴ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:43.

³⁵ Sūrah al-Anāām, 6:19.

³⁶ *Badān asādak Allāh tāālā*; a phrase commonly used in books to address the reader.

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَى ۙ عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى ۙ ۝۱۰ أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَىٰ ۙ أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالْقَوَىٰ ۙ

Did you not see him who wishes to prevent – the slave [of Allāh] when he prays;
Do you not see, that if he were upon guidance – or enjoined righteousness?³⁷

Here, ‘slave’ refers to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and so do the third-person pronouns [referring to the slave] – and the second-person pronoun addresses everyone who hears [or reads] it.

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدَ بِالذِّينِ

[After which,] what makes you belie [and reject] the Day of Judgement?³⁸

This verse specifically addresses disbelievers; and even among them, it is especially aimed towards those who reject Judgement Day such as idolators, polytheists, Aryas, Hindus etc. Similarly, the pronoun *kaaf* in both verses [of Sūrah Mu’minūn and Sūrah Muḥammad ﷺ] is addressed to every person who hears it: **“O listener! Seek forgiveness for your sins and the sins of all your Muslim brothers.”**

9. In fact, in the verse of Sūrah Muḥammad , the context is clear that the address is not meant for RasūlAllāh ﷺ, because it starts thus:

فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِذَنبِكَ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

Know, that there is no God but Allāh; and seek forgiveness
for your sins and for men and women believers.³⁹

So this is addressed to someone who does not know that there is no other God but Allāh; because, commanding someone ‘to know’ what he already knows, is pointless. Thus, the meaning is: O listener who has still not gained certainty about *tawḥīd* – whoever you may be – bear faith in *tawḥīd* and then seek forgiveness for your sins and the sins of your Muslim bretheren. The final clause of the verse clarifies that it is a generic command:

وَاللَّهُ يَعْلَمُ مُتَقَلِّبِكُمْ وَمَثُونَكُمْ

And Allāh knows where you turn to and where you are all destined to.⁴⁰

If you can extrapolate “*then know*”⁴¹ – then what prevents you from extrapolating “*your sin*”? If you cannot extrapolate “*your sin*,” then how can you extrapolate “*then know*”? In either case, the argument is in our favour, and the objection of the critic is repudiated.

³⁷ Sūrah al-Álaq, 96:9-11.

³⁸ Sūrah al-Tin, 95:7. ‘After which’ means after guidance and proof has come to you, what else remains?

³⁹ Sūrah Muḥammad, 47:19.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ And say: it is not restricted only for those who have not learned about *tawḥīd*, as presented for the sake of argument.

10. In both the verses, the tense is imperative, which is a form of a non-informative sentence;⁴² and it does not denote occurrence. So its outcome is: “If perchance it has occurred, then it is necessary to seek forgiveness” not that – we seek Allāh’s refuge - indeed, it has occurred.

For example, if one is told: “Honour your guest” – this does not mean that a guest is present at this time, nor is it information that some guest is certain to come; rather, it simply means: “If a guest comes, honour your guest”.

11. **Dhanb** – sin – in the language of the Qur’ān, is not exclusively used for deliberate disobedience. Allāh tāālā has said: “**And Ādam made an error in following the Command of his Lord**”⁴³ even though Allāh tāālā Himself says: “**For he forgot and We did not find him doing so deliberately.**”⁴⁴ An error of omission or due to forgetfulness is neither a sin, nor is there any blame, nor censure upon it. The Qur’ān has taught this prayer to the slaves of Allāh:

رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا

O our Lord! Do not hold us responsible if we forget or mistake⁴⁵

12. The degree of strictness in rulings is according to one’s nearness [to Allāh]

*[Distich:] Those with high ranks, will find exemptions difficult.*⁴⁶

A powerful king may tolerate the [boorish] behaviour and unrefined speech of an uncivilised villager, but he may not tolerate the same from a city dweller; among the city dwellers, the treatment of common people will be lax and tougher with notables – and further, among notables, those who are courtiers will be treated differently than others; and the courtiers will be forgiven that which a minister may not be excused. *The good deeds of the righteous are akin to sins of the close ones.* Here, choosing the lesser of the two better options [*khilāf awlā*] is deemed a sin – even though, it is not a sin in reality.

13. If the poor Arya, whose father and grandfather have never heard of Arabic does not know, he can be excused – but any ordinary student [of Islamic school] knows that the weakest of association is sufficient to attribute something towards someone [*izāfat*]. This is also true in other languages such as Persian, Urdu and Hindi. For example, a house is attributed to its owner; but it is also a common practice to attribute it to the tenant; similarly a person who has temporarily rented a place – whoever goes to meet him will say: “ We had been to X’s house”.

⁴² *Jumlah Inshā’iyyah*: Non-informative sentence such as a command, a wish, a question or an emotion; this is in contrast to *Jumlah Khabariyyah*: An informative sentence, in which some information is present.

⁴³ Sūrah Ṭā-hā, 20:121.

⁴⁴ Sūrah Ṭā-hā, 20:115. A more detailed discussion on these verses and Divine Immunity granted to Prophets is present in the translation of the first volume of *Bahār e Shari‘at*, published by Ridawī Press.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Jinkay rutbay hain siwā, unko siwā mushkil hai.*

In fact, those who are measuring the fields will ask each other: “How much of *your land* did you measure” – even though, in this case it is neither owned nor rented – but attribution is considered valid [in the context of that statement]. Similarly, when something is given from the house of a person’s son, it is acceptable to say: “We received something from your house.” So also, ‘your sin’ refers to the lapses of the noble household – and after this, “for other believing men and believing women’ is generalisation after a specific case [*tāmim baád takhṣiṣ*]. In other words: Intercede for your household [*ahl bayt*] and for all believers – men and women. This is also an antidote for the Arya’s madness that the mention of followers is also present; another example of such construct [generalisation after a specific case] is found in the Qur’ān:

رَبِّ اَعْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِي مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

O my Lord Almighty! Forgive me, and my parents and those believers who entered my house and all other believers - men and women.⁴⁷

14. In a similar manner, in the verse of Sūrah al-Fatḥ, the *lām* in *laka* [‘you’] is the *lām* of reason⁴⁸ [*tálil*] and *mā taqaddama min dhanbika* = the sins of your forefathers; I mean those of our masters Ábdullāh and Aāminah (may Allāh be pleased with them both) – and all the ancestors⁴⁹ until the end, with the exception of Prophets, such as Ádam, Shīth, Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm Khalīl and Ismāyīl عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام. And, *mā ta’akh-khar* = your descendants; that is, your household and followers [*ummah*] to come until Judgement Day.

In conclusion, the meaning of the verse is: ***We have given you a manifest victory, so that Allāh may – for your sake – forgive the sins of all those [related to you] among your forefathers and descendants.*** All praise belongs to Allāh, the Creator-Sustainer of the universe.

15. Just as it was clearly evident from the commentary that ‘prior’ and ‘later’ [mentioned in the verse] refers to the period prior to revelation and post-revelation, in this verse, it is certainly one of the possible interpretations; we have already proved that in which case, its being a ‘sin’ in reality stands refuted.⁵⁰

Allāh’s blessings upon the intercessor of sinners and may Allāh give him grace and greetings until Judgement Day; and also upon his descendants and every one among his Companions.

Allāh táālā knows best.



⁴⁷ Sūrah Nūḥ, 71:28. Believers who entered my house is specific; and all believing men and women is generic.

⁴⁸ Thus *laka* = for your sake. *Lām tálil*: the lam indicating cause.

⁴⁹ Lit. “noble fathers and chaste mothers”.

⁵⁰ See point #11 above.

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Translation and Footnotes

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